



## Daily Report

Wednesday, 18 December 2024

This report shows written answers and statements provided on 18 December 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:30 P.M., 18 December 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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**Notes:**  
Questions marked thus **[R]** indicate that a relevant interest has been declared.  
Questions with identification numbers of **900000 or greater** indicate that the question was originally tabled as an oral question and has since been unstarred.

## ANSWERS

### ATTORNEY GENERAL

#### ■ Serious Fraud Office: Equality

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[18883\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the Serious Fraud Office.

**Lucy Rigby:**

The Serious Fraud Office has one full-time equivalent staff member employed on this basis.

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

#### ■ Business: Government Assistance

**Dame Harriett Baldwin:**

[\[19682\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has met with business representatives to discuss the Control Subsidy Regime.

**Justin Madders:**

To date I have not met with business representatives to discuss the subsidy control regime, however my department would welcome the views of business representatives in response to the current public consultation on refinements to the UK's subsidy control regime. The consultation closes on 21 January 2025.

#### ■ Carers: Employment

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**

[\[19622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will produce guidance for employers on how to support unpaid carers in the workplace.

**Justin Madders:**

We are committed to ensuring that carers are supported to balance work and caring responsibilities and that guidance around policies which benefit unpaid carers in the workplace is readily available to employers and employees.

Gov.uk guidance is already available covering flexible working, time off for family and dependents and unpaid carer's leave. This will be of particular benefit to unpaid carers in employment and those who employ them.



## ■ Conditions of Employment: Disability

**Nadia Whittome:** [\[20045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of introducing a standalone employment right to disability-related leave.

**Justin Madders:**

The Government is invested in protecting and enhancing the rights of vulnerable groups in the workplace.

The Equality Act 2010 requires employers to accommodate the needs of disabled employees through reasonable adjustments. This is likely to include provision for disability-related absence.

In addition, changes proposed by the Employment Rights Bill include making it easier for employees to negotiate a flexible working arrangement which suits their needs. This will benefit, among others, employees with long-term physical or mental health conditions and disabilities.

## ■ Construction: Fraud

**Ben Maguire:** [\[18841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle rogue builders.

**Justin Madders:**

There are a strong set of consumer law duties that apply to builders like any other trader in the UK, and the Government believes that dealing with rogue builders is primarily a matter of effective enforcement of that legislation. To this end DBT is strengthening consumer law enforcement through the implementation of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024. The Act gives the CMA new administrative powers, and the CMA and courts the ability to impose significant monetary penalties on businesses which exploit their customers.

## ■ Consumer Goods: Safety

**Clive Jones:** [\[19821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department has taken to support small businesses with meeting the requirements of the EU Regulation on General Product Safety (2023/988).

**Clive Jones:** [\[19822\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of EU Regulation on General Product Safety (2023/988) on small businesses.

**Justin Madders:**

The updated GPSR largely formalises how many businesses are already operating in the UK and the measures are therefore likely to have limited impact. However, we understand that for some businesses, the regulation will require changes, and we take any concerns very seriously.

Government is supporting small businesses to understand the regulation. We have published guidance on GPSR in Northern Ireland, which we will keep under review, and we are continuing to engage directly with businesses. Firms exporting to the EU should note that EU guidance is now available and may also wish to contact the Government's Export Support Service.

**■ Department for Business and Trade: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution****Emily Thornberry:****[18909]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how much his Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

**Justin Madders:**

The Department for Business and Trade (formerly Department for International Trade until July 2023) publishes all government procurement card (GPC) spend of over £500. This is available at:

a) (i) GPC spend over £500 for 2022:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dit-spending-over-500-for-2022>

(ii) GPC spend over £500 for 2023 (Jan to June)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dit-spending-over-500-for-2023>

GPC spend over £500 for 2023 (July and August)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbt-spending-over-500>

GPC spend over £500 for 2023 (September to December)

£57,661.27

b) (i) GPC spend below £500 for 2022:

£233,872.67

(ii) GPC spend below £500 for 2023:

£380,373.90

The guiding policy setting out the requirement to publish GPC transactions over £500 remains in place. Guidance is available to all government departments on gov.uk at the following link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e8b402686650c18ce2cb541/Procurement\\_Cards\\_-\\_Pan\\_Government\\_Policy\\_V4\\_06042020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e8b402686650c18ce2cb541/Procurement_Cards_-_Pan_Government_Policy_V4_06042020.pdf)

The policy clearly sets out the standard that departments must publish to which covers transaction date, transaction reference, merchant name and the amount spent.

■ **Department for Business and Trade: Remote Working**

**Andrew Griffith:**

[\[19955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department takes to monitor the productivity of officials when they work from home.

**Justin Madders:**

It is expected that every Department for Business and Trade employee has personal objectives aligned to their role. Performance is monitored regularly against these objectives, as part of ongoing reviews.

■ **Department for Business and Trade: Senior Civil Servants**

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[19133\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what information his Department holds on the number and proportion of senior civil servants within his Department that have (a) historic and (b) current directorships listed on Companies House.

**Justin Madders:**

As of July 2023, the current number of SCS that have a directorship listed on Companies House is 1 out of 306 SCS listed on payroll.

Historical information is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. For information the current limit is £850, worked out in person hours needed to provide the answer.

■ **Department for Business and Trade: Staff**

**Dame Harriett Baldwin:**

[\[19681\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to ensure the accuracy of his Department's headcount and payroll data.

**Justin Madders:**

DBT verifies headcount monthly through commissioning each business area to review employee records, check leaver processing and performs quality assurance to reconcile any data issues.

DBT ensures accuracy of payroll data from our shared service provider (UKSBS) through monthly reviews and control account reconciliations. DBT also:

- monitors UKSBS's performance against KPIs monthly and has representation on governance boards.
- ensures segregation of duties and approval/authorisation controls where we have administrative responsibility.

- undertakes comparative analytics and queries movements outside our understanding of operations.
- Submits Annual Report & Accounts to NAO, who sample-test payroll data and report any errors.

■ **Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Development Aid**

**Chi Onwurah:** [\[20010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how the Official Development Assistance expenditure managed by the former Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy was redistributed following the machinery of Government changes in February 2023.

**Justin Madders:**

No Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget was allocated to my department when it was created in February 2023 through the machinery of Government changes.

■ **Elbit Systems UK: Exports**

**Apsana Begum:** [\[19051\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether any Thor drones have been exported from the UK by Elbit Systems UK to partner companies in Israel.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

Exports of these items from the UK would be subject to an export licence. Our records indicate that we have not issued any individual export licences for Israel to the company for the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) referenced.

The company is also registered to two Open General Export Licences which in theory permit exports of UAVs to Israel, among other countries. The licences in question however only relate to transfers in support of UK Government defence contracts (e.g. for products that are then delivered back to the UK), or for the return of military goods that have been temporarily imported into the UK for exhibition or demonstration purposes.

As the Secretary of State announced to Parliament on 2 September, we have suspended export licences for Israel for military goods which could be used by the IDF in military operations in Gaza.

**Apsana Begum:** [\[19052\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether any Magni-X drones have been exported from the UK by Elbit Systems UK to partner companies in Israel.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

Exports of these items from the UK would be subject to an export licence. Our records indicate that we have not issued any individual export licences for Israel to the company for the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) referenced.

The company is also registered to two Open General Export Licences which in theory permit exports of UAVs to Israel, among other countries. The licences in question however only relate to transfers in support of UK Government defence contracts (e.g. for products that are then delivered back to the UK), or for the return of military goods that have been temporarily imported into the UK for exhibition or demonstration purposes.

As the Secretary of State announced to Parliament on 2 September, we have suspended export licences for Israel for military goods which could be used by the IDF in military operations in Gaza.

## ■ G20

**Andrew Griffith:**

[\[19950\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many of his counterparts from G20 nations (a) he and (b) Ministers in his Department have met.

**Justin Madders:**

(a) Since July, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade has met with counterparts from 16 G20 nations .

(b) The DBT ministerial team have met a total of 18 G20 nations.

## ■ Import Controls

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[19754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent steps he has taken to ensure that imported products containing banned ingredients are not sold in shops in the UK.

**Justin Madders:**

UK product safety regulations require that only safe consumer products be placed on the market. Importers must ensure their products comply with these regulations, including any requirements covering chemicals or banned substances. Distributors have a duty of care to not sell products they know, or should know, are unsafe.

National and local regulators enforce these regulations, including using data and intelligence to target checks on dangerous and non-compliant products entering the UK at the border and sold online.

The Government's Product Regulation and Metrology Bill, introduced to Parliament in September, provides powers to further strengthen the UK's product safety framework.

## ■ Iron and Steel: Manufacturing Industries

**Richard Tice:**

[\[18457\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what contingency measures his Department has should negotiations with Jingye on the future of steel blast furnaces collapse.

**Sarah Jones:**

The Government is in negotiations with British Steel's shareholder regarding the company's commercial plans to transition to productive and efficient methods of steel production.

As with any responsible Government, we continue to consider all possible outcomes, and we stand ready to support local workers and local communities as needed.

The steel industry declined more than 50% in the last decade because there was no strategy to protect and grow this strategically important sector. We are developing a Steel Strategy which we will publish in Spring 2025, and we have committed up to £2.5bn of investment to rebuild the UK steel industry.

**Liam Byrne:**[\[20002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what estimate his Department has made of the potential impact of public funding for the steel industry on levels of private-sector investment in that industry in each of the next five years.

**Liam Byrne:**[\[20003\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department plans to take to maximise the value for money from public funding for the steel industry over the next five years.

**Sarah Jones:**

The Government is developing a steel strategy, in partnership with the steel sector and trade unions, that will set out a long-term vision for steel and create opportunities for public and private investment.

We have committed to providing up to £2.5bn for steel which will be available through the National Wealth Fund and other routes. This is in addition to the £500m for Tata at Port Talbot steelworks. When designing how best to invest this money, we will consider a range of factors, including leveraging private sector investment and making the UK a great place to invest.

**■ Minimum Wage: Glasgow North East****Maureen Burke:**[\[18737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what estimate he has made of the number of people that will be impacted by the increase to the national minimum wage in Glasgow North East constituency.

**Justin Madders:**

The Government will publish an Impact Assessment alongside the legislation that implements the increase to the National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage in 2025. This will include analysis of the number of workers affected by region and country. More granular estimates by constituency are subject to greater data reliability issues due to survey response rates.

## ■ Post Office

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[17652\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the written Statement of 5 November 2024 on Post Office Update, HCWS184, what work the external consultants have done; and what account the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Business and Trade took of that work in his statement of 13 November 2024 on Future of the Post Office, Official Report columns 806-807.

**Gareth Thomas:**

The Post Office faces a number of complex challenges. As set out on 13 November, Nigel Railton's transformation plan aims to reduce Post Office's central costs and deliver a real-terms increase in postmaster pay. As set out on 5 November, it is also important that Government has a clear vision for the future direction of the Post Office. The Department has appointed external consultants to develop options for the future remit, structure and ownership of the Post Office as well as to assess the options and recommendations made by Nigel Railton. Government plans to publish a Green Paper to seek views on a range of different proposals in the first half of 2025.

## ■ Postal Services: Visual Impairment

**Helen Maguire:**

[\[19208\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has had discussions with Ofcom on the future of Royal Mail's delivery of the Articles for the Blind service.

**Justin Madders:**

Section 31 of the Postal Services Act 2011 outlines the minimum requirements of the universal postal service and includes the requirement that free-of-charge postal services are provided to people who are blind or partially sighted.

Earlier this year, I met representatives of Ofcom, who reasserted their commitment to ensuring that the universal postal service meets the reasonable needs of users. The Government has no current plans to change the minimum requirements set out in the legislation.

## ■ Public Sector: Productivity

**Andrew Griffith:**

[\[19951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has had discussions with (a) the ONS (b) the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the Public Services Productivity Review.

**Justin Madders:**

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade has confirmed that no formal discussions have taken place with (a) the Office for National Statistics (ONS) or (b) the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the Public Services Productivity Review.

## ■ Standard Individual Export Licences

**Andrew Griffith:**

[19444]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many applications for standard individual export licences were made between July and November 2024.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

We will release statistics on export licensing outcomes relating to this period one quarter at a time via our regular Strategic Export Controls Licensing Statistical Releases.

Export licensing statistics for 1 January to 30 June 2024 were published on 12 December 2024: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/strategic-export-controls-licensing-statistics-1-january-to-31-march-2024> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/strategic-export-controls-licensing-statistics-1-april-to-30-june-2024>.

Statistics for July to September 2024 will be available by March 2025, and statistics for October to December 2024 will be available by June 2025. In addition, we will publish data from 2024 as a whole in the 2024 Annual Report, including the number of licensing applications we have received during the year, which we will publish in the Summer 2025.

## ■ Trade Union Officials

**Alison Griffiths:**

[19977]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many meetings Ministers in his Department have had with trade union officials since 5 July 2024.

**Justin Madders:**

Ministers have met with many trade unions, representing millions of British workers, on numerous occasions since 5 July 2024. This is part of this government's regular engagement with union leaders to support our growth mission, including on multiple industrial issues neglected by the previous government. Information about ministerial meetings can be found on Gov.uk.

## CABINET OFFICE

## ■ Blood: Contamination

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**

[19629]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many victims of the infected blood scandal have received their full compensation.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:**

In late October, the Infected Blood Compensation Authority began contacting the first group of people so that they could begin making their compensation claims. As of 12th December, 10 people have been offered compensation totalling over £13



million. The first few people have accepted their offers and the first payments have now been made. Between now and January, the Authority will reach out to more people so that they can begin making their compensation claims. The Authority is aiming to reach around 250 claims in early 2025 and continue ramping up payments from there. At the October Budget the Government committed £11.8 billion of funding for the compensation scheme. The individual payments build on the more than £1 billion which victims have received so far in interim payments.

## ■ Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review

**Liam Byrne:**

[20001]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the answer of 4 November 2024 to Question 11837 on Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review, what plans he has to (a) engage and (b) inform Parliament on each review.

**Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:**

In relation to my answer of 4 November 2024 to Question 11837, decisions about parliamentary engagement are matters for the relevant department owners of each review.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster committed to a review of UK national resilience in his statement to the House of Commons on 19 July, in response to the Covid-19 Inquiry's Module 1 report. The review is expected to conclude in Spring 2025 and includes a broad programme of engagement, including Parliamentary, to ensure the UK Government's approach to resilience best helps mitigate the challenges we face. The review will also consider the future approach to reporting on and scrutiny of UK national resilience.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### ■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

**Emily Thornberry:**

[18919]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how much her Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

DCMS publishes departmental transaction level data on government procurement card purchases for transactions over £500 in accordance with policy. The guiding policy setting out the requirement to publish GPC transactions over £500 remains in place.

Guidance is available to all government departments on gov.uk at the following link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e8b402686650c18ce2cb541/Procurement\\_Cards\\_-\\_Pan\\_Government\\_Policy\\_V4\\_06042020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e8b402686650c18ce2cb541/Procurement_Cards_-_Pan_Government_Policy_V4_06042020.pdf)

The most recent publication of expenditure via GPCs at DCMS is available using the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dcms-spending-over-500-october-2024>

1. With regards to transactions above £500, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport spent the following (minus refunds) via Government Procurement Cards:
  - i. 2022 - £168,578.66
  - ii. 2023 - £125,104.19
  
1. In relation to transactions below £500, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport spent the following (minus refunds) via Government Procurement Cards:
  - i. 2022 - £89,996.23
  - ii. 2023 - £89,065.33

## ■ Football: Gambling

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:**

**[18876]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of a ban on gambling (a) sponsorship and (b) advertising in football.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

As the Minister for Gambling set out in her speech at the GambleAware conference on 4 December, we want to see the gambling industry further raise standards to ensure that levels of gambling advertising does not exacerbate harm. This work will be monitored closely.

There are a range of robust rules and restrictions which apply to gambling adverts, wherever they appear, to ensure they are socially responsible.

As part of the UK Advertising Codes, issued by the Committees for Advertising Practice (CAP) and Broadcast Committees of Advertising Practice (BCAP), sister organisations of the Advertising Standards Authority, content with 'strong appeal' to children such as top flight footballers or celebrities popular with children is prohibited from appearing in gambling adverts. As part of the Code of Conduct published by major sports governing bodies, including the Premier League and English Football League, gambling sponsorships must be designed to limit its reach and promotion to those under the age of 18, such as ensuring that no gambling sponsor logos or other promotional materials relating to gambling sponsorship appear on sections of their website which are designed to be viewed and used specifically by children. The

Department will closely monitor the implementation of the Codes to ensure they have a meaningful impact. Premier League clubs have also agreed to remove front of shirt sponsorships by gambling firms by the end of the 2025/26 season.

## ■ Football: Women

**Edward Morello:**

[\[19206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support the growth of women's grassroots football in West Dorset constituency.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

This Government is committed to supporting every aspect of women's sport, including grassroots football, and ensuring all women and girls, no matter their background, have access to high quality sport.

The Government is providing £123 million of funding for the UK-wide Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme in 2024/25 alongside our ongoing investment into Sport England. This includes long term investment of £26.1 million into the FA to invest in community football initiatives that will benefit everyone, including women and girls, across the country, including in West Dorset.

## ■ Music: Africa

**Jayne Kirkham:**

[\[20103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department is taking steps to help support musical acts from Africa to perform in the UK.

**Chris Bryant:**

The British Council supports a number of programmes that support cultural exchange between the UK and African music sector. Events such as The Great Escape and the Worldwide Music Expo connect African music professionals with UK platforms, promoters, and festivals such as Africa Oye. The British Council also supports talent development in sub-Saharan Africa, with programmes including Scripts and Bars in Zimbabwe.

Arts Council England (ACE) supports a number of organisations that promote African artists. The ACE National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) Africa Oye Limited receives £217,456 per annum, and delivers an annual festival in Liverpool's Sefton Park that celebrates and champions African music and culture. Over the past 5 years the festival has brought many high profile African artists to the UK to perform. Yaram Arts Community Interest Company (CIC), another ACE NPO receiving £81,370 per annum, has promoted, presented and supported touring for hundreds of African and world music artists in the UK, Europe and Africa.

**DEFENCE****■ Afghanistan: Home Country Nationals****Tom Gordon:**[\[19939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to tackle delays in processing ARAP applications (a) from people at immediate risk of harm in Afghanistan and (b) generally.

**Luke Pollard:**

It is a priority for this Government to relocate all those eligible under ARAP as quickly as possible, with multiple Government Departments playing a key role to deliver this service.

The Ministry of Defence have received over 107,000 unique applications in total but all require consideration. In addition, the Ministry of Defence receive additional family member applications in relation to most eligible applicants, as well as requests for review of ineligible decisions, all of which must be considered. We are working to process these applications as quickly as possible. However, every case has to be considered individually based on the information available. Where cases are particularly complex, time must be taken to properly take into account all considerations to ensure the right outcome is reached.

**Tom Gordon:**[\[19941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what resources have been allocated to ensure that the ARAP scheme is functioning (a) efficiently and (b) effectively.

**Luke Pollard:**

The successful delivery of the ARAP scheme is contingent on the joint capabilities of the Defence Afghan Relocation and Resettlement (DARR) directorate and the Operation LAZURITE programme.

The Ministry of Defence has allocated £308 million in funding for Afghan resettlement, for this year. As of 1 December 2024, there are also 304 contractors, civilian and military colleagues working within DARR, and 365 Service personnel deployed under Operation LAZURITE, who ensure the ARAP process is efficient and effective; this ranges from determining eligibility, through to providing resettlement support for Afghan eligible principals and their families in the UK.

**■ Armed Forces: Recruitment****Helen Maguire:**[\[20118\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the average time is between first inquiry and enlistment for candidates wishing to serve in the (a) Royal Navy, (b) Royal Air Force and (c) Army.

**Luke Pollard:**

The new Government inherited a crisis in recruitment. We have made it a priority to address this with a series of work streams designed to increase recruitment and renew the contract between the nation and those who serve to improve retention.

Many factors affect the time taken to proceed through the recruiting pipeline. Many candidates proceed much faster than the average when they are well prepared and ready to move quickly. Others take longer, for reasons including:

- Delays in the receipt of primary healthcare records.
- Medical deferment for those requiring time to get medically fit.
- The need to align the start of basic of training with trade training.
- A candidate’s current domestic, employment and housing situation.
- A candidate’s choice regarding pace and level of engagement.

The requested numerical information is provided in the table below, noting that direct comparisons between each Service should be avoided due to the different processes in use; for example, recruits to the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force must achieve a Security Check level of security clearance before joining.

**Average Time of Flight taken between Application and Basic Training Starts for Regular Other Ranks UK Nationals in the 12 Months ending 1 October 2024**

SERVICE	TIME OF FLIGHT (DAYS)
Royal Navy (RN) / Royal Marines (RM)	279
Army	249
Royal Air Force (RAF)	301

**Notes :**

1. Time of Flight is defined as the time passed in days between the date of application and the date of intake to the untrained strength.
2. Average Time of Flight is expressed as the median number of days, meaning that Time of Flight for half of all candidates is shorter than the figures provided, and half is longer. For example, half of RN/RM candidates take up to 279 days, with half taking longer.
3. Application data is taken from the Defence Recruitment System and Recruitment IT System (RN and RAF) and matched to intake data from the Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) system and should reflect time of entry to training.
4. Army figures differ from Recruiting Group (RG) information reported elsewhere due to differing methodologies. The RG figures are intended to support operational decision-makers monitoring operational and pipeline performance.

- 5. Applications from non-UK candidates are excluded, with Nationality as declared on JPA. Army figures include applications from Irish personnel but exclude applications from other countries and those applicants without a known nationality.
- 6. For a small number of Navy personnel, application date is recorded as after their intake date, likely due to outflowing and re-joining the Service. These personnel have been excluded from calculations.
- 7. When an individual has multiple applications to the RAF, the applications closest before their intake was used as the application submission date.
- 8. Where an application date is not held in the data or an application cannot be matched to intake, such as where there is no corresponding service number or National Insurance number, the case is excluded.

■ **Ministry of Defence: Alcoholic Drinks**

**Cat Smith:** [\[19343\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether Ministers in his Department have met with representatives of the alcohol industry since July 2024.

**Al Carns:**  
Details of Ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK. Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

■ **Ministry of Defence: ICT**

**Helen Maguire:** [\[20116\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many of his Department's (a) computers, (b) laptops, (c) phones and (d) USB sticks were (i) lost and (ii) stolen in each month in 2024.

**Maria Eagle:**  
The table below shows the number of computers, USBs, phones and laptops which were either lost or stolen in each month in 2024. The data supplied below is only for incidents which have been closed.

NUMBER OF COMPUTERS, USBs, PHONES AND LAPTOPS WHICH WERE EITHER LOST OR STOLEN IN 2024 (CLOSED INCIDENTS)

	Computers	USBs	Phones	Laptops
January	1	9	13	13
February	4	4	6	7
March	1	5	16	44
April	3	4	13	7

NUMBER OF COMPUTERS, USBs, PHONES AND LAPTOPS WHICH WERE EITHER LOST OR STOLEN IN 2024 (CLOSED INCIDENTS)

May	0	3	10	9
June	5	84	11	7
July	11	12	19	10
August	0	0	6	11
September	0	1	19	8
October	0	2	37	19
November	0	1	4	2
December (up to 15th)	0	0	5	1
Total	25	125	159	138

We take the security of defence assets very seriously and have robust policies and procedures to prevent losses and thefts. Defence personnel are regularly reminded of their responsibilities to safeguard Defence assets.

Proportionate security controls are used to protect electronic devices according to the classification and nature of the information which the asset can hold.

## ■ Ministry of Defence: Temporary Accommodation

**Neil O'Brien:**

[\[19002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many people seeking (a) asylum and (b) humanitarian protection are in accommodation on his Department's property.

**Al Carns:**

There are currently no people seeking asylum or humanitarian protection accommodated on the Defence Estate.

The Secretary of State for Defence recently made an announcement regarding the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP). The ARP is a cross-government delivery programme that will improve efficiency, value for money and outcomes across Afghan Resettlement. This Government has always supported the aims of the Afghan resettlement schemes and we will deliver its commitments to those in Afghanistan who are eligible to relocate and resettle in the UK.

As part of this, the use of the Defence Estate for transitional accommodation will reduce over time however it is currently providing temporary and long-term accommodation to over 5,600 Afghans.

**■ Nuclear-free Zones: Treaties**

**James Cartlidge:** [\[18988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he has had with his US counterparts on the application of the Treaty of Pelindaba to Diego Garcia.

**Luke Pollard:**

The Secretary of State holds regular meetings with US counterparts where they cover a range of issues, including the sovereignty negotiations for the Chagos Archipelago.

**■ Veterans: Radiation Exposure**

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:** [\[19302\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many nuclear veterans have (a) applied for and (b) been refused compensation under the War Pension Scheme.

**AI Carns:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to Question 13419 on 19 November 2024 to the hon. Member for the Wrekin (Mark Pritchard).

**Attachments:**

1. [Veterans: Radiation Exposure](#) [UIN 13419.docx]

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:** [\[19303\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his Department's timetable is for its review of the medical records of nuclear veterans.

**AI Carns:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to Question 17507 on 12 December 2024 to the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes).

**Attachments:**

1. [Veterans: Radiation Exposure](#) [UIN 17507.docx]

**EDUCATION****■ Academies**

**Neil O'Brien:** [\[19004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of (a) primary and (b) secondary schools secured academy status in each year since 2010; and how many of these were in a multi-academy trust.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The attached information details the current number of open academies and free schools, by phase and their respective year of opening, as well as the proportion of state-funded schools this represents.

Of the 11,224 open academies and free schools as of 1 December 2024, 10,352 are part of a multi-academy trust.



**Attachments:**

1. [19004\\_attachment\\_state\\_funded\\_schools\\_2010\\_to\\_2024](#)  
[19004\_state\_funded\_schools\_2010\_to\_2024.xlsx]

**■ Children: Health****Luke Murphy:**[\[19176\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of free school breakfast programmes on children's health outcomes.

**Stephen Morgan:**

This government is committed to delivering on our pledge to provide free breakfast clubs in every state-funded school with primary aged children. We have made early progress towards this, announcing that up to 750 early adopter schools will be delivering these new breakfast clubs by April 2025. We are clear on the impact that breakfast clubs can have to support children to arrive at school ready to learn and support working parents. Having a healthy breakfast at a club can help children get the energy they need to start the school day so that they are ready to learn.

**■ Children: Poverty****Ben Coleman:**[\[19215\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the nature is of her Department's consultation with (a) charities representing disabled children and (b) disabled young people on the development of the Child Poverty Strategy.

**Ben Coleman:**[\[19216\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with which charities representing disabled children her Department has consulted on the development of the Child Poverty Strategy.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The Child Poverty Taskforce, of which my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education is co-chair, is building on the wealth of existing evidence and expertise across the UK to develop an ambitious strategy to reduce child poverty. We are listening carefully to the voices of children and families living in poverty, including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Examples of the engagement we have undertaken are events with Contact, a charity for families with disabled children, ALLFIE, a campaign group focused on including disabled learners in mainstream education, and the Challenging Behaviour Foundation, which aims to improve opportunities for young people with severe learning disabilities and their families.

The Taskforce recognises that poverty impacts the whole family so, alongside this, a forum of parents and carers has been brought together to input to the strategy. The approach has been designed to be inclusive and capture the experiences of a broad range of parents, carers and children, including those with SEND.

## ■ Holiday Activities and Food Programme

**Yasmin Qureshi:** [\[18921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had recent discussions with local authorities on the future of the Holiday Activities and Food programme after March 2025.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The department has received its overall budget and we are now working through the details of the budget settlement. Departmental budgets for 2025/26 will be confirmed in due course, including the exact funding available for this type of support for children, young people and families during the holidays.

## ■ Learning Disability: Work Experience

**Damian Hinds:** [\[18924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that people with learning disabilities can access work experience opportunities.

**Damian Hinds:** [\[18925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to ensure that people with learning disabilities are able to access as many work experience opportunities as people without learning disabilities.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department is committed to ensuring that young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have equitable access to work experience opportunities.

Data published by the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) provides evidence of an increase in positive outcomes for young people with SEND. SEND settings are outperforming mainstream institutions against Gatsby Benchmark 6, 'experiences of workplaces', with 77% of special schools reporting that the majority of learners had experience of workplaces by the end of year 11, increasing to 88% in year 12 or 13. By comparison, in mainstream schools 76% of students had an experience of a workplace by the end of year 11, rising to 84% in year 12 or year 13.

Our work experience guarantee will ensure that all pupils are provided with two weeks' worth of work experience over the course of their secondary education by the end of this Parliament. These opportunities must be inclusive and accessible for all young people with learning disabilities in schools across England.

Through our delivery partner, CEC, we are piloting the delivery of this guarantee. This includes testing a ringfenced 'disadvantage premium' to assist schools with the costs of work experience for disabled pupils, such as transportation and assisted travel, and the development of a virtual work experience platform to improve the accessibility of opportunities. Piloting work began in October 2024 with end of pilot reporting in August 2025.

## ■ Members: Correspondence

**Clive Jones:**

[\[19163\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Wokingham on the British Psychological Society campaign for reform of the SEND system, dated 10 October 2024.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

I can confirm that a response to the correspondence dated 10 October 2024 from the hon. Member for Wokingham was sent on 15 October 2024.

## ■ Pupils: Disadvantaged

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[18993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of (a) living in temporary accommodation, (b) being a child at risk, (c) being a looked-after child and (d) being a child of UK armed services personnel on the educational attainment of children at each of the key stages from early years to KS4.

**Janet Daby:**

This government's Opportunity Mission will break the link between young people's backgrounds and their future success, ensuring family security and providing the best start in life, with all children achieving and thriving and building skills for opportunity and growth.

Too often opportunity for children and young people is defined by their background. We know that disadvantaged young people face barriers to engagement with education, which can have a negative impact on their educational outcomes. This can include practical barriers like insecure housing. If children are unable to engage with education, it doesn't matter how good teaching and learning is, they will not benefit.

From April 2025, we will be rolling out Family Help Services that will prioritise supporting the whole family and intervening at the earliest opportunity to prevent challenges escalating. Lead practitioners will undertake assessments of all needs of the family, including those who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness, and work to support families where this may be part of a more complex set of needs.

As announced at the Autumn Budget 2024, funding for homelessness services is increasing next year by £233 million compared to this year, 2024/25. This increased spending will help to prevent rises in the number of families in temporary accommodation and help to prevent rough sleeping. This brings total spend to nearly £1 billion in 2025/26.

The impact of pre-care and care experience can also be a significant barrier to a child's educational achievement. In 2022/23 at key stage 2, 37% of children in care for at least 12 months and 30% of children in need achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, which is significantly lower than all pupils (60%). However, it is important to recognise that 49.9% of children in need and 58.1% of

children in care for at least 12 months have a special educational need, including mental health needs.

All local authorities have a statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of children in their care and are required to appoint a virtual school head (VSH), who is responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational outcomes of the authority's looked after children, including those placed out of authority, and for championing their progress. While VSHs have had an overwhelmingly positive impact on the outcomes of looked-after children, we want to see the same for all children with a social worker. This is why we intend to extend the role on a statutory basis to support educational outcomes of all children on child in need and child protection plans, as announced in our policy statement 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive'.

Service children's attainment at school is on a par with that of non-service children and they achieve very well at school. However, children who move frequently perform less well than those who move school less often or not at all, whilst service pupils can also experience additional needs relating to their emotional and social well-being. Service children attract Service Pupil Premium, which is currently worth £340 per pupil and can be used by schools to help improve their wellbeing and educational progress.

## ■ Schools: Neurodiversity

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**

[\[19217\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make it her policy to fund the Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools programme beyond 2025.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life. The department is committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools.

The Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) programme brings together integrated care boards, local authorities and schools, working in partnership with parents and carers to support schools to better meet the needs of neurodiverse children and their families. PINS deploys specialists from health and education workforces to build teacher and staff capacity to identify and meet the needs of neurodiverse children in around 1,600, or 10%, mainstream primary schools. The programme is being evaluated and the learning will inform future policy development around how schools support neurodiverse children.

The Spending Review for 2025/26 has been allocated and business planning is underway so that programmes can be given certainty about funding as soon as possible.

## ■ Special Educational Needs: Transport

**Manuela Perteghella:**

[\[19120\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make it her policy to extend home-to-school transport for SEND students to include those in post-16 education.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

I refer the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon to the answer of 11 September 2024 to Question [4162](#).

## ■ Teachers: Safety

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[18941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to increase the safety of teachers.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

Teachers should not be subjected to any form of abuse simply for doing their jobs. Any form of violence in school is completely unacceptable and should not be tolerated.

All school employers, including trusts, have a duty to protect the health, safety, and welfare of their employees.

By law, schools must have a behaviour policy. It is for school leaders to develop and implement behaviour policies that work for their own schools and school community. Any policy must be lawful, proportionate and reasonable, and comply with the school's duties under the Equality Act 2010, Education and Inspections Act 2006, and Human Rights Act 1998.

While the department expects schools to take immediate and robust action if incidents of violence occur, any decision on how to sanction the pupil involved is a matter for the school. In the most serious cases, suspensions and permanent exclusion may be necessary to ensure that teachers and pupils are protected from disruption and to maintain safe, calm environments. Should the incident constitute a criminal offence, the school should report it to the police.

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

## ■ Boilers: Carbon Emissions

**Mr Joshua Reynolds:**

[\[19211\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of zero emission domestic boilers on the transition to net zero.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

Zero emission boilers, or heat batteries are a promising technology because they utilise time-of-use tariffs, do not require outside space, and can be cheaper to install than heat pumps in some circumstances. However, they are also less efficient than heat pumps and will therefore use more energy to meet the same heating demand.

The Department is exploring, through studies like the Homes for Net Zero Trial, the role heat batteries could play in the future. We will continue to review our position on heat batteries, and other alternative electric heating technologies, as the supporting evidence base develops.

**■ Climate Change Convention****Uma Kumaran:**[\[19186\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for (a) his policies and (b) the IPCC's seventh assessment cycle of negotiations on the Global Stocktake at COP29 in Baku.

**Kerry McCarthy:**

The UK is fully committed to taking forward the outcomes of the Global Stocktake, including through our recently announced 1.5 aligned Nationally Determined Contribution of at least 81% reduction in emissions by 2035 based on 1990 levels. We are disappointed that COP29 failed to follow up on historic commitments made at COP28 and will champion ambition to ensure that COP30 delivers on implementation of the Global Stocktake. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is expected to agree the scope and timeline for the publication of its Seventh Assessment Report at its next plenary in February 2025.

**■ Climate Change: Finance****Harriet Cross:**[\[19573\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what the potential cost to the public purse is of the Government's international climate finance commitments since July 2024; and if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of this spending on the funding available for energy infrastructure projects.

**Kerry McCarthy:**

The Government has made a number of spending commitments since July to deliver the UK's pledge, announced in 2019, to spend £11.6 billion in International Climate Finance (ICF) between April 2021 and March 2026. The £11.6 billion commitment is from the UK's Official Development Assistance budget, currently set on a temporary basis at 0.5% per cent of Gross National Income.

■ **Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**

**Emily Thornberry:**

[\[18910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how much his Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) was created in February 2023, so no information is held for periods prior to that date.

However, even though DESNZ was set up in February 2023, the spilt across GPC cards was not done at that point and was much later, all data prior to 2024 was recorded as BEIS, so we hold no DESNZ data for 2023.

■ **Fuel Poverty: Lambeth**

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**

[\[19034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps the Government is taking to reduce the number of people dying in fuel poverty in Lambeth.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Government is committed to a preventative approach to public health. Keeping people warm and well at home and improving the quality of new and existing homes will play an essential part in enabling people to live longer, healthier lives, reducing pressures on the NHS.

There are multiple targeted schemes delivering energy efficiency measures to low-income and fuel poor households. The Warm Home Discount schemes provide a £150 rebate off bills to eligible low-income households across Great Britain.

The Government has kickstarted delivery of the Warm Homes Plan, including an initial £1.8 billion to support fuel poverty schemes over the next 3 years.

■ **Fuel Poverty: Liverpool**

**Kim Johnson:**

[\[19070\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to the Marie Curie report Dying in Poverty, published on 12 November 2024, what steps his Department is taking to help (a) tackle fuel poverty and (b) reduce the number of people who die in fuel poverty in Liverpool each year.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Government is committed to a preventative approach to public health. Keeping people warm and well at home and improving the quality of new and existing homes will play an essential part in enabling people to live longer, healthier lives, reducing pressures on the NHS.



There are multiple targeted schemes delivering energy efficiency measures to low-income and fuel poor households. The Warm Home Discount schemes provide a £150 rebate off bills to eligible low-income households across Great Britain.

The Government has kickstarted delivery of the Warm Homes Plan, including an initial £1.8 billion to support fuel poverty schemes over the next 3 years.

## ■ Geothermal Power

**Dr Roz Savage:** [\[19616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department is taking steps to help develop deep geothermal energy resources.

**Kerry McCarthy:**

We know that to achieve net zero, we must look at how we can accelerate the potential of all low carbon technologies including geothermal. The Government understands that geothermal can play a role in our decarbonisation ambitions. The Green Heat Network Fund is able to support applications for heat network investments utilising deep geothermal heat, and geothermal technologies that generate electricity are eligible for the Contracts for Difference scheme. We have also commissioned research into unlocking geothermal heat in the UK and will use this to understand how the government can support the sector to achieve its potential.

## ■ Greenhouse Gas Emissions

**Uma Kumaran:** [\[19187\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to his Written Statement of 12 November 2024 on the UK's 2035 Nationally Determined Contribution emissions reduction target under the Paris Agreement, HCWS206, what steps his Department is taking to assess the potential health impacts of different pathways for implementing mitigation ambitions.

**Kerry McCarthy:**

The UK's 2035 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), to reduce all greenhouse gas emissions by at least 81% on 1990 levels is an economy-wide target, covering all greenhouse gases, sectors and categories and aligned with limiting global warming to 1.5c. Our NDC is aligned with the advice of the independent Climate Change Committee (CCC) and consistent with the effort required to deliver our ambitious Carbon Budget 6 (2033-2037). In providing advice on pathways to meet CB6 and the UK's 2050 Net Zero target, the CCC emphasised the host of health benefits attached to the net zero transition and appointed an expert advisory group on Health to support their advice.

## ■ Joint European Torus

**Tim Farron:** [\[19670\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent discussions he has had with international partners on the future of the JET fusion project.



**Kerry McCarthy:**

JET has been at the forefront of fusion research and innovation, and its final experiments produced a world record in energy output. However, JET is now 40 years old. An evaluation undertaken by EUROfusion in 2016 concluded that upgrades to JET did not provide value for money and it was decided to plan for the end of scientific operations. JET decommissioning will generate valuable knowledge for future fusion endeavours, alongside UK investment in new facilities. We are not aware of any instances where the decommissioning of JET has been raised by the EU Commission in discussion with UK ministers.

■ **National Grid****Nick Timothy:**[\[19978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department has taken to identify the (a) location and (b) severity of capacity constraints in the energy transmission network.

**Michael Shanks:**

National Energy System Operator (NESO) is responsible for strategic network planning of transmission infrastructure. NESO considers the network design objectives of economic efficiency, deliverability and operability, environmental impacts, and community impacts when making recommendations for infrastructure. Recommendations were previously based on NESO's Network Options Assessment which considered network constraints in its analysis. In future recommendations will be based on NESO's Future Energy Pathways, which includes modelling of energy supply and demand considering network capacity constraints, and the forthcoming Strategic Spatial Energy Plan.

■ **Natural Gas: Storage****Chris Hinchliff:**[\[20549\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of improving the longevity of gas storage capacity.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Government recognises the value in having natural gas storage facilities in place as a source of balancing system flexibility when demand for gas is high and allowing for the future storage of hydrogen. Energy security remains a key priority for this government. The Government will continue to work with storage operators, as well as the regulatory community, to explore options around the role storage can play in supporting future gas system resilience in a changing gas landscape.

**■ Renewable Energy****Claire Coutinho:** [\[19410\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when he plans to publish his Department's assessment of the full systems costs of a fully decarbonised, renewables-based grid by 2030.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Government published the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan 'a new era of clean electricity' on 13 December 2024 detailing our plan to achieve deliver clean power by 2030.

**■ Renewable Energy: Environment Protection****Nick Timothy:** [\[19981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of expanding (a) offshore wind, (b) onshore wind and (c) solar energy on environmental conservation.

**Michael Shanks:**

We have important checks and balances in the planning system that require extensive up-front environmental surveying, and for decision makers to ensure statutory environmental and habitats impact assessments are conducted as part of the planning determination.

**■ Renewable Energy: Land Use****Nick Timothy:** [\[19983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether an assessment has been made of the potential impact of expanding (a) onshore wind and (b) solar energy on the availability of agricultural land.

**Michael Shanks:**

Current planning policies guide developments away from using Best and Most Versatile agricultural land where possible. Developers will submit information on land use and classification when seeking planning consent, and this information will be taken into account by decision makers. However, Government does not set a prescriptive approach and as such does not hold this information.

**■ Solar Power: Batteries****Nick Timothy:** [\[19985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department has made a determination of the recommended safe distance between residential dwellings and solar PV farm battery energy storage systems.

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[19986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of (a) police, (b) ambulance and (c) fire rescue services located near solar photovoltaic farm battery energy storage systems.

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[19987\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, which solar PV farm battery energy storage systems are deemed to be within an unsafe distance from a residential dwelling.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Government has updated Planning Practice Guidance to encourage battery storage developers and local planning authorities to engage with local fire and rescue services, and for local planning authorities to refer to guidance published by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). The NFCC's current guidance proposes a minimum distance of 25 metres between grid-scale batteries and occupied buildings.

The Department only considers consenting for solar projects over 50MW, and under this regime no solar PV farm battery has been consented which has been deemed an unsafe distance from a residential dwelling. Projects below 50MW are considered under the local planning regime.

## ■ Solar Power: Supply Chains

**Alicia Kearns:**

[\[19973\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment process his Department uses to determine if solar companies operating in the UK have supply chain links to forced labour.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Government opposes all forms of forced labour and is determined to ensure that all UK business do everything in their power to remove any instances of it from their supply chains. However, the UK Government does not hold data about the supply chains of individual companies.

Solar Energy UK, who co-chair the Solar Taskforce, is leading the industry's response on this matter by developing and launching the Solar Stewardship Initiative (SSI), in partnership with Solar Power Europe. Members of the SSI have committed to applying its traceability standards and audits, while encouraging its adoption throughout their supply chain.

**Alicia Kearns:**

[\[19975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many solar companies based in the UK his Department has assessed to have supply chain links to forced labour.

**Michael Shanks:**

The UK Government does not hold data about the supply chains of individual companies.

The Solar Roadmap, to be published in Spring 2025, will outline the actions required develop supply chains that are resilient, sustainable, and free from forced labour.

The UK's main solar industry trade association – Solar Energy UK, who co-chair the Solar Taskforce - is leading the industry's response on this matter by developing and launching the Solar Stewardship Initiative (SSI), in partnership with Solar Power Europe. Members of the SSI have committed to applying its traceability standards and audits, while encouraging its adoption throughout their supply chain.

■ **Wind Power: Seas and Oceans**

**Claire Young:** [\[19791\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he is taking steps to use maritime spatial planning to identify areas with high potential for the development of offshore wind energy.

**Michael Shanks:**

In October 2024, the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments jointly commissioned the NESO to produce a Strategic Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP) for Great Britain. This more strategic approach to planning will help accelerate the government's clean energy superpower mission, including through the development of offshore wind.

This first SSEP will cover infrastructure for power generation, including offshore generation in Great British waters, so that the government can create a more efficient electricity network and reduce waiting times for generation projects to connect to the grid. This will move to a whole energy system plan in future iterations.

The SSEP will sit alongside the existing Marine Spatial Prioritisation programme, as well as wider planning reform, whilst respecting devolved competencies.

**ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**

■ **Agriculture**

**Dr Beccy Cooper:** [\[17435\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to his speech to the 2024 Country Land and Business Association conference of 21 November 2024, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the proposed 25-year farming roadmap to include (a) food and (b) food consumption.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

At the Country Land and Business Association conference, Defra communicated that we would work together with farmers on a 25-year roadmap. This means we will not be telling farmers what to do. The 25-year farming roadmap will be co-produced to

transition to new models that are more environmentally, and more financially, sustainable for the long-term.

Defra will focus on making farming and food production more profitable and sustainable for decades to come.

## ■ Agriculture: Grants

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[20070\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the closure of Capital Grant Applications on (a) farm productivity and (b) food security.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

We have allocated the largest ever budget for sustainable food production through the farming budget. In the first week of December, we paid £343 million into the rural economy, benefiting more than 31,000 farmers. After unprecedented demand, parts of the Capital Grant have been temporarily closed. Protection and Infrastructure grants, Woodland Tree Health grants, Capital Grants plans, Woodland Management Plan and Higher Tier Capital Grants all remain open. We are reviewing the offer to ensure funding goes further to improve outcomes for food security and nature conservation and will provide an update in early 2025.

## ■ Chemicals: Exports

**Graham Leadbitter:**

[\[19564\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to align the UK's regulations with the EU's recent prohibition on exporting banned chemicals to countries where they remain permitted.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Government is committed to protecting human health and the environment.

Requirements for the export of hazardous chemicals are agreed at the international level under the Rotterdam Convention. In GB, the export of certain hazardous chemicals is regulated through the GB Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Regulation .

The regulatory requirements under GB PIC are the same as under the EU PIC Regulation but the UK now makes its own decisions under PIC and other chemicals legislation.

We continue to monitor developments in other countries and learn from their experiences.

## ■ Climate Change

**Alex Easton:**

[\[19181\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he is taking steps to increase the use of nature-based solutions to tackle climate change.

**Emma Hardy:**

Defra has a vital role to play to ensure nature-based solutions are a core part of tackling climate change and averting its impacts. Nature-based solutions deliver multiple benefits for climate, biodiversity and people, and can therefore play a critical role in helping deliver the Government's priorities, such as ensuring nature recovery. Defra's Secretary of State has made nature recovery one of the five top priorities for the Department.

This Government is committed to achieving its tree planting targets and is committed to the legal target to plant 16.5% tree cover by 2050. We will also restore hundreds of thousands of hectares of peatland and we are developing delivery mechanisms for peatland restoration.

Defra has secured a farm support budget of £2.4 billion for the next financial year. This means we can maintain the momentum of our Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes, which will rise to the highest funding levels ever by 2025/26. Through this investment, we are helping to secure a healthy and resilient future for English farming and restore our natural landscapes for generations to come whilst continuing to support farmers and landowners in their low-carbon, nature friendly practices.

**■ Landscape Recovery Scheme****Caroline Voaden:**[\[20095\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when the third round of Landscape Recovery will open for applications.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

This Government reconfirmed its commitment to Environmental Land Management schemes in the recent Spending Review, where we prioritised directing investment to these schemes as part of the largest ever budget directed at sustainable food production and nature's recovery in our country's history.

As a core element of the Environmental Land Management schemes, Landscape Recovery is uniquely placed to provide large-scale, long-term benefits for nature, delivering improvements to biodiversity, carbon emissions, water quality, air quality, flood resilience and food security.

Landscape Recovery projects that were awarded funding in rounds one and two are continuing, and we are continuing to move into the delivery phase with the first round of projects. Plans for a third round of Landscape Recovery will be confirmed in due course.

**■ Public Sector: Rural Areas****Blake Stephenson:**[\[901934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the equality of access to public services in rural areas.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Public bodies, in exercising their statutory responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), consider the adequacy of equality of access to public services, including through the use of tools such as Equality Impact Assessments.

We are already working across Government to ensure that all policy decision making is rural proofed, which will help ensure that rural communities are not disadvantaged by policy developments and their implementation.

**Rivers: Environment Protection****Helen Maguire:**[\[18071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his department is taking to help protect chalk streams from (a) pollution and (b) overextraction.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Government is committed to the protection and restoration of our cherished chalk streams. We have taken immediate action to clean up our waterways, including a new Water (Special Measures) Bill to ban the payment of unfair bonuses to polluting water bosses, and bring criminal charges against those who persistently break the law. In October we launched an independent commission into the water sector regulatory system to deliver transformative change to the water system.

We are investing in initiatives to improve chalk streams including 55 projects this financial year through the Water Environment Improvement Fund. As part of the Water Resources Chalk Partnership Fund, this financial year, the Government will contribute £1m for chalk stream projects with partners on 30 projects, aimed at safeguarding these rare and irreplaceable habitats.

We are committed to ending damaging abstraction of water from rivers and groundwater wherever possible. We will make full use of our existing powers to amend abstraction licences to protect and improve the environment and make sure water companies deliver the improvements in their current business plans, including licence reductions of around 100 million litres per day in chalk streams.

Through the Price Review 2024, Ofwat will set out the next cycle of planned water company investment covering 2025-2030, which will include further actions to restore chalk streams. The exact funding is currently being determined by Ofwat, with final determinations due to be published on 19 December. Environmental requirements for abstraction reductions to improve chalk streams flows are part of the environmental planning scenarios that Regional Water Resources Groups and water companies have included in their planning to 2050.



**■ Water: Standards**

**Nick Timothy:** [\[19476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he is taking steps to consult (a) angling clubs and (b) fishery owners on reforms to the Bathing Water Regulations 2013.

**Emma Hardy:**

Defra and the Welsh Government are currently running a six-week consultation on proposed reforms to the Bathing Water Regulations 2013, which closes on 23 December. We encourage all interested parties to respond to the consultation. Both Defra Ministers and officials have engaged with stakeholders before and following the launch of the public consultation. We have engaged with fishery stakeholders including the angling community and fishery conservation organisations in public forums and correspondence. We will continue to work closely with stakeholders as we progress with any proposed changes.

**Nick Timothy:** [\[19477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to consult on the proposal in Wider Reform 1 to redefine multiple watercrafts and others as 'bathers'.

**Emma Hardy:**

Defra and the Welsh Government are currently running a six-week consultation on proposed reforms to the Bathing Water Regulations 2013, which closes on 23 December. In this consultation, we are calling for evidence on a wider reform for potential future development, regarding the clarification and expansion of the definition of 'bathers'. We are seeking views on whether a wider range of water users should be considered, and if so, what other types of users should be included and how their needs can be balanced against current users. We encourage all parties to respond to the consultation.

**Nick Timothy:** [\[19478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has carried out an impact assessment for proposed changes to the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 on (a) fisheries, (b) fish spawning grounds, and (c) riparian rights.

**Emma Hardy:**

Defra and the Welsh Government are currently running a six-week consultation on proposed reforms to the Bathing Water Regulations 2013, which closes on 23 December. We have engaged with fishery stakeholders and encourage all interested parties to respond to the consultation. The Government will consider all responses to the consultation before publishing a government response to the consultation. Following this response, an assessment of impacts will be considered if appropriate.



**FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE****■ Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement****Fabian Hamilton:**[\[19633\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when the Government plans to ratify the Global Oceans Treaty.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The Government is completely committed to ratification of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement, also known as the Global Oceans Treaty or the High Seas Treaty), which is in line with our determination to reinvigorate the UK's wider international leadership on climate and nature. Work is in hand on the measures needed to implement the detailed and complex provisions of the Agreement before the UK can ratify.

**■ Diego Garcia: Military Bases****Mr Mark Francois:**[\[18899\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has negotiated legal agreements with Mauritius that preserve the operational freedom of the military base on Diego Garcia in relation to nuclear-related activities.

**Stephen Doughty:**

Our primary goal within the Agreement is to protect the joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia, which plays a crucial role in regional and international security. Our approach will ensure the operation of the base will continue unchanged with strong protections from malign influence, while also remaining compatible with our international obligations. Details of the Treaty will be presented to Parliament in due course, through the normal treaty scrutiny processes.

**Mr Mark Francois:**[\[18902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the transfer of sovereignty over Diego Garcia to Mauritius on restrictions on the (a) storage, (b) deployment and (c) transit of (i) nuclear weapons and (ii) nuclear-powered vessels at the UK-US base.

**Stephen Doughty:**

Our primary goal within the Agreement is to protect the joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia, which plays a crucial role in regional and international security. Our approach will ensure the operation of the base will continue unchanged with strong protections from malign influence, while also remaining compatible with our international obligations. Details of the Treaty will be presented to Parliament in due course, through the normal treaty scrutiny processes.

**■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Alcoholic Drinks****Cat Smith:** [\[19338\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many alcohol industry representatives Ministers in his Department have met since July 2024.

**Catherine West:**

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK. Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

**■ France: Religious Practice****Jim Shannon:** [\[18544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with the Holy See on the future of the Tridentine Mass at the Chartres pilgrimage in France.

**Stephen Doughty:**

This is an internal matter for the Catholic Church. We continue to engage the Holy See regularly bilaterally and in multilateral fora on areas of mutual interest. Most recently, on 27 November Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner met Cardinal Parolin, with whom she discussed homelessness, inter-faith dialogue and climate.

**■ Gaza and Lebanon: Humanitarian Aid****Mary Glendon:** [\[18122\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help support humanitarian organisations in (a) Gaza and (b) Lebanon to prepare for winter.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK is committed to alleviating humanitarian suffering in both Lebanon and Gaza, particularly with the arrival of winter. The Foreign Secretary, together with his French and German counterparts, has written to Israeli Foreign Minister Sa'ar to urge Israel to ensure sufficient aid, including vital medical treatment, reaches civilians in Gaza. Minister Dodds also raised aid restrictions in her meetings with Israeli interlocutors during her recent visit to the region, including with Deputy Foreign Minister Haskel. I raised this issue with Minister Haskel on 05 December and met with Mr Philippe Lazzarini, the UN's Commissioner-General of UNWRA in Doha on 08 December. The UK has announced £112 million for the Occupied Palestinian Territories so far this financial year, providing vital services to civilians in Gaza and the West Bank delivered through partner agencies. Additionally, we have provided £46 million in support to Lebanon, of which £15 million is additional funding to respond to the widespread lack of shelter, and reduced access to clean water, hygiene and healthcare.

## ■ International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace

**Matt Western:**

[\[16999\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of working with his international counterparts to establish an international fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

This government has prioritised working to end this conflict and secure the safe release of hostages, in co-ordination with international partners, since day one. We will continue to use every diplomatic lever to bring about a ceasefire deal as the first step towards long-term peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians, and the wider region. The Prime Minister has pledged his support for the establishment of an International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace. Speaking on December 2, 2024, he announced plans for the Foreign Secretary to convene an "inaugural meeting in London to support civil society in the region, as part of that work to negotiate a two-state solution." The Foreign Secretary and I welcome the opportunity to discuss further with civil society organisations their work and the prospects for peacebuilding. The Foreign Secretary has raised the issue of securing long-term peace in all his meetings with counterparts across the region, in addition to the US, Germany and France. The UK will play our full diplomatic role in ending this conflict and creating a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.

## ■ Israel: Palestinians

**Matt Western:**

[\[17000\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to include Israeli-Palestinian civil society peacebuilding in diplomatic resolutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Prime Minister has pledged his support for the establishment of an International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace. Speaking on December 2, 2024, he announced plans for the Foreign Secretary to convene an "inaugural meeting in London to support civil society in the region, as part of that work to negotiate a two-state solution."

This government has been clear; we are committed to pursuing a lasting solution to the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict, including through achieving a two-state solution. We continue to support efforts to this end through our aid programmes, which assist civil society in Israel and Palestine on a range of issues, including peacebuilding and conflict resolution. I have met with representatives of the Alliance for Middle East Peace to discuss their proposal for an International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace. The Foreign Secretary and I welcome the opportunity to discuss further with civil society organisations their work and the prospects for peacebuilding. We further

support grassroots local peacebuilding efforts between Israeli and Palestinian civil society, for example on more inclusive and conflict-sensitive journalism.

## ■ Jagtar Singh Johal

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[20020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his counterpart in India on the detention of Jagtar Singh Johal.

**Catherine West:**

We remain absolutely committed to pushing the Government of India for faster progress to resolve Jagtar Singh Johal's case. The Foreign Secretary has raised Mr Johal's case with his Indian counterpart on several occasions, most recently on 25 November. This is in addition to other UK Government Ministers raising the case with Indian counterparts, including the Prime Minister, who raised Mr Johal's case with Prime Minister Modi on 18 November. I raised Mr Johal's case on 19 November with the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs.

## ■ Mauritius: Treaties

**Wendy Morton:** [\[18944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what his planned timetable is for laying the agreement with Mauritius before Parliament for ratification.

**Stephen Doughty:**

Following signature, the Treaty will be laid before Parliament in the usual way, consistent with the Constitutional Reform and Governance (CraG) Act 2010. The Government also intends to bring forward a Bill to implement the Treaty in domestic law, as soon as Parliamentary schedule allows.

We will keep the House updated.

## ■ Myanmar: Armed Conflict

**Stephen Gethins:** [\[20014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the conflict in Myanmar.

**Catherine West:**

Since the coup in February 2021, the UK has provided more than £150 million for life-saving humanitarian assistance, healthcare, education and support for civil society and local communities in Myanmar. UK Ministers and officials work with many international partners to address the Myanmar crisis including the EU. G7 Foreign Ministers reiterated their commitment to addressing the Myanmar crisis in their November 2024 Foreign Ministers' Meeting. FCDO officials continue to coordinate with the EU on sanctions, including announcing a joint round of sanctions with

Canada in October 2024 which targets the Myanmar military's access to military material, equipment and funds.

## ■ Nagorno Karabakh: Humanitarian Situation

**Stephen Gethins:**

[\[20015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he last had discussions with his Azerbaijani counterpart on the humanitarian situation in Nagorno Karabakh.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The UK remains in close contact with the Azerbaijani Government on a wide range of issues, including the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. I spoke with the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister on 31 October and discussed the situation in the region.

## ■ Russia: Oil

**Calum Miller:**

[\[17470\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to his oral contribution in response to the question from the hon. Member for Bicester and Woodstock on 26 November 2024, Official Report, column 631, what the value is of fines that have been (a) levied and (b) paid following a breach of sanctions in relation to oil exports from Russia since 5 February 2023.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Government is committed to strengthening sanctions enforcement. I launched a cross-Government review to ensure we have the right powers, approach, capacity and resourcing on sanctions enforcement. The Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation is the UK's competent authority responsible for the implementation of the UK's ban on the maritime transportation of Russian oil and oil products and associated services. The Department for Business and Trade implemented the UK ban of Russian oil and oil products and HMRC are responsible for its enforcement. No fines have been issued for violations of either measure. The Foreign Secretary recently announced a new wave of sanctions to choke Russian oil revenues: [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-imposes-new-wave-of-sanctions-choking-russian-oil-revenues-with-foreign-secretary-arriving-in-italy-for-g7>]

## ■ Sanctions: Enforcement

**Alex Sobel:**

[\[18176\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps to increase resources for enforcement agencies to (a) investigate and (b) prosecute complex sanctions evasion schemes.

**Stephen Doughty:**

A range of Departments have responsibility for the enforcement of UK sanctions, including the Home Office, Department for Business and Trade, Department for Transport and HM Treasury. Resourcing is decided by those Departments and their

agencies in conjunction with HM Treasury. I launched a cross-Government review of sanctions at the first Small Ministerial Group on enforcement in October. The review is examining whether we have the right powers, approach, capacity and resourcing on policy, implementation and enforcement, with an urgent focus on strengthening the latter. It is being led by the FCDO in collaboration with key sanctions Departments.

■ **Syria: Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes**

**Alicia Kearns:** [\[19063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps to send justice and accountability experts to Syria to collect evidence of (a) war crimes and (b) crimes against humanity by the regime led by Bashar Al-Assad.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We are currently considering options for building on our ongoing accountability work in Syria. In the meantime, we will continue to support partners who are playing a pivotal role in developing a credible evidence base to record atrocities committed by the former regime and others. This year alone, we have committed £1.15 million to accountability and documentation related programmes. In addition, we will continue to work with our international partners and civil society to advocate for and support mechanisms such as the UN International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) and Independent Institution for Missing Persons (IIMP) to ensure that accountability is a core part of the transitional process.

■ **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons**

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[18645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether a Minister will attend the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in March 2025.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Government does not believe the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) will bring us closer to a world without nuclear weapons. The UK will not sign, ratify or engage with the Treaty and will not send Observers to the Third Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW. The Government firmly believes that the best way to achieve our collective goal of a world without nuclear weapons is through gradual multilateral disarmament negotiated using a step-by-step approach, under the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

■ **Tyler Kerry**

**James McMurdock:** [\[18852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) support the family of Tyler Kerry following his death in Turkey and (b) help ensure that their concerns about the investigation are addressed.

**James McMurdock:**

**[18853]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has had recent discussions with the Turkish authorities on (a) access to evidence and (b) transparency in the investigation of Tyler Kerry's death.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has been providing consular support to Mr Kerry's family since 29 November. FCDO support for bereaved families includes providing guidance on bereavement support; repatriation; and media handling alongside information about relevant police investigations. Due to relevant data protection legislation, we are unable to discuss the details of the support we are providing to Mr Kerry's family or our engagement with Turkish authorities. It is for local authorities to conduct investigations relating to deaths in their jurisdiction. UK police can pass on concerns from affected families to overseas counterparts via Interpol. Our sincere condolences and sympathies are with his family and friends at this difficult time.

**James McMurdock:**

**[18857]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support the family of Tyler Kerry following his death in Turkey.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has been providing consular support to Mr Kerry's family since 29 November. Due to relevant data protection legislation, we are unable to discuss the details of the support we are providing to Mr Kerry's family. However, FCDO support for bereaved families includes providing guidance on bereavement support; repatriation; and media handling alongside information about relevant police investigations. Our sincere condolences and sympathies are with his family and friends at this difficult time.

**James McMurdock:**

**[18858]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help ensure a thorough investigation into the death in Turkey of Tyler Kerry.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has been providing consular support to Mr Kerry's family since 29 November. Due to relevant data protection legislation, we are unable to discuss the details of the support we are providing to Mr Kerry's family or our engagement with Turkish authorities. It is for local authorities to conduct investigations relating to deaths in their jurisdiction. With the consent of families, we can register our interest in investigations relating to British nationals and request updates on their scope and progress. Our sincere condolences and sympathies are with his family and friends at this difficult time.



## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ Alzheimer's Disease: Knowsley

**Anneliese Midgley:** [\[19102\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of people living with Alzheimer's in Knowsley constituency; and what plans his Department has to improve dementia (a) diagnosis and (b) care for those people.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

According to data from the Alzheimer's Society, Knowsley's prevalence of people living with dementia currently stands at 2,200, with a diagnosis rate of approximately 64%. There are thought to be 982,000 living with dementia in the United Kingdom.

Those suspected of living with dementia are referred into the Later Life and Memory Service (LLAMS) within Knowsley, and assessments are completed within 10 days. A recent national audit shown that Knowsley's overall wait time from assessment to diagnosis is 110 days, compared to the national average of 151 days. Following diagnosis, the LLAMS will deliver continued care, treatment, and support in line with guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. The service provides a named nurse, non-pharmaceutical therapies, and medication options.

There is a Dementia Care Navigator within Knowsley, which means any person living with a diagnosis of dementia is never discharged from a memory service. This offers a streamlined and accessible service without the need for new general practice referrals.

The Knowsley LLAMS began a pilot scheme, funded by NHS England, to improve diagnosis rates in Knowsley care homes, using the Diadem tool. They liaised with care homes to identify any residents who may be living in care homes without a formal dementia diagnosis, and were able to diagnose a further 40 residents with unspecified dementia, or refer them back to services for the full memory pathway.

### ■ Antenatal Care: Accident and Emergency Departments

**Helen Hayes:** [\[18572\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the availability of early pregnancy services in A&E departments (a) at weekends and (b) overnight.

**Karin Smyth:**

No assessment has been made of the adequacy of the availability of early pregnancy services in accident and emergency departments. It is vital that women seeking support, including in early pregnancy, get the care they need. We will continue to work with NHS England to improve the Early Pregnancy Assessment Units' (EPAUs) services, where the Pregnancy Loss Review found variation in the availability of EPAUs.



We encourage all women who have concerns about their pregnancy to seek help from a healthcare professional. Accident and emergency departments are 24-hour services, so a person presenting with concerns related to early pregnancy would initially be assessed by an emergency medicine clinician. Where further specialist care is needed, the person would be supported in an Early Pregnancy Assessment Clinic, or through the attendance of an obstetrician at the accident and emergency.

## ■ **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Autism: Cheshire and Merseyside**

**Mike Amesbury:**

**[19761]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce waiting times for (a) autistic and (b) ADHD diagnostic assessments in the Cheshire and Merseyside area.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

It is the responsibility of integrated care boards (ICBs) to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) assessments, in line with relevant National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines.

On 5 April 2023, NHS England published a national framework and operational guidance to help ICBs and the National Health Service to deliver improved outcomes for children, young people, and adults referred to an autism assessment service. In 2024/25, £4.3 million is available nationally to improve services for autistic children and young people, including autism assessment services.

We are also supporting a cross-sector taskforce that NHS England has established to look at ADHD service provision and support across sectors, and their impact on patient experience. The taskforce is bringing together expertise from across a broad range of sectors, including the NHS, education, and justice, to better understand the challenges affecting people with ADHD, including timely access to services and support.

The Cheshire and Merseyside ICB advises that it is working with a range of partners to implement standardised pathways or models of care for neurodiversity, primarily ADHD and autism, for both children and young people, and adults. The ambition for both pathways is to enable early help, and the ability to access support without the need for diagnosis. This will ensure people's needs are met in a more timely way, and enable assessment capacity to focus on those with the greatest need, also enabling waiting times for assessments to be reduced.

## ■ **Autism: Cornwall**

**Ben Maguire:**

**[19802]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the average waiting time for an autism diagnosis in Cornwall.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

It is the responsibility of integrated care boards (ICBs) to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including autism assessments and diagnosis, in line with relevant National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines.

On 5 April 2023, NHS England published a national framework and operational guidance to help ICBs and the National Health Service to deliver improved outcomes for children, young people, and adults referred to an autism assessment service. In 2024/25, £4.3 million is available nationally to improve services for autistic children and young people, including autism assessment services.

■ **Brain: Injuries**

**Andy McDonald:** [\[18132\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what health pathways are available for people whose acquired brain injury is identified when they are in the criminal justice system.

**Andy McDonald:** [\[18133\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what social care pathways are available for people whose acquired brain injury is identified when they are in the criminal justice system.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

People in prison are entitled to the same range and quality of health services that they would receive in the community. Offender health services are commissioned by NHS England.

All people in prison should receive an early health screening within the first 24 hours of entry, and a further health assessment within seven days. The initial assessment is fully comprehensive, to ensure that all physical and mental health needs are identified, including if the person has a brain injury, and where appropriate, that treatment is commenced at an early stage.

Health services in prison include health screening, primary care, secondary mental health, and substance misuse services. Where services cannot be provided in prison, prisoners are supported to access services with an appropriate escort.

Local authorities are responsible for assessing individuals' care and support needs and, where eligible, for meeting those needs. Where individuals do not meet the eligibility threshold, they can get support from their local authorities in making their own arrangements for care services, as set out in the Care Act 2014.

Local authorities further have a duty to shape their care markets and commission a diverse range of care and support services that enable people to access quality care.

## ■ Cancer: Health Services

**Clive Jones:**

[R] [\[19827\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to tackle the future demand for cancer services in (a) the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire West integrated care board and (b) England.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Department is committed to tackling the future demand for cancer services, and this includes cancer patients in the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire West Integrated Care Board, and across England.

Developing our workforce is key to responding to the future demand for cancer services. NHS England invested approximately £90 million on training and educating the cancer and diagnostics workforce throughout 2024/25, focusing on growing the number of specialist doctors, nurses, support workers, and allied health professionals, as well as providing opportunities to upskill those already providing frontline services.

To ensure the most advanced treatment is available to patients, we are investing £70 million in new radiotherapy machines. In addition, we are committed to improving waiting times for cancer treatment across England. As a first step, we will deliver an extra 40,000 operations, scans, and appointments each week, helping to ensure earlier diagnoses and faster treatment for those who need it most.

The National Health Service will maximise the pace of the roll-out of the additional diagnostic capacity, delivering the final year of the three-year investment plan for establishing Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs), and ensuring timely implementation of new CDC locations and upgrades to existing CDCs, with capacity prioritised for cancer diagnostics.

## ■ Childbirth

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**

[\[19271\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to paragraph 69 of the House of Lords Preterm Birth Committee report entitled Preterm Birth: reducing risks and improving lives, HL 30, published on 14 November 2024, if his Department will revise the national maternity safety ambition to reduce the (a) incidence and (b) impact of pre-term births.

**Karin Smyth:**

We welcome the House of Lords' Preterm Birth Committee's report focused on reducing risks and improving lives. We thank all the individuals and organisations that gave evidence to the Inquiry, and the committee members for their detailed examination of the issues and evidence in drawing their conclusions. We will respond to the report and the recommendations in the new year.

The National Maternity Safety Ambition will end in 2025. We are currently looking carefully at what comes beyond this ambition, to ensure that an evidence-based approach is taken, and that all targets are woman- and baby-centred.

## ■ Colonoscopy

**Clive Jones:** [R] [\[19536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the potential cost to the public purse is of diagnostic colonoscopies per foundation trust in each year since since 2020.

**Karin Smyth:**

The attached table shows the potential cost to the public purse of diagnostic colonoscopies per foundation trust, each year since 2020, as well as the spend across all National Health Service foundation trusts for two groups of patient activity, specifically: a diagnostic colonoscopy with a biopsy, for those aged 19 years old and over; and just a diagnostic colonoscopy, for those aged 19 years old and over.

### Attachments:

1. [PQ19536 - Table](#) [TABLE FORMATTED FOR MINISTERIAL CLEARANCE PQ19536 - Clive Jones MP - table of costs of colonoscopies - Copy.docx]

## ■ Department of Health and Social Care: Public Expenditure

**Clive Jones:** [R] [\[19165\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much and what proportion of the increase in funding for his Department announced at the Autumn Budget 2024 will be spent on (a) National Insurance contribution increases, (b) pay increases, and (c) overspend by his Department.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 16 December 2024]:* We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at the Autumn Budget, and this enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department, from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26.

National Insurance contributions will be funded from staffing budgets in the usual way. We have provided written evidence to the Pay Review Bodies setting out our view on what pay increases are affordable, but the eventual spend on pay increases will not be determined until we respond to the Pay Review Body recommendations, which we will do at the earliest opportunity. Finally, the Department is not planning to overspend.

## ■ Diagnosis

**Dr Roz Savage:** [\[19619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that diagnostic results are transmitted promptly between NHS hospitals and GPs;

and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of using electronic communication for those results.

**Karin Smyth:**

Ensuring that diagnostic test results are received quickly is a priority for the Government, including the transmission of results between National Health Service hospitals and general practices (GPs). Electronic communication is an important mechanism to enable this.

NHS England has formed 22 imaging and 27 pathology networks across the country, which are working to improve the quality, safety, and productivity of care, including by speeding up test reporting through the use of digital investment. Investment to improve network digitisation will enable diagnostic test results to get back to patients and GPs faster.

■ **Employment: Mental Health Services**

**Helen Whately:**

[\[17191\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the White Paper entitled Get Britain Working, published November 2024, whether the 384,000 additional Talking Therapies places in Priority 1 were previously (a) announced and (b) funded in the Autumn Statement 2023.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government inherited a £22 billion blackhole in the nation's finances which has required necessary choices around spending priorities. Despite this backdrop, we were determined to identify the funding required to support NHS Talking Therapies.

The White Paper confirms the Government's commitment to expand access to NHS Talking Therapies for adults in England with common mental health conditions.

■ **Gender Dysphoria: Hormone Treatments**

**Sarah Owen:**

[\[19394\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what (a) medical professionals, (b) charities, (c) organisations and (d) other groups the Commission on Human Medicines consulted on the provision of puberty blockers.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government's response to the targeted consultation on proposed changes to the availability of puberty blockers was published on 11 December 2024, and details the individuals and organisations with which the Commission on Human Medicines consulted. It is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-changes-to-the-availability-of-puberty-blockers-for-under-18s/outcome/9702c8a7-3299-4a01-94dc-a63861786dd9>

■ **Gender Dysphoria: Surgery**

**Rupert Lowe:** [\[18455\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many under 18 year olds have undergone gender reassignment surgery in each of the last ten years.

**Karin Smyth:**  
No individual under 18 years of age has received surgical intervention for gender dysphoria through commissioning arrangements put in place by the National Health Service in England.

■ **General Practitioners: North Yorkshire**

**Tom Gordon:** [\[19464\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of GP-to-patient ratios in (a) Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency and (b) North Yorkshire in each of the last five years.

**Stephen Kinnock:**  
*[Holding answer 17 December 2024]:* Each general practice (GP) is required to provide services to meet the reasonable needs of their patients. There is no recommendation from NHS England for how many patients a GP should have assigned, or the ratio of GPs or other practice staff to patients.  
  
The demands each patient places on their GP are different and can be affected by many different factors, including rurality and patient demographics. It is necessary to consider the workforce for each practice as a whole, not only the GPs but also including the range of health professionals available who are able to respond to the needs of their patients. The following table shows the full-time equivalent (FTE) doctor to patient ratios in the Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency, for the last five years:

DATE	MEDIAN NUMBER OF GP FTE DOCTORS PER 10,000 REGISTERED PATIENTS
September 2020	6.9
September 2021	6.3
September 2022	6.8
September 2023	6.4
September 2024	6.7

While it is not possible to provide data specifically for the county of North Yorkshire, the following table shows the FTE GP doctor to patient ratios within the Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB), for the last five years:

DATE	MEDIAN NUMBER OF GP FTE DOCTORS PER 10,000 REGISTERED PATIENTS
September 2020	5.8
September 2021	5.6
September 2022	5.7
September 2023	5.8
September 2024	6.2

Notes:

1. the data does not include estimates for practices that did not provide fully valid staff records;
2. doctors in GP includes both fully qualified GPs and GPs in training grades;
3. FTE refers to the proportion of full-time contracted hours that the post holder is contracted to work, as one would indicate they work a full set of hours, 37.5 hours, and 0.5 would indicate that they worked half time;
4. in the GPs in Training Grade contracts, one FTE equals 40 hours, and in this table these FTEs have been converted to the standard Workforce Minimum Data Set measure, of one FTE equalling 37.5 hours, for consistency;
5. figures shown do not include staff working in Prisons, Army Bases, Educational Establishments, Specialist Care Centres, including Drug Rehabilitation Centres, Walk-In Centres and other alternative settings outside of traditional GPs, such as urgent treatment centres and minor injury units;
6. practices in the Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency were identified using practice postcodes and the National Statistics Postcode Lookup; and
7. at both an ICB and constituency level, practices have been assigned to these geographies using their 2024 boundaries.

■ **General Practitioners: Recruitment**

**Clive Jones:**

[R] [\[19158\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) newly-qualified GPs have been employed and (b) primary care networks have claimed reimbursement under the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme GP Sum in each integrated care board since August 2024.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

*[Holding answer 16 December 2024]:* Data on the number of general practitioners employed through the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme is currently not available.

■ **Health Professions: Regulation****Daisy Cooper:**[\[19779\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 25 July 2024 to Question 403 on Health Professions: Regulation, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of expediting the removal of the five-year rule in relation to regulators being able to consider fitness to practise concerns where these involve allegations of historic sexual abuse.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government has been considering its priorities for professional regulation and will be setting these out shortly.

■ **HIV Infection: Health Services****Kate Osborne:**[\[19788\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to (a) measure and (b) ensure improvements in the quality of life of people living with HIV.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The UK Health and Security Agency (UKHSA) provides key surveillance and data for HIV, including annual official HIV statistics and reports. Their recently published HIV Action Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2024 report provides key indicators of the quality of life of people living with HIV, and recommendations for improvements to HIV care. The UKHSA also publishes the Positive Voices survey report periodically, updated recently in 2024, which includes questions on people's lived experience and stigma. As part of the current HIV Action Plan, the Department funds HIV Prevention England, which hosted a HIV Stigma Symposium in March 2024. This brought together approximately 100 community experts, activists, healthcare professionals, and people with lived experience to discuss the impact of HIV stigma and explore effective stigma reduction strategies across the country. This evidence will inform the Government's new HIV Action Plan, which is due to be published in summer 2025. We will consider the key actions needed to support the groups disproportionately affected by HIV, to ensure improvements in the quality of life of all people living with HIV.

■ **Hospitals: Food****David Chadwick:**[\[19884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the effect of access to nutritious, appetising hospital food on patient's health, recovery



and time spent in hospital; and what plans he has to introduce policies to improve access to that food.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Independent Review of Hospital Food, applicable to hospitals in England only, and published in October 2020, made a suite of recommendations for improving hospital food. The review made clear the positive effect on patient recovery and wellbeing of access to nutritious, healthy food.

In response to the Independent Review of Hospital Food, NHS England published their updated Food and Drink Standards in November 2022. These set out the expectations for National Health Service trusts regarding the food they provide to patients and staff. Emphasis is placed on providing healthy, nutritious food options.

■ **Hydrocephalus: Babies**

**Monica Harding:**

[\[19566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of routine monitoring of infant head circumference after 8 weeks of age as a diagnostic tool for early identification of hydrocephalus.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

It is vitally important that babies are diagnosed as early as possible so treatment can be provided. Current National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance recommends measuring the head circumference of babies in the first week, at approximately eight weeks, and at other times only if there are concerns. The baby's general practitioner, or nominated primary care examiner, has responsibility for ensuring the six-to-eight-week newborn infant physical examination screen, where head size is measured, is completed for all registered babies. The Department is seeking advice from the NICE and the royal colleges on the value of a clinical review of the current guidelines surrounding infant head circumference.

The Healthy Child Programme sets out the requirements for health visiting services, including five mandated reviews, where the child's health and development is assessed. This includes when the baby is 10 to 14 days old, and at six to eight weeks old, as well as additional contacts depending on need, providing an opportunity to identify any health or development concerns and to make appropriate referrals. The Department and the NHS National Disease Registration Service do not hold information on the proportion of infants diagnosed after eight weeks.

■ **Inflammatory Bowel Disease: Health Services**

**Lisa Smart:**

[\[20065\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve (a) support and (b) care pathways in the NHS for people diagnosed with inflammatory bowel disease.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

NHS England's National Bladder and Bowel Health Project is delivering better care for people with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), with a focus on developing best practice clinical pathways. NHS England commissions specialised colorectal services nationally to support equity of access to high-quality treatment for patients with IBD requiring complex surgery. This work is supported within NHS England by the clinical leadership of the Specialised Colorectal Services Clinical Reference Group.

NHS England's Getting It Right First Time Programme on gastroenterology aims to reduce variations in care, increase early diagnosis and proactive management of Crohn's disease and colitis, and increase access to IBD specialist nurses.

We have also committed more broadly to ensuring patients get the care they need as quickly as possible. Funding announced in the Autumn Budget for elective care will also support the delivery of an additional 2 million operations, scans, and appointments during our first year in Government, which is equivalent to 40,000 per week, across all specialties, as a first step in our commitment to ensuring that patients can expect to be treated within 18 weeks. As part of this package, £1.5 billion of capital funding in 2025/26 will enable new surgical hubs and diagnostic scanners to build capacity for over 30,000 additional procedures and over 1.25 million diagnostic tests, as they come online.

**■ Medical Treatments****Maureen Burke:**[\[18738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help (a) reduce bureaucracy and (b) improve access to treatments.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

While health is a devolved matter, to reduce bureaucracy the Government and NHS England have launched a Red Tape Challenge, to address bureaucracy between primary and secondary care, to give our health professionals time back to do what they do best.

We are working to improve access by increasing the number of appointments delivered in general practice (GP), and taking the pressure off those currently working in the system, by investing £82 million in England to recruit over 1,000 newly qualified GPs through the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme. We are also training thousands more GPs and ending the 8:00am scramble for appointments by introducing a modern booking system.

Last January, Pharmacy First was launched, which enables patients to receive treatment for seven common health conditions from a pharmacy without the need to visit a GP. In dentistry, we are working to ensure patients can start to access 700,000 additional urgent dental appointments as soon as possible, targeting the areas that need them most.

Additionally, funding announced in the Autumn Budget will support the delivery of an additional 2 million operations, scans, and appointments during our first year in

Government, which is the equivalent to 40,000 per week, as a first step in our commitment to ensuring that patients can expect to be treated within 18 weeks.

As part of the Government's five long-term missions, we have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS and make it fit for the future. The plan will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts needed to move healthcare from hospital to the community, analogue to digital, and sickness to prevention. The online portal is available for engagement at the following link:

<https://change.nhs.uk/en-GB/>

## ■ **Neurodiversity: Diagnosis**

**Ben Maguire:**

**[19803]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to decrease the waiting times for diagnosis of (a) autism and (b) other (i) neurological and (ii) developmental disorders.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

It is the responsibility of the integrated care boards (ICBs) in England to make available the appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) services, in line with relevant National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines.

On 5 April 2023, NHS England published a national framework and operational guidance to help ICBs and the National Health Service to deliver improved outcomes for children, young people and adults referred to an autism assessment service. In 2024/25, £4.3 million is available nationally to improve services for autistic children and young people, including autism assessment services.

In respect of ADHD, we are supporting a cross-sector taskforce that NHS England has established to look at ADHD service provision and support across sectors, and their impact on patient experience. The taskforce is bringing together expertise from across a broad range of sectors, including the NHS, education, and justice, to better understand the challenges affecting people with ADHD, including timely access to services and support. The ADHD taskforce will also work closely with the Department for Education's neurodivergence task and finish group.

## ■ **NHS: Gender**

**Claire Coutinho:**

**[17617]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when his Department plans to respond to the suggested guidance on single-sex spaces in the NHS drafted by the Darlington Nurses Union.

**Karin Smyth:**

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care met with five nurses from the Darlington Nursing Union last month, to hear about their concerns regarding single-sex spaces for staff in National Health Service hospitals

Since the meeting the nurses have shared correspondence setting out suggested policy on single-sex spaces for staff in the NHS. My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will reply at the earliest opportunity. The Government is clear that everybody deserves to feel safe and to be treated with respect at work.

■ **NHS: Standards**

**Lee Anderson:** [\[19390\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that 92% of NHS patients are treated within 18 weeks.

**Karin Smyth:**

Tackling waiting lists is a key part of our Health Mission. The NHS Constitutional Standard for 92% of patients to wait no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment has not been met consistently since September 2015, and is a priority for the Government. As a first step, we will deliver an extra 2 million operations, scans, and appointments per year, which is equivalent to 40,000 a week, during our first year in Government.

A plan will be published in the coming weeks, which will set out more detail on how the National Health Service will deliver on the 18-week standard.

■ **Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures: Regulation**

**Melanie Onn:** [\[18946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 15 November 2024 to Question 12940 on Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures: Regulation, whether he has made an estimate of the potential cost to the public purse of rectifying unregulated cosmetic procedures.

**Karin Smyth:**

We have made no estimate of the potential cost to the public purse of rectifying complications relating to cosmetic procedures.

■ **Nuclear Weapons: Testing**

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:** [\[20126\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make it her policy to (a) review and (b) update the National Radiological Protection Board report published on 4 January 1988.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The National Radiological Protection Board report that was published in 1988 has been updated a further three times. The publications are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nuclear-weapons-test-participants-study/reference-papers-and-reports>

A summary of the fourth analysis published in 2022 is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nuclear-weapons-test-participants-study/plan-for-the-fourth-analysis-of-the-nuclear-weapons-test-participants-study>

■ **Ophthalmic Services: Children**

**Marsha De Cordova:** [\[19383\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an estimate of the cost to outpatient paediatric ophthalmology of (a) cancelled appointments and (b) appointments missed because the patient did not attend in 2023-24.

**Marsha De Cordova:** [\[19384\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many outpatient paediatric ophthalmology appointments for children under 19 years were (a) cancelled and (b) missed because the patient did not attend in 2023-24.

**Karin Smyth:**

Patients awaiting outpatient care make up over 85% of the elective waiting list, which includes children. Minimising missed appointments will help us to make sure we maximise the use of clinical time and ensure that all patients can be seen sooner. This is part of delivering on our commitment that 92% of patients, including children awaiting hospital-based eyecare, return to waiting no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment.

The following table shows the recorded outcomes of outpatient paediatric ophthalmology appointments in 2023/24, for children aged zero to 18 years old:

OUTCOME	APPOINTMENTS
Cancelled by hospital	69,335
Cancelled by patient	61,699
Did not attend	61,904
Not known/other	221
Attended	377,520

Source: Hospital Episode Statistics, NHS England.

No estimate has been made of the cost of missed appointments to outpatient paediatric ophthalmology because the Department does not hold information centrally on the extent to which outpatient clinics are overbooked based on the expectation that some appointments will be cancelled or marked as did not attend, and that clinicians may undertake other clinical work during these missed clinic appointments.

## ■ Pharmacy: Finance

**Joe Robertson:**

[\[19799\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the delay to community pharmacy funding negotiations on community pharmacies.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

As identified by Lord Darzi's review, primary care is under pressure and in crisis. The Government inherited a system that has been neglected for too long, and it remains very difficult for pharmacists to deliver for patients at a local level. I am committed to working with the sector to achieve what we all want, a service fit for the future.

Now that the Budget for Government has been set, we will shortly be resuming our consultation with Community Pharmacy England regarding the funding arrangements for community pharmacy.

## ■ Postural Tachycardia Syndrome: Diagnosis and Medical Treatments

**Mark Pritchard:**

[\[19668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve the (a) diagnosis and (b) treatment of postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (PoTS) is managed through cardiovascular services, and is managed by specialised cardiologists, linking with expertise from other specialties according to individual patients' needs. Specialised Cardiology is one of the services which is being delegated to integrated care boards. Improvements in diagnosis and treatment are for local determination within national frameworks and NICE guidance and standards.

As of the end of October 2024, there were 412,017 patient pathways waiting for Cardiology Service, with 59.6%, or 245,532 patient pathways, waiting within 18 weeks. This is far below the 92% 18-week Referral-to-Treatment NHS Constitutional Standard. It is unacceptable that people cannot access the care they need, when they need it.

We have committed to getting back to the 18-week standard by the end of this Parliament. Funding announced in the Autumn Budget will support delivery of an additional 2 million operations, scans, and appointments during our first year in Government, which is equivalent to 40,000 per week, as a first step towards achieving this.

As part of this package, £1.5 billion of capital funding in 2025/26 will enable new surgical hubs and diagnostic scanners to build capacity for over 30,000 additional procedures and over 1.25 million diagnostic tests as they come online.

Dedicated and protected surgical hubs will transform the way the National Health Service provides elective care, improving outcomes for patients and reducing pressures on hospitals. Some hubs offer cardiology treatments and procedures, which could include treatment for PoTS.

## ■ **Processed Food: Consumption**

**Sir Ashley Fox:**

**[19959]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions the recent UK Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition meeting had on (a) ultra-processed foods and (b) future policies to reduce consumption of those foods.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Dietary recommendations for the United Kingdom are based on independent advice from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN).

In July 2023, the SACN published a position statement on [processed foods and health](#), summarising a scoping review of the evidence on food processing and health. The SACN concluded that observed associations between ultra-processed foods and health are concerning, but it is unclear whether these foods are inherently unhealthy due to processing or due to their nutritional content. Given the SACN's concerns, the committee agreed to consider the issue again at its horizon scan in October 2024. At the meeting, the SACN considered a draft update review on this topic which considers more recently published evidence. It also considered the draft update review at its meeting in November 2024. Papers for these meetings are available on the SACN's webpages. The SACN is planning to publish the update review on processed foods in 2025.

The SACN has only a dietary risk assessment remit. The SACN is not involved in policy development, and therefore has not had discussions on policies to reduce consumption of processed foods.

## ■ **Respiratory Diseases: Health Services**

**Paulette Hamilton:**

**[16641]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle workforce shortages in respiratory care and (b) ensure (i) GPs and (ii) their teams have access to (A) training and (B) accreditation for (1) spirometry and (2) other diagnostic tests.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the National Health Service and make it fit for the future. Ensuring we have the right people, in the right places, with the right skills, including for respiratory care, will be central to this vision.



The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) sets the postgraduate curriculum for general practitioners (GPs) and ensures it remains up to date. All GPs must cover the curriculum before they are able to pass the examination to become a member of the RCGP and to work independently as a GP.

NHS England provides a wide range of resources to the NHS via the eLearning for Healthcare platform, including a respiratory diseases toolkit on the prevention and management of respiratory conditions, and diagnostic tests such as spirometry.

## ■ Royal Berkshire Hospital

**Clive Jones:**

[R] [\[19831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the rebuild of the Royal Berkshire Hospital will include IT (a) infrastructure and (b) equipment necessary for greater research capacity.

**Karin Smyth:**

Plans for the new Royal Berkshire Hospital as part of the New Hospital Programme (NHP) are at the early stages of development. The trust is currently developing their Strategic Outline Case for the scheme to establish their preferred way forward. This is the first stage of the business case process, and as set out in the HM Treasury Green book, the Strategic Outline Case is followed by an Outline Business Case, and finally a Full Business Case.

The NHP's approach to standardising design for future hospitals, known as Hospital 2.0, is being designed with clinical and operational staff. Part of the Hospital 2.0 design is to integrate digital solutions and smart technology to increase productivity and drive efficiency, empowering staff to maximise the use of the facilities. Through the business case process, individual trusts will put forward plans for the relevant infrastructure to meet their digital and research requirements.

## ■ Self-harm: Young People

**Melanie Ward:**

[\[18469\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many incidents of self-harm using (a) paracetamol, (b) aspirin and (c) ibuprofen were recorded amongst (i) 16 and (ii) 17 year olds in each of the last five years.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The information requested is not held centrally.

## ■ Sexually Transmitted Deiseases: Screening

**Kate Osborne:**

[\[19785\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will provide (a) funding and (b) resources to support a year-round online (i) HIV and (ii) STI postal testing service.



**Andrew Gwynne:**

Scaling up HIV testing for all population groups will be a key objective of the new HIV Action Plan, which is due to be published in summer 2025. We are currently working together with the UK Health Security Agency, NHS England, and other key stakeholders and considering which testing interventions would be best suited to achieve our ambitions, including the most effective role for online testing.

On 28 November 2024, the Prime Minister confirmed £27 million of additional funding for 2025/26 to expand the highly successful National Health Service emergency department opt-out HIV testing programme, supporting national HIV testing. As part of the extension of the programme, approximately 90 sites will be offered funding to roll out HIV opt-out testing until March 2026. Further funding will be confirmed in due course after the spending review phase two process has concluded.

Local authorities in England are responsible for commissioning open access sexual health services, including HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing services, through the public health grant, funded at £3.6 billion in 2024/25. It is for individual local authorities to decide their spending priorities based on an assessment of local need, and to commission the services that best suit their population, including decisions about online, face to face or postal testing services. We have set up the national HIV and syphilis self-sampling framework to assist local authority commissioners with providing online testing to their residents.

**■ Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust: Capital Investment****Mike Amesbury:**[\[19762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the level of capital investment required for Warrington and Halton hospital campus sites.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government recognises that delivering high quality National Health Service healthcare services requires the right facilities and support systems in the right places, and we understand that strategic, value for money investments in capital projects, whether through allocations prioritised locally or through national programmes, is important in achieving this.

Managing the local capital budget for its area and allocating funds according to local priorities, including investment in healthcare facilities, are matters for the local integrated care board (ICB), the Cheshire and Merseyside ICB. The ICB should have considered the investment needed for the Warrington and Halton hospital campus sites as part of their 10-year infrastructure strategy, in collaboration with the relevant trusts.

## HOME OFFICE

### ■ Anti-social Behaviour: Knowsley

**Anneliese Midgley:** [\[19097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle antisocial behaviour in Knowsley constituency.

**Anneliese Midgley:** [\[19098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of trends in the level of antisocial behaviour in Knowsley constituency.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB) is a top priority for this Government and a key part of our Safer Streets Mission.

The Government recently announced Respect Orders, which will be introduced in the forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill. Respect Orders can be applied for by police and local councils and are issued by the courts. They will enable courts to place wide-ranging restrictions on the behaviour of the most persistent and disruptive ASB offenders.

Breach will be a criminal offence meaning officers can arrest and take action quickly to disrupt ongoing ASB. Breaches will be heard in the criminal courts who will have a wide range of sentencing options, including community orders, unlimited fines and, for the most severe cases, up to two years' imprisonment.

We will also put thousands of neighbourhood police and community support officers into local communities so that residents have a named officer they can turn to when things go wrong.

### ■ Arms Trade: Israel

**Apsana Begum:** [\[19847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been arrested using counter terrorism powers for activity relating to protests on arms sales to Israel since (a) 8 October 2023, (b) 26 January 2024 and (c) 2 September 2024.

**Apsana Begum:** [\[19850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been arrested under counter terrorism powers for activity relating to protests against Elbit Systems UK's arms sales to Israel since (a) 8 October 2023, (b) 26 January 2024 and (c) 2 September 2024.

**Apsana Begum:** [\[19856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been arrested using counter terrorism powers for activity relating to protests against climate change in the last year.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Home Office publishes information and statistics relating to the number of arrests and outcomes (such as charges and convictions) for terrorist-related activity each quarter.

However, this data is provided to the Home Office by Counter Terrorism Policing Headquarters (CTPHQ) and does not include the type of detail requested relating to each arrest.

**■ Asylum: LGBT+ People****Neil O'Brien:****[19005]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to update the LGB asylum data tables, last updated on 25 August 2022.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

The Home Office publishes data on asylum in the [‘Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release’](#). Data on asylum claims relating to sexual orientation are published in the [‘Asylum claims on the basis of sexual orientation tables’](#). The latest data on claims and initial decisions relates to 2023 and was updated as part of the [year ending June 2024 release](#) in August 2024. The next planned update is in August 2025.

**■ Asylum: Syria****Alicia Kearns:****[19057]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to reject asylum applications from former government officials of the Syrian regime led by Bashar al-Assad.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

The Home Office acted swiftly to temporarily pause decisions on Syrian asylum claims whilst we assess the current situation.

We keep all country guidance relating to asylum claims under constant review so we can respond to emerging issues.

While all asylum claims are routinely considered on their individual merits, it is standard procedure to deny protection to anyone who has committed crimes against peace, war crimes, crimes against humanity, other serious crimes abroad or acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

**■ Computer Misuse Act 1990****Helen Maguire:****[20112]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to implement the recommendations of the consultation entitled Review of the Computer Misuse Act 1990, which closed on 6 April 2023.

**Dan Jarvis:**

The Computer Misuse Act (CMA) plays a vital role in ensuring that the UK has the right legislative framework to allow us to tackle cyber harms. The Government is committed to ensuring the CMA remains up to date and effective to tackle criminality.

As part of the Review, officials are scoping several areas of legislative reform to give law enforcement the tools and powers they need to investigate and prosecute cyber criminality. Some of these areas are quite complex in nature and require further engagement with stakeholders to ensure we get them right.

We will update in due course on any proposals that we take forward.

**Economic Crime****Lloyd Hatton:**[\[19167\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing ring-fenced funding for taking criminal enforcement measures against professional enablers of economic crimes.

**Dan Jarvis:**

Professional enablers are a critical facilitator of serious and organised crime, particularly in helping criminals and corrupt elites move and hide their illicit funds across the world, including in the UK.

The National Economic Crime Centre launched a cross-system strategy to tackle the serious and organised crime threat posed by professional enablers earlier this year. This sets out a series of actions for the public and private sectors to strengthen the UK's response to professional enablers and includes commitments to enhance collective understanding, improve public-private data sharing, make better use of powers and intervention tools, and develop joint disruption strategies to tackle the threat.

Criminal justice interventions and regulatory interventions are essential to driving a response. Professional enabler cases are often longer and more protracted than other cases.

While we recognise the potential benefits of ring-fencing funding, we must ensure that our approach to funding remains sufficiently agile to tackle this increasingly complex threat. A critical component of this is the Economic Crime (Anti-Money Laundering) Levy, which provides sustainable, long-term funding to combat economic crime, helping law enforcement agencies pursue criminals and their enablers. This funding, paired with other targeted investment, enables the delivery of key outcomes to protect the UK's national security whilst supporting economic growth.

## ■ Home Office: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

**Emily Thornberry:**

[18918]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much her Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

The total GPC Expenditure for 2022 financial year is £2,815,250.58

The total GPC Expenditure for 2023 financial year is £2,333,928.42

The expenditure over £500.00 for each financial year is published on the Government website and can be found using the following link:

[Home Office spending - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/home-office-spending)

## ■ Human Rights: Pakistan

**Marie Goldman:**

[19110]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to ensure the safety of British Pakistanis speaking out about human rights violations in Pakistan.

**Dan Jarvis:**

The Government regularly assesses potential threats to the UK, and takes the protection of individuals' rights, freedoms, and safety in the UK very seriously.

As you would expect, Home Office officials work closely with the FCDO and MHCLG as well as other Government departments to ensure that the UK is a safe and welcoming place.

The Home Secretary regularly discusses issues regarding national security with her counterparts, including the Foreign Secretary.

## ■ Migration: Internet

**Rupert Lowe:**

[19127]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of publishing a migration data dashboard showing information on (a) immigration and (b) irregular migration.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

I refer the Honourable member to the answer I gave on 27 November to question UIN 15076.

## ■ Money Laundering: Russia

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:**

[\[19222\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will use her discretionary powers to redirect a portion of the cash and cryptocurrency seized by the National Crime Agency in Operation Destabilise for the benefit of survivors of the war in Ukraine.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Operation Destabilise is an NCA-led operation, which has so far resulted in over £20 million in cash and cryptocurrency being seized. The allocation of recovered criminal funds under POCA is governed by the Asset Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (ARIS), a discretionary funding model that allocates returned funds between central government and operational partners.

In the spirit of the scheme, the Government encourages agencies to use ARIS funds to increase asset recovery and, where appropriate, fund local crime fighting priorities for the benefit of the community. Victims of crime can also apply for the release of seized funds to them.

In some circumstances, funds can be returned to a state at their request. The UK remains fully committed to working with allies to pursue all lawful routes through which Russian seized assets can be used to support Ukraine.

## ■ Police

**Saqib Bhatti:**

[\[19068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of recent pay rises for police officers on trends in the level of police numbers.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The independent Police Remuneration Review Body (PRRB) and Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) make recommendations to the Government on the appropriate level of pay and allowances for police officers. In reaching their recommendations, the Review Bodies consider the need to recruit and retain officers.

On 29 July, the Government announced it had accepted the PRRB's and SSRB's recommendations to award officers a consolidated pay award of 4.75% with effect from 1 September. The Home Office has provided £175 million of additional funding in 2024-25 towards policing to help with the cost of this pay increase.

The Government is committed to working with policing to improve public confidence and prioritise frontline services. This includes ensuring there are 13,000 more police officers, police community support officers and special constables in neighbourhood policing roles by the end of this parliament.

## ■ Synthetic Opioids Taskforce

**Chris Philp:**

[\[20018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether a Minister in her Department has chaired a meeting of the synthetic opioids taskforce; and how many times that taskforce has met since 5 July 2024.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Ministers are prioritising the risk of synthetic opioids as part of the wider long-term drug strategy. The Synthetic Opioids Taskforce is chaired by the Director General of the Public Safety Group at the Home Office on behalf of the Minister. The Taskforce meets quarterly, including on 3 July and most recently on 10 October 2024. It will next meet in January 2025 and Ministers are regularly briefed by officials on the response.

Reducing drug harms has important benefits for the Government's missions to deliver safer streets, improve health outcomes and break down barriers to opportunity, while supporting overall economic growth.

## ■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[18940\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she is taking steps to support the National Crime Agency to implement a recruitment strategy for meeting operational challenges presented by small-boat crossings in the English Channel.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

We work closely with the National Crime Agency to ensure it has the resources it needs to investigate organised immigration crime leading to small boat crossings. Since July, we have funded an extra 100 specialist NCA intelligence and investigative officers focusing on this threat. The NCA and the new Border Security Command, backed by £150 million of funding, are together stepping up our efforts to smash the criminal gangs threatening our borders.

As announced alongside the National Crime Agency pay award on 29 July 2024, measures are underway to develop a set of comprehensive proposals for reform of the existing pay structure at the Agency. Once finalised, the government will seek to implement these proposals in a timely fashion, which in turn will support the Agency's recruitment and retention efforts.

## ■ Visas

**Neil O'Brien:**

[\[19006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many visas were granted to (a) people and (b) family dependents in each quarter since January 2021.

**Seema Malhotra:**

The Home Office publishes data on entry clearance visas in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on visas granted, by quarter, visa route and

applicant type, are published in table Vis\_D02 of [Entry clearance detailed dataset](#). Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbook. The latest data relate up to the end of September 2024.

## ■ Visas: Skilled Workers

**Melanie Ward:** [\[19175\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average processing time was for a (a) Skilled Worker and (b) Skilled Worker Dependent Visa in each of the last five years.

**Seema Malhotra:**

The Home Office does not publish the requested data.

But, the latest Transparency Data, which does provide data on applications for various routes processed within service standards, can be found at: [Visas, status and immigration data: Q3 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

## HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### ■ Babies: Death

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[18992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information her Department holds on the number of deaths of babies from families in temporary accommodation where the type of accommodation was officially recorded as a factor in that death since 2019.

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[18994\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the health of the carer of a (a) child and (b) baby is assessed (i) generally and (ii) for the impact of (A) sexual and (B) domestic violence when moving into temporary accommodation.

**Rushanara Ali:**

All temporary accommodation must be safe and suitable. The Homelessness Code of Guidance is clear that temporary accommodation should not be considered suitable for a family with children under two if there is not enough space for a cot and that housing authorities should support families to secure a cot where needed. The department does not hold information on the deaths of babies in temporary accommodation.

It is vital that survivors of domestic abuse are housed in suitable accommodation and that safeguarding should be a top priority. Legislation is clear that temporary accommodation has to be suitable, and local authorities should keep the suitability of accommodation under review.



## ■ Buildings: Insulation

**Mike Amesbury:**

[18996]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's Remediation Acceleration Plan, published on 2 December 2024, whether her Department plans to set a deadline for the completion of cladding remediation works on 11 to 18 metre buildings.

**Alex Norris:**

By the end of 2029, every building 11m+ with unsafe cladding will either have been remediated, have a date for completion, or the landlords will be liable for severe penalties.

We have to recognise that with so many mid-rise residential buildings still to be identified that they won't all be fixed by 2029. But we must make sure that they all have an end date in sight – or that there will be consequences for landlords if not. This will give all residents the certainty that so many of them currently lack.

## ■ Cabinet Office: Infrastructure

**Priti Patel:**

[18359]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Prime Minister's speech entitled Plan for Change of 5 December 2024, what each of the 150 major infrastructure projects are.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The 150 major infrastructure projects are defined as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), which are decided through the Development Consent Order (DCO) process.

Government has not identified what all of the 150 projects will be, rather this represents what we expect to come through the system over this Parliament, as well as projects currently in the pipeline.

Further details on existing NSIP projects can be found on the Planning Inspectorate's website: <https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/>

## ■ Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[17140]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the material considerations were that satisfied the call-in criteria for the proposed Chinese Embassy near the Tower of London.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Call-in decisions are inherently about process and not the merits of any given planning application.

I refer the hon Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 26 March 2019 ( [HCWS1452](#) ) which outlines the broad criteria for calling-in planning applications, but makes clear it is not restrictive in its application.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[17563\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how the planning application for the proposed Chinese Embassy near the Tower of London differs from the previous planning application for the Embassy turned down by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The application in question is identical to the application submitted for the proposed scheme in June 2021. It was refused (against officer recommendation) in February 2023. The applicant chose not to appeal that decision.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[17566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department made an assessment of the potential impact of calling in the planning application for the proposed Chinese Embassy in Tower Hamlets on (a) diplomatic, (b) economic and (c) political relations with the People's Republic of China.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [17140](#) on 18 December 2024.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[18953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2024 to Question 17009 on Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission, whether (a) the Prime Minister and (b) 10 Downing Street had discussions with (i) her and (ii) her Department on the proposed Chinese Embassy before her decision to call in the planning application.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [17009](#) on 6 December 2024.

## ■ Council of the Nations and Regions: National Identity

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[18960\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking with the Council for the Nations and Regions to support the (a) English national identity and (b) interests of England.

**Jim McMahon:**

The Council of the Nations and Regions brings together the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales, the First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, and the Mayors of Combined Authorities and County Combined Authorities in England.

As Government delivers on its devolution agenda, more English regions will be covered by Mayors and have the opportunity to have their identities and interests represented at the Council of the Nations and Regions.

## ■ **Devolution: East of England**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[18957\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2024 to Question 16746 on Devolution: East of England, if she will make it her policy to ensure that the Devolution White Paper follows the principles of (a) subsidiarity and (b) double devolution when determining which level to devolve power and responsibility.

**Jim McMahon:**

We are committed to putting the right powers at the right levels, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, and this has informed development of the devolution framework.

That is why Strategic Authorities (SAs) will focus on issues like strategic planning, adult education and local growth plans which require strategic oversight of the entire region.

Local authorities will continue to shape their places and deliver the critical local public services residents rely on, and we are ending the destructive Whitehall knows best mindset that drives micromanagement by working to remove the need for Secretaries of State to sign-off on councils' use of their powers.

We will also empower communities with new rights and levers to influence their neighbourhoods, while protecting cherished community assets and high streets.

## ■ **Economic Situation**

**Mr Andrew Snowden:**

[\[19889\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of paragraph 2.45 of the Office for Budget Responsibility's report entitled Economic and fiscal outlook – October 2024, published on 30 October 2024.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The Office for Budget Responsibility October Economic and Fiscal outlook based their forecast on the existing policy environment, and did not take account of the impact of policies that we have announced.

The Plan for Change published on 5 December 2024 set out our commitment to the ambitious milestone of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes in England this parliament.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December includes policies designed to support increased build out rates, including the promotion of mixed tenure development.

Our New Homes Accelerator aims to unblock and accelerate the delivery of large-scale housing developments that have for various reasons become delayed, or which are not progressing as quickly as they could be.

In addition to increasing the supply of homes of all tenures, we have committed to introducing a permanent, comprehensive mortgage guarantee scheme and to giving first-time buyers the first chance to buy homes.

We will continue to consider a range of evidence in delivering this, including OBR work, and will set out a full suite of policy measures next year when we publish our long-term housing strategy.

## ■ Hinduism

**Dr Neil Hudson:** [\[19077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to support the Hindu community in the UK; and what steps she is taking to promote community cohesion.

**Alex Norris:**

The Minister for Faith regularly engages with faith groups, including representatives from the Hindu community. On 16 December, he had the great pleasure of visiting Neasden temple to show the government's support for Britain's Hindu community and to thank them for everything they do locally.

On community cohesion, no one should be a victim of hatred because of their race or religion and the Government continues to work with police and community partners to monitor and combat this. We are fully committed to protecting the right of individuals to freely practise their religion and we will not tolerate anti-Hindu hatred, or any form of religious hatred.

## ■ Homelessness: Northern Ireland

**Jim Shannon:** [\[18938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent discussions she has had with her counterpart in the Northern Ireland Executive on tackling homelessness.

**Rushanara Ali:**

MHCLG Ministers and officials engage regularly with their counterparts in the devolved administrations to discuss a range of issues, including tackling homelessness.

## ■ Homes for Ukraine Scheme

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[18955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the monthly amount payable to hosts under the Homes to Ukraine scheme will be in (a) 2024-25, (b) 2025-26 and (c) 2026-27.

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

**[18956]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's notification entitled Update on Homes for Ukraine Thank You payments and the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme, published on 6 December 2024, whether her Department has made changes to the level of (a) funding, (b) thank you payments for hosts and (b) other support for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme since 5 July 2024.

**Rushanara Ali:**

Applications will open on the 4 February 2025 for eligible Ukraine scheme visa holders to apply for further permission to remain in the UK for an additional 18 months under the Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) scheme.

The department has recently confirmed that to support guests still in sponsorship under UPE and to thank sponsors for their continued generosity, thank you payments for eligible sponsors will be extended for 18 months under the new scheme where guests were previously on a Homes for Ukraine visa.

Sponsors will continue to be eligible for thank you payments for the full duration of a Homes for Ukraine guest's 18 month UPE visa period if they remain in sponsorship, but no further.

To fund this support and ensure it is affordable within government budgets, from 1 April 2025, all thank you payments will be paid at a flat rate of £350 per month for all sponsors of guests on Homes for Ukraine and UPE visas, regardless of how long guests have been in the UK.

To support this transition, we are signposting sponsors to the Government's 'rent a room' scheme for those who wish to convert their lodging arrangements with their sponsors. If sponsors move to an arrangement where they charge rent, they will no longer be eligible for thank you payments.

The department also confirmed that we are maintaining the existing local authority tariff arrangements of £5,900 (£10,500 for eligible minors) per Homes for Ukraine arrival. This should support local authorities with ongoing administration of the scheme and allow local authorities to continue supporting guests to rebuild their lives and fully integrate into communities.

## ■ **Housing: Construction**

**David Simmonds:**

**[15928]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the press notice entitled Thousands of new homes to be built as government unlocks brownfield sites, published on 15 October 2024, how much and what proportion of the £550 million impact investments are funded by (a) direct grants from and (b) financial transactions underwritten by the government.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the Hon Member to the answer to Question UIN [16497](#) on 5 December 2024.

**Housing: Sewers**

**Clive Lewis:** [\[19717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of new housing targets on sewerage infrastructure.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer my Hon Friend to my answer to Question UIN [9948](#) on 23 October 2024.

**Leasehold: Forfeiture**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[18958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 15206 on Leasehold Forfeiture, whether she plans to introduce backstop measures to ensure compliance with lease agreements.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the Hon Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)).

**Letter Boxes**

**Tom Hayes:** [\[19554\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to require a minimum height for letterboxes in new build homes.

**Alex Norris:**

Guidance on letterplate specifications are already referenced in Approved Document Q (ADQ), but the Government has recently published a Frequently Asked Question alongside ADQ on gov.uk ([Frequently asked questions - GOV.UK](#)), providing guidance on letterbox and letterplate positioning.

**Local Government Finance**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[18951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Written Ministerial Statement entitled Local Government Finance of 28 November 2024, Official Report, HCWS265, how she plans to manage the debts of councils subject to Section 114 notice following the proposed reorganisation of local government.

**Jim McMahon:**

The decision to issue a Section 114 notice is for a council's section 151 officer and government has no role in the process.

Under the previous government, the then Secretary of State used statutory powers to intervene in a small number of councils failing their Best Value Duty partly associated

with high levels of unsustainable debt. Government is engaging closely with Best Value Commissioners and Panel Members to understand these councils' plans to return to a sustainable position. The Government has confirmed that there will be a framework in place to support councils in the most difficult positions.

The English Devolution White Paper published on 16 December announced that the Government will facilitate local government reorganisation for two-tier areas and for unitary councils where there is evidence of failure, or where their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality public services.

## ■ **Local Government Pension Scheme**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

**[18952]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment has been made of potential risks to investment returns from the proposed Local Government Pension Scheme reforms.

**Jim McMahon:**

The Government is [currently consulting](#) on proposals to strengthen asset pooling in the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) England and Wales. Asset pooling boosts the resilience and performance of investments by enabling administering authorities to diversify their portfolios across a wider range of asset classes, and to manage their assets more efficiently and at reduced risk. The consultation also makes proposals to ensure consistently high standards of governance across the scheme.

LGPS members' pension and benefits are guaranteed in statute and are not affected by the performance of investments, or by any other aspect of the Pensions Review.

## ■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Buildings**

**Mary Glendon:**

**[19290]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of her Department's proposed office closures on (a) disabled staff, (b) neurodiverse staff, (c) staff with caring responsibilities and (d) staff with other protected characteristics.

**Mary Glendon:**

**[19291]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has met with trade union representatives for staff in her Department since 5 July 2024.

**Alex Norris:**

I refer my hon Friend to my answer to Question UIN [19288](#) on 17 December 2024.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**

**Emily Thornberry:** [\[18914\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much her Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

**Alex Norris:**

Details of the department spend on government procurement cards can be found [here](#).

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Appointments**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[18954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question 16179 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Appointments, when she plans to deposit the correspondence in the Library of the House.

**Alex Norris:**

A copy of the letter has been deposited in the Library of the House and can be found at the following link: [Deposited paper DEP2024-0794 - Deposited papers - UK Parliament](#).

■ **Park Homes: Sales**

**James MacCleary:** [\[20512\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of removing the 10% commission charge on the sale of park homes.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [11995](#) on 6 November 2024.

■ **Planning Authorities: Finance**

**Ben Goldsborough:** [\[19156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much funding has been allocated to local authority planning departments in each of the last ten financial years.

**Jim McMahon:**

The majority of funding in the Local Government Finance Settlement is unringfenced recognising that local leaders are best placed to identify local priorities.

Local authorities routinely publish their spending information in Revenue Outturn data, which includes information on how much money they have spent on planning



services. The latest Revenue Outturn information can be found on gov.uk here: [Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2022 to 2023 individual local authority data - outturn - GOV.UK](#)

## ■ Planning Authorities: Staff

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

**[18959]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to paragraph 3.35 of Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, in which financial years will the additional funding for the training and recruitment of planning officers be allocated; and whether that funding will be baselined into the Local Government Finance Settlement in future years.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

At the Budget, the Chancellor announced a £46 million package of investment into the planning system as a one-year settlement for 2025-2026. A proportion of this funding will be used to support capacity and capability in local planning authorities, including the recruitment and training of 300 graduate and apprentice planners and developing the skills needed to implement reforms and unlock housing delivery.

As part of the government's commitment to simplify the local government funding landscape, we intend to significantly reduce the number of housing, planning, resettlement, and numerous other smaller grants owned by MHCLG – rolling them into the Local Government Finance Settlement wherever possible. More detailed proposals for simplification will be announced in due course.

More broadly, the Department's established Planning Capacity and Capability programme is also developing a wider programme of support, working with partners across the planning sector, to ensure that local planning authorities have the skills and capacity they need, both now and in the future, to modernise local plans and speed up decision making, including through innovative use of digital planning data and software.

The government has also recently consulted on increasing planning fees. This will support local planning authorities in the longer-term by putting them on a more sustainable financial footing.

## ■ Property: Fraud

**Marie Goldman:**

**[19111]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) providing support for victims to recover investments and (b) holding perpetrators accountable in cases of fraudulent property sales.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

HM Land Registry provides a state guarantee which in appropriate circumstances financially compensates victims of property registration fraud.

HM Land Registry has the power to seek recovery of indemnity payments from perpetrators of fraud and conveyancers who are complicit. It can also seek to recover such payments from those who, through negligence, have failed to prevent property fraud from occurring.

HM Land Registry also offers a free Property Alert service to try to avoid people becoming the victims of property fraud.

Property fraud can be prosecuted in the criminal courts resulting in a criminal conviction and punishment. Civil or commercial fraud may result in a claim of compensation brought by the claimant against the party who committed the fraud.

## ■ Public Lavatories

**Alex Easton:** [\[19183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent assessment the Department has made of the adequacy of public toilet provision; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of appointing a public toilet commissioner to ensure (a) consistent standards and (b) accessibility for all communities.

**Alex Norris:**

Local authorities are best placed to understand local priorities, including on the important issue of provision of public toilets whether they are operated by local councils directly or through community schemes.

As set out in the Local government finance policy statement 2025 to 2026 published on 28 November, we are taking action to address the significant challenges councils face, including through the first multi-year funding settlement for local government in 10 years and reducing the number of funding pots so that councils have more certainty and flexibility to judge local priorities, to meet the needs of local people, and to decide how best to deliver on our national priorities.

## ■ Rented Housing: Students

**Uma Kumaran:** [\[19188\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of (a) regulations and (b) enforcement mechanisms to hold landlords accountable for non-compliance with housing standards in the student sector.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government is committed to improving housing quality for students and will apply a Decent Homes Standard (DHS) to the private rented sector (PRS) for the first time to ensure homes are safe, secure and hazard free. This will include homes let to students on assured tenancies. The Renters' Rights Bill is the means by which this will be done.

The Renters' Rights Bill will also provide local authorities with effective enforcement powers for the DHS. Where a local authority serves a notice and the landlord fails to

make the necessary improvements to meet the DHS, the local authority will be able to prosecute the landlord or alternatively impose on them a financial penalty of up to £40,000 – the proceeds of which it must use for future PRS enforcement action. Tenants (and local authorities, where any rent has been paid via Universal Credit) will also be able to take direct action in such instances by pursuing a rent repayment order, meaning the responsible landlord will need to pay the tenant (or local authority) up to two years' rent.

The Bill will exempt Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) from the assured tenancy system if the landlord is signed up to a government approved code of management practice. Such accommodation will therefore not be subject to the DHS, but landlords will need to meet rigorous standards set by the codes which are tailored to the needs of PBSA. This includes maintaining the safety of the accommodation, ensuring the property is well-managed and making sure there is an effective working relationship between tenants and managers. Members of the codes must also have robust procedures in place for handling complaints and remedying issues raised by students. Failure to meet these standards will result in membership being terminated, meaning the property will then be subject to the DHS.

#### ■ **Social Rented Housing: Rents**

**Sarah Coombes:**

[\[19993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate she has made of the number of housing associations in England that are charging tenants for a 53 week rent year.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The Government does not collect data on whether weekly rent charged by housing associations is collected 52 or 53 times in a year. Government policy on social housing rents stipulates how the maximum weekly rent is to be calculated for any given social housing property, not how many times that weekly rent may be charged in any given year. The arrangements for charging rent should be set out in a tenancy agreement.

#### ■ **Temporary Accommodation**

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[18990\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information her Department holds on the number and proportion of families placed in temporary accommodation outside their local authority area in each of the last five years.

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[18991\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance her Department has issued on steps local authorities should take to inform a child's (a) GP and (b) school when they are moved into temporary accommodation.

**Rushanara Ali:**

I refer the hon member to the answer to Question UIN [18551](#) on 17 December 2024.

## ■ Trees: Conservation

**Blake Stephenson:** [19114]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the Tree Protection Order regime in protecting (a) ancient and (b) veteran trees.

**Blake Stephenson:** [19116]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of granting additional protections to (a) ancient and (b) veteran trees in planning policy.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees are already strictly protected in national planning policy, while Tree Preservation orders safeguard individual trees or groups of trees of particular value. Local planning authorities have the principal responsibility for applying these protections effectively.

We keep policy in this and other areas under review, working closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Defra recently completed a review on the implementation of national planning policy for protecting ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees.

## ■ Trees: Urban Areas

**Blake Stephenson:** [19117]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the potential role of (a) ancient and (b) veteran trees in place-making for (i) large-scale new towns and (ii) urban extensions.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government is committed to delivering a new generation of new towns. We have made clear these must be well-connected, well-designed, sustainable and attractive places where people want to live and that they must have all the infrastructure, amenities and services necessary to sustain thriving communities.

In addition to making recommendations to ministers regarding appropriate locations, we have tasked the New Towns Taskforce chaired by Sir Michael Lyons with advising on a 'New Towns Prospectus' – standards that developers must meet in these new settlements (covering social and affordable homes, design, transport links to towns and city centres, public transport, green spaces). The Taskforce's full terms of reference can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

## JUSTICE

### ■ Child Arrangement Orders: Appeals

**Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:**

[\[19152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many Child Arrangement Orders determined by a bench of lay magistrates have been appealed; and how many of those appeals were successful.

**Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:**

[\[19153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of magistrates determining Child Arrangement Orders.

**Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:**

[\[19154\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment she has made of the potential merits of introducing specialist family judges to determine all child arrangement orders.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The Ministry of Justice and HMCTS do not collect data on the number or outcome of applications for Child Arrangement Orders heard by magistrates in the family courts.

When sitting in the family courts, magistrates are supported by legal advisers who are qualified to provide advice on the law and procedures magistrates must follow, and who are also subject to an ongoing family training requirement. All judges – including magistrates – who hear applications for Child Arrangements Orders are obligated by the Children Act 1989 to have the child's welfare as their paramount consideration and must undergo extensive training.

To safeguard their independence, the appointment and training of magistrates is overseen by the judiciary as set out under the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007, and Coroners and Justice Act 2009. Magistrates have been determining cases in the family court since that court's inception in 2014, and in the predecessor Family Proceedings Courts before then.

To be appointed as a magistrate, each individual must undertake training on determining the best interests of the child, navigating the welfare checklist, and ways of communicating with people in court, particularly where there is high conflict.

### ■ Courts: Opening Hours

**Dr Kieran Mullan:**

[\[19083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, on what date she signed the concordat on court sitting days.

**Sarah Sackman:**

The former Lord Chancellor reached an agreement with the judiciary on the Concordat in June 2024. The former Lord Chancellor sent the initial Concordat proposal to the Lady Chief Justice and the Senior President of the Tribunals on 5th

June. The Lady Chief Justice and the Senior President of the Tribunals responded on 12th June, and the former Lord Chancellor sent a final letter of response, concluding the process, on 28th June 2024.

Since then, the current Lord Chancellor increased the allocation by an additional 500 Crown Court sitting days in September, and on 17 December announced further funding for up to an additional 2,000 Crown Court days, bringing the Crown Court allocation to up to 2,500 days beyond that originally agreed through the Concordat. This brings the total to 108,500, the highest level since financial year 2015/16.

## ■ Crime Prevention

**Dr Kieran Mullan:** [\[19426\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, when she plans to publish the impact evaluation for the acquisitive crime project.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

We will publish the first impact evaluation of the Acquisitive Crime project next year. This will evaluate the effectiveness of compulsory, global positioning system (GPS) location monitoring at deterring burglars, robbers and thieves from reoffending and supporting police investigation and prosecutions.

## ■ Domestic Abuse and Sexual Offences: Victim Support Schemes

**Helen Grant:** [\[19272\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of ring-fencing a proportion of the funding provided to Police and Crime Commissioners for the provision of (a) independent domestic violence advisers and (b) independent sexual violence advisers.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

Supporting victims and witnesses remains a priority focus for the Department and Ministers. Collectively, we are committed to the Government's pledge to halve Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in a decade.

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in England and Wales receive grant funding from the Ministry of Justice's victim and witness budget to commission local practical, emotional, and therapeutic support services for victims of all crime types. For 2022-25 this includes:

- 'Core' funding, which is for PCCs to allocate at their discretion, based on their assessment of local need.
- Funding that is ringfenced for sexual violence and domestic abuse community-based services.
- Funding that is ringfenced for Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) and Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) posts.

From 2025/26, the ISVA/IDVA ringfenced fund has been merged with the domestic abuse and sexual violence ringfenced fund. This was assessed to be the best-balanced approach, providing flexibility for local areas to adapt to challenges in their area whilst retaining a focus on VAWG. PCCs can commission ISVA and IDVA support from this funding stream.

## ■ Domestic Abuse: Prisoners' Release

**Alicia Kearns:**

[\[19064\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to prevent domestic abusers convicted of other offences from being released early.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

This Government inherited a criminal justice system on the brink of collapse, with prisons weeks away from overflowing. This would have meant complete gridlock of the system and impacted the police's ability to arrest people. As a result, we were forced to bring in emergency measures that see the automatic release points for standard determinate sentences reduced to 40%.

There are a number of offences excluded from this change including serious violent offences with sentences of four years or more, sex offences and a series of offences connected to domestic abuse. Exempting domestic abuse related offences and allowing probation a number of weeks to prepare is a significant departure from the previous Government's End of Custody Licence scheme which saw c13,000 offenders released early.

It is only possible to legally exempt specific offences and domestic abusers are prosecuted under many crimes. Our exclusions send a very clear message about how seriously this Government takes domestic abuse.

## ■ Employment Tribunal Service: Legal Aid Scheme

**Nadia Whittome:**

[\[20046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to improve access to Legal Aid for discrimination claims in the Employment Tribunal.

**Sarah Sackman:**

Legal aid is available for legal advice and assistance in relation to discrimination cases which fall under the Equality Act 2010 or previous discrimination legislation, subject to passing the means and merits tests. Legal aid for other employment matters may be available through the Exceptional Case Funding (ECF) Scheme, if a failure to provide legal aid would breach, or likely risk a breach of, an individual's rights under the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Ministry of Justice has recently undertaken a comprehensive review of civil legal aid and, having considered the evidence collected, we acknowledge that the sector is facing a number of challenges. We are committed to improving the experience of users and providers and, as an important first step towards this, we intend to consult on uplifts to housing and immigration legal aid fees in January 2025. We will continue



to consider the fees paid in other categories of civil legal aid, including as part of the second phase of the Government's Spending Review.

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) is responsible for commissioning legal aid services in England and Wales. There are currently 20 providers who offer legal aid services in relation to the Discrimination category of legal aid operating out of 24 offices across England and Wales. The LAA monitors supply across its legal aid contracts on an ongoing basis. Where additional supply is needed it takes action within its operational remit to ensure access to legal aid-funded services.

The LAA also maintains the Civil Legal Advice (CLA) Helpline. This is a national telephone helpline that helps members of the public check whether they may be eligible for civil legal aid and triages them to appropriate sources of advice. The CLA Helpline provides specialist remote advice though legal aid in four categories of law, including discrimination, for any individual that is determined to be eligible for these services. The majority of advice and assistance cases in the discrimination category are currently delivered by the CLA service.

#### ■ Legal Systems: Islam

**Sir John Hayes:** [\[18879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an estimate of the number of sharia councils operating in England and Wales.

**Sarah Sackman:**

Sharia Councils are not part of the judicial system; therefore the Ministry of Justice does not hold data on the number of sharia councils in operation, and there is no plan to produce such data at this time.

#### ■ Ministry of Justice: Alcoholic Drinks

**Cat Smith:** [\[19346\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether Ministers in his Department have met with representatives of the alcohol industry since July 2024.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

Details of Ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK. Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

#### ■ Ministry of Justice: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

**Emily Thornberry:** [\[18913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much her Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.



**Alex Davies-Jones:**

Government Procurement Card (GPC) spending over £500 Transparency data for the Ministry of Justice is published on GOV.UK.

The published data for both 2022 and 2023 can be found at:

- [MOJ: spending over £500 on a GPC 2022 - GOV.UK.](#)
- [MOJ: spending over £500 on a GPC 2023 - GOV.UK.](#)

The total spend for transactions under £500 on GPC is set out in the table below:

	TOTAL 1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2022	TOTAL 1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2023
Under £500 including refunds	28,370,116.77	31,559,138.10

**Emily Thornberry:**[\[19661\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many government procurement cards were held by staff within (a) her core Department and (b) executive agencies of her Department at the end of calendar years (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The following number of Government procurement cards (GPCs) were held at:

DATE	ACTIVE CARDS IN CORE DEPARTMENT	ACTIVE CARDS IN EXECUTIVE AGENCIES
31 December 2022	74	1135
31 December 2023	95	1182

## ■ Offenders: Deportation and Repatriation

**Rupert Lowe:**[\[18747\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many (a) foreign national offenders have been deported and (b) UK citizens have been returned following imprisonment abroad for each country with which the UK has a prisoner transfer agreement in each of the last 10 years.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Data on returns of foreign national offenders are regularly published in the Home Office's quarterly release "[Immigration Systems Statistics](#)".

Statistics on UK citizens who were returned to England and Wales following imprisonment abroad are provided in the table attached. To prevent disclosure that could identify individuals, as required under the data protection principles, the symbol \* is used for suppressed values of five or fewer.

Foreign national offenders who commit crime should be in no doubt that the law will be enforced and, where appropriate, we will work with the Home Office to pursue their deportation. This will help to manage prison pressures, keep the public safe and reduce crime.

Attachments:

1. [PQ\\_18747\\_table](#) [2024-12-17 PQ 18747 table.xlsx]

■ Prisoners

**Rupert Lowe:** [\[18750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many prisoners remained in prison beyond the end of their sentence in HMP (a) Maidstone, (b) Huntercombe and(c) Morton Hall in each of the last ten years.

**Rupert Lowe:** [\[18751\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much was spent on (a) translation and (b) interpretation in HMP (i) Maidstone, (ii) Huntercombe and (iii) Morton Hall in each of the last ten years.

**Rupert Lowe:** [\[18752\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an estimate of the total number of drug related incidents in (a) HMP Maidstone, (b) HMP Huntercombe and (c) HMP Morton Hall in each of the last five years.

**Rupert Lowe:** [\[18753\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will provide a breakdown of the offences inmates are serving time for in (a) HMP Maidstone, (b) HMP Huntercombe and (c) HMP Morton Hall.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

To provide data on prisoners remaining in custody beyond their sentence date would require a search of individual records, which could not be done without incurring disproportionate cost.

Information on interpretation and translation costs covering the time period specified is not available. Expenditure interpretation and translation in the current financial year to date is shown in the table below. As both types of expenditure are accounted for under the same budget item, it is not possible to provide a further breakdown.

ESTABLISHMENT	INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION COSTS, APR-SEPT 2024 (£)
HMP Maidstone	41,230.97
HMP Huntercombe	1,890.87
HMP Morton Hall	8,575.63

“Drug-related incident” is not a discrete category within the data collected. A variety of different types of incidents could potentially be drug related. It would therefore be necessary to make a detailed search of individual records to establish which incidents could be categorised in that way. This could not be done without incurring disproportionate cost.

The latest published breakdown of offences for which prisoners at the three establishments have been imprisoned can be found via the following link (under the ‘PT’ tab): [Prison Population data tool 2024-09-30.xlsx](#).

## ■ Prisoners: Transgender People

**Ian Sollom:**

**[19488]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she plans to prevent transgender women being placed in male population prisons while their cases are reviewed.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Transgender women that have a history of violent and/or sexual offences, or retain their birth genitalia, are initially allocated to the men’s prison estate. Arrangements are made to keep them and other prisoners safe ahead of risk assessments that consider their ongoing placement. These assessments can be held prior to sentencing, and where they are not, they will be convened urgently for transgender women allocated to the men’s estate.

Recognising the vulnerability of some transgender prisoners, separate provision for transgender women exists on a discrete unit at HMP Downview, which enables us to manage transgender women who both pose too much risk to be held in the general women’s estate but are too vulnerable to be held in the men’s estate.

We support transgender prisoners regardless of where they are held, and most transgender women do not request to be held in the women’s estate.

## ■ Prisons: Crimes of Violence

**Rupert Lowe:**

**[18749]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many assaults on staff there were by prisoners in HMP (a) Maidstone, (b) Huntercombe and (c) Morton Hall in each of the last five years; and what the national average was for those assaults.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Please see the below table showing the number and rate of assaults on staff in HMP (a) Maidstone, (b) Huntercombe and (c) Morton Hall in each of the last five years, together with the rate of assaults on staff across the estate as a whole.

**Number and rate per 1,000 prisoners of assaults on staff <sup>1</sup> within prison custody, 2019 to 2023**

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Number of incidents</b>					
Maidstone	25	48	20	27	40
Huntercombe	19	16	17	10	8
Morton Hall	42	13	8	6	16
England & Wales	9,185	7,501	7,539	7,221	9,204
<b>Rate of incidents per 1,000 prisoners <sup>2</sup></b>					
Maidstone	42.6	86.8	35.9	46.7	67.2
Huntercombe	40.8	37.0	41.2	22.1	17.3
Morton Hall	170.0	114.9	107.7	33.7	47.9
England & Wales	111.6	93.9	96.5	89.8	107.6

These figures have been drawn from the HMPPS Incident Reporting System. Care is taken when processing and analysing returns but the detail is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system. Although shown to the last case, the figures may not be accurate to that level.

(1) Assaults on staff are a subset of all assault incidents. Some assault incidents may be recorded as both a prisoner-on-prisoner assault and an assault on staff.

(2) Rates express the number of incidents per 1,000 prisoners, and give a more reliable indicator of trends than numbers of incidents because they take account of changes in the prison population over time. The rates are calculated by dividing the number of incidents occurring within a twelve-month period by the average prison population at the end of each month within the same period, multiplied by 1,000. The prison population figures are published in Offender Management Statistics Quarterly.

## ■ Prisons: Repairs and Maintenance

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**

**[19860]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment she has made of the (a) effectiveness and (b) value for money the privatised prison maintenance service.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The value and performance of the Department's private-sector service providers are subject to ongoing contract management, and current performance is in line with expected parameters.

As contracts approach expiry, assessments are conducted to inform decisions about future services. A 2023 assessment in partnership with the Cabinet Office determined

that a privatised solution was the preferred option for future prison maintenance services. These contracts will be competitively tendered.

## ■ Probation Service: Buildings

**Sir Ashley Fox:**

[19968]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many Probation Service staff are assigned to work in each office in London; and how many desks are there in each office.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

Information on staff numbers at London Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) as at 30 September 2024 can be found in table 16, lines 91-108 (broken down by grade), of the HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2024 tables at:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/673de4672ff787d4e01b0886/hmpps-workforce-statistics-tables-sep-2024.ods>.

The methodology used to calculate occupancy at Probation Buildings in London Offices does not take into account individual desk usage over specific time periods.

## ■ Reoffenders: Nationality

**Rupert Lowe:**

[18746]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December to Question 16095 on Reoffenders: Foreign Nations, what was the (a) total number of reoffences and (b) nationality of the five reoffenders with the highest number of reoffences.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Regarding (a), the total number of reoffences for all adult foreign national offenders who received a court or custody order, I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave on 11 November to Question [12200](#).

We have provided data for (b), the nationalities of the five foreign national reoffenders with the highest number of reoffences, in the attached table.

We refer all foreign national offenders in receipt of custodial sentences to the Home Office. Those sentenced to 12 months, or more are automatically considered for deportation.

Foreign national offenders who commit crime should be in no doubt that the law will be enforced and, where appropriate, we will work with the Home Office to pursue their deportation. This will help to manage prison pressures, keep the public safe and reduce crime. We are currently on track to remove more foreign national offenders this year than at any time in recent years, and we are working across government to explore the ways we accelerate this work further.

### Attachments:

1. [PQ 18746 table](#) [2024-12-17 PQ 18746 table - FINAL.xlsx]

## ■ Schools: Civil Proceedings

**Laurence Turner:**

**[20096]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what information her Department holds on the number of legal cases against schools for claimed (a) disability discrimination and (b) a failure to make reasonable adjustments.

**Sarah Sackman:**

Information about appeals to the First-tier Tribunal for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), which includes disability discrimination in schools, is published at: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics).

Failure to make reasonable adjustments is not recorded as a separate category of disability discrimination.

Those claims will be included in the “uncategorised” data set.

## ■ Young Offender Institutions

**Chris Hinchliff:**

**[19557]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of HM Inspectorate of Prisons' report entitled Separation of children in young offender institutions – review of progress, published on 1 October 2024.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Where there is a clear risk of harm, separation is used to prevent harm to the child or young person who is being separated, or to others. Separation should be a last resort when managing behaviour, but it can be critical to reducing the risk of harm in difficult situations.

The separation of children and young people is rightly an area for scrutiny. The Youth Custody Service (YCS) has clear oversight at a national level of every child and young person who is separated, including the length of time for which they have been separated, and their access to regime. It should be noted that there are some children and young people who are subject to separation who have elected not to associate with their peers.

The increase in use of separation should be seen in the context of the change over time in the level of risk. In 2023-24, on average, 68% of children and young people were in custody for offences of violence against the person, compared with 33% in 2015-16. In Young Offender Institutions (YOIs), approximately 40% of the population are on remand, which adds to high number of new admissions and consequent instability. Unlike other parts of the Children and Young People Secure Estate, YOIs are required to accept any child or young person placed with them.

Our YOIs are working hard to reduce the use of separation and non-association, which is often necessary to manage risk and safeguarding concerns. The YCS has taken a range of actions to improve use of separation in the youth estate, including providing additional resources to ensure effective management and to improve

national and local oversight. It is working hard to improve regime and time-out-of-room for all children.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### ■ Economic Growth: Northern Ireland

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[19294\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what discussions he has had with the Department for Economy on Northern Ireland growth deals.

**Hilary Benn:**

The UK Government is investing £617m through the four City and Growth Deals which cover the whole of Northern Ireland.

My officials meet regularly with their counterparts from the Northern Ireland Departments of Economy and Finance to discuss delivery of the four Northern Ireland growth deals and to maximise the use of this funding for the long-term economic growth of Northern Ireland.

I have met with a range of stakeholders and delivery partners, including the First Minister, deputy First Minister and Minister of Finance to discuss the City and Growth Deals. I was delighted to recently sign the Mid South West Growth Deal's Heads of Terms Document in Cookstown. The signing was a fantastic culmination of the collective efforts of the local councils involved and a demonstration of what can be achieved when we work together.

### ■ Gender Based Violence: Northern Ireland

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[19299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will hold further discussions with the Northern Ireland Executive on tackling violence against women and girls in Northern Ireland.

**Hilary Benn:**

This Government is committed to halving violence against women and girls within a decade, through a joined up approach across the UK. We have discussed this issue with the First and deputy First Minister, and with a range of civil society organisations working to tackle violence against women and girls in Northern Ireland. We will continue to work collaboratively with the Executive, as they implement the new Northern Ireland Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls.

### ■ Murder of Patrick Finucane Independent Inquiry

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**

[\[20005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, when he expects the independent inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005 into the murder of Patrick Finucane to begin sitting.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Inquiries Act 2005 sets out clear steps to follow in setting up an inquiry, including the appointment of the Chair, agreement on the Terms of Reference, working through the necessary logistics such as facilities and services procurement, and setting up the Inquiry secretariat. I am keen that the Inquiry is able to begin its work without undue delay.

■ **Northern Ireland Office: Alcoholic Drinks****Cat Smith:** [19348]

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether Ministers in his Department have met with representatives of the alcohol industry since July 2024.

**Hilary Benn:**

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

**SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ **Broadband and Internet: Hendon****David Pinto-Duschinsky:** [19218]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department plans to take steps with industry to help improve (a) broadband and (b) other internet speed in Hendon.

**Chris Bryant:**

According to the independent website Thinkbroadband.com, over 99% of premises in the Hendon constituency can already access superfast broadband speeds ( $\geq 30$  Mbps), and over 75% of premises can access a gigabit-capable broadband connection.

We anticipate that the majority of the premises in urban areas such as Hendon will receive a gigabit-capable connection through the commercial market, although we are conscious that connections to some properties in some areas can be affected by complex wayleave negotiations. Any remaining premises will be considered for support through the government's Project Gigabit.

■ **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution****Emily Thornberry:** [18911]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much his Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.



**Feryal Clark:**

Department for Science Innovation and Technology does not hold the requested information for 2022 as DSIT was established in February 2023. The total department spent on government procurement card purchases between February 2023 to December 2023 are outlined below:

- a) Above £500 - total £114,646
- b) Below £500 - total £78,502

## ■ Global Challenges Research Fund and Newton Fund

**Chi Onwurah:**[\[20011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Official Development Assistance (ODA) expenditure has been provided to the (a) Newton Fund and (b) Global Challenges Research Fund (i) in total and (ii) in each year since their launch; when each fund will close; and how ODA funding previously allocated to each fund will be redirected once these funds close.

**Feryal Clark:**

Official Development Assistance (ODA) spend, by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) on research and development (R&D) is as follows:

(£M)	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
GCRF	391	379	220	139	84	1,430
Newton Fund	119	99	72	24	15	450

Due to the Machinery of Government change, and reporting of previous years' spend alongside spend now reported under the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, disaggregated data for solely DSIT's share pre-2019 is not currently available.

Both GCRF and the Newton Fund will come to a natural close by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. The Government will allocate future ODA to Departments as part of its standard Spending Review process.

## ■ Social Media: National Security and Politics and Government

**Mark Pritchard:**[\[18514\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will take steps to prevent social media companies adjusting network algorithms to promote actions by users (a) favouring political (i) candidates and (ii) outcomes and (b) who are potential national security threats.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Online Safety Act gives platforms duties to tackle illegal content. The regulator, Ofcom, has outlined steps providers can take to fulfil these duties in codes of

practice, including recommending steps for stopping illegal foreign interference and terrorism content being promoted via algorithms. These duties should be in effect by spring 2025.

The Act will also require all services to have clear, accessible Terms of Service (ToS) and will require Category 1 services to state what legal content for adults is not accepted. Companies must have effective reporting mechanisms, enabling users to raise concerns about enforcement of ToS, if they feel companies are not fulfilling their duties.

## ■ Solar Events: Research

**Dr Ben Spencer:** [\[18658\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment has he made of potential opportunities for research into (a) space weather and (b) its consequences through Horizon Europe.

**Dr Ben Spencer:** [\[18659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with Horizon Europe on UK-based research into (a) space weather and (b) its consequences since July 2024.

**Chris Bryant:**

Space research in Horizon Europe is covered under Pillar 2, in the cluster 'Digital, Industry and Space'. DSIT encourages UK researchers to take part in the available funding opportunities to support international cooperation.

The EU has restricted the participation of associated countries in a small part of the programme, which includes some calls focused on space technology. DSIT is working constructively with the EU to address these restrictions. We do not pay for areas in which we do not participate.

Making Horizon Europe association a success is DSIT's priority and DSIT is working to boost UK participation and remove barriers to international R&D collaborations.

**Dr Ben Spencer:** [\[18666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of AI on UK research into space weather and its consequences.

**Chris Bryant:**

We have made no such direct assessment, but as a general-purpose technology, AI has a wide array of applications and the UK's existing expert regulators are best placed to regulate the vast majority of AI systems in the context in which they're deployed.

**SCOTLAND****■ Scotland Office: Alcoholic Drinks****Cat Smith:**[\[19345\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, whether Ministers in his Department have met with representatives of the alcohol industry since July 2024.

**Ian Murray:**

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK. Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

**TRANSPORT****■ A75: Repairs and Maintenance****John Cooper:**[\[20475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the oral contribution of the Leader of the House in response to the question from the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway of 14 November 2024, Official Report, column 935, when she plans to respond in relation to the money earmarked for the A75.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

In the Autumn Budget 2024, the Chancellor committed to move forward feasibility work on improvements to the A75 by providing up to £5 million to the Scottish Government in 2025-26.

Initial work has been done by Transport Scotland to scope out possible options for the realignment of the A75 around the settlements of Springholm and Crockettford. Following the Budget, the Scottish Government announced they have awarded a contract to progress this work.

**■ Civil Aviation Authority: Equality****Sir John Hayes:**[\[19237\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the Civil Aviation Authority.

**Mike Kane:**

As of 12 December 2024, the Civil Aviation Authority employs one full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion member of staff.

**■ Department for Transport: Alcoholic Drinks****Cat Smith:**[\[19335\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many alcohol industry representatives Ministers in his Department have met since July 2024.

**Mike Kane:**

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK. Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

**■ Department for Transport: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution****Emily Thornberry:**[\[18912\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much her Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

**Mike Kane:**

(a) The value of spend for purchases under £500 made against the Department's budget using a Government Procurement Card was:

(i) in calendar year 2022 - £391,995.07

(ii) in calendar year 2023 - £415,715.73

(b) The value of spend for purchases over £500 made against the Department's budget using a Government Procurement Card was:

(i) in calendar year 2022 - £567,711.85

(ii) in calendar year 2023 - £633,173.21

**■ Driving Licences: Northern Ireland****Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[20006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 25 November 2024 to Question 14917 on Driving Licences: Northern Ireland, when she plans to announce the other measures.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Further measures to support young and novice drivers are being considered. More information will be set out in due course.

**■ Driving Tests****Luke Taylor:**[\[19118\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will provide extra funding to the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency to help tackle backlogs in driving tests.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's (DVSA) main priority is upholding road safety standards while it works hard to reduce car practical driving test waiting times.

Measures in place to reduce waiting times include the recruitment of new driving examiners (DE), conducting tests outside regular hours, including at weekends and on public holidays, and buying back annual leave from DEs. DVSA also continues to

deploy DEs from areas with lower waiting times into those where waiting times are longer.

DVSA is largely funded from the fees it charges for the delivery of its operational activities including driving tests.

DVSA keeps the fees it charges for all of its statutory services, including driving tests, under continuous review. Any proposals to change any fees would be subject to HM Treasury approval and public consultation.

## ■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

**Helen Maguire:**

[\[20120\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of regulating the prices for electric vehicle charging points.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Government is committed to making EV charging infrastructure affordable and accessible.

Energy suppliers providing energy to EV chargepoints are regulated by Ofgem. Ofgem does not currently set a limit for the price that can be charged for the resale of electricity through EV chargepoints. We continue to work with DESNZ and Ofgem on measures to keep EV charging affordable.

Under the Public Charge Point Regulations 2023, all chargepoint operators must display the price of charging using a common metric of p/kWh and make their data on pricing available freely. This allows drivers to easily compare the price of charging and find the best chargepoint for their needs.

## ■ High Speed Two: Equality

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[18880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by High Speed Two Limited.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

HS2 Ltd has no full-time roles dedicated to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

## ■ Highway Code

**Graeme Downie:**

[\[20100\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she plans to take to increase awareness of the changes to the hierarchy of road users in Highway Code Rules H1 to 3.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Following a review of the Highway Code in 2022, the Department introduced a hierarchy of road users, which ensures that those who can do the greatest harm have the greatest responsibility to reduce the danger or threat they may pose to others.

Communications to raise awareness of the changes were launched via a factual awareness raising campaign in 2022. This was followed by broader behaviour change campaigns in the summers of 2022 and 2023, to help embed the changes and encourage understanding and uptake of the guidance. Over £2.4 million has been spent on media across the campaign, utilising channels such as radio, digital audio, video on demand and social media advertising.

Campaign outcomes included 86% of road users having heard of the changes by September 2023, and 9 in 10 of those who recognised a campaign advert saying they had taken action as a result.

We continue to promote The Highway Code changes on THINK! and Department for Transport social media channels and via our partner organisations. We continually review allocation of communications spend across road safety issues based on the latest insights and evidence.

#### ■ Independent HS2 Construction Commissioner and Independent HS2 Residents' Commissioner

**Greg Smith:** [\[20034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when she last met with the HS2 (a) Construction Commissioner and (b) Residents Commissioner.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Secretary of State, who was appointed on 29th November 2024, has not yet met the Construction or Residents' Commissioners. However, Minister for Rail Lord Hendy met both Commissioners on Monday 16th December.

#### ■ Motor Insurance: Young People

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[19766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to her Answer on 9 December to UIN 17876 on motor insurance - young people, how many meetings of the cross-government motor insurance taskforce have taken place; and what progress has been made in reducing motor insurance premiums.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

We are committed to tackling the increased costs of motor insurance, to deliver on our manifesto commitment.

As set out in my previous response, the Taskforce, including the Stakeholder Panel, met for the first time on 16th October. The Taskforce is currently exploring short- and long-term actions for departments that may contribute to stabilising or reducing premiums, while maintaining appropriate levels of cover.

As it takes this work forwards, the Taskforce will continue to work closely with the independent Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the Competition and Markets Authority. The FCA has launched a market study into the premium finance market

and is undertaking work to analyse the cause of increased claims costs in the motor insurance market.

## ■ **Motorcycles: Safety**

**Dr Luke Evans:**

**[20257]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with local authorities on ensuring (a) major new road infrastructure design is safe for motorcyclists and (b) pothole funding ensures smooth roads for (i) motorcyclists and (ii) other road users.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Local authorities are responsible for setting their own design standards for their roads. They are subject to various legal duties in managing their roads, including to promote road safety. It is for them to ensure road infrastructure is safe and fit for purpose and is designed and delivered in a way that takes account of all road users' needs.

This Government is committed to tackling the poor state of our roads. As announced in October's Budget, the Government is providing local highway authorities in England with an additional £500 million funding for local highway maintenance for the 2025/26 financial year. This will help them to provide smoother, safer roads for motorcyclists and other road users. Further details of this will be set out shortly.

## ■ **Railways: North of England**

**Jerome Mayhew:**

**[19012]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of Northern Powerhouse Rail.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Government is progressing planning and design works to support future delivery of our plans for northern rail connectivity.

As set out by the Chancellor at the Budget, the Transpennine Route Upgrade between York and Manchester, via Leeds and Huddersfield, will transform northern rail connectivity and lay the ground for Northern Powerhouse Rail.

We are thoroughly reviewing the position we have inherited and will set out further details in due course.

## ■ **Road Works**

**Lewis Cocking:**

**[R] [19996]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to ensure the adequacy of the Street Manager service.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Street Manager service is closely managed by the Department, with officials also overseeing ongoing development and improvement of the service in line with Government Digital Services best practice. There is a governance group made up of elected representatives from the public and private sector whom officials meet monthly, and a small group of subject matter experts are consulted on a weekly basis. A roadmap setting out future enhancements of the service is agreed with the governance group and published every six months. Users can provide feedback and raise any concerns they have about the service at any point, and a yearly survey monitors satisfaction.

**Roads: Lighting****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[19706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what her policy is on local highways authorities delivering carbon savings by turning off street lighting at night.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The management of street lighting in England is the responsibility of local highway authorities, and it is for each local highway authority to decide the level of service they wish their street lighting network to deliver, and at what times. In reaching their decisions local authorities will take a number of factors into account, including the safety of all road users.

The Department for Transport encourages all local highway authorities to replace their street lighting with LED lighting, which is better for the environment than traditional street lighting.

The Department is also funding a £30 million research programme ("Live Labs 2") to allow local authorities to pilot innovative ways of reducing the carbon impact of their highways operations. One of the projects is piloting new ways of decarbonising and rationalising street lighting, and testing lower carbon alternatives to it.

**Shipping: Territorial Waters****Dr Andrew Murrison:**[\[19267\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many (a) unregistered and (b) uninsured vessels have been boarded by UK authorities in UK territorial waters in 2024.

**Mike Kane:**

No unregistered or uninsured commercial vessels have been boarded by UK authorities in UK territorial waters this year.



## ■ South Western Railway: Rolling Stock

**Edward Morello:**

[\[19199\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department plans to take to help fund the replacement of end-of-life rolling stock on South Western Railways. in the context of the planned establishment of Great British Railways.

**Simon Lightwood:**

South Western Railway has procured 750 new Class 701 carriages to replace older Class 455 units. The first trains have entered passenger service, with a gradual roll out expected over the next two years.

The Government is in the early stages of formulating a rolling stock strategy. Once established, Great British Railways will take the strategy forward providing a long-term approach to future rolling stock needs and helping to secure better value from the private rolling stock market.

## TREASURY

### ■ Bank Services: Direct Debits

**Lisa Smart:**

[\[20062\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring banks to notify account holders when a new direct debit is established against their account.

**Lisa Smart:**

[\[20063\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to help tackle the potential misuse of customer bank details by merchants when setting up direct debits.

**Lisa Smart:**

[\[20064\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to require explicit consumer consent for each direct debit set up on a bank account.

**Tulip Siddiq:**

The government believes there should be strong protections in place to ensure that customers can make payments in a secure and informed way. There are already such protections in place for Direct Debit payments under the rules made by its operator, Pay.UK, which is regulated by the Bank of England and the Payment Systems Regulator. As such, the government does not currently have plans to legislate in this area.

Under these rules, when a Direct Debit is established the receiving organisation is required to verify that the Direct Debit instruction has been authorised by the payment account holder. Notice of the amounts and dates of collection for each Direct Debit payment must also be given to customers in advance, unless otherwise agreed, enabling customers to review their upcoming outgoing payments and plan ahead. In

the case of any incorrect or fraudulent payments, the account holder is entitled to an immediate refund of any unauthorised amounts collected from their account provider under the Direct Debit Guarantee scheme. Further information about Direct Debits is available at: [www.directdebit.co.uk](http://www.directdebit.co.uk)

## ■ Fossil Fuels: Insurance

**Clive Lewis:** [\[19719\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2024 to Question 17571 on Fossil Fuels: Insurance, whether her Department has taken steps with the Prudential Regulation Authority to ensure Lloyd's of London's underwriting activities are compliant with the UK's legal climate commitments.

**Clive Lewis:** [\[19720\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2024 to Question 17571 on Fossil Fuels: Insurance, whether the Prudential Regulation Authority is responsible for enforcing the (a) development and (b) implementation of transition plans for (i) UK regulated financial institutions and (ii) FTSE 100 companies.

**Tulip Siddiq:**

The Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) is responsible for overseeing the prudential regulation and supervision of financial institutions in the UK, ensuring their safety, soundness, and compliance with regulatory standards.

Responsibility for regulatory requirements relating to transition plans sits with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), who have set out their plans to consult on strengthened transition plan disclosure expectations for listed companies.

The PRA and the FCA are both operationally independent regulators, who have the power to take action against financial services firms that do not comply with their rules.

## ■ Members: Correspondence

**Clive Jones:** [\[19159\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when the Chief Secretary to the Treasury plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Wokingham on Orchestral Tax Relief, dated 24 September 2024.

**James Murray:**

A response to this correspondence has been sent to the hon. Member for Wokingham.

**Clive Jones:** [\[19160\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when she plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Wokingham on Food Banks and Universal Credit, dated 4 October 2024.

**Darren Jones:**

HM Treasury officials reviewed the correspondence and feel that it would be more appropriate for a response to be provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Colleagues from DWP have confirmed acceptance of this case and the hon. Member for Wokingham will receive a response from them in due course.

**■ Money Laundering: Politically Exposed Persons****Mr Gregory Campbell:****[20004]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many non-domestic politically exposed persons have been prosecuted since the amendment to the Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Transfer of Funds Regulations 2017 became operational in January 2024.

**Tulip Siddiq:**

The Ministry of Justice holds prosecution statistics; however, these statistics are not separated by the status of individuals as politically exposed persons (PEPs).

The enforcement of the Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Transfer of Funds Regulations 2017, as amended, is carried out by various supervisory authorities such as the FCA. This includes actions in relation to regulatory failings involving non-domestic PEPs where applicable.

The FCA is in the process of updating its guidance on PEPs to reflect the changes made by The Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (Amendment) Regulations 2023. The FCA's revised guidance will be published in due course.

**■ Private Education: VAT****Esther McVey:****[18930]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many and what proportion of private schools have been provided with a VAT number.

**Esther McVey:****[18931]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many and what proportion of private schools have been provided with a VAT number.

**James Murray:**

HMRC publishes data on the VAT population by sector on an annual basis. The latest statistics can be found here: [Value Added Tax \(VAT\) annual statistics - GOV.UK](#)

The point at which private schools need to register for VAT depends on their individual circumstances and fee schedules. A significant number were registered for VAT before the announcement that, from 1 January 2025, all education and boarding services provided by a private school or connected person will be subject to VAT at the standard rate of 20%.

HMRC is also supporting schools through the registration process via webinars, its helpline and a dedicated technical query mailbox which can be used by schools, their representative bodies and tax advisors.

## ■ Public Expenditure

**Rupert Lowe:** [19126]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will consult hon. Members with business experience on a cross-party basis in the spending review.

**Darren Jones:**

Phase 2 of the Spending Review will maximise the use of independent scrutiny and external experience. External experts will support departments to review and scrutinise budgets, bringing ideas, expertise and innovation of the private sector into the heart of government.

This will also include greater use of departmental non-executive directors – many of whom have extensive experience of business and industry – in the process.

The Treasury has published an external representation portal, where both businesses and members of the wider public can put forward policy proposals, including proposals for delivering public services more efficiently or effectively.

## ■ Treasury: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

**Emily Thornberry:** [18917]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what total amount of expenditure was incurred on purchases (a) above £500 and (b) below £500 made on government procurement cards issued by (i) HM Treasury and (ii) HMRC net of any refunded payments in (A) 2022 and (B) 2023.

**James Murray:**

Procurement cards assist with the reduction in procurement bureaucracy and boost efficiency. Controls are in place that limit purchase types and values in line with individual departmental controls.

Departmental expenditure made on government procurement is published on gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/gpc-spend>

## ■ Wholesale Trade: Business Rates

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:** [18903]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has had recent discussions with the food and drink wholesale sector on the classification of wholesale premises as online retail warehouses in the Transforming Business Rates Policy Paper; and what assessment she has made of the potential impact of this classification on the sector.

**James Murray:**

HM Treasury releases a quarterly record of Ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations. This can be found online:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmt-ministers-meetings-hospitality-gifts-and-overseas-travel>.

The Transforming Business Rates Discussion Paper, published by the Government at the Autumn Budget, set out that we are creating a fairer business rates system that protects the high-street, supports investment, and is fit for the 21st century.

To deliver our manifesto pledge, we intend to introduce permanently lower tax rates for high street retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties, with rateable values below £500,000, from 2026-27.

This tax cut must be sustainably funded, and so the Government intends to apply a higher rate from 2026-27 on the most valuable properties - those with a Rateable Value of £500,000 and above. These represent less than one per cent of all properties, but include the majority of large distribution warehouses, including those used by online giants.

The rates for any new business rate multipliers will be set at Budget 2025 so that the Government can take into account the upcoming revaluation outcomes as well as the economic and fiscal context. The statutory definition for qualifying RHL properties will be set out in regulations ahead of implementation in the 2026-27 financial year.

## WALES

### ■ Wales Office: Buildings

**Sir Ashley Fox:**

**[19969]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the Answer of 19 November 2024 to Question 13970 on Wales Office: Buildings, how many staff attended the Department's HQ building in that period; and how many staff are assigned to that workplace.

**Dame Nia Griffith:**

The average number of staff attending the Department's HQ building in that period for which figures are available is 15. The Office currently has 24 civil servants assigned to its London Office.

## WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

### ■ Disability: Discrimination

**James Naish:**

**[901930]**

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking to help end discrimination against disabled people.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

We are tackling pay discrimination through our plan to make work pay – implementing disability pay gap reporting for large employers, and enshrining in law the right to equal pay for disabled people.

On International Day of Persons with Disabilities, I announced new Lead Ministers for Disability in every Government department. Working together, we will break down barriers to opportunity and fulfil the manifesto commitment to ensure the views and voices of disabled people are at the heart of everything this Government does.

**Domestic Abuse****Helen Morgan:**[\[901927\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Justice on the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to create domestic abuse-aggravated offences.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

I regularly meet with the Lord Chancellor to discuss the Government's mission to halve VAWG and tackle domestic abuse.

I am aware of Private Members Bill tabled by the Honourable Member for Eastbourne.

I will carefully consider both the merits and risks of creating domestic abuse-aggravated offences and respond via the usual parliamentary procedure.

**Special Educational Needs****Dr Roz Savage:**[\[901936\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education on SEND provision.

**Bridget Phillipson:**

We are working across government and the sector to ensure children and young people with SEND receive the right support to succeed, in mainstream schools where possible.

High needs funding will increase by almost £1bn in 2025-26, compared to 2024-25. We have announced £740 million of capital funding to create more specialist places in both mainstream and special schools.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### ■ Child Maintenance Service: Telephone Services

**Jo Platt:**

[\[19767\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to (a) monitor and (b) reduce the average call waiting time for the Child Maintenance Service helpline.

**Andrew Western:**

The Child Maintenance Service is committed to delivering the best possible service to all customers within our growing caseload. We continuously monitor telephony performance and through this we fully recognise that call waiting times are, at times, longer than we would like. To address this, we are working to improve the efficiency of our customer interactions through both telephone and digital channels.

In September, we introduced the Digital Assist Telephony Service, which has been a significant step forward in our mission to support and encourage customers to use our online services. In October, we restructured our call routing to make more caseworkers available to answer telephone calls. By promoting self-service options online and efficient call routing, we have freed up valuable resources to deliver a more responsive service and allow caseworkers more time to better assist customers who need to reach out to us via telephone.

Additionally, we have extended the hours of the telephony service to 6pm on weekdays in order to meet demand, and our online services are available to all customers 24/7. This has been extremely successful with just over 1 million customers logging on to their online My Child Maintenance Case account in November. As a result, we have seen a reduction in call volumes, as well as improved customer service delivery through the combination of telephone and digital channels.

We will continue to review, evaluate, and enhance our telephony service to meet demand and deliver a quality customer service.

### ■ Department for Work and Pensions: Alcoholic Drinks

**Cat Smith:**

[\[19336\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many alcohol industry representatives Ministers in his Department have met since July 2024.

**Andrew Western:**

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK. Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

## ■ Department for Work and Pensions: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

**Emily Thornberry:**

**[18915]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much her Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

**Andrew Western:**

The table below shows the government procurement card spend split by transactions above £500 and transactions of £500 and below for the 2022 and 2023 calendar years. Figures are net of refunded payments.

	2022	2023
Value of GPC purchases above £500	£59,801.33	£286,902.08
Value of GPC purchases of £500 and below	£197,628.68	£524,973.18

*(Source: Smart Data Online)*

Information about payments above £500 can be found here: [DWP and CMG spending over £500 - GOV.UK](#)

## ■ Department for Work and Pensions: Occupational Health

**Rupert Lowe:**

**[19128]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff employed by her Department are responsible for staff welfare; and whether her Department has any contracts with external organisations for staff welfare services.

**Andrew Western:**

The DWP Wellbeing Team includes a resource of 8 employees who are responsible for ensuring we proactively support the health and wellbeing of colleagues across DWP, creating a safe and healthy culture for colleagues at work.

DWP has a contract for Occupational Health provision and delivery of a comprehensive Employee Assistance Programme with People Asset Management (PAM). DWP also has an Eyecare contract with Specsavers which provides an eyecare service for DWP employees who use display screen equipment at work and offers a free eye test once every two years.



## ■ Department for Work and Pensions: Technology

**Matt Vickers:**

[\[19421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to use technology to improve its productivity.

**Andrew Western:**

As part of the Department's ongoing transformation, we are increasing our use of automation, improving our underlying technology, and increasing the number of citizen self-service opportunities where it is appropriate to do so, meaning that, despite increased demand on our services, more of our time can be deployed onto the activities that support our customers at the point of demand.

## ■ Department for Work and Pensions: Training

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[19125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will publish a list of companies contracted by her Department to undertake training for staff.

**Andrew Western:**

The Department's main route for Learning is via the Cabinet Office led Learning Frameworks contracts whose main suppliers are KPMG and Ernst and Young.

Any other learning is by exception and this information is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

## ■ Funeral Payments: Cohabitation

**Tom Hayes:**

[\[19553\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the eligibility for the Funeral Expenses Payment of unmarried partners.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Funeral Expenses Payments (FEP) scheme provides an important contribution towards the cost of a simple, respectful funeral arranged by someone who is in receipt of certain income related benefits or tax credits and has taken responsibility for the funeral.

A partner (married, unmarried or in a civil partnership) or immediately family member (adult child or parent) can make a claim for FEP. Where there is no partner or immediate family member, a close relative or friend may also be eligible for FEP.

The scheme meets the necessary costs of a burial or cremation in full and offers up to £1000 to meet other funeral expenses such as, the cost of a coffin, church and funeral director fees.

**■ Jobcentres: Assistive Technology**

**Richard Burgon:** **[19368]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will ensure that every computer in a jobcentre is equipped with assistive technology.

**Andrew Western:**

Computers allocated to DWP staff in jobcentres are equipped with the suite of software that comes with the operating system, augmented by specialist software as determined through the reasonable adjustments process on an individual basis to meet the specific needs of the staff member in question.

As part of its commitment to make services accessible to all customers, the Department provides computers for customer use in Jobcentres. All the computers have assistive technology built into those Operating Systems such as screen readers and screen magnification and are managed separately from the wider DWP IT estate.

The Department also provides a range of other items in Jobcentres such as alternative keyboards. Computers for customer use with assistive technology are currently in 634 permanent jobcentres.

**■ Motor Vehicles: Excise Duties**

**Manuela Perteghella:** **[19833]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will have discussions with the Secretary of State for Transport on the potential for data sharing with the DVLA to enable applications for reduced rate vehicle excise duty to be made (a) online and (b) in post offices.

**Andrew Western:**

The Secretary of State and I have regular discussions with Ministerial colleagues on a range of issues affecting those receiving social security benefits, including those which may bring with them an entitlement to additional support from other Departments, and how such services can be delivered more effectively.

**■ Pension Credit: Sutton and Cheam**

**Luke Taylor:** **[19490]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many eligible pensioners have applied for Pension Credit in Sutton and Cheam constituency since 1 August 2024.

**Emma Reynolds:**

National statistics published on 28 November, show that 150,000 Pension Credit claims were received between 29 July 2024 and 17 November 2024 - [Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - GOV.UK](#). Please note, this information is published weekly and the nearest available date to 1 August was used.

We do not hold this data at constituency level.

## ■ Pension Funds: Environment Protection

**Clive Lewis:**

[\[19718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2024 to Question 17570 on Pension Funds: Environment Protection, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of creating a legal obligation for UK-based pension schemes to divest from companies that are not compliant with the UK's climate commitments.

**Emma Reynolds:**

As set out in our answer of 9 December to Question 17570, in line with their fiduciary duty trustees of pension schemes have a responsibility to consider and review their approach to investment, stewardship and voting in light of the climate risks to their members. The Government has no current plans to change legislation.

## ■ Pension Service

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[19134\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many contacts to the Pension Service there were in each month of the last five years.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The attached table shows volumes of telephone calls received within Pension Service over the last 5 years and includes the following services:

- State Pension
- Pension Credit
- International Group
- Attendance Allowance
- Carers Allowance
- Winter Fuel Payment
- Bereavement
- Future Pension Service
- Includes all G4S outsourced.

Information regarding other contacts is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

**Attachments:**

1. [Attachment](#) [PQ 19134 Table.pdf]

**■ Social Security Benefits: Disability****Lisa Smart:****[20066]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of financial support available through the benefits system to people with (a) inflammatory bowel disease and (b) other unseen disabilities.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) provide a contribution towards the extra costs that may arise from a long-term disability or health condition. These benefits are assessed on the basis of needs arising and not on the condition itself so are available to those with inflammatory bowel disease and other, hidden conditions.

The extra costs benefits are non-contributory, non-means-tested and can be worth over £9,500 a year, tax free. Individuals can choose how to use their benefit, in the light of their individual needs and preferences. The benefit can also be paid in addition to any other financial or practical support someone may be entitled to such as Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance, NHS services, free prescriptions, help with travel costs to appointments or the Blue Badge scheme. The benefits have been consistently uprated in line with inflation since they were introduced and were, like other benefits, increased by 6.7% from 8 April 2024.

**■ State Retirement Pensions: Age****Steve Darling:****[19105]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many full-time equivalent staff are currently working on her Department's response to the report by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman entitled Women's State Pension age: our findings on injustice and associated issues, published on 21 March 2024.

**Emma Reynolds:**

In responding to the Ombudsman's report work was undertaken by civil servants across grades who worked both full and part-time.

The Ombudsman's report was detailed and complex. It took around 6 years to complete and the issues it considered spanned a period of some 30 years.

It is not possible to determine the exact number of people who worked on this as it fluctuated as we reviewed and considered different elements of the Ombudsman's report and evidence.

This work included input from teams across the Department, who supported as and when needed.

Following careful consideration of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's report into how changes to the State Pension age were communicated, the Government has decided we will not be paying compensation.

We have made our decision on the facts of the matter which we have set out in our detailed response and deposited in the House Library.

## ■ Winter Fuel Payment: Poverty

**Matt Vickers:**

**[18407]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of recent changes to the eligibility criteria for the Winter Fuel Payment on trends in the level of pensioners living in (a) relative and (b) absolute poverty.

**Emma Reynolds:**

On 19 November, Secretary of State wrote to the Work and Pensions Select Committee to share internal government modelling produced by the Department outlining estimates of the number of pensioners estimated to move into poverty as a result of the policy change. This letter is available here [Winter Fuel Payments eligibility change - Letter from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions](#).

The latest modelling shows that compared to the numbers that would have been in poverty without this policy, it is estimated that:

(a) there will be an additional 50,000 pensioners in relative poverty after housing costs in 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2027/28 and an additional 100,000 pensioners in relative poverty after housing costs in 2026/27, 2028/29 and 2029/30.

(b) for all other measures of poverty, it is estimated that there will be an additional 50,000 pensioners in poverty each year from 2024/25 to 2029/30.

The poverty impacts represent the change in the numbers in poverty as a result of the policy change only. They are not an estimate of the change in overall poverty each year or over time and should not be added together or interpreted as cumulative data.

It's important to note that this modelling is subject to a range of uncertainties meaning the poverty impacts are rounded to the nearest 50,000 individuals and the nearest 0.1 percentage point which should be taken into account when interpreting the results. This means that small variations in the underlying numbers impacted can lead to much larger changes in the rounded headline numbers.

The modelling does not account for any other measures announced at the Autumn Budget. The modelling also does not include any impacts on Pension Credit take-up as a result of the changes to Winter Fuel Payment eligibility.

The Prime Minister has been clear that means-testing the Winter Fuel Payment is not a decision that the Government wanted to take but given the £22 billion black hole in the economy, tough choices had to be made to fix the foundations and restore economic stability to make everyone better off in the long term.

Last year Winter Fuel Payments cost around £2 billion and were paid to pensioners regardless of their income. Given the dire state of the public finances the Government

has inherited, it's right that the Government targets support to those who need it most while the Government continues our work to stabilise the economy.

But the Government will continue to stand behind vulnerable households this winter, including through delivering the £150 Warm Home Discount for low-income households from October and extending the Household Support Fund with £421 million to ensure local authorities can support vulnerable people and families. The Government will also ensure around 1.3 million households in England and Wales will continue to receive up to £300 in Winter Fuel Payments, and the new state pension will increase by around £470 next year, which will significantly outstrip any loss for pensioners of the winter fuel payments.

In addition, the Government and industry have worked together to deliver a £500m Winter Support Commitment for customers, which will help customers most in need by providing credit on bills, enhanced debt write-off schemes, and increased funding for charity partners to target hard to reach customers.

The Government continues to urge anyone who thinks they may be entitled to Pension Credit to check now, as all eligible claims can be backdated, and anyone who makes a successful claim will receive their payment. Over a million pensioners will still receive the Winter Fuel Payment and our drive to boost Pension Credit take up has already seen a 145% increase in claims. Anyone who makes a successful claim for Pension Credit before 21 December and meets the eligibility criteria will receive both Pension Credit and a Winter Fuel Payment, and the Government has deployed more than 500 additional staff to process the increase in Pension Credit claims.

## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

#### ■ Free Trade Agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Update on Continuous Negotiations

**Minister of State for Trade Policy and Economic Security (Mr Douglas Alexander):**  
[\[HCWS333\]](#)

Growth is the number one mission of this government. Central to growing our economy and ensuring working people in every community feel the benefits of that growth, is an expansion of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with strategic partners.

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade announced the government's intention to deliver the UK's FTA negotiations programme in July. Negotiations with the GCC resumed on 24 September. Since then, the UK has held ongoing virtual and in person negotiations. This included a GCC delegation visiting London during the week of 21 October and a UK delegation visiting Riyadh during the week of 11 November.

To progress negotiations, I had productive discussions with counterparts in Saudi Arabia whilst attending the 2024 Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh. This was ahead of the Secretary of State for Business and Trade's visit to Qatar later in the week to attend the GCC Trade Ministers' meeting on 31 October. This event provided a good opportunity to discuss key issues with ministers from all member states and the shared ambition to move negotiations forward at pace.

Talks throughout the autumn have continued to be constructive, with good momentum from the GCC, which has enabled further treaty text to be agreed. The focus from both sides is on achieving a modern and commercially meaningful agreement.

A mutually beneficial FTA between the UK and the GCC will deliver economic growth, higher wages and new investment. A deal will deliver targeted growth that could increase bilateral trade by 16%, potentially adding an extra £8.6 billion a year to trade between the UK and GCC countries in the long run. This £8.6bn is on top of the £57.4bn worth of trade that we already have.

The negotiation is progressing at pace and good progress is being made in the following areas:

Services, Investment and Digital

Detailed technical discussions have been held across these areas, narrowing down outstanding issues in the text and setting out expectations for market access schedules. Constructive discussions have been had around mobility to better support the movement of businesspersons between the UK and the GCC. Investment remains a key area of interest for both sides, recognising the levels of inward and outward investment between the UK and GCC countries. A digital chapter, alongside provisions relating to innovation,

reflect the shared ambition for a future-facing deal, that can respond to the changes that technology will continue to bring to the global economy.

#### Goods

The aim of negotiators' discussions on goods market access is achieving commercially meaningful outcomes. This is an important area for both sides, and we continue to press for further progress on key UK interests and look forward to building on these discussions in the coming weeks. We also made good progress in technical discussions on Rules of Origin and Trade Remedies and are working constructively with the GCC to narrow down outstanding issues in the text.

#### Other areas of note

Negotiators continued to have constructive discussions on areas of sustainable trade, including Environment and Labour, as well as making further progress through negotiations on disputes and transparency.

I value the important role that Parliament plays in the scrutiny of the government's ambitious trade agenda. We will continue to ensure that Parliament is appropriately updated whilst also ensuring we protect our negotiating position.

## DEFENCE

### ■ Afghan Resettlement

**Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):**

[\[HCWS335\]](#)

Last month, people came together all over the United Kingdom, to honour all the members of our Armed Forces who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our security and freedoms. In this significant year of remembrance anniversaries, the Remembrance Sunday service at the Cenotaph was also notable for an historic first. This year was the first time our veterans of the Afghanistan campaign, marched past the Cenotaph together, as a distinct unit; a solemn acknowledgement of the sacrifice and bravery of their colleagues during the operation, and in the rebuilding process which followed. Tragically, 454 of their colleagues, did not have the option of joining them. I pay tribute to the commitment and courage of all those who served our country in Afghanistan.

Alongside British personnel, many Afghans also worked with commitment and courage to support the UK mission in Afghanistan. This includes members of Afghan specialist units, commonly known as the Triples, who fought valiantly alongside UK personnel, with some giving their lives and others suffering life-changing injuries. As set out by the Government in October, key issues have been identified and resolved through the Triples Review, with eligible former Triples and their families being invited to relocate to the UK. We are expecting an overturn rate of approximately 25% on a cohort of applications that were previously considered ineligible.

This Government is fully committed to delivering on the pledge made by Parliament to those in Afghanistan who are eligible to relocate and resettle, and we continue to welcome eligible Afghans and their families to the UK through our Afghan resettlement



schemes. We would like to express our gratitude to the Government of Pakistan for their cooperation as we have done this.

Whilst we recognise that resettlement is a complicated endeavour, we believe there is room for improvement in how we deliver for eligible Afghans and the communities in which they are being resettled, and ensure value for money for the taxpayer. At present, arrivals through different schemes are subject to differing and complex funding and support offers. This is why we are fixing the foundations of a complicated system and drawing together a single pipeline for Afghan resettlement, to deliver greater efficiency and better outcomes across Government.

By reforming our internal organisation across Government, we will bring to bear the collective expertise within the Home Office, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Ministry of Defence and ensure the best possible outcomes at each stage of the resettlement journey. It is only by empowering the departments to play to their strengths, that we will ensure optimal services and value for money are provided overall.

The best resettlement delivers successful integration and supports arrivals to rebuild their lives in their new home. That is why, from the spring, we will be limiting the time that arrivals spend in transitional accommodation to nine months. Transitional accommodation – provided by the Ministry of Defence – will continue to be a mixture of serviced accommodation, and hotels, alongside reduced use of the defence estate. It is a vital part of our support offer to Afghan arrivals, allowing them to orient themselves and set themselves up for success for their new lives in the UK.

All Afghan arrivals will be supported to source their own settled accommodation through the Find Your Own Accommodation (FYO) pathway. In recognition of the pressures on housing supply and the unique challenges facing this cohort, the Government commits to continuing to fund and support a pipeline of settled housing to support around half of these arrivals, who are the hardest to house. This will be through additional capital funding, community sponsorship and some Service Family Accommodation. This will ensure that there is a pipeline of settled accommodation to support delivery of the Afghan Resettlement Programme.

Local Authority and Devolved Government colleagues are essential to make this vision a reality. Building on ongoing engagement, we will be meeting with representatives of local government and Strategic Migration Partnerships early in the new year to embark on a specific process of co-design and delivery of immediate programme developments. It is their experience of resettlement and their continued calls for simplification which have informed this programme, and we look forward to working closely with them in its development.

We want to thank local authorities and communities for their continued support of this endeavour, which has been instrumental to both the successful operation of our transitional accommodation sites and for supporting moves into settled accommodation. In order for them to continue to deliver this vital work, we will continue to robustly test planning assumptions.

Over the past 12 months, we have welcomed around 90 eligible families each month and we expect this pace to continue. This cannot, however, be an endless process and ultimately, the Government intends to reach a position where the UK Afghan resettlement schemes can be closed. We will update the House on this accordingly.

We are grateful for the cross-Government commitment and approach to delivery on this important programme and will provide further updates in the new year. We will continue to work to deliver on our commitment to resettle those eligible Afghans who have supported the UK, and to whom we owe a debt of gratitude.

## ■ **Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2024**

**Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):**

[\[HCWS338\]](#)

I have today laid before parliament the 13th Armed Forces Annual Covenant Report. The 2024 report covers October 2023 to September 2024, and showcases the work that has been achieved throughout the UK in support of our Armed Forces community.

Thank you to all my colleagues for their departments contributions and continued support to strengthen the Armed Forces Covenant.

## EDUCATION

## ■ **Dedicated Schools Grant allocations 2025-26**

**Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell):**

[\[HCWS337\]](#)

Today the Department for Education has published local authorities' allocations through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for schools, high needs and early years for 2025-26.

Overall, core schools funding is increasing by £2.3 billion in 2025-26 compared to 2024-25. This means that overall core school funding will total almost £63.9 billion next year, including a £1 billion increase in high needs funding for the costs of complex SEND. The publications today confirm the funding increases that each local authority will see in 2025-26.

The DSG allocations to local authorities consist of four blocks: a schools block, a high needs block, an early years block, and a central school services block. The DSG allocations are calculated from the latest pupil numbers, and therefore update the provisional national funding formulae allocations that were recently published.

Nationally, mainstream school funding in the DSG is increasing by 2.15% per pupil in 2025-26, compared to 2024-25, bringing total funding through this block of the DSG to £48.7 billion. This includes funding to ensure that the 2024 pay awards are fully funded at a national level in 2025-26, and further increases in the schools national funding formula on top of this.

High needs funding will increase to £11.9 billion in 2025-26, a 9% cash increase compared to this year. The vast majority of this will be allocated to local authorities through the high needs block of DSG. Every local authority will receive an increase in

funding of at least 7% per head (of their population aged 2-18), with some local authorities seeing increases up to 10%.

Alongside their DSG allocations, local authorities will also receive a separate core schools budget grant in 2025-26 to pass on to special schools and alternative provision to continue helping with the costs of teachers' pay and pension increases, and other staff pay increases, from 2024. This grant consolidates the separate grants for pay and pensions that are allocated for these settings in 2024-25. Further detail on the grant for 2025-26 is published at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-schools-budget-grant-csb-g-2025-to-2026-for-special-schools-and-alternative-provision>

Indicative allocations for the 2025-26 early years entitlements, totalling more than £8 billion, have been published. On top of over £8 billion through the core funding rates, we are providing an additional £75 million grant for 2025-26 to support the sector in this pivotal year to grow the places and the workforce needed to deliver the final phase of expanded childcare entitlements from September 2025.

The Dedicated Schools Grant allocations are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026>

Pupil premium rates will be announced shortly in the new year.

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### ■ UK sanctions

**Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories (Stephen Doughty):** [\[HCWS334\]](#)

Today I am updating the House on how this Government has delivered a step change in the use of our sanctions regimes to tackle malign activity and protect the UK's national security interests domestically and internationally.

Sanctions are a powerful foreign and security policy tool, and this Government is committed to maximising their impact. Since the election, we have ramped up our collaboration with partners, particularly the US and the EU, to coordinate our action and to tackle circumvention.

UK sanctions are targeted, proportionate and robust, within a fair and transparent framework. Our approach has been repeatedly endorsed by the courts.

#### **New sanctions to deter and disrupt malign actors**

We have taken ambitious action to deploy new UK sanctions in innovative ways to deliver maximum impact. Since July, we have:

- Led the way in targeting Russia's shadow fleet – the UK has targeted more ships than any other actor and has successfully encouraged partners to support our efforts;

- Delivered the largest single package of Russia sanctions, designed to disrupt Russia's military industrial complex, since May 2023;
- Used our sanctions to deter and disrupt Iran's military support to Russia;
- Called out the perpetrators of the Russian state's forcible deportation of Ukrainian children;
- Clamped down on Russian cyber criminals who have targeted UK schools and hospitals;
- Launched a cross-Government review of sanctions enforcement;
- Legislated to strengthen our sanctions enforcement powers, with the formal launch of the new Office of Trade Sanctions Implementation.

### **Russia sanctions**

We have taken clear action to bear down on Russia's sources of revenue, including energy revenues.

In July, the Prime Minister led a Call to Action to tackle Russia's 'Shadow Fleet' at the European Political Community Summit. This has been endorsed by over 40 countries and by the EU. Russia has invested at least \$10bn into its shadow fleet and sanctions have plunged it into crisis. Since July, this Government has targeted 69 new oil tankers, nine Liquefied Natural Gas carriers and six vessels involved in the transport of military goods. Many UK-sanctioned vessels have been left idling or at anchor, unable to continue their trade in Russian oil and depriving Russia of funds to wage its illegal war.

In November, we launched the largest package of sanctions against Russia in 18 months, disrupting the supply of western-sanctioned goods to the Russian military-industrial complex. This included individuals and entities in third countries. We are also targeting Private Military Security Companies, and, in November, the UK was the first G7 country to sanction Russian backed mercenary group, Africa Corps.

The impact of our sanctions is clear. Sanctions have deprived Russia of over \$400bn since February 2022, reducing Putin's war chest and forcing him to turn to North Korea and Iran for supplies.

Sanctions are putting grit in Russian military supply chains: increasing costs and delays and reducing equipment quality. The Russian defence sector has seen the cost of components rise by 30% and sanctions have prevented Russia expanding military supplies to the battlefield.

On the financial side, 70% of Russian importers and 30% of Russian exporters now have to rely on specialised agents to settle payments with foreign partners, increasing the effective price of imports to Russia by 6-30%

The Russian government has also had to undertake the first major tax hike in over 20 years. Interest rates are at 21%, there is runaway inflation and the rouble has plummeted. Russia's future energy ambitions are in tatters and we are seeing increasingly vocal disagreements between Russian officials and industrialists.

## **Tackling corruption and illicit finance**

Last month, we launched a campaign against illicit finance, raising our ambition and backing words with action. We sanctioned kleptocrats who have stashed stolen wealth in Britain and those who aid and abet them. Figures like Dmitry and Lada Firtash who have extracted hundreds of millions of pounds from Ukraine. Or Isabel dos Santos who systematically abused her positions at Angolan state-run companies. On 9 December we took aim at the illicit gold trade, targeting five gold smugglers in coordination with the US, including three UK nationals. This Government will continue to use our sanctions powers to make the UK a more hostile environment for corrupt actors and to develop our sanctions regimes to address changing threats.

## **Iran**

Sanctions are also important to confronting the threat posed by Iran, including its support for Russia. In September, we introduced new sanctions to disrupt Iran's Unmanned Aerial Vehicle and missile industries in response to Iran's transfer of ballistic missiles to Russia for use against Ukraine. In October, following further Iranian attacks on Israel, we sanctioned senior Iranian military figures and organisations, including the Iranian Space Agency for their role in destabilising the Middle East. This was followed in November by sanctions on Iran's national airline, Iran Air, and its state-owned national shipping carrier, the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, in line with the commitments outlined by the E3 in September. These sanctions will further restrict Iran's direct scheduled commercial air services to and from the UK.

## **Cyber sanctions**

Our sanctions also directly support UK security. On 1 October, in coordination with international partners, we designated 16 individuals associated with Russia-based ransomware group Evil Corp, which has links to the Russian State and has sought to compromise UK health, government and public sector institutions. This sends a clear message that the UK is prepared to stand up to cyber threats.

## **Upholding human rights and promoting democracy**

This Government has also taken sanctions action to uphold human rights. Following an unprecedented rise in settler violence in the West Bank, we designated three settler outposts and four organisations that have supported, incited and promoted violence against Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

We have also used sanctions to promote democracy. In September 2024, following Russia's veto of the renewal of the UN sanctions regime on Mali, we legislated to enable the UK to sanction persons who obstruct Mali's return to constitutional, civilian rule or who undermine the rule of law in Mali.

On 29 October, along with the EU and Canada, we also announced sanctions to increase pressure on the military regime in Myanmar and its associates. These sanctions target entities supplying aviation fuel and equipment to the Myanmar military and signal our clear opposition to the coup with the aim of undermining the regime's credibility.

The UK strongly supports the use of UN sanctions to promote international peace and given the global signal they send and their reach across all 193 UN Member States. On 8 November, the UN Security Council sanctioned two individuals involved in ethnically motivated atrocities in Sudan. This is part of wider efforts to apply pressure on conflict parties to stop fighting, allow humanitarian access and bring about a political transition as called for by the people of Sudan.

### **Coordination across the sanctions coalition**

We coordinate with likeminded partners to disrupt, deter and respond to shared threats. We have repeatedly emphasised, alongside our G7 partners, that Russia must pay for the damage it has caused to Ukraine. On 22 October, the Chancellor announced that the UK will provide £2.26bn in further support to Ukraine, as part of the G7 Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration (ERA) Loans to Ukraine scheme. This is earmarked for military spending, further bolstering Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russia's illegal war. The UK's contribution will be repaid using the extraordinary profits generated on immobilised Russian sovereign assets held primarily in the EU.

Tackling Russia's efforts to circumvent our sanctions remains a key strategic UK objective and a shared G7 commitment. Together with our G7 partners, particularly the US and EU, we continue to coordinate to tackle circumvention risks across priority countries in Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. I have personally underscored the importance of tackling sanctions circumvention in my recent meetings with the Deputy Foreign Ministers of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Diplomatic outreach at all levels has led to all these priority countries introducing Russia-facing controls on Common High Priority (CHP) goods and a reduction in supply to Russia.

One off engagement however is not enough. My officials, together with their EU and US counterparts (including during joint visits), are engaging with countries of concern and have secured commitments to control the re-export of the most sensitive goods, though we need to keep up the pressure. To underpin our commitment to tackling circumvention, the UK Government has deployed Regional Sanctions Coordinators throughout our priority regions to provide leadership and expertise in our global network and to coordinate action across like-minded international partners in-country. We have complemented this with capacity building programmes and technical assistance. The Prime Minister's announcement last week highlights that approach in relation to the Republic of Cyprus as it establishes its new National Sanctions Implementation Unit.

We are also playing a leading role in regional fora. The UK leadership in tackling the shadow fleet has seen our inclusion in the Nordic-Baltic forum alongside Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden. This forum is confronting the risks posed by the shadow fleet, especially in the environmentally sensitive waters of the Baltic Sea and the North Sea and is exploring new possibilities for common measures against the shadow fleet within the framework of international law.



### **Strengthening sanctions enforcement across Government**

This Government continues to work with industry to maximise compliance with our sanctions, but we are clear that failures to comply should be met with the full force of the law. Punishments include seizures at the UK border and – for the most serious breaches – large fines or criminal prosecution.

A range of departments have responsibility for the enforcement of UK sanctions, including the Home Office, Department for Business and Trade, Department for Transport and HM Treasury. In October we introduced new sanctions enforcement powers for the Department for Business and Trade and the Department for Transport, including the power to impose civil monetary penalties for breaches of the UK's aircraft, shipping and certain trade sanctions. These powers also introduced new reporting requirements for suspected breaches and give us the option to 'name and shame' sanctions offenders. These powers underpinned the launch of the new Office of Trade Sanctions Implementation (OTSI).

The creation of OTSI will strengthen the implementation and enforcement of the UK's trade sanctions. OTSI will work in partnership with HMRC in enforcing trade sanctions and its focus will include the movement of goods and services across third country borders to Russia or other sanctioned destinations. These third country powers are an important expansion of our toolkit in tackling sanctions evasion and circumvention.

We are committed to doing what is necessary to clamp down on sanctions offenders and the introduction of additional capacity and powers is starting to pay off. We are seeing this in the increase in reporting of suspected breaches, which we expect will result in further fines and referrals for prosecution.

Since February 2022, HMRC has issued six compound settlements against UK companies that have breached the Russia sanctions regulations for a total of £1,363,129, including one in August 2023 for £1 million and the latest in August 2024 for just over £58,000. On 27 September 2024, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) fined Starling Bank Limited (Starling) £28,959,426 for financial crime failings related to its financial sanctions controls and screening. In September 2024, following a proactive investigation, OFSI issued a monetary penalty of £15,000 to Integral Concierge Services (ICSL) for breaches of financial sanctions imposed on Russia in response to its illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022. ICSL did not challenge the penalty and paid in full. I want to see many more enforcement actions in the coming months to maximise the deterrent effect of our sanctions and hold people and institutions accountable.

I plan to go further to strengthen the UK's sanctions system, and I have launched a cross-Government review of sanctions enforcement with the support of Ministers from HM Treasury, the Department of Business and Trade, the Department for Transport and the Home Office. In parallel, I have been speaking to the leaders of the Overseas Territories, including at the recent Joint Ministerial Council, where we jointly agreed on the importance of strengthening sanctions implementation and enforcement across the entire British family. We are matching our commitment with action, including providing direct support to enhance sanctions enforcement capability in our Overseas Territories.

I will use the review to consider where we can go further and deeper to improve our sanctions system. I want us to look at how we can make our sanctions easier to comply with, how we can build our cross-government capabilities to combat sanctions circumvention and how we can expand and improve our sanctions toolkit. I look forward to substantially enhancing enforcement efforts and reporting the outcomes to Parliament.

## HOME OFFICE

### ■ Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022 – Unexplained Wealth Order Report 2023 to 2024

**The Minister of State for Security (Dan Jarvis):** [\[HCWS340\]](#)

Today, the Unexplained Wealth Order report for the period 2023 to 2024, has been laid before Parliament. The Unexplained Wealth Order report details the number of Unexplained Wealth Orders made by the High Court in England and Wales during that period, and the number of applications made to that Court by enforcement authorities for such an order.

During this reporting period, two Unexplained Wealth Orders were applied for. One was obtained and the other did not receive a judicial decision during the reporting period. One of the UWOs applied for in the 2022 to 2023 reporting period was also obtained in this reporting period.

Enforcement agencies remain committed to using the Unexplained Wealth Order power where they see it is the best tool available to them. Not all cases merit an Unexplained Wealth Order, and often the range of civil and criminal powers available to them to investigate, search for, and seize assets, better suit the circumstances of a given case. Large amounts of assets are being recovered. In the financial year 2023 to 2024, £62.9 million was recovered through Civil Recovery Order Receipts, the highest amount recovered in the last 6 years.

Enforcement agencies continue to review whether cases are suitable for a UWO.

Copies of the report will be available in the Vote Office, and it will also be published on GOV.UK.

### ■ Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 – Appointed Person Report 2023 to 2024

**The Minister of State for Security (Dan Jarvis):** [\[HCWS341\]](#)

Today, the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 Appointed Person report covering England and Wales for the period 2023 to 2024, has been laid before Parliament. The Appointed Person is independent of Government and scrutinises the circumstances and manner in which search and seizure powers conferred by the Act are exercised without prior judicial approval and where nothing is seized for more than 48 hours.

I am pleased that we are now able to publish the Appointed Person's latest report. The report details that search and seizure powers were used in these circumstances on five occasions.



The Appointed Person has confirmed in the report that he is satisfied that the criteria required for justifying the searches without prior judicial approval were met and that the powers of search were exercised appropriately. The Appointed Person has made no new recommendations for the period. This would indicate that the powers are being used reasonably and appropriately in accordance with the Act. We will continue to monitor the way that the powers have been used closely.

Copies of the report will be available in the Vote Office, and it will also be published on GOV.UK.

## ■ **Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 – Costs protection report**

**The Minister of State for Security (Dan Jarvis):**

**[\[HCWS339\]](#)**

Today, the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (“POCA”) costs protection report covering England and Wales, has been laid before Parliament. The report is a statutory requirement under section 215 of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023. The government is required to review whether costs protection should be introduced for enforcement agencies in civil recovery proceedings under Part 5 of POCA and publish a report by the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the day on which the Act was passed.

I am pleased that we are now able to publish the report. The report outlines the engagement exercise that took place to seek consultees views and the options considered for introducing potential changes. The report concludes that the government sees merit in introducing costs protection based on the consultation responses and is making progress to determine whether amendments to legislation should be made.

Copies of the report will be available in the Vote Office, and it will also be published on GOV.UK.

## **HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

## ■ **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Allocations Announcement 2025/26**

**Minister for Homelessness and Democracy (Rushanara Ali):**

**[\[HCWS336\]](#)**

We are facing a homelessness crisis across the country, with unprecedented levels of homelessness and a sharp increase in rough sleeping. There are a record 123,100 households living in temporary accommodation, including 159,380 children. The number of people sleeping rough on our streets is rising with almost 4,000 people sleeping rough on a single night in 2023. This didn't happen overnight, it is the result of 14 years of neglect. This is the legacy this government has inherited, and I am determined to address these failures head on, but it will take time to put right and get us back on track to ending homelessness and for good.

We are already tackling the root causes of homelessness. This government will deliver the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation, and with the Renters Rights' Bill we will abolish Section 21 'no fault' evictions, preventing private

renters being exploited and discriminated against, and empowering people to challenge unreasonable rent increases.

We are also taking action to support councils to deliver homelessness and rough sleeping services. In the Autumn Budget, we announced that funding for homelessness services is increasing next year by £233 million compared to this year (2024/25). This brings the total spend on homelessness and rough sleeping to nearly £1 billion in 2025/26, a record level of funding.

Today I am setting out how we will use that funding to deliver three important changes as the first steps in our long-term plan to tackle homelessness.

First, we must increase our focus on prevention and stopping households from becoming homeless in the first place. The current system is not working, local authorities have been unable to invest in preventative interventions. This results in more households entering temporary accommodation, at great cost to the individuals and the council.

I am therefore providing an uplift of £192.9 million to the Homelessness Prevention Grant, bringing total funding for 2025/26 to £633.2 million - the largest investment in this grant since it began. This will be allocated to all local authorities in England based on homelessness pressures. We will require at least 49% of this grant to be spent on activities to prevent and relieve homelessness, including associated staff costs, to help ensure this increase in funding is used to prevent families and single people from reaching crisis point.

Second, we must address the growing use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) and nightly-let accommodation for homeless families. The number of families living in these types of emergency accommodation has nearly doubled in three years, with 4 in 10 homeless families living in B&B or nightly-let accommodation. Not only do these forms of accommodation provide limited stability for families and often lack basic facilities such as proper cooking facilities, they are also among the most expensive for councils. We must address this and ensure that where homelessness cannot be prevented, temporary accommodation provides safe, decent housing with as much stability for children as possible. I want to see the use of emergency accommodation for homeless families reduce and to eliminate the use of B&Bs for families other than in genuine emergencies.

As a first step to addressing this, my department will work with 20 local authorities facing the most acute pressures for B&B use for temporary accommodation through a new programme of Emergency Accommodation Reduction Pilots, backed by £5 million to test innovative approaches and kickstart new initiatives. My department's team of homelessness experts will work in partnership with pilot local authorities to identify solutions which work for their local circumstances and share the learning across the country.

Third, we must streamline funding structures, reduce bureaucracy and support councils to do what they do best: deliver services to meet the needs of their local communities. Our rough sleeping and single homelessness programmes, including our new streamlined Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant, will provide up to £280.75 million in funding in 2025/26, allocated to local authorities and their delivery partners across the

country to help support them to continue vital services for some of the most vulnerable people in society. Our sector support grants will continue to support the skills and capacity of our valued voluntary sector partners. Our investment in prevention will stop people from rough sleeping in the first place, meaning local authorities will be able to target their rough sleeping resources at those that need help the most.

In addition, 15 local area partnerships across England will continue to be supported through the Changing Futures Programme. We are providing £10 million in 2025/26 to improve support and outcomes for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

This is only the first step to meeting our commitment to getting the country back on track to ending homelessness. We will continue to work across government to deliver the long-term solutions we need to get us back on track to ending all forms of homelessness, including developing a long-term homelessness strategy, which we will publish next year following the multi-year Spending Review.

## ■ **Local Government Finance Settlement**

**Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon):**  
[\[HCWS342\]](#)

### **Introduction**

Our fiscal inheritance means there will be tough choices to get us back on the path to recovery. Fixing the foundations of local government will be a long process following the 14 years of decline and instability overseen by the previous government. But our programme of reorganisation and reform will lead to more efficient structures; will mean funding is sent to where it is needed the most; investment focusses on crisis prevention rather than an expensive crisis response; and councils once again have the certainty and flexibility they need to focus on their priorities. Together, we will fix the foundations for everyone.

We are under no illusion about the scale of this task. The demand for, and cost of, services has increased significantly. The persistent failure of the previous government to do the right thing, underlined by their decision to drop the long overdue Fair Funding Review, compounded by spiralling inflation and a failure to grow our economy, has left councils of all stripes in crisis. Our fiscal inheritance means that there is no easy route to solving this.

This 2025-26 Local Government Finance Settlement and our programme of reform for the future mark the first steps towards stabilising and rebuilding the financial sustainability of local government. We will take a more efficient approach to government grant funding, including a one-off Recovery Grant to get councils back on their feet. And, in 2026-27, when we move to the first multi-year Settlement for local government in a decade, we will ensure grant funding goes to where it is needed the most, delivering better services by investing in prevention, and improving value for taxpayers' money. Our [consultation on local authority funding reform](#) sets us on this path to recovery.

More secure finances must go hand-in-hand with higher standards and stronger financial decision-making, both of which are impeded by the broken local audit system we have

inherited in England. Today, we launched a [strategy to streamline and simplify the local audit system](#) through the establishment of a new and proportionate Local Audit Office – combining the functions of the existing system – and ensuring the core underpinnings are fit for purpose. We will embed transparency, restore our public financial early warning system, and ensure that every council is equipped to deliver the best value for council taxpayers and business ratepayers. We will strengthen the local government standards system to support councils to deliver the high standards that they strive for. We welcome views on proposals to better support local government to uphold the highest standards of conduct and sanction misconduct whenever and wherever it occurs as part of our [standards consultation](#). These steps are a crucial part of our plans for a stronger local government as set out in the English Devolution White Paper this week.

Together, these reforms will begin to stabilise local government finances and ensure that all councils are fit, legal and decent, so they can better deliver for their residents. We will build on the significant steps we are already taking, laying the groundwork for children's social care reform and increasing funding for homelessness and SEND services next year. We are giving councils more say over how they run local bus services, guaranteeing the future of vital reforms to our waste and recycling system, filling potholes, and bringing planning fees up to cost recovery. The hard work has already begun, and today we set out our detailed funding proposals for 2025-26 and our plan for the years ahead.

### **Provisional local government finance settlement 2025-26**

The Autumn Budget announced over £4 billion in additional funding for local government services, of which £1.3 billion would go through 2025-26 Local Government Finance Settlement. We recognise the challenges local authorities are facing as demand increases for critical services. Today we are announcing over £700 million of additional grant, which increases the total additional grant funding which will be made available to local councils in England through the Settlement to over £2 billion. The over £700 million increase in funding announced today includes a £200 million increase to the Social Care Grant, taking the grant's total increase from 2024-25 to £880 million. It also includes £515 million of further funding will be made available at the final Settlement to support councils with the increase in employer National Insurance Contributions.

The provisional Settlement for 2025-26 therefore makes available £69 billion for local government, which is a 6% cash terms increase and a 3.5% real terms increase in councils' Core Spending Power on 2024-25. The final Settlement will increase further, to incorporate the £515 million of funding announced for National Insurance Contributions.

### **Grant decisions for 2025-26**

The proposals we announced on 28 November – a new £600 million Recovery Grant, a new Children's Social Care Prevention Grant, additional funding for social care, and repurposing the existing Rural Services Delivery Grant and the Services Grant – lay the foundations for fundamental reform by allocating new funding through improved formulas in 2025-26 and investing in priority services.

### **Social care**

We will make available up to £3.7 billion extra funding for social care authorities through the Settlement next year. In total, local government will receive over £10 billion in grant funding for social care, including: £1.05 billion in the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund, £2.6 billion via the Local Authority Better Care Grant, and £5.9 billion via the Social Care Grant.

We can also today confirm the new Children's Social Care Prevention Grant will be uplifted at the final Settlement to £263 million. Taken together with the new Children and Families Grant, the government is doubling Settlement investment in preventative services within children's social care, to over half a billion in 2025-26, laying the groundwork for fundamental reform of children's social care next year.

### **National Insurance Contributions (NICs)**

In recognition of the decision to increase employer NICs, we can today confirm that the government will provide £515 million to English local councils, including mayoral combined authorities and fire and rescue authorities, allocated based on an assessment of each council's share of relevant net service expenditure. We have published a methodology note today to explain how this funding will be distributed across local authorities. Individual allocations will be published at the final Settlement early next year.

### **Council tax**

It is for local authorities to decide at what level they set their council tax. However, the government is committed to keeping taxes on working people as low as possible. This Settlement maintains the previous government's policy, as set out in the March 2024 Office for Budget Responsibility forecast, of setting a 5% council tax referendum principle, made up of a 3% core principle and the 2% principle for the adult social care precept. Voters will have the final say over excessive increases above this threshold.

The government is committed to improving the presentation and transparency of council tax bills and will therefore require local authorities to adjust the presentation of the adult social care precept on council tax bills from 2025-26. This will simplify bills and provide clarity on council tax levels set by the local authorities. The government will publish a consultation in 2025 to consider other options to improve transparency of council tax billing and support taxpayers manage their household finances with a default option to pay over 12 months as with most other household bills.

### **Requests for exceptional financial support**

The government has a framework to support councils in financial difficulty. This will be a collaborative and supportive process, and we have already confirmed we will not replicate previous conditions which made borrowing more expensive. Similar to the approach taken by the previous government, we will consider requests for bespoke referendum principles from councils seeking exceptional financial support. But this government will put taxpayers and the impact on working people at the forefront of our decisions. Any requests from councils will be considered on a case-by-case basis and the government expects any additional increases to only be agreed in exceptional circumstances, not as a punishment where councils have failed. We will look carefully at councils' specific

circumstances, for example, their existing levels of council tax relative to the average and the strength of plans to protect vulnerable people. MHCLG continues to offer any council a discussion, in confidence, about its ability to manage its budget.

### **Levy account**

Every authority in England will receive a share of the accumulated surplus currently held in the business rates levy account. We can confirm that £100 million will be returned to the sector on a one-off basis, distributed in line with relevant legislation. Individual allocations of this funding will be published at the final Settlement early next year.

### **Fixing the foundations: consultation on local authority funding reform**

From 2026-27, the government will fundamentally improve the way we fund councils based on a new assessment of need and resources. These reforms will build on the framework set out in the previous government's abandoned review of Relative Needs and Resources (originally Fair Funding Review).

We will reset the Business Rates Retention System as was intended when the previous government established the system. We will move gradually towards an updated system and will invite views on possible transitional arrangements to determine how local authorities reach their new funding allocations. Some local authorities work collaboratively with Mayoral Combined Authorities in their area to ensure that extra business rates income is directed to local growth priorities across the wider region. In recognition of this, and as part of the government's reform of funding for local government, we will consider how the Business Rates Retention System could better and more consistently support Strategic Authorities to drive growth. The government will also reduce the number of funding pots to give councils more flexibility to focus on priority outcomes agreed with government.

Today's consultation is on objectives and principles. The consultation will give councils, sector organisations and the public the opportunity to contribute to the government's proposals. We will consider all representations to develop our understanding of the drivers of need, including the impact of rurality. This reform is about spending taxpayers' money as efficiently as possible, but it is also about the impact it will have on real people's lives and local authorities' ability to deliver for their citizens.

### **Conclusion**

The [consultation on the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2025-26](#) will be open for four weeks, closing on 15 January 2025. The consultation on local authority funding reform will be open for eight weeks, closing 12 February 2025. We welcome views from the sector and beyond on each of these consultations.

This Written Ministerial Statement covers England only.



## JUSTICE

### ■ Youth Justice Board Review

**Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Sir Nicholas Dakin):**

[\[HCWS332\]](#)

I am pleased to announce the review of the Youth Justice Board (YJB). This review is being conducted as part of the Public Bodies Review Programme, which aims to ensure that public bodies are operating effectively, and that their functions remain useful and necessary.

An efficient and effective youth justice system is essential for preventing crime and keeping communities safe. In line with our safer streets mission, it is vital that we have robust systems in place to stop young people being drawn into crime. Equally, we must support children who do find themselves in contact with the youth justice system to ensure they do not enter a cycle of crime which continues into adulthood.

The youth justice system is a complex one, requiring collaboration between many government departments, agencies and public and voluntary services. Whilst there is much to celebrate, including a significant reduction in the number of children in custody in the last decade, it is right that we regularly review how our structures, system and agencies operate to ensure they are as effective and efficient as possible.

The YJB was set up to play a critical role in delivering positive outcomes for children in contact with the criminal justice system, and to provide oversight, assurance and technical expertise around the operation of the youth justice system. However, much time has passed since the last Cabinet Office review of the YJB in 2013; since then, the youth justice landscape, and YJB itself, have changed significantly.

With that in mind, this review is an opportunity to consider whether the YJB's statutory functions remain useful and necessary, where these functions should sit, and whether the YJB's current delivery model remains appropriate. This review will also be key to assessing how the YJB and department should work together to deliver ministerial priorities and deliver value for money.

This review will ensure that our current arrangements actively support the essential work undertaken by youth justice services and support the effective delivery of the department's priorities for youth justice and reducing reoffending.

I have appointed Steve Crocker (former President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services) to lead on the review. He is independent from the Ministry of Justice and will provide objective analysis of the YJB and the department. Steve Crocker will also lead a period of stakeholder engagement across England and Wales.

I will make a further announcement on completion of the review in Spring 2025. Following this, I will set out the Government's response.

**TRANSPORT****■ Car practical driving test waiting times**

**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood):**

**[\[HCWS343\]](#)**

I am pleased to announce today that this government is taking decisive steps to address long waiting times for car practical driving tests.

A driving licence is a passport to employment, opportunities and better living standards for hundreds of thousands of people each year.

Across the country, waiting times for a car practical driving test are at 13 weeks in Wales, over 15 weeks in Scotland, and nearly 21 weeks in England. These figures highlight a system under strain.

The proportion of 17- to 20-year-olds with a full driving licence dropped from 35% in 2019 to 29% in 2023. This matters, because one in six jobs requires a driving licence. The top occupations for young drivers include roles critical to our public services and economic growth: healthcare workers, construction trades, and transport workers.

Learner drivers should be able to take a test when they are ready to pass. Yet thousands have had to wait many months for a test, with some being exploited by businesses taking advantage of long waiting times or having to travel hundreds of miles in the process.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) provided over two million car driving tests. And it has over half a million driving tests booked in the next 24 weeks.

In response to increased demand, DVSA created an extra 145,000 test slots between October 2023 and March 2024 by redeploying eligible managers and administrative staff to conduct tests. DVSA has also reviewed its recruitment process and increased its effort to recruit and train driving examiners. But the case for further action is undeniable.

So today, I am setting out the robust plan I have asked DVSA to deliver to tackle this issue head-on, while it helps to keep Britain moving safely and sustainably.

First, we will recruit and train 450 driving examiners. This will aim to significantly increase the workforce and ensure that examiners are available in high-demand areas, reducing waiting times for learners across the country.

Second, we will increase the notice period for changing or cancelling a test without losing the fee from 3 to 10 working days. This will minimise last-minute disruptions and ensure that cancelled slots can be reallocated to those ready to take their test.

Third, we will review and improve the rules around booking tests, including measures to ban the resale of driving test appointments. This will ensure fairer access to test slots and stop the profiteering that disadvantages learners.

Fourth, we will strengthen terms and conditions for driver training businesses managing test bookings. This will improve the efficiency of the booking system, making it harder for those looking to exploit learner drivers to secure test dates.



Fifth, we will consult on introducing longer waiting times to rebook a test for candidates who fail by making multiple serious or dangerous faults, abuse driving examiners or fail to attend their test, and we will consider a penalty fee for those who fail to attend. This will discourage bad behaviour and ensure that examiners' time is respected.

Sixth, we will explore allowing learner drivers to book tests further in advance than the current 24-week limit. This will give learners more certainty in planning their preparation and reduce the stress of finding available slots.

And finally, we will expand the successful 'Ready to Pass?' campaign to help learners throughout the whole process of learning to drive. This will increase the likelihood of learners passing their test the first time, reducing overall demand on the system.

These measures are practical, targeted, and designed to address the issues facing the driving test system.

But I have to be clear: there is no quick fix to the current situation. It will take time for us to tackle the root causes of this issue, fix the broken system this government inherited and to build a robust system for the future.

I am also pleased to announce today the publication of DVSA's 2024 to 2025 business plan.

This plan sets out the main business priorities the agency will deliver, including measures on the delivery of the car practical driving test that underpin the measures I have just announced, as well as the key performance indicators by which DVSA's performance will be assessed.

This plan allows service users and members of the public to understand DVSA's plans for delivering its services and managing its finances.

The business plan will be available electronically on GOV.UK and copies will be placed in the libraries of both Houses.