



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 3 January 2025 and the information is correct at the time of publication (03:57 P.M., 03 January 2025). 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

■ Arms Trade: Israel

Apsana Begum: [\[19405\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, how many people have been charged with alleged offenses relating to protests on arms sales to Israel since (a) 8 October 2023, (b) 26 January 2024 and (c) 2 September 2024.

Apsana Begum: [\[19848\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, how many people have been charged with offenses 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: [\[19857\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, how many people have been charged with offences relating to protests on climate change in the last year.

Lucy Rigby:

From 1 October 2023 to 30 June 2024 the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) authorised charges in respect of 104,696 suspects for all criminal offences. Of these charges, the CPS is unable to identify which offences involved defendants who were taking part in a protest without a manual review of each case which would incur disproportionate cost.

The CPS publishes quarterly bulletins of data tables and summaries of main trends as part of its ongoing commitment to transparency on prosecution performance. This information can be found here: [CPS quarterly data summaries | The Crown Prosecution Service](#).

■ Attorney General: Alcoholic Drinks

Cat Smith: [\[19341\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, how many alcohol industry representatives Ministers in her Department have met since July 2024.

Lucy Rigby:

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.

■ Attorney General: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:**[\[20179\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 9604 on Attorney General: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Lucy Rigby:

As per the former Solicitor General's (Sarah Sackman KC MP) answer of 31 October to Question [9604](#), following the dissolution of the last Parliament on 30 May 2024 and before the General Election on 4 July 2024, officials in the Attorney General's Office (AGO) arranged for the two ministerial offices to be modestly refurbished. The costs are set out in that answer.

No other refurbishment has taken place between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024.

■ Gender Based Violence: Surrey**Zöe Franklin:**[\[20415\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, what steps she is taking to increase prosecution rates for cases relating to violence against women and girls in Surrey.

Lucy Rigby:

In 2023-24, in the Surrey police force area, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecuted 487 cases flagged for domestic abuse and 41 cases flagged for rape.

The CPS uses thematic monitoring flags to track progress and performance surrounding certain types of cases within its case management system (CMS). "Flags" are identified and applied by lawyers and administrative staff. Monitoring flags currently exist within CMS for the following VAWG-related offences: rape; domestic abuse; so-called honour abuse / violence; forced marriage; and child abuse.

These figures for 2023-24 represent an increase from 434 and 30 in 2022-23, respectively.

The CPS has already produced a new operating model for the prosecution of rape based on robust evidence from Operation Soteria and launched the Domestic Abuse Joint Justice Plan with policing in November 2024. The early results of improvements in partnership working with policing under the plan have already led to modest initial increases in domestic abuse referrals, setting a strong foundation for future improvements.

In September 2024, the CPS prosecuted the third conviction for female genital mutilation (FGM) and the first conviction of conspiring to commit FGM in England and Wales. This marks a significant milestone and demonstrates the growing effectiveness of prosecuting these cases.

However, more can be done to increase prosecution rates for VAWG, in Surrey and across the country. This Government's ambition is to halve violence against women

and girls within a decade, as part of our Safer Streets Mission, and delivering effective prosecutions is a key part of this.

To address the increasing complexity of VAWG offending, and holistic needs of victims, the CPS is producing a new VAWG strategy which will be published in spring 2025.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Business Rates

Matt Vickers:

[19879]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on business rates.

Justin Madders:

We are creating a fairer business rates system that protects the high street, supports investment, and is fit for the 21st century. The Secretary of State works closely with all his cabinet colleagues, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

To deliver our manifesto pledge, we intend to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties, including those on the high street, from 2026-27. The Government has also published a Discussion Paper setting out priority areas for business rates reform and inviting industry to co-design a fairer business rates system: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transforming-business-rates>

■ Business: Domestic Visits

Andrew Griffith:

[19441]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many times (a) he and (b) Ministers in his Department have visited businesses in the UK since 5 July 2024.

Justin Madders:

A) Since 5 July 2024, the Secretary of State has carried out 11 domestic visits across the UK. All domestic visits include substantive engagement with businesses, through multiple site visits, roundtables and meetings with business leaders.

B) Since 5 July 2024, Junior Ministers in the Department for Business and Trade have carried out 15 domestic visits. These visits have also included substantive engagement with businesses, through site visits, roundtables and meetings with business leaders.

These visits form part of an extensive business engagement that SoS and ministers have led since July, which helped addressing issues raised by business leaders.

■ Business: Exports**Sarah Hall:**[\[20882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department has taken to improve the (a) visibility and (b) accessibility of the Export Academy for micro businesses looking to export.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The UK Export Academy is here to support all businesses to grow by giving attendees the confidence and know-how to land overseas deals, and it is reaching more micro-businesses than ever before. Already this year, more than 3,700 micro-businesses have registered so far to attend the free training sessions, which is an increase on 2023/24 where 3,639 micro-businesses registered. To make the UK Export Academy more accessible, we are piloting video-on-demand and a catch-up service has been launched so micro-business owners can access session recordings at a time that suits them, online, and from anywhere across the UK.

■ Conditions of Employment: Cancer**Clive Jones:**[\[20862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to provide employment protections for (a) young cancer patients and (b) their families.

Justin Madders:

It is important that people with cancer are supported to return to, or remain in work, if that is what they choose to do. Workers with cancer and their carers are protected from employment discrimination under the Equality Act 2010. Their family members or friends may also be entitled to up to a week of unpaid carer's leave to support them. We are reviewing implementation of carer's leave and are exploring whether additional support may be needed.

■ Consumer Goods: Safety**Sorcha Eastwood:**[\[20075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to support British-based businesses to appoint a responsible person under the General Product Safety Regulations to access to Northern Ireland and EU markets.

Justin Madders:

The Government is supporting small businesses to understand and comply with the new General Product Safety Regulation.

We have published guidance on the new Regulation in Northern Ireland, which we will keep under review, and we are continuing to engage directly with businesses, including through regular drop-in sessions. 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.

Claire Hanna:

[\[20838\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps the Government plans to take to monitor the impact of General Product Safety regulations on SME's and sole traders sending goods to Northern Ireland.

Justin Madders:

The Government is supporting SMEs to comply with the new General Product Safety Regulation. We have published guidance and have been engaging with businesses directly. We will keep the guidance under review and will continue to engage with businesses directly to monitor the situation and to ensure we are supporting them to trade freely across the whole of the UK.

John Whitby:

[\[20869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to support artisans and sole traders in (a) Derbyshire and (b) the UK with (i) the requirement for an EU-based responsible person and (ii) the other requirements under the new General Product Safety Regulation.

Justin Madders:

The Government is supporting small businesses across the UK to understand and comply with the new EU General Product Safety Regulation (GPSR) and its application in Northern Ireland.

We have published information on GOV.UK regarding GPSR's application in Northern Ireland, which we regularly review, and continue engaging 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. Since October, the UK Export Academy has delivered five free online GPSR training sessions to over 2,600 attendees.

■ Consumer Goods: UK Trade with EU

Ben Maguire:

[\[20837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to support small businesses exporting to the EU to navigate the requirements set out in the EU General Product Safety Regulation.

Justin Madders:

The Government is supporting small businesses to understand and comply with the new EU General Product Safety Regulation (GPSR). We published information on GOV.UK regarding its application in Northern Ireland, which we regularly review, and continue engaging directly with businesses. Since October, the UK Export Academy has delivered five free online GPSR training sessions, with over 2,600 attendees.

The responsibility for interpreting and providing guidance on EU legislation rests with the European Commission. Exporters to the EU should consult EU guidance and may also contact the Government's Export Support Service.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Alcoholic Drinks**Cat Smith:** [\[19329\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many alcohol industry representatives have Ministers in his Department met with since July 2024.

Justin Madders:

As part of the Government's transparency agenda, the Department for Business and Trade releases quarterly data on Ministerial meetings, gifts, hospitality and travel on the transparency pages of gov.uk. The next release will be for the period July to September 2024 with a yet to be confirmed date to be set by the Cabinet Office.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Complaints**Dame Harriett Baldwin:** [\[19286\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many complaints his Department has received through its official complaints team between (a) July 2023 and July 2024 and (b) July 2024 and November 2024.

Justin Madders:

The Department received a total of 20 eligible complaints through its official complaints team between July 2023 and July 2024 and a further 11 eligible complaints between July 2024 and November 2024.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Employment Tribunals Service**Andrew Griffith:** [\[19438\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many employment tribunals were heard relating to employees of his Department between 1 August 2024 and 1 December 2024.

Justin Madders:

During the period stated, the Department for Business and Trade had 1 Employment Tribunal heard.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Media**John Cooper:** [\[20478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade has not spent anything on media and voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:**[\[20182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 29 October 2024 to Question 9609 on Department for Business and Trade: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in his Department and its predecessor Departments between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Justin Madders:

All facilities management services, including the procurement of furniture and undertaking of refurbishments, are carried out on behalf of the Department for Business and Trade, by the Government Property Agency (GPA).

The GPA have confirmed that they did not undertake any refurbishment work to Ministers offices in Old Admiralty Building, London, during the period specified.

Any ministerial furniture requests are administered by the GPA on behalf of the department and no central records are maintained by the department of such requests.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Staff**Andrew Griffith:**[\[19435\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what value of money assessment he has made of his Department's headcount and payroll data, published on 10 December 2024.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) publishes Workforce Management Information regularly on data.gov.uk. DBT does not publish value for money assessments on this headcount and payroll data.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Statistics**Laurence Turner:**[\[20337\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the Office for Statistics Regulation's publication entitled OSR's statement on the Labour Force Survey-derived estimates and Annual Population Survey-derived estimates, published on 12 December 2024.

Justin Madders:

Putting the best evidence at the heart of policy development is critical to achieving the Department's objective of supporting businesses to invest, grow and export, creating jobs and opportunities across the country.

The Department has been engaging with the Office for Statistics Regulation on quality concerns with the Labour Force Survey, so have noted their statement and

welcome the clarity it provides. We will continue to work closely with the OSR and the ONS on their next steps to ensure that our labour market data is as strong as possible.

■ **Department for Business and Trade: Visits Abroad**

Andrew Griffith:

[\[19439\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many foreign trips (a) he and (b) Ministers in his Department have made since 5 July 2024; and where these trips were to.

Justin Madders:

(a) Since 5 July 2024, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade has carried out four international visits. These were:

Italy to attend the G7 Trade Ministers Meeting

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to help progress GCC negotiations

Brazil to attend the G20 Trade and Investment Ministerial Meeting

Qatar to attend the GCC Trade Ministers' meeting & UAE (joint visit)

(b) Since 5 July 2024, Junior Ministers in the Department for Business and Trade have carried out fourteen international visits. These were:

Minister Jones to Italy to attend the Ambrosetti Forum

Minister Alexander to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Oman to progress GCC FTA negotiations, to Thailand for the Enhanced Trade Partnership and to Laos for the ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting (combined visit)

Minister Jones to France to visit Airbus Toulouse

Minister Madders to France for the OECD for a Consumer Ministerial meeting

Minister Alexander to Ireland for the British Ireland Chamber of Commerce Annual Conference

Minister Alexander to Switzerland to visit the WTO

Minister Alexander to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the Future Investment Initiative conference

Minister Gustafsson to the Netherlands for the World Pension Summit

Minister Jones to Poland for the Rebuild Ukraine conference

Minister Alexander to Azerbaijan for COP29

Minister Gustafsson to Spain for the UK-Spain Business Awards

Minister Thomas to Italy for Pontignano

Minister Alexander to Vancouver for the CPTPP Commissioners Meeting

Minister Gustafsson to Hong Kong & China for MIPIM Asia

■ Disclosure of Information

Stuart Anderson: [\[20709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to improve protections for whistleblowers.

Justin Madders:

Workers who blow the whistle are entitled to protections from detriment or dismissal as a result of making a protected disclosure and a route of redress through the Employment Tribunals if these protections are infringed.

The Employment Rights Bill will strengthen protections for whistleblowers, by making it explicit that sexual harassment can be the basis for a protected disclosure.

■ Export Credit Guarantees

Sarah Hall: [\[20881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many businesses engaged with UK Export Finance in financial years (a) 2021-22, (b) 2022-23 and (c) 2023-24.

Gareth Thomas:

The numbers of businesses that UK Export Finance (UKEF) supported in the financial years in question are shown in the table below:

	TOTAL EXPORTERS SUPPORTED
2021/22	545
2022/23	532
2023/24	650

Further information is available in UKEF's annual report and accounts, available online at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-export-finance-annual-report-and-accounts-2023-to-2024.

■ Fireworks: Safety

Cat Smith: [\[20219\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 17421 on Fireworks: Safety, what discussions she has had with (a) businesses, (b) consumer groups and (c) charities on the adequacy of the Fireworks Regulations 2004 at protecting (i) people and (ii) animals from the negative impacts of fireworks.

Justin Madders:

The Government regularly engages with a wide range of stakeholders in relation to the impacts of fireworks. Our engagement includes with businesses, consumer groups and charities. The current regulatory framework is designed to support people

to enjoy fireworks whilst lowering the risk of dangers and disruption to people, pets, and property. It is important that we ensure the safe, responsible and considerate use of fireworks for business and consumers alike.

At this stage I am examining the detail of existing legislation in relation to fireworks to decide if and where policy changes may be needed. I can assure you that the safety of the public and the impact on people, animals and property will be central in decisions on how we proceed in relation to the regulation of fireworks. To inform any future decisions I intend to engage with businesses, consumer groups and charities to gather evidence on the issues with and impacts of fireworks.

■ Foreign Investment in UK

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20223\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has had recent discussions with participants at the UK Investment Summit 2024 on the status of their planned investments in the context of the Autumn Budget 2024.

Sarah Jones:

The International Investment Summit brought together the world's most important companies and investors to showcase the UK's strengths and opportunities. Since it took place, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade has been working closely with the Chancellor and the Minister for Investment to follow up with participants, unlock new investment commitments, and ensure that planned investments are supported, including through the Office for Investment.

■ Franchises

Sir John Hayes: [\[19240\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will take steps to prevent companies from changing commissions to franchisees at short notice.

Justin Madders:

The franchising industry self-regulates through the British Franchise Association (BFA) and its Code of Ethics, and the Quality Franchise Association, which offers a Code of Conduct. Franchise agreements are the primary instrument that govern the relationship between franchisors and franchisees and those should normally include details such as fees, territory rights, contract duration and dispute resolution mechanisms. Disputes are, therefore, a private matter in which it would be inappropriate for Government to intervene.

■ Low Pay Commission: Equality

Sir John Hayes: [\[20130\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the Low Pay Commission.

Justin Madders:

There are zero full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff employed by the Low Pay Commission.

■ **Multinational Companies**

Alex Easton: [\[20806\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to ensure greater oversight of UK-based multinational corporations.

Justin Madders:

As set out in the King's Speech, the Government will publish a draft Audit Reform and Corporate Governance Bill to strengthen audit and corporate governance oversight of corporations including UK-based multinationals. The draft Bill will uphold standards and independent scrutiny of companies' reporting and governance, supporting investment and economic security.

■ **New Businesses**

Andrew Griffith: [\[19442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many new businesses were registered on Companies House in each month since July 2024.

Justin Madders:

Official statistics on company incorporation are published quarterly. These are made publicly available online by Companies House. We have excerpted and reproduced the relevant figures for your convenience below:

MONTHLY INCORPORATION VOLUMES

Month	Incorporations	Published Incorporations, Quarterly
July 2024	63,820	
August 2024	62,956	
September 2024	64,907	191,683

The most recent complete datasets can be found here:

[Incorporated companies in the UK July to September 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

Statistics for previous periods are available [here](#).

Companies House will publish the next quarterly release on 30 January 2025 which will cover the period from October to December 2024.

■ NHS: Postal Services

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[20355\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will have discussions with Royal Mail on ensuring that NHS correspondence is given a guaranteed next day delivery status.

Justin Madders:

The NHS has a Digital First strategy and most urgent appointments are already communicated by other means.

The Government does not have a role in the operational decisions of Royal Mail as it is an independent business. However, in November, I met with Royal Mail's CEO, Emma Gilthorpe and discussed the importance of a reliable universal postal service for delivering NHS correspondence. I understand Royal Mail is working with NHS bodies to ensure they have a choice of speed and price, including protecting the option of a First-Class service six days a week for more urgent NHS letters.

■ Renewable Energy: Seas and Oceans

Brian Leishman:

[\[19145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending UK workers rights to people working offshore on renewable energy projects.

Justin Madders:

The Government is committed to the protection of workers' rights and is delivering an ambitious set of reforms to ensure workplace rights are fit for a modern economy, empower working people, and contribute to economic growth. Whether workers are covered by UK employment law is dependent upon the worker establishing a sufficient connection to Great Britain. The Government will give further consideration to the issue raised in due course.

■ Small Businesses: Employers' Contributions

Luke Taylor:

[\[20847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of changes to employer National Insurance contributions on trends in the level of growth of small and medium-sized businesses.

Justin Madders:

The Government has protected the smallest businesses and charities from the impact of the increase to Employer National Insurance by increasing the Employment Allowance from £5,000 to £10,500 meaning, that 865,000 employers will pay no NICs at all next year, and more than half of employers will see no change or will gain overall from this package.

All eligible employers will be able to employ up to four full-time workers on the National Living Wage and pay no Employer NICs. Additionally, 4.1million SMEs do

not employ anyone aside from the business owner and will not be affected by these tax rises.

■ **Small Businesses: Exports**

Sarah Hall:

[\[20880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to provide export support for small businesses.

Gareth Thomas:

Under the umbrella of the recently announced Business Growth Service, UK businesses can access DBT's wealth of export support via Great.gov.uk. This comprises an online support offer and a wider network of support including the Export Academy, UK Export Finance, the International Markets network and one-to-one support from International Trade Advisers.

DBT is piloting an enhanced partnership with Greater Manchester Combined Authority, taking a targeted place-based approach to accelerate small business growth through exporting across the region. This will be rolled out to other regions across England over the next 12 months.

■ **Small Businesses: Government Assistance**

Luke Taylor:

[\[20846\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department is taking steps to help support small and medium-sized businesses to compete with online retailers.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

SMEs remain a key part of the high street, and a thriving high street will need a strong retail offering.

This is why the Government is creating a fairer business rate system and transforming the apprenticeship levy to support business and boost opportunities. This work will be supported by the publication of The Small Business Strategy Command Paper next year.

Through the Retail Sector Council, we are addressing strategic issues for the sector, including high street regeneration, skills and sustainability.

■ **Trade Agreements: Animal Welfare**

Gareth Snell:

[\[20696\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he plans to include core standards for animal welfare within his planned trade strategy.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

We are currently developing the trade strategy, closely engaging with stakeholders as we refine its content. The trade strategy will set out how we can achieve long-term sustainable, inclusive, and resilient growth through trade. The development of the

trade strategy will consider the Government's commitment to uphold our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety standards, areas in which the UK is a world leader.

■ Trade Union Recognition

Nick Timothy: [\[20552\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to his Department's consultation, Making Work Pay: Consultation on creating a modern framework for industrial relations, published in October 2024, what his planned timetable is for the consultation on lowering the admissibility requirements for the statutory trade union recognition ballot process.

Justin Madders:

The Employment Rights Bill includes a provision to provide Ministers with the power to bring forward secondary legislation to vary the trade union recognition admissibility threshold between 2% and 10%. Once the Bill obtains Royal Assent the Government intends to consult on lowering the admissibility threshold prior to issuing secondary legislation.

Nick Timothy: [\[20553\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will take steps to consult on (a) secondary legislation and (b) policy on trade union voluntary access (i) agreements and (ii) adjudication.

Justin Madders:

Clause 46 of the Employment Rights Bill provides a framework for trade unions to access workplaces where an access agreement is reached between an independent trade union and an employer, making it easier for union representatives to recruit, organise and carry out other union-related activities.

The Government ran a consultation that closed on 2 December about the approach to enforcement of the right of access provisions. We are currently considering the responses to that consultation and will publish a government response in due course.

The Government will also consult on secondary legislation relating to the right of access framework following Royal Assent of the Employment Rights Bill.

Nick Timothy: [\[20554\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of changing the threshold for the number of employees within an organisation for it to be eligible for the statutory trade union recognition ballot process.

Justin Madders:

The Government is simplifying the process and the law around statutory recognition thresholds, so that working people have a meaningful right to organise through trade unions.

As part of this, we are removing the antiquated rule that means that unions must show at the application stage that they are likely to get a majority in a subsequent recognition ballot. We will also consult on whether the 10% membership requirement on application should be reduced following Royal Assent of the Employment Rights Bill.

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[20751\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what information (a) his Department, (b) the Certification Officer and (c) the Central Arbitration Committee hold on (i) successful and (ii) unsuccessful trade union recognition ballots in each of the last ten years.

Justin Madders:

Information from the Central Arbitration Committee in relation to the outcome of statutory trade union recognition ballots is provided below for each of the last 10 years:

	SUCCESSFUL	UNSUCCESSFUL
2015	4	4
2016	5	1
2017	5	4
2018	7	6
2019	6	2
2020	2	0
2021	8	4
2022	5	1
2023	3	5
2024	4	5

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[20752\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of (a) lowering the required member percentage from 10% to 2% for the statutory trade union recognition ballot process, (b) removing the likely majority support at the application stage and (c) removing the 40% support threshold at the recognition ballot stage on the number of recognised trade unions.

Justin Madders:

The Government has published a final stage impact assessment on strengthening workers' rights to access, recognition and representation. This is available at: [Impact](#)

[assessment: Strengthening workers' rights to trade union access, recognition and representation](#)

■ Trade Unions

Nick Timothy: [\[20910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent estimate he has made of the number of employers in the (a) private and (b) public sector whose employees are members of an unrecognised trade union.

Justin Madders:

The Government does not hold information on the number of employers in the private and public sectors whose employees are members of an unrecognised trade union.

The Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey estimates the percentage of employers with recognised unions and employers with union members. The difference in percentages could be used as a proxy to estimate the percentage of employers whose employees are members of an unrecognised trade union.

■ Urban Areas

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 26 November 2024 to Question 16140 on Nightclubs: Closures, what steps his Department plans to take to measure the effectiveness of the five point plan for high streets.

Gareth Thomas:

Kickstarting economic growth is the number one mission for this government and thriving high streets are essential to supporting this.

We have launched a new package to tackle late payments, backing small businesses and the self-employed, alongside measures to tackle retail crime and address the disproportionate business rates burden faced by high street businesses.

The 100th banking hub has just been opened in Darwen, Lancashire, and High Street Rental Auctions, a new permissive power for local authorities to auction rental rights of commercial high street property that has been vacant for longer than 12 months in a 24-month period, came into effect on 2 December 2024. However, there is more to be done, and we are working across Whitehall to deliver a cross-government approach for revitalising high streets. We will set out more information in due course.

■ Vodafone Group

Sir John Hayes: [\[19241\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, on what occasions Ministers in his Department met representatives of Vodafone in the last five years.

Gareth Thomas:

Details of the meetings held by Ministers of the Department for Business and Trade and its predecessor the Department for International Trade are available on

transparency pages of gov.uk and are released as part of the Government's transparency agenda.

CABINET OFFICE

■ 10 Downing Street: Art Works

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[20833\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question HL2664 on 10 Downing Street: Art Works, whether the portrait of Queen Elizabeth I will be permanently installed in 11 Downing Street.

Georgia Gould:

The Government Art Collection website lists the artworks on display in Downing Street

https://artcollection.dcms.gov.uk/?s=&display=artworkonly&search_place=Downing+Street

■ 10 Downing Street: Council Tax

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[20834\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Ministerial residence in 10 Downing Street pays council tax as a (a) sole or main residence and (b) second home.

Georgia Gould:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is currently allocated the flat above 10 Downing Street and pays full council tax.

■ Blockchain

John Glen:

[\[19276\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, which Department is responsible for (a) leading on and (b) delivering blockchain technology.

Georgia Gould:

The primary existing use-case for blockchain technology is in cryptoassets. The Treasury has confirmed government's intention to proceed with a financial services regulatory regime for cryptoassets, which will provide valuable protections for consumers and give firms regulatory certainty along with the flexibility to innovate. Blockchain technology has broader use-cases, which are addressed by responsible departments.

■ Boris Johnson

Emily Thornberry:

[\[20167\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to page 187 of his Department's publication entitled Annual report and accounts 2023 to 2024, published on 12 December 2024, on what date Boris Johnson (a) notified his Department of his intention to make

claims for office set-up costs incurred in the financial year 2022-23 and (b) submitted invoices in support of those claims.

Emily Thornberry: [\[20168\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to page 187 of his Department's publication entitled Annual report and accounts 2023 to 2024, published on 12 December 2024, on what date the decision to reimburse Boris Johnson for office set-up costs incurred in the financial year 2022-23 was taken.

Georgia Gould:

Mr Johnson's claim for the Public Duty Cost Allowance covering eligible costs incurred in 2022/23 was paid on 1 November 2023. This followed a decision made the previous month to grant an exception to the policy which requires all claims to be submitted by the end of quarter 1 of the following financial year. This was granted because Mr Johnson only began accruing eligible costs in late 2022/23.

■ Cabinet Office: Civil Servants

Nick Timothy: [\[19470\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many officials at each civil service grade have been allocated to the EU Directorate within his Department.

Georgia Gould:

The EU Relations Secretariat was established in the Cabinet Office to give effect to the Government's manifesto commitments to reset the relationship with the EU, implement the Windsor Framework in good faith and protect the UK's internal market, as well as responsibility for the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement and Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

The EU Relations Secretariat brings together civil servants who were already working on EU relations from across the government. The data on this headcount will be published in 2025.

■ Cabinet Office: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

Emily Thornberry: [\[19654\]](#)

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

Georgia Gould:

The Cabinet Office has a clear policy for new government procurement card applications which must be accompanied by confirmation a budget holder within the relevant business unit approves the issue of the card. Initial use of the card is restricted to certain categories of spend alongside a single transaction limit and monthly spend limit. These restrictions can only be lifted by completing a business case. All new card applications must include a signature to confirm that the

cardholder has read and accepted departmental policies and the consequences of misuse.

The Cabinet Office had 298 and 320 government procurement cardholders at the end of 2022 and 2023 respectively.

The Government Property Agency had 5 and 8 government procurement cardholders at the end of 2022 and 2023 respectively.

■ **Cabinet Office: Vacancies**

Nick Timothy: [\[19471\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what senior leadership positions are vacant in the EU Directorate within his Department.

Georgia Gould:

The EU Relations Secretariat was established in the Cabinet Office to give effect to the Government's manifesto commitments to reset the relationship with the EU, implement the Windsor Framework in good faith and protect the UK's internal market, as well as responsibility for the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement and Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

All Senior Civil Servant roles within the EU Relations Secretariat are currently filled. We are recruiting for the new role of Second Permanent Secretary; the advert for which closed on 8 December.

■ **Civil Servants: Cheltenham**

Max Wilkinson: [\[20522\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of relocating civil servants working on cyber security and technology to be closer to the cyber industry in Cheltenham as part of the Places for Growth Scheme.

Georgia Gould:

We are working with departments on their future plans as part of the upcoming Spending Review.

■ **Civil Servants: Disciplinary Proceedings**

Nick Timothy: [\[19479\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many civil servants have been suspended due to allegations of misconduct since in each year since 2020.

Georgia Gould:

Decisions to suspend an employee are delegated to individual departments. Data on the number of civil servants who have been suspended due to allegations of misconduct are therefore not held centrally.

[Civil Service statistics](#) on the composition of the Civil Service workforce, including data on those leaving the Civil Service due to dismissals, are available on [GOV.UK](#).

■ Consumer Goods: Safety

Claire Hanna: [\[20839\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what discussions he has had with the EU on the impact of General Product Safety regulations on small and medium businesses sending goods to Northern Ireland.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

The Government maintains a dialogue with the EU on matters of mutual interest. The updated General Product Safety Regulation largely formalises the reality of how businesses are already operating in the UK and the measures are therefore likely to have limited impact. Where businesses need to make changes, we expect that they will be adapting anyway in order to continue trading with the EU. We are keeping this matter under careful review and are supporting small and medium businesses through providing detailed guidance and via regular engagement to ensure we are enabling them to trade freely across the whole of the UK.

■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Ministers' Private Offices

Emily Thornberry: [\[20171\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 12891 on Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Ministers' Private Offices, how much the Government Property Agency spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and its predecessor Departments between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items.

Georgia Gould:

The Government Property Agency confirmed £24,315.62 excluding VAT was spent during the period 4th July 2022 to 4th July 2024 on new furniture and fittings plus other refurbishment (including moves) This is broken down as follows;

- New Furniture and Fittings - £526.87
- Other Refurbishment of Ministerial Offices including moves - £23,788.75

The full itemised list can be found below:

(a) new furniture and fittings

Covering the period from the creation of DSIT, as announced by the Prime Minister on 7 February 2023 to 4 July 2024:

- Date reference: 01/03/2023
- What: Supply and installation of 4x key safe for private offices
- How much: £302.89 ex VAT

- Note: 1x key safe out of these 4 key safes was for the DSIT Permanent Secretary's room (not ministerial) - however, we are not able to separate the cost of this from the overall costs for these fittings and works as a whole
- Date reference: 02/02/2024
- What: Supply and installation of key safe for private office
- How much: £68.25 ex VAT
- Date reference: 02/04/2024
- What: Installation of portrait of HM The King at ministerial offices
- How much: £51.91 ex VAT
- Note: Portrait was supplied under the government's His Majesty The King's Portrait Scheme
- Date reference: 16/04/2024
- What: Installation of a heavy duty key safe for private office
- How much: £103.82 ex VAT

(b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices

Covering the period from the creation of DSIT, as announced by the Prime Minister on 7 February 2023 to 4 July 2024:

- Date reference: 26/7/2023
- What: Removal of whiteboards from wall, repair and redecoration (repainting) of damaged wall in ministerial office
- How much: £472.98 ex VAT
- Date reference: 7/8/2023
- What: Churn of furniture (relocation, repositioning, removal of furniture to storeroom and installing furniture from storeroom) in private offices
- How much: £311.47 ex VAT
- Date reference: 16/11/2023
- What: Churn of furniture (removal of furniture to storeroom and installing replacement furniture, reused from separate office) in ministerial office
- How much: £415.30 ex VAT
- Date reference: 15/12/2023
- What: Major churn of furniture (internal movement and relocation of furniture to move ministerial teams to different rooms from previous rooms) of ministerial and private offices
- How much: £13,661.92 ex VAT
- Date reference: 19/1/2024

- Removal of noticeboards and relocation of artwork, repair and redecoration (repainting) of damaged walls in 2x ministerial rooms
- How much: £1,855.57 ex VAT
- Date reference: 12/04/2024
- Removal of whiteboards from 3x walls, repair and redecoration (repainting) of damaged walls in ministerial office
- How much: £2,249.52 ex VAT
- Date reference: 21/06/2024
- What: Redecoration (repainting) of ministerial office
- How much: £1,539.77 ex VAT
- Note: Works completed prior to 4 July 2024
- Date reference: 27/06/2024
- What: Redecoration (repainting) of ministerial office, and installation of 7 pictures throughout ministerial office and private office
- How much: £3,281.99
- Note: Works completed prior to 4 July 2024

During this period DSIT was originally part of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) which was dissolved on 7th February 2023 and split into DESNZ, DSIT and DBT. As a result of this, the former BEIS departments were moved out of 1 Victoria Street and into different buildings. The GPA has no record of any ministerial furniture or refurbishment expenditure at the former BEIS office (1 Victoria Street) during the requested period.

■ Firearms: Licensing

Helen Maguire:

[\[20113\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many people were (a) killed and (b) wounded by a (i) licensed and (ii) previously licensed firearm in each of the last ten years.

Georgia Gould:

The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority.

A response to the Hon. Lady's Parliamentary Question of 13 December is attached.

Attachments:

1. [Letter from the National Statistician](#) [PQ20113.pdf]

■ Honours

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[20830\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the Government's priorities are for the honours system.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

The priorities for the honours system are available online:

<https://honours.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about/governance/#primeminister>

■ Immigration**Rupert Lowe:****[19505]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's contract entitled Travel, Transport, Accommodation & Venue Solutions, reference RM6342 TTA&VS, published on 9 October 2024, how much and what proportion of the contract value relates to the provision of services for (a) asylum seekers, (b) refugees and (c) migrants.

Georgia Gould:

The Travel, Transport, Accommodation & Venue Solutions (RM6342) is not a contract but a commercial agreement. There is no guaranteed spend associated with this agreement, as it is designed to provide a solution for potential procurement needs. As such, there is no specific spend or proportion of the agreement value allocated to the provision of services for asylum seekers, refugees, or migrants.

■ Lobbying**Tessa Munt:****[R] [20199]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he plans to respond to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee of Session 2023-24 on Lobbying and Influence: post-legislative scrutiny of the Lobbying Act 2014 and related matters, HC 203.

Georgia Gould:

The Government is grateful to the Committee for its report.

The Government will consider the report alongside the development of other proposals to strengthen standards in public life and will update Parliament in due course.

■ MyCSP: Freedom of Information**Mr Richard Holden:****[19411]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Civil Service pension scheme administrator MyCSP is a public authority for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Georgia Gould:

MyCSP is a private company and carries out most of the day-to-day administration of the Civil Service Pension Scheme, under a contract with the Cabinet Office. As a private company, MyCSP is not subject to the Freedom of Information Act. The Cabinet Office is a public authority for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act.

■ National Security Adviser**Mr Richard Holden:** [20828]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the new National Security Adviser can direct civil servants; and for what reason he was appointed as a special adviser.

Georgia Gould:

In line with the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers, special advisers cannot manage civil servants.

■ Non-departmental Public Bodies: Costs**Rupert Lowe:** [20085]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the cost to the public purse was for all non-departmental bodies in the last financial year.

Georgia Gould:

We are currently collecting financial data from arms lengths bodies, which includes non-departmental public bodies, for 2023/24 and will publish it in due course.

Financial data for arm's length bodies, including non-departmental public bodies, in 2022/23 is published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

■ Places for Growth Programme: Cheltenham**Max Wilkinson:** [20909]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of relocating civil service offices to Cheltenham via the Places for Growth Scheme.

Georgia Gould:

We are working with departments on their future workforce and location plans as part of the upcoming Spending Review.

■ Prime Minister: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:** [20181]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 9605 on Prime Minister: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in 10 Downing Street between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Georgia Gould:

The cost to the public purse for new furniture and fittings or refurbishment of the Prime Minister's office in the specified time period was £0.

■ Prime Minister: Self-assessment**Mr Richard Holden:** [18203]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister plans to publish his tax return on gov.uk for 2023-24.

Georgia Gould:

There is an established process in place for the declaration and management of interests held by ministers. This ensures that steps are taken to avoid or mitigate any actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

As set out in the List of Ministers' Interests (November 2024), as part of the ministers' interests process, Ministers are asked to confirm that their tax affairs are up to date and that the arrangement of their affairs is consistent with their overarching duty to comply with the law. The List of Ministers' Interests is available on GOV.UK at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/list-of-ministers-interests>

Public Sector: Procurement

Mr Richard Holden: [20750]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 16510 on Public Sector: Procurement, what his timetable is for publishing the National Procurement Policy Statement; and whether he plans to consult with stakeholders on his proposed procurement policy.

Georgia Gould:

The government will publish a new National Procurement Policy Statement under the Procurement Act that will support the Government's missions, drive value for money and deliver social value. We have been consulting with stakeholders on the development of the statement. This has included a series of roundtable discussions, and an online NPPS stakeholder survey. The new National Procurement Policy Statement will be completed in time for the commencement of the Procurement Act on 24 February 2025.

Special Advisers: Pay

Mr Richard Holden: [20832]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he plans to publish a list of the salaries of special advisers.

Georgia Gould:

Information on Special Adviser numbers and costs is published annually in the Annual Report on Special Advisers as per the requirements of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, as was the case under the previous Administration. The 2025 Annual Report on Special Advisers will be published next year

Steroid Drugs: Death

Will Stone: [20049]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many death certificates mentioning steroids were issued in each of the last five years.

Georgia Gould:

The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority.

A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 13th December is attached.

Attachments:

1. [Letter from the National Statistician](#) [PQ20049 (1).pdf]

■ **Sue Gray****Mr Richard Holden:****[20829]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, for what reason Sue Gray was not appointed as Envoy for the Nation and Regions.

Georgia Gould:

I refer the Rt Hon Member to the answer given by my Noble Friend on 4 December, Official Report, PQ HL2660.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT■ **American Football: Public Participation****Mr Louie French:****[20472]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she is taking steps to promote participation in American football.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government is committed to improving access to sports and physical activity for everybody, wherever they live. Sport and physical activity is central to achieving our health and opportunity manifesto missions, with the biggest gains coming from supporting those who are inactive to move more.

Sport England provides investment to British American Football, the National Governing Body for American Football in Britain, which received up to £250,000 to invest in the growth and participation of American football.

UK Sport recently awarded British American Football £500,000 in funding. The funding will specifically support the development of the elite Great Britain Flag Football Olympic programme over the next three and a half years – in the run up to the Los Angeles Summer Olympic Games in 2028.

I have also met with the National Football League to discuss their plans for the sport in the UK.

■ Arts: Health

Shockat Adam:

[\[20886\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of (a) arts and (b) creative activities on the health of (i) children and (ii) babies in socially deprived communities.

Chris Bryant:

DCMS has carried out a range of work to research the impact of arts and creativity upon health. For instance, through the Culture and Heritage Capital (CHC) Programme, the Department has recently published a new study that monetises the impact of culture and heritage engagement on health and wellbeing. This draws on evidence for a range of groups, including children and young people. While the report is not specifically about children from socially deprived communities, its findings are striking. For example, one model within the research finds that general engagement with culture and heritage for adults aged 30-49 has annual health and wellbeing benefits worth £992 per person and £8bn to wider society each year. Specifically for children, another model finds that participating in art can have benefits worth £134 per child per year in terms of improvements to quality of life and self esteem, worth £120mn per year to society.

The research highlights one of the many reasons that Government invests to support arts and creativity, including activity with children and young people. For example, one third of organisations supported through Arts Council England's National Portfolio Investment Programme (334 Organisations) report that they deliver "creative health" activity, including 121 who support the health of children and young people.

■ Charity Commission: Equality

Sir John Hayes:

[\[20561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the Charity Commission.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Charity Commission for England and Wales has no full time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff.

■ Community Wealth Funds

Matt Bishop:

[\[19580\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to ensure the Community Wealth Fund benefits (a) Cinderford West in the Forest of Dean and (b) other deprived communities.

Stephanie Peacock:

The government has allocated £87.5 million of dormant assets funding to the Community Wealth Fund and is committed to ensuring it delivers meaningful benefits to communities across England. DCMS and MHCLG are working to shortly publish

the government response, this will set out the final design of the Community Wealth Fund, including further information on how beneficiary communities will be selected, and other elements of its delivery.

■ Cricket

Mr Louie French: [\[19448\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions she has had with (a) the England and Wales Cricket Board and (b) County Cricket Clubs on the sustainability of the county cricket system.

Stephanie Peacock:

This Government wants a thriving sport sector, with robust National Governing Bodies that can use their nationwide remit to deliver sport to people across the country.

I meet with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on a range of topics, including the future of the sport, and have seen the work of their charitable arm, Chance to Shine, to encourage more children to take up cricket. It is for the ECB to work with County Cricket Clubs on the sustainability of the county cricket system and other issues.

Mr Louie French: [\[19455\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential implications for her policies of the England and Wales Cricket Board's decision to revoke no objection certificates for English county cricket players.

Stephanie Peacock:

Policies on when to issue "no objection certificates" for English county cricket players, which permit them to play in overseas tournaments, are a matter for the England and Wales Cricket Board in their stewardship of the game.

■ Cricket: Public Participation

Mr Louie French: [\[19456\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to increase participation in cricket amongst (a) women and girls and (b) young people in schools.

Stephanie Peacock:

Every child should have the opportunity to play sport and do regular physical activity. Schools play a key role in allowing all children to have high quality opportunities to take part in PE and sport, setting them up for a lifetime of physical activity. This Government is also committed to supporting every aspect of women's sport, including cricket, and ensuring all women and girls, no matter their background, have the opportunity to access sport and physical activity.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) is the National Governing Body for cricket and has committed to making the sport as inclusive as possible for children and young people through their new strategy and state school action plan. I have also seen the work of their charitable arm, Chance to Shine, to encourage more children to take up cricket.

We provide the majority of support for grassroots sport through our Arm's Length Body, Sport England, which annually invests over £250 million of National Lottery and government money. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) receive £10.2 million funding from Sport England across up to five years to help deliver strategic objectives, including tackling inequalities and improving access to sport.

■ **Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Alcoholic Drinks**

Cat Smith: [\[19330\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many alcohol industry representatives Ministers in her Department have met since July 2024.

Stephanie Peacock:

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 Culture, Media and Sport: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**

Emily Thornberry: [\[19667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 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.

Stephanie Peacock:

Core Department:

A total of 23 DCMS core civil servants held government procurement cards at the end of the 2022 calendar year. A total of 15 DCMS core civil servants held government procurement cards at the end of the 2023 calendar year. This enabled them to make purchases against the Department's budget, subject to internal policy and approval.

Executive Agencies:

DCMS does not hold executive agency GPC data.

■ **Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Media**

John Cooper: [\[20479\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Stephanie Peacock:

The department has not spent any expenses on media or voice training for ministers since 5 July 2024.

■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:**[\[20184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 22 October 2024 to Question 9065 on Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Stephanie Peacock:

DCMS spent £120,687.71 incl VAT on the refurbishment of Ministerial offices during the period 4th July 2022 to 4th July 2024 on new furniture, fittings plus other refurbishment (including moves). This is broken down as follows:

New furniture and fittings: £106,736.66

Other refurbishment of Ministerial Office including moves: £13,951.04

The full itemised list can be found below:

i) £83,215.85

ii) 5 executive L-shaped desks made of veneered MDF and varnished wood veneer. 5 wood veneer meeting tables with power and media connectors for video conferencing. 5 coffee tables made of veneered MDF. 12 meeting chairs made of mid range fabric and leather arm pads.

iii) £23,521

iv) x5 soft furnishings and 1 bookcase

v) £13,951.04

vi) Painting and Decorating of 5 Ministerial offices

■ Gambling**Mr Louie French:**[\[20874\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the suitability of the NHS Health Survey in assessing problem gambling rates in the United Kingdom.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government is committed to reviewing all official statistics assessing gambling harm in the United Kingdom to help to build our picture of gambling harm. This includes the NHS Health Survey, and we will continue to engage with relevant officials in the Department for Health and Social Care about the NHS Health Survey and the evidence it provides on gambling harm.

We are aware that the harms that can ensue from harmful gambling are many and diverse and we will use all available evidence to better understand the impact that harmful gambling can have on people. Considering the NHS Health Survey alongside the Gambling Commission's Gambling Survey for Great Britain provides us with a wider understanding of the potential consequences that can arise from gambling and ensures that we have more frequent statistics on gambling harm rates. Policy and regulatory change is not based on single statistics or evidence sources, and we will continue to use evidence from a range of sources to assess harmful gambling in the United Kingdom.

■ **Gambling: Video Games**

Mr Louie French:

[\[20878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to prevent children participating in gambling via online video games.

Stephanie Peacock:

Protecting children and young people from being harmed or exploited by gambling is a core priority for the Government and a Gambling Commission objective. Under the Gambling Act 2005, gambling is defined as playing a game of chance for a prize of money or money's worth. Gambling-like features in video games, such as loot boxes, do not meet this legal definition of gambling.

We are aware that there are instances where third party websites allow players to gamble using prizes that can be transferred in and out of some video games. Where these instances of illegal gambling are identified, the Gambling Commission takes swift action to disrupt these websites and protect players. The Government and the Gambling Commission continue to pay close attention to novel and emergent forms of gambling and gambling-like products, including within video games, to ensure that appropriate regulation is in place.

■ **Greyhound Racing**

Mr Louie French:

[\[19452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she is taking steps to promote greyhound racing.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government acknowledges the importance of greyhound racing to the nation's culture and economy, for example employing over 5,400 people across the country.

The Department continues to engage with the Greyhound Board for Great Britain (GBGB) on developments in the industry.

The GBGB receives funds through the British Greyhound Racing Fund (BGRF) in the form of voluntary contributions from bookmakers on betting turnover on licensed greyhound racing, which sit alongside commercial deals between the betting and racing industries. The Department is also engaging with bookmakers to underline the importance of the voluntary levy to support the growth and sustainability of the sport.

Crucial to that sustainability is implementation of GBGB's welfare strategy "A Good Life for Every Greyhound".

■ Horse Racing

Mr Louie French:

[19449]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of measures announced in the Autumn Budget on the horseracing industry.

Stephanie Peacock:

In order to repair the public finances and help raise the revenue required to increase funding for public services, the Government took difficult decisions at the Autumn Budget. Major tax measures were accompanied by Tax Information and Impact Notes in the usual way.

The Government recognises the significant contribution that racing makes to British sporting culture and its importance to the British rural economy. In addition to the above measures, we recognise the unique position of horseracing and that the Horserace Betting Levy is vital for financial sustainability of the sport. The Minister for Gambling recently met representatives from the horseracing and betting industries and has written to both encouraging a voluntary deal that fairly reflects the relationship between racing and betting.

Within the budget, the Government also announced its intention to publish a consultation next year on proposals to bring remote gambling (meaning gambling offered over the internet, telephone, TV, and radio) under a single tax, rather than taxing it through a three-tax structure. This consultation will consider the impacts of reforming gambling duties, and subsequently set out any expected impacts of any potential changes.

■ Loneliness

Jacob Collier:

[20409]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the (a) economic and (b) social impact of loneliness.

Stephanie Peacock:

There are multiple sources of evidence on loneliness including research on the economic and social impact of loneliness.

The economic impact of loneliness

[DCMS research](#) estimates that the costs associated with loneliness based on the impact on subjective wellbeing, health and productivity of the chronically lonely individual can be represented as a yearly sum of £9,537 per person. Chronic loneliness refers to loneliness that occurs frequently over a period of time, this has been shown to have a negative effect on health and wellbeing.

This figure is our current best estimate. It is challenging to understand the economic impact of loneliness as it can be difficult to disentangle this from the impact of other drivers of low wellbeing. Further research is underway to enhance our understanding of these nuances.

The social impact of loneliness

[DCMS research](#) shows a bidirectional and cyclical relationship between chronic loneliness and mental health, with people experiencing chronic loneliness 3.7 times more likely to experience mental health distress compared to those who do not experience chronic loneliness. Furthermore, [external research](#) in the US and the [Quartet Community Foundation Health and Wellbeing report](#) demonstrate the negative impact chronic loneliness can have on physical health.

Loneliness has also been linked to poorer educational and employment performance by [external research](#) and [DCMS research](#) suggests those who are unemployed and economically inactive are more likely to experience chronic loneliness.

■ **Motor Sports: Employers' Contributions**

Mr Louie French:

[\[20473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to employer National Insurance contributions on motor sport.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government has protected the smallest businesses and charities from the impact of the increase to Employer National Insurance by increasing the Employment Allowance from £5,000 to £10,500, which means that 865,000 employers will pay no National Insurance Contributions (NICs) at all next year, more than half of employers will see no change or will gain overall from this package, and all eligible employers will be able to employ up to four full-time workers on the National Living Wage and pay no employer NICs.

The Government published a Tax Information and Impact Note on 13 November which sets out the impact of the employer NICs changes.

■ **Museums and Galleries: Finance**

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[20899\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the level of financial support provided to (a) the River and Rowing museum in Henley-on-Thames and (b) other museums outside London.

Chris Bryant:

We have made no such specific assessment about the River and Rowing museum, but we are keen to see museums outside London flourish. Funding is tight, but DCMS oversees the £86m Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND), which invests in museum infrastructure nationally and the Chancellor announced a package of new

cultural infrastructure funding at the Autumn Budget, to build on existing capital schemes. The Budget also recommitted to the cultural tax reliefs, which provide important revenue support for museums and arts organisations.

■ Newspaper Press: Foreign Investment in UK

Jack Rankin: [\[19589\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many Foreign State Intervention Notices have been issued in the last six months.

Stephanie Peacock:

There have been no Foreign State Intervention Notices issued in the last six months.

■ Parthenon Sculptures

Alberto Costa: [\[20639\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions she has had with relevant stakeholders on the future status of the Parthenon marbles.

Chris Bryant:

The Secretary of State and I have separately met with the Chair and Director of the British Museum. The position of the Parthenon Sculptures was one of a number of issues discussed on both occasions.

I also met Greece's Tourism Minister Olga Kefalogianni on 4 November for a meeting regarding tourism, and she briefly raised the Parthenon Sculptures.

Decisions relating to the care and management of the Parthenon Sculptures are a matter for the British Museum Trustees, acting within the law.

■ Rugby

Dr Luke Evans: [\[20259\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had recent discussions with (a) the Rugby Football Union, (b) Premiership Rugby and (c) the Rugby Players Association on the issues facing rugby union.

Dr Luke Evans: [\[20260\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will undertake a review of (a) financial pressures and (b) governance challenges facing rugby union in England.

Dr Luke Evans: [\[20261\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will meet representatives of (a) Rugby Football Union, (b) Premiership Rugby, (c) Championship Clubs and (d) Community Clubs Union to discuss (i) future governance, (ii) financial stability and (iii) executive pay.

Stephanie Peacock:

Rugby Union has a vital role to play in our national identity. I recently met with the Rugby Football Union and Premiership Rugby to discuss the future of the sport, and my department is in regular contact with the rugby union authorities.

The RFU is independent of the Government and is responsible for the regulation of rugby union, and for protecting and promoting the financial sustainability of the sport. My department does not intend to conduct a review into the finances or governance of rugby union at this time.

My department continues to work with the RFU, representatives of Premiership clubs and Championship clubs, and the wider sport sector to support the ongoing sustainability of elite and community level rugby union.

■ Rugby: Children**Mr Louie French:**[\[19447\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to increase participation in rugby (a) union and (b) league amongst school children.

Mr Louie French:[\[19451\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to promote participation in Rugby Union amongst (a) girls and (b) young women.

Stephanie Peacock:

Everyone should have the opportunity to play sport and do regular physical activity. Schools play a key role in allowing all children to have high quality opportunities to take part in PE and sport, setting them up for a lifetime of physical activity. The expert-led review of the curriculum will ensure that no child misses out on a broad range of subjects, including PE and sport. This Government is also committed to supporting every aspect of women's and girls' sport, including rugby union and rugby league.

Rugby Union and Rugby League are sports that are delivered through the Government-funded School Games programme, which provides children across the country with the opportunity to take part in local and accessible sport and physical activity.

We provide the majority of support for grassroots sport through our arm's-length body, Sport England, which annually invests over £250 million of National Lottery and Exchequer money. The Rugby Football League (RFL) and the Rugby Football Union (RFU) receive £11.9 million and £13.8 million funding from Sport England respectively across up to five years to help deliver strategic objectives, including tackling inequalities and improving access to sport.

The women's Rugby World Cup in 2025 will provide an opportunity to use the tournament as a springboard for women's rugby. The RFU's Impact 25 programme has been developed to create more opportunities for women and girls in all aspects of women's rugby.

■ Television Licences: Fees and Charges

Jim Shannon:

[\[19293\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will take steps to widen the eligibility criteria for a (a) free and (b) discounted TV licence.

Stephanie Peacock:

As part of the next Charter Review, the government will engage with the BBC and others to consider how to ensure the BBC thrives well into the next decade and beyond. This will include discussions on a range of important issues, including how we ensure that there is a sustainable funding model that is fair for those who pay for it.

In the meantime, the Government will be legislating to expand the Simple Payment Plan, to enable more households in financial hardship to pay their TV licence in flexible fortnightly or monthly installments.

■ Young Futures Hubs: Finance

Gareth Snell:

[\[20695\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether planned funding arrangements for Young Futures Hubs will include provision for long-term funding.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government is committed to breaking down barriers to success and opportunity. Too many children and young people today do not have access to the same enrichment opportunities as their peers, suffer from poor mental health, and, in some cases, end up being drawn into crime rather than achieving their full potential.

While services already exist to provide support for this group, many still go unsupported, because they are unable to access the services they need, when and where they need them. Young Futures Hubs will bring together the support services that tackle these underlying needs and make them more accessible to those that need them. In doing so, the hubs will promote children and young people's development, improve their mental health and wellbeing, and prevent them from being drawn into crime. They will be staffed with professionals including youth workers, mental health support workers and career advisors. The new Young Futures Hubs will support the delivery of the government's safer streets, health and opportunity missions.

The number of hubs, their specific locations, and their reach are still being determined, and long term funding for these will be determined through the Phase 2 of the Spending Review.

The department will engage with national and local partners, local communities, and children and young people to work together on design and delivery, including considering relevant reports.

■ Youth Investment Fund

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[19897\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what plans there are for a third phase of the Youth Investment Fund to be launched in 2025.

Stephanie Peacock:

More than £85 million will be allocated in recognition of the urgent need for more youth facilities. This will include £26 million of new funding for youth clubs to buy new equipment and undertake much needed renovations via the Better Youth Spaces programme. This funding will also enable the completion of current Youth Investment Fund projects.

Any further capital investment in youth facilities would be subject to the next stage of the Spending Review.

This Government fully recognises the importance of youth services to help young people live safe and healthy lives, and we are committed to giving all young people the chance to reach their full potential.

The Culture Secretary has also announced that £100 million from the next tranche of dormant assets funding will be used to deliver youth outcomes between 2024 and 2028, supporting the provision of services, facilities and opportunities for young people across the country.

■ Youth Services

Helen Maguire:

[\[20114\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what the (a) scope of and (b) timeline for producing the National Youth Strategy is.

Stephanie Peacock:

This Strategy, co-produced with young people and the youth sector, will better coordinate youth services, bringing power back to young people and their communities, and rebuilding a thriving and sustainable sector.

Over the coming months, we will be developing our plans in partnership with young people and with organisations within the youth sector, engaging closely with them to fully understand their needs and the issues they consider to be most crucial in addressing. This National Youth Strategy will cover youth services and policy at local, regional and national levels, and will outline a long-term vision for how all young people can realise their potential, with choices and chances, and be empowered and active members of society. It will also look to empower local areas and communities, moving away from one-size-fits-all approaches.

We will be holding a series of youth-led roundtables and we will set up a youth advisory board to work alongside us, influence our work and challenge us every step of the way. We will ensure this is an accessible engagement period that reaches as many young people as possible.

We will be publishing the Strategy in 2025.

Gareth Snell:

[\[20693\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to continue funding for research into shared impact measurements for youth services.

Stephanie Peacock:

This Government fully recognises the importance of youth services to help young people live safe and healthy lives, and we are committed to giving all young people the chance to reach their full potential.

We are also committed to improving the evidence base for the youth sector and making impactful improvements. Confirmation of decisions regarding any funding for improvements on shared measures will be shared in due course.

In November this government launched the ambitious new National Youth Strategy, which will be co-produced together with young people and the youth sector. This Strategy will allow us to put young people back in charge of their own destiny and provide them with meaningful choices and chances.

We are commissioning research that will inform the development and direction of the National Youth Strategy by exploring young people's challenges and experiences, and their proposed solutions. The research will consist of an evidence review as well as youth engagement.

The Strategy will be published next year.

■ Youth Services: Finance

Gareth Snell:

[\[20694\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she is taking steps to provide ring-fenced revenue funding for universal and open-access youth services for all young people all year round.

Stephanie Peacock:

This Government fully recognises the importance of youth services to help young people live safe and healthy lives, and we are committed to giving all young people the chance to reach their full potential.

Next financial year, in 2025/26, we are increasing the total funding for other DCMS youth programmes. We will also be funding new work in partnership with local authorities to start the journey of building back lost capacity in local areas and of ensuring young people's voices are heard in their local services.

We are also allocating over £85m of funding in 2025/26 to create fit-for-purpose, welcoming spaces for young people, including launching the new Better Youth Spaces fund, which will allocate at least £26m for youth clubs to buy new equipment and do renovations. This will also include completing the Youth Investment Fund projects.

In addition, this government has committed to the co-production of an ambitious new National Youth Strategy, which will allow us to put young people back in charge of their own destiny and provide them with meaningful choices and chances. As part of the Strategy, we will be engaging closely with young people and the youth sector from across the country over the coming months to fully understand their needs and the issues they consider to be most crucial in addressing. This will allow us to better target funding and services where they are most needed.

The Strategy will be published next year.

DEFENCE

■ Afghanistan: Home Country Nationals

Tom Gordon:

[\[19940\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many applicants to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme are awaiting a response; and what the average time taken is to process applications under that scheme.

Luke Pollard:

As of 12 December 2024, 7,662 principal applicants are awaiting an initial eligibility decision under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme. This Government has inherited a large number of ARAP applications but is committed to continuously improving the efficiency of the decision-making process across all cases, so that eligible applicants are identified and relocated quickly. . The time it takes to process an ARAP application varies, and not all applicants will receive an eligibility decision in the same timeframe due a wide range of factors, for example the length of time an applicant takes to respond to a request for information and verification checks required with Other Government Departments. Each case is assessed on its own merit and, as such, some may take longer than others to process.

■ Armed Forces: Engineers

James Cartlidge:

[\[15457\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to his Oral Statement of 20 November 2024 on Defence Programmes Developments, Official Report, columns 287-289, whether he plans to extend the retention bonuses for aircraft engineers to non-aircraft engineers.

Al Carns:

The single-Services each pay targeted retention payments where they are most needed, and where they provide the most efficient use of tax-payers money.

As part of the Government's commitment to renew the nation's contract with those who serve, eligible Tri-service aircraft engineers will be given £30,000 when they sign

up for additional three years' of service. From April 2025, this will be applicable to around 5,000 personnel in total.

■ Armed Forces: Incentives

James Cartlidge: [\[15456\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to his Oral Statement of 20 November 2024 on Defence Programmes Developments, Official Report, columns 287-289, whether retention bonuses for Army personnel will be made available to the (a) Royal Navy and (b) RAF.

Al Carns:

The Ministry of Defence pay retention payments in a variety of ways depending on the needs of the single-Services. Retention payments for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force are targeted where they are most needed, and where they make the most efficient use of tax-payers money.

From January 2025, a new £8,000 retention payment will be awarded to eligible regular Privates and Lance Corporals who have served four years. The payment targets Army Personnel as they enter a critical part of their career, with 12,000 personnel expected to benefit over the next three years.

■ Army

James Cartlidge: [\[18985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 12029 on Army and with reference to the keynote recording of the Chief of the General Staff at the RUSI Land Warfare Conference 2024, published on 23 June 2024, whether it is a formal departmental target to double the lethality of the British Army by 2027 and treble it by 2030.

Luke Pollard:

Ministers are fully supportive of the Chief of the General Staff's ambition to double the fighting power of the British Army by 2027 and treble it by 2030, which is in line with the Departmental priorities for the British Army.

■ Defence: Procurement

Mr Mark Francois: [\[19645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of the Integrated Procurement Model in improving value for money for defence acquisitions.

Maria Eagle:

Good progress has been made on design and implementation of the key features of a reformed model, which form part of the wider defence reforms announced by the Defence Secretary in October.

We will take a more joined up, One Defence approach to our requirements to secure the best possible value for money from the defence budget.

Improving value for money will be a key aim of the reforms and of the new National Armaments Director role being established. Its aim is to ensure the Armed Forces are properly equipped to defend Britain, to build up the British defence industry, and to cut waste.

■ Ministry of Defence: Staff

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[16182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many full-time equivalent employees are employed by (a) his Department and (b) non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department; and what estimate he has made of the number of such employees who will be employed in 12 months.

AI Carns:

We are working to ensure our workforce remains affordable and targeted at delivering the Department's priorities and are committed to achieving a more efficient and effective civil service.

The number of civilian personnel employed by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) as at 1 October 2024 was 56,800 (Full Time Equivalent (FTE), rounded). This includes civilians within MOD Main Top Level Budgets, Executive Agencies and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, but excludes Locally Engaged Civilians.

The latest forecast is that the MOD will employ 55,430 (FTE, rounded) civilian personnel on 1 April 2025 (using the above inclusions and exclusion). The forecast is informed by assumptions based on historic outflow and current recruitment plans. This is an indicative number used for planning purposes, and not a target. This figure represents only one part of MOD's workforce, and the actual figure may be impacted by changes to the size and shape of other workforce types including military staff, reservists and contractors.

For those Non-Departmental Public Bodies that employ public servants, responsibility for their staffing levels and human resources policies is delegated to the organisation and information is not held centrally.

■ Puma Helicopters

James Cartlidge:

[\[17164\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the potential operational implications are of retiring Puma helicopters in March 2025.

James Cartlidge:

[\[17167\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of retiring Puma helicopters in March 2025 on capability.

Luke Pollard:

The MOD takes a rigorous approach in assessing the risk of any capability transitions. The Department is exploring options to fulfil some short-term capability gaps in Cyprus and Brunei before the H-145 platform enters services from 2026. Key operational tasks will continue to be fulfilled.

James Cartlidge: [\[17170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the potential operational implications are of retiring the Puma helicopters early for (a) the RAF, (b) RAF Akrotiri and (c) British Forces Cyprus.

James Cartlidge: [\[20678\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he plans to respond to Question 17170 on Puma Helicopters tabled by the hon. Member for South Suffolk on 2 December 2024.

Luke Pollard:

The Puma aircraft based in the Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) on the island of Cyprus have historically supported emergency response across the SBAs, as well as providing firefighting, troop movement, training and defence engagement tasks. Defence is exploring options to fulfil some short-term capability gaps, before the H-145 platform enters service from 2026. Defence's Strategic Objectives will continue to be fulfilled.

James Cartlidge: [\[17173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of retiring the Puma helicopters early on (a) Episkopi and (b) Dhekelia Garrison.

Luke Pollard:

The Puma helicopters in the Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) on the island of Cyprus have historically supported emergency response across the SBAs, as well as providing troop movement and defence engagement tasks to British Forces Cyprus, including Episkopi and Dhekelia garrisons.

The MOD takes a rigorous approach in assessing the risk of any capability transitions. The Department is exploring options to fulfil some short-term capability transitions in the SBAs before the H-145 platform enters services from 2026. Defence's Strategic Objectives will continue to be fulfilled.

EDUCATION**■ Apprentices: Degrees****Alex Baker:** [\[20427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many degree apprenticeships were (a) advertised and (b) completed in (i) Aldershot constituency, (ii) Hampshire and (iii) London in each of the last five years.

Janet Daby:

The table below provides details of degree level apprenticeship (level 6 and 7) vacancies in Aldershot constituency, Hampshire and London that were advertised on the Find an Apprenticeship (FAA) service on GOV.UK in each of the last five years.

The department encourages employers to advertise on FAA to maximise engagement with their vacancies and to ensure that they are accessible to all potential apprentices. However, not all choose to use the service. Employers may choose to recruit apprentices through their own channels, for example via their own websites, which the department does not monitor. The figures below therefore do not represent the total number of degree level apprenticeship vacancies advertised.

ACADEMIC YEAR	ALDERSHOT	HAMPSHIRE	LONDON
2019/2020	0	110	990
2020/2021	20	340	1,130
2021/2022	20	290	3,060
2022/2023	30	130	2,740
2023/2024	40	310	2,450

To note

- Numbers are rounded to nearest 10.
- Geography is based on the postcode associated with the vacancy location.
- The data source is the Apprenticeship Service (AS).
- In 2023 the Recruit an Apprentice (RAA) service was changed to ensure that every vacancy was led by an employer to improve the service to users by giving confidence a real job existed. Previously colleges and training providers often posted vacancies before an employer had been identified leading to delays in some apprentices starting their training or leaving the programme before they started.

The table below provides details of degree level (level 6 and 7) apprenticeships that have been achieved in Aldershot constituency, Hampshire and London in each of the last five years, as published in the apprenticeships statistics publication.

ACADEMIC YEAR	ALDERSHOT	HAMPSHIRE	LONDON
2019/20	low	70	450
2020/21	20	210	1,160
2021/22	20	360	1,790

ACADEMIC YEAR	ALDERSHOT	HAMPSHIRE	LONDON
2022/23	40	550	2,890
2023/24	60	830	3,880

To note

- These figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
- 'Low' indicates a value of fewer than 5.
- The source is the Individualised Learner Record.
- Geography is based on the learner home postcode.

■ Breakfast Clubs: Northern Ireland

Jim Shannon:

[\[20208\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had discussions with her counterpart in the Northern Ireland Executive on funding for breakfast clubs for children of people on the lowest income.

Stephen Morgan:

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

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education met with Minister Givan on two occasions, most recently, at the UK Education Minister Council in Northern Ireland on 20 November 2024, but she has not had substantive discussions with him about breakfast clubs. I have also met with Minister Givan twice. As education is a devolved issue, whether to require breakfast clubs in Northern Ireland is matters for the executive. We will be happy to share our learnings from the Early Adopters programme following its launch in April 2025.

■ Childcare and Pre-school Education: Finance

David Williams:

[\[19501\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether (a) private, (b) voluntary and (c) independent settings will be able to access (i) Early Years and (ii) workforce funding.

Stephen Morgan:

In the 2025/26 financial year alone, the department expects to provide over £8 billion for early years entitlements, an increase of over 30% compared to 2024/25, as the department rolls out the expansion of the entitlements.

This funding is distributed to local authorities as hourly funding rates, determined using the early years national funding formulae (EYNFF). The hourly rate includes funding to support providers with the cost of delivering the entitlements, including workforce costs, to deliver essential local early years services and ensure children

with special educational needs and disabilities can access the funded childcare offer. The EYNFF, and local formulae which local authorities use to distribute that funding to individual providers, cover private, voluntary and independent settings, as well as public sector providers.

Alongside hourly funding rates, eligible children, in any setting, can also attract additional funding through the early years pupil premium (EYPP). Early education gives all children, and especially disadvantaged children, the best start in life. This government is therefore delivering the largest ever uplift to the EYPP, increasing the EYPP rate by over 45% from 68p per hour in the 2024/25 financial year to £1 per hour in the 2025/26 financial year, equivalent to up to £570 per eligible child per year.

On top of over £8 billion through the core funding rates, we are also providing an additional £75 million grant for the 2025/26 financial year 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.

In addition, pilot funding is being given to 20 local authorities to pass onto providers to recruit eligible early years staff, who spend at least 70% of their time working directly with children. Eligible joiners and returners will receive a payment of up to £1,000 after tax and National Insurance shortly after they take up post. The pilot runs from April to December 2024.

■ Childcare: Aldershot

Alex Baker:

[\[20421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help increase the availability of childcare in Aldershot constituency.

Stephen Morgan:

Giving children the best start in life is key to the government's Opportunity Mission. Good parenting and high-quality early education provide the foundation for children to achieve and thrive. This government is determined to ensure that parents have access to high-quality, affordable and flexible early education and childcare.

The department is rolling out more government-funded childcare entitlements to help millions of families, working hand in hand with the early years sector to build a system that works for them, parents and above all, children. This includes delivering 3,000 new and expanded school-based nurseries to make high-quality childcare accessible and available. As a first step, primary schools can now apply for up to £150,000 of £15 million capital funding for nursery places to open from September 2025. High-quality, school-based nursery provision is popular with parents, especially families with multiple children. It can help schools upgrade spare space whilst also providing early support to children and families, supporting their transition into primary school. School-based nursery settings have proportionally higher qualified staff and see lower staff turnover, providing more consistency of care for children. Proportionally, school-based nurseries also look after more children with special educational needs and disabilities and offer a higher proportion of places in the most deprived areas.

In the 2024/2025 financial year, early years providers are set to benefit from over £2 billion extra investment compared to last year, to support the rollout of 30 hours of government-funded early education from next September, rising in 2027/28 to over £4.1 billion. As announced in the Autumn Budget 2024, the department expects to provide over £8 billion for the early years entitlements in 2025/2026, which is around a 30% increase compared to 2024/25, as we continue to deliver the expansion to eligible working parents of children aged from nine months. Departmental hourly funding rates for Hampshire have been confirmed at, for 3 to 4-year-olds: £5.98 for 2-year-olds: £8.32 and for under 2s: £11.30.

The planned September 2025 childcare rollout of 30 funded hours per week will go ahead, but there will be challenges including providers securing enough staff and places to meet demand, with the capacity needed varying across the country. The department is supporting the sector to attract talented staff and childminders to join the workforce by creating conditions for improved recruitment. The department is urging the public to 'do something BIG' and start a career working with small children through our national recruitment campaign. Our dedicated website also helps people find out more about gaining qualifications and search for existing job vacancies.

Skills Bootcamps for the early years are available and lead to an accelerated apprenticeship, and we are funding Early Years Initial Teacher Training as a route for new and existing staff to gain Early Years Teacher Status. To support childminders to join and stay in the profession, the department has implemented new flexibilities to work with more people and spend more time working from non-domestic premises.

The department is working closely with local areas and the early years sector to do everything we can to ensure there are enough places and the sector has the workforce it needs to provide those places and to bridge local gaps ahead of September 2025.

■ Children: Corporal Punishment

Rachael Maskell:

[\[20220\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to legislate for (a) a ban on the physical chastisement of children and (b) penalties for people who do so.

Stephen Morgan:

This government does not condone violence or abuse of children. There are laws in place to protect children against this.

Crown Prosecution Service guidance is clear that only the mildest form of physical punishment can be used to justify discipline. Where a defence is unsuccessful, the usual sentencing powers for charges of assault and/or battery would be available for courts to consider.

The department is looking closely at changes in Wales and Scotland but has no plans to legislate at this stage.

We recognise that parents have different views and approaches to disciplining their children and that we need to consider all those voices, including those that might be disproportionately affected by the removal of the defence, as well as the voice of the child and trusted stakeholders in making any decisions.

The government encourages the use of evidence-based parenting programmes. Many such programmes address the issue of managing children's behaviour and promote positive parenting. This does not include the use of physical punishment. Family support might be available at Family Hubs to help parents with positive parenting and discipline and details can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/find-family-hub-local-area>.

■ Children: Social Services

Matt Bishop:

[19832]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to improve the (a) quality and (b) safety of social care services for children at home.

Janet Daby:

Reforming children's social care is critical to giving hundreds of thousands of children and young people the start in life they deserve. In November, through the 'Keeping children safe, helping families thrive' policy statement, this government set out its plans for the biggest overhaul to children's social care in a generation. This includes ensuring that every child is safe inside and outside of their home and have access to the right help at the right time.

This government wants to shift the focus of the children's social care system to early support. We will continue to deliver whole-system reform to help families to overcome challenges, stay together and thrive, where appropriate, and to keep children safe and in stable loving homes, including when they cannot stay with their family. This includes through roll out of the families first for children pathfinder and family networks pilot, which includes multi-agency child protection reforms. The 'Local Government Finance Settlement' policy statement also sets out an additional £250 million through the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant, which will enable investment in prevention activity.

We have also set out our vision to ensure children are kept safe through changes to the existing legislative framework which are set out in the Children's Wellbeing and School Bill. This includes improving information sharing across and within agencies through the use of a single unique identifier for children, strengthening protecting children from harm through integrated multi-agency child protection teams, placing a new duty on safeguarding partners to ensure education is sufficiently involved in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and requiring parents to obtain consent from their local authority if they wish to home educate children where there are child protection concerns.

■ Construction: Apprentices**Dame Harriett Baldwin:** [\[19283\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, where the Homebuilding Skills Hubs will be located.

Janet Daby:

Homebuilding Skills Hubs will be established by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and the National Housebuilding Council (NHBC) on a demand led basis, in areas where large scale homebuilding projects lead to a surge in demand. Locations will be confirmed over time. The Hubs will initially provide training for skills in critical demand for homebuilding, including groundwork, site carpentry, and bricklaying.

■ Construction: Training**Munira Wilson:** [\[19392\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of skills training for the (a) construction, (b) planning and (c) architecture sectors.

Munira Wilson: [\[19393\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure adequate numbers of skilled workers in the (a) construction, (b) planning and (c) architecture sectors.

Janet Daby:

The department is working closely with the construction sector to ensure its skills offer meets the needs of employers. We are working with the Construction Leadership Council (CLC), Construction Skills Delivery Group (CSDG), industry leaders and other government departments, to help more people access high-quality training and careers in construction. The CSDG has been instrumental in bringing together partners from industry, and across different government departments, to identify barriers to growth in construction and feed intelligence on how the skills offer can be shaped to best meet the needs of the industry.

This government has announced £140 million industry investment in Homebuilding Skills Hubs. These will be established by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and the National Housebuilding Council (NHBC) on a demand led basis, in areas where large scale homebuilding projects lead to a surge in demand. The hubs are projected to deliver over 5,000 fast track apprenticeships per year by 2027/28, in shortage occupations including Bricklaying and Groundwork, making use of the existing flexibilities in our apprenticeships system to help businesses get the skilled workers they need more quickly. This initiative represents £100 million investment from the NHBC and the CITB, an executive non-departmental public body.

The department continues to support the take-up of construction and construction-related subjects in further education. Skills, including construction, planning and

architecture are crucial for the delivery of the government's missions. The department is building a coherent, flexible, high-quality skills system to break down barriers to opportunity and drive economic growth, underpinned by a new post-16 skills and education strategy.

A wide range of government-funded programmes are available for construction employers who are considering hiring employees, offering work experience, or upskilling existing staff. These include apprenticeships, T Levels, Skills Bootcamps, and free courses for jobs.

There are currently 91 high-quality apprenticeship standards in the construction and the built environment sector, with a further two standards in development, including in occupations like level 2 scaffolder, level 3 bricklayer, and level 6 construction site manager.

The department has introduced innovations to support growth of training programmes in the sector. For example, we are making apprenticeships more flexible through flexi job apprenticeships. There are Skills Bootcamps around the country that offer courses in different areas of construction.

T Levels provide an excellent option for 16 to 19 learners and include valuable workplace experience through an industry placement of at least 45 days. Thousands of young people have benefited from T Levels such as Design, Surveying and Planning, and Building Services Engineering, which can lead to rewarding careers in the construction sector.

There are 21 Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) currently available in the Construction and the Built Environment occupational route, with a further 19 becoming available from September 2025. Examples of HTQs currently available in these areas include a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Modern Methods of Construction, HND in Architectural Technology and a Higher National Certificate Construction Quantity Surveying.

Following the Review of Qualifications Reform, which looked at level 3 qualifications due to be defunded by 31 July 2025, the department is retaining 12 level 3 qualifications in Construction and the Built Environment until 2026. The department's expectation is that, at this point, the combination of A levels, T Levels and reformed qualifications will meet the needs of learners in this route.

As part of this review, the department announced that new enrolments onto the T Level in Onsite Construction will cease. Although this T Level is providing valuable education and industry experience, on the whole, its success and uptake has been limited due to the overall lack of demand for a large level 3 qualification in this area. Moving forward, the needs of learners will best be met through apprenticeships and other classroom provision as set out here.

The department is also setting up Skills England to bring together central and local government, businesses, training providers and unions to help meet the skills needs of the next decade. Aligned to the government's industrial strategy, this work will also

be underpinned by local skills improvement plans, which help make technical education and training more responsive to local labour market and employer needs, including employers in the construction section.

■ **Department for Education: Alcoholic Drinks**

Cat Smith: [\[19331\]](#)

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

Janet Daby:

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 Education: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**

Emily Thornberry: [\[19664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, 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.

Janet Daby:

The table below provides a breakdown of the Electronic Purchasing Card Solution (ePCS) cards that were held by staff within the department, its arms-length bodies and executive agencies as of 31 December 2022 and 31 December 2023.

	31 DECEMBER 2022	31 DECEMBER 2023
Department for Education (DfE) – Core Department	58	84
Arms-Length Bodies (including 19 Executive Agencies).		17
Total	77	101

ePCS cards assist with the reduction in procurement bureaucracy, boost efficiency, support the government's Prompt Payment initiative for small-and-medium sized enterprises, and help maintain cash flow to suppliers.

The department has a clear policy for card allocation which involves confirmation from budget holders to approve the issuing, and use of cards to staff within their delegated budget areas.

The department has robust controls in place that limit purchase types and values and these are regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure acceptable card usage in line with the Pan-Government policy:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/payment-cards-pan-government-policy>.

■ Department for Education: Media**John Cooper:** [\[20480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Janet Daby:

The department has not spent any money on media or voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

■ Department for Education: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:** [\[20178\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 1 November 2024 to Question 9069 on Department for Education: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Janet Daby:

The department spent £608,685 on the refurbishment of Ministerial offices during the period 4 July 2022 to 4 July 2024 on new furniture and fittings and other refurbishment. This is broken down as follows:

- Furniture and Fittings - £127,385
- Refurbishment of Ministerial Offices - £481,300

The department has been undertaking a refurbishment project at Sanctuary Buildings to transform the building from its previous use as the department head office into a Government Property Agency (GPA) hub with multiple government occupants. This is part of the consolidation of buildings in and around Whitehall and will generate cost savings.

This project refurbished all relevant floors that the department occupies including where the Ministerial offices are located. As a result of this wider project, during the timeframe referenced, all Ministerial offices were rebuilt, and furniture replaced. As part of the renovation, the direct costs to create Ministerial rooms (excluding mechanical and engineering plant systems) includes costs for purchase and installation of carpets, wood panelling, paint upgrades and glass partitions.

A list of furniture and fittings purchased are available in the attached document.

Attachments:

1. [Ministerial Office Furnishings and Fittings](#) [20178 attachment - Ministerial Office - Furniture and Fittings.pdf]

■ Disadvantaged**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[20021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to tackle the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on future earnings.

Catherine McKinnell:

Every child should have every opportunity to succeed, no matter who they are, where they are from, or how much their parents earn. Too often opportunity for children and young people is defined by their background.

That is why this government is committed to breaking the link between a child's background and their future success. The Opportunity Mission will set every child up for the best start in life, help every child to achieve and thrive at school, build skills for opportunity and growth, and build family security, tackling the underlying barriers to opportunity that hold too many children and young people back. The Plan for Change sets out more details on our priorities for the Opportunity Mission:

<https://www.gov.uk/missions>.

Tackling child poverty is at the heart of breaking down barriers to opportunity and improving the life chances for every child. For too many children, living in poverty robs them of the opportunity to learn and to prosper.

On 23 October 2024 the government published 'Tackling Child Poverty: Developing Our Strategy', which sets out how the government will develop the Strategy, which will harness all available levers to deliver a reduction in child poverty this parliament as part of an ambitious ten year strategy. The report is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-child-poverty-developing-our-strategy>.

The Strategy will look at levers across four key themes of increasing incomes, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience, and better local support, especially in the early years.

This government will also, at last, commence the socio-economic duty in Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010. The duty will require public bodies, when making strategic decisions, to actively consider how their decisions might help to reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage. We will be updating Parliament on this in due course.

■ Education: Standards**Andrew Cooper:****[20378]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to tackle inequalities in education outcomes in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England.

Catherine McKinnell:

Every child and young person should have every opportunity to achieve and thrive. The Opportunity Mission will promote equal opportunities for all by setting every child up for the best start in life, helping them achieve and thrive, and build skills for opportunity and growth. This will be underpinned by addressing family security, as the department is aware it must tackle the underlying barriers to opportunity that hold too many young people back.

High and rising standards, with excellent teaching in every school, are at the heart of the mission to break down barriers to opportunity and improve outcomes for every child, no matter their background. That is why the department has started work to recruit an additional 6,500 expert teachers and launched an independent, expert led Curriculum and Assessment Review that will look closely at the key challenges to attainment for young people.

The department is also committed to creating 3,000 new school-based nurseries, providing free breakfast clubs in every primary school, and launching Skills England to transform opportunities and drive growth.

The department recognises the impact poverty and disadvantage has on outcomes for children and young people, which is why the Child Poverty Taskforce is bringing together expertise from across and beyond government to develop a UK-wide Child Poverty Strategy, which will tackle the root causes of poverty and ensure every child has the best start in life.

The department's North West regional team works closely with Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester local authorities, as well as multi-academy trusts operating in the area, regarding education performance and outcomes in schools across the authorities. From early 2025, new Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence teams will drive higher standards, supporting all state schools by facilitating networking, sharing best practice and empowering schools to feel they can better access support and learn from one another.

■ Education: Weather

Alex Mayer:

[20350]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many hours of teaching were lost as a result of (a) extreme heat and (b) flooding in 2024.

Stephen Morgan:

From the start of the 2024/25 academic year, schools have had a duty to provide daily attendance data to the department. Attendance data can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools>.

The department does not specifically collect data on teaching hours lost due to extreme heat and flooding.

It is for individual settings and responsible bodies to determine their approach to closure based on their own risk assessment. Closures should be considered a last resort and the imperative is for settings to remain open, where it is safe to do so.

Where a school was planning to be open for a session, but then has to close unexpectedly, for example, due to adverse weather, the attendance register is not taken as usual because there is no session. For statistical purposes this is counted as a not possible attendance.

Where settings are temporarily closed they should consider providing remote education for the duration of the closure in line with the department's guidance. Providing remote education does not change the imperative to remain open or to reopen as soon as possible. As set out in the department's guidance on providing remote education, pupils who are absent from school and receiving remote education still need to be recorded as absent using the most appropriate absence code. Schools should keep a record of, and monitor, pupil's engagement with remote education, but this is not formally tracked in the attendance register. The guidance on providing remote education is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/providing-remote-education-guidance-for-schools/providing-remote-education-guidance-for-schools>.

■ Educational Institutions: Mental Health Services

Olly Glover:

[20385]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to support people working in education who experience mental health issues.

Catherine McKinnell:

I refer my hon. Friend, the Member for Didcot and Wantage to the answer of 12 December 2024 to Question [19632](#).

■ Free School Meals

Kate Osborne:

[20264]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to increase uptake of free school meals among eligible children in areas with high levels of (a) child obesity and (b) household food insecurity.

Stephen Morgan:

There are currently around 2.1 million pupils eligible for and claiming free school meals (FSM). The department recognises the vital role played by FSM in supporting disadvantaged children and families and encourages all those who are eligible to take up their entitlement. To make this process as easy as possible, the department provides the Eligibility Checking System, which allows local authorities to quickly verify eligibility for FSM. Further to this, our published guidance on FSM provides clarity to families about whether they may qualify for, and how they may claim their FSM entitlement.

The department is aware of a range of measures aimed at maximising take-up of FSM, including through approaches being trialled by local authorities. We welcome local authorities taking action to ensure government support reaches families, subject to them meeting legal and data-protection requirements.

In addition to this, we are also rolling out free breakfast clubs in every primary school, so children start the day ready to learn. This is part of the department's commitment to breaking down barriers to opportunity so that all children have the freedom to achieve and thrive in education.

The department is also working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to develop a child poverty strategy to reduce child poverty by tackling its root causes and giving every child the best start in life. The strategy will be published in the spring.

David Smith:

[20413]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when her Department last made an estimate of the proportion of pupils who are eligible but not registered for means-tested free school meals.

Stephen Morgan:

The new government has a central mission to break down barriers to opportunity for every child.

The government has inherited a trend of rising child poverty and widening attainment gaps between children eligible for free school meals (FSM) and their peers. Child poverty has increased by 700,000 since 2010, with over four million children now growing up in a low-income family. The government is committed to delivering an ambitious strategy to reduce child poverty by tackling the root causes and giving every child the best start at life. To support this, a new Ministerial taskforce has been set up to develop a Child Poverty Strategy, which will be published in spring 2025. The taskforce will consider a range of policies in assessing what will have the greatest impact in driving down rates of child poverty.

The department does not make a formal assessment of the proportion of children who are eligible to receive FSM but who are not registered. The last assessment conducted in 2013 suggested that 89% of eligible pupils were registered for FSM. As with all policies, the government keeps the approach to FSM under review.

■ Free School Meals: Aldershot

Alex Baker:

[20418]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many (a) primary and (b) secondary school students receive free school meals in Aldershot constituency.

Stephen Morgan:

The department publishes the number of pupils in primary and secondary schools in the Aldershot constituency who receive free school meals. This data is available in the 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics' publication, based on the January 2024 school census. The most recent figures can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>.

The publication webpage includes a school-level data file, listed under the dropdown heading 'Additional supporting files' as 'School level underlying data - 2023/24 (csv, 22 Mb)'.

This file contains one row per school, and you can filter the data by school phase and constituency. Data on parliamentary constituencies use boundaries as they were when the statistics were published. The most recent constituency boundaries will be

updated in the next 'Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics publication' in June 2025.

■ Further Education: Down's Syndrome

Damian Hinds:

[\[18923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to improve further education opportunities for people with Down syndrome.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life.

Further education (FE) colleges must use their best endeavours to secure the special educational provision called for by the student's special educational needs (SEN). In addition, colleges also have duties and obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that they are acting inclusively and not discriminating against disabled students. As with other FE providers, they are obliged to make reasonable adjustments to prevent disabled students being placed at a substantial disadvantage.

Furthermore, under the SEND code of practice there should be a named person with oversight of SEND provision in every college. They co-ordinate, support and contribute to the strategic and operational management of the college. Curriculum and support staff in a college should know who to go to if they need help in identifying a student's SEN, are concerned about their progress or need more advice.

In addition, the government has established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, covering ages 5 to 18, chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE. The Review will focus on ensuring excellent foundations in reading, writing and mathematics as part of a curriculum which is rich and broad, inclusive and innovative.

The review will look closely at the key challenges to attainment for young people, and the barriers which hold children back from the opportunities and life chances they deserve – in particular those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, or with SEND.

■ Further Education: Finance

Ian Sollom:

[\[18252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will undertake a review of further education funding, in the context of the pay dispute with teachers at non-academised sixth forms.

Ian Sollom:

[\[18253\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support the education of pupils at non-academised sixth forms in the context of planned industrial action.

Janet Daby:

This government recognises the vital role that further education (FE) teachers and providers play in equipping learners with the opportunities and skills that they need to succeed in their education, and will consider workforce sufficiency and what this might mean for FE funding in future years.

The Autumn Budget 2024 set out the government's commitment to skills by providing an additional £300 million revenue funding for FE to ensure young people are developing the skills this country needs. The department will set out in due course how this funding will be distributed.

Government plays no role in recommending or setting pay or terms and conditions of employment within the FE sector. Institutions remain solely responsible for the pay, contractual conditions and terms of service for their workforce, and for managing their own industrial relations.

The department encourages sixth form colleges both to ensure good industrial relations and, if necessary, to take appropriate mitigations to ensure that young people's learning can continue during industrial action.

Dr Andrew Murrison:[\[20580\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, on what dates she has met with further education college representatives to discuss further education funding in preparation for Phase 2 of the Spending Review.

Janet Daby:

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, my noble Friend, the Minister for Skills, and other members of the Ministerial team at the department regularly meet with further education colleges and their representatives. There have been several recent meetings which have touched on funding.

■ Further Education: Pay Settlements**Luke Taylor:**[\[19496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether teachers in post-16 education will be included in the teacher pay award.

Janet Daby:

As confirmed in July, schools delivering post-16 education would be included in the teacher pay award for the 2024/25 academic year, in line with the independent School Teachers' Pay Review Body (STRB) recommendations. The department confirmed that an additional £63 million would be provided for schools delivering post-16 education.

Further education (FE) providers are not included in the school teacher pay award and FE does not fall under the STRB's remit. FE colleges, rather than government, are responsible for setting and negotiating pay within colleges. Colleges are not bound by the national pay and conditions framework for school teachers and are free to implement their own pay arrangements in line with their own local circumstances.

FE colleges, including sixth form colleges, were incorporated under the terms of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, which gave them autonomy over the pay and contractual terms and conditions of their staff.

The Autumn Budget 2024 set out the government's commitment to skills, by providing an additional £300 million revenue funding for FE to ensure young people are developing the skills this country needs. The department recognises the vital role that FE teachers and providers play in equipping learners with the opportunities and skills they need to succeed in their education. We will set out in due course how this funding will be distributed.

In making their recommendations for 2025/26, the STRB were asked to consider the impact of recommendations on the FE teaching workforce in England. Given FE and school workforce are closely related, it is important for the STRB to consider the totality of the workforce.

■ GCE A-level: Knowsley

Anneliese Midgley:

[20744]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to improve GCE A-level provision in Knowsley constituency.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government is determined to break down barriers to opportunity for all young people, essential to which is ensuring every young person has access to high-quality post-16 pathways.

It is vital that all young people have access to a range of post-16 educational options, including A levels and technical qualifications. The department recognises the concern about the lack of A level provision in Knowsley, and the reintroduction of A level provision in the borough is being considered as part of regular discussions by departmental officials with local post-16 providers on the topic of the educational offer available.

Students from Knowsley currently study A level provision in colleges in local surrounding boroughs. We understand that this necessity to travel can be a barrier to young people's participation. Local authorities are responsible for putting in place transport arrangements to help young people aged 16 to 19 to access education or training, including those aged 19 to 24 with special educational needs.

The department remains committed to ensuring that young people have access to an inclusive and extensive educational offer that enables them to achieve and thrive. We will continue to keep this under review and make evidence-based decisions that ensure the best educational experience possible for Knowsley's young people.

■ Higher Education: Disadvantaged

Ian Byrne:

[\[19905\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of reintroducing maintenance grants on widening access to higher education.

Janet Daby:

The department is determined that the higher education (HE) funding system should deliver for our economy, universities and students, and the government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university.

The government recognises the impact that the cost of living crisis has had on students. That is why we are increasing maximum loans for living costs for the 2025/26 academic year by 3.1%, in line with the forecast rate of RPIX inflation, to ensure that the most support is targeted at students from the lowest income families. In addition, vulnerable groups of students, such as lone parents and some disabled students who are eligible for benefits, qualify for higher rates of loans for living costs.

Means-tested, non-repayable grants remain available to low-income students with children, or adults who are financially dependent on them. Students undertaking nursing, midwifery and allied health profession courses also qualify for non-repayable grant support through the NHS Learning Support Fund.

However, the department recognises that there is more to be done to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds and is determined to reverse the decline in participation rates for disadvantaged students.

The department will set out this government's longer term plan for HE reform by summer 2025.

■ Home Education

Luke Murphy:

[\[20719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the recording and monitoring of the number of children being home-schooled in England; and whether her Department has identified any gaps in this data collection.

Luke Murphy:

[\[20720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what safeguards are currently in place to ensure the (a) well-being and (b) safety of children who are home-schooled; and whether her Department reviews these safeguards regularly.

Stephen Morgan:

Keeping children safe is an absolute priority for the government.

The department's elective home education data collection shows that in autumn 2024, local authorities reported 111,700 children in home education. While this data

collection is mandatory for local authorities to complete, the numbers reported are based on the voluntary registers of home educated children they hold. Parents are not required to inform their local authority that they are home educating or provide any information for these registers, which means that the data may underestimate the numbers of children in elective home education.

That is why this government is going further to identify and support children as part of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill which is a landmark piece of legislation that will make child-centred government a reality. This Bill will introduce a requirement for all local authorities in England to keep Children Not in School registers and accompanying duties on parents of eligible children and certain out-of-school education providers to provide information for these registers. Local authorities will also have a new duty to provide support to the parents of home educating families on their registers. These proposals will enable local authorities to identify children not in school in their areas and provide support to them and, for those who are not receiving a suitable education or who are at risk of harm, to take action where this is the case.

It includes a new requirement for parents to obtain local authority consent before they can home educate if their child is subject to a child protection enquiry or has a child protection plan. Local authorities will also have new powers to require any home educated child to attend school if their home or learning environment is unsuitable. These proposals will strengthen the existing system of oversight for these children.

Local authorities have existing duties to safeguard all children in their areas, regardless of where they are educated. Where a child is identified as suffering or likely to be suffering significant harm, the local authority has a duty to investigate and take appropriate action and we expect them to do so. The evidence, such as the most recent Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel annual report, shows that while home education is not an inherent safeguarding risk, some children not in school are at risk of serious harm.

■ Non-teaching Staff and Teachers: Pay

Josh Babarinde:

[\[20741\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to ensure that (a) teachers and (b) school staff receive adequate pay.

Catherine McKinnell:

Teachers' pay is set through an independent, statutory process each year, and the 2025/26 process is currently underway. The School Teachers' Review Body will assess written and oral evidence from government and organisations representing schools and the teaching profession, amongst a range of other factors, when making its recommendations.

The School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document, which sets out the statutory requirements for teachers' pay and conditions within maintained schools in England, is then updated, following consultation, to include all accepted recommendations.

We are currently legislating, via the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, to extend the statutory teacher pay framework to include academy trusts. Bringing academy schools and alternative provision academies into a more flexible statutory framework will mean all prospective and current school teachers in state schools would benefit from a transparent, guaranteed core pay and conditions offer, which is subject to scrutiny and consultation through the pay review process, rather than some or all of their terms and conditions differing based on the school's administrative structure.

This year's pay round follows the 2024/25 pay award of 5.5%. This substantial award recognises our hard working school teachers and leaders, and demonstrates this government's commitment to resetting the relationship with the sector, and delivering opportunity and growth.

We also recognise the vital role that school support staff play in children's education and the smooth running of schools. That is why we have set out our plans to reinstate the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) through the Employment Rights Bill, which was introduced in Parliament on 10 October 2024.

The SSSNB will be tasked with establishing a national terms and conditions handbook and fair pay rates for support staff, as well as advising on training and career progression routes.

Most school support staff are currently employed on National Joint Council for local government services pay and conditions. The 2024/25 pay award for these employees, a flat cash uplift of £1,290, was recently agreed.

■ Overseas Students: Finance

Kate Osamor:

[\[20665\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of extending access to student finance to students from Hong Kong with a British National (Overseas) Visa.

Janet Daby:

I refer my hon. Friend, the Member for Edmonton and Winchmore Hill to the answer of 29 October 2024 to Question [10190](#).

■ Parliament: Educational Visits

Ben Maguire:

[\[20433\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of funding school trip coach costs for visits to Parliament.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government is committed to creating opportunities for all children to achieve and thrive. The department has not made an assessment of the merits of funding school trips to Parliament. It is for schools to decide whether to offer school trips to their pupils and what trips to offer. Schools receive pupil premium funding to improve

educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and may use this funding to support extracurricular activities, including school trips and associated transport costs. Schools may also ask parents to contribute towards the cost of school trips but may not make compulsory charges for trips which take place during school hours, or are part of the national curriculum, religious education or the syllabus for a public exam the pupil is being prepared for at the school.

■ Pre-school Education

Layla Moran: [\[20244\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will publish a timeframe for implementing the findings of the research by Ofsted entitled Best start in life part 3: the 4 specific areas of learning, published on 8 October 2024.

Catherine McKinnell:

Ofsted is an independent non-ministerial government department and, as such, we are unable to comment on its processes or on specific issues. The department has responsibility for policy on inspection and registration, but how it is implemented is for Ofsted to decide and to be held to account by Parliament. The department will therefore not be publishing a timeline for implementation of findings in 'Best Start in Life part 3: the 4 specific areas of learning', nor were there any particular recommendations made by Ofsted for it to implement. The reviews published by Ofsted are publicly available on GOV.UK and are primarily intended to help early years practitioners to raise the quality of early years education.

■ Pre-school Education: Romford

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20161\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she has taken to work with local authorities to support the early years sector in Romford constituency.

Stephen Morgan:

This government is committed to breaking down the barriers to opportunity and that starts by ensuring every child has the best start in life. High-quality early education and childcare is essential to supporting this.

By 2027/28, this government expects to be spending in excess of £8 billion every year on free hours helping working families with their childcare costs. We have committed to ensuring that 30 hours of government-funded childcare is available for eligible working parents of children aged 9 months to the time they start school, by September 2025. This is the largest expansion of funded childcare ever and will remove barriers to work for nearly half a million parents with a child under 3 in England.

The Romford constituency is within the area covered by Havering local authority, who, under Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006, are responsible for ensuring that the provision of childcare is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in their area. Part B of the 'Early education and childcare' statutory guidance for local authorities

highlights that local authorities are required to report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare, and to make this report available and accessible to parents. The guidance can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-and-childcare--2>.

The department worked closely with Havering local authority as they delivered the first two stages of the early entitlement expansion, and we continue to engage with them regularly as they prepare for September 2025. Currently no local authorities are reporting that eligible children are unable to access early years places.

If through our support, Havering local authority report any sufficiency challenges, we will where possible support them with any specific requirements. We have a delivery support contractor, Childcare Works, in place to support local authorities and providers to deliver the early years expansion.

Finally, 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 as they grow the places and the workforce needed to deliver the final phase of expanded childcare entitlements from September 2025. We know how important the details of funding arrangements are to local authorities and providers and so we will provide further details on how this grant will work as soon as possible.

■ Pupils: Absenteeism

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[20022]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle persistent absence in schools in Slough constituency.

Stephen Morgan:

This government is determined to tackle the generational challenge of school absence which is a fundamental barrier to learning and life chances. Missing school regularly is harmful to a child's attainment, safety and physical and mental health, which limits their opportunity to succeed. There is evidence that more students are attending school this year compared to last, thanks to the sector's efforts although around 1.6 million children remain persistently absent and miss 10% or more of lessons.

The department has a national approach to supporting all schools to tackle absence, including those in the Slough constituency. Central to this approach are stronger expectations of local authorities and schools, as set out in the 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance, which was made statutory on 19 August 2024. The guidance promotes a 'support first' approach, encouraging schools, trusts and local authorities to work with families in addressing attendance barriers.

Every state school in England should now be sharing their daily attendance register data with the department, local authorities and trusts. These bodies can access this data through a secure, interactive dashboard which is maintained by the department, allowing them to target attendance interventions more effectively.

The department recognises the importance of creating opportunities within the sector to share existing best practice on how to improve attendance. This is why the department has set up a network of 31 attendance hubs, who have offered support to 2000 schools and shared their strategies and resources for improving attendance.

In addition to this work, the department also aims to improve the existing evidence on which interventions work to improve attendance. Over £17 million is being invested across two mentoring projects that will support at least 12,000 pupils in 15 areas. These programmes will be evaluated and the effective practice shared with schools and local authorities nationally.

From early 2025, new Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) teams will support all state schools by facilitating networking, sharing best practice across areas, including attendance, and empowering schools to feel they can better access support and learn from one another. For schools requiring more intensive support, RISE teams and supporting organisations will work collaboratively with their responsible body to agree bespoke packages of targeted support, based on a school's particular circumstances.

School attendance is also supported by broader investments, such as funded breakfast clubs, across all primary schools to ensure children start their day ready to learn. The department will also initiate new annual Ofsted reviews focusing on safeguarding, attendance and off-rolling.

We are working across government on plans to provide access to specialist mental health professionals in every school, new Young Futures hubs, including access to mental health support workers, and an additional 8,500 new mental health staff to treat children and adults.

Data published in May this year showed that, in Slough local authority, 42% of schools and colleges worked with a Mental Health Support Team in March 2024 compared to 34% nationally, and 78% of schools and colleges had signed up for a senior mental health lead training grant, compared to 74% nationally.

Schools can also allocate pupil premium funding, which has now increased to over £2.9 billion for the 2024/25 financial year, to support pupils with identified needs to attend school regularly.

Sarah Coombes:

[20312]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to reduce persistent absences in primary and secondary schools in West Bromwich constituency.

Stephen Morgan:

This government is determined to tackle the generational challenge of school absence which is a fundamental barrier to learning and life chances. Missing school regularly is harmful to a child's attainment, safety and physical and mental health, which limits their opportunity to succeed. There is evidence that more students are attending school this year compared to last, thanks to the sector's efforts although

around 1.6 million children remain persistently absent and miss 10% or more of lessons.

The department has a national approach to supporting all schools to tackle absence, including those in the West Bromwich constituency. Central to this approach are stronger expectations of local authorities and schools, as set out in the 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance, which was made statutory on 19 August 2024. The guidance promotes a 'support first' approach, encouraging schools, trusts and local authorities to work with families in addressing attendance barriers.

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In addition to this work, the department also aims to improve the existing evidence on which interventions work to improve attendance. Over £17 million is being invested across two mentoring projects that will support at least 12,000 pupils in 15 areas. These programmes will be evaluated and the effective practice shared with schools and local authorities nationally.

From early 2025, new Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) teams will support all state schools by facilitating networking, sharing best practice across areas, including attendance, and empowering schools to feel they can better access support and learn from one another. For schools requiring more intensive support, RISE teams and supporting organisations will work collaboratively with their responsible body to agree bespoke packages of targeted support, based on a school's particular circumstances.

School attendance is also supported by broader investments, such as funded breakfast clubs, across all primary schools to ensure children start their day ready to learn.

We are working across government on plans to provide access to specialist mental health professionals in every school, new Young Futures hubs, including access to mental health support workers, and an additional 8,500 new mental health staff to treat children and adults.

Schools can also allocate pupil premium funding, which has now increased to over £2.9 billion for the 2024/25 financial year, to support pupils with identified needs to attend school regularly.

■ Pupils: English Language

Rupert Lowe:

[20296]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on the proportion of children that started secondary school who are (a) new to and (b) have early acquisition of English in each of the last 10 years.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department does not hold data for children who have learnt English throughout their lifetime. Data for the proportion and number of children who are not known to have English as their first language can be found at school level in the school census publication: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>.

A pupil is recorded to have English as an additional language if they are exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English. This measure is not a measure of English language proficiency or a good proxy for recent immigration.

■ Pupils: Per Capita Costs

Alex Baker:

[20425]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the average funding per pupil in mainstream schools was in (a) Aldershot constituency, (b) Hampshire and (c) England in each of the last three years.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department is able to provide links to the published dedicated schools grant (DSG) tables from the 2022/23 financial year to the 2024/25 financial year. These tables show average per pupil funding amounts, split by primary and secondary phase, for each local authority and at national level.

As the DSG is allocated at local authority level, DSG allocations are not available broken down to the level of individual constituencies. The individual allocations that schools within Aldershot constituency receive are determined each year by the local funding formula set by Hampshire local authority.

Links to the published DSG tables are listed below:

- 2022/23 financial year DSG:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2022-to-2023>.
- 2023/24 financial year DSG:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2023-to-2024>.
- 2024/25 financial year DSG:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2024-to-2025>.

■ Schools: Food**Yasmin Qureshi:**[\[20597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to review the School Food Standards.

Stephen Morgan:

It is important that children eat nutritious food at school and the department encourages schools to have a whole school approach to healthy eating. The School Food Standards regulate the food and drink provided at lunchtime and at other times of the school day, including, for example, breakfast clubs. The School Food Standards restrict foods high in fat, salt and sugar, as well as low quality reformed or reconstituted foods. They ensure that pupils always have healthy options for their school lunch.

School governors have a responsibility to ensure compliance and should provide appropriate challenge to ensure the school is meeting its obligations.

To support governors in their role around compliance, the department, along with the National Governance Association, is running a pilot online training course on school food for governors and trustees. This launched on 4 November 2024 and will run until 1 April 2025. This will help governors to improve their understanding of the standards and give governing boards confidence to hold their school leaders to account on their whole school approach to food. The department will evaluate the training programme's reception and effectiveness in the short term.

The department's aim is to deliver better life chances for all through a system which works for all. As part of this, as with all government programmes, we will keep our approach to school food under continued review.

■ Schools: Great Yarmouth**Rupert Lowe:**[\[20083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an estimate of the number of school places in Great Yarmouth constituency (a) available and (b) requested in the next academic year.

Catherine McKinnell:

As part of the school capacity survey 2023, Norfolk local authority submitted to the department information on school capacity and forecast demand for school places. Forecasts are made for pupil place planning areas, which are not a standard geography and cannot be linked to parliamentary constituency. However, there is a Great Yarmouth planning area.

Using school capacity survey 2023 data, as well as information on centrally delivered programmes, the department estimated that in the 2025/26 academic year there would be 426 spare primary places and 323 spare secondary places in the Great Yarmouth planning area.

These estimates were made in 2023. These estimated spare places may or may not be available for pupil placements, as this depends on admission policies set by the individual admission authorities covering the Great Yarmouth planning area.

The department does not have information on the number of places requested for the 2025/26 academic year, as the national primary and secondary applications and offers rounds have not yet started.

■ Schools: Transport

James McMurdock:

[\[20796\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of transport services for school children with special educational needs in (a) Essex and (b) England.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department'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's home-to-school travel policy aims to make sure no child is prevented from accessing education by a lack of transport. The department is working to understand how well home-to-school transport supports all children to access educational opportunity.

Local authorities must arrange free home-to-school travel for children of compulsory school age who attend their nearest school and would not be able to walk there because of the distance, their special educational needs (SEN), disability or mobility problem, or because the route is unsafe. There are extended rights to free home-to-school travel for children from low-income families, aimed at helping them exercise school choice. We know that challenges in the wider SEN system are creating pressure on home-to-school travel. More children have education, health and care plans and more of them travel a long way to a school that can meet their needs. We are grateful to local authorities for their considerable efforts to ensure eligible children can continue to get to school.

The government is committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, so fewer children need to travel long distances to a school that can meet their needs. This will reduce the pressure on home-to-school travel over time.

In addition, the government prioritised local government at the Autumn Budget 2024. We announced £1.3 billion of new grant funding in the 2025/26 financial year for local government to deliver core services, including home-to-school travel. The government recognises the challenges local authorities are facing. Together with local income from council tax and business rates, this will provide a real-terms increase in core spending power of around 3.2%.

■ Secondary Education: Aldershot

Alex Baker: [20420]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the average staff to student ratio was in secondary schools (a) nationally and (b) in Aldershot constituency in (i) 2019, (ii) 2020, (iii) 2021, (iv) 2022 and (v) 2023.

Alex Baker: [20426]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many hours of (a) mathematics, (b) English, (c) sciences and (d) modern foreign languages were taught in secondary schools in Aldershot constituency by teachers with no relevant (i) A-level and (ii) higher level qualification in the last full year for which data are available.

Catherine McKinnell:

Information on the school workforce, including the pupil to adult and pupil to teacher ratios at national, regional, local authority and individual school level, plus subjects taught in state-funded secondary schools, is published in the 'School workforce in England' statistical publication, which is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>.

In the 2023/24 academic year, which is the latest data available, the ratio of pupils to teachers (qualified and unqualified) was 16.8 in state-funded secondary schools in England, which is the same as the previous year. The ratio of pupils to adults (excluding auxiliary staff) was 12.0 in state-funded secondary schools in England, which is again the same as the previous year.

The attached table provides the pupil to adult ratio and the pupil to teacher ratio for state-funded secondary schools in Aldershot constituency and England for the 2019/20 to 2023/24 academic years.

The total number of hours taught by subject in state-funded secondary schools is published here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/f01b06d4-a691-4c8d-6209-08dd1b6a61d0>.

The proportion of those hours that were taught by teachers without a relevant post A level or higher level qualification is published at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/2b0e7522-f965-400d-6219-08dd1b6a61d0>.

Timetabled teaching is reported for a typical week in November, as determined by the school. It does not cover an entire year of teaching. If there are variations in timetabling across the year, this is not covered in the data available to the department.

Subject and hours taught are only collected from secondary schools that use electronic timetabling software that can produce data in the format required. Data is then weighted to provide national totals. Therefore, breakdowns by local authority and parliamentary constituency are not available.

Attachments:

1. [20420_20426_pupil_teacher_adult_ratio_Aldershot](#)
[20420_20426_pupil_teacher_adult_ratio_Aldershot.xlsx]

■ Special Educational Needs: Pupil Exclusions**Zöe Franklin:****[20399]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of trends in the level of (a) suspensions and (b) exclusions among pupils with SEND.

Stephen Morgan:

Every pupil deserves to learn in a safe, calm classroom, and the department will always support our hardworking and dedicated teachers to make this happen. Schools can use sanctions as a measure to improve behaviour and, in the most serious cases, exclusion may be necessary to protect other pupils from disruption and restore a safe environment.

This government is determined to address the causes of poor behaviour. The statutory 'Suspension and permanent exclusion' guidance is clear that, in all cases, school leaders should consider early intervention strategies to address the underlying causes or contributing factors of a pupil's disruptive behaviour before issuing an exclusion. This includes situations where a pupil has special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Schools should also consider using a multi-agency assessment for pupils who display persistent disruptive behaviour, which could include those with unidentified SEND. Schools should arrange such assessments when concerns arise, rather than waiting for a specific trigger.

This government is absolutely committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring special schools cater to children and young people with the most complex needs. The department will also strengthen accountability on mainstream settings to be inclusive including through Ofsted, support the mainstream workforce to increase their SEND expertise, and encourage schools to set up resourced provision or special educational needs units to increase capacity in mainstream schools.

■ Students: Finance**Caroline Voaden:****[20814]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether additional funding will be made available to students from England on graduate entry medicine courses under the Lifelong Learning Entitlement.

Janet Daby:

Under the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, the government will make available an additional entitlement for priority subjects and longer courses, above an individual's core four year entitlement.

Learners will be able to access this additional entitlement to study a limited number of priority subjects, such as medicine. This will ensure that learners can always gain skills in priority areas, regardless of remaining entitlement or previous qualifications.

In 2025, the department will outline in more detail the specific courses that will be eligible for this additional entitlement.

■ Students: Loans

Manuela Perteghella:

[R] [19865]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of interest rates for university student loans on (a) students and (b) their families.

Janet Daby:

Interest rates on student loans do not affect monthly repayments made by borrowers. Regular repayments are based on a fixed percentage of earnings above the applicable repayment threshold, not on amount borrowed or the rate of interest. The income of the wider household/family is not included.

If income is below the relevant repayment threshold, or a borrower is not earning, they do not have to make any repayments. Any outstanding debt, including interest accrued, is written off after the loan term ends, or in case of death or disability, at no detriment to the borrower. The debt does not pass to the borrower's family.

An impact assessment on the current student loan plan type can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reform-equality-impact-assessment>.

The government is determined that the higher education funding system should deliver for our economy, universities and students. The department has taken the system under consideration and will continue to engage with stakeholders on this.

Yasmin Qureshi:

[20598]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending the lifelong loan entitlement to offer maintenance loans for remote learners.

Janet Daby:

The Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will deliver a transformational change to the student finance system in England, by broadening access to high-quality, flexible education and training.

All courses and modules with in-person attendance that are eligible for LLE tuition funding will also be eligible for maintenance loans. This represents an expansion of the maintenance offer for part-time learners and those studying technical courses.

Eligibility and qualifying conditions for LLE funding will broadly mirror existing policy. As such, remote learners will continue to have access to tuition fee loan funding but be out of scope of the maintenance offer. However, it is government's intention that

the existing exemptions will continue to apply, for example remote learners who qualify for maintenance support due to a disability.

Decisions on student finance have had to be taken alongside other spending priorities to ensure the system remains financially sustainable. The department has therefore decided to continue targeting living costs support at courses that require students to attend their institution.

The government, and the department, will keep this policy under review.

Ruth Cadbury: [20630]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the average amount of interest accrued on student finance loans for women on maternity leave in the latest period for which data is available.

Ruth Cadbury: [20631]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for what reason interest rates are applied to student finance loans for women on maternity leave.

Janet Daby:

Student loans are subject to interest, to ensure that those who can afford to contribute to the full cost of their degree can do so.

The student finance system protects borrowers in cases where they see a reduction in their income for whatever reason, including women on maternity leave or any other person on parental leave. Student loan repayments are based on a borrower's monthly or weekly income, not the interest rate or amount borrowed, and no repayments are made for earnings below the relevant student loan repayment threshold. Any outstanding debt, including interest accrued, is written off at the end of the loan term with no detriment to the borrower.

A full equality impact assessment of how the student loan reforms may affect graduates, including detail on changes to average lifetime repayments under Plan 5, was produced and published in February 2022, and can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reform-equality-impact-assessment>.

■ Teachers: Aldershot

Alex Baker: [20424]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to improve the (a) recruitment and (b) retention of teachers in Aldershot constituency.

Catherine McKinnell:

Supporting our expert teachers is critical to the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and boost the life chances for every child. However, this government has inherited a system with critical shortages of teachers, with the growth in teacher numbers not keeping pace with demographic changes. This is why the government has set out the ambition to recruit 6,500 new expert teachers.

We have made good early progress towards this key pledge by ensuring teaching is once again an attractive and respected profession, key to which is ensuring teachers receive the pay they deserve. This is why we have accepted in full the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendation of a 5.5% pay award for teachers and leaders in maintained schools for 2024/25.

Alongside teacher pay, we have made £233 million available from the 2025/26 recruitment cycle to support trainee teachers with tax-free bursaries of up to £29,000 and scholarships of up to £31,000 in shortage subjects. The department has also expanded its school teacher recruitment campaign, 'Every Lesson Shapes a Life', and the further education teacher recruitment campaign 'Share your Skills'.

In addition to recruiting expert teachers, we want them to stay and thrive in the profession. To support this, new teachers of mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing in the first five years of their careers will now receive a targeted retention incentive of up to £6,000 after tax if working in disadvantaged schools. There are four schools in Aldershot that are eligible for targeted retention incentives.

To further support retention, we have provided workload and wellbeing resources that were developed with school leaders through our new 'Improving Workload and Wellbeing' online service, as well as continuing to promote the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter, which nearly 4,000 schools and colleges have already signed up to.

To reduce workload, the department has also removed the requirement for performance related pay and has abolished one-word Ofsted judgements to deliver a system which provides better information for parents and is proportionate for staff.

To help retain a more diverse workforce, the department is committed to supporting schools to implement flexible working practices, including taking planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time remotely. The department is also funding bespoke support provided by flexible working ambassador schools and multi-academy trusts. The named flexible working ambassador for schools in Aldershot is Upton Court Grammar school, part of the Pioneer Educational Trust.

High quality continuous professional development is also key to ensuring we retain an effective teaching workforce. The department has established Teaching School Hubs across the country, which provide approved high quality professional development to teachers at all stages of their careers. They play a significant role in delivering Initial Teacher Training, the Early Career Framework, National Professional Qualifications and Appropriate Body services. The Success for Every Teacher Teaching School Hub is a centre of excellence supporting teacher training and development across Basingstoke and Deane, East Hampshire, Guildford, Hart, Rushmoor and Waverley.

■ Truancy: Sandwell**Sarah Coombes:****[20314]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of above average unauthorised absence rates on educational outcomes in Sandwell local authority area.

Stephen Morgan:

Improving school attendance is central to the government's Opportunity Mission to drive high and rising standards for every child. The government has inherited an epidemic of school absence which is one of the biggest barriers to opportunity, damaging learning, health and wellbeing.

Each day of lost learning can do serious harm. Days missed add up quickly. We know there is a link between absence and attainment, and that can have a knock-on effect on lifetime outcomes.

Analysis produced by the department in 2016 found that overall absence due to family holiday has a statistically significant negative link to attainment at both key stage 2 and key stage 4. The analysis is available here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a808fdee5274a2e8ab50d9f/The-link-between-absence-and-attainment-at-KS2-and-KS4-2013-to-2014-academic-year.pdf>.

This is further supported by a 2023 study by the Office for the Children's Commissioner using departmental data which shows of the pupils who were persistently absent in year 10 and 11, 36% passed at least 5 GCSEs, including English and mathematics, compared to 78% who were rarely absent. The full details of the analysis can be found in the 'Missing Children, Missing Grades' report, which is accessible here:

<https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/11/CC-REPORT--Attendance-and-Attainment--Oct-23.pdf>.

Absence does not just harm the attainment of those not in school, it can impact children in the classroom too. Children thrive on stability, but a steady churn of absences disrupts the learning of every child. The work of staff to cultivate a sense of community and belonging is weakened, and it increases workload for teachers who have to replan lessons.

The department's 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance, which became statutory in August 2024, emphasises the importance of a 'support first' approach, setting clear expectations that schools and local authorities should work with families to address barriers to attendance in a sensitive way.

The department is also supporting school attendance through broader investments, such as funded breakfast clubs across all primary schools to ensure children start their day ready to learn and providing access to specialist mental health professionals in every school.

■ Unemployment: Slough

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[19753]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of young people out of (a) work, (b) education and (c) training in Slough.

Janet Daby:

The department publishes statistics on those not in education, employment or training (NEET) for England from the labour force survey (LFS) for young people aged 16 to 24. The statistics are available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/neet-statistics-annual-brief>.

The number of 16 to 24-year-olds estimated as NEET in England at the end of 2023 is estimated to be 709,600 (11.9% of the population). However, these estimates are only published at national level due to limitations with sample sizes for lower-level geographies. Therefore, NEET rates for young people aged 16 to 24 in Slough cannot be provided.

However, local authorities are required to encourage, enable or assist young people's participation in education or training and return management information for young people aged 16 and 17. This data is published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neet-and-participation-local-authority-figures>. The data shows that of the 4,435 young people aged 16 and 17 years old who were known to Slough local authority at the end of 2022 (average of December 2022, January 2023 and February 2023), 217 were NEET or their activity was not known (117 known to be NEET and 100 young people for whom the local authority could not confirm their activity). These statistics are published as transparency data so some caution should be taken if using these figures.

■ Universities: Antisemitism

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[19872]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to tackle antisemitism at universities.

Janet Daby:

This government is clear that every student, regardless of their background or religion, should be able to pursue their studies at university without fear of harassment or discrimination. As autonomous institutions, universities have robust processes in place to prevent and tackle incidents of harassment and abuse on campus.

The latest Community Security Trust (CST) report, titled 'Campus Antisemitism in Britain 2022-2024', confirms a significant increase in antisemitic incidents on university campuses over the past two academic years. Additionally, recent Home Office hate crime data indicates that Jewish communities are disproportionately targeted by hate crimes.

The department considers tackling antisemitism in education a key priority and has already taken important steps to address it. We have confirmed £7 million in funding for the Tackling Antisemitism in Education (TAE) programme and have launched a new procurement (which will close on 16 January 2025) to upskill school and college teachers and key university staff to prevent, recognise and address incidents of antisemitism.

Under the TAE programme, we have already awarded £500,000 to the University Jewish Chaplaincy (UJC) to provide welfare-based support for Jewish students who may be worried about their safety. The funds will be used by UJC to enhance their support services, which include offering counselling, organising community events, and providing a safe space for Jewish students to discuss their concerns.

We continue to liaise closely with Jewish stakeholder groups including the UJC, the Union of Jewish Students and CST to discuss and address their concerns.

■ Young People: Employment

Caroline Voaden:

[\[19792\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that (a) school and (b) higher education leavers are supported into meaningful employment, and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of piloting initiatives to address barriers to workforce entry for young people nationally.

Janet Daby:

The department is developing a comprehensive strategy for post-16 education and skills, to break down barriers to opportunity, support the development of a skilled workforce and drive economic growth through the government's Industrial Strategy.

The department is committed to working collaboratively with the sector to bring forward this strategy, building on the Curriculum and Assessment Review, the introduction of Skills England and with a continued focus on lifelong learning.

The department's vision for a Youth Guarantee will ensure all young people aged 18 to 21 have the opportunity to access the education, training, apprenticeship or employment support they need to open up job and career opportunities. It also looks to strengthen the support for 16 to 17-year-olds who are at risk of or have disengaged from sustained participation in education and learning.

The guarantee will bring together and enhance provision and support for young people by providing tailored support for 18 to 21-year-olds into further learning and onto fulfilling work who may need additional help. The guarantee will address personal barriers, such as mental or physical health, care giving responsibilities, homelessness or transport. Additionally, it will enable preparation for employment and, through work experience, offer additional careers advisers and a new National Jobs and Careers Service.

The guarantee will also help 18 to 21-year-olds to access education and training opportunities locally and will build on wider system improvements including Skills

England, the new foundation apprenticeship, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and the Growth and Skills offer.

The Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions are developing the guarantee with mayoral authorities to provide local, tailored support and will work with local areas on future expansion. The department will launch eight Trailblazers in England from spring 2025 backed by up to £45 million in funding.

High-quality careers advice is an essential part of the government's missions to break down the barriers to opportunity and to drive economic growth. Secondary schools are legally required to provide independent careers guidance on the full range of education and training options and offer at least six opportunities for providers of technical education or apprenticeships to speak to all pupils during years 8 to 13.

Additionally, in secondary education, the department is boosting work readiness with its plan to guarantee two weeks' worth of work experience for every young person. The department wants to see multiple, targeted workplace experiences with all types of businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises and growth sectors. The department is funding pilots initially with a focus on identifying what works. To ensure every young person can get the expert advice they need, the department will train 1,000 careers advisers. These ambitions are vital to ensuring that young people develop relevant skills for work and are supported to make successful transitions from education and training into meaningful employment.

The Office for Students also holds higher education providers to account for students' employment outcomes. Providers are expected to offer high-quality careers support and ensure that at least 60% of their students' progress into professional employment or further study within 15 months of graduating.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Alternative Fuels: Rural Areas

Blake Stephenson:

[\[19489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to support off-grid properties to transition to clean fuels.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Currently, the Government's Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) provides grants for energy efficiency measures and low carbon heating to low-income households living in the worst performing, off-grid homes in England.

In September 2024, the Government announced a new Warm Homes: Local Grant (WH:LG) which will provide energy performance measures and low carbon heating to low-income households in England including privately owned EPC band D-G homes both on and off the gas grid. £500 million has been allocated as part of the Autumn Budget for the Warm Homes: Local Grant to be delivered from 2025 to 2028 by eligible local authorities.

■ British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[20902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has agreed to meet with the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme Trustees.

Sarah Jones:

Details of Ministers' and Permanent Secretaries' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK.

Published declarations include the purpose of the meeting and the names of any additional external organisations or individuals in attendance.

■ Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage

Michelle Scrogham: [\[20851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what plans he has to sequence carbon capture, usage and storage projects after Track 1 and 2.

Michelle Scrogham: [\[20852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department plans to publish information on the development of carbon capture, usage and storage projects outside of the Track 1 and 2 processes.

Sarah Jones:

Our £21.7 billion investment in CCUS will help launch an era of clean energy in Britain – boosting energy security, backing industries, and supporting thousands of highly skilled jobs across the country.

In the longer term, it is important that industry and government enable the development of a self-sustaining UK CCUS sector supporting good jobs and reducing emissions, putting the UK at the forefront of global CCUS.

Decisions for continued CCUS deployment will be taken in due course.

■ Carbon Emissions

Esther McVey: [\[20607\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential risks that the transition to net zero poses to (a) households and (b) businesses.

Kerry McCarthy:

The transition to net zero will be an incredible opportunity for jobs and growth all across the country. As the OBR has noted in its July 2021 Fiscal Risks Report, “the costs of failing to get climate change under control would be much larger than those of bringing emissions down to net zero”. The Government is taking coordinated action to ensure a fair and inclusive transition to clean energy and net zero, addressing workforce challenges and enabling workers to benefit from the economic opportunities.

Our priority is making it easier, clearer and more affordable for people to access new technologies and benefit from the transition.

Esther McVey:

[\[20608\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the transition to net zero on energy security.

Michael Shanks:

Switching to homegrown clean energy, including renewables and other clean technologies, offers security that fossil fuels simply cannot provide. The Government recognises the challenges in moving away from fossil fuels but the only way to ensure energy security is through homegrown clean power. The Government has empowered the independent National Energy System Operator with the responsibility to carry out resilience functions across the electricity and gas systems and it will continue to work with stakeholders to improve and maintain the resilience of energy infrastructure.

■ **Carbon Emissions: Technology**

Lee Barron:

[\[20504\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will hold discussions with the electrical contracting industry on estimated future trends in the level of demand for electricians for the implementation of low carbon technologies.

Sarah Jones:

Alongside the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, The Office for Clean Energy Jobs published an evidence annex, which provides an initial assessment of the skills challenges for the Clean Energy Mission. This evidence will be used as a basis for the Government to better understand the 2030 workforce requirements and support targeted skills planning. DESNZ has longstanding links with the electrical contracting industry and looks forward to continuing working with them in the future.

■ **Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Contracts**

Nick Timothy:

[\[20292\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of the processes put in place by his Department to ensure that the Contracts for Difference Allocation Round 7 (a) is open and transparent and (b) will allocate contracts according to which bid achieves the highest value for money.

Michael Shanks:

We are reviewing the Contracts for Difference scheme, as we do before every round, to ensure it continues to deliver value for money and all other objectives. We set out some of the changes to the scheme we are considering in the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan and will be consulting on these early next year. We will open Allocation Round 7 in the summer of 2025, and publish further details for the round in due course.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Media**John Cooper:** [20481]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Michael Shanks:

There has been no spend on either (a) media or (b) voice training for Ministers since 5th July 2024 in the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

■ Drax Power: Subsidies**Rosie Duffield:** [20242]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to the finding by Ofgem that Drax had misreported data in relation to their annual profiling submission between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, published on 29 August 2024, whether he plans to investigate its subsidies during the previous 10 years.

Michael Shanks:

Compliance with biomass sustainability criteria is a priority and Ofgem as the independent regulator is responsible for ensuring generators' compliance. Ofgem's recent investigation found that whilst Drax complied with sustainability standards, it had failed to report data accurately. This is a serious matter and Government expects full compliance with all regulatory obligations. Ofgem did not find any evidence to suggest that Drax had been issued with subsidies incorrectly. Drax's subsequent £25 million redress payment underscores the robustness of the regulatory system.

■ Energy Company Obligation: Hampshire**Alex Baker:** [20808]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many households have been awarded funding for energy efficiency installations under the ECO4 scheme in (a) Aldershot constituency and (b) Hampshire.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

ECO4 does not award funding to households, it is an obligation set by Government on large energy suppliers to install energy efficiency measures.

To the end of September 2024 (the [latest available data](#) by local authority and parliamentary constituency), ECO4 has supported 79 households in the Aldershot constituency and 1,470 households in Hampshire (includes Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth and Southampton local authorities).

■ Energy Performance Certificates: Listed Buildings**Kevin Hollinrake:** [19705]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to his Department's announcement of 23 September 2024, on minimum energy efficiency standards, what assessment he has made of the average cost of making a listed dwelling

meet the EPC 'C' requirements by 2030; and whether listed buildings will be required to meet that statutory target.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government will consult shortly on increasing minimum energy efficiency standards in the domestic private rented sector. The consultation includes proposals on required spend from landlords and potential exemptions. It will be accompanied by the Department's assessment of potential cost to landlords. Following the consultation and legislation changes, we will issue guidance to landlords to comply with the requirement, and publish this on gov.uk. The Energy Performance of Buildings reform consultation, published in December 2024, proposes that valid EPCs should be required for all rented heritage buildings so that owners are well-informed about their building's energy performance alongside recommendations for improvements.

■ **Energy Performance Certificates: Rented Housing**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[19708\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to his Department's press release of 23 September 2024 entitled Home upgrade revolution as renters set for warmer homes and cheaper bills announcement, if he will list the exemptions that will apply to the requirement for (a) private and (b) social rented sector homes to have an Energy Performance Certificate C or equivalent by 2030.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government will consult on increasing minimum energy efficiency standards in the domestic private rented sector and on introducing a minimum energy efficiency standard for the social rented sector. The Government will work closely with both the private and socially rented sectors during the consultations and will consider potential exemptions as part of the consultation process.

■ **Energy: Housing**

Zöe Franklin:

[\[20404\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on steps to ensure all new homes are built to high energy efficiency standards.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government has dual ambitions of delivering 1.5 million new homes by the end of this Parliament and achieving clean power by 2030. These objectives are not mutually exclusive, and with good planning and smart design we can build the high quality, low carbon homes we need.

The Future Homes and Buildings Standards consultation was published in December 2023 and closed in March 2024 under the previous Government. We fully support the need for low carbon homes, fit for a net zero future. We are reviewing proposals and

feedback from the Future Homes and Building Standards consultation and will publish the Government Response in due course.

Max Wilkinson: [20524]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to improve the energy efficiency of homes in winter 2024-2025.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

We have various schemes already delivering improvements to home energy efficiency through the Energy Company Obligation, the Great British Insulation Scheme, the Home Upgrade Grant, the Warm Homes: Social Housing Decarbonisation, and the Boiler Upgrade Scheme.

Customers can also use the tool 'Find Ways to Save Energy in your Home' (www.gov.uk/improve-energy-efficiency), which provides users with tailored recommendations for home improvements to increase energy efficiency and clean heat.

As the first step towards the Warm Homes Plan, the Government has committed an initial £3.4 billion over the next 3 years towards heat decarbonisation and household energy efficiency.

■ Energy: Meters

Edward Morello: [19581]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department consulted (a) consumer groups and (b) energy providers on the reduction of off-peak tariff periods associated with smart meters.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government recognises the importance of time of use tariffs, and we are putting in place reforms such as Smart Metering and the Market-wide Half Hourly Settlement to support the growth of these products. Tariff setting is a matter for suppliers, and is regulated by Ofgem, including through the price cap which already has a variant to accommodate multi-rate tariffs such as Economy 7.

I regularly engage with stakeholders, including consumer groups and energy suppliers, to ensure that the sector meets the differing needs of consumers.

■ Energy: Prices

Edward Morello: [19582]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of reducing off-peak tariff periods from 12 to seven hours on households reliant on overnight energy use.

Edward Morello: [19583]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the potential financial impact on (a) households reliant on

Economy 7 and (b) other households using time-of-use tariffs of the reduction of off-peak periods to seven hours.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government recognises the importance of time of use tariffs, and we are putting in place reforms such as Smart Metering and the Market-wide Half Hourly Settlement to support the growth of these products. Tariff setting is a matter for suppliers, including the setting of peak and off-peak tariffs, and is regulated by Ofgem, including through the price cap which already has a variant to accommodate multi-rate tariffs such as Economy 7.

I regularly engage with stakeholders, including consumer groups and energy suppliers, to ensure that the sector meets the differing needs of consumers.

■ **Energy: Standing Charges**

Ian Byrne:

[\[19845\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of standing charges issued by energy suppliers on low and middle-income households.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Although standing charges are a commercial matter for suppliers and are regulated by Ofgem under the price cap, the Government knows that too much of the burden of the bill is placed on them. Ofgem's recently published update regarding reforming standing charges outlines 3 broad options it will take forward:

- Consulting on introducing a zero standing charge price cap tariff in the new year;
- Consulting on lowering standing charges by around £10 through a review of operating costs;
- Reviewing whether regional standing charge price differences should remain or not as part of a review of how system costs are recovered.

Ofgem's review of standing charges considered the distributional impacts of potential changes to standing charges, and it can be found here:

<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/standing-charges-update-our-review>.

The changes Ofgem are seeking to introduce are aimed at giving consumers, including those who may be struggling with their bills, more control over their energy costs. Consumers will be able to choose the right tariff to suit their consumption pattern.

■ **Fuel Poverty: Aldershot**

Alex Baker:

[\[20810\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many and what proportion of care recipients are in fuel poverty in Aldershot.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Fuel poverty statistics for England do not include a breakdown of whether residents of households receive care. Furthermore, the statistics are based on the English Housing Survey, which surveys households and does not include communal establishments. Therefore, the statistics do not cover residents of care homes.

The latest statistics for the number and proportion of households in fuel poverty in parliamentary constituencies in England can be found in the published sub-regional fuel poverty Official Statistics, in Table 5:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sub-regional-fuel-poverty-data-2024-2022-data>.

■ Fuel Poverty: Ely and East Cambridgeshire**Charlotte Cane:****[19528]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the (a) number and (b) proportion of people in fuel poverty in Ely and East Cambridgeshire constituency.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The latest statistics for the number and proportion of households in fuel poverty in parliamentary constituencies in England can be found in the published sub-regional fuel poverty Official Statistics, in Table 5:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sub-regional-fuel-poverty-data-2024-2022-data>.

There are targeted schemes to deliver energy efficiency measures, and bill support through the Warm Home Discount scheme, available to eligible low-income and fuel poor households. The Warm Homes Plan includes an initial £1.8 billion to support fuel poverty schemes over the next 3 years. The 2021 fuel poverty strategy, which sets out how we will reach our fuel poverty targets, is currently under review.

■ Fuel Poverty: Stratford-on-Avon**Manuela Perteghella:****[19498]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to tackle fuel poverty in the Stratford-on-Avon constituency in winter 2024-25.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

There are multiple targeted schemes to deliver energy efficiency measures to low-income and fuel poor households. The Warm Home Discount schemes also 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, helping around 225,000 households reduce their energy bills by around £200.

We will consult shortly on proposals for privately rented homes to achieve Energy Performance Certificate C or equivalent by 2030. We are also reviewing the 2021 fuel poverty strategy.

■ Fuel Poverty: Surrey

Zöe Franklin:

[\[20397\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to tackle fuel poverty in Surrey in winter 2024-25.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

There are multiple targeted schemes to deliver energy efficiency measures to low-income and fuel poor households. The Warm Home Discount schemes also 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.

We will consult shortly on proposals for privately rented homes to achieve Energy Performance Certificate C or equivalent by 2030. We are also reviewing the 2021 fuel poverty strategy.

■ Great British Energy

Andrew Bowie:

[\[20239\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is planning to take to ensure that Great British Energy will work in collaboration with (a) the National Wealth Fund and (b) Great British Nuclear.

Michael Shanks:

Initially, while it is established, we expect Great British Energy's (GBE) investment activity to be undertaken by the National Wealth Fund (NWF). This will enable GBE to invest quickly and draw on the NWF's experience and pipeline of projects. As GBE scales up, we will set out how the two institutions will collaborate and complement each other.

Great British Nuclear (GBN) will remain an independent sister company to GBE. The Government is considering how GBE and GBN can work best together to ensure that the UK achieves energy security and clean power whilst securing thousands of skilled jobs.

■ Heating: Housing

Mr Will Forster:

[\[19576\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing equal incentives for homeowners to install (a) heat batteries and (b) other low-emission heat sources.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

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 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. As the evidence base develops, we will continue to review the incentives available and whether this is sufficient, appropriate, and in line with our net zero ambitions.

■ Insulation: Housing**Dr Roz Savage:**[\[19617\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to help improve the insulation of housing.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Warm Homes Plan will help people find ways to save money on energy bills and transform our ageing building stock into comfortable, low-carbon homes that are fit for the future.

As the first step towards the Warm Homes Plan, the Government has committed an initial £3.4 billion over the next 3 years towards heat decarbonisation and household energy efficiency. In 2025-2026 alone, we will be upgrading up to 300,000 homes, using around £1 billion of Warm Homes Plan money, social housing provider co-funding, and further support through the Energy Company Obligation and the Great British Insulation Scheme.

We will set out further details on the Warm Homes Plan in due course.

■ Nuclear Fusion and Small Modular Reactors**Andrew Bowie:**[\[18594\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department is taking steps to (a) invest in nuclear fusion and (b) expand the use of small modular nuclear reactors.

Michael Shanks:

At the Autumn Budget the Government announced significant support in 2025-26 for UK fusion energy research, to build on the UK's position as a global leader in fusion energy. On small modular reactors (SMRs), the government welcomes the opportunity for SMRs to play a wider role in Britain's clean energy future. In addition to the SMR competition being delivered by Great British Nuclear, the government is considering responses on new uses of nuclear energy as part of the Alternative Routes to Market consultation for Advanced Nuclear Technologies and will publish a factual response in due course.

■ Renewable Energy: Aldershot

Alex Baker:

[\[20809\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he plans to increase funding for renewable energy sources in Aldershot constituency.

Michael Shanks:

We've already had £34.8 billion of private investment announced into the UK's clean energy industries since July. Significant investment in our energy system is required no matter what, to replace retiring generation capacity and meet increasing demand. This investment is therefore one we cannot afford not to make. Our 2030 mission will ensure this investment is directed at the technologies, places and people that provide the most affordable, secure and prosperous future for the British public.

■ Renewable Energy: Smart Export Guarantee

Luke Murphy:

[\[20718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the barriers facing consumers in completing the Smart Export Guarantee certification process; and what steps he plans to take to tackle these.

Michael Shanks:

The Smart Export Guarantee (SEG) is a market-led mechanism that ensures individuals are guaranteed payment for any electricity exported to the grid.

The Government is aware of consumers' concerns about the length of time it is taking the District Network Operator (DNO) to process grid connection applications before an export Metering Point Administration Number (MPAN) can be issued and SEG payments made by energy suppliers. Working with the Energy Network Association (the industry body for the UK gas and electricity transmission and distribution licence holders) the Government aims to make sure improvements are made.

■ Solar Power

Shivani Raja:

[\[20059\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to (a) prioritise a roofs first approach to solar panel installation to ensure efficient use of urban spaces and (b) incentivize homeowners and businesses to adopt rooftop solar technology.

Michael Shanks:

Changes have been introduced to permitted development rights, enabling more solar installations to benefit from the flexibilities and planning freedoms permitted development rights offer. This includes a new permitted development right that allows for the installation of solar canopies in non-domestic, off-street, car parks.

For non-domestic rooftop solar, the 1MW cap was removed so that there is no limit on the electricity generated by solar installations.

Our Warm Homes Plan will transform homes across the country by making them cleaner and cheaper to run, from installing new insulation to rolling out low carbon heating like solar and heat pumps.

■ Solar Power: Planning Permission

Sir John Hayes: [\[20564\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many solar farm applications he has approved since July 2024.

Michael Shanks:

The Secretary of State has granted a development consent order for four solar farm developments since July 2024: Sunnica, Gate Burton, Mallard Pass and Cottam.

Sir John Hayes: [\[20565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many of the solar farm applications he has approved since July 2024 include development on high grade agricultural land.

Michael Shanks:

All four solar developments consented since July 2024 included some use of agricultural land classified as 'best and most versatile' (BMV). Our assessment of the use of this BMV land and its weighting on the planning balance are detailed in the decision letter for each consent decision.

■ Solar Power: Smart Export Guarantee

Luke Murphy: [\[20717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the guidance and resources available to assist homeowners in the post-installation certification process for Smart Export Guarantee eligibility following the installation of solar panels.

Michael Shanks:

Under the Smart Export Guarantee (SEG) legislation, Ofgem must publish guidance to SEG generators and SEG licensees on the operation of the SEG. The guidance for homeowners provides information about how the SEG works, who can apply and how, the SEG contract and payments and what to do if they have a complaint.

Ofgem must keep the guidance under review and will publish updated guidance if it thinks it is appropriate.

■ Warm Homes Plan: Insulation

David Simmonds: [\[20291\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December to Question 16276 on Warm Homes Plan: Insulation, whether the Warm Homes Plan will support investment in loft insulation protection.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government's Warm Homes Plan will support investment in insulation, low carbon heating and other home improvements to cut bills. We will set out full details in due course.

■ **Wind Power: Fylde****Mr Andrew Snowden:**[\[20865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the answer of 17 December 2024 to question 19898 on Wind Power: Fylde, what account the cost assessments have taken of existing infrastructure connecting Stanah to Penwortham.

Michael Shanks:

National Energy System Operator (NESO) recommended the transmission infrastructure required to connect Morgan and Morecambe offshore wind projects to the grid as part of its Holistic Network Design (HND). In producing the HND, NESO assessed multiple onshore and offshore design options against future generation and demand scenarios, existing infrastructure in the National Electricity Transmission System, and total capital and operational costs. NESO then used an economic optimiser to determine the optimal economic design from the options.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS■ **3-nitrooxypropanol****Rupert Lowe:**[\[17364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will review the use of Bovaer.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Food Standards Agency has advised milk from cows given Bovaer, an authorised feed additive used to reduce methane emissions, is safe to drink. Bovaer has undergone a rigorous safety assessment and is approved for use in Great Britain.

■ **Agricultural Products and Food: Trade Barriers****Matt Bishop:**[\[19823\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent steps he has taken with Cabinet colleagues to tackle trade barriers to farming exports.

Daniel Zeichner:

We are supporting businesses to capitalise on strong global demand for UK food and drink products by breaking down barriers to trade and maximising access to export markets. Since Labour took office, the UK now has a network of sixteen agrifood and drink attachés covering all continents who are breaking down these barriers and creating new opportunities for the sector. We have had notable recent market access

wins across the farming sector including relisting sites to export pork to China estimated by industry to be worth £80 million and securing for the first time access for UK beetroot exports to the USA.

The Government is committed to developing a trade strategy that will support economic growth and promote the highest standards of food production. We have been clear that we will protect farmers from being undercut by low welfare and low standards in trade deals. Europe remains a priority market, and we are seeking to negotiate a veterinary/Sanitary and Phytosanitary agreement with the EU to boost trade and deliver benefits to businesses and consumers on both sides. The Government is ambitious and wants to move forward at pace, but delivering new agreements will take time.

■ **Agricultural Products: UK Trade with EU**

Stephen Gethins:

[\[17821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 15757 on Agricultural Products: UK Trade with EU, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential financial impact of the UK leaving the EU on the agri-food sector.

Daniel Zeichner:

I refer the hon. Member to the reply previously given on 4 December 2024, [UIN 15757](#). Although the Trade and Cooperation Agreement allows zero tariffs and zero quota trade, leaving the EU single market and customs union had an impact on the export of agri-food products, as have other changes in trade policy such as new Free Trade Agreements with other countries, and global shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Agri-food trade with the EU has fallen since 2018 in real terms (after adjusting for trade inflation) by 20% (exports) and 11% (imports). However, there is difficulty separating out the impact of the UK leaving the EU from those other factors. The majority of UK agri-food exports were still to EU countries in 2023, 57% (£14 billion).

We are working to reset our relationship with our European friends to strengthen ties and tackle barriers to UK-EU trade. We will seek to negotiate a veterinary/sanitary and phytosanitary agreement to boost trade and deliver benefits to businesses and consumers in the UK and the EU. We have been clear that our trading relationship can be improved but we are not rejoining the single market or customs union, and we will not return to freedom of movement.

■ **Agriculture: Environment Protection**

Tim Farron:

[\[20007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that farmers can engage in environmentally sustainable farming projects during winter 2024-25.

Daniel Zeichner:

Environmental Land Management schemes remain at the centre of our offer for farmers, with the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery all continuing. There are now over 60,000 live agreements across these schemes, supported by £5 billion in the agricultural budget over the next two years in the recent budget. This budget is funding farmers in these schemes deliver improvements to food security, biodiversity, carbon emissions, water quality, air quality and flood resilience through winter 2024/25 and beyond.

■ Agriculture: Floods**Tim Farron:**[\[20008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support farmers with managing flooding in winter 2024-25.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Farming Recovery Fund was set up to support farmers affected by unprecedented extreme wet weather last winter (October 2023 to March 2024). Through these one-off recovery payments, £57.5 million has now been paid to over 12,700 farm businesses to help them recover from the impacts of the exceptional flooding and wet weather over the duration of this period.

The Government inherited flood assets in their worst condition on record following years of underinvestment by the previous government – 92% of the Environment Agency's 38,000 assets are currently at required condition.

To ensure we protect the country from the devastating impacts of flooding, we will invest £2.4 billion over 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience, by building, maintaining, and repairing flood defences. The Government also announced £50 million of investment into internal drainage boards, supporting farmers and rural communities from the impacts of flooding.

The new Flood Resilience Taskforce provides oversight of national and local flood resilience and preparedness ahead of and after the winter flood season.

■ Agriculture: Food Supply**Martin Wrigley:**[\[20073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the impact of family farms on food security.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra does not collect any farming data based on whether farms are owned by a family.

Estimates are produced based on the economic size of farms (based on Standard Outputs*). The latest estimates show that in England in 2022, a small number of economically 'very high output farms' produced over half (62%) the agricultural output

using just 35% of the total farmed land area. Conversely, 45% of 'very low output' farms produced 2% of total output using 8% of the total farmed land area (Slide 8 at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e7e0b33f1299ce5d5c3ed9/Farming_evidence_pack_16sept24.pdf)

We understand the importance of all farms, including family farms to food security; in delivering environmental outcomes; and in supporting rural communities. That's why our farming budget will be maintained at £2.4 billion in 2025/26. Most notably, £1.8 billion of this will be directed towards Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes—which are the key mechanisms supporting sustainable food production and nature's recovery in the UK.

* Standard Output measures the total value of output across all enterprises on a farm - per head for livestock and per hectare for crops. For crops this will be the main product (e.g. wheat, barley, peas) plus any by-product that is sold, for example straw. For livestock it will be the value of the main product (milk, eggs, lamb, pork) plus the value of any secondary product (wool) minus the cost of replacement.

■ Agriculture: Government Assistance

Charlie Dewhirst:

[20398]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help support people affected by changes made to (a) agricultural property relief, (b) Business Property Relief and (c) capital grants at the Autumn Budget 2024 in rural communities.

Daniel Zeichner:

From 6 April 2026, 0% inheritance tax will be due on the first £1 million of combined agricultural and business property. Above this amount, landowners will access 50% relief from inheritance tax and will pay inheritance tax at a reduced effective rate up to 20%, rather than the standard 40%. This tax can be paid in instalments over 10 years interest free, rather than immediately, as with other types of inheritance tax.

This is on top of all the other spousal exemptions and nil-rate bands that people can access for inheritance tax too. This means that two people who share ownership of a piece of farmland, depending on their circumstances, can pass on up to £3 million without paying any inheritance tax. Furthermore, if land is transferred 7 years before death, farmers pay no inheritance tax at all.

Data from HMRC and supported by the independent Office for Budgetary Responsibility (OBR) indicates that around 500 estates a year will be impacted. The majority of those will be able to adapt their businesses. The exact number will depend on a wider range of factors based on their individual circumstances. It is not broken down to specific constituencies.

With 73% of claims being for less than £1 million, the majority of estates will be unaffected, and they will be able to pass the family farm down to their children just as

previous generations have always done. This is a fair and balanced approach that protects the family farm while also fixing the public services that we all rely on.

As an outcome of the recent Spending Review, we have also committed £5 billion in the agricultural budget over the next two years – the biggest ever budget for sustainable food production and nature recovery in this country's history. This enables us to keep momentum on the path to a more resilient and sustainable farming sector. In the first week of December, we paid £343 million into the rural economy, benefiting more than 31,000 farmers.

Any farmer or land manager who received Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) payments at least up until October 2022 in England is also eligible for support from the Farming Resilience Fund (FRF). The FRF provides free business support (and mental health support, where appropriate) to farmers and land managers in England to help them through agricultural transition. It does this by awarding grants to organisations who help farmers and land managers to understand the changes that are happening, identify how, what and when they may need to adapt their business models, and access tailored support to adapt. The support is offered free of charge to farmers and land managers by organisations known and trusted in the farming community. The support will run until March 2025.

■ **Agriculture: Inheritance Tax**

Martin Wrigley:

[\[20067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will have discussions with the National Farmers' Union on their statistical information relating to changes to agricultural property relief.

Daniel Zeichner:

We are listening to the sector to ensure their views are heard. Ministers and officials regularly meet with a range of farming stakeholders, including the National Farmers Union (NFU), the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), and the Tenant Farmers Association (TFA). We will continue to meet with stakeholders to ensure their views are heard.

■ **Agriculture: Overseas Trade**

Martin Wrigley:

[\[18730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of (a) UK-US trade relations and (b) the incoming US administration on the agricultural sector.

Daniel Zeichner:

The US is the UK's single largest trading partner (with over £300 billion in trade) and the UK's third largest export market for agri-food products, with trade worth over £2.5 billion.

UK-US trade and investment is a vital part of this Government's plan to deliver economic growth. As the Prime Minister set out our relationship with the United States has been the cornerstone of our security and our prosperity for over a century.

The UK looks forward to working with President-elect Trump in office, including on his policy priorities and improving UK-US trading relations to support businesses on both sides of the Atlantic.

■ Agriculture: Subsidies

James McMurdock: [\[19630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of (a) grants and (b) subsidies available to farmers for (i) adopting new technologies and (ii) improving farm infrastructure.

Daniel Zeichner:

Within the Farming Innovation Programme Defra has supported over 260 projects with over £130 million of Government investment awarded in contracts.

Within the Farming Investment Fund schemes Defra has paid out over £164 million to date in capital grants to support farmers and horticultural businesses to invest in infrastructure and equipment.

Regarding future capital grant support, Defra is currently assessing next year's (2025) Capital Grants offer and will provide an update in early 2025.

We plan to simplify and rationalise our grant funding, ensuring that grants deliver the most benefit for food security and nature. We will confirm any future grant rounds in due course.

Helen Morgan: [\[20324\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what methodologies the Rural Payments Agency uses to determine the set proportion of total eligible farm area provided funding.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Rural Payments Agency uses both the Environment Agency and Met Office data to establish which farm businesses may be eligible for Farming Recovery Payment. The data on river flooding and exceptional rainfall allows the agency to identify affected land.

The full methodology can be found in the link below.

[Our approach to Farming Recovery payments – Farming.](#)

Charlie Dewhirst: [\[20400\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of accelerated changes to delinked payments on farming businesses.

Charlie Dewhirst:

[20403]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of proposed changes to the delinked basic payment scheme on the profitability of farming businesses.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government has committed to support farmers through a farming budget of £5 billion over two years, including £2.4 billion in 2025/26. Accelerating the phase out of Direct Payments will allow us to focus more of this funding on Environmental Land Management schemes, which will boost nature and sustainable food production. This will enable farmers to make their businesses more sustainable and resilient, including those who have been often ignored such as small, grassland, upland and tenant farmers.

We publish regular statistics on farm income in England and other data related to farm businesses. For example, on 14 November 2024, we published our Farm Business Income statistics ([Farm business income - GOV.UK](#)), which looked at how farm business income has changed in 2023/24, including the contribution of Direct Payments and agri-environment payments to farm incomes, including analysis by farm type. Farming evidence packs have been recently updated including key statistics and farm performance ([Farming statistics evidence packs - GOV.UK](#)). These set out an extensive range of data to provide an overview of agriculture in the UK, and the contribution of farm payments to farm incomes, including analysis by sector, location in England and type of land tenure.

We will continue to carry out appropriate and timely assessments of our interventions to inform policy development.

■ **Animal Feed: 3-nitrooxypropanol**

Richard Tice:

[17381]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of long-term health concerns associated with the use of 3-Nitrooxypropanol in cattle feed.

Daniel Zeichner:

3-Nitrooxypropanol is the active ingredient in a methane suppressing feed product commercially known as Bovaer.

The Food Standards Agency has advised milk from cows given Bovaer, an authorised feed additive used to reduce methane emissions, is safe to drink. Bovaer has undergone a rigorous safety assessment and is approved for use in Great Britain.

■ Animal Welfare: Hendon**David Pinto-Duschinsky:** [\[20802\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to improve animal welfare in Hendon constituency.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Department has already initiated a series of meetings with key animal welfare stakeholders as part of the development of an overarching approach to animal welfare. We will be outlining more detail in due course. **BACKGROUND NOTE (NOT TO BE PUBLISHED)**

■ Animal Welfare: Prosecutions**Robin Swann:** [\[18303\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many prosecutions there have been under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2019.

Daniel Zeichner:

Responsibility for enforcing the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 lies with English local authorities. Local authorities may keep records of individual enforcement activity, including cases that have led to prosecutions. However, the information requested regarding prosecutions is not held centrally by Defra.

Defra is finalising a post-implementation review (PIR) of the Regulations. The PIR considers the effectiveness of the regulations, including enforcement. The report into the review will be published shortly.

■ Animal Welfare: Standards**Gareth Snell:** [\[20697\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of introducing core standards for animal welfare; and what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade about whether he plans to include such standards in his planned trade strategy.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government shares the public's high regard for the UK's environmental protections, food standards and animal welfare.

All agri-food products must comply with our import requirements in order to be placed on the UK market. This includes ensuring imported meat products have been slaughtered to animal welfare standards equivalent to our domestic standards.

The trade strategy will set out how we can achieve long-term sustainable, inclusive, and resilient growth through trade. It will reflect the Government's commitment to

uphold our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety standards, areas in which the UK is a world leader.

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a range of issues, and Cabinet discussions are considered confidential.

■ Carbon Emissions

Nick Timothy: [\[19991\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate his Department has made of UK carbon emissions by consumption in each year since 2010.

Emma Hardy:

Information about the Carbon footprint for the UK is published here : [Carbon footprint for the UK and England to 2021 - GOV.UK](#)

Data are available up to 2021.

The total carbon footprint now includes the seven main Greenhouse Gases comprising: CO₂, Methane (CH₄), Nitrous oxide (N₂O), Hydro-fluorocarbons (HFC), Perfluorocarbons (PFC), Nitrogen trifluoride (NF₃) and Sulphur hexafluoride (SF₆).

Figures up to 2021 for the UK can be found in the table below.

Table 1: Greenhouse gas emissions associated with UK consumption, million tonnes CO₂ equivalent, UK, 2010-2021

YEAR	GHG FROM UK PRODUCED GOODS AND SERVICES CONSUMED BY UK RESIDENTS	GHG EMBEDDED IN IMPORTED GOODS AND SERVICES TO UK	UK HOUSEHOLDS HEATING EMISSIONS ARISING FROM THE USE OF FOSSIL FUELS	UK TRANSPORT EMISSIONS GENERATED DIRECTLY BY UK HOUSEHOLDS
2010	310	336	91	66
2011	292	347	74	66
2012	305	360	80	66
2013	295	358	82	67
2014	283	366	69	67
2015	275	362	72	68
2016	236	320	73	69
2017	211	321	71	70
2018	213	342	74	70
2019	208	336	71	70

YEAR	GHG FROM UK PRODUCED GOODS AND SERVICES CONSUMED BY UK RESIDENTS	GHG EMBEDDED IN IMPORTED GOODS AND SERVICES TO UK	UK HOUSEHOLDS HEATING EMISSIONS ARISING FROM THE USE OF FOSSIL FUELS	UK TRANSPORT EMISSIONS GENERATED DIRECTLY BY UK HOUSEHOLDS
2020	176	311	71	54
2021	189	381	76	59

■ Cats: Imports

Steve Darling:

[\[20053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many cats were imported under the Balai Directive in each month of (a) 2023 and (b) 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

Balai Cat Imports EU:

MONTH	2023	2024
Jan	216	253
Feb	310	267
Mar	270	256
Apr	179	224
May	164	165
Jun	170	196
Jul	194	166
Aug	197	222
Sep	253	287
Oct	282	290
Nov	261	
Dec	287	
Total	2,783	2,326

Balai Cat Imports ROW:

MONTH	2023	2024
Jan	306	254
Feb	304	292
Mar	372	251
Apr	331	279
May	321	346
Jun	377	314
Jul	278	332
Aug	289	307
Sep	338	292
Oct	190	293
Nov	316	
Dec	259	
Total	3,681	2,960

The EU data may include animals that have originated from a non-EU country but have travelled through an EU Border Control Post (BCP). The database records the EU BCP Country as the Country of Origin for these imports. The Rest of the World data will not include any animals that have arrived through an EU BCP.

This information is drawn from external IPAFF systems not directly controlled by the department.

■ Chemicals: Pollution Control

Clive Jones:

[\[20331\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make it his policy to amend the Persistent Organic Pollutants (Amendment) Regulations to allow, by derogation, the placing on the market of UV-328 present in articles and the use of such articles in land-based motor vehicles until 26 February 2030.

Emma Hardy:

Defra officials are in the process of engaging with the automotive industry in relation the Persistent Organic Pollutants (Amendment) Regulation 2024, including the use of UV-328 by the automotive industry and the issue of derogations. Details of any further steps will be published in due course.

■ Coastal Erosion and Flood Control

Rupert Lowe: [\[20079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to prevent further damage following coastal erosion in Hemsby; and what his Department's timetable is for reviewing the funding formula for flood defences.

Emma Hardy:

I refer the Honourable Member to the answers to his previous questions; PQ [12005](#), tabled on 30 October 2024, and PQ [8968](#), tabled on 14 October 2024.

■ Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Martin Wrigley: [\[20071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he has taken to ensure timely payments from the Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) began making payments to Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier agreement holders at the start of the December 2024, along with those in Countryside Stewardship Mid-Tier and Environmental Stewardship, with around £330 million paid to date. The RPA is working hard to complete processing on remaining claims and issue payments as promptly as possible. The new Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier scheme will open in 2025 and will move to quarterly payments to help with cashflow management

■ Countryside Stewardship Scheme: Aldershot

Alex Baker: [\[20432\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many and what proportion of farms in Aldershot constituency are part of Countryside Stewardship scheme.

Daniel Zeichner:

As of the 17 November there are no Farm Businesses with a current Countryside Stewardship scheme agreement in the Aldershot constituency.

The above is based on the registered address for the business postcode.

Note: The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) only holds data for the number of farms that are registered with the RPA and have Countryside Stewardship Agreement.

■ Dangerous Dogs

Dr Luke Evans: [\[19398\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of police force reporting of dog on dog attacks.

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[19399\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will (a) undertake a review of the recording of dog on dog attacks by police forces and (b) make an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing guidance to ensure consistency of reporting of those attacks.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra is working with the police, local authorities and animal welfare groups to help prevent attacks by encouraging responsible dog ownership, to ensure dog control issues are addressed before they escalate and to make sure the full force of the law is applied. As part of this work, we will continue to consider how we can improve data collection and recording on dog attacks so that we are in a better position to take action.

■ **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**

Emily Thornberry:

[\[19656\]](#)

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

Daniel Zeichner:

The table below sets out the number of cardholders at the end of each calendar year, by organisation.

	2022	2023
Core Department	235	292
Animal and Plant Health Agency	64	63
Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science	266	357
Rural Payments Agency	11	11
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	15	14

■ Domestic Waste: Recycling**Joe Robertson:** [\[19916\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what information (a) his Department and (b) its agencies holds on the number of household receptacles required for rubbish and recycling collections by each local waste collection authority.

Mary Creagh:

Defra and the Environment Agency do not routinely collect data on the number of containers required for waste and recycling collections by each waste collection authority.

■ Domestic Waste: Waste Disposal**Joe Robertson:** [\[19907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the frequency of residual waste household collections on (a) public health and (b) local amenities.

Mary Creagh:

Under section 89 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, there is a duty on local authorities to keep land and highways clear of litter.

We recognise that as recycling services are expanded and improved under Simpler Recycling in England, local authorities may choose to review residual waste services to ensure they are providing the most appropriate service for local circumstances. The government's priority is ensuring that households' needs are met, and we expect local authorities to continue to provide services to a reasonable standard.

Defra recently published guidance to ensure that local authorities consider certain factors when they review services, to ensure that reasonable standards are maintained. These include ensuring that there are no disamenity impacts, such as the build-up of odorous waste at the kerbside or an increase in fly-tipping of residual waste.

Joe Robertson: [\[19914\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what information his Department holds on the frequency of household residual bin collections by local waste collection authorities.

Mary Creagh:

Defra does not routinely collect data on the frequency of household residual bin collections by waste collection authorities.

Joe Robertson: [\[19922\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what guidance has been produced by his Department on the issuing of fines by local authorities on householders who leave items by the curtilage of their property to be given away and re-used.

Mary Creagh:

The department has not produced guidance for local authorities on issuing fixed penalty notices for householders who leave items by the curtilage of their property to be given away and re-used.

The principles of the Regulators' Code applies, however, to enforcement action local authorities undertake. This states that regulatory activity should be carried out in a way which is proportionate, transparent, accountable and consistent. We are considering whether further guidance is necessary with regards to fly-tipping enforcement.

Joe Robertson:[\[19923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what (a) his Department's policy is and (b) what guidance has been given to local authorities on the use of microchips in household wheelie bins.

Mary Creagh:

No, the department has not outlined a policy relating the use of microchips in household wheelie bins and has not issued guidance to local authorities in relation to this topic.

Joe Robertson:[\[20290\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question 14178 on Domestic Waste: Waste Disposal, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of the removal of the minimum residual bin collection requirement in the final Simpler Recycling policy on the prevalence of local waste collection authorities moving to three-weekly or monthly bin collections.

Mary Creagh:

Local authorities are already legally required to deliver waste collection services to all households in their area. Simpler Recycling in England will go further by mandating weekly food waste collections under the Environment Act 2021. Local authorities have always had flexibility to choose residual waste frequency, depending on local need.

Local authorities are best placed to determine the effective delivery of local services. We recognise that as recycling services are expanded and improved under Simpler Recycling, local authorities may choose to review residual waste services to ensure they are providing best value for money in line with local need. The Government's priority is ensuring that households' needs are met, and we expect local authorities to continue to provide services to a reasonable standard, as they do now.

Defra recently published guidance to ensure that local authorities consider certain factors when they review services, to ensure that reasonable standards are maintained. These include ensuring that there are no disamenity impacts, such as the build-up of odorous waste at the kerbside or an increase in fly-tipping of residual

waste. We expect local authorities to monitor any changes to collection frequencies to ensure there are no unintended adverse consequences.

■ Environment Agency: Motor Vehicles

Joe Robertson: [\[20097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much the Environment Agency spent on road vehicle fleet maintenance by (a) vehicle type, (b) fuel type and (c) non-essential modifications in each of the last three financial years.

Joe Robertson: [\[20098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much the Environment Agency has spent on custom wheel lug nuts for Agency vehicles in each of the last three years; and for what purpose.

Joe Robertson: [\[20099\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the ratio of staff to road vehicles in the Environment Agency (a) is and (b) was in each of the last three years.

Emma Hardy:

A breakdown of how much the Environment Agency spent on its commercial fleet's maintenance by vehicle type and fuel type in the last three financial years is shown in the table below. This does not include leased vehicles as maintenance costs are included in their monthly costs. Data on 'non-essential modifications' is not available.

VEHICLE AND FUEL TYPE	21/22	22/23	23/24
Car	£671.17	£2,089.80	£2,344.56
HYDROGEN	£671.17	£2,089.80	£2,344.56
Small Van	£197,643.65	£197,404.86	£227,939.27
DIESEL	£197,643.65	£197,404.86	£224,646.14
ELECTRIC	£0.00	£0.00	£3,293.13
Medium Van	£86,972.06	£99,222.66	£103,457.00
DIESEL	£81,230.17	£91,656.48	£73,595.68
ELECTRIC	£5,741.89	£7,566.18	£29,861.32
Large Van	£301,630.69	£382,204.70	£451,251.81
DIESEL	£301,630.69	£382,204.70	£423,340.53
ELECTRIC	£0.00	£0.00	£27,911.28

VEHICLE AND FUEL			
TYPE	21/22	22/23	23/24
Small 4x4	£208,105.55	£231,725.88	£285,599.07
DIESEL	£54,821.86	£45,706.05	£34,994.41
PLUGIN P	£153,283.69	£186,019.83	£250,604.66
Medium 4x4	£126,009.05	£114,164.04	£120,265.74
DIESEL	£126,009.05	£114,164.04	£120,265.74
Large 4x4	£898,377.91	£1,130,997.98	£1,243,435.82
DIESEL	£898,377.91	£1,130,997.98	£1,243,435.82
HGV	£264,550.99	£284,979.48	£295,272.97
DIESEL	£264,550.99	£284,979.48	£295,272.97
Grand Total	£2,083,961.07	£2,442,789.40	£2,729,566.24

The Environment Agency does not purchase customised wheel lug nuts. The ratio of staff to road vehicles in the Environment Agency, for the last three financial years, is shown in the below table:

FINANCIAL YEAR	COMMERCIAL		RATIO	LEASE CARS		RATIO
	STAFF COUNT	VEHICLES		LEASE CARS	RATIO	
21/22	11,645	1,451	8.03	3,641	3.20	
22/23	12,539	1,415	8.86	3,229	3.88	
23/24	14,072	1,522	9.25	2,848	4.94	

■ Environmental Land Management Schemes

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[20401\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions his Department had with farmers before freezing the capital grant scheme.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Capital Grants scheme has been closed to new agreements following unprecedented demand this Autumn, which would use all the available funding. We are forecast to spend more on capital grants this year than ever before. This is only possible because we 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. We currently are

reviewing the Capital Grants offer to ensure funding goes further to improve outcomes for food security and nature conservation and will provide an update in early 2025.

Caroline Voaden:

[20721]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure (a) farmers and (b) landowners are aware of relevant funding initiatives under the ELM scheme which are available to help them comply with environmental objectives.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra regularly communicates and engages with farmers and landowners through a range of methods. Links to Defra's grants and schemes are available through <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-for-farmers>, a single webpage designed to make it easier for farmers and landowners to be aware of opportunities available. Regular updates explaining schemes and updating on changes are made through <https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/>, which includes a subscription function so users can receive e-mail updates when new posts are published. Defra ministers and engagement teams regularly meet with stakeholders and members of the agricultural community in order to share and discuss Defra's grants and schemes, including attending agricultural shows and other stakeholder events.

■ Flood Control

Claire Young:

[20507]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of increasing river dredging to help reduce flooding on agricultural land.

Emma Hardy:

Dredging and clearing channels is an important option for watercourse maintenance, where it is technically and cost effective, does not significantly increase flood risk for others and is environmentally acceptable.

For many locations, there are more effective ways to protect land and communities from floods as part of a catchment-based approach.

■ Flood Control: Aldershot

Alex Baker:

[20429]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has allocated funding to flood defences in Aldershot.

Emma Hardy:

To ensure we protect the country from the devastating impacts of flooding, we will invest £2.4 billion in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience, by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences.

The projects to receive Government funding in 2025/26 will be consented over the coming months in the usual way through Regional Flood and Coastal Committees with local representation.

■ Flood Control: Corby and East Northamptonshire

Lee Barron: [\[20493\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much the Environment Agency spent on flood defences in Corby and East Northamptonshire constituency in each year since 2019.

Emma Hardy:

To ensure we protect the country from the devastating impacts of flooding, we will invest £2.4 billion in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience, by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences.

The Environment Agency are best placed to provide detailed information about flood risk management in Corby and East Northamptonshire.

■ Flood Control: Finance

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[20025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2024 to Question 17203 on Flood Control, what the potential cost to the public purse is of the University of Hull and Humberside Fire and Rescue Service's proposal to establish a National Flood Resilience Centre; what percentage of his Department's forecast spending on flood resilience over the next decade that cost represents; and what proportion of his Department's spending on flood resilience goes on (a) training and (b) flood research.

Emma Hardy:

Departmental budgets are set through the Spending Review Process. We therefore do not know budget allocations for the next decade. Budgets are then allocated to Departmental activities.

To protect the country from the devastating impacts of flooding, we will invest £2.4 billion in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience, by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences.

The Government is aware of the University of Hull and Humberside Fire and Rescue Service proposal for a National Flood Resilience Centre, but there are no current plans to fund this from Defra. Defra understands the funding model has not been finalised.

Training on flood resilience undertaken by different teams and composes many different activities. It is not possible to disaggregate the proportion of the Department's spending on flood resilience that goes on training.

Flood research and development is funded through separate finance streams to Flood Resilience. It is therefore not appropriate to consider part of the Flood Resilience budget as being allocated to research.

Defra funding for Research and Development projects is declared publicly on Science Search: [Science Search](#).

Helen Morgan: **[20325]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the methodology used to decide which areas are eligible for funding under the Frequently Flooded Allowance.

Helen Morgan: **[20326]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has produced an impact assessment for projects funded by the Frequently Flooded Allowance.

Emma Hardy:

This Government is investing £2.4bn in 2024/25-2025/26 to improve flood resilience. The projects to receive Government funding in 2025/26 will be consented over the coming months in the usual way through Regional Flood and Coastal Committees with local representation.

We will consult in the new year on a review of the formula that allocates flood defence funding to ensure the challenges facing businesses and rural and coastal communities are adequately taken into account.

The process used to allocate funding to floods projects in the investment programme follows a consistent approach that aims to reduce flood risk and secure benefits. The approach follows Green Book guidance on value for money.

■ Flood Control: Hampshire

Alex Baker: **[20430]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department plans to take to help reduce the risk of flooding in Hampshire.

Emma Hardy:

To ensure we protect the country from the devastating impacts of flooding, we will invest £2.4 billion in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience, by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences.

The Environment Agency, Hampshire County Council and the Southern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee have jointly funded a Property Flood Resilience programme to help small communities across Hampshire become more flood-resilient.

■ Flood Control: Leicester

Shivani Raja:

[\[18713\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) provide funding for flood defence infrastructure, (b) help tackle the impact of climate change and (c) otherwise mitigate flood risks in Leicester.

Emma Hardy:

This Government is investing £2.4 billion over this year and next year to improve flood resilience by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences. Climate change projections are built into the design of new flood defences to make sure they are fit for the future.

The £8 million Leicester Conveyance Flood Risk Management Scheme was completed in 2019 to reduce the flood risk to over 2000 properties in Leicester. Flood Risk Management Authorities continue to work in partnership to identify further opportunities to reduce flood risk in Leicester and support communities to become more resilient to flooding in the future.

■ Flood Control: North Shropshire

Helen Morgan:

[\[20322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to protect properties in North Shropshire constituency against surface water flooding.

Emma Hardy:

To ensure we protect the country from the devastating impacts of flooding, we will invest £2.4 billion in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience, by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences.

The Environment Agency has strategic overview for all flood risk in England, however, it is for Lead Local Flood Authorities to develop local interventions to reduce surface water flood risk for communities.

The Environment Agency continues to work closely with Shropshire Council, who are the Lead Local Flood Authority on North Shropshire.

■ Floods: North Yorkshire

Tom Gordon:

[\[19466\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many incidents of flooding have been reported in (a) Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency and (b) North Yorkshire in the last 12 months.

Emma Hardy:

The Government inherited flood assets in their worst condition on record following years of underinvestment by the previous Government – 92.1% of the Environment Agency's 38,000 high consequence assets are currently at required condition

Lead Local Flood Authorities undertake formal investigations after significant floods and produce Section 19 reports, which include the number of properties affected. Not all floods require a Section 19 investigation. Criteria for investigation include the number of properties internally flooded, nature of flooding, frequency of flooding, and critical infrastructure affected.

Over the last year, there have been three periods when areas of North Yorkshire have experienced significant or prolonged flooding, including one in Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency. North Yorkshire Council has 125 recorded reports of flooding since January 2024, over 50 of those in Knaresborough. Knaresborough experienced significant surface water flooding in May 2024, with over 50 homes and businesses affected.

Last winter, York and parts of North Yorkshire were affected by continued high river levels following prolonged wet weather and storms. Although widespread flooding was largely avoided, lower lying areas and communities were impacted. Storm Darragh recently affected communities in Derwent and Rye catchments in North Yorkshire, with 30-40 properties flooded. Villages such as Kirkby Mills, Kirkbymoorside and Marton were affected.

■ **Fly-tipping: Aldershot**

Alex Baker:

[20428]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent steps he has taken to help tackle illegal waste in Aldershot constituency.

Mary Creagh:

The Government is committed to tackling waste crime, which is a blight on our local communities and the environment and damages legitimate businesses. My department is considering what further measures to pursue to tackle waste crime, including regulatory reform.

The Environment Agency assesses all reports of suspected waste crime. All information and any intelligence is recorded and used to target resources where the offending poses the greatest risk and harm to people and the environment. The Environment Agency do not currently have any active high risk illegal waste sites recorded in the Aldershot constituency. Due to concerns about ongoing criminal activity in the area, a number of vulnerable landowners in the constituency have been contacted proactively to reduce the risk of thousands of tonnes of waste being illegally deposited on their land. Waste crime is borderless, those carrying waste have been stopped on multi-agency days of action in Hampshire and neighbouring Surrey to ensure they are compliant with the law.

■ Food Supply

Chi Onwurah:

[\[19688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will have discussions with the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology on the potential for joint working on the proposed food strategy.

Daniel Zeichner:

The issues the food sector faces cut across the work of many Departments, and also of Devolved Governments. Development of the strategy will be led by Defra, but this work will require a whole-of-government effort with involvement from several other Government departments, including the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology.

■ Food: Labelling

Gareth Snell:

[\[20692\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to his Department's consultation entitled Fairer food labelling, which closed on 7 May 2024, when he plans to respond to that consultation; and whether he plans to bring forward legislative proposals to mandate method-of-production welfare labelling for (a) pork, (b) chicken and (c) eggs.

Daniel Zeichner:

A public consultation on fairer food labelling was undertaken between March and May 2024 by the previous Government. This sought views on proposals to improve and extend current mandatory method of production labelling. The consultation also sought views on whether new rules should be introduced on country-of-origin labelling. We are now carefully considering all responses before deciding on next steps and will respond to this consultation in due course.

■ Food: Reserves

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[20457\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if his Department will publish information on food stock-to-consumption ratios in the UK.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra publishes a related measure, production to supply ratio, for a range of produce in its Agriculture in the UK publication. The same publication includes stock changes in its supply and use tables for cereals. The department's UK Food Security Report 2024 also includes global stock to consumption ratios for a range of agricultural commodities.

■ Furs: Imports and Sales**Shivani Raja:** [\[18716\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of banning the import and sale of fur products on (a) businesses and (b) consumers in Leicester.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra is continuing to build the evidence base on the fur sector in Great Britain. This includes commissioning our expert Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) to produce a report on what constitutes responsible sourcing of fur. The AWC report will add to our understanding of the fur industry and help inform our next steps.

■ Houseboats**John McDonnell:** [\[19226\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he has taken to help ensure that the children of the families of boat dwellers without a permanent mooring are able to reasonably achieve daily access to education without the risk of (a) their boat licence being shortened or withdrawn for remaining too close to one place in term time, (b) seizure of their boat by the Canal and River Trust and (c) similar enforcement action by other navigation authorities.

Emma Hardy:

Navigation authorities are responsible for operational matters on their waterways, and that boaters using navigable waterways are required to comply with the terms of their licences for the benefit of all waterway users. The Canal and River Trust has provided assurances that appropriate enforcement action on its waterways is only used as a last resort in response to persistent non-compliance, to ensure fairness to all boaters. Those with children who choose to live on a boat without a permanent mooring are responsible for ensuring they have access to education; the Trust provides reasonable adjustments for anyone who qualifies under the Equalities & Human Rights Act.

■ Housing: Sewers**Helen Maguire:** [\[20121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Communities, Housing and Local Government on the potential impact of targets for newly-built homes on the capacity of smaller sewage pumping stations.

Emma Hardy:

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a range of issues, and Cabinet discussions are considered confidential. The Government recognises the importance of having a robust drainage system both now and for future demand and expects water companies to plan their infrastructure appropriately to meet new growth.

As part of the Environment Act 2021, water companies in England are required to produce Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMPs). DWMPs set out how a water company intends to improve their drainage and wastewater systems over the next 25 years, accounting for factors including growing population and changing environmental circumstances. These plans will help sewerage companies to fully assess the capacity of the wastewater network and develop collaborative solutions to current problems and future issues.

■ Hunting

Jayne Kirkham: [\[20402\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of (a) hunting with hounds and (b) trail hunting on rural communities.

Mary Creagh:

This is a devolved matter with regard to Scotland and Northern Ireland; hunting with dogs is a reserved matter with respect to Wales and therefore, the information provided relates to England and Wales only.

The Government is committed to banning trail hunting as part of a wider drive to introduce ambitious plans to improve animal welfare. Work to determine the best approach for doing so is ongoing and, to date, no assessment has been made on either the impact of hunting with hounds or trail hunting on rural communities.

■ Imports: Carbon Emissions

Nick Timothy: [\[19976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate his Department has made of UK carbon emissions from imports from (a) China and (b) the rest of the world in each year since 2010.

Emma Hardy:

Information about the Carbon footprint for the UK is published here : [Carbon footprint for the UK and England to 2021 - GOV.UK](#)

Data is available up to 2021.

The total carbon footprint now includes the seven main Greenhouse Gases comprising: CO₂, Methane (CH₄), Nitrous oxide (N₂O), Hydro-fluorocarbons (HFC), Perfluorocarbons (PFC), Nitrogen trifluoride (NF₃) and Sulphur hexafluoride (SF₆).

We do not hold information on total UK emissions but can provide those associated with consumption. UK consumption emission figures are provided in the table below.

Table 1: Breakdown of UK consumption emissions by region of import 2010 to 2021, million tonnes CO₂ equivalent, UK

YEAR	IMPORTS FROM EUROPE	IMPORTS FROM CHINA	IMPORTS FROM USA	IMPORTS FROM RoW
2010	87	54	25	170
2011	87	56	26	177
2012	91	54	26	190
2013	93	54	24	188
2014	96	63	26	181
2015	103	59	24	176
2016	102	49	21	148
2017	112	41	16	153
2018	119	41	18	163
2019	118	41	19	158
2020	104	41	17	149
2021	128	50	21	182

■ Incinerators

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[18087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of existing waste incineration facilities for the next five years.

Mary Creagh:

The Government is committed to transitioning to a circular economy, which will support economic growth, deliver green jobs, promote efficient and productive use of resources, minimise negative environmental impacts and help us accelerate to Net Zero. There will however still be a need for the safe and sanitary management of residual waste. In accordance with the Waste Hierarchy, sending residual waste that cannot currently be prevented, prepared for reuse, or recycled to Energy from Waste plants is preferable to disposal in landfill. We are clear however that we do not support incineration overcapacity.

Before the end of this year, the Government will publish an analysis of residual waste treatment capacity, including waste incineration, in England setting out our future capacity needs to inform future policy directions.

■ Inland Waterways

John McDonnell:

[\[19225\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether (a) he and (b) the Transport Infrastructure Planning Unit has had recent discussions with the Canal and River Trust on a proposal for (i) an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 and (ii) other legislative proposals on the operation of inland waterways.

Emma Hardy:

Defra officials meet regularly with Canal and River Trust senior management to discuss a range of issues. The Trust has recently announced the formation of an independent Commission to review the legal framework around boat licensing so that it reflects the changes in use of the network over the past 30 years, within which potential legislative reforms and/or operational changes to the Trust's boat licensing activities may be considered. The review will take place in 2025 and will inform any decision by the Trust to pursue a potential Order under the Transport and Works Act 1992.

■ Internal Drainage Boards: Finance

Robbie Moore:

[\[18677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the oral contribution of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs during the oral question on Flood Resilience of 14 November 2024, Official Report, column 889, and pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 16251 on Internal Drainage Boards: Finance, whether the (a) allocation of a further £50 million to internal drainage boards and (b) provision of a one-off £75 million IDB Fund constitute separate funding streams; and how much his Department has (i) allocated and (ii) disbursed to internal drainage boards in financial year 2024-25.

Emma Hardy:

The one-off £75 million Internal Drainage Board (IDB) Fund will accelerate IDBs' recovery from the winter 2023-24 storms and provide opportunities to modernise and upgrade assets. This funding will support greater resilience for farmers and rural communities in the long term.

To date, the Environment Agency has allocated £54.62 million and has disbursed £30.4 million, with the rest of the 2024-25 funding on track to be disbursed by the end of March 2025.

■ Job Security: Rural Areas

Jim Shannon:

[\[19295\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of job security in rural areas.

Daniel Zeichner:

Rural policy is a devolved matter, and the information provided therefore relates to England only.

The UK Government is committed to improving the quality of life for people living and working in rural areas. To achieve this, we are ensuring that the needs of people and businesses in rural areas are at the heart of policymaking including in the government's economic growth agenda.

Defra has a team dedicated to developing the evidence base on rural areas. It publishes the [Statistical Digest for Rural England](#) to provide up-to-date analysis across a wide range of subjects including information on employment and redundancy rates in rural areas.

In Q2 2024, the percentage of working-age people (16-64) in employment was 79.1% in Rural areas and 73.9% in Urban areas.

Redundancy rates in England have fluctuated over time, although both Rural and Urban areas have shown an overall decrease in redundancies over the period 2007 to 2024 (falls of 2.5 and 2.3 redundancies per 1,000 employees respectively). In Q2 2024 redundancy rates were lower in Rural areas than in Urban areas, at 3.8 and 4.0 redundancies per 1,000 employees respectively.

Motor Vehicles: Aldershot**Alex Baker:**[\[20439\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to prevent off-road vehicles used for recreational purposes from causing damage to (a) farmland and (b) the countryside in Aldershot constituency.

Mary Creagh:

While many users make use of these rights in a responsible way, the Government is aware of damage and disturbance caused by excessive use of off-road motor vehicles on highways where such activities are legal, such as byways open to all traffic and on other unsealed roads which carry motor vehicle rights, often referred to as 'green lanes'. Motor vehicle use on green lanes can damage the surface and reduce enjoyment of the route by other users. Defra consulted on banning vehicles from green lanes as part of the 2019 Landscapes Review, but a legislative ban to remove vehicular rights was not supported. Defra believes that the current Traffic Regulation Order process is legally robust enough to protect green lanes with carefully targeted local action to protect sensitive areas, while allowing vehicle users to responsibly enjoy the countryside.

It is local authorities' responsibility to monitor and repair public rights of way, which includes green lanes.

■ National Landscapes: Environment Protection

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[19824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 1 November 2024 to Question 11126 on National Landscapes: Environment Protection, what steps the Government is taking to make National Landscapes wilder and greener.

Mary Creagh:

This Government is committed to making Protected Landscapes greener, wilder and more accessible. We have just announced our intent to strengthen legislation, when parliamentary time allows, and this will form part of a wider package of tools and resourcing. We look forward to developing this package with our partners. We are also publishing new guidance for relevant authorities to make expectations clear in relation to their duty to seek to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes.

■ Nature Conservation

Ellie Chowns:

[\[19560\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to publish his Department's consultation on a broader definition of irreplaceable habitat.

Ellie Chowns:

[\[19561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of including priority grassland habitats in the list of Irreplaceable Habitats for biodiversity net gain.

Ellie Chowns:

[\[19930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make it his policy to include ice age ponds in the list of Irreplaceable Habitats for biodiversity net gain.

Mary Creagh:

Irreplaceable habitat includes some of England's most ecologically valuable terrestrial and intertidal habitats.

The list of irreplaceable habitats in the biodiversity net gain regulations broadly mirrors the non-exhaustive list of examples of irreplaceable habitat in the National Planning Policy Framework. Defra will provide an update on irreplaceable habitat in due course.

In the meantime, we are gathering evidence to inform whether an updated list would offer welcome additional protection to these important habitats, whilst aligning with wider Government objectives for house building and growth.

■ Nature Conservation: EU Law

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[19349\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans he has to (a) amend and (b) repeal assimilated EU law on the Habitats Directive on (i) newts and (ii) other protected species.

Mary Creagh:

This is a devolved matter, and the information provided therefore relates to England only.

As the Prime Minister said in his speech on 5 December the Government will streamline development processes to meet new and ambitious targets to build 1.5 million homes and advance 150 major infrastructure projects.

The Government will also use the Planning and Infrastructure Bill to establish a more efficient and effective way for obligations related to our most important sites and species to be discharged at a scale that has the greatest environmental benefits.

The Government has committed to only act in legislation where we can confirm to Parliament that the steps we are taking will deliver positive environmental outcomes. Necessary amendments may be made to assimilated EU law on the Habitats Directive to secure the operability of the proposed new approach.

■ Neonicotinoids

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[20513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to reintroduce the use of neonicotinoid as a pesticide.

Emma Hardy:

This Government is clear that we will change existing policies to end the use of neonicotinoid pesticides that threaten bees and other vital pollinators.

■ Packaging: Recycling

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[19028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of costs associated with extended producer responsibility on small businesses.

Mary Creagh:

We have made a full assessment of the impacts that implementing packaging extended producer responsibility will have. This includes assessment of the impacts on small businesses, which can be found in Section 8 of the impact assessment: [The Producer Responsibility Obligations \(Packaging and Packaging Waste\) Regulations 2024](#).

Packaging extended producer responsibility cost obligations will only apply to large producers with a turnover over £2 million and who place more than 50 tonnes of

packaging on the market. This threshold exempts around 70% of producers from paying these fees. Any large producers who supply the exempt producers with empty packaging will pay the fees associated with that packaging.

■ **Persistent Organic Pollutants (Amendment) Regulations 2024**

Clive Jones:

[\[20332\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish an impact assessment of the Persistent Organic Pollutants (Amendment) Regulations on the automotive industry.

Emma Hardy:

Defra officials are in the process of engaging with the automotive industry in relation to the impacts of the Persistent Organic Pollutants (Amendment) Regulation 2024. Details of any further steps will be published in due course.

■ **Pet Travel Scheme: Cats**

Steve Darling:

[\[20055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many cats travelled to the UK under the Pet Travel Scheme in each month of (a) 2023 and (b) 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

MONTH	2023	2024
Jan	2,750	3,207
Feb	1,777	1,860
Mar	2,024	2,357
Apr	2,219	2,700
May	2,762	2,029
Jun	5,638	3,015
Jul	2,618	2,692
Aug	3,974	3,828
Sep	7,634	2,094
Oct	759	3,154
Nov	2,314	
Dec	3,814	
Total	38,283	26,936

The data regarding the Pet Travel Scheme covers pets entering Great Britain and is based on information provided by checkers employed by approved carriers of pet animals. Please be aware that this is subject to change as we often receive throughput returns from carriers months later.

Steve Darling: [\[20056\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many cats travelled to the UK under the Pet Travel Scheme via (a) sea, (b) tunnel and (c) air in 2023 and 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

MEANS OF TRANSPORT	JANUARY - DECEMBER 2023	JANUARY - OCTOBER 2024
Air	8,786	7,712
Sea	16,237	8,137
Tunnel	13,260	11,087
Grand Total	38,283	26,936

The data regarding the Pet Travel Scheme covers pets entering Great Britain and is based on information provided by checkers employed by approved carriers of pet animals. Please be aware that this is subject to change as we often receive throughput returns from carriers months later.

■ Pet Travel Scheme: Dogs

Steve Darling: [\[19836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many dogs travelled to the UK under the Pet Travel Scheme by (a) sea, (b) tunnel and (c) air in each of the last 12 months.

Daniel Zeichner:

MEANS OF TRANSPORT	NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023	JANUARY – OCTOBER 2024
Air	2131	13662
Sea	12097	105568
Tunnel	39262	160014
Total	53490	279244

The data regarding the Pet Travel Scheme covers pets entering Great Britain and is based on information received to date, provided by checkers employed by approved carriers of pet animals. Please be aware that this is subject to change as additional throughput returns from carriers may be received.

Steve Darling: [\[20054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many dogs travelled to the UK under the Pet Travel Scheme in each month of 2023.

Daniel Zeichner:

MONTH	TOTAL
January	18,840
February	14,838
March	15,790
April	24,722
May	20,738
June	21,633
July	31,068
August	51,913
September	29,096
October	6,581
November	16,779
December	36,711
Total	288,709

The data regarding the Pet Travel Scheme covers pets entering Great Britain and is based on information provided by checkers employed by approved carriers of pet animals. Please be aware that this is subject to change as we often receive throughput returns from carriers months later.

■ **Pets: Electronic Training Aids**

Ruth Jones: [\[19769\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has consulted (a) canine and feline behaviourists, (b) manufacturers of

electronic shock collars and (c) farming bodies on the use of electronic shock collars on dogs and cats in England.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra has previously engaged with a wide range of stakeholders in relation to electric shock collars, including via a public consultation in 2018, direct engagement across the sector, and consideration of relevant academic research.

We will be considering available evidence around the use of hand-controlled e-collars and their effects on the welfare of animals.

■ **Plants: Imports**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[18885\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many plant health inspection staff were employed at UK Border Control Posts in (a) England and (b) Wales as of 10 December 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) has 162 plant health inspectors in post covering England and Wales.

This number includes all inspectors working at border control points (BCPs), inspection centres and control points. This number cannot be broken down to specify the number of inspectors specifically at BCPs because inspectors often cover multiple sites. The inspectors cover all work for the EU, and the rest of the world including work at ports and inland.

The number does not include new inspectors which APHA is currently onboarding or who are currently at the job offer stage of recruitment.

■ **Plastics: Waste**

Joe Morris:

[\[18723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the use of single-use plastic.

Mary Creagh:

This Government is committed to moving to a circular economy for plastics - a future where we keep our resources in use for longer; waste is reduced; we accelerate the path to net zero, we see investment in critical infrastructure and green jobs; our economy prospers; and nature thrives. This is why we have a number of restrictions on unnecessary single use plastic products, and why it is important that any alternatives to conventional plastics consider the waste hierarchy and support a circular economy for plastics.

The Government is currently considering the actions that can be taken to address the challenges associated with single-use plastic products. We will continue to review the latest evidence on problematic products and/or materials to take a systematic

approach, in line with circular economy principles, to reduce the use of unnecessary single-use plastic products and encourage reuse solutions.

■ **Processed Food and Slaughterhouses**

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[19815\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of his Department collecting information on how many (a) abattoirs and (b) food processing plants in (i) England and (ii) the UK are family-owned businesses.

Daniel Zeichner:

There are 232 approved Food Standards Agency (FSA) abattoirs across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland and the FSA records which are sole traders, partnerships, and incorporated companies.

The majority of food processing plants are overseen by local authorities, and while their trading names are published by the FSA and Food Standards Scotland, this does not give an indication of the makeup of ownership.

Defra remains focused on supporting the farming, meat and food processing sectors, and the collection of this level of detail is not required or necessary to facilitate the delivery of any Official Controls.

■ **Proteins: Novel Foods**

Chi Onwurah:

[\[19689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the National Food Strategy will include the role of (a) alternative proteins and (b) engineering biology in the food supply.

Daniel Zeichner:

Our ambitious food strategy will set and deliver clear long-term outcomes that create a healthier, fairer, and more resilient food system, and in doing so will consider elements of the food system that can contribute towards those outcomes.

■ **Quarries: Air Pollution**

Alberto Costa:

[\[20016\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) amending the Quarry Regulations 1999 to ensure that (i) levels of PM10 and PM2.5 particulate emissions in quarries are (A) monitored and (B) controlled and (ii) risk assessments in relation to those particulate emissions are undertaken and (b) directing the Health and Safety Executive to introduce evidence-based standards for levels of air quality in quarries.

Emma Hardy:

Under The Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations, environmental permits for quarries issued by local authorities must already include

emission limit values, monitoring requirements and other controls for particulate matter and other air pollutants.

[The Quarries Regulations 1999](#) require operators of quarries to take necessary measures to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the quarry and its plant are designed, constructed, equipped, commissioned, operated and maintained in such a way that persons at work can perform the work assigned to them without endangering their own health and safety or the health and safety of others. The duty holder for the quarry is required to ensure that risks and exposure to harmful substances are adequately controlled.

■ Rodenticides: Safety

David Chadwick:

[20106]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the findings on trends in the level of rat poison found in birds of prey in the report by Wild Justice entitled The Rodenticide Stewardship Scheme, published on 10 November 2024, whether his Department is taking steps to help ensure that non-target species are not harmed by rat poison.

Mary Creagh:

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) rather than Defra has responsibility for regulating rodenticides/rat poisons. Given the potential risks posed to the environment by rodenticides, they are subject to strict regulation.

Where wild birds of prey or any non-target species of wildlife are killed illegally by rat poison the full force of the law should apply to proven perpetrators of the crime. Defra is a principal funder of the National Wildlife Crime Unit which helps prevent and detect illegal poisoning by obtaining and disseminating intelligence and directly assisting law enforcers in their investigations. Defra also provides funding for England's Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme which determines the underlying cause of death of wildlife where illegal use of pesticides or rodenticides/rat poison is suspected.

To help ensure that non-target species are not harmed by rat poison, Defra would further advise anyone seeking to lawfully manage rodents to consider the most humane method of control and apply the least severe solution. There are a range of effective, alternative methods for successful rodent management including elimination of harbourage, food and water. The use of spring traps and live capture traps are also inexpensive, reusable and widely available.

■ Sewage

Rupert Lowe:

[20080]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department uses sewage to estimate population changes.

Emma Hardy:

Defra does not routinely measure population changes and therefore does not use sewage monitoring for this purpose.

Sewerage undertakers account for population changes in their business planning by using local Government growth plans and population data supplied by the Office of National Statistics.

Sewerage undertakers use projections of population growth at a sewerage catchment level to assess future capacity needs within their Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMP). Since 1 September 2024, sewerage undertakers in England are required to prepare, publish and maintain a DWMP. The DWMP is a key evidence base to inform future capacity needs in the sewerage undertakers' business plans.

■ Sewage: Aldershot**Alex Baker:**[\[20435\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help reduce sewage discharges in Aldershot constituency.

Emma Hardy:

For too long, water companies have discharged record levels of sewage into our rivers, lakes and seas.

That is why we are placing water companies under special measures through the Water (Special Measures) Bill, which will strengthen regulation, including delivering new powers to ban the payment of bonuses for polluting water bosses and bringing criminal charges against persistent law breakers.

We are also carrying out a full review of the water sector to shape further legislation that will transform how our water system works and clean up rivers, lakes and seas for good.

The Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) will continue to drive investment and improvement at a range of Thames Water Sewage Treatment Works and Storm Overflows. Several schemes were funded between 2020-2025 in the Aldershot constituency, including to monitor spills at storm tanks and to monitor the flow at Sewage Treatment Works from the inlet to full treatment.

The final determination for the next Price Review by Ofwat, due on the 19 December, will confirm additional investment planned by Thames Water for 2025-2030 to reduce pollution and improve storm overflows.

■ Sewage: Cornwall**Ben Maguire:**[\[19597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Bassetts Cove.

Ben Maguire: [\[19598\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Bedruthan Steps Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[19599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Black Cliff Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[19600\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Chapel Porth Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[19601\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Constantine Bay.

Ben Maguire: [\[19602\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Crantock Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[19603\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Fishing Cove.

Ben Maguire: [\[19604\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Fistril Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[19605\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Fox Cove.

Ben Maguire: [\[19606\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Godrevy Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[19607\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Great Western Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[19608\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Greenbank Cove.

Ben Maguire: [\[19609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Gwithian Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[19610\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Harbour Cove.

Ben Maguire: [\[19611\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Harlyn Bay.

Emma Hardy:

Cleaning up our rivers, lakes and seas is a top Government priority.

The Water (Special Measures) Bill will deliver on the government's commitment to put water companies under special measures. It will drive meaningful improvements in the performance and culture of the water industry as a first important step in enabling wider, transformative change across the water sector.

On 23 October, the Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Welsh Government, launched an Independent Commission on the water sector regulatory system, to fundamentally transform how our water system works and clean up our rivers, lakes and seas for good.

With respect to the areas mentioned, data does not show widespread releases of raw sewage from the sites raised; pollution incident reports from beach users are very low and water quality data remains consistently high. All the designated bathing waters raised are classified as Excellent or Good

South West Water's plans for Asset Management Period 8 (covering 2025-2030), include improvements to sewage treatment infrastructure and storm overflows in the area to further reduce pollution in the area.

Ben Maguire: [\[20358\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Hawkers Cove.

Ben Maguire: [\[20359\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Mawgan Porth Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[20360\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Mother Iveys Bay.

Ben Maguire: [\[20361\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Newtrain Bay.

Ben Maguire: [\[20362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Pentire Steps Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[20363\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Porth Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[20364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Porthcothan Bay.

Ben Maguire: [\[20365\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Porthtowan Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[20366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Rock Beach.

Ben Maguire: [\[20367\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at St George's Cove.

Ben Maguire: [\[20368\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Trevone Bay.

Ben Maguire: [\[20369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Treyarnon Bay.

Ben Maguire: [\[20370\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Watergate Bay.

Ben Maguire: [\[20372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle and (b) prevent sewage dumping at Whipsiderry Beach.

Emma Hardy:

Cleaning up our rivers, lakes and seas is a top Government priority.

The Water (Special Measures) Bill will deliver on the government's commitment to put water companies under special measures. It will drive meaningful improvements in the performance and culture of the water industry as a first important step in enabling wider, transformative change across the water sector.

On 23 October, the Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Welsh Government, launched an Independent Commission on the water sector regulatory system, to fundamentally transform how our water system works and clean up our rivers, lakes and seas for good.

With respect to the areas mentioned, data does not show widespread releases of raw sewage from the sites raised; pollution incident reports from beach users are very low and water quality data remains consistently high. All the designated bathing waters raised are classified as Excellent or Good

South West Water's plans for Asset Management Period 8 (covering 2025-2030), include improvements to sewage treatment infrastructure and storm overflows in the area to further reduce pollution in the area.

■ Sewage: Pollution Control

Zöe Franklin:

[\[20483\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to tackle unlawful discharges of sewage by water companies into waterways in Surrey.

Emma Hardy:

For too long, water companies have discharged record levels of sewage into our rivers, lakes and seas.

That is why we are placing water companies under special measures through the Water (Special Measures) Bill, which will strengthen regulation, including delivering new powers to ban the payment of bonuses for polluting water bosses and bringing criminal charges against persistent law breakers.

We are also carrying out a full review of the water sector to shape further legislation that will transform how our water system works and clean up rivers, lakes and seas for good.

The Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) will continue to drive investment and improvement at a range of Thames Water Sewage Treatment Works and Storm Overflows across Surrey. Several schemes were funded in WINEP 2020-25 in the Guildford constituency including to monitor sewage spills at storm tanks and to tighten environmental permit limits for phosphorous.

The final determination for the next Price Review by Ofwat, due on the 19 December, will confirm additional investment planned by Thames Water for 2025-2030 to reduce phosphorus levels and improve storm overflows in Surrey.

■ Sugar Beet: Disease Control

Helen Maguire:

[\[20123\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what support his Department provides farmers to (a) research and (b) implement natural defences to aphids instead of neonicotinoid pesticides.

Emma Hardy:

The UK Government has provided research funding through the Farming Futures Fund to look at the potential for precision breeding in producing virus-resistant varieties of sugar beet. Separately, the British Beet Research Organisation is operating an industry-funded programme researching alternative methods to protect sugar beet crops.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is at the heart of our approach to minimise the risks associated with pesticides. Four IPM actions are available within the Sustainable Farming Incentive. Farmers are paid to complete an assessment and produce an IPM plan; establish and maintain flower-rich grass margins, blocks, or in-field strips; establish a companion crop and to move towards pesticide-free farming.

■ Sugar Beet: Neonicotinoids

Mr Toby Perkins:

[\[18922\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate his Department has made of the levels of yellow virus on sugar beet; and if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the use of Cruiser SB on sugar beet on wildlife.

Emma Hardy:

Viruses transmitted by aphids can severely reduce yields of sugar beet crops. The degree of threat varies from location to location and from year to year. Decisions on emergency authorisation applications must be taken in line with legal requirements. In making these decisions, Ministers will take full account of the available evidence and expert advice.

■ Sustainable Farming Incentive

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[19401\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of temporarily closing the Sustainable Farming Incentive schemes to new applications on farmers.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government's commitment to British farmers, including family farms, remains steadfast. We will always champion British farming to boost rural economic growth, strengthen food security and improve the environment.

In the Budget announced last month, the Government committed £5 billion to the farming budget over two years, including more money than ever for sustainable food production: £1.8 billion for environmental land management schemes in 2025/26.

This enables us to keep momentum on the path to a more resilient and sustainable farming sector.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) is open to farmers so they make their businesses more sustainable and resilient. We will continue to optimise it and our other farming schemes, so they work efficiently for all farmers, food security and the environment, especially for those that are too often ignored such as small, grassland, upland and tenanted farms.

■ Sustainable Farming Incentive: Aldershot

Alex Baker: [\[20431\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many and what proportion of farms in Aldershot constituency are part of the Sustainable Farming Incentive.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Sustainable Farming Incentive has a rolling application window and as of 17 November there are currently no Farm Businesses with a Sustainable Farming Incentive agreement in the Aldershot constituency.

* The above is based on the registered address for the business postcode

Note: *The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) only holds data for the number of farms that are registered with the RPA and have SFI agreement.

■ Tree Planting: Aldershot

Alex Baker: [\[20440\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what data his Department holds on the number of trees that have been planted in Aldershot constituency since 2010.

Mary Creagh:

The Forestry Commission publishes statistics on new planting of woodland, and trees outside woodland, in England. These can be found in [Forestry Commission Key Performance Indicators](#). These statistics are reported for each financial year in thousands of hectares. The Government does not hold data for individual constituencies but continues to work with delivery partners across England to increase tree planting rates.

■ Waste Management

Lloyd Hatton: [\[18005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the Residual Waste Infrastructure Capacity Note will make an assessment of the adequacy of (a) incineration capacity and (b) potential feedstock availability in the light of (i) the statutory target to halve residual waste sent to either incineration or landfill per person by

2042, (ii) the non-combustible nature of some residual waste, and (iii) competing uses for the feedstock.

Mary Creagh:

This is a devolved matter, and the information provided therefore relates to England only.

The Government is committed to transitioning to a circular economy. As part of this we will consider the role of Energy from Waste, including waste incineration, in the context of circularity, economic growth, and reaching net zero.

Defra's analysis of municipal residual waste treatment infrastructure capacity, including exports, which we hope to publish shortly, sets out incineration capacity and municipal residual waste arisings in England, taking into account the implementation of the packaging reforms up to 2035. The analysis will also give consideration to the levels of residual waste in 2042, in context of the statutory residual waste target to effectively halve residual wastes. This analysis will support decision making relating to planning for new residual waste treatment infrastructure.

Regarding competing uses for the feedstock, the analysis considers all forms of treatment for municipal residual waste, including energy recovery, landfill and exports.

■ **Waste: Codes of Practice**

Joe Robertson:

[\[19918\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 19 November 2024, to Question HL2390, on Waste: Codes of Practice, when his Department plans to respond to the consultation on making the Code of Practice a statutory code.

Mary Creagh:

The Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse is already a statutory document, and Local Councils must have regard to it when carrying out their duty to keep relevant land clear of litter and refuse.

Separate guidance on enforcement was published in 2019 and attached to the Code of Practice but is not statutory. Under the previous Government a consultation was run on making this enforcement guidance statutory.

At this stage, the Government has not yet made an assessment of how it can further support local authorities to tackle litter. Any decisions or updates will be communicated in due course.

■ **Water Charges: Hampshire**

Alex Baker:

[\[20434\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the affordability of water bills for people in (a) Aldershot constituency and (b) Hampshire.

Emma Hardy:

As the independent economic regulator, Ofwat independently scrutinises water company business plans and ensure the prices water companies charge their customers are fair and proportionate. Ofwat published their final determinations for Price Review 2024 on 19 December, which sets company expenditure and customer bills for 2025-2030.

The Government is committed to taking action to address water poverty and help vulnerable customers with their water bills. All water companies, including South East Water and Southern Water, have measures in place for customers who struggle to pay for their water and wastewater services, including measures such as WaterSure, social tariffs, payment breaks and holidays, and debt management support.

Furthermore, we expect companies to hold themselves accountable for their public commitment to end water poverty by 2030 and will work with the sector to ensure appropriate measures are taken to this end.

■ Water Companies: Accountability**Shivani Raja:**[\[18715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to hold water companies accountable for financial mismanagement.

Emma Hardy:

Ofwat monitors the financial position of all water companies, taking action when needed to strengthen company's long-term financial resilience and producing an annual 'Monitoring Financial Resilience Report' to provide a publicly available assessment of the financial resilience of each water company.

Ofwat has also strengthened its powers to improve financial resilience, including stopping water companies paying dividends where financial resilience is compromised and preventing customers funding executive bonuses where companies do not meet performance expectations.

Furthermore, the Water (Special Measures) Bill will drive meaningful improvements in the performance and culture of the water industry as a first important step in enabling wider, transformative change across the water sector.

And finally, on 23 October, the Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Welsh Government, launched an Independent Commission on the water sector regulatory system. The commission aims to build consensus for a resilient and innovative water sector and a robust wider regulatory framework that will deliver long-term benefits and ultimately serve both customers and the environment.

■ Water: Pollution**Adam Dance:** [\[20547\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of levels of water pollution in Yeovil constituency.

Emma Hardy:

For too long, customers have been let down and water companies have discharged record levels of sewage into our rivers, lakes and seas.

That is why we are placing water companies under special measures through the Water (Special Measures) Bill, which will strengthen regulation, including delivering new powers to ban the payment of bonuses for polluting water bosses and bringing criminal charges against persistent law breakers.

On 23 October, the Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Welsh Government, launched an Independent Commission on the water sector regulatory system, to fundamentally transform how our water system works to put people and the environment first and clean up our rivers, lakes and seas for good.

To date this financial year the Environment Agency's Wessex Area (which covers Yeovil) has delivered over 200 water company industry inspections, as well as inspections of non-water company permitted discharges throughout Wessex. This risk-based inspection programme is strengthening oversight of companies.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Bangladesh: Hinduism****Bob Blackman:** [\[20599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of recent reports of the persecution of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

Catherine West:

The UK has a long-standing commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). We monitor human rights and FoRB closely in Bangladesh. We raise this issue with the Bangladeshi authorities. Our Bangladesh Collaborative, Accountable and Peaceful Politics programme promotes: the protection of civic and political space; collaboration; efforts to reduce corruption; and efforts to mitigate tensions that lead to violence. We are providing up to £27 million under this programme.

Bob Blackman: [\[20600\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent (a) meetings and (b) other discussions with his Bangladeshi

counterpart on the (a) arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das and (b) potential implications of that arrest for the rights of minority communities in that country.

Catherine West:

The UK is committed to promoting and protecting human rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). We monitor human rights in Bangladesh closely, including following student-led protests in Bangladesh. I understand the concerns about the arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das. In November, during my visit to Bangladesh, I discussed the importance of protecting religious minorities, including the Hindu community, with Chief Adviser Yunus. I underlined the UK government's commitment to religious freedom in Bangladesh. We will continue to engage with the Interim Government of Bangladesh on the importance of FoRB.

■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty**

James Cartlidge:

[\[20672\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of the statement made by the Prime Minister of Mauritius to the Mauritian Parliament on 17 December 2024.

Stephen Doughty:

Prime Minister Ramgoolam of Mauritius reiterated his willingness to conclude a deal with the UK in his statement of 17 December. We are confident that the agreement is in both sides' shared interests, and we will continue working with the new Mauritian government to finalise the deal.

■ **British Nationals Abroad: Carbon Monoxide**

Dr Al Pinkerton:

[\[20900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to improve the awareness of carbon monoxide poisoning risks among British tourists overseas.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We provide information and guidance in our Travel Advice on the issues most likely to be of relevance to British nationals visiting or living in each country/territory. In determining what we include in our Travel Advice we assess a range of factors, including drawing on local knowledge and monitoring trends in consular cases. The risk of carbon monoxide poisoning is currently covered in our Travel Advice pages for China and Nepal. In addition, two of our Travel Aware partners, RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) and the Safer Tourism Foundation, run campaigns and continue to develop messaging to alert travellers to the risks of carbon monoxide poisoning around the world. We regularly review the work we do with all our Travel Aware partners ensuring that they are highlighting appropriate issues to British travellers.

Dr Al Pinkerton:

[\[20903\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of integrating carbon monoxide risks into country-based travel advisories.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development (FCDO) travel advice remains under regular review to ensure it reflects our latest assessment of risks to British nationals. The risks of carbon monoxide poisoning is currently covered in our Travel Advice pages for China and Nepal. We aim to include information in our travel advice on the issues most likely to be of relevance to British nationals visiting or living in each country/territory. In determining what we include in our Travel Advice we assess a range of factors, including drawing on local knowledge and monitoring trends in consular cases.

■ **British Nationals Abroad: Detainees**

Wendy Morton:

[\[19318\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a strategy to tackle the detention of UK dual-nationals by foreign countries.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) assesses all requests for consular assistance in line with our public consular charter and broader consular and crisis strategy. This includes our assistance to British dual nationals, including those who are detained overseas. The FCDO seeks continuously to improve our processes and services to strengthen our support for British nationals abroad.

■ **Colombia: Peace Negotiations**

Katrina Murray:

[\[19571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking as UN Security Council penholder for the 2016 Colombian Peace Agreement to maintain international community's support for implementation of that country's peace accords.

Catherine West:

The UK has been a leading international advocate for Colombian efforts to implement the 2016 Peace Agreement. The UK acts as penholder for the Colombian peace process at the UN Security Council and supports the important work of the UN Verification Mission, whose mandate the UN Security Council renewed in October. Through the Integrated Security Fund (ISF), the UK has historically committed £80 million to support the implementation of the agreement. In partnership with UN agencies and civil society organisations, UK funding has supported rural development and reintegration programmes to strengthen the security of the communities in conflict affected areas. During her visit in November, Baroness

Chapman met Foreign Minister Rojas and emphasised the UK's support for the Colombian peace process and 2016 agreement at international forums.

■ Democratic Republic of the Congo: Peace Negotiations

Helen Maguire:

[\[20124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) progress towards a resolution, (b) support civilians and (c) work diplomatically with regional partners to secure peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is committed to supporting the Luanda process which aims to bring about sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and encourages continued engagement and delivery on commitments by all parties. The postponement of the tripartite summit on 15 December was disappointing and the UK has urged both parties to return to the negotiating table. In August and September, Lord Collins visited Angola, DRC and Rwanda where he met with their respective presidents and urged de-escalation. The UK is delivering a three-year £115 million humanitarian programme in the east of DRC, providing life-saving emergency assistance and increasing the resilience of crisis affected communities.

■ Development Aid

Sarah Hall:

[\[20887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen partnerships with (a) humanitarian organisations, (b) women-led organisations and (c) local civil society in the UK's development work.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Department has strong relationships with the main humanitarian agencies. The Foreign Secretary and I have met or spoken to the main UN humanitarian agencies and to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The work of grassroots women's rights organisations is critical to advancing gender equality. The UK has a growing number of partnerships with diverse women's rights organisations across the programme portfolio, complemented by diplomatic support to amplify voices and share platforms.

The FCDO recognises that stronger, more inclusive engagement with local civil society better empowers the communities it serves. We continue to modernise and improve our relationships. Our innovative programme 'Shifting the Power' is investing up to £60m into building the capacity of local Civil Society Organisations in Ghana, Zambia and Malawi.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Cost Effectiveness**Priti Patel:**[\[18362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what (a) productivity, (b) efficiencies and (c) savings he plans to make to meet the 2% target for departmental productivity, efficiencies and savings; how much of his budget for 2025/26 is in scope of this target; and what the cash level is of savings targeted.

Catherine West:

The Department's 25/26 2 percent productivity, efficiency and savings target applies to the non-ODA RDEL budget of £1,798 million (excluding funding ringfenced for a voluntary exit scheme and funds drawn down from prior year capital receipts). The core FCDO budget 2 percent target is £24 million, apportioned pro rata. The breakdown of how the FCDO will meet its target is not yet known as the budget setting process for 2025/26 is still in progress. However, the Department expects to achieve it through a combination of workforce savings, sustainability improvements to the global estate and the completion of IT programmes.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Media**John Cooper:**[\[20491\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Catherine West:

Since 5 July 2024, £1848 has been spent by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on media or voice training for junior Ministers.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:**[\[20186\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in his Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Catherine West:

The FCDO's UK Estate comprises five primary sites in the UK. Each building has a separated operational budget from which furniture and fittings are procured, either by planned projects or through reactive requests. Office refurbishments are completed as required and are not seen as specific to Ministerial requirements. We are unable to separate costs specifically for Ministerial offices within the deadline period due to the complexities created by separating expenditure. However, previously we have been able to confirm no specific works in Ministerial offices between 1 January 2022 and 31 December 2023.

■ Iraq: Women's Rights

Apsana Begum: [\[20274\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the amendments proposed to the Personal Status Law No. 188 of Iraq.

Apsana Begum: [\[20275\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Iraqi counterparts on the amendments proposed to the Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK is analysing the proposed amendments to Iraq's Personal Status Law and its implications for women and children's rights, which we note have not yet been passed through the House of Representatives. As we continue to privately engage with a range of Iraqi interlocutors to discuss this, including the Government of Iraq, we are emphasising the importance of any amendments' compatibility with Iraq's international obligations.

■ Israel: Arms Trade

Marsha De Cordova: [\[16767\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will conduct a further review with Cabinet colleagues into the compatibility of the Government's export licences to Israel with its obligations under international humanitarian law in the context of recent civilian deaths in (a) Lebanon, (b) the West Bank and (c) Gaza; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Cell undertakes regular assessments of Israel's commitment and capability to comply with International Humanitarian Law in order to meet our legal obligations under the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria (SELC). On 2 September, following a conclusion that there is a clear risk that items might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of IHL, we suspended relevant export licences to Israel for use in military operations in Gaza. This is subject to the specific measures set out to Parliament excluding exports to the global F-35 programme from the scope of the suspension. We continue to keep all export licences under careful review and licences may be suspended, amended or revoked.

■ Israel: F-35 Aircraft

Andy McDonald: [\[17111\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to take steps with his international counterparts to review Israel's access to the F-35 Global Supply Chain pool.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The F-35 programme remains under constant review by the F-35 Partner Nations. As set out in the Secretary of State for Business and Trade's statement of 2 September, it is not currently possible for the UK to suspend licensing of F-35 components for use by Israel without prejudicing the entire global F-35 programme, including its broader strategic role in NATO and Western support to Ukraine. Therefore, as announced to Parliament in his statement of 2 September, the Foreign Secretary advised, and the Secretary of State for Business and Trade agreed, that to ensure international peace and security it was necessary to take the specific measure of excluding exports to the F-35 programme from the scope of the suspension, but this exclusion should not in principle apply to licences for F-35 components which could be identified as going to Israel. Departing from the Strategic Export Licencing Criteria (SELC) to exclude F-35 licences from the scope of the suspension decision is consistent with HMG's published policy, which states that the application of the SELC is "without prejudice to the application to specific cases of specific measures as may be announced to Parliament from time to time".

■ Israel: International Humanitarian Law**Jon Trickett:**[\[20137\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to make an assessment of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law in the context of its recent military activity in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are monitoring the situation closely and continue to call on Israel to uphold their obligations to peace, stability, and security under international law. The Israeli government has stated that their presence in the Golan Heights buffer zone is defensive, limited and temporary - and we expect them to adhere to this commitment. It is longstanding UK policy that the Golan Heights are occupied territory, and we do not recognise Israel's annexation of them. We oppose the construction of illegal settlements.

■ Israel: Palestinians**David Taylor:**[\[19837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to convene an inaugural meeting in London to support civil society in Israel-Palestine in working towards a two-state solution.

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. In June 2024, the G7 Heads of Government included milestone new language in their communiqué, committing to "working together and with other international partners to closely coordinate and institutionalize our support for civil society peacebuilding efforts, ensuring that such efforts are part of a larger strategy to build the foundation necessary for a negotiated and lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace."

■ Kenya: Development Aid

Alex Sobel: [\[20706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much overseas aid funding his Department disbursed to (a) the Kenyan government and (b) Kenyan civil society organisations in financial year (i) 2022-2023 and (ii) 2023-2024.

Anneliese Dodds:

In 2022 and 2023, Kenya featured within the top ten recipient countries for UK bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA). In 2022/23 we spent £45 million of bilateral ODA in Kenya. In 2023/24, this figure increased to £48 million of bilateral ODA. Our assistance is not delivered directly to the Government of Kenya, but is disbursed to trusted partners and focused on refugees, women and girls, and climate-smart economic development.

■ Kosovo: Politics and Government

Wendy Morton: [\[19315\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in (a) Kosovo and (b) countries neighbouring Kosovo.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign Secretary and I have engaged with counterparts in Kosovo and neighbouring states in the Western Balkans several times in recent months. With Kosovo, the Foreign Secretary messaged President Osmani on 30 November, and I spoke to Prime Minister Kurti on 1 December, following the 29 November attack on critical infrastructure in northern Kosovo. I spoke to Serbian Foreign Minister Djuric on 1 December on the same subject. On 3 December I met Albanian Foreign Minister Hasani, Montenegrin Foreign Minister Ibrahimović and Macedonian Foreign Minister Mucunski at the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting, covering a range of bilateral and regional issues including security, growth and aspirations for Euro-Atlantic alignment. In October I also had substantive meetings with Foreign Minister Djuric and Foreign Minister Ibrahimović during the Berlin Process Foreign Ministers Meeting.

■ Middle East: Humanitarian Situation

Tom Morrison:

[\[18427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking in response to the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK remains committed to alleviating humanitarian suffering in the Middle East. A resolution to the conflict in Gaza has been a priority since day one of this government, and we continue to push for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, protection of civilians, and a rapid increase of aid into Gaza. The UK has now announced £112 million for the Occupied Palestinian Territories this financial year, including £41 million for UNRWA, providing vital services to civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, and to Palestinians in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. £4.5 million of joint UK-Kuwait funding announced in September will help UNICEF deliver lifesaving aid to almost 2.5 million people in Gaza and Yemen. And following the unprecedented events in Syria, on 9 December the Prime Minister announced that the UK is providing an additional £11 million of humanitarian aid for the most vulnerable in the country.

■ NATO Countries: Defence

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[20704\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps the Government is taking to help ensure NATO member states meet the target of spending 2% of GDP on defence.

Stephen Doughty:

At the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in December, the Foreign Secretary and I called on all Allies to boost their defence spending. This is a strategic imperative and it is why the UK is committed to setting out a pathway to 2.5% of GDP at a future fiscal event. The Government welcomes that as of 2024 two-thirds of NATO are spending at least 2% of GDP on defence. We will continue to make the case with our Allies on the need to invest more in our collective defence.

■ Nigeria: Foreign Relations

Chi Onwurah:

[\[19690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the UK-Nigeria joint communiqué, published on 6 November 2024, what support for humanitarian action is included in the new UK-Nigeria Strategic Partnership.

Anneliese Dodds:

In the Financial Year 2024/25, UK humanitarian support to Nigeria totalled £33.5 million in life-saving assistance and has reached approximately 1 million people with our Humanitarian and Resilience Programme (HARP), reducing mortality and increasing resilience for people with the most severe humanitarian needs. This

assistance is one part of our development partnership with Nigeria - an important component of the new UK-Nigeria Strategic Partnership.

■ **Nigeria: Vaccination**

Chi Onwurah: [\[19691\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to support the expansion of immunisation programs in northern Nigeria.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK supports immunisation programmes in Nigeria through GAVI (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation), the public-private global alliance that has helped vaccinate more than half the world's children against some of the world's deadliest diseases. The UK's contribution to GAVI is £1.65 billion over five years (2021-2025). Nigeria will receive over \$1 billion in funding from GAVI between 2018 and 2028, one of the largest of any country. The UK continues to work with the Government of Nigeria to strengthen health systems in Northern Nigeria, which are crucial for ensuring access to life-saving vaccinations for the poorest and most vulnerable.

■ **Pakistan: Religious Hatred**

Jim Shannon: [\[20214\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will have discussions with his Pakistani counterpart on protecting religious minorities from hate crimes, (b) promoting accountability for perpetrators of violence and (c) safeguarding the rights of Ahmadi Muslims in that country.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We work to protect and promote human rights in Pakistan through our diplomatic engagement and programme funding. I underlined the importance of promoting religious tolerance and harmony when I met with Pakistan's Human Rights Minister on 19 November. On 20 November, I also attended a meeting with Pakistan's Interior Minister, where the British High Commissioner and I raised concerns about violence directed towards Ahmadi Muslims. The UK will continue to urge the Government of Pakistan to fully investigate incidents of violence, prosecute those responsible and provide justice to victims and their families.

■ **Pakistan: Uyghurs**

Blair McDougall: [\[20340\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Pakistani counterpart on the role of that country's Islamic Council in the persecution of Uyghur Muslims.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK remains deeply concerned by the discrimination faced by marginalised religious communities around the world. In Pakistan, we work to promote the rights of religious minorities through diplomatic engagement and programme funding. I raised

the issue of religious tolerance when I met with Pakistan's Human Rights Minister when I visited this year. The UK also stands firm on human rights in China, including in Xinjiang, where China continues to persecute and arbitrarily detain Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities. We raise our concerns with China at the highest levels - the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary both raised human rights recently with their Chinese counterparts.

■ **Russia: International Law**

Jon Trickett:

[\[20138\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to make an assessment of Russia's compliance with international humanitarian law in the context of its military activity in Ukraine.

Stephen Doughty:

We are fully committed to holding Russian forces to account for any violations of international humanitarian law that have been committed in Ukraine. Established accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court's investigations and Ukrainian domestic judicial processes are investigating allegations of atrocity crimes. The UK, US and EU established the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group, specifically to support Ukraine in its efforts to document, investigate and prosecute such crimes.

■ **Russia: Sanctions**

Dr Andrew Murrison:

[\[20162\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what estimate he has made of the impact of unregistered and uninsured vessels on the value of sanctions against the Russian Federation that have been evaded.

Stephen Doughty:

Our oil-related sanctions are having a significant impact, with Russia forced to shoulder a 25% reduction in oil and gas revenues from January to October 2024, compared to the same period in 2022. Where Russia has sought to circumvent those sanctions, we have taken robust action. We have now sanctioned 93 shadow fleet oil tankers; and we are exposing malign maritime practices by requesting proof of insurance from suspected shadow vessels passing through the English Channel - an approach partners along the Baltic route will now replicate. We continue to step up our efforts, working closely with partners, to ensure our sanctions' effectiveness and impact.

■ **Sudan: Humanitarian Aid**

Wendy Morton:

[\[18873\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister for Development in response to the Rt hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills during the Oral Statement of 28 November 2024 on

UK Leadership on Sudan, Official Report, column 945, with which countries in the African Union he has had bilateral engagements on the situation in Sudan; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of those engagements in securing access to humanitarian aid within Sudan.

Anneliese Dodds:

I have raised the issue of humanitarian access with key regional actors, including during my visit to South Sudan and Ethiopia in August, as well as in bilateral engagements with Egypt at the Humanitarian Forum in Cairo in December. The Foreign Secretary also engaged with the African Union and African Security Council members during his visit to New York in November, including at a roundtable he hosted where he urged states to use their influence with the warring parties to push for improved humanitarian access in Sudan. In December, Lord Collins also spoke to the Ugandan Foreign Minister on Sudan to seek views on how we can work more closely to support region-led mediation efforts, particularly with the African Union. He also hosted an open briefing at the UN Security Council (UNSC), during the UK's presidency in November, with a focus on the protection of civilians' recommendations. The UK also co-led a Resolution at the UNSC with Sierra Leone on the protection of civilians, which failed to pass due to a Russian veto. We welcome the recent diplomatic efforts including by the Aligned for Advancing Lifesaving and Peace in Sudan (ALPS) members such as Egypt to pressure the Sudanese authorities to keep the Adré border open. We will continue to use our engagements with African partners to push for Adré to remain open permanently, for alternative cross-border routes beyond Adré, and for greater crossline access.

■ **Syria: Armed Conflict**

Wendy Morton: [\[19304\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the Middle East on the situation in Syria.

Wendy Morton: [\[19305\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help secure a peaceful political process in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK has been at the forefront of the response to fast moving events in Syria, speaking regularly to regional and other partners about the situation. The Foreign Secretary has spoken to the UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria and a number of regional counterparts. I have also discussed the developments in Syria with regional partners and Syrian civil society actors.

The focus of discussions has been on protecting civilians, including minorities, and moving quickly to a political transition. It is essential that this transition is inclusive, comprehensive and most importantly determined by the Syrian people themselves.

The UK will continue to engage closely with Syrian contacts, international and regional partners to support a peaceful political transition.

■ Syria: Humanitarian Aid

Wendy Morton: [\[19307\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps he is taking to ensure access of humanitarian aid into Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK is calling on all parties to support humanitarian access, including access and protection for humanitarian workers in all regions of Syria. We are working closely with humanitarian and international partners to monitor the situation, assess impacts and needs, and determine how best to respond.

The UK continues to support those in need across Syria, where it is safe to do so. Through NGOs and UN organisations, we are providing food, healthcare and other life-saving assistance. The UK has announced an additional £61 million in funding since November 2024 to support vulnerable Syrians, in Syria and the region.

In addition, I announced in early December an additional £300,000 in funding to the White Helmets after meeting them to discuss their vital work across Syria. The funding will support search and rescue operations, facilitate humanitarian access, allow the expansion of their existing ambulance system and enable the safe removal of unexploded weapons.

■ Syria: Women's Rights

Wendy Morton: [\[19308\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help safeguard the rights of women and girls in Syria.

Wendy Morton: [\[19309\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help ensure access to education for women and girls in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Support to women and girls is at the heart of the UK's policy and programmes in Syria, including through active engagement with women's rights activists, women-led organisations and women involved in the political process. Over the 2023-24 financial year, 53 percent of UK humanitarian programming in Syria was spent supporting women and girls. The UK will continue to engage closely with Syrian contacts, international and regional partners to support an inclusive political transition.

■ USA: Foreign Relations

Jim Shannon: [\[20619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help strengthen the UK-US relationship.

Stephen Doughty:

The United States is an indispensable ally and the Foreign Secretary is deeply committed to strengthening the UK-US relationship. In September, he hosted the first UK-US Strategic Dialogue with his counterpart Secretary of State Anthony Blinken. Our department is in constant dialogue with the US on everything we do, from sanctions to Syria - the Foreign Secretary last spoke to Secretary Blinken last weekend. Next month, the US will have a new Administration. The Foreign Secretary has met and developed relationships with many senior Republicans, including meeting with President-elect Trump with the Prime Minister in September for dinner. We are looking forward to working with the new Administration when they take office.

■ **USA: Northern Ireland****Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[19636\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with representatives of the incoming U.S. President on the appointment of a US Special Envoy to Northern Ireland.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign Secretary has not discussed the appointment of a US Special Envoy to Northern Ireland with representatives of the incoming US President. Appointments by the incoming US administration are a matter for them. We will work constructively with whoever is appointed as the next administration's US Special Envoy to Northern Ireland, just as we continue to work constructively with Joe Kennedy III, the current US Special Envoy. The UK has a thriving trading and investment relationship with the US that encourages mutual growth across the whole of the UK, including Northern Ireland. We are pleased that US delegations regularly visit Northern Ireland, and we expect that to continue in the years ahead.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE■ **Accident and Emergency Departments: Standards****Edward Argar:**[\[19321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what percentage of patients waited longer than four hours in A&E in (a) September, (b) October and (c) November 2024.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: The following table shows the percentage of patients in England who waited longer than four hours in accident and emergency, in September, October, and November of 2023 and 2024:

MONTH AND YEAR	PERCENTAGE OF PATIENTS WHO WAITED LONGER THAN FOUR HOURS
September 2024	25.8%
October 2024	27.0%
November 2024	27.9%
September 2023	28.3%
October 2023	29.7%
November 2023	30.2%

Source: NHS England, available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ae-waiting-times-and-activity/>

Luke Murphy:

[20736]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average waiting time at A&E in (a) Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital, (b) Hampshire and (c) England was in each of the last ten years.

Karin Smyth:

The data is not available in the format requested. Official data on the total amount of time patients wait in accident and emergency is collected and published by NHS England. This information is published monthly, including by National Health Service trust, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ae-waiting-times-and-activity/>

This information is also published annually, at the national level, and is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-accident--emergency-activity>

■ Adrenaline Auto-injectors: First Aid and Schools

Dr Allison Gardner:

[20823]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to improve access to adrenaline pens (a) for first aid organisations and (b) in schools.

Andrew Gwynne:

Since October 2017, the Human Medicines (Amendment) Regulations 2017 have allowed all schools to buy adrenaline auto-injector (AAI) devices without a prescription, for emergency use. The Department has published non-statutory

guidance to accompany this legislative change, with the guidance being available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/using-emergency-adrenaline-auto-injectors-in-schools>

This guidance advises schools on the recognition and management of an allergic reaction and anaphylaxis, and outlines when and how an AAI should be administered for pupils. The guidance makes clear that any AAIs held by a school should be considered a spare device and not a replacement for a pupil's own AAIs. It also states that children at risk of anaphylaxis should have their own prescribed AAIs at school for use in an emergency, and that they should always carry two devices.

In November 2021, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and the Commission on Human Medicine's Adrenaline Auto-injector Expert Working Group, with wide-ranging input from patient groups, leading allergy experts and healthcare professionals, published a report which outlined recommendations for the safe and effective use of AAIs, including quicker treatment, to help save lives. The MHRA has worked alongside the Department and wider health system to take forward these recommendations, some of which are already in place.

In June 2023, the MHRA, with the support of allergy awareness advocates, launched a safety campaign to raise awareness of anaphylaxis and provide advice on the use of AAIs.

The MHRA produced a toolkit of resources for health and social care professionals to support the safe and effective use of AAIs. Alongside this, the MHRA produced guidance, which states that prescribers should prescribe two AAIs to make sure patients always have the second dose and that those who are prescribed AAIs should always carry two of them.

A public consultation will be needed before a decision can be made on the wider availability of AAIs in public places, including with first aid organisations, together with legislative change.

The Community First Responder (CFR) programme enables volunteers trained by the ambulance service to attend certain types of emergency calls in the area where they live or work. CFRs have had first aid training but are not medically trained. CFRs are trained in the administration of a patient's own AAI, which would ensure the correct medication and dose for that patient. In general, CFRs do not carry medication.

■ Ambulance Services

Connor Naismith:

[20815]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) Community First Responders and (b) Emergency Medical Technician use blue light vehicles.

Karin Smyth:

This data is not held centrally by the Department. Community First Responders (CFRs) are community volunteers who respond to incidents, supporting ambulance

services. CFRs are not trained to drive under blue light emergency conditions, and must follow all road traffic laws.

Emergency Medical Technicians are trained to drive under blue light conditions, and may be deployed to incidents in a single crewed vehicle or a twin crewed vehicle with an accompanying paramedic.

■ **Anaesthesia Associates and Physician Associates**

Adrian Ramsay:

[19194]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress he has made on outlining the clinical scope of the (a) role and (b) duties undertaken by (i) physician and (ii) anaesthesia associates.

Karin Smyth:

On 20 November 2024, the Government announced that it had commissioned an independent review of physician associates (PAs) and anaesthesia associates (AAs), led by Professor Gillian Leng CBE. The review will consider the safety of the roles, and their contribution to multidisciplinary healthcare teams.

As set out in the published Terms of Reference, the review will be an end-to-end review of the PA and AA professions, covering selection and recruitment, training, day to day work, scope of practice, oversight, supervision, and professional regulation. The review will report in spring 2025.

NHS England has issued guidance on the deployment of PAs and AAs in the National Health Service, which describes the expectations of how organisations providing NHS care should deploy them, so that they can contribute to the delivery of safe and effective healthcare in a supportive environment. This guidance remains in place whilst the review is ongoing, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/summary-of-existing-guidance-on-the-deployment-of-medical-associate-professions-in-nhs-healthcare-settings/>

In the meantime, regulation with the General Medical Council has begun, and will help to ensure patient safety and professional accountability.

■ **Blood Cancer: Diagnosis**

Andrew Rosindell:

[20579]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to achieve national coverage of the NHS' Non-Specific Symptom (NSS) diagnostic pathways for blood cancer.

Andrew Gwynne:

It is a priority for the Government to support the National Health Service to diagnose cancer, including blood cancer, as early and as quickly as possible, and to treat it faster, to improve outcomes.

In addition to improving cancer waiting time performance, the NHS has implemented non-specific symptom pathways for patients who present with vague and non-site-specific symptoms, which do not clearly align to a tumour type. This includes leukaemia, which the national evaluation found was one of the most common cancers diagnosed via these pathways. We are close to national coverage for NSS pathways, with 115 out of the 121 NSS services being live nationally.

■ **Bowel Cancer: Screening**

Claire Hanna: [\[20891\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the current age range for bowel cancer screening.

Andrew Gwynne:

Based on advice from the UK National Screening Committee, NHS England committed in the Long Term Plan to extend the age range of people eligible for bowel screening using the FIT home testing kit from age 60 down to age 50.

The age extension for bowel screening is already underway. NHS England started in April 2021 with the 56-year-old cohort and, based on modelling and clinical advice, has planned to gradually reduce to age 50 by 2025. This has been done to ensure that screening centres could manage any required increase in colonoscopy capacity.

■ **Breast Cancer: Screening**

Sam Carling: [\[20739\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of lowering the minimum age of mammograms for breast cancer checks.

Andrew Gwynne:

We currently do not screen those younger than 50 years old for breast cancer due to the lower risk of women under this age developing breast cancer, and the fact that women below 50 years old tend to have denser breast tissue, which reduces the ability of getting an accurate mammogram. It may also increase the risk of overtreatment and distress for women who do not have breast cancer, but who would be subject to invasive and painful medical treatments and diagnostic tests.

United Kingdom guidelines recommend that women with a moderate or high risk of breast cancer, because of their family history, should start having screening mammograms every year in their forties. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance on the management of people with a family history of breast cancer was introduced in 2004, and has changed over time. The current version of this guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg164>

There is a large trial, Age Extension, which is exploring whether an additional screen before 50 years old would meet the UK National Screening Committee's criteria. Results are expected in 2026.

■ Cancer: Young People

Paul Davies: [20761]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to ensure that the specific issues faced by teenagers and young adults with cancer are accounted for in the 10-Year Health Plan.

Paul Davies: [20762]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to consult teenagers and young adults with cancer on the 10-year Health plan.

Paul Davies: [20763]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that teenagers and young adults with cancer have access to clinical trials within the 10-year Health plan.

Paul Davies: [20764]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department plans to take to ensure that teenagers and young adults with cancer have access to specialist psychological support within the 10-year health plan.

Paul Davies: [20765]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department will take to improve the speed of diagnosis for teenagers and young adults with cancer within the 10-year Health plan.

Karin Smyth:

As part of the work to develop a 10-Year Health Plan, we will carefully be considering policies, including those that impact teenagers and young adults with cancer, with input from the public, patients, health staff, and our partners, as we develop the plan.

We have also launched a significant public engagement process, and we would encourage all those with an interest in the way teenagers and young adults with cancer receive care, and who are aged 16 years old or over, to take part in that process, so that we can fully understand what is not working as well as it should and what the potential solutions are. This can be done via the online portal, which is available at the following link:

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

We plan to run engagement events with children and young people in the new year and are working with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Children's Commissioner, the National Children's Bureau, and other partners to ensure we hear from children affected by ill health.

Following publication of the 10-Year Health Plan, the Department will publish a National Cancer Plan. We are committed to ensuring that the needs of children and young people with cancer are carefully considered in the National Cancer Plan, and will set out further details in due course.

In order to maximise our potential to be a world leader and develop a more competitive, efficient and accessible clinical research system, the Department is committed to implementing recommendations from the Lord O'Shaughnessy independent review of commercial clinical trials in full.

Paul Davies:

[\[20766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department taking to improve information for (a) young people and (b) their families about the symptoms of cancer.

Andrew Gwynne:

We are committed to getting the National Health Service catching cancer on time, diagnosing it earlier, and treating it faster, so that more patients survive this horrible set of diseases. This includes in relation to children and young people.

NHS England and other NHS organisations, nationally and locally, publish information on the signs and symptoms of many different types of cancer, including those that are most common in children. Further information on cancer signs and symptoms is available on the NHS.UK website.

The Department is not currently taking any additional specific action to expand on information of the signs and symptoms of childhood cancers. However, we are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people with cancer and are considering next steps to take forward work in this area through the relaunch of Children and Young People Cancer Taskforce.

Paul Davies:

[\[20767\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to tackle barriers teenagers and young adults with cancer face in accessing clinical trials.

Andrew Gwynne:

To maximise our potential to be a world leader and develop a more competitive, efficient and accessible clinical research system, the Department is committed to implementing recommendations from the Lord O'Shaughnessy independent review of commercial clinical trials in full.

The Department funds research and research infrastructure, which supports patients and the public to participate in high-quality research across the United Kingdom, through the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR). For children and young people with cancer, this infrastructure includes the Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres, co-funded by the NIHR, Cancer Research UK and the Little Princess Trust, which act as a UK-wide network, bringing together world-leading laboratory and clinical researchers to test new treatments for adults and children with cancer. This includes 12 paediatric phase I/II centres, which function as a single

virtual centre to improve patient recruitment and expand geographical access to cancer treatments, tackling some of the barriers to teenagers and young adults accessing cancer clinical trials.

The Department is committed to ensuring clinical trials are people-centred and more accessible, including for teenagers and young adults with cancer. For example, the NIHR provides an online service called 'Be Part of Research' which promotes participation in health and care research by allowing users to search for relevant studies. Young adults aged 18 or over, can consent to be matched to and contacted about relevant studies.

■ Carers: Loneliness

Mike Amesbury: [\[16794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help prevent social isolation of carers.

Stephen Kinnock:

We want to ensure that people who care for family and friends are better able to look after their own health and wellbeing.

Local authorities have duties to support people caring for their family and friends. The Care Act 2014 requires local authorities to deliver a wide range of sustainable, high-quality care and support services, including support for carers. Additionally, the Better Care Fund includes funding that can be used for unpaid carer support, including short breaks and respite services for carers.

Social prescribing can also work well for those who are socially isolated or whose wellbeing is being impacted by non-medical issues, and routinely present to primary or secondary care as a result.

The Department worked with NHS England and the Carers Partnership to produce a social prescribing summary document that was disseminated to local carer organisations in March 2023. This aimed to help upskill staff at carer organisations on social prescribing as an intervention for loneliness, and to increase unpaid carer health and wellbeing.

■ Cheltenham Hospital: Midwives

Max Wilkinson: [\[20529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help increase the recruitment of midwives for Cheltenham General Hospital's Aveta Birth Centre.

Karin Smyth:

Information on local plans is not collected centrally by the Department. National Health Service organisations are responsible for their own recruitment, and for developing their own workforce plans based on local service needs. At a national

level, we are committed to training the staff the NHS needs, and will work closely with partners in education to do this.

NHS England continues to lead on a range of initiatives to boost retention of existing staff and ensure that the NHS remains an attractive career choice for new recruits. This includes a strong focus on improving organisational culture, supporting staff health and wellbeing, and promoting flexible working opportunities. It is continually reviewing the effectiveness of these and their impact on the workforce.

■ **Community Diagnostic Hubs: Rural Areas**

Stuart Anderson:

[\[20708\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the number of community diagnostic hubs in rural areas.

Karin Smyth:

We have committed to getting back to the 18-week standard by the end of this Parliament, addressing the unacceptably long waits experienced by too many people. The Department is working with NHS England on a reform plan for elective care, which will be published in the coming weeks, and will set out more detail on the plans for more timely, accessible, and accurate diagnostic testing.

Approximately £1.5 billion of additional capital funding has been allocated in the Budget for 2025/26 to support National Health Service performance across secondary and emergency care. This investment includes the purchasing of new diagnostic scanners, which will reduce waiting times and increase diagnostic capacity outside of hospitals, in communities and primary care, including in Community Diagnostic Centres (CDC). Details of how this investment will be spent are currently being developed with NHS England.

All existing CDC locations have been chosen based on robust guidance to ensure that they meet certain specifications in order to reduce health inequalities, and integrated care boards were responsible for making recommendations on where there was the greatest need across their areas, including in rural areas. This includes ensuring that they have good transport links to improve access to diagnostic tests for the communities where the need is greatest.

■ **Compulsorily Detained Psychiatric Patients**

Ian Sollom:

[\[19112\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 25 November to Question 14520 on Compulsorily Detained Psychiatric Patients, how many people have been held in Section 136 suites for over 24 hours in the last five years; and under which section of the Mental Health Act 1983 they were held.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department does not hold the information in the format requested. Information on the number of uses of section 136 suites, collected by NHS England, is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-act-statistics-annual-figures>

■ Congenital Abnormalities: Health Services

Rupert Lowe:

[19989]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of the costs to the NHS of treating birth defects resulting from cousin marriage in each of the past ten years.

Karin Smyth:

The Government has not carried out an assessment of the costs to the National Health Service of treating birth defects resulting from cousin marriage.

We will continue to work with the NHS as it delivers its three-year maternity and neonatal plan to grow our maternity workforce, develop a culture of safety, and ensure women and babies receive safe, personalised, and compassionate care.

■ Death Certificates: Standards

Neil O'Brien:

[20028]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the average time taken for deaths to be reviewed under the national medical examiner system since 9 September 2024; and if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the time taken for deaths to be reviewed on the time taken to arrange funerals.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is monitoring the impact of the death certification reforms, which came into legal effect on 9 September 2024. The median time taken to register a death since the introduction of the statutory medical examiner system in England and Wales is eight days. This figure is for all deaths, as it includes those certified by a doctor and those investigated by a coroner. The median time taken to register a death varies depending on the type of certification. Deaths certified by a doctor, that comprise approximately 80% of deaths registered each week, had a median time to registration of seven days. The Department has not conducted a separate review of the time taken to arrange funerals, which can depend on a number of external factors.

The core purposes of the death certification reforms are to introduce scrutiny of the cause of death to detect and deter malpractice, to improve reporting, and crucially to put the bereaved at the centre of the process by offering a conversation with the medical examiner about the cause of death. The expectation on doctors and medical examiners is clear, that they should complete certification as quickly and efficiently as possible, and the Department is working with all stakeholders to make sure this is the case.

■ Dementia: Care Workers

Sarah Hall: [\[20879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the Alzheimer's Society's report entitled *Because we're human too: Why dementia training for care workers matters, and how to deliver it*, published on 13 November 2024; and if he will make it his policy that adult social care staff should have mandatory dementia training.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department welcomes knowledge sharing across the sector and officials will consider the report in future policy development. Under the Health and Social Care Act 2008, care providers are required to provide sufficient numbers of suitably qualified, competent, skilled, and experienced staff to meet the needs of the people using the service.

We now have a national career framework for adult social care, the Care Workforce Pathway, which is linked to several existing competency frameworks, including the dementia training standards framework. The Department developed the pathway in partnership with Skills for Care, representatives from the adult social care workforce, and people who draw on care and support.

The Department has also launched a new Level 2 Adult Social Care Certificate qualification which links to outcomes in the Care Workforce Pathway. This contains the baseline knowledge required to provide quality care and will make sure that those who are starting out their careers in care have an informed awareness of dementia.

■ Dental Health: Children

Adam Dance: [\[20540\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his planned timetable is for implementing the supervised toothbrushing scheme.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 19 December 2024]: We are committed to introducing a supervised toothbrushing scheme for three to five-year-olds, targeting the areas of highest need. Further information on the implementation timetable will be confirmed in due course.

■ Dental Services

Andrew Cooper: [\[20373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what (a) financial and (b) other steps his Department is taking to increase access to NHS dentistry in (i) Mid Cheshire constituency, (ii) Cheshire and (iii) England.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 19 December 2024]: The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access National Health Service dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new

dentists to the areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contract with the sector, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to the integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. For the Cheshire constituency, this is the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB.

■ Dental Services: Cheltenham

Max Wilkinson: [\[20525\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department taking to increase the provision of NHS dental care in Cheltenham constituency.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access National Health Service dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to the areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contract with the sector, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to the integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. For the Cheltenham constituency, this is the NHS Gloucestershire ICB.

■ Dental Services: Gloucestershire

Max Wilkinson: [\[20527\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of poor access to NHS dental services on health outcomes in Gloucestershire.

Stephen Kinnock:

Dental Statistics - England 2023/24, published by the NHS Business Services Authority on 22 August 2024, is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/statistical-collections/dental-england/dental-statistics-england-202324>

The data for the Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board, which includes the Cheltenham constituency, shows that 29% of adults were seen by a National Health Service dentist in the previous 24 months, compared to 40% in England, and 51% of children were seen by an NHS dentist in the previous 12 months, compared to 56% in England.

The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access NHS dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to the areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the

long term and increase access to NHS dental care, we will reform the dental contract, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

■ Dental Services: Norfolk

James Wild: [20798]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential implications for his policies of (a) the forecast spend on NHS dentistry by Norfolk and Waveney ICB and (b) its allocated budget for the financial year 2024-5.

Stephen Kinnock:

The National Health Service in England invests £3 billion on dentistry every year. The responsibility for commissioning primary care, including dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to all integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. The NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB has committed to investing £6.7 million in dental services for 2024/25.

James Wild: [20799]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many additional emergency NHS dental appointments have been provided in the Norfolk and Waveney integrated care board area since 4 July 2024.

Stephen Kinnock:

Data on the number of urgent care courses of treatment is published annually. The latest data, for 2023/24 is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/statistical-collections/dental-england/dental-statistics-england-202324>

■ Dental Services: Patients

Luke Murphy: [20733]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many new patients NHS dental practices in (a) Basingstoke constituency, (b) Hampshire and (c) England accepted in each of the last ten years.

Stephen Kinnock:

Data on the number of new patients seen since March 2024 as part of the New Patient Premium scheme will be published by NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) in due course. This will be available at national as well as integrated care board (ICB) level. We do not hold historical data on the number of new patients seen.

The Government will tackle the immediate crisis with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contract, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of National Health Service dentists.

NHS dentists are required to keep their NHS.UK profiles up to date so that patients can find a dentist more easily. This includes information on whether they are accepting new patients. This information is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist>

The responsibility for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to ICBs across England. For Basingstoke and Hampshire constituency, this is the NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICB.

■ Dental Services: Rural Areas

Adam Dance: [\[20543\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he is taking steps to increase access to dental services in rural areas.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 19 December 2024]: We are aware of the challenges faced in accessing a dentist, particularly in more rural and coastal areas. The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access National Health Service dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to the areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contract with the sector, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

Integrated care boards (ICBs) have started to advertise posts through the Golden Hello scheme. This recruitment incentive will see up to 240 dentists receiving payments of £20,000 to work in those areas that need them most for three years. As of 7 November 2024, 629 Expressions of Interest have been received, 308 of which have been approved for participation in the Dental Recruitment Incentive Scheme. 64 posts have been advertised, with five dentists commenced in post.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to the ICBs across England.

■ Dental Services: Standards

Adam Dance: [\[20541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress he has made on the provision of 700,000 additional dental appointments; and what his target date is for that provision.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 19 December 2024]: The Government is committed to tackling the challenges for patients trying to access National Health Service dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to the areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we

will reform the dental contract with the sector, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists. We are working to ensure patients can start to access 700,000 additional urgent dental appointments as soon as possible, targeting areas that need them most.

Luke Murphy:

[20734]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average waiting time for an NHS dental appointment in (a) Basingstoke constituency, (b) Hampshire and (c) England was in each of the last ten years.

Stephen Kinnock:

Patients in England are not registered with a National Health Service dental practice, although many NHS dental practices do tend to see patients regularly. There is no geographical restriction on which practice a patient may attend. Dental practices may operate local waiting list arrangements.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care, including dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to all integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. For the Basingstoke constituency, this is the NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICB.

■ Dental Services: Surrey

Zöe Franklin:

[20408]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of access to emergency dentistry in Surrey.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Dental Statistics - England 2023/24, published by the NHS Business Services Authority on 22 August 2024, is available from the following link:

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/statistical-collections/dental-england/dental-statistics-england-202324>

In 2023/24, 47,123 urgent National Health Service dental treatments were delivered in the Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Board (ICB). This was 8.25% of all NHS dental treatments delivered in the Surrey Heartlands ICB that year. In England in 2023/24, 3,674,731 urgent NHS dental treatments were delivered, which was 10.7% of all treatments delivered.

The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access NHS dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to the areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contract with the sector, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to the ICBs across England. For the Surrey constituency, this is the NHS Surrey Heartlands ICB.

■ Dentistry: Labour Turnover and Recruitment

Adam Dance:

[\[20544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of levels of recruitment and retention in NHS dentistry; and what steps he plans to take to tackle this.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Dental Statistics - England 2023/24, published by the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) on 22 August 2024, is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/statistical-collections/dental-england/dental-statistics-england-202324>

The NHSBSA's annual dental statistics publication provides details of dental activity and dental workforce data for National Health Service dental treatment in England, including the number of dentists delivering NHS treatment, by contract type and commissioning region.

The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access NHS dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to the areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term and increase access to NHS dental care, we will reform the dental contract, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

Earlier this year, the Department ran a consultation on introducing a further piece of legislation to give the General Dental Council powers to provisionally register overseas qualified dentists, which would help to address some of the workforce challenges.

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

Emily Thornberry:

[\[19655\]](#)

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

Karin Smyth:

In relation to the number of Government procurement cards held by staff within the core Department, I refer the Hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury to the answer given on 18 January 2024 to Question [PQ8714](#).

In addition, the following table shows the number of cards held by the Department's two executive agencies, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), in 2022 and 2023:

EXECUTIVE AGENCY	2022	2023
UKHSA	120	80

EXECUTIVE AGENCY	2022	2023
MHRA	194	182

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Statistics

Laurence Turner:

[\[20336\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the Office for Statistics Regulation's publication entitled OSR's statement on the Labour Force Survey-derived estimates and Annual Population Survey-derived estimates, published on 12 December 2024.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department uses the data and outputs from both the Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey to feed into some of our own statistical products. We recognise the importance of these surveys, and whilst it is disappointing that the accredited official statistics status has been removed from these two surveys, we understand these products continue to follow statistical best practice where possible.

The reduced sample size in the Annual Population Survey means there may be more uncertainty around some of our estimates at a local authority level, and there may be a gap in some of our data at local authority level in the short term. We will continue to work with the Office for National Statistics to ensure that any implications for our own evidence is clearly understood and explained to our users, in line with the Statistics Code of Practice.

■ Diseases: Health Education

Lisa Smart:

[\[20302\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to raise (a) public and (b) professional awareness of (i) inflammatory bowel disease and (ii) other unseen disabilities in the context of access to (A) healthcare and (B) social support for people with those conditions.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 19 December 2024]: 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 inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) specialist nurses.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has also produced a range of guidance on IBD, Crohn's disease and colitis, to support early diagnosis and effective management of these conditions. It ensures that the care provided to people with IBD is based on the best available evidence. In the last two years, the NICE has recommended four new drugs for the treatment of moderate to severe Crohn's

disease and ulcerative colitis, including Upadacitinib, Risankizumab, Mirikizumab, and Etrasimod.

NHS England's National Bladder and Bowel Health Project is delivering better care for people with IBD, with a focus on developing clinical pathways. NHS England commissions specialised colorectal services nationally to support the 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, which is made up of experts in surgery, medicine, radiology, pathology, and nursing, alongside patient and public voice representatives.

To raise awareness of IBD among general practitioners and other primary care staff, the Royal College of General Practitioners has produced an Inflammatory Bowel Disease Toolkit. The toolkit outlines when to suspect IBD, the appropriate investigative tests and diagnostic tools for IBD, how to manage a flare-up of symptoms, and how to support patients with IBD.

Under the Equality Act 2010, health and social care organisations must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged. NHS England has issued guidance for National Health Service commissioners with respect to the Reasonable Adjustments Digital Flag (the Flag). The Flag has been developed to enable health and care workers to record, share, and view, in digital records, details of the reasonable adjustments required by an individual across the NHS, wherever the person is treated. The Flag was built and launched by NHS England in September 2023, and is being implemented in phases. NHS organisations will be required to fully comply with the requirements of the Flag by 31 December 2025.

■ DNACPR Decisions

Tessa Munt:

[\[20201\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his planned timetable is to respond to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's Report entitled End of life care: improving Do Not Attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation conversations for everyone, published on 14th March 2024.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 19 December 2024]: I have responded to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's March 2024 report entitled End of life care: improving Do Not Attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation conversations (DNACPR), in a letter dated 5 November 2024. In this response, the Department set out the ongoing work on each of the recommendations in the report.

The Department is committed to ensuring that DNACPR discussions do not happen in silo or only in emergency settings, which is often too late and carried out under extreme stress, but as a part of wider advance care planning (ACP) conversations. To facilitate this, the Department and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman will jointly convene a roundtable to further discuss ACP and the findings of this report.

■ Employment: Mental Illness

Helen Whately: [\[17758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his Department's Get Britain Working White Paper published on 26 November 2024, whether the 140,000 places for Individual Placement and Support for severe mental illness are in addition to the those announced in the Autumn Statement 2023.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government inherited a £22 billion blackhole in the nation's finances which has required tough choices around spending priorities. Despite this bleak financial backdrop, we were determined to identify the funding required to support local Individual Placement Support schemes.

The White Paper confirms the Government's commitment to expand the number of places on these schemes, to help thousands more people with severe mental illness find and stay in employment.

■ Ethnic Groups

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[19886\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what (a) his and (b) NHS policy is on the use of (i) BAME and (ii) BME (A) in public policy on health and (B) generally.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities recommended in March 2021 that the Government stop using the term BAME, which stands for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic. Since then, where possible, the Department has referred to ethnic minority groups individually, rather than as a single group. Where an aggregated ethnic group is referred to, the term 'ethnic minority' has been used. Further information about how the Government refers to different ethnic groups can be found on GOV.UK website, at the following link:

<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity/>

The National Health Service is always specific, where possible, about the ethnic groups referred to, only using collective terminology where there is a legitimate need to do so. Where collective terminology is needed, it is guided by context.

■ Finasteride

Kirsty Blackman: [\[20625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of the sales Finasteride medications through telehealth companies on an increase in the level of cases of Post-Finasteride Syndrome in the past 12 months.

Karin Smyth:

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's (MHRA) role is to continually monitor the safety of medicines during their use. We have robust, safety monitoring and surveillance systems in place for all healthcare products, including finasteride. As part of our monitoring and surveillance activities, we take into account any changes in the usage of a particular medicine.

Finasteride containing medicines are prescription only medicines. This means they must be prescribed by a doctor or other authorised health professional, and must be dispensed from a pharmacy or from another specifically licensed premises.

The MHRA has recently completed an extensive safety review into finasteride, with the subsequent updates to the product information having been implemented, and the development of a patient alert card is underway. We also published a Drug Safety Update to raise awareness amongst healthcare professionals of the adverse psychiatric and sexual side effects. We are aware that the European Medicines Agency has launched a review, and we are monitoring this closely. Further information on the Drug Safety Update is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/finasteride-reminder-of-the-risk-psychiatric-side-effects-and-of-sexual-side-effects-which-may-persist-after-discontinuation-of-treatment>

Please be reassured that the MHRA continuously monitors the safety of finasteride via information from various sources, including the published literature. Information from all sources is carefully screened and may identify unexpected side effects, indicate that certain side effects occur more commonly than previously believed, or that some patients are more susceptible to some effects than others. If a new side effect is identified, information is carefully considered in the context of the overall side effect profile for the medicine. When necessary, the MHRA may take action to ensure that a medicine is used in a way which minimises risk and maximises benefits to the patient.

■ Fractures: Health Services**Matt Bishop:****[20469]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions he has had with NHS England officials on their role in supporting the development of a roll-out plan for universal Fracture Liaison Services.

Andrew Gwynne:

Fracture Liaison Services (FLS) are a globally recognised care model for secondary fracture prevention. This government is committed to expanding access to these important preventative services.

FLS provision is ultimately a matter for Integrated Care Boards, who are best placed to make commissioning decisions according to local need. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Strangford on 05/11/2024 to Question [UIN](#)

[13008](#). Officials are continuing to work closely with NHS England on how to ensure better quality and access to FLSs – including on how best to support systems.

■ Gender Dysphoria: Children and Young People

Sarah Owen:

[\[19395\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what services NHS England gender services provide for children and young people.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England commissions gender services for children and young people in line with its interim service specification for children and young people with gender incongruence.

Children and young people are cared for holistically by specialist multi-disciplinary teams based in specialist children's hospitals. The multi-disciplinary team should include expertise in paediatrics, psychological health, and neurodevelopmental conditions.

Each child or young person will have a tailored individual care plan to meet their needs. Depending on individual need, the gender service for children and young people will provide psychosocial and clinical interventions, including support for the family. Further information from the interim service specification is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/interim-service-specification-for-specialist-gender-incongruence-services-for-children-and-young-people/>

■ General Practitioners

Max Wilkinson:

[\[20532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure new GP surgeries are included as part of strategic housing developments.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government is committed to delivering a National Health Service that is fit for the future, and this means we require world class NHS infrastructure across the entire NHS estate. Beyond hospitals, we know we need the right infrastructure in the right places to deliver on our commitments of creating a true Neighbourhood Health Service and ensuring that patients receive the care they deserve.

We are aware of the additional demand and challenges placed upon primary care infrastructure by significant housing developments. The Department of Health and Social Care has worked closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government to address this issue in the recently published updated National Planning Policy Framework, clearly outlining the importance of health infrastructure. The Department of Health and Social Care will continue to work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government on updating guidance and ensuring

that all new and existing developments have an adequate level of healthcare infrastructure.

The relevant integrated care board is responsible for deciding how the NHS budget for its area is spent, and allocates funding according to local priorities. Any further support for NHS organisations will be set out at the Autumn Spending Review.

■ **General Practitioners: Internet**

Jess Brown-Fuller: [\[18065\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of GP practices use online forms promoted in the Help us Help You advertising scheme.

Jess Brown-Fuller: [\[18066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate his Department has made of the potential cost saving to the public purse of GP's using online appointment forms promoted in the Help Us to Help You advertising scheme (a) in total and (b) per GP.

Jess Brown-Fuller: [\[18067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the FTE staff hours that have been saved (a) in total and (b) per practice as a result of GPs using online forms promoted in the 'Help Us Help You' advertising scheme.

Stephen Kinnock:

To date, no Help Us Help You national advertising campaign activity has promoted the use of online consultation request forms in general practice.

■ **General Practitioners: Vacancies**

Luke Murphy: [\[20731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the vacancy rate for GP roles in (a) Basingstoke constituency, (b) Hampshire and (c) England was in each of the last ten years.

Stephen Kinnock:

The data requested is not held centrally.

■ **Genetics: Diseases**

Mr Richard Holden: [\[19417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding was provided by NHS England to the Culturally Sensitive Genetic Literacy project in the current financial year.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 17 December 2024]: NHS England does not recognise the title 'Culturally Sensitive Genetic Literacy project', we believe this was used in a job advert by an NHS trust involved in the Genetic Risk Equity project.

■ Gonorrhoea: Vaccination

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[20742\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent progress his Department has made on providing a new gonorrhoea vaccine through the NHS.

Andrew Gwynne:

On 10 November 2023, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) issued advice on standing up a targeted, routine vaccination programme for the prevention of gonorrhoea.

Officials across the Department, the UK Health Security Agency, and NHS England are developing policy options based on the JCVI's advice, taking into account a number of factors, including programme deliverability, interrelationship with other immunisation programmes, and National Health Service delivery options. A decision on the vaccination programme is expected shortly after the outcome of this process.

■ Haemochromatosis: Diagnosis

Luke Taylor:

[\[20844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to increase diagnosis levels for genetic haemochromatosis.

Andrew Gwynne:

Genomic testing in the National Health Service in England is provided through the NHS Genomic Medicine Service (GMS) and delivered by seven NHS Genomic Laboratory Hubs. Genomic testing for genetic haemochromatosis is available through the NHS GMS for all patients in England who show an unexplained iron overload, suggestive of hereditary haemochromatosis, to aid in the diagnosis of the disease. Any healthcare professional who suspects their patient may have haemochromatosis can refer their patient for testing via their local NHS Clinical Genomic Service. Individuals can discuss with their healthcare professional, for instance their general practitioner, whether genomic testing is appropriate for them.

■ Health Services: Taiwan

Kate Osamor:

[\[20663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to establish a reciprocal healthcare agreement with Taiwan.

Andrew Gwynne:

Department officials continue to engage with Taiwanese officials. Any new reciprocal healthcare agreement between the United Kingdom and Taiwan would be subject to negotiations.

■ Health: Children

Neil O'Brien:

[\[20255\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average height was for state school pupils in (a) reception and (b) year six in each academic year since 2005-06; what the average height was for state school pupils in each ethnic group in those academic years in that period; and how many state school pupils were in each ethnic group in those academic years in that period.

Andrew Gwynne:

The height of state school pupils in Reception and Year 6 is measured in the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP). The following table shows the average height in centimetres of boys and girls aged five and 11 years old, in the academic years from 2008 to 2024:

AGE	ACADEMIC YEAR	MEAN HEIGHT FOR GIRLS	MEAN HEIGHT FOR BOYS
5	2008 to 2009	109.2cm	110.0cm
5	2009 to 2010	109.2cm	110.1cm
5	2010 to 2011	109.2cm	110.1cm
5	2011 to 2012	109.3cm	110.2cm
5	2012 to 2013	109.2cm	110.1cm
5	2013 to 2014	109.3cm	110.2cm
5	2014 to 2015	109.3cm	110.2cm
5	2015 to 2016	109.3cm	110.2cm
5	2016 to 2017	109.3cm	110.3cm
5	2017 to 2018	109.3cm	110.3cm
5	2018 to 2019	109.3cm	110.3cm
5	2019 to 2020	109.4cm	110.4cm
5	2020 to 2021	109.8cm	110.9cm
5	2021 to 2022	109.7cm	110.7cm
5	2022 to 2023	109.3cm	110.4cm
5	2023 to 2024	109.3cm	110.3cm
11	2008 to 2009	145.7cm	145.0cm

AGE	ACADEMIC YEAR	MEAN HEIGHT FOR GIRLS	MEAN HEIGHT FOR BOYS
11	2009 to 2010	145.8cm	145.0cm
11	2010 to 2011	145.9cm	145.1cm
11	2011 to 2012	145.9cm	145.1cm
11	2012 to 2013	146.0cm	145.1cm
11	2013 to 2014	146.1cm	145.3cm
11	2014 to 2015	146.2cm	145.3cm
11	2015 to 2016	146.3cm	145.5cm
11	2016 to 2017	146.3cm	145.5cm
11	2017 to 2018	146.4cm	145.6cm
11	2018 to 2019	146.5cm	145.6cm
11	2019 to 2020	146.6cm	145.7cm
11	2020 to 2021	148.0cm	146.5cm
11	2021 to 2022	148.0cm	146.4cm
11	2022 to 2023	147.8cm	146.3cm
11	2023 to 2024	147.5cm	146.4cm

Source: data is from the NCMP, with further information available at the following link:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/obesity-profile-november-2024-update>

Height data has not been published for the years 2005 to 2008. Height data by ethnic group of pupil is not available, but is due to be published by the Department on 4 February 2025, and will be available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/obesity-profile-february-2025-update>

The Department for Education publishes information on the number of state school pupils by ethnicity. This information can be found in the Schools, pupils, and their characteristics publication on GOV.UK website, which is based on January school census data. Statistics from May 2010 onwards are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-and-pupil-numbers>

Data is not published for Reception and Year 6 children specifically. Statistics from 2005 to 2009 are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-pupil-and-their-characteristics-2002-to-2009-data>

■ Heart Diseases: Screening

Jon Trickett:

[20140]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a programme of routine ECG heart screening in schools and universities.

Andrew Gwynne:

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) last reviewed screening for sudden cardiac death (SCD) in people under the age of 39 years old in 2019, and concluded that screening should not be offered. Further information on this review is available at the following link:

<https://view-health-screening-recommendations.service.gov.uk/sudden-cardiac-death/>

Research showed that the current tests are not accurate enough to use in young people without symptoms, and that treatments and interventions were not based on good scientific evidence to prevent SCD.

To stop SCDs in young people, the current consensus is to focus on rapid identification and care of people who are likely to be at risk of SCD due to a family link or because they have had symptoms, and to train people to carry out cardiopulmonary resuscitation and to use defibrillators.

NHS England has published guidance for inherited cardiac conditions which requires services to investigate patients with previously undiagnosed cardiac disease, suggestive symptoms, or from families with sudden unexplained deaths. Where a genetic variation is identified, cascade testing is offered to relatives based on risk.

We are aware that the UK NSC has received a submission via its annual call process to consider SCD screening in young people aged 14 to 35 years old who engage in sport. The UK NSC is currently reviewing all annual call proposals. More information on the annual call process can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nsc-annual-call-submitting-a-screening-proposal/uk-nsc-annual-call-how-to-submit-a-proposal>

■ Heart Diseases: Young People

Jon Trickett:

[20139]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to reduce trends in the level of sudden cardiac death amongst (a) school and (b) university aged young people.

Karin Smyth:

In 2017, NHS England published a national service specification for inherited cardiac conditions (ICC), which defines the standards of care expected from organisations funded by NHS England. This specification covers young adults with previously undiagnosed cardiac disease. The aim of ICC services is to improve the diagnosis, treatment, and outcome of patients with ICCs. NHS England is currently reviewing this service specification, working with a broad range of stakeholders as part of the review, including NHS clinical experts, the Association of Inherited Cardiac Conditions, Cardiomyopathy UK, Heart Valve Voice, and the British Heart Foundation.

■ Hepatitis: Diagnosis**Rebecca Smith:**[\[19568\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve earlier diagnosis of hepatitis B (a) nationally and (b) within Devon Integrated Care System.

Andrew Gwynne:

Hepatitis B is usually asymptomatic in the early years, and therefore, many people remain unaware of their infection. The UK Health Security Agency estimates that 268,767 people were living with chronic hepatitis B in England in 2022, 38.1% of whom we estimate are diagnosed. As a result, raising both professional and public awareness remains critical to reducing the undiagnosed burden of hepatitis B.

In April 2022, the NHS England introduced the bloodborne virus opt out testing in emergency departments programme, which was implemented across 34 sites. In its first 24 months 1,185,678 hepatitis B tests had been conducted in the programme, which has led to 1,957 new diagnoses of hepatitis B. Following the success of this programme, it is now being expanded to a further 47 sites nationwide. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bloodborne-viruses-opt-out-testing-in-emergency-departments/emergency-department-bloodborne-virus-opt-out-testing-12-month-interim-report-2023>

In addition, the list of sites and go live dates is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bloodborne-viruses-opt-out-testing-in-emergency-departments/appendix-for-emergency-department-bloodborne-virus-opt-out-testing-12-month-interim-report-2023>

The United Kingdom has continued to see the success of well-established antenatal screening. Antenatal screening coverage has remained high at 99.8%, which ensures pregnant women living with hepatitis B are diagnosed and interventions are implemented, to prevent transmission of hepatitis B to their children.

As set out in the published Hepatitis B in England 2024 report, effective interventions have also been developed to raise awareness of hepatitis B among healthcare

professionals and communities at risk of acquiring viral hepatitis, support primary care in identifying and managing cases, and offer testing and immunisations to close contacts. These interventions need to be more widely implemented to continue to improve diagnosis and access to care. The Hepatitis B in England 2024 report is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hepatitis-b-in-england/hepatitis-b-in-england-2024#raising-awareness-supporting-the-diagnosis-of-people-living-with-undiagnosed-hepatitisand-reducing-barriers-to-treatment>

■ Hospitals: Discharges

Esther McVey: [20604]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the efficiency of supplying medication at hospital discharge to ensure faster discharge.

Esther McVey: [20606]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average wait time is for hospital patients to be provided with medications at discharge.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department and NHS England recognise the need for patients who are ready to go home to be discharged as quick as possible, both for their benefit and to improve the efficiency of hospitals. Information on the average wait time for hospital patients to be provided with medication at the point of discharge is not held centrally by NHS England, and it is the responsibility of individual trusts to monitor discharge and medication efficiency. To support hospitals on improving processes, guidance has been published, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/urgent-emergency-care/improving-hospital-discharge/>

Esther McVey: [20605]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to make the hospital discharge process more efficient.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government will improve hospital discharge processes, to tackle delayed discharges, and to make sure people do not spend longer than necessary in hospital, freeing up hospital beds.

We will do so by developing local partnerships, working between the National Health Service and social care, making sure people get the right support from health and social care services to return home as soon as possible. Currently, every acute hospital has access to a care transfer hub, which brings together professionals from the NHS and local authorities to manage discharges for people with more complex needs, and collaboration between integrated care boards and local authorities will continue to be supported by the Better Care Fund framework through 2025/26.

■ IVF

Sarah Coombes: [\[20304\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he will make an assessment of the eligibility criteria for IVF on access to treatment for (a) single patients and (b) same-sex female couples.

Sarah Coombes: [\[20309\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of same-sex female couples are receiving NHS-funded IVF after undertaking six self-funded rounds of Intrauterine insemination as recommended by NICE.

Karin Smyth:

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has advised that between 2020 and 2022, the years in which they have the most recently data available, 25% of patients in same-sex female couples in the United Kingdom received National Health Service-funded in vitro fertilization (IVF), after completing six self-funded rounds of intrauterine insemination.

Integrated care boards are expected to commission fertility services in line with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. The NICE is currently reviewing the fertility guidelines and will consider whether the current recommendations for access to NHS-funded treatment are still appropriate. We expect this review to be published in 2025. The Government will also be receiving advice from NHS England on the eligibility criteria for IVF and on access to treatment, and this will inform the Government's considerations of future policy options.

■ IVF: Discrimination

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[19876\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ensure that there is no discrimination in NHS IVF treatment.

Karin Smyth:

Funding decisions for health services in England are made by integrated care boards and are based on the clinical needs of their local population. Organisations are expected to commission fertility services in line with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. The NICE is currently reviewing the fertility guidelines and will consider whether the current recommendations for access to National Health Service-funded treatment are still appropriate. We expect this review to be published in 2025. NHS England will also be providing advice on this issue to inform the Government's considerations of future policy options.

■ Maternity Services: Essex**Sir John Whittingdale:** [\[20127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to publish the report of the CQC inspection of maternity services in Mid and South Essex carried out in March 2024.

Sir John Whittingdale: [\[20128\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish details of the Section 31 notice issued to Mid and South Essex Hospitals relating to maternity services at Broomfield Hospital.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 19 December 2024]: The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is working to publish its report following its inspection of maternity services in Mid and South Essex at the earliest opportunity. Publication of the report, following the Care Quality Commission's inspection of maternity services in Mid and South Essex, has been delayed due to system and technology issues that have occurred during a large-scale transformation programme within the CQC. Details about any enforcement action, including the Section 31 against Broomfield Hospital, will be included in the full report .

The CQC is taking urgent steps to ensure that it is able to publish inspection reports in a more timely manner. While the publication of some reports has been delayed, any immediate action that is needed to take to protect people using these services will not have been affected, and is being acted on appropriately.

■ Maternity Services: Nurses**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[19416\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many close relative marriage neonatal nurses there are in the NHS.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 17 December 2024]: The Department does not hold the data requested.

■ Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency: Equality**Sir John Hayes:** [\[19238\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

Karin Smyth:

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) headcount stands at 1,452 employees. The MHRA has a Head of Diversity and Staff Engagement, and a Diversity and Staff Engagement Coordinator, who are focussed

on diversity, equality, and inclusion for half of their full-time equivalent (FTE) hours, with the remaining half of their FTE hours focussed on other human resources portfolio priorities.

■ **Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency: Finance**

Rupert Lowe: [\[20468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if will make an assessment of the potential merits of conducting a review into the funding of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

Karin Smyth:

There is currently no planned review of the funding of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

The MHRA is funded predominately by charging fees to industry, for the services it delivers, with additional funding being provided by the Department. The fees are set to recover the full cost of delivering the respective services. This follows the HM Treasury guidance, Managing Public Money. This cost-recovery approach means that the regulated bear the cost of regulation, rather than the taxpayer and, by extension, patients.

Departmental funding to the MHRA is set in advance through collaborative spending review processes, which consider the MHRA's needs in detail.

■ **Mental Health**

Alex Mayer: [\[20351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) mental health and (b) dementia related hospital admissions took place during heatwaves in 2024.

Stephen Kinnock:

The information is not held in the format requested.

■ **Mental Health Services: Children and Young People**

Luke Murphy: [\[20735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average waiting time for children and young people to access (a) CAMHS and (b) other NHS mental health services was in (i) Basingstoke constituency, (ii) Hampshire and (ii) England in each of the last ten years.

Stephen Kinnock:

The following table shows the waiting time, measured in the number of days, between referral and first contact for children and young people aged under 18 years old in England, from 2020/21 to 2023/24:

YEAR	MEAN AVERAGE WAITING TIME BETWEEN REFERRAL AND FIRST CONTACT
2020/21	75.3
2021/22	65.0
2022/23	69.7
2023/24	75.4

Source: Mental Health Services Dataset.

In addition, the following table shows the waiting time, measured in the number of days, between referral and first contact for children and young people aged under 18 years old, in the Basingstoke and Deane local authority district, from 2020/21 to 2023/24:

YEAR	MEAN AVERAGE WAITING TIME BETWEEN REFERRAL AND FIRST CONTACT
2020/21	138.9
2021/22	119.1
2022/23	132.6
2023/24	210.4

Source: Mental Health Services Dataset.

Finally, the following table shows the waiting time, measured in the number of days, between referral and first contact for children and young people aged under 18 years old, in the Hampshire county local authority, from 2020/21 to 2023/24:

YEAR	MEAN AVERAGE WAITING TIME BETWEEN REFERRAL AND FIRST CONTACT
2020/21	126.3
2021/22	124.0
2022/23	133.2
2023/24	186.6

Source: Mental Health Services Dataset.

■ Mental Health Services: Men

Lee Anderson:

[\[19777\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to increase the availability of mental health support for men under 50.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government accepts that too many men are not getting the support with their mental health that they deserve. As part of our mission to build a National Health Service that is fit for the future, we will recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers to reduce delays and provide faster treatment, which will also help ease pressure on the busy mental health services.

We are also committed to tackling suicide as one of the biggest killers of men. The 8,500 new staff will be specially trained to support people at risk from suicide.

The five-year Suicide Prevention Strategy for England, published in September 2023, identifies young people and middle-aged men as one of a number of groups for consideration for tailored or targeted action at a national level.

Many voluntary community and social enterprise organisations are also working hard to ensure that men have access to different types of services for a range of needs and preferences, in places where they are most likely to engage.

■ Mental Health Services: Schools

Damian Hinds:

[\[18868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many mental health professionals the previous Government planned to be placed in schools in each of the next three academic years; and how many he plans to place in schools in the same period.

Stephen Kinnock:

Nationally, there are, on average, 8,400 pupils or learners and 17 schools or colleges per mental health support team (MHST), up to and including waves seven and eight. There are 109 MHSTs that will become part of the programme in waves nine and 10, with education mental health practitioners who started training from autumn 2023 due to become operational in 2024/25. Assuming the average number of schools or colleges and pupils or learners per MHST remains constant, we estimate that, including waves nine and 10, coverage would increase to 54% of pupils or learners, and 42% of schools or colleges, by the end of 2024/25, specifically by March 2025.

■ Mental Health Services: Slough

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[15233\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of patients referred to mental health services were seen within the target waiting time in Slough constituency in the last 12 months.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 25 November 2024]: The following table shows the latest available performance data on waiting times against the existing mental health waiting time standards for NHS Frimley, which covers the Slough constituency, for the latest available 12-month reporting period, from October 2023 to September 2024:

SERVICE	WAITING TIME STANDARD	TARGET	PERFORMANCE AGAINST WAITING TIME STANDARD
Early Intervention in Psychosis (EIP)	Proportion of referrals on the EIP pathway entering treatment within two weeks	60%	77%
Children and Young People's Eating Disorders	Proportion of urgent referrals entering treatment within one week of referral	95%	81%
Children and Young People's Eating Disorders	Proportion of routine referrals entering treatment within four weeks of referral	95%	81%
NHS Talking Therapies	Proportion of referrals where the course of treatment finished and the person waited six weeks or less for first treatment contact	75%	94%
NHS Talking Therapies	Proportion of referrals where the course of treatment finished and the person waited 18 weeks or less for first treatment contact	95%	100%

Source: Mental Health Services and NHS Talking Therapies datasets.

■ **Mental Health: Wolverhampton**

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge:

[20078]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Mental Health Bill on mental wellbeing in Wolverhampton.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 19 December 2024]: We have carried out an Impact Assessment, which is in the public domain and is available on the Bills Parliament web page. The benefits related to wellbeing in the Impact Assessment are not quantified but are explored through breakeven analysis. The analysis seeks to estimate the non-monetised benefits required to offset the estimated net monetised impacts of the policy.

The bill largely follows the recommendations of the Independent Review of the Mental Health Act, which heard from a broad range of stakeholders and views, including service users and carers, to make recommendations to improve people's experience of the Mental Health Act.

■ Mental Illness: Drugs**Dr Al Pinkerton:**[\[20768\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of (a) the utilisation of psilocybin-based treatments for mental health conditions and (b) commissioning further research into the therapeutic applications of psychedelic drugs.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department recognises that the use of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapies, such as psilocybin, to treat mental illness is gaining attention both within the medical and scientific communities, as well as across the public more broadly. However, there is no proven medical use for psilocybin in the United Kingdom, and no such substance has yet been licensed as safe and effective in the treatment of mental health conditions. The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) is supporting psilocybin research via the NIHR King's Clinical Research Facility, the NIHR Oxford Health Clinical Research Facility, and the NIHR Maudsley Biomedical Research Centre, where researchers are developing and evaluating the efficacy and safety of psilocybin therapies.

■ Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust: Finance**James McMurdock:**[\[19902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the support provided via the NHS England Recovery Support Programme (RSP) to the Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation.

Karin Smyth:

The Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust is in segment four of the NHS Oversight Framework. This means that the trust is in receipt of national mandated support via NHS England's Recovery Support Programme (RSP), led by senior and multidisciplinary teams to help embed sustainable quality and financial improvements.

RSP governance and oversight is well established, and Department officials meet with NHS England and the Care Quality Commission monthly to assess the progress and developments within the programme. This helps to ensure effective lines of communication and enables us to continue to assure that organisations are receiving appropriate support.

■ **Midwives: Labour Turnover**

Max Wilkinson:

[\[20530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve the retention of midwives.

Karin Smyth:

The Government is committed to tackling the retention and recruitment challenges that face the National Health Service. NHS England is leading a range of initiatives to boost retention of existing staff and ensure that the NHS remains an attractive career choice for new recruits. This includes building a compassionate and inclusive culture, supporting staff wellbeing, and promoting flexible working opportunities.

Targeted retention work for midwives is being undertaken by NHS England and led by the Chief Nursing Officer. This includes a midwifery and nursing retention self-assessment tool, mentoring schemes, strengthened advice and support on pensions and flexible retirement options, and the publication of menopause policies and guidance. NHS England has also invested in unit-based retention leads who focus on retention and provide pastoral support to midwives. This initiative, alongside investment in workforce capacity, has seen a reduction in vacancy, leavers, and turnover rates.

■ **Miscarriage**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[20567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to (a) record and (b) report the number of miscarriages each year.

Karin Smyth:

The Government recognises that experiencing a miscarriage can be an extremely difficult time. We are determined to make sure all women receive safe, personalised, and compassionate care, particularly when things go wrong.

While miscarriage hospital stay data is collected, the majority of baby losses occur outside of healthcare settings, and it is rightly the choice of the individual who has experienced the loss to disclose this information to healthcare professionals. It is therefore not possible to gather accurate and comprehensive data on miscarriages.

The Pregnancy Loss Review was published in July 2023 and recommended policies to improve data around miscarriage. We will ensure that we listen to women and their families, and learn lessons from recent inquiries and investigations, including this report.

■ Muscular Dystrophy: Health Services**John Milne:** [\[20849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ensure that the early access programme for people with Duchennes is made available across all NHS trusts.

Karin Smyth:

Access to the Early Access Programme (EAP) for givinostat must be through one of the 23 NorthStar Centres in the United Kingdom. However, participation in the EAP is decided at an individual National Health Service trust level, and a North Star Centre will not be able to provide givinostat if its local trust has not approved participation. Under the EAP, givinostat is free to both patients taking part in it and to the NHS, although the NHS trusts must still cover the cost of administering it to patients. Only Duchenne muscular dystrophy clinicians can make requests for givinostat for their patients. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis for individual named patients aligned to eligibility criteria.

■ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence: Equality**Sir John Hayes:** [\[20136\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

Karin Smyth:

I am informed by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence that it has a 0.5 full time equivalent in post, as an Organisational Design and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Consultant.

■ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence: Finance**Clive Jones:** [\[R\] \[20310\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how the additional funding announced in the Autumn Budget 2024 for the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence will be allocated.

Karin Smyth:

There was no additional funding announced for the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

■ Neurological Diseases: Health Services**Mark Swards:** [\[20864\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce waiting times for people with (a) Motor Neurone Disease and (b) other degenerative conditions.

Andrew Gwynne:

Patients, including those with motor neurone disease (MND), have been let down for too long whilst they wait for the care they need. The Government is committed to putting patients first. This means making sure that patients are seen on time and ensuring that people have the best possible experience during their care.

We have made a commitment that 92% of patients should wait no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment within our first term. This includes those waiting for treatment for MND. As a first step to achieving this, following the Budget, we will deliver an additional 2 million operations, scans, and appointments across all specialities during our first year in Government, which is equivalent to 40,000 per week.

At the national level, there are a number of initiatives supporting service improvement and better care for patients with MND, including the Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) Programme for Neurology and the RightCare Progressive Neurological Conditions Toolkit. NHS England has also established a Neurology Transformation Programme (NTP), a multi-year, clinically led programme to develop a new model of integrated care for neurology services, including MND.

The GIRFT National Specialty Report made recommendations designed to improve services nationally and to support the National Health Service to deliver care more equitably across the country. The report highlighted differences in how services are delivered, and provided the opportunity to share successful initiatives between trusts to improve patient services nationally.

In addition, the NTP has developed a model of integrated care for neurology services to support integrated care boards (ICBs) to deliver the right service, at the right time, for all neurology patients, including providing care closer to home. A toolkit is being developed to support ICBs to understand and implement this new model. The NTP has also developed an online, interactive adult neurology dashboard to support systems to understand their local neurology landscape and benchmark against other ICBs in England. It sets out key metrics and visualisations for neurology services locally, providing information about the scope and quality of local neurology services using existing whole population, whole pathway data.

The NTP is also working with the National Clinical Director for Neurology and the Neurology Clinical Reference Group to develop a revised service specification for neurology, which will: set out clear deliverables for specialised centres; provide a clearer model of care, incorporating up-to-date guidance and best practice; and set out new quality outcomes focusing on improving patient outcomes and experience.

■ NHS Trusts: Communication**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[19887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has written to NHS Trusts on the use of sex-specific language in NHS guidance.

Karin Smyth:

The Department has not written to the National Health Service trusts on the use of sex-specific language in NHS guidance. The Government understands the need for health information to be as clear as possible and to use language that appropriately reflects sex, as defined as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010.

■ NHS: Public Consultation**Joe Robertson:****[20773]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 16662 on NHS: Public Consultation, what the total budget is for deliberative engagement in the 2024-25 financial year.

Karin Smyth:

Following an invitation to tender competition process, we appointed Thinks Insight, Kaleidoscope Health and Care, and IPPR to support us to run the 10-Year Health Plan engagement exercise. The awarded value of the contract is up to £2.96 million, and includes running online and in-person engagement activities, the Change NHS online portal, and analysis of the insight received.

The current contract start date is 13 September 2024 with an end date of 31 March 2025, with an option to extend by three months. This means that final costs, such as those to undertake analysis, are dependent on the level of engagement that takes place.

The details of this award and redacted contract are available at the following link:

<https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/80963989-c4d6-4a16-8e12-c31b43a81dda>

We will be able to provide full costs of the exercise once it is complete.

■ NHS: Staff**Joe Robertson:****[19826]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding (a) his Department and (b) NHS England has provided for the Global Majority Fellowship Programme in the last year for which figures are available.

Andrew Gwynne:

There is no such thing as the Global Majority Fellowship Programme. The NHS Global Fellowship programme offers volunteer reciprocal leadership development opportunities for clinical and non-clinical staff to experience health systems across the globe.

NHS England provided £441,773.27 for the NHS Global Fellowships Programme for the financial year 2023/24.

■ NHS: Workplace Pensions**James MacCleary:**[\[20389\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that retired NHS staff affected by the McCloud Judgement receive their full pension entitlements for the remedy period between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2022; and whether his Department will publish a timeline for implementing the second phase of the McCloud Remedy.

Karin Smyth:

The NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) is implementing the McCloud remedy for impacted members of the NHS Pension Scheme. Remedy implementation is a complex and large-scale undertaking. The core element of the remedy will provide members with a choice of benefits at retirement for the period the discrimination identified by the McCloud judgment was effective. Approximately 350,000 retired members will be offered this choice retrospectively.

The Department expects that the majority of impacted retired members will not receive their choice until after April 2025. Whilst the majority of impacted retired members are likely to already be in receipt of their most beneficial set of benefits, the Department is working with the NHSBSA to accelerate the provision of this choice, prioritising members for whom there would be a significant and immediate financial impact. The NHSBSA will communicate revised timelines with members once these are confirmed.

■ Nursing and Midwifery Council: Reviews**Tracy Gilbert:**[\[20859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Nursing and Midwifery Council's review entitled Independent Culture Review, published in July 2024, if his Department will launch an independent review into that organisation.

Karin Smyth:

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is the regulator of nurses and midwives in the United Kingdom, and nursing associates in England. The NMC is independent of the Government, directly accountable to Parliament, and is responsible for operational matters concerning the discharge of its statutory duties.

The Department has no current plans to launch an independent review, but we expect the NMC to ensure swift and robust action is taken to deliver against the 36 recommendations set out in the Independent Culture Review report.

■ Operating Theatres: Fire Prevention**Luke Akehurst:**[\[19864\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to introduce (a) mandatory training and (b) policies on surgical fires within all NHS hospital settings.

Andrew Gwynne:

In 2023, the Centre for Perioperative Care published revised National Safety Standards for Invasive Procedures (NatSSIPs2). The standards were designed to reduce misunderstandings or errors, and to improve team cohesion. The NatSSIPs2 include a requirement for providers to have a local fire safety policy, in order to minimise the risk of surgical fires, and a management plan in the event of one occurring.

The NatSSIPs2 should form the basis of improvement work, inspections, and curricula. The standards support National Health Service organisations in providing safer care, and to reduce the number of patient safety incidents related to invasive procedures in which surgical fires can occur.

At this time, the Department has no plans to make training mandatory or to introduce further policies in relation to surgical fires

■ Ophthalmic Services**Alex Mayer:**[\[20347\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps his Department is taking to improve the availability of (a) eye clinic appointments and (b) hospital eye services.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government is committed to putting patients first. This means making sure that patients are seen on time and have the best possible experience during their care. As of October 2024, the waiting list for ophthalmology services stands at just over 593,000. 66.1% of these involved treatment within 18 weeks.

This is not good enough, and we have committed to getting back to the NHS Constitutional standard that 92% of patients should be seen within 18 weeks of referral, by the end of this Parliament, across all specialities. 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.

NHS England is also testing how improved IT connectivity between primary care optometry and secondary eye care services could improve the referral process and allow for the virtual triage of patients. This also includes looking at whether patients can be managed in the community, freeing up hospital eye clinic capacity for patients that need face to face specialist input.

■ Ophthalmic Services: Waiting Lists**Marsha De Cordova:**[\[18997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will require NHS England to publish Referral To Treatment waiting times for (a) glaucoma, (b) macular degeneration and (c) other irreversible sight loss conditions separately from minor and reversible eye condition waiting times.

Stephen Kinnock:

There are no current plans to require NHS England to publish Referral to Treatment waiting times for glaucoma, macular degeneration, and other irreversible sight loss conditions separately from minor and reversible eye condition waiting times.

■ **Palliative Care**

Kim Johnson: [20353]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether palliative and end of life care will be prioritised in the new NHS 10-year plan.

Joe Robertson: [20502]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the 10-year health plan will include policies on palliative care.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have committed to developing a 10-year plan to deliver a National Health Service fit for the future. We will carefully be considering policies, including those that impact people with palliative and end of life care needs, with input from the public, patients, health staff, and our stakeholders, including those in the hospice sector, as we develop the plan.

The engagement process has been launched, and I would encourage the palliative and end of life care sector, including hospice providers, service users, and their families, to engage with that process to allow us to fully understand what is not working as well as it should, and what the potential solutions are. Further information is available at the following link:

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

On 19 December the government announced the biggest investment in a generation for hospices to help ensure that hospices can continue to deliver the highest quality end of life care possible for their patients, families, and loved ones.

We are supporting the hospice sector with £100 million funding for adult and children's hospices to ensure they have the best physical environment for care.

Children and young people's hospices will also receive a further £26 million revenue funding for 2025/26. This is a continuation of the funding which until recently was known as the children and young people's hospice grant.

We will set out the details of the funding allocation and dissemination in the new year.

Kim Johnson: [20354]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the needs of the palliative and end of life care sector will be represented in the upcoming NHS workforce plan.

Joe Robertson: [\[20503\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the refreshed NHS workforce plan will include policies on the palliative care sector.

Stephen Kinnock:

The refreshed Long Term Workforce Plan will deliver the transformed health service that we will build over the next decade and will ensure that patients get the treatment they need, when and where they need it, including those at the end of their lives. In the development of the plan, we will engage with a range of stakeholders to ensure their needs are considered.

■ Pharmacy

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[20609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to bring forward hub and spoke dispensing legislation for pharmacies in 2025.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government is working towards introducing legislation to enable hub and spoke dispensing between different legal entities in 2025. This change will be enabled via amendments to both primary and secondary legislation, and is subject to the usual parliamentary processes.

■ Preventive Medicine

Lisa Smart: [\[20303\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to create a cross-governmental strategy for the prevention of ill health that would include measures on tackling (a) health and (b) other lifestyle factors that affect a person's risk of developing dementia that are (i) within and (ii) not within people's control, such as air pollution.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 19 December 2024]: As part of the Government's health mission, we will shift from sickness to prevention, to tackle ill health, prevent premature deaths, and build a fairer United Kingdom where everyone lives longer, healthier lives.

We have committed to developing a 10-year plan to deliver a National Health Service fit for the future. We will carefully be considering policies, including those that impact people with dementia care needs, with input from the public, patients, and health staff as we develop the plan.

Since 2018, dementia risk reduction has been incorporated in the NHS Health Check to increase dementia awareness and motivate people to make positive changes to reduce their risks.

We recognise that air pollution is one of the risk factors for dementia. The National Institute for Health and Care Research is supporting research to explore the link

between dementia and air pollution, including a project to address how air pollution mitigation measures impact on neurological endpoints.

■ Prostate Cancer: Diagnosis

Luke Murphy:

[\[20724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make a comparative assessment of prostate cancer diagnosis rates in (a) Basingstoke, (b) Hampshire and (c) England.

Karin Smyth:

No comparative assessment has been made. However, data for prostate cancer diagnosis rates are collected by integrated care board (ICB), both Basingstoke and Hampshire are located within the Hampshire and Isle of White ICB. The following table shows this data up to 2022:

STAGE AT DIAGNOSIS	COUNT	RATE
All stages	2312	249.4
Stage 1 & 2	986	106
Stage 3 & 4	828	88.9

For comparison, the following table shows the national data for 2022:

STAGE AT DIAGNOSIS	COUNT	RATE
All stages	54732	212.4
Stage 1 & 2	21610	82.4
Stage 3 & 4	19042	74

The Department is supporting the National Health Service in taking steps to speed up and improve the efficiency of diagnostic pathways. This includes the introduction of a best-practice timed pathway for prostate cancer so that those suspected of having prostate cancer receive a multi-parametric magnetic resonance imaging scan first; this ensures only those men most at risk of having cancer undergo an invasive biopsy. For patients, the prostate best-practice timed pathway may reduce anxiety and uncertainty of a possible cancer diagnosis, with less time between referral and receiving the outcome of a diagnostic test.

Furthermore, NHS England's Getting It Right First Time programme published guidance in April 2024 to support the implementation of good practice in management of prostate cancer, which includes ensuring the diagnostic pathways for prostate cancer were implemented from primary care setting to secondary care presentation.

■ Public Health

Cat Smith:

[\[19326\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many public health representatives he has met to discuss (a) tobacco, (b) obesity and (c) alcohol harm; and whether he plans to meet more public health organisations in the New Year to discuss those issues.

Andrew Gwynne:

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

I can confirm that Department ministers expect to continue to engage with prevention and public health stakeholders across a number of important issues next year.

■ Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn: Finance

James Wild:

[\[20795\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding has been released to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn Trust under the New Hospitals Programme.

Karin Smyth:

Up to the end of 2023/24, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn NHS Foundation Trust has received £3.2 million in funding to support the development of the business case for their New Hospital Programme scheme.

■ Respiratory Diseases: Children

Luke Murphy:

[\[20730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many children under the age of 18 in (a) Basingstoke constituency, (b) Hampshire and (c) England were diagnosed with respiratory conditions associated with poor (i) air quality and (ii) housing conditions in each of the last ten years.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department does not hold information on diagnosed respiratory conditions caused by air quality and housing conditions.

The Government is committed to a preventative approach to the public's health, and is determined to improve air quality for everyone. That is why we are working across Government to tackle these issues. This includes supporting the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs to deliver their comprehensive and ambitious Clean Air Strategy, and an initial £3.4 billion towards heat decarbonisation and household energy efficiency over the next three years, to improve housing conditions.

■ Respiratory Diseases: Screening

Jim Shannon:

[20212]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to widen the availability of spirometry testing in primary care settings.

Stephen Kinnock:

NHS England is continuing to support the restoration of local spirometry services, and is enhancing capacity through Community Diagnostic Centres. These initiatives provide structured pathways for general practitioners (GPs) to refer patients for essential respiratory diagnostic tests such as spirometry, ensuring faster access to these services for individuals with suspected respiratory conditions, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). By equipping primary care with the tools and pathways for earlier and more accurate diagnosis, this effort addresses the significant issue of undiagnosed COPD, which is estimated to affect 2.1 million people in England. These measures are designed to strengthen the collaboration between primary and secondary care, increasing capacity to meet diagnostic demands effectively.

As part of Phase 2 of the GP Direct Access scheme, launched in December 2023, the National Health Service aims to achieve earlier detection and diagnosis of COPD so that patients access timely interventions and optimal treatment, improving patient management and outcomes. The guidance recommends that GP teams refer patients for spirometry for the diagnosis of COPD.

■ Schools: Mental Health Services

Alex Baker:

[20423]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many Mental Health Support Teams there were in (a) Aldershot constituency, (b) Hampshire and (c) London in each year since 2010.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department does not hold the data requested at a constituency level. Nationally, the Mental Health Support Team (MHST) pilot programme commenced in 2018. The number of MHSTs in each integrated care board, from 2018, is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/cyp/trailblazers/>

■ Skin Diseases: Steroid Drugs

Dr Marie Tidball:

[20520]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has plans to support scientific evidence gathering for topical steroid withdrawal including (a) patient involvement in research (b) research into mechanisms underlying the condition, (c) risk factors for developing the condition and (d) how common the condition is.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 19 December 2024]: The Department's National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including topical steroid withdrawal. It is not usual practice to ring-fence funds for particular topics or conditions. Applications are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards being made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and health and care services, value for money, and scientific quality.

The NIHR expects patient and public involvement in the research it supports. Applicants for NIHR funding are required to set out plans for involving the patients and the public in funding applications, which are assessed by funding committees.

Dr Marie Tidball:[\[20521\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to speed up diagnosis times for patients with topical steroid withdrawal.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 19 December 2024]: General practitioners are responsible for ensuring their own clinical knowledge, including of topical steroid withdrawal, remains up-to-date, and for identifying learning needs as part of their continuing professional development. This activity should include taking account of new research and developments in guidance, such as that produced by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, to ensure that they can continue to provide high quality care to all patients. All United Kingdom registered doctors are expected to meet the professional standards set out in the General Medical Council's (GMC) Good Medical Practice.

In 2012 the GMC introduced revalidation, which supports doctors in regularly reflecting on how they can develop or improve their practice, gives patients confidence doctors are up to date with their practice, and promotes improved quality of care by driving improvements in clinical governance. The training curricula for postgraduate trainee doctors is set by the Royal College of General Practitioners and must meet the standards set by the GMC.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency has reviewed topical steroid withdrawal reactions, and first communicated about these reactions in September 2021 in its Drug Safety Update. It produced a further review this year. The British Association of Dermatologists has formed a Topical Steroid Withdrawal Working Party Group, which aims to produce an expert consensus and guidance on supporting people with concerns about topical steroid withdrawal.

■ Social Services**Neil O'Brien:**[\[19000\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to publish the work his Department commissioned from the Adult Social Care Research Unit on updating the 2013 Adult Social Care Relative Needs Formula.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department of Health and Social Care funds independent research through its research delivery arm, the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR). This project is funded through the NIHR Adult Social Care Policy Research Unit.

The publication of research is led by the research team and in line with NIHR commitments to the transparent and independent publication of high-quality research will be made available on the Adult Social Care Policy Research Unit Website. The views expressed in outputs of the research are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

The Department of Health and Social Care is still considering this research as part of its ongoing policy work. We are working closely the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the role of a specific Adult Social Care funding formula is considered within the consultation 'Local authority funding reform: objectives and principles', published on 18 December 2024. We will update further in due course.

■ Social Services: Charities**Joe Robertson:**[\[20892\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ensure that fees paid by commissioners take into account changes in the costs faced by not-for-profit social care providers.

Stephen Kinnock:

Local authorities are best placed to understand and plan for the needs of their population, which is why, under the Care Act 2014, local authorities are tasked with the duty to shape their care market to meet the diverse needs of all local people. This includes negotiating and ensuring fee levels take into account the costs of delivering care, including inflationary and other pressures, to support market sustainability and provider viability.

The Government recognises the important role councils have in commissioning and delivering adult and children's social care services. To support social care authorities to deliver these key services in light of pressures, the Government has this week announced a further £200 million for adult and children's social care.

■ Social Services: Local Government**Bradley Thomas:**[\[19904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the impact of adult social care obligations on local authorities.

Stephen Kinnock:

Department ministers regularly discuss a range of topics with other Cabinet colleagues. In response to the pressures facing adult social care, the Government will make up to £3.5 billion of additional funding for social care authorities available in 2025/26, which includes a £680 million increase in the Social Care Grant.

■ Social Services: Public Consultation

Alicia Kearns: [\[20281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that care providers, including those in supportive living care settings, are consulted during (a) policy reviews and (b) before policy decisions.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department regularly engages with and consults stakeholders, including providers and people with lived experience of care and support services, to ensure that a wide range of views are taken into account through all stages of the policy life cycle. This includes holding regular meetings and provider forums, working with partners in the sector, and also running formal public consultations, as necessary.

■ Sodium Valproate: Compensation

Dr Beccy Cooper: [\[20820\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to expedite implementation of the recommendations from the Hughes report, published on 7 February 2024; and whether he plans to prioritise establishment of (a) interim payments and (b) a valproate specialist unit to support those affected.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is carefully considering the valuable work done by the Patient Safety Commissioner and the resulting Hughes Report. The report sets out options for redress for those harmed by valproate and pelvic mesh, including proposals for a financial scheme and for the establishment of a valproate specialist unit. The Government will be providing an update to the Patient Safety Commissioner's Report at the earliest opportunity.

■ Surgical Mesh Implants

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[18894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that vaginal mesh implant procedures do not result in removal surgery.

Karin Smyth:

A national pause was introduced in 2018 for the use of vaginally inserted mesh to treat prolapse and the use of a retropubic sub-urethral mesh sling to treat stress urinary incontinence. Conditions were put in place for this pause, and NHS England continues to monitor the progress on meeting these conditions.

In response to the recommendations from the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety review, the Department and the National Health Service have taken steps to improve the collection and monitoring of outcome data. The Pelvic Organ Prolapse and Stress Urinary Incontinence registry will be launched in early 2025. NHS England is extending the registry to be United Kingdom-wide and improving the recording of patient outcomes and experience. The Department has also

commissioned, through the National Institute for Health and Care Research, a £1.56 million study to develop a patient reported outcome measures for prolapse, incontinence, and mesh complication surgery. This will improve collection of short- and long-term data on patient outcomes.

To provide support for women who have experienced complications from pelvic mesh implants, NHS England has established nine specialist mesh centres across England. These ensure that women in every region of England with complications of mesh inserted for urinary incontinence and vaginal prolapse get the right support. Each mesh centre is led by a multi-disciplinary team to ensure patients get access to the specialist care and treatment that they need, including pain management and psychological support. As health is a devolved matter, these centres do not cover Northern Ireland.

■ **Surgical Mesh Implants: Compensation**

Saqib Bhatti:

[\[19419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the report by (a) Baroness Cumberlege entitled Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review, published 8 July 2020 and (b) Dr Henrietta Hughes entitled Options for redress for those harmed by valproate and pelvic mesh, published on 7 February 2024; and whether he plans to establish a taskforce to improve patient advocacy services for those affected by vaginal mesh implants.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: The Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review's overarching conclusion was that the system failed to listen to patients or put patients at the centre of their care. Subsequent work has focussed on improving how the system listens to and responds to concerns raised by patients, strengthening the evidence base on which decisions are made, including through making sure the right data is collected and used, and improving the safety of medicines and devices.

The Government is carefully considering the valuable work done by the Patient Safety Commissioner and the resulting Hughes Report, which builds on some of the issues identified by Baroness Cumberlege in the IMMDS Review. The Hughes Report sets out options for redress for those harmed by valproate and pelvic mesh, including a proposal on advocacy services. We will be providing an update to the Patient Safety Commissioner's report at the earliest opportunity.

■ **Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[17074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill on the NHS budget.

Stephen Kinnock:

Now that Parliament has voted to give the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill a Second Reading, the Government will assess the impacts of the bill and publish these in due course.

This continues to be a matter for Parliament and, as the bill progresses, Members of Parliament, both Honourable and Right Honourable, will further debate and scrutinise the legislation and the Government will respect Parliament's will.

■ Trastuzumab Deruxtecan**Rebecca Paul:**[\[20508\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to take steps to encourage further negotiation between (a) NICE, (b) Daiichi Sankyo Company, Limited and (c) AstraZeneca on the supply of Enhertu.

Karin Smyth:

Decisions on whether new medicines should be routinely funded by the National Health Service in England are made on the basis of recommendations from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), following an evaluation of a treatment's costs and benefits. These are very difficult decisions to make, and it is important that they are made independently, and on the basis of the available evidence.

The NICE published guidance in July 2024 on the use of Enhertu for the treatment of HER-2 low metastatic and unresectable breast cancer, and was unfortunately unable to recommend it for routine NHS funding. I understand that the NICE and NHS England have sought to apply as much flexibility as they can in their considerations of Enhertu for HER2-low breast cancer, and have made it clear to the companies that their pricing of the drug remains the only obstacle to access.

Earlier this year, ministers met with the manufacturers of Enhertu, AstraZeneca, and Daiichi Sankyo, to encourage them to re-engage in commercial discussions with NHS England. Despite the NICE and NHS England offering unprecedented flexibilities, the companies were unable to offer Enhertu at a cost-effective price. The NICE's guidance will therefore remain unchanged. Although the deadline for a rapid review has now passed, the NICE has reassured me that the door remains open for the companies to enter into a new NICE appraisal, if they are willing to offer Enhertu at a cost-effective price.

■ Vaccination: Side Effects**Adam Jogee:**[\[20301\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the support given to people who have experienced a (a) severe adverse reaction and (b) bereavement after receiving a vaccine on levels of vaccine hesitancy.

Andrew Gwynne:

The United Kingdom has one of the most extensive immunisation programmes in the world, with uptake rates amongst the highest globally.

No specific assessment has been made of the impact of the support given to people who have experienced a severe adverse reaction or bereavement after receiving a vaccine on levels of vaccine hesitancy. However, to assess public confidence in vaccinations programmes more generally, the UK Health Security Agency undertakes research to understand how knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes towards immunisation, vaccine safety, and disease severity influence vaccine uptake. And to ensure that those being offered vaccines are aware of the potential benefits and side effects of vaccines, public-facing information is provided in multiple languages and accessible formats, with training standards provided for healthcare professionals who will support the consent process.

The Government remains committed to addressing challenges around vaccine confidence and to improving vaccination uptake rates to fully protect the public from preventable diseases.

■ Viral Diseases: Screening**Bobby Dean:**[\[17928\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to continue funding for the opt-out blood-borne virus testing programme at (a) St George's, Epsom and (b) St Helier Hospitals and Health Group beyond March 2025.

Andrew Gwynne:

On 28 November 2024, the Prime Minister announced a further £27 million of funding for the continuation of the HIV Emergency Department opt-out testing programme for 2025/26. As part of the extension, more than 90 sites will be offered funding to continue or begin the roll out of HIV opt out testing until March 2026, including St George's, Epsom, and St Helier hospitals.

NHS England will evaluate the costs and feasibility of further extending this programme regarding hepatitis B and C opt-out testing, once budgets for 2025/26 are confirmed, and expects to provide an update on their decision in the early new year.

There are currently no plans to extend opt-out HIV testing beyond emergency departments. However, the Department, together with the UK Health and Security Agency, and NHS England are working together in the development of a new HIV Action Plan, which will include a focus on scaling up HIV testing, and which we aim to publish in summer 2025.

HOME OFFICE**■ Animal Experiments****Sarah Champion:**[\[20215\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has had discussions with the (a) Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology and (b) Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on (i) coordinated action to deliver the phase out of animal testing and (ii) the potential merits of establishing a cross-Government taskforce.

Dan Jarvis:

This Government has made a commitment to the development of alternative methodologies to the use of animals in science and Lord Hanson has held discussions on the delivery of that commitment with Ministers for the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The plan we develop will maintain the UK's place at the forefront of science development and innovation.

In the limited circumstances where there is no animal alternative and procedures are required to deliver important benefits to people, the environment, and other animals then we deliver robust, rigorous and trustworthy regulation of those procedures.

The Home Office assures that, in every research proposal: animals are replaced with non-animal alternatives wherever possible; that experiments are appropriate designed and analysed experiments that are robust, reproducible, and add to the knowledge base; and that we assure the methodologies use the latest technologies to minimise pain, suffering and distress and improve understanding of the impact of welfare on scientific outcomes.

■ Anti-social Behaviour: Great Yarmouth**Rupert Lowe:**[\[20082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she has taken to reduce antisocial behaviour in Great Yarmouth 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.

■ Anti-social Behaviour: Motor Vehicles

Luke Murphy:

[\[20728\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the impact of the proposed Respect Orders on anti-social car meets and illegal street racing in Basingstoke.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Acts of anti-social behaviour (ASB) - such as the arrangement of illegal car meets – cause great harm, distress and nuisance to our communities, and, if left unchecked, can lead to even more serious offending. That is why tackling ASB is a top priority for this Government, and a key part of our Safer Streets Mission, and it is also why we are putting 13,000 additional police officers and community support officers back on the beat to restore effective and visible neighbourhood policing in communities like Basingstoke.

As recently announced by the Home Secretary, the Respect Orders we will introduce in the forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill will enable the courts to place wide-ranging restrictions on the behaviour of the most persistent and disruptive ASB offenders. Breaches of those orders will be a criminal offence, and the courts will have a wide range of sentencing options for those convicted, including community orders, unlimited fines and, for the most severe cases, up to two years' imprisonment.

The Home Office publishes statutory Guidance for police and local authorities on the use of the anti-social behaviour powers under the Anti-social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014, and this will be updated to include the Respect Order. The Respect Order will be piloted to ensure it is as effective as possible, before national roll-out.

Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 empowers the police to issue a warning to anyone driving both in a careless and inconsiderate manner on road or off-road without consent and in a way which causes alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public. If the driver ignores the warning to stop the behaviour, the police can seize the vehicle. It is then only released on payment of prescribed fees.

The Home Office has recently announced plans to strengthen this law so that these vehicles can be seized by police when they are used to commit anti-social behaviour, including illegal street racing, without the necessity to issue a prior warning, thereby speeding up effective enforcement action and allowing the police to swiftly seize vehicles being used anti-socially.

The Home Office does not collect data on vehicles seized under Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002.

■ Arms Trade: Israel**Apsana Begum:**[\[19789\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information her Department holds on the number of people who have been arrested in relation to protests against arms sales to Israel since (a) 8 October 2023, (b) 26 January 2024 and (c) 2 September 2024.

Dame Diana Johnson:

According to data provided by the National Police Coordination Centre, the number of people arrested in relation to protests against arms sales to Israel is as follows:

- From 8 October 2023 to 25 January 2024: 126 arrests
- From 26 January 2024 to 1 September 2024: 105 arrests
- From 2 September 2024 to present: 31 arrests

This totals 262 arrests across multiple police forces.

Apsana Begum:[\[19849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been arrested 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.

Dame Diana Johnson:

According to data provided by the National Police Coordination Centre, the number of people arrested for activity relating to protests against Elbit Systems UK is as follows:

- From 8 October 2023 to 25 January 2024: 44 arrests
- From 26 January 2024 to 1 September 2024: 36 arrests
- From 2 September 2024 to present: 17 arrests

This totals 97 arrests.

Apsana Begum:[\[19852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been arrested using powers in the (a) Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2023 and (b) Public Order Act 2023 for activity relating to protests against Elbit Systems UK's arms sales to Israel since (i) 8 October 2023, (ii) 26 January 2024 and (iii) 2 September 2024.

Apsana Begum:[\[19853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been arrested using powers in the (a) Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2023 and (b) Public Order Act 2023 for activity relating to protests against arms sales to Israel since (i) 8 October 2023, (ii) 26 January 2024 and (iii) 2 September 2024.

Apsana Begum:[\[19855\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been arrested using powers in the (a) the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2023 and

(b) Public Order Act 2023 for activity relating to protests against climate change in the last year.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The information requested could not be obtained without disproportionate cost. While the Home Office does hold data around protest-related arrests, this information is not categorised in a way that would enable to identification of arrests specifically made under this legislation. To obtain this information would require a review of arrest records across multiple police forces, which would exceed the cost threshold.

■ **Asma al-Assad**

Blair McDougall: [\[20339\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will remove Asma Assad's UK citizenship.

Dame Angela Eagle:

We do not comment on individual cases.

But in the wider issue raised, 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.

■ **Assaults on Police**

Jim Shannon: [\[20621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Home Department, how many assaults there have been on police officers in the last 12 months.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Data on the number of police recorded crimes for assaults against police officers is published by the Office for National Statistics as part of their quarterly 'Crime in England and Wales' series which can be accessed here:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice>.

Information on the number of offences of assaults against police officers in England and Wales, for the year ending 30 June 2024, can be found in Table A5a of the Crime in England and Wales Appendix Tables here:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalesappendixtables/yearendingjune2024/appendixtablesjun24final.xlsx>.

■ Asylum: Housing

Neil O'Brien:

[\[20254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, on what occasions a Contract Change Note has been issued for contracts for asylum accommodation and support services since 2021.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Since 2021, Contract Change Notices have been issued for the Asylum Accommodation and Support contracts on the following occasions:

Serco MEE

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
006.02	01/03/2021
006.04	12/11/2021
006.07	06/01/2022
006.08	01/04/2022
006.10	24/05/2022
006.12	24/08/2022
006.14	31/10/2022
006.16	12/01/2023
006.18	12/01/2023
006.20	07/03/2023
006.22	27/03/2023
006.24	06/04/2023
006.26	24/05/2023
006.28	27/06/2023
006.30	20/07/2023
006.32	03/08/2023
006.34	20/10/2023
006.36	20/10/2023
008.00	14/12/2021
008.01	01/04/2022

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
008.02	16/11/2022
008.03	27/11/2022
009.00	01/01/2021
011.00	01/05/2022
012.00	24/05/2022
014.00	14/02/2022
015.00	01/09/2022
017.00	10/01/2023
018.00	01/01/2022
019.00	01/01/2023
019.10	11/08/2023
020.00	11/08/2023
022.00	03/08/2023
022.10	06/11/2023
022.20	05/01/2024
022.30	05/03/2024
022.40	05/06/2024
022.50	05/08/2024
023.00	04/07/2023
023a	08/09/2023
023b	18/09/2023
023c	18/09/2023
024.00	07/08/2023
024.10	07/08/2023
025.00	06/10/2023
026.00	08/12/2023

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
027.00	01/10/2024

Serco NW

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
005	23/11/2021
006.01	28/01/2021
006.03	13/07/2021
006.05	12/11/2021
006.06	06/01/2022
006.09	01/04/2022
006.11	24/05/2022
006.13	24/08/2022
006.14	31/10/2022
006.15	31/10/2022
006.17	12/01/2023
006.19	12/01/2023
006.21	07/03/2023
006.23	27/03/2023
006.25	06/04/2023
006.27	24/05/2023
006.29	27/06/2023
006.31	20/07/2023
006.33	03/08/2023
006.35	20/10/2023
006.37	20/10/2023
009	06/01/2022
011	01/05/2022

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
012	24/05/2022
013	11/05/2022
013.1	24/06/2022
014	11/02/2022
017	10/01/2023
018	01/01/2022
019	01/01/2023
019.01	01/04/2024
020	11/08/2023
025	06/10/2023
026	18/12/2023
027	01/10/2024

Mears NEYH

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
013	23/02/2021
014	01/03/2021
015	21/05/2021
016	06/09/2022
019	25/02/2022
022	06/04/2022
023	04/11/2022
024	01/01/2023
025	27/02/2023
026	11/07/2023
027	30/08/2023
028	17/11/2023

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
029	14/09/2023
030	05/01/2023
030A	20/02/2024
031	08/12/2023
033	08/01/2024
034	01/01/2024
035	01/02/2024
036	08/03/2024
037	15/03/2024
038	29/06/2024
039	24/07/2024
040	31/08/2024
041	29/09/2024
042	01/11/2024
043	17/11/2024
044	01/10/2024
048	01/12/2024
049	13/12/2024

Mears NI

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
009	17/01/2022
012	17/01/2022
013	04/04/2022
016	23/08/2023
019	09/02/2024
020	01/02/2024

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
021	01/10/2024
022	13/12/2024

Mears Scotland

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
010	15/01/2021
011	23/02/2021
012	01/03/2021
013	15/01/2021
014	25/02/2022
015	04/04/2022
016	15/01/2021
017	15/01/2021
018	15/01/2023
019	15/01/2021
020	23/08/2023
020A	23/08/2023
021	15/01/2021
022	01/02/2024
023	01/10/2024
024	18/11/2024
025	18/11/2024
026	01/10/2024
027	13/12/2024

CRH South

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
006e	22/03/2022
006f	25/10/2022
010	28/01/2021
011	31/03/2021
012	02/12/2021
013	11/02/2022
014	28/01/2022
015	01/04/2022
016	03/11/2022
016a	10/11/2022
016b	11/12/2022
016c	12/03/2023
016d	12/06/2023
016e	12/09/2023
016f	12/12/2023
017	22/11/2022
018	01/10/2021
019	01/01/2023
020	25/04/2023
021	11/06/2023
022	06/06/2023
023	26/07/2023
024	27/11/2023
025	13/11/2023
026	29/11/2023
028	23/07/2024

CRH Wales

CCN NUMBER	DATE EFFECTIVE
010	28/01/2021
012	02/12/2021
013	11/02/2022

■ **Banks: Vandalism**

Lauren Edwards: [\[20747\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with police forces on tackling vandalism of bank branches.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 provides the police, local authorities and other local agencies with a range of flexible tools and powers that they can use to respond quickly and effectively to anti-social behaviour, including acts of vandalism and criminal damage.

It is for local areas and individual police forces to decide how best to deploy these powers depending on the specific circumstances of each case, but the Government is determined to restore the neighbourhood policing that enables local forces to respond visibly and effectively to incidents of crime in our country's high streets and town centres, including putting 13,000 more neighbourhood police and community support officers back on the beat in local communities to help lead that fight.

■ **Biometric Residence Permits**

Ben Maguire: [\[19612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of shortening the application period for extending biometric residence permits from three months to 28 days on (a) all biometric residence permit holders and (b) biometric residence permit holders with children who are (i) taking exams and (ii) applying for university or apprenticeships.

Ben Maguire: [\[19613\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to support Ukrainian biometric residence permit holders whose jobs may be affected by the revised biometric residence permit extension application period.

Seema Malhotra:

The Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) scheme will open applications on 4 February 2025, with applications being accepted within 28-days of an individual's current permission expiring.

Applications under most immigration routes are only accepted 28 days before the expiry of the current permission. This ensures sufficient time to apply to the scheme before existing permission expires. Provided an application is made before the date of expiry of existing permission, the applicant will continue to benefit from ongoing permission in the UK (and associated access to benefits and services) until a decision is made on their UPE application.

The scheme will provide the same rights and entitlements as the existing Ukraine Schemes, to access work, benefits, healthcare and education. Further details on eligibility and application processes can be found at: [Applying to the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/applying-to-the-ukraine-permission-extension-scheme).

■ **British Nationality: Biometrics**

Layla Moran: [\[19381\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of removing the referee requirement for UK citizenship applications, in the context of the introduction of biometric identity checks.

Seema Malhotra:

The application process for British citizenship is kept under regular review with a view to making it as efficient and straightforward as possible while upholding necessary security requirements.

■ **Community Security Trust: Finance**

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[19868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to provide funding for the Community Security Trust.

Dan Jarvis:

The Community Security Trust will receive funding of £18 million per year through the Jewish Community Protective Security Grant (JCPS) from 2024/25 to 2027/28.

The Jewish Community Protective Security Grant provides protective security measures (such as security personnel services, CCTV and alarm systems) at synagogues, Jewish educational establishments and community sites. It is managed on behalf of the Home Office by the Community Security Trust.

We continue to work closely with the Community Security Trust on how best to protect Jewish communities across the UK.

■ **Counter-terrorism**

Nick Timothy: [\[20295\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to follow the Prevent duty guidance, published on 12 March 2015, during meetings with Islamist organisations.

Dan Jarvis:

In 2024 a new definition of extremism was published, alongside a set of engagement principles, to ensure that the Government is not inadvertently providing a platform, funding or legitimacy to groups or individuals who attempt to advance extremist ideologies.

The definition sits alongside a set of cross-government engagement principles. The definition and engagement principles are used by Government departments when considering with whom to engage.

The Prevent duty guidance advises specified authorities on best practice to help them comply with the Prevent duty. It includes advice on how they can limit exposure to radicalising narratives and ensure radicalising ideologies are challenged and are not permitted to flourish.

The latest iteration of the Prevent duty guidance came into force in December 2023.

■ Counter-terrorism: Finance

Nick Timothy: [\[20294\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what funding has been provided to the counter-extremism centre of excellence since 4 July 2024.

Dan Jarvis:

The March 2024 announcement of a new centre of excellence for counter-extremism within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was a commitment by the previous administration and has not been continued by this Government.

■ Counter-terrorism: Kent

Lauren Edwards: [\[20746\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information her Department holds on the number of referrals made to the Prevent programme in relation to people from (a) Rochester and Strood constituency, (b) Medway and (c) Kent in each of the last five years.

Dan Jarvis:

The Home Office does not publish data on the number of referrals made to the Prevent programme below regional levels because it could enable a threat picture to be built which could be used for terrorist purposes.

The number of referrals made to the Prevent programme in the South-East region, in which the areas the Hon Member has asked about are contained, is provided in the table below.

Number of individuals referred to the Prevent Programme within the South East region each year since the financial year ending 2020

FINANCIAL YEAR	PREVENT REFERRALS MADE WITHIN THE SOUTH EAST REGION
2019//20	867
2020/19	774
2021/22	1,115
2022/23	1,106
2023/24	1,200
Grand total	5,062

Further information on the individuals referred to Prevent can be found in the published annual statistics on GOV.UK: Individuals referred to Prevent: to March 2024.

■ **Crime**

Rupert Lowe: [\[19829\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of including immigration status on crime reports.

Dame Diana Johnson:

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer he was given on 4th December to question UIN 16906.

■ **Crime: Nationality**

Rupert Lowe: [\[19995\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of a review of which nationalities proportionately commit the largest number of crimes.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Ministry of Justice already publishes the nationality of those entering custody or serving prison sentences as part of their quarterly Offender Management Statistics: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2024/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2024>.

■ Crime: Rural Areas**Stuart Anderson:** [\[20711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to support police forces to purchase equipment for tackling rural crime.

Dame Diana Johnson:

It is an operational matter for policing to determine how they use the resources they have been allocated in order to carry out their duties, taking into account local priorities.

The Provisional Police Funding Settlement announced funding of up to £19.5 billion for 2025-26, an increase of up to £1 billion, or 5.5% in cash terms, from last year's settlement.

■ Crimes of Violence: Greater London**Luke Taylor:** [\[19497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to reduce youth-related gang violence in London.

Dame Diana Johnson:

To deliver our pledge to halve knife crime in the next decade, it is crucial that we tackle the gangs that lure children and young people into crime and run county lines through violence and exploitation.

An estimated 14,000 children are identified as at risk or involved in child criminal exploitation. That is why this Government's manifesto included a commitment to introduce a new offence of criminal exploitation of children, which we will bring forward as part of the Crime and Policing Bill.

County Lines is the most violent model of drug supply and a harmful form of child criminal exploitation. Through the County Lines Programme, which includes funding for dedicated County Lines Taskforce in the Metropolitan Police, we will continue to target exploitative drug dealing gangs and break the organised crime groups behind the trade.

The Government has also committed to the creation of a new Young Futures Programme (YFP), which will establish a network of Young Futures Hubs and Young Futures Prevention Partnerships, to intervene earlier to ensure this cohort is identified and offered support in a more systematic way, as well as creating more opportunities for young people in their communities, through the provision of open access to mental health and careers support.

■ Deportation**Rupert Lowe:** [\[20477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many notices that a person is to be treated as an illegal entrant or as a person liable to administrative removal under

section 10 of the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999 have been issued by her Department in each of the last five years.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The specific information requested is not readily available from published statistics, and could only be obtained for the purpose of answering this question at disproportionate cost.

■ **Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner**

Ian Roome:

[\[20889\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to page 16 of the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, whether her Department plans to abolish the role of Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Since their introduction, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) have brought greater local accountability to policing and we recognise the important role they play as the elected voice of their local communities.

The English Devolution White Paper sets out an ambition that where geographies of mayoral strategic authorities align with police forces, Mayors will, by default, exercise PCC functions. This does not abolish the role of Police and Crime Commissioner, but rather incorporates the functions as part of the role of the mayor, where one is established. We believe this offers wider levers to tackle and prevent crime and anti-social behaviour, whilst preserving directly elected oversight for policing.

Government will engage with partners across England, including in Devon and Cornwall, to agree devolution proposals that are right for the area.

■ **Economic Crime: Crown Dependencies**

Phil Brickell:

[\[20818\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she plans to take to ensure UK law enforcement authorities use criminal measures against professional enablers of economic crime who have exploited Crown Dependencies.

Dan Jarvis:

Professional enablers are a critical facilitator of serious and organised crime.

As part of the Economic Crime Plan 2, the National Economic Crime Centre launched a cross-system strategy to tackle the threat posed by professional enablers to the UK earlier this year.

This sets out a series of actions for the public and private sectors including commitments to enhance collective understanding, improve information sharing, make better use of powers and intervention tools, and develop joint disruption strategies to tackle the threat. One of the key objectives is for law enforcement and supervisory bodies to deliver impactful disruptions and use the full range of

intervention opportunities, including criminal justice outcomes, to achieve this. We expect the strategy to start delivering results in 2025.

The Crown Dependencies are separate, self-governing jurisdictions responsible for their own domestic affairs and whose law enforcement agencies are responsible for tackling criminality that occurs in their jurisdictions. The Home Office works closely with the Crown Dependencies to strengthen their transparency requirements to reduce the threat of professional enablers and companies laundering money in the Crown Dependencies.

■ Home Office: Alcoholic Drinks

Cat Smith: [\[19339\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many alcohol industry representatives Ministers in her Department have met since July 2024.

Dame Diana Johnson:

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.

■ Home Office: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

Emily Thornberry: [\[19666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, 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.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The volumes of government procurement cards held by core Home Office and executive agencies (ALBs) on 31 December 2022 and 31 December 2023 are:

2022

HO 1061

ALB 34

2023

HO 1052

ALB 36

■ Home Office: Equality

Nick Timothy: [\[19469\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to remove (a) diversity and inclusion advisers and (b) champion positions in her Department.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The type of positions referred to by the Hon. Member were established under the previous Government, for the reasons set out in the answer of 10 January 2017 to Question 58238, which remain relevant today.

■ Home Office: Media**John Cooper:**[\[20490\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Dame Diana Johnson:

There has been no spend on media or voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

■ Home Office: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:**[\[20169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 30 October 2024 to Question 9278 on Home Office: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government Property Agency has confirmed expenditure of £8,210.87 excluding VAT during the period 4th July 2022 to 4th July 2024 on new furniture and fittings plus other refurbishment (including moves) in relation to private offices for the Home Office. This is broken down as follows;

- New Furniture and Fittings - £677.90
- Other Refurbishment of Ministerial Offices including moves - £7,532.97

The full itemised list of Other Refurbishment of Ministerial Offices including moves can be found below:

Cost of New Furniture and Fittings (£677.90)

- Supply and install of 1x new desk. £677.90. Works Completed 24/01/2023

Cost of Other Refurbishment of Ministerial Offices including moves (£7,532.97)

- Desk moves. £346.56. Works Completed 14/07/2022
- Supply and installation floor-box. £138.64. Works Completed 01/11/2022
- Furniture moves. £816.50. Works Completed 01/11/2022
- Desk moves. £418.60. Works Completed 03/11/2022
- Desk moves. £138.64. Works Completed 21/11/2022
- Desk moves. £368.14. Works Completed 19/04/2023
- Signage. £156.98. Works Completed 05/05/2023

- Furniture moves. £784.25. Works Completed 02/10/2023
- Pattress for video wall installation. £2,903.28. Works Completed 21/03/2024
- Desk moves. £51.75. Works Completed 11/07/2024
- Desk moves. £467.28. Works Completed 12/07/2024
- Install meeting table from storage. £219.91. Works Completed 20/08/2024
- Signage. £722.44. Works Completed 30/09/2024

■ Islam

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19354\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has a working definition of Islamism.

Dan Jarvis:

In the context relevant to the Home Office's responsibility for tackling Islamist extremism or terrorism the UK's counter-terrorism strategy CONTEST says that Islamist terrorism is the threat or use of violence as a means to establish a strict interpretation of an Islamic society.

■ Knives: Crime Prevention

Luke Taylor: [\[19494\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking with the Metropolitan Police to deploy educational awareness campaigns aimed at reducing youth-related knife crime in London.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Halving knife crime over the next decade is a key part of the Government's Safer Streets mission. We are taking a range of steps to realise this ambition. For example, we have banned Zombie style knives and zombie style machetes and are currently consulting on a ban of ninja swords. We are also creating a new Young Futures programme - intervening earlier to stop young people being drawn into crime. It is vital we have a system that can identify and support those young people who need it most.

The Home Office funds the London Violence Reduction Unit, a multiagency partnership which includes the Metropolitan Police, to understand and tackle the drivers of serious violence. London VRU supports delivery of a range of youth initiatives across London boroughs which raise awareness of the impact of knife crime, for example the Choices Weapons Awareness Programme, delivered across Camden secondary schools to increase understanding of the consequences of knife crime on families affected and deter knife-carrying.

■ **Marriage: Relatives**

Richard Tice:

[\[20089\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many first-cousin marriages were recorded in each of the last three years, broken down by the nationalities of the parties involved.

Seema Malhotra:

This information is not collected or held.

■ **Metropolitan Police**

Luke Taylor:

[\[20840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of comments made by Sir Mark Rowley to the London Policing Board on 10 December 2024 in relation to (a) funding and (b) potential job losses in the Metropolitan Police.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Provisional Police Funding Settlement was published on 17 December. This settlement provides £19.5 billion of funding for 2025-26 which is an increase of up to £1 billion. For the Metropolitan Police, this means funding of up to £3.8 billion in funding in 2025-26, an increase of up to £226.9 million when compared to the 2024-25 police settlement.

We will continue to work closely with the force to ensure that they have the resources they need.

■ **Migrants: Government Assistance**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[19504\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's contract entitled Services to Support Migrants Currently Living in the Community Who Do Not Have Permission to Live in the UK, reference C16116, published on 14 December 2020, how many migrants have used these services.

Dame Angela Eagle:

A total of 84 participants took part in the Refugee and Migrant Advice Service, which ran from June 2020 until June 2022.

■ **Mobile Phones: Theft**

Uma Kumaran:

[\[20352\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has had discussions with representatives of the mobile phone industry on (a) using technology to prevent stolen phones from being re-used and (b) the adequacy of security on banking phone apps.

Dame Diana Johnson:

A series of meetings have already been held, and we will be holding a Home Office Mobile Phone Theft Summit, drawing together representatives from the mobile phone industry, including tech companies, and law enforcement to see what more can collectively be done to break the business model of mobile phone thieves.

As part of our Safer Streets Mission, this government is determined to crack down on theft and other crimes that make people feel unsafe in our communities, including strengthening neighbourhood policing, tackling anti-social behaviour and restoring public confidence.

■ Money Laundering: Crown Dependencies**Phil Brickell:**[\[20556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that Crown Dependencies are not used to launder the proceeds of corruption.

Dan Jarvis:

The Crown Dependencies are separate, self-governing jurisdictions responsible for their own domestic affairs, including financial services regulation. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for managing the UK's constitutional relationship with the Crown Dependencies but all UK Government departments are responsible for their respective policy areas towards the Crown Dependencies and engage directly with them. The Home Office leads on illicit finance liaison with the Crown Dependencies for the UK Government.

Corruption and illicit finance threaten global security, harm democracy, hamper economic growth and prosperity, slow development, and harm victims. The UK Government is committed to working together with international financial centres, including the Crown Dependencies and the Overseas Territories, to help tackle corruption and money laundering.

The Crown Dependencies (the Bailiwick of Jersey, the Bailiwick of Guernsey including Alderney, and the Isle of Man) have company beneficial ownership registers and they share data from these with UK law enforcement via the Exchange of Notes arrangements.

Publicly accessible company beneficial ownership registers are a critical tool for tackling illicit finance, making it more challenging for illicit actors to hide funds and launder the proceeds of corruption. The Home Office continues to work with the Crown Dependencies to help improve their beneficial ownership transparency and welcomes the commitments the Crown Dependencies have made for greater corporate transparency; the Crown Dependencies are working towards implementing legitimate interest access to their registers, including access for media and civil society.

However, this Government is committed to tackling illicit finance and expects this to be an interim step to public registers. I look forward to meeting with the Crown Dependencies in 2025 to discuss this ongoing agenda.

■ National Wildlife Crime Unit

Chris Evans:

[20602]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to support the National Wildlife Crime Unit.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Wildlife crime can have devastating consequences for our natural environments and countryside communities. This Government is committed to reducing crime in rural areas and anyone exploiting or deliberately harming British wildlife should face the full force of the law.

That is why, along with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Home Office directly funds the National Wildlife Crime Unit, which plays a vital role in providing intelligence, analysis and investigative assistance to the police and other law enforcement agencies across the UK.

Any non-notifiable wildlife crime reported to the police can still be investigated where appropriate, as Chief Constables have operational independence to tackle the crimes that matter most to their communities.

■ Naturalisation

Chris Kane:

[20300]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of applications for naturalisation as a British citizen were processed within the UK Visas and Immigration six-month service standard in the latest period for which data is available; and what steps her Department is taking to meet this service standard.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office publishes regular data on the processing of applications for British citizenship on the Gov.uk website. This includes performance against the service standard for completing applications. The most recent Migration Transparency data published in November 2024 shows that 99.9% of straightforward applications were decided within service standard.

The link to the latest Migration Transparency Data can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/passport-citizenship-and-civil-registrations-data-q3-2024>.

■ Nature Conservation: Crime

Chris Evans:

[20601]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of making wildlife crimes notifiable offences.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Wildlife crime can have devastating consequences for our natural environments and countryside communities. This Government is committed to reducing crime in rural areas and anyone exploiting or deliberately harming British wildlife should face the full force of the law.

That is why, along with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Home Office directly funds the National Wildlife Crime Unit, which plays a vital role in providing intelligence, analysis and investigative assistance to the police and other law enforcement agencies across the UK.

Any non-notifiable wildlife crime reported to the police can still be investigated where appropriate, as Chief Constables have operational independence to tackle the crimes that matter most to their communities.

■ Offences against Children: Arrests**Chris Philp:**[\[19371\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been arrested as a result of investigations by the Grooming Gangs Taskforce since 5 July 2024.

Jess Phillips:

The Child Sexual Exploitation Police Taskforce (or 'Grooming Gangs Taskforce') provides practical, expert, on the ground support for local forces investigating complex, group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation, with a focus on grooming gangs. It supports force-led investigations rather than running its own investigations.

Data is collected and reported quarterly. Arrest data is currently available from 34 out of the 44 forces that the Taskforce collects data from. In the most recent data collection – which is for Quarter 3 of 2024 (1 July – 30 September) - those 34 forces recorded 222 arrests for group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation offences. 'Group-based' offending in this context includes any offence with two or more perpetrators. This will include – but is not limited to – 'grooming gang' type offending; other 'group-based' offending includes intra-familial and peer-on-peer abuse, for example.

■ Overseas Students: Visas**Rupert Lowe:**[\[19942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to verify that individuals that enter the country on student visas are attending their courses.

Seema Malhotra:

Sponsoring institutions of international students are required to promptly report where sponsorship is withdrawn due to failure to enrol or attend classes in line with published duties to UKVI. Sponsors are required to submit an annual assessment

where course completion and enrolment rates of their sponsored students are assessed against published metrics.

Where educational institutions fall below these metrics, the Home Office is entitled to take compliance action against the sponsoring institution. Those students who do not enrol or persistently fail to attend their courses also face their Student permission being cancelled.

In addition, UKVI has a range of other mechanisms available to ensure that institutions are meeting their sponsor duties, including through onsite compliance visits.

■ Petr Aven

Sir Iain Duncan Smith:

[\[19223\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will use her discretionary powers to redirect a portion of the £783,827 recovered from Petr Aven to support survivors of the conflict in Ukraine.

Seema Malhotra:

The NCA secured a forfeiture of Petr Aven's funds after breaches of sanctions regulations. The allocation of forfeited 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 the reconstruction of Ukraine.

■ Police

Chris Philp:

[\[19370\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has written to Chief Constables setting out her priorities for policing.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Secretary spoke with all Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners within her first days of office, on 7th July. In that same week on 11th July, the Home Secretary attended meetings of both the NPCC and APCC to set out this Government's Safer Streets mission and priorities for policing.

She discussed her priorities for policing with sector leaders at the National Policing Board on 23rd October and, on 19th November, set out more detail of her plans to all Chief Constables and PCCs at the National Police Chiefs Council and Association of Police Crime Commissioners Summit.

The Home Secretary wrote to all Chief Constables and Police Crime Commissioners (PCCs) on 5th December on the Government's Plan for Change and the ambition to restore neighbourhood policing.

Charlotte Nichols:

[20043]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the number of police officers in 2027.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Police forces in England and Wales are expected to maintain officer numbers, as per the officer maintenance grant. The Government is currently working with police forces on setting an accurate baseline for neighbourhood policing numbers.

■ **Police Custody and Stop and Search: Body Searches**

Marsha De Cordova:

[20027]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of publishing data on whether illicit objects were found during strip searches (a) in police custody and (b) during police stop and searches by (i) police force and (ii) the (A) age, (B) sex and (C) ethnicity of the person.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Strip search is one of the most intrusive powers available to the police. Its use must be fair, respectful, without unlawful discrimination, and transparent. The Government is committed to introducing new legal safeguards around strip searching children.

As part of the Home Office's Annual Data Requirement, data on strip searches which take place in custody is collected and published on an annual basis online at gov.uk:

[Other PACE powers, year ending March 2023 \(second edition\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/other-pace-powers-year-ending-march-2023-second-edition)

This custody data includes the number of strip searches carried out, as well as the age, sex and ethnicity of persons searched. For the 2024/25 custody data collection, forces will be required to record the reasonable grounds for search during a strip search. However, the data does not currently include data on the outcome of the search, and this is something the Home Office will consider collecting in future years.

Since April 2023, the Home Office has also collected data on the extent of clothing removal in stop and searches, allowing analysis of strip searches under stop and search powers. This includes publishing for the first time in September 2024 a breakdown by the sex, age and ethnicity of the person strip searched following the stop and search encounter. Home Office statistics on stop and search includes data on the outcome of the search, including the grounds for the search and whether the outcome of the search was linked to the grounds, which allows analysis of items found.

Information on the levels of stop and search is available at gov.uk:

Stop and search, arrests and mental health detentions, March 2024 - GOV.UK
(www.gov.uk)

Data on the level of clothing removal during stop and search is labelled as 'Official Statistics in development' to denote its collection on a voluntary basis and ongoing quality improvements to the data.

■ Police Federation of England and Wales Independent Review

Jonathan Hinder:

[\[20476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress has been made on the independent review into the Police Federation of England and Wales.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Police Federation of England and Wales has appointed an independent panel to review past failings and future governance of the organisation. That review is independent of Government; the progress of the review and the publication of its findings are matters for the independent panel and the Police Federation.

■ Police National Computer

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[\[19427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the Police National Computer retains nominal records for deceased people.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Police National Computer (PNC) provides police and law enforcement agencies with access to centralised information about individuals, property and vehicles.

A Nominal record is retained until at least 100 years after a Nominal's birth, regardless of the date of death. This is to facilitate criminal investigations that might start or conclude after the death of a Nominal.

The data retention practices on the PNC are governed by:

1. The Police Information and Records Management Code of Practice
2. The Code of Practice for the Police National Computer (PNC) and the Law Enforcement Data Service (LEDS)

■ Police Stations: Finance

Saqib Bhatti:

[\[19418\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the £264 million additional core grant funding for police will support police stations to remain open.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The 2025-26 provisional police funding settlement provides funding of up to £19.5 billion for the policing system in England and Wales. This is an overall increase of up to £1 billion when compared to the 2024-25 settlement, and equates to a 5.5% cash increase, and 3% real terms increase in funding.

Total funding to police forces will be up to £17.4 billion, an increase of up to £987 million compared to the 2024-25 police funding settlement.

The Government recognises the importance of accessibility to the police, and police stations remain one of many important methods where incidents can be reported by members of the public. It is the responsibility of locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables to take decisions around their resourcing and estates including police stations, based on their local knowledge and experience.

■ Police: Employers' Contributions

Esther McVey: [\[19676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the cost to the police service in (a) England and (b) Wales of the increase in Employers' National Insurance Contributions.

Esther McVey: [\[19677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the cost to the police service in (a) England and (b) Wales of the increase in minimum wage.

Dame Diana Johnson:

On 12 December, the PSC issued a circular stating that it has agreed to the deletion of the lowest pay point (£23,286) on the PSC Pay Spine with effect from 1 April 2025. This is to reflect that the increase in the National Living Wage, which will take effect on 1 April 2025, and will result in a rate of £12.21 per hour which will equate to £23,555 and which would be above the lowest pay point on the PSC pay spine.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/police/police-staff/police-staff-council-circulars/psc-joint-8>

We announced the provisional police funding settlement for 2025-26 on 17 December. This includes additional funding of £230.3 million to cover the costs to the police for additional employer's National Insurance contributions.

■ Police: Recruitment

Lee Anderson: [\[19775\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the press notice entitled More bobbies on the beat as PM puts people's priorities first, published on 4 December 2024, what steps her Department is taking to recruit 13,000 (a) police officers, (b) special constables and (c) Police Community Support Officers by the end of this Parliament.

Dame Diana Johnson:

As part of the Government's Safer Streets mission, the Home Secretary has made a clear commitment to strengthen neighbourhood policing through the introduction of a Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. This includes delivering an additional 13,000 police officers, PCSOs and special constables in neighbourhood policing roles up and

down the country and ensuring every community has a named officer to turn to. Every part of the country benefit from this pledge.

£100 million will be made available in 2025/26 to kickstart the recruitment of neighbourhood policing roles.

We are working closely with policing to implement this commitment and will announce our plans for the delivery of neighbourhood officers shortly.

■ Refugees: Employment

Lisa Smart: [\[20460\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for what reason her Department discontinued the Refugee Employability Programme.

Lisa Smart: [\[20461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the decision to discontinue the Refugee Employability Programme on the ability of refugees to (a) secure employment, (b) integrate into local communities, and (c) access local childcare and healthcare services.

Seema Malhotra:

I refer the Honourable Member to the answer I gave on 17 December to Question UIN 18515.

■ Revenge Porn Helpline and StopNCII.org: Finance

Steve Race: [\[19482\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans she has for funding the (a) Revenge Porn Helpline and (b) StopNCII.org website in the next five years.

Jess Phillips:

Violence against women and girls (VAWG), including so-called 'revenge porn' can have devastating consequences on victims. We have set out an unprecedented mission to halve VAWG in a decade, and we have committed to ban the creation of sexually explicit deepfakes, ensuring that those who create these images without consent face appropriate punishment.

Following the spending review announcements in October, the Home Office is now deciding how the total funding settlement is allocated across the organisation, to deliver the Government's priorities.

■ Separated People: Domestic Abuse

Richard Foord: [\[19862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps the Government is taking to help tackle post-separation economic abuse.

Jess Phillips:

I recognise the devastating impact financial and economic abuse can have on victims, even after they have separated from an abusive partner. We continue to work closely with and fund Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA), which supports victims of economic and financial abuse - offering specialist advice to victims via the Financial Support Line in partnership with Money Advice Plus, training financial services providers, and rolling out the Economic Abuse Evidence Form to ensure victims only have to tell their story once. We are committed to working across Government, and with stakeholders, to prevent economic abuse and improve our response to it when it does arise as part of the wider mission to halve VAWG within a decade.

■ **Slavery****Carolyn Harris:**[\[20235\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the impact of negative conclusive grounds decisions under the National Referral Mechanism on vulnerable individuals.

Jess Phillips:

From January 2020 to September 2024, there were 70,790 referrals into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). These have seen a continued increase.

In the same period, there were 51,850 positive reasonable grounds decisions made, and 34,254 conclusive grounds decisions made. Of which 24,233 were positive and 10,021 were negative. These statistics may change as new information becomes available, or if decisions are reconsidered.

With regards to the impact of recent legislation, the Illegal Migration Act 2023 has not been commenced in full, and the Government has made clear that the migration partnership with Rwanda will end. Any legislative plans resulting from this decision will be set out in due course.

This Government has been clear that identifying and supporting victims effectively is a key priority – that is why we have invested in 200 new decision makers to clear the backlog of cases and reduce wait times for victims.

The Home Office publishes modern slavery statistics on a quarterly basis and holds all policies and procedures under review to ensure they are effective in delivering the aims of the Government. As part of our New Plan for Immigration, we will take forward an evaluation workstream to understand the impact being achieved.

■ **Stalking****Dan Tomlinson:**[\[20388\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to take steps to increase protection for victims of stalking when the perpetrator has a mental health condition.

Jess Phillips:

This Government is fully committed to tackling stalking and doing all that it can to protect victims and robustly manage perpetrators.

On 3 December, the Government announced a raft of new measures to tackle stalking by putting victims first and increasing the protections available to them. This includes plans to increase the use of Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs) by legislating to provide for the courts to impose them of their own volition on conviction or acquittal. Currently only the police can apply for an SPO to a magistrate's court.

SPOs are an essential tool designed to protect victims of stalking at the earliest possible opportunity and address the perpetrator's behaviours before they become entrenched or escalate in severity. They allow positive requirements to be imposed and this can include the perpetrator attending mental health support, but also a perpetrator programme to address the root causes of their offending.

Terrorism: Convictions**Jim Shannon:**[\[20620\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been convicted of terrorism offences in the last 12 months.

Dan Jarvis:

In the year ending 30 September 2024, there were 72 trials for terrorism offences in England & Wales, 71 of which were convicted and 1 acquitted.

Further information on the use of police powers under terrorism and subsequent legislation can be found in the published quarterly statistics on GOV.UK: [Operation of police powers under TACT 2000, to September 2024](#).

Undocumented Migrants: Children**Chris Philp:**[\[18967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many migrants entering the country illegally claimed to be children since 5 July 2024; how many and what proportion of those migrants were subsequently assessed to be (a) under and (b) over 18; and whether those migrants were assessed using scientific age assessments.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office publishes quarterly statistics on detected irregular arrivals to the UK in the 'Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release'. Quarterly data on detected irregular arrivals by age group is published in table Irr_D01 of the 'Irregular migration to the UK detailed datasets'. The latest data is up to the end of September 2024, with data up to December 2024 to be published on 27 February 2025.

The Home Office also publishes data on asylum in the 'Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release'. Data on age disputes raised and resolved is published in table Asy_D05 of the 'Asylum applications, initial decisions and resettlement detailed datasets'. The latest data relates to year ending June 2024.

Accurately assessing an individual's age remains an incredibly complex and difficult task, and current methods and procedures for doing so are set out in detail in the Home Office's Assessing Age guidance, which is publicly available here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/672e169e4f7608e424ffdab1/Assessing+age.pdf> (opens in a new tab).

The effectiveness of these and other potential methods and procedures for age assessment are kept under regular review, and any future changes will be updated in the usual way. On the issue of scientific age assessments, I will write to the Rt Hon Member to address in more detail the question he has raised.

■ Visas: Applications

Greg Smith: [20038]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proportion of people with the right to remain in the UK have registered for an e-Visa.

Greg Smith: [20039]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proportion of people with the right to remain in the UK have reported issues registering for an e-Visa.

Greg Smith: [20040]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many complaints her Department has received on systems for registering for an e-Visa.

Greg Smith: [20041]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many registrations for an e-Visa have (a) failed to complete the process and (b) experienced technical difficulties.

Greg Smith: [20042]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to extend the deadline for registering for an e-Visa.

Seema Malhotra:

There is no deadline for registering for a UKVI account to access an eVisa. Most BRPs expire on 31 December and we encourage all BRP holders to create a UKVI account before their BRP expires. If a person has not created an account by 31 December 2024, they will still be able to do so in 2025, using their expired BRP if needed.

eVisas are a key part of our Border Transformation and have been successfully used by over 6 million people in recent years.

The rollout of eVisas does not affect a person's immigration status. Even where someone has not yet created a UKVI account, their eVisa is already available and employers and landlords can digitally check a person's right to work status using the 'Check a job applicant's right to work' and 'Check a tenant's right to rent in England' services.

It is not possible to provide accurate figures on the number of people who have failed to complete the UKVI account registration process. These failures can be due to a number of reasons, including the user choosing to pause the process. Similarly, it is not possible to identify the proportion of people who may have experienced technical difficulties with the eVisa system itself rather than for another reason.

There have been 441 complaints relating to eVisas received by our Customer Complaints Team between 28 August 2024 and 15 December 2024, which is the most recent reporting period available. This number refers to all complaints relating to eVisas rather than just in relation to registering for a UKVI account.

Over 3.1 million people, mostly with BRPs, have successfully made the transition to eVisas from March to November this year. There are still a proportion of customers who have not yet signed up, and we would strongly encourage them to do so. We publish monthly statistics on the number of people who have created a UKVI account, the latest edition of which can be found at [Online immigration status \(eVisa\): UKVI account creation data - GOV.UK](#).

■ **Visas: Colombia**

Dan Tomlinson:

[20387]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of the new visa requirements for Colombian citizens on UK citizens who are intending to return to the UK with children born through surrogacy in Colombia.

Seema Malhotra:

The status of British Citizens is not affected by the reintroduction of a visa requirement for Colombian nationals. The new visa requirements introduced on 26 November 2024 relate to visitors and passengers in transit only. The visa requirements for those who intend to settle in the UK or enter for any other reason have not changed. Full consideration was given to the likely impact of the change on Colombian nationals. British Citizens who intend to return to the UK with a child born through surrogacy are advised to seek specialist immigration advice.

■ **Visas: Entertainers**

Shaun Davies:

[19885]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of exemption to the rules preventing anyone previously sentenced to more than 12 months in custody from obtaining visas for performing artists who have had clean records for the past 10 years.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Immigration Rules in this area are aligned with the long-standing automatic deportation threshold for individuals who have received a custodial sentence of 12 months or more, as set out in the UK Borders Act 2007. In exceptional

circumstances, a visa may be granted, but that has not been a common practice since the passage of the 2007 Act.

■ **Visas: Married People**

Rupert Lowe: [\[19992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proportion of spousal visas were issued to cousins in each of the previous ten years.

Seema Malhotra:

The requested data is not currently collected, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

■ **Visas: Migrant Workers**

Blair McDougall: [\[20855\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to review the salary threshold for the visa sponsorship programme.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Secretary confirmed on 30 July that the Government will be retaining the increase to the general salary threshold for the Skilled Worker visa route brought in by the previous government. The general salary thresholds are updated on an annual basis to keep track with the latest available salary data and pay scales to account for overall wage increases.

■ **Windrush Generation: Public Inquiries**

Marie Goldman: [\[19485\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a new public inquiry into the Windrush scandal.

Seema Malhotra:

This government is determined to put right the appalling injustices caused by the Home Office's treatment of members of the Windrush community, making sure that those affected receive the compensation they rightly deserve, and ensuring cultural change is embedded permanently into the fabric of the Home Office.

We have established a new Windrush Unit in the Home Office with a remit dedicated to driving systemic and cultural change across the whole organisation. The new Windrush Unit will be undertaking a review of the Home Office's response to the Windrush Lessons Learned Review to assess how far the department has come and what more needs to be done.

We will be appointing a Windrush Commissioner to act as an independent advocate for all those affected. This independent advocate will ensure the voices of Windrush victims and communities are heard throughout government and will help ensure lasting change is delivered and lessons of the past are truly learned.

We believe that these measures will be the quickest and most effective way to learn lessons and ensure victims get the support they deserve.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Affordable Housing

Lee Anderson: [19776]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to prioritise the allocation of affordable housing to UK citizens.

Matthew Pennycook:

Eligibility for social housing is already tightly controlled. If a person's visa means that they cannot access state benefits or local authority housing assistance, they are not eligible for an allocation of social housing. Migrants arriving in the UK on student or work visas are not eligible and nor are those who arrive in the country illegally with no leave to remain.

Where someone is eligible, they will have their housing needs considered on the same basis as other eligible applicants in accordance with the local authority's housing allocation scheme. Social housing goes to those who need it most.

The previous government consulted on changes to social housing allocation tests. This government's response was published on 2 September and can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

■ Affordable Housing: Aldershot

Alex Baker: [20804]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has taken recent steps to increase the construction of (a) social housing and (b) affordable homes in Aldershot constituency.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government has committed to delivering the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation.

On 30 July we announced a number of changes in planning policy designed to support the delivery of affordable homes. We also confirmed a range of new flexibilities for councils and housing associations, both within the Affordable Homes Programme and in relation to how councils can use their Right to Buy receipts, and a further £450 million for councils through the Local Authority Housing Fund enabling councils to grow their housing stock.

At the Budget on 30 October, the Chancellor set out details of an immediate one-year cash injection of £500 million to top up the existing Affordable Homes Programme which will deliver up to 5,000 new social and affordable homes. This comes ahead of the multi-year Spending Review next spring, where the Government will set out details of new investment to succeed the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme.

The Chancellor also confirmed that we will reduce Right to Buy discounts to their pre-2012 regional levels and allow councils to retain 100% of the receipts generated by Right to Buy sales.

In addition, the government will consult on a new 5-year social housing rent settlement to provide the sector with the certainty it needs to invest in new social housing.

■ Affordable Housing: Essex

James McMurdock:

[19906]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many affordable homes were (a) started and (b) completed in Essex in 2023-24.

Matthew Pennycook:

Data on new affordable housing starts and completions by upper tier local authority, including Essex, is available on the affordable housing supply open data published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply>.

The number of completions is available since 1991-92. The department started publishing the number of starts in 2015-16. However, starts not reported via Homes England or the Greater London Authority only started being collected in 2016-17 and are collected on a voluntary basis. This means 2015-16 data does not include these data and subsequent years may still be under reporting it. The published open data file includes the figures for 2023-24.

■ Antisemitism

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[20356]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle antisemitism.

Alex Norris:

The appalling rise in antisemitism we have seen over the last year is a stain on our society, and the Government is absolutely committed to rooting out this abhorrent form of hatred. We have been working closely with the Independent Adviser on Antisemitism Lord Mann along with Jewish community voices such as the Community Security Trust on the most effective methods to tackle antisemitism.

Government has committed further funding of £54 million for the Jewish Community Protective Security Grant to provide protective security measures (such as security personnel services, CCTV and alarm systems) at synagogues, Jewish educational establishments and community sites until 2028. We are in the process of finalising a more integrated and cohesive approach to tackling antisemitism and will announce more on this soon.

■ Buildings: Energy

Peter Fortune:

[\[19551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Reforms to the Energy Performance of Buildings regime, published on 4 December 2024.

Alex Norris:

The Government published the consultation on reforms to the Energy Performance of Buildings regime via www.gov.uk and is content that it meets the expected accessibility standards to allow all interested parties to contribute their views. As prescribed in the Government's Publishing Accessible Documents [guidance](#), the consultation is published in HTML format to make it easier to read and to find.

It provides alternative ways to respond to meet the range of accessibility needs; an online response option, a direct email address and a postal address for those unable to respond online. Anyone having any difficulty responding can get in touch using the contact details available to request assistance or an alternative way to respond. We also provide documents in alternative formats when these are requested by the public, including large print and braille. We have an alternative formats email address published on gov.uk which invites users to request a different format if they cannot use one of our documents (alternativeformats@communities.gov.uk).

■ Buildings: Insulation

Mike Amesbury:

[\[20026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's Remediation Acceleration Plan, published on 02 December 2024, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of providing support to volunteer directors of Resident Management Companies and Right to Manage Companies in the event of enforcement action being taken at their building.

Alex Norris:

In accordance with the [Regulator's Code](#), regulators must carry out their activities in a way that supports those they regulate to comply and grow. This includes making sure they take a proportionate approach to enforcement, and educate those they regulate about their responsibilities.

MHCLG expects regulators to engage with a building's leaseholders (including any RTMs or RMCs in place) prior to enforcement, to understand what factors are delaying remediation. If regulatory action has escalated to formal enforcement action, this may be because engagement with relevant parties has failed to produce a positive outcome. Under the Housing Act 2004, local authorities also have a duty to take enforcement action where they identify category 1 hazards (the most dangerous level).

This month, MHCLG published [remediation enforcement guidance for regulators](#) to support regulators to enforce permanent remediation at unsafe buildings. Annex D of

our guidance stresses the importance of regulators taking proportionate regulatory action at leaseholder-managed buildings. We recommend that – in certain cases - non-statutory action to educate RTMs and RMCs about the remediation process and their responsibilities may be the most appropriate and helpful action a regulator can take to get an unsafe building fixed.

Mike Amesbury: [\[20246\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled Joint plan to accelerate developer-led remediation and improve resident experience, published on 2 December 2024, when her Department will begin publishing developer performance against audits; and whether it will report retrospectively on audits carried out since the commencement of the Developer Remediation Contract.

Mike Amesbury: [\[20250\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to paragraph 2h of her Department's policy paper entitled Joint plan to accelerate developer-led remediation and improve resident experience, published on 2 December 2024, what her planned timetable is for issuing final guidance on alternative dispute resolutions; and if it will be mandatory for developers and building owners to participate in alternative dispute resolution.

Mike Amesbury: [\[20707\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference her Department's policy paper entitled Joint plan to accelerate developer-led remediation and improve resident experience, published on 2 December 2024, what the target date is for publication of the final guidance on Alternative Dispute Resolution; and whether (a) developers and (b) building owners will be required to participate in Alternative Dispute Resolution.

Alex Norris:

We will start reporting on audit results in 2025.

Under the terms of the developer remediation contract, signatory developers committed to use all reasonable endeavours to resolve third party disputes fairly and as quickly as possible.

In the joint plan we published on 2 December, the Government committed to publish guidance on alternative dispute resolution by March 2025. Developers that signed up to the joint plan have committed to offer alternative dispute resolution where necessary to resolve such disputes.

■ Buildings: Insurance

Peter Fortune: [\[19548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the Consultation on

introducing permitted insurance fees for landlords, freeholders and property managing agents, published on 2 December 2024.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government published the consultation on introducing permitted insurance fees for landlords, freeholders and property managing agents via gov.uk and its content that it meets the expected accessibility standards to allow all interested parties to contribute their views.

As prescribed in the government's Publishing Accessible Documents [guidance](#), the consultation is published in HTML format to make it easier to read and to find. The guidance in question provides alternate ways to respond to meet the range of accessibility needs, including an online response option and via direct email address. Anyone having any difficulty responding can get in touch using the contact details available to request assistance or an alternative way to respond. We also provide documents in alternative formats when these are requested by the public, including large print and braille. We have an alternative formats email address published on gov.uk which invites users to request a different format if they cannot use one of our documents (alternativeformats@communities.gov.uk).

■ **Care Homes: Essex**

James McMurdock:

[\[19911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many care homes were referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in (a) South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency and (b) Essex in each of the last five years; and how many were (i) privately-owned and (ii) local authority-owned.

Jim McMahon:

The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) records complaints by the individual local authority or care provider, and not by geographical area. The LGSCO received 93 complaints about Essex County Council's adult social care services in the 2019-20 financial year, 44 in 2020-21, 45 in 2021-22, 58 in 2022-23 and 36 in 2023-24.

■ **Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[19351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the deadline is for submitting representations to the planning application for the proposed Chinese Embassy in Tower Hamlets; and if she will make it her policy to ensure that (a) each representation and (b) information on whether each representation is from a resident in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets is published on the Planning Inspectorate website.

Matthew Pennycook:

The deadline for submitting written representations in relation to this planning application was 2 December 2024. This is consistent with the timetabling

arrangements set out in the Planning Inspectorate's called-in planning applications: procedural guide which can be found on gov.uk [here](#). The Planning Inspectorate does not publish representations received on its website. However, all representations will be taken into account before the application is decided.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19356\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her planned timetable is for the Planning Inspectorate's inquiry into the Chinese Embassy planning application; and what the target date is for (a) the inspector's report to be submitted and (b) a final decision to be made.

Matthew Pennycook:

An appointed Inspector is set to open a public inquiry in February 2025 which will hear a range of evidence for and against the proposals. After the close of the inquiry, the Inspector's report and recommendation will be sent to the Department. The Secretary of State will have a target date of 13 weeks from receipt of the report to make her decision.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the answer of 9 December 2024 to Question 16572 on Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission and with reference to paragraphs 18 and 19 of her Department's Guidance on planning propriety: planning casework decisions, whether the call-in representations are being made available to the interested parties in the called-in planning application.

Matthew Pennycook:

We do not routinely make requests to call in planning applications available to interested parties.

Alicia Kearns: [\[20284\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the Prime Minister requested she call-in the application for a new Chinese Embassy in Tower Hamlets after his phone call with the President of China on 23 August 2024.

Matthew Pennycook:

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

■ Civil Disorder

Claire Young: [\[19795\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking with Cabinet colleagues to strengthen communities in the aftermath of the recent riots.

Alex Norris:

The Government has made £15 million available to the places most severely affected by disorder through the Community Recovery Fund to support the immediate

recovery. Officials from my department have also carried out an extensive engagement process with these places to understand the underlying causes of the unrest.

The disorder that affected communities across the UK following the Southport tragedy this summer has made clear that a new approach to community cohesion is urgently needed. This is a priority for the Government and I have stood up a cross-government Communities & Recovery Steering Group to oversee this work.

We are listening to communities across the country to understand the challenges they face and this will inform how this government works to empower communities and build greater cohesion.

■ Civil Society: Islam

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[20228\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2024 to Question 17299 on Muslim Council of Britain, whether her Department engages with (a) MEND, (b) CAGE and (c) the Muslim Association of Britain.

Alex Norris:

The department does not engage with MEND, CAGE or the Muslim Association of Britain.

■ Community Development: Surrey

Zöe Franklin:

[\[20419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help support cross-community inter-faith work in Surrey.

Alex Norris:

Ministers have been meeting a wide range of faith and belief leaders, along with interfaith practitioners, to hear more about the vital work undertaken in communities to help foster good relations.

This department was pleased to support Inter Faith Week in November, and we continue to fund a number of partners to deliver cohesion programmes in local communities which help to contribute to positive interfaith relations.

■ Community Relations: English Language

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[19361\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Answer of 6 December 2024, to Question HL2740 on English Language: Education, what steps the her Department is taking to help promote English language proficiency in the context of integration and community cohesion.

Alex Norris:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [HL2739](#) on 4 December 2024.

■ Conveyancing: Standards

Adam Jogee: [\[20306\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she plans to take to improve outcomes in the conveyancing process.

Adam Jogee: [\[20307\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with the Land Registry on digitising the conveyancing process.

Adam Jogee: [\[20308\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of using digitisation to speed up the conveyancing process.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government recognises that the current home buying and selling process in England is slow, costly and stressful, and that conveyancing is one reason for this.

Digitalisation can make the home buying and selling process more transparent and efficient for the conveyancing sector.

His Majesty's Land Registry (HMLR) have already made progress on this issue through their Local Land Charges programme which will assist in providing quicker, more accurate responses to property search requests, potentially taking weeks off transaction times.

■ Council Tax: Disposable Income

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of trends in the level of council tax on Real Household Disposable Income per person.

Jim McMahon:

Local authorities are responsible for deciding the level of council tax, and as such the government has not undertaken such an assessment of impact on disposable income.

■ Embassies: Planning Permission

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19358\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether embassies are required to apply for planning permission for development within the

curtilage of their land; and whether the Government has issued guidance for embassies on planning law.

Kevin Hollinrake: [19359]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether embassies are subject to planning enforcement decisions.

Kevin Hollinrake: [19360]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance her Department issues on whether embassies are subject to planning enforcement decisions by (a) local authorities and (b) the courts.

Matthew Pennycook:

Embassies are required to apply for planning permission for development proposals, including those within the curtilage of their land, similar to other properties. They are expected to comply with the same planning regulations as other entities. Enforcement powers are available at the discretion of the relevant local planning authority.

■ **Empty Property and Second Homes: Council Tax**

Kevin Hollinrake: [19701]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 15447, on Empty Property and Second Homes: Council Tax, what steps he plans to take if a local authority does not meet the requirement in guidance to advertise in at least one local newspaper; and whether failure to advertise would make the scheme invalid.

Jim McMahon:

Councils have a duty to set their determinations in line with the government's regulations. As the government has set out in the guidance, a council's determination to charge the premium will not be invalidated where they do not publish this notice.

■ **Empty Property: Hampshire**

Alex Baker: [20803]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an estimate of the number of unoccupied dwellings in (a) Hampshire and (b) Aldershot constituency.

Matthew Pennycook:

According to the latest published statistics, excluding second homes, there are 719,470 vacant dwellings in England. 265,061 of these dwellings are classed as Long-Term Empty Homes, meaning they have been empty for more than 6 months. These statistics are published annually and can be found on gov.uk [here](#). They include a breakdown of vacant dwellings by local authority district. We do not hold records on vacant homes on a constituency basis.

■ Energy Performance Certificates: Aldershot**Alex Baker:** [\[20790\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate she has made of the proportion of houses that have an EPC rating of (a) A, (b) B, (c) C, (d) D and (e) E in Aldershot constituency.

Alex Norris:

All EPC data is available for download by parliamentary constituency at <https://epc.opendatacommunities.org/>.

■ Environmental Impact Assessment**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[20226\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 26 July 2024 to Question 1315 on environmental assessments, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of repealing the environmental assessment regimes originating from the (a) EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive and (b) Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Directive.

Matthew Pennycook:

As set out in the Written Ministerial Statement I made on 16 December 2024 ([HCWS317](#)), the government will, in due course, replace the current systems of environmental assessment with Environmental Outcomes Reports.

■ Fire and Rescue Services: Finance**Dr Neil Hudson:** [\[20510\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has made an assessment on the potential impact of the removal of the Funding Guarantee Scheme on the Fire and Rescue Service.

Jim McMahon:

We recognise the challenges that local authorities are facing as demand increases for critical services. That is why in the provisional Settlement for 2025-26 we have made available £69 billion for local government including a £5 referendum principle for Fire and Rescue Authorities. Together with central government grant and locally retained business rates, the proposed principles provide a real-terms increase in core spending power of 3.5% on 2024-25. The government also announced an additional £515 million of unringfenced funding for local government, including Fire and Rescue Authorities, specifically to manage the impact of changes to employer NICs announced at the Autumn Budget. Allocations for individual Fire and Rescue Authorities will be confirmed at the final Settlement.

■ Flats: Fire Prevention

Julia Lopez: [\[20705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether (a) fire risk appraisals and (b) EWS1 assessments carried out by an engineer who has been suspended by the Institution of Fire Engineers must be reassessed.

Alex Norris:

Robust auditing processes are in place to ensure that all Fire Risk Appraisals of External Walls (FRAEWs) for buildings in the Government's remediation funding programmes meet appropriate standards before the associated funding application can progress. Where required, feedback is given to allow assessors to make appropriate changes to the FRAEW to address any deficiencies identified. Reassessments of appraisals are not therefore necessary.

EWS1s are not a legal or regulatory requirement. Their use is a commercial decision by lenders and subject to their individual lending criteria. If residents have concerns about the fire safety of their building they should raise this with the building owner or person responsible for fire safety.

The Institution of Fire Engineers is an independent organisation following bespoke reporting and investigation processes. Following the publication of the Grenfell Tower Fire Inquiry Report, the Department is reviewing the findings and recommendations in relation to the fire engineering sector.

■ Floods: Housing

Matt Bishop: [\[20416\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to support residential properties impacted by recent flooding.

Matt Bishop: [\[20875\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to provide (a) grants and (b) funding support to people impacted by Storm Bert.

Alex Norris:

My thoughts remain with householders and business owners impacted by flooding after Storm Bert, flooding is a devastating experience for those affected.

Government support in the aftermath of flooding is only provided in exceptional circumstances. On this occasion, the Flood Recovery Framework was not activated following Storm Bert, due to the localised nature of the flooding. Overall, the scale of impacts was similar to that seen in many local areas this autumn and was not sufficiently significant for Government to intervene and for the Framework to be activated.

■ Government Departments: Civil Servants

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[18377\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answers of 16 October 2024 to Questions 6111 and 6401 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Civil Servants, of 17 October 2024 to Question 6147 on Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Civil Servants, of 18 October 2024 to Question 6124 on Department for Education: Civil Servants, and of 14 October 2024 to Question 6116 on Department for Transport: Civil Servants, if she will publish the job titles of each of the appointments made under exception 1.

Alex Norris:

MHCLG made 47 appointments by exception to fair, open and merit-based recruitment principles from 1 July to 31 September 2024. 40 of those appointments were made under Exception 1 to the recruitment principles on a temporary basis. We are unable to provide a more detailed breakdown without individuals potentially being identifiable.

The Department publishes a senior and junior organogram biannually setting out job titles and salaries – [Organogram of Staff Roles & Salaries - data.gov.uk](https://data.gov.uk/organogram)

■ Help to Buy Scheme: Hampshire

Alex Baker: [\[20787\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many Help to Buy homeowners are waiting for a decision on a loan redemption application in (a) Aldershot constituency and (b) Hampshire.

Matthew Pennycook:

Homes England do not hold information on redemptions initiated and redemptions concluded by constituency or local authority. In the last three months to November, for Help to Buy and associated legacy schemes, an average of 2320 redemptions per month were initiated and an average of 2288 concluded. Please note that these numbers are not directly comparable.

In order to be able to redeem a Help to Buy loan, several steps need to be completed by the customer, their surveyor, their solicitor and by the Help to Buy Mortgage Administrator. Timescales are therefore dependent on each of the parties.

Redemptions may also be initiated by customers who subsequently decide not to proceed.

■ Holiday Accommodation: Taxation

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20221\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 15209 on Holiday Accommodation: Taxation, whether she has received representations from local authorities on providing powers to impose additional (a) surcharges, (b) licensing fees and (c) taxes on (i) hotels

and (ii) short-term lets other than through council tax, business rates and business improvement districts.

Matthew Pennycook:

Whilst both hotels and short-term lets are vital to many local economies, some Mayors have called for the introduction of a tourist levy and some local authorities have called for further powers to manage the impacts of short-term lets where they are affecting the affordability and availability of housing to buy and rent.

Areas can introduce a form of voluntary levy on businesses providing overnight accommodation (such as hotels) through setting up an Accommodation Business Improvement District.

The government have also committed to introducing a short-term let register and abolishing the furnished holiday lets tax regime. We are considering what further powers we might give to local authorities to help them respond to excessive concentrations of short-term lets.

As with all aspects of the tax system, any decisions on future tax changes will be taken by the Chancellor in the context of wider public finances.

■ **Homes England: Equality**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[20566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by Homes England.

Matthew Pennycook:

As of 19 December 2024, no staff within Homes England are employed in full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion roles.

■ **Housing Associations: Service Charges**

Jim Shannon:

[\[19292\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of trends in the level of service charges by housing associations.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government recognise the considerable financial strain that rising services charges are placing on leaseholders and tenants of housing associations.

The level of service charge that leaseholders pay depends on many factors, including the terms of a lease and the age and condition of a building.

By law, variable service charges must be reasonable. Should leaseholders wish to contest the reasonableness of their service charges they may make an application to the appropriate tribunal.

The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 includes measures designed to drive up the transparency of service charges to make them more easily challengeable if leaseholders consider them to be unreasonable.

The government is committed to acting quickly to implement the provisions of the Act. Further detail can be found in the written ministerial statement published on Thursday 21 November ([HCWS244](#)).

■ Housing: Construction

Mr Richard Holden: [\[19066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate her Department has made of the number of houses that will be built in the (a) 2024-25, (b) 2025-26, (c) 2026-27, (d) 2027-28, (e) 2028-29 and (f) 2029-30 financial years.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government's Plan for Change includes a hugely ambitious milestone of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes in England in this Parliament. Progress will be measured through the number of net additional dwellings and we will update Parliament in the usual manner.

Dr Roz Savage: [\[19618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to require new houses to be built to Passivhaus standards.

Alex Norris:

Passivhaus represents an example of innovative and efficient design that is leading the way in delivering highly efficient, low carbon buildings and stimulating the skills and supply chains that are needed to bring about a net zero future.

We recognise the fact that some homebuilders are already building to standards above the current Building Regulations or installing low carbon heating systems. However, it is important we strike a balance by setting standards that enable all parts of industry to be ready to build homes at scale that are fit for a zero-carbon future.

Future standards next year will set our new homes on a path that moves away from relying on volatile fossil fuels and towards more clean, secure energy. These homes will be future proofed with low carbon heating and high levels of energy efficiency. No further energy efficiency retrofit work will be necessary to enable them to become zero-carbon over time as the electricity grid continues to decarbonise.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment Homes England has made of the viability of delivering the Government's 1.5 million housebuilding target in this Parliament.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government's Plan for Change milestone of building 1.5 million new homes in this Parliament is hugely ambitious but achievable.

Kevin Hollinrake:[\[19704\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to page 24 of the document entitled Plan for Change, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, what her target is for the number of net additional dwellings that need to be delivered in each year to meet the 1.5 million homes target by the end of this Parliament.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon. Member to my answer to Question UIN [19066](#) on 20 December 2024.

Mike Amesbury:[\[19759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what percentage of housing development on grey belt land will be required to be homes for social rent.

Matthew Pennycook:

Our golden rules require that where development occurs on the grey belt, it delivers 15 percentage points more affordable housing than the existing local plan affordable housing requirements, up to a maximum of 50% (except where the local plan requirement is already higher). We estimate that the median affordable housing target will be 50%.

It is for local authorities to judge the right mix of affordable homes for ownership and for rent that will meet the needs of their communities. However, we have made clear that local authorities should consider the particular needs of those who require Social Rent homes when undertaking needs assessments and setting policies on affordable housing requirements.

Mike Amesbury:[\[19760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of retaining new homes bonus payments.

Matthew Pennycook:

As set out in the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement on 18 December, the government have committed to a further year of the New Homes Bonus (NHB) in 2025-26 which will provide £290m of funding to local government in recognition of a net increase of 214,000 homes. We have also committed to consulting on reforming the NHB in the new year.

Lee Anderson:[\[19774\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that newly-built homes reflect the (a) family size and (b) income of the communities in each local area.

Matthew Pennycook:

The revised National Planning Policy Framework, published on 12 December, makes clear that it is for local authorities to assess the size, types and tenure of housing needed for different groups in their area, including those who require affordable housing and families with children, and to reflect this in their planning policies.

Bradley Thomas:**[19901]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that future housing is designed to a beautiful standard, following the closure of the Office for Place.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 12 November 2024 ([HCWS209](#)).

Rupert Lowe:**[19932]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will have discussions with local authorities on increasing the level of consultation with local residents when calculating housing targets.

Matthew Pennycook:

Following consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, the government has implemented a new mandatory standard method for assessing housing needs which aligns with our ambition to build 1.5 million new homes in this parliament.

National planning policy and guidance is clear that when developing their local plan, local planning authorities should carry out robust consultations with their local communities and ensure views are taken into account. Local planning authorities must also comply with the specific requirements in regulation 18 and 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 on consultation and representations as well as with the commitments in their Statement of Community Involvement.

Rupert Lowe:**[19934]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of ensuring that infrastructure investment is in place before any new building of homes.

Matthew Pennycook:

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of supporting infrastructure in a sustainable manner.

Local development plans should address needs and opportunities in relation to infrastructure and identify what infrastructure is required and how it can be funded and brought forward. When preparing a Local Plan, Planning Practice Guidance recommends that local planning authorities use available evidence of infrastructure

requirements to prepare an Infrastructure Funding Statement. Such Statements can be used to demonstrate the delivery of infrastructure throughout the plan-period.

The Government provides financial support for essential infrastructure in areas of greatest housing demand through the Housing Infrastructure Fund.

The changes to the National Planning Policy Framework announced on 12 December will also support the increased provision and modernisation of various types of public infrastructure.

The Government is also committed to strengthening the existing system of developer contributions to ensure new developments provide necessary affordable homes and infrastructure. Further details will be set out in due course.

Rupert Lowe:

[19938]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an estimate of the proportion of planned housing development that will be located within the green belt.

Matthew Pennycook:

The amount of development that occurs in any given Green Belt will depend on local circumstances.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December makes clear that before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the relevant authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. Where it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give priority to previously developed land, then consider grey belt which is not previously developed, and then other Green Belt locations.

It is for local planning authorities to assess whether Green Belt land should be released, with their decisions informed by Green Belt reviews undertaken at a local level. The government recognises the need to provide further guidance, to ensure a consistent approach to Green Belt Reviews and the identification of grey belt land. We will be providing further guidance in January 2025 to assist in this.

Mike Amesbury:

[20248]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate she has made of the number of houses of (a) all tenure and (b) social housing tenure expected to be built in (a) Halton and (b) Chester West and Chester Council area by the end of the Parliament.

Matthew Pennycook:

The standard method for calculating local housing need figures for each local authority, including Halton, and Chester West and Chester, is set out in the Government Response to the 'Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system'. This can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

The standard method should be used to identify the total number of homes needed in a local area. However, within this context it is for local authorities to identify the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community, including those who require affordable housing.

Mike Amesbury: [\[20249\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an estimate of the number of qualified brick layers required to help meet the Government's new house building targets.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government are working with industry to ensure the housebuilding sector has access to the skilled workers needed to build 1.5 million new homes in this Parliament. This includes a £140 million package of industry investment to deliver 5,000 more apprenticeship places through 32 new Homebuilding Skills Hubs.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has an annual house building target for England.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon. Member to my answer to Question UIN [19066](#) on 20 December 2024.

James Wild: [\[20794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department is taking steps to promote the use of timber framing in construction.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Government is committed to delivering 1.5 million homes in this Parliament. Greater adoption of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), including timber frame, will be crucial to achieving this. We will set out further details as part of the Long-Term Housing Strategy.

■ Housing: Disability

Alex Baker: [\[20786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the supply of adapted housing for (a) adults and (b) children with disabilities in Aldershot constituency.

Rushanara Ali:

The [English Housing Survey](#) includes data on adaptations within the home at a national level. Data is not held at constituency level.

The right housing arrangements are crucial in supporting people to live independently and well. The National Planning Policy Framework outlines that it is for local planning authorities to assess the housing needed for different groups in their area, including disabled people, and reflect this in their local plan.

Local housing authorities also have a statutory duty to provide Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding for home adaptations to disabled people of all ages and tenures subject to a means test, eligibility criteria and a needs assessment.

Government provided funding of £1,312,512 to Rushmoor Borough Council which covers the town of Aldershot for the DFG for 2024 – 2025.

■ Housing: Foreign Nationals

Rupert Lowe: [\[19936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of implementing restrictions on foreign (a) nationals and (b) companies purchasing new houses.

Rupert Lowe: [\[19937\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will introduce legislation to prohibit non-resident foreigners from purchasing residential property in the UK.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government made clear in its manifesto that we would increase the non-resident Stamp Duty Land Tax surcharge by one percentage point.

At the Budget, we decided to go further and instead increased the Higher Rate for Additional Dwellings by 2 percentage points to 5%. This will raise £310 million by 2029-30 and go further than the manifesto commitment to rebalance the housing market.

Overseas entities who want to buy, sell, or transfer property or land in the UK, must register with Companies House and tell us who their registrable beneficial owners or managing officers are.

■ Housing: Great Yarmouth

Rupert Lowe: [\[19933\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will (a) make an assessment of the adequacy of local infrastructure in Great Yarmouth constituency and (b) reassess the housing target for that constituency following that assessment.

Matthew Pennycook:

Local development plans should address needs and opportunities in relation to infrastructure and identify what infrastructure is required and how it can be funded and brought forward, including in Great Yarmouth.

When preparing a Local Plan, Planning Practice Guidance recommends that local planning authorities use available evidence of infrastructure requirements to prepare an Infrastructure Funding Statement. Such Statements can be used to demonstrate the delivery of infrastructure throughout the plan-period.

I understand that Great Yarmouth Council intend to adopt the Community Infrastructure Levy to help secure contributions towards local infrastructure.

The government has no intention of reassessing the recently implemented new standard method for assessing housing needs.

■ **Housing: Health Services**

Clive Jones:

[R] [\[20313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she plans to take to ensure that new housing developments include (a) GP surgeries and (b) other primary healthcare infrastructure.

Matthew Pennycook:

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of supporting infrastructure in a sustainable manner.

Local development plans should address needs and opportunities in relation to infrastructure and identify what infrastructure is required and how it can be funded and brought forward. When preparing a Local Plan, Planning Practice Guidance recommends that local planning authorities use available evidence of infrastructure requirements to prepare an Infrastructure Funding Statement. Such Statements can be used to demonstrate the delivery of infrastructure throughout the plan-period.

The government provides financial support for essential infrastructure in areas of greatest housing demand through the Housing Infrastructure Fund.

The changes to the National Planning Policy Framework announced on 12 December will support the increased provision and modernisation of various types of public infrastructure, including health infrastructure.

The Government is also committed to strengthening the existing system of developer contributions to ensure new developments provide necessary affordable homes and infrastructure. Further details will be set out in due course.

■ **Housing: HIV Infection**

Paul Davies:

[\[19575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department considers people living with HIV to have a priority need for housing.

Matthew Pennycook:

Local authorities are required to give 'reasonable preference' (priority) for social housing to people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds. This includes people with chronic or progressive medical conditions such as HIV.

Paul Davies:

[20740]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending the Housing Act 1996 to help protect people living with HIV from housing discrimination.

Matthew Pennycook:

All people diagnosed with HIV are already afforded the full protections from discrimination relating to the provision of housing or services under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords and agents may not victimise or discriminate against a person based on their HIV status in relation to the offer of a tenancy, the terms on which a tenancy is offered, or in their general treatment in relation to the letting process.

■ Housing: Ownership

Kevin Hollinrake:

[20640]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17553 on Housing: Ownership, if she will make an estimate of the number of replacement affordable housing units in each of the next five years.

Matthew Pennycook:

As detailed in the [review of the increased Right to Buy discounts introduced in 2012](#) published on 30 October 2024 alongside the Budget, during the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2021 the replacement target was 62,485 but only 47,864 replacements were delivered, which means there were 14,621 fewer replacements than the target.

The changes this government has made to the Right to Buy, including reducing maximum cash discount levels, allowing local authorities to retain the share of receipts formerly paid to HM Treasury, and increasing the flexibilities on how councils can use their receipts, will improve the ratio of replacements to sales.

■ Housing: Planning Permission

Lewis Cocking:

[R] [20743]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to Q53 of the evidence given by the Minister of State for Housing and Planning to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee on 20 November 2024, HC432, at what (a) geographical and (b) administrative level regional strategic plans will operate.

Matthew Pennycook:

Detail about the government's proposed approach to strategic planning can be found in the English Devolution White Paper published on 16 December 2024.

■ Housing: Sales**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[18947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the previous Government's submission to the then Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee entitled Improving the home buying and selling process, published in April 2024, whether it remains her Department's policy to bring forward legislative proposals to increase the information provided by sellers when a home is marketed for sale as set out in the April 2024 proposals.

Matthew Pennycook:

Providing essential information upfront is important in supporting potential buyers to make important decisions about whether a property is suitable for them early in the process, reducing the risk of transactions falling through when this information comes to light at a later stage. With this in mind, we continue to work with stakeholders across industry, government and the public sector to understand the most effective way of supporting buyers to make the right decisions for them. We will set out more details in due course.

Andy MacNae:[\[19499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing protections for buyers in the final stages of purchasing a home whereby the formal acceptance of an offer creates a legally binding contract between buyer and seller.

Matthew Pennycook:

We recognise that the home buying and selling process in England and Wales is inefficient and costly for consumers and professionals with one in three property transactions falling through. We continue to review evidence from other jurisdictions, including on protections such as reservation agreements, as we consider next steps.

■ Housing: Water Supply**Adrian Ramsay:**[\[20755\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will include in the National Planning Policy Framework requirements for local authorities to make an assessment of the potential impact of proposed housing developments on the sustainability of local (a) water services and (b) sewerage systems.

Matthew Pennycook:

Water companies are under a statutory duty to provide new water and sewage connections to residential properties, as well as planning to meet the needs of growth as part of Water Resource Management Plans and Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans.

The way that water resources are planned for is being considered as part of a commission reviewing the Water Sector Regulatory System, as recently announced by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

■ Insolvency: Assets

Torsten Bell: [\[19804\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November to Question 13792 on Insolvency: Assets, what information (a) HM Land Registry and (b) Companies House hold on the number of registered freehold titles excluding those dealt with by the Bona Vacantia division that have (i) apparently vested in the Crown and (ii) not been referred to the Bona Vacantia division by an interested party following dissolution of companies through (A) striking off by the Registrar of Companies and (B) formal liquidation to date.

Matthew Pennycook:

HM Land Registry does not hold data on the number of registered freehold titles where ownership has passed to the Crown following the dissolution of a company, where the Bona Vacantia Division has not yet been notified.

Companies House does not hold the requested information. Companies are required to provide to the Registrar of Companies the information set out in the Companies Act 2006. This does not include information about land titles held as assets by companies.

■ Land Registry: Buildings

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[19964\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many civil servants are assigned to work in the Land Registry's London office; and how many desks there are for those civil servants.

Matthew Pennycook:

HM Land Registry's Head Office is in Croydon and it does not have any other London-based offices. It had 416 staff based in the Croydon office on 13 December 2024 with 280 desks available for HM Land Registry's use.

■ Levelling Up Partnerships: Torridge

Sir Geoffrey Cox: [\[20582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when the funding for the Levelling Up Partnership in Torridge will be released.

Alex Norris:

The funding will be released subject to completion of the necessary business case that officials from MHCLG and officers from Torridge District Council are working hard to finalise.

■ Local Government Finance

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19357\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Written Statement of 28 November 2024 on Local Government Finance,

HCWS265, what the (a) estimated and (b) assumed level in council tax receipts is in absolute terms in (a) 2024-25 and (b) 2025-26 on which the settlement is based.

Jim McMahon:

It is for local authorities to decide at what level they set their council tax. The government will maintain the previous government's policy of a 3% core council tax referendum principle and the 2% principle for the adult social care precept, in line with OBR forecasting. The full set of proposed referendum principles is set out in the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

Based on these referendum principles, the assumed council tax requirement for Core Spending Power in 2024-25 is £36.2 billion. In 2025-26 it is £38.3 billion. These figures exclude parish precepts, police and fire authorities.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[20646\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17562 on Local Government Finance, how the Recovery Grant will be funded.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[20647\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17562 on Local Government Finance, what deprivation data her Department will use.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[20648\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17562 on Local Government Finance, how many councils will receive that funding.

Jim McMahon:

The government is taking immediate action to begin addressing the challenges facing local government by ensuring that funding goes to the places that need it most in the 2025-26 Local Government Finance Settlement. We are taking difficult decisions to repurpose a number of grants to improve the value for money and efficiency of the grant funding we provide, including through the new Recovery Grant.

The grant is intended to be highly targeted, meaning that not all authorities will receive an allocation. We have published a full methodology alongside the provisional Settlement, and we are consulting until 15 January on allocations. The Recovery Grant will go to places where, weighted by population, deprivation outweighs council tax raising ability. The metrics used are based on the most recent publicly available data: the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation, the mid-2023 population estimate, as published by the Office for National Statistics, and 2024 council taxbase data.

■ Local Government Finance: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes:

[\[20133\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire will receive funding from the Recovery Grant, announced on 28 November 2024.

Jim McMahon:

The newly announced £600 million Recovery Grant, part of the provisional 2025-26 Local Government Finance Settlement, is part of the careful balance this Government is making between meeting the current, acute pressures and taking meaningful steps towards a fundamental update of the system that will improve sector sustainability as a whole. The Recovery Grant will go to places where, weighted by population, deprivation outweighs council tax raising ability.

The government is also clear that the outcomes of this grant will not reflect the final outcome of reform which will be based on a full, broader assessment of need and will not be based on deprivation alone.

Both Lincolnshire County Council and South Kesteven District Council will not receive funding from the Recovery Grant. South Holland District Council will receive £0.2 million. Although not all councils will receive allocations from the Recovery Grant, it is only one part of the 2025-26 Settlement, which will be worth £69 billion and will ensure that no council will see a decrease in Core Spending Power.

■ Local Government Finance: Rural Areas

Ian Roome:

[\[20412\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's press release entitled Council funding to be overhauled to deliver better outcomes, published on 28 November 2024, what methodology her Department will use to measure (a) the impact of rurality and (b) levels of (i) demand and (ii) deprivation to calculate the funding to replace the Rural Services Delivery Grant.

Jim McMahon:

The government is committed to tackling the issues that matter to rural communities. Places with a significant rural population will on average receive around a 5% increase in their Core Spending Power next year, a real terms increase.

The Rural Services Delivery Grant (RSDG) seen in previous Local Government Finance Settlements does not properly account for need and a large number of predominantly rural councils receive nothing from it – a sign we need to allocate funding more effectively. We are currently consulting on local government funding reform from 2026-27 onwards and we are keen to hear from councils on the impact of rurality on the costs of service delivery, and demand.

For 2025-26, the RSDG has been repurposed alongside a number of other grants to form the Recovery Grant, although this is not a direct replacement. The Recovery

Grant will go to places where, weighted by population, deprivation outweighs council tax raising ability. [This is explained fully in our accompanying methodology note.](#)

■ Local Government Services: Rural Areas

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20641\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17560 on Local Government Services: Rural Areas, if she will publish that equality impact assessment.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17560 on Local Government Services: Rural Areas, whether her Department has carried out an environmental principles assessment on repurposing the Rural Services Delivery Grant.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20652\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much each eligible local authority received in Rural Services Delivery Grant in 2024-25; and how much was allocated in total.

Jim McMahon:

The provisional settlement, published on 18 December, increases the total additional grant funding which will be made available to local councils in England through the settlement to over £2 billion. This Government is absolutely committed to tackling the issues that matter to rural communities. Places with a significant rural population will on average receive around a 5% increase in their Core Spending Power next year, which is a real terms increase. No council will see a reduction – and new funding will be available to rural areas in 2025-26 through guaranteed EPR payments.

The government intends to include a summary of the equalities impacts of its proposals as part of the response to the consultation on the provisional local government finance settlement 2025 to 26. This will be published alongside the final settlement, as usual.

The government considered the implications of all decisions made through the provisional Settlement and is of the view that the Rural Services Delivery Grant does not properly account for need. It is important also to note that the Rural Services Delivery Grant was not paid to all local authorities delivering services in rural areas, as such it did not do as it suggested.

As set out in the Environmental principles assessment guide, decisions around the spending or allocation of resources within government are exempt from the duty to give due regard to the Policy Statement on Environmental Principles.

Annex A of the Rural Services Delivery Grant Determination 2024-25: (No. 31/7256), sets out allocations in 2024-25. The total allocation of Rural Services Delivery Grant 2024-25 to local authorities in England was £104,645,256.

■ Local Government: Devolution

Martin Wrigley:

[\[20898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has issued a map similar to that shown in Figure 1 of her Department's English Devolution White Paper, published in December 2024 for new English Devolution authorities.

Jim McMahon:

The Government has not published a map of England showing potential future devolution geographies.

■ Local Government: Devon

David Reed:

[\[20856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to engage with local communities in Devon on local government restructuring.

Jim McMahon:

The English Devolution White Paper sets out the Government's plans for local government reorganisation, and that the Government will write to council leaders as soon as possible to formally invite proposals, setting out information on our criteria for sustainable unitary structures, how and when to submit proposals and how the government intends to respond to proposals.

■ Local Government: Employers' Contributions

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[20644\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17552 on Local Government: Employers' Contributions, what representations her Department has received on the cost of local government procurement of (a) goods and (b) services in the context of the planned increase in employer National Insurance contributions.

Jim McMahon:

The department regularly engages with a wide range of councils and representative bodies. Alongside the provisional Settlement, the government launched a consultation that seeks views, in particular from representatives of local government, on proposals for the local government finance settlement for 2025-26.

We propose to allocate £515 million of additional funding to support local government manage the impact of changes to employer NICs between local authorities in England based on their shares of total relevant net current expenditure. We have published a methodology note to assist councils with their financial planning and will provide final allocations to individual local authorities by the final Local Government Finance Settlement in early 2025.

Local Government: Essex**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[20657\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2024 to Question 16934 on Devolution: Essex, whether the May 2025 local elections will take place as scheduled.

Martin Wrigley: [\[20854\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to page 101 of the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, whether she plans to postpone local authority elections in Devon in 2025.

Jim McMahon:

It is usual for the government to take account of requests for reorganisation, and to decide on the appropriateness of elections taking place to local authorities which are planned to be replaced, usually postponing to allow elections to the new shadow authorities soon after.

I will consider any requests I receive to postpone the May 2025 local authority elections in Devon, Essex or elsewhere only where this will help the areas to deliver both reorganisation and devolution to the most ambitious timeframe – either through the Devolution Priority Programme or where reorganisation is necessary to unlock devolution or open up new devolution options. As I set out in my letter of 16 December to those councils, I will need a clear commitment to these aims, including a request from the council(s) whose election is to be postponed, on or before Friday 10 January.

Local Government: Lobbying**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[18948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the policy set out in the Written Ministerial Statement entitled Protecting Public Money of 23 February 2015, HCWS292, on the payment of lobbyists by local authorities remains her Department's policy; and if she will take steps to ensure that local authorities do not pay lobbyists for work on (a) local government restructuring, (b) the local government finance settlement and spending review and (c) devolution deals.

Jim McMahon:

The policy as set out in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity has not changed.

Local Government: Local Press**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[20908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to amend the requirement for local authority statutory notices to be published in local newspapers.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [15985](#) on 3 December 2024.

■ **Local Government: Norfolk****Rupert Lowe:**[\[20506\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to put proposed changes to the structure of local government in Norfolk to voters in that county.

Jim McMahon:

The English Devolution White Paper sets out the Government's plans for local government reorganisation, and that the Government will write to council leaders as soon as possible to formally invite proposals, setting out information on our criteria for sustainable unitary structures, how and when to submit proposals and how the government intends to respond to proposals.

■ **Local Government: Social Services****Vikki Slade:**[\[19586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she is taking steps to ensure that local authorities remain democratically accountable for the provision of social care, in the context of her Department's plans for devolution.

Jim McMahon:

The Government has no intention of changing local authorities' democratic accountability for provision of social care. As set out in the English Devolution White Paper, we will reset the relationship with local government, to give the sector more autonomy and put councils on the road to recovery.

■ **Local Plans****Jessica Toale:**[\[19534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure local plans are in line with national housing targets.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government have implemented a new mandatory standard method for assessing housing needs which aligns with our ambition to build 1.5 million new homes in this parliament.

Delivering on that ambitious milestone requires local planning authorities to plan for sufficient homes, as well as commercial development and wider infrastructure, through their local development plans.

Local plans clearly spell out to developers and communities where development will and will not take place, bringing certainty to all parties. They are also the mechanism through which local communities can have their say in how homes are built.

The government inherited a planning system in which only 31% of local planning authorities have adopted plans in the last five years. That is not sustainable, and I am clear that it is unacceptable for local planning authorities to not make a local plan.

We are determined to drive local plans to adoption as quickly as possible, to progress towards our ambition of achieving universal plan coverage and ensure plans contribute positively to our ambition of delivering 1.5 million homes. To that end, we have implemented transitional arrangements and have committed to providing funding to authorities that are at advanced stages of plan making but who will need to revise their draft plans.

We want to work in partnership with local planning authorities to deliver for their communities, but where they fail to do so the Deputy Prime Minister will make use of the intervention powers available to her to get local plans in place.

■ **Mayors: South West**

Martin Wrigley:

[\[20843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans she has for establishing a mayor for Devon and Cornwall.

Jim McMahon:

In September, the Government confirmed a non-mayoral devolution agreement with Cornwall and to establish a Combined County Authority in Devon & Torbay. These are important first steps for devolution in the region.

We have set out the framework in the English Devolution White Paper so that counties can self-organise to reach a consensus on proposals for their areas.

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

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[20658\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2024 to Question 15005 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Buildings, if she will list the address of every departmental office in the United Kingdom which is (a) remaining open and (b) closing by how many staff are assigned to each of those offices.

Alex Norris:

The address of every departmental office and the number of staff assigned to each of those offices is set out below, together with confirmation of which offices will remain open and which will close.

OFFICE LOCATION	ADDRESS	STATUS	STAFF ASSIGNED
Belfast	Erskine House 20-32 Chichester Street Belfast BT1 4GF	Remaining open	21
Birkenhead	Rosebrae Court Woodside Ferry Approach Birkenhead Merseyside CH41 6DU	Remaining open	87
Bristol	Temple Quay House Redcliffe Bristol BS1 6HA	Remaining open	169
Cambridge	First Floor Eastbrook Shaftesbury Road Cambridge CB2 8DU	Remaining open	53
Cardiff	Ty William Morgan 6 Central Square, Cardiff CF10 1XS	Remaining open	45
Darlington	Feethams House Feethams Darlington DL1 5BF	Remaining open	127
Edinburgh	Queen Elizabeth House Sibbald Walk Edinburgh EH8 8FT	Remaining open	52
Hastings	1 Priory Square Hastings TN34 1EA	Remaining open	27
Hemel Hempstead	The Forum Hemel Hempstead HP1 1DN	Remaining open	57
Leeds	7 Wellington Place Leeds LS1 4AP	Remaining open	168
London	Fry Building 2 Marsham Street Westminster London SW1P 4DF	Remaining open	2,222
Manchester	Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD	Remaining open	199

OFFICE LOCATION	ADDRESS	STATUS	STAFF ASSIGNED
Norwich	Rosebery Court Norwich NR7 0HS	Remaining open	12
Nottingham	Apex Court City Link Nottingham NG2 4LA	Remaining open	70
Plymouth	Seaton Court 2 William Prance Road Plymouth PL6 5WS	Remaining open	23
Wolverhampton	i9 Building Railway Drive Wolverhampton WV1 1LH	Remaining open	278
Birmingham	23 Stephenson Street Birmingham B2 4BH	Closing	149
Exeter	The Senate Southernhay Gardens Exeter EX1 1UG	Closing	26
Newcastle	Citygate Gallowgate Newcastle NE1 4WH	Closing	67
Sheffield	2 St Paul's Place 125 Norfolk Street Sheffield S1 2FJ	Closing	51
Truro	Lemon Quay House Lemon Quay Truro Cornwall TR1 2PU	Closing	15
Warrington	Renaissance House 1220 Centre Park Square Warrington WA1 1RU	Closing	59
Grand Total			3,977

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: HOPE not hate**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[19364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 15 November 2024 to Question 12772, if she will publish details of (a) discussions and (b) other meetings between officials and Hope Not Hate since 5 July 2024.

Alex Norris:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer to Question UIN [12772](#) on 15 November 2024. The department has no plans to publish further details.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Media**

John Cooper:[\[20498\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Alex Norris:

The department has not incurred any expenses on media or voice training for ministers since 5 July 2024.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Ministers' Private Offices**

Emily Thornberry:[\[20172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question 9072 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Alex Norris:

Between 4th July 2022 and 4th July 2024, £12,128.11 was spent on new furniture and fittings in Ministerial Offices and a breakdown of costs is below:

ITEM/ PLACE	COST (£)
Bookcase	£7,581.41
TV Installation	£607.23
Supply and install 2 x 2 seater sofa	£3,818.19
Supply and install gromet and cable tray	£121.28
Total	£12,128.11

There were no costs on the refurbishment of these Ministerial office during this period.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Secondment**

Kevin Hollinrake:[\[20642\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17559 on Ministry of Housing,

Communities and Local Government: Secondment, which organisations second staff to her Department.

Alex Norris:

Organisations provided are for secondments active on 30/11/2024 within the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government.

ORGANISATION

University of Cambridge

Aylesbury Vale District Council

Newcastle City Council

Homes England

Local Government Association

Sandwell Council

Natural England

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Staff**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[20656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many staff in her Department work on integration and community cohesion.

Matthew Pennycook:

Staff in the department often work across a range of policy areas other than their primary role so it is not possible to specify exact numbers.

Cohesion & Integration is a core thread of policy that cuts across many aspects of the departments work.

Details of staffing are published in departmental organograms, which are updated periodically.

■ **National Policy Statements**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[19703\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to page 25 of the document entitled Plan for Change, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, which National Policy Statements she expects to update by next summer.

Matthew Pennycook:

Consenting departments are working closely with MHCLG and Treasury to explore which National Policy Statements can be updated.

■ Park Homes: Fees and Charges

Lee Anderson:

[\[19778\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to protect park home owners from charges by park owners when they sell their home.

Matthew Pennycook:

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

■ Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[20643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to implement the Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019.

Alex Norris:

The Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019 places a duty on the Government to prepare a code of practice containing guidance about the operation and management of private parking facilities.

This government is determined to drive up standards in the private parking sector and will announce its plans for the new Code in due course.

■ Parking: Codes of Practice

Martin Wrigley:

[\[20863\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to implement a statutory code of conduct for parking operators that includes appropriate levels for permissible charges within this Parliamentary session.

Alex Norris:

The Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019 places a duty on the Government to prepare a code of practice containing guidance about the operation and management of private parking facilities.

This government is determined to drive up standards in the private parking sector and will announce its plans for the new Code in due course.

■ Planning

David Simmonds:

[\[19980\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled Planning Reform Working Paper: Planning Committees, published on 9 December 2024, whether it is her policy that Councillors would have a role in determining a reserved matters application where the outline approval was compliant with the Local Plan but a reserved matter may not be.

David Simmonds: [\[19982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to policy paper entitled Planning Reform Working Paper: Planning Committees, published on 9 December 2024, which individual would decide whether or not an application was compliant with a Local Plan; and what the process would be in the event of a disagreement on that matter, when deciding whether or not to delegate to planning officers.

David Simmonds: [\[19984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled Planning Reform Working Paper: Planning Committees, published on 9 December 2024, what say ward councillors would have on a planning application in their ward; where they disagreed with the decision of the planning officer; and whether they could call-in the matter to a planning committee.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government's planning reform working paper on planning committees invites views on three options for a national scheme of delegation. If we determine to take forward any of those options, each of which would require primary legislation through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, they would be the subject of further detailed consultation in the normal way – in particular where necessary to underpin secondary legislation following passage of the Bill.

■ **Planning Permission: Disclosure of Information**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19353\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has issued guidance to local authorities on publicly disclosing the (a) names and (b) addresses of those who submit representations on planning applications.

Matthew Pennycook:

There is no requirement for local authorities to publish representations received on planning applications, but many do so to give transparency to the decision-making process. Where local authorities choose to publish representations they must comply with data protection laws, such as the General Data Protection Regulations, which means they cannot publish personal details without consent.

■ **Planning Permission: Environment Protection**

Dr Luke Evans: [\[19402\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, If she will make a comparative assessment of the effect of the (a) proposals in Planning Reform Working Paper: Planning Committee on the applicability of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and (b) protections afforded to the (i) habitats and (ii) species listed in Section 41 of that Act.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government's planning reform working paper on planning committees invites views on a number of proposals designed to support better decision making in the planning system. The working paper does not propose any changes which would affect the application of the biodiversity duties and protections under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

■ Planning Permission: Public Consultation**Mr Andrew Snowden:**[\[19927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance her Department issues to planning authorities on (a) ensuring applications for lawful development certificates are properly assessed and (b) taking into account the views of local residents when assessing such applications.

Matthew Pennycook:

My Department has published Planning Practice Guidance on the topic of lawful development certificates, which can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

■ Planning: Environment Protection**Adrian Ramsay:**[\[20754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps under the National Planning Policy Framework to increase protections for (a) chalk streams and (b) ancient woodlands.

Matthew Pennycook:

The National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, which can include ancient woodland and chalk streams, should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists.

■ Planning: Local Government**David Simmonds:**[\[20293\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the policies set out in her Department's policy paper entitled Planning Reform Working Paper: Planning Committees, published on 9 December 2024, on local democracy.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government believe that planning committees have an integral role in providing local democratic oversight of planning decisions. It is however vital that in exercising that democratic oversight, planning committees operate as effectively as possible.

The government's planning reform working paper on planning committees invites views on a range of proposals designed to support better decision making in the planning system. If we determine to take forward any of the proposals in question,

each of which would require primary legislation through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, they would be the subject of further detailed consultation in the normal way – in particular where necessary to underpin secondary legislation following passage of the Bill.

■ **Planning: Reform**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20653\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Government response to the proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system consultation, published on 12 December 2024, if she will publish the substantive responses to the consultation not sent by individuals.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Department does not routinely publish responses received to public consultations. Many organisations, including councils, choose to publish their responses on their websites.

■ **Planning: Rural Areas**

Mr Andrew Snowden: [\[19895\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential effect of the National Planning Policy Framework, announced on 12 December 2024, on infrastructure and services in (a) Fylde constituency and (b) other rural areas.

Matthew Pennycook:

The revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December makes clear that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of necessary infrastructure and facilities.

A number of updates have been made to the Framework to support the improvement and modernisation of public service infrastructure; ensure sufficient provision of post-16 education and early years places; and encourage a collaborative, vision-led approach to transport planning in both rural and urban areas.

■ **Private Rented Housing: Energy Performance Certificates**

David Simmonds: [\[15936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the impact of planning restrictions on the ability of private rented homes to meet the new Energy Performance Certificate C requirement.

Alex Norris:

The Government will shortly consult on implementing a minimum energy efficiency standard of Energy Performance Certificate Band C or equivalent in the private

rented sector by 2030. The consultation will be accompanied by an Options Assessment, which will consider impacts arising from the policy proposals.

■ **Property Management Companies: Regulation**

Alberto Costa:

[\[20638\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of regulating private land management companies.

Matthew Pennycook:

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

■ **Recreation Spaces: Aldershot**

Alex Baker:

[\[20784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to (a) protect and (b) enhance green spaces in Aldershot constituency.

Alex Norris:

The government is firmly committed to creating better access to parks and green spaces for all sections of society. They are an essential part of local social infrastructure which supports more connected, stronger communities. Two green spaces in the Aldershot constituency, Wellesley Woodlands and Farnborough Business Park, have been recognised for their quality through the MHCLG-owned Green Flag Award. The Green Flag Award scheme sets the national quality standard for parks and green spaces.

Furthermore, changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will bolster environmental requirements that are already in place for new developments, including an objective for new residents to be able to access good quality green spaces within a short walk of their homes. Local authorities are mainly responsible for the provision and maintenance of green spaces and they are best placed to identify how to direct their resources. The Autumn Budget announced over £4 billion in additional funding for local government services, £1.3 billion of which will go through the Local Government Finance Settlement.

■ **Religious Freedom**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[20827\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Prime Minister's oral contribution in response to the question from the hon. Member for Birmingham Hall Green and Mosely, of 27 November 2024, Official Report, column 768, what steps the Government is taking to help tackle the desecration of (a) all religious texts and (b) the prophets of the Abrahamic religions.

Alex Norris:

Desecration of religious texts and abusing or targeting people for their faith or belief is awful and should be condemned. The Government is working with partners to tackle all forms of prejudice, division and hatred experienced by religious and other communities.

To champion freedom of religion or belief abroad, my Hon Friend the Member for North Northumberland has been appointed Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, promoting tolerance and mutual respect through and alongside the UK's diplomatic network.

■ **Rents: Aldershot****Alex Baker:**[\[20801\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an estimate of the average increase in private rents in Aldershot constituency in the last 12 months; and what assessment she has made of the potential impact of those increases on people in that constituency.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes data on the average increase in rent. Private rents across the UK increased by 9.1% in the 12 months to November 2024 (provisional estimate), up from 8.7% in the 12 months to October 2024.

While there is no data available on Aldershot specifically, Aldershot is located in Rushmoor. The ONS found that the average monthly rent in Rushmoor was £1,257 in November 2024, an annual increase of 6.9% from £1,176 in November 2023.

The government recognises that paying rent is likely to be a tenant's biggest monthly expense. The Renters' Rights Bill will empower private rented sector tenants to challenge unreasonable within-tenancy rent increases.

■ **Retail Trade: Aldershot****Alex Baker:**[\[20782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many high street businesses in (a) England and (b) Aldershot constituency closed in each of the last five years; and whether she plans to make changes to the business rates system.

Jim McMahon:

Whilst there is no strict definition for a high street business, the Office for National Statistics publishes business demographic information on an annual basis. The latest release was published on 18 November: [Business demography, UK - Office for National Statistics](#).

At Budget 2024, the government published 'Transforming Business Rates,' this sets out the government's first steps to reform the business rates system.

As part of this reform plan, the government has announced that it intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for high street retail, hospitality, and leisure properties, with rateable values below £500,000, from 2026-27, and has introduced primary legislation to deliver on this commitment.

■ Retail Trade: Empty Property

Stuart Anderson:

[\[20710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what fiscal steps she is taking to help reduce the number of empty retail units on high streets in rural areas.

Alex Norris:

The Government is determined to combat the blight of vacancy on high streets. On 2nd December, new High Street Rental Auction powers came into force enabling local authorities to tackle persistent vacancy, implementation is supported by over £1 million of funding.

Retail businesses across the country will also benefit from reforms to the business rates system including an extension to the retail, hospitality and leisure rate relief for one year, at 40 per cent up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business, and the freezing of the small business multiplier for 2025/26.

■ Right to Buy Scheme

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[20649\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17553 on Housing: Ownership, whether she has made an estimate of potential changes in the levels of Right to Buy sales arising from changes to Right to Buy (a) discounts and (b) eligibility.

Matthew Pennycook:

A review of Right to Buy discounts was published alongside the Budget. In this review, our modelling suggests a reduction in Right to Buy sales under the new maximum cash discounts with a long run average of c. 1,700 sales annually.

On 20 November we launched a consultation on wider reforms to the Right to Buy. The consultation seeks views on eligibility criteria and any policy changes brought forward following the consultation will be subject to appropriate assessment.

■ Social Rented Housing: Construction

Mike Amesbury:

[\[19382\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her Department's target is for new build homes for social rent for (a) 2024-25, (b) 2025-26, (c) 2026-27, (d) 2027-28 and (e) 2028-29.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government has not set an annual supply target for new social rented homes.

■ Social Rented Housing: Hampshire

Alex Baker:

[20789]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the potential implications for her policies of trends in the prevalence of damp and mould in social housing in (a) Aldershot constituency and (b) Hampshire.

Matthew Pennycook:

The English Housing Survey includes data on dwelling condition, including damp and mould. It can be found on gov.uk [here](#). In 2022/23 the survey found that 11% of homes in the South East of England did not meet the Decent Homes Standard. Nationwide, 10% of private rented households, 7% of local authority rented households, 4% of households renting from housing associations and 2% of owner occupier households were living with damp and mould.

The government is committed to working with social housing providers to ensure that homes are safe, decent, warm, and free from damp and mould. We have committed to bringing forward the regulations necessary to introduce Awaab's Law in the Social Rented Sector this Autumn. This will set new time limits for social landlords to fix dangerous hazards, including damp and mould. We have also committed to extending Awaab's Law to the private rented sector.

Social rented sector homes must also meet the Decent Homes Standard and all rented homes must be free of serious 'category 1' hazards, including damp and mould, as defined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. The government has published consolidated guidance on the health impacts of damp and mould.

We also intend to consult on and implement a new Decent Homes Standard and Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards early next year.

■ Unitary Councils

Sir Bernard Jenkin:

[20129]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, what the evidential basis is that unitary councils save money.

Jim McMahon:

The Case For Local Government Reorganisation in the English Devolution White Paper, states *"In 2020 a PwC report, "Evaluating the importance of scale in proposals for local government reorganisation", for the County Councils Network, estimated that reorganisation of the then 25 two-tier areas to a single unitary structure would have a one-off cost of £400 million, with the potential to realise £2.9 billion over five years, with an annual post implementation net recurring saving of £700 million. The unitary proposals submitted in relation to the most recently established unitary councils identified a range of efficiencies that could be achieved where council services are*

brought together in one organisation. For North Yorkshire Council, established in April 2023, unitarisation has enabled the council to manage financial pressures through structural changes and service transformation which are expected to achieve more than £40 million in savings by March 2026.”

■ **Unitary Councils: Lincolnshire**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[20563\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an estimate of the cost of creating a unitary authority in Lincolnshire.

Jim McMahon:

There has not been such an estimate made for the cost of creating a unitary authority in Lincolnshire. That will be for councils to consider when developing their proposals for new unitary councils that are the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

JUSTICE

■ **Custody: Homosexuality**

Rachel Taylor:

[\[19820\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she plans to issue an official apology on behalf of the Government to lesbian mothers who had their custody rights affected between the 1970s and 1990s because of their sexuality.

Alex Davies-Jones:

I have been very saddened to hear accounts from lesbian mothers who have said that their custody rights in earlier decades were affected by their sexuality.

The government is committed to ensuring equality and fairness in today's justice system.

The legal framework has changed in many ways over the past decades. Following the implementation of the Children Act 1989, where decisions are made about a child or their upbringing, the court's primary consideration must be the welfare of that child and what will be in their best interests.

The UK has also developed an expansive legal framework to help ensure that LGBT+ people and families are safe, included and protected from discrimination. This includes the introduction of the Equality Act 2010, which protects people from discrimination based on sexual orientation.

■ **Domestic Abuse: Older People**

Helen Grant:

[\[19273\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment she has made of the prevalence of economic abuse of older people.

Alex Davies-Jones:

Economic abuse is recognised as a form of abusive behaviour under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This Government is committed to halving violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse, in a decade. Though the Department does not hold prevalence data for economic abuse specifically, I have had several meetings with the specialist domestic abuse sector and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and am due to speak to Ministerial colleagues specifically on this issue.

In addition, the Department for Health and Social Care oversees The Care Act 2014, which makes it clear that local authorities have a statutory duty to investigate safeguarding concerns. Since April 2023, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) have had a duty to assess local authorities' delivery of their duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2024.

Helen Grant:[\[19274\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she has had recent discussions with Cabinet colleagues on developing a strategy for preventing violence and abuse against older people.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The Government is clear that violence and abuse towards anybody is unacceptable. Though anyone can suffer from domestic abuse, for older victims, abuse may be more disguised or compounded by other age-related factors such as ill health. I have had meetings on these issues with the specialist domestic abuse sector, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and Ministerial counterparts as part of the Government's agenda to protect victims.

The Home Office has funded Hourglass, a specialist elder abuse charity, for a number of years to enhance their helpline, provide casework support, and train specialist Independent Domestic Violence Advisers. We are committed to halving violence against women and girls in a decade, which includes reducing the prevalence of domestic abuse against all victims.

■ Driving under Influence: Convictions**Jim Shannon:**[\[20622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people have been convicted of drink driving offences in the last 12 months.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Ministry of Justice publishes data on the number convicted for drink driving offences at criminal courts in England and Wales in the Outcomes by Offences data tool, that can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice Statistics landing page here: [Criminal Justice Statistics](#).

This can be accessed by navigating to the 'Prosecutions and convictions' tab, using the HO Offence Code filter to select the following offences:

80301 - Driving or attempting to drive a motor vehicle whilst unfit through drink or drugs (impairment) (MOT).

80302 - Driving or attempting to drive a motor vehicle while having a breath, urine or blood alcohol concentration in excess of the prescribed limit (MOT).

80303 - Failing without reasonable excuse to provide a specimen for a laboratory test or two specimens for analysis of breath if at the relevant time driving or attempting to drive a motor vehicle (MOT).

80306 - Being in charge of a motor vehicle and failing to provide a specimen for a laboratory test or two specimens for analysis of breath if at the relevant time driving or attempting to drive a motor vehicle (MOT).

80309 - Driving or attempting to drive a motor vehicle whilst unfit through drink or drugs (impairment) - drink (MOT).

■ Forward Trust: Prisons

Rupert Lowe:

[\[20758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much the Forward Trust received from contracts in HMP (a) Maidstone, (b) Huntercombe and (c) Morton Hall in the last financial year.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

In the last financial year (FY 23/24) Forward Trust has received £7,401,140 from the Department for prison contracts. Forward Trust has received £0 for contracts relating to HMP Maidstone, HMPS Huntercombe and HMP Morton Hall in the last financial year.

■ HM Courts and Tribunals Service: Complaints

Sarah Olney:

[\[20689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many stage (a) one and (b) two complaints were submitted to HM Courts and Tribunals Service in each year since 2015.

Sarah Sackman:

HM Courts and Tribunals Service holds the following data on how many stage (a) one and (b) two complaints were submitted in each year since 2015. For context the annual HMCTS report published for the period 2015/16 states HMCTS handled over 3.98 million cases and the 2023/4 reports states HMCTS received over 4.1 million cases.

YEAR	FIRST CONTACT (STAGE 1)	REVIEW (STAGE 2)
2015	16,511	1,591
2016	17,253	1,768
2017	17,575	1,928

YEAR	FIRST CONTACT (STAGE 1)	REVIEW (STAGE 2)
2018	19,484	2,387
2019	21,078	3,011
2020	18,444	2,223
2021	23,797	2,878
2022	28,195	3,580
2023	32,745	4,188
2024*	32,212	3,496

*Data for 2024 is for the period 1 January – 30 November inclusive.

Sarah Olney: [\[20690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what information her Department holds on the number of complaints that were submitted to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman about His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service in each year since 2015.

Sarah Sackman:

HM Courts & Tribunals Service does not hold the data requested.

The number of complaints submitted to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman will be information held by them.

■ Judges: Conflict of Interests

Apsana Begum: [\[20266\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many judges have recused in England and Wales in 2023-24.

Sarah Sackman:

The Ministry of Justice does not hold this information. This is because a decision to recuse is a judicial responsibility. Whilst individual court and tribunal centres may hold records of recusals, the information requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

■ Law Reporting

Apsana Begum: [\[20265\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of making court transcripts available to (a) defendants and (b) plaintiffs both (i) during and (ii) after court hearings.

Sarah Sackman:

Proceedings in the civil, family and crown courts are audio recorded, and HM Courts and Tribunals Service have processes in place which allow individuals, including defendants and plaintiffs, to request access to transcripts.

Where requested after the hearing has concluded, transcripts are produced by transcription companies using audio recordings. If a defendant or plaintiff requests an instantaneous transcript as a hearing is taking place, this can be provided through a qualified stenographer attending in-court. Both types of requests are subject to judicial approval and typically provided on payment of the relevant fee to cover the cost of the transcription.

Life Imprisonment

Ben Goldsborough: [\[20327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people were serving life sentences for second listed offences in prisons in England and Wales on 31 October 2024.

Ben Goldsborough: [\[20328\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of the people serving life sentences for second listed offences in prisons in England and Wales on 31 October 2024 were sentenced (a) on or prior to 9 November 2000, (b) between 9 November 2000 and 4 April 2005 and (c) after 4 April 2005.

Ben Goldsborough: [\[20329\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many of the people serving life sentences for second listed offences in prisons in England and Wales on the 31 October 2024 (a) were serving a recall and (b) have never been released.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Information that would enable us to answer these questions robustly is not collated centrally, and to obtain it would involve a manual interrogation of courts and prison records which would result in a disproportionate cost to the Department.

Magistrates' Courts: Fines

Ben Goldsborough: [\[19943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of all sentences under the Single Justice Procedure were fines in each of the last five financial years.

Ben Goldsborough: [\[19944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of magistrates' court sentences were fines in each of the last five financial years.

Ben Goldsborough: [\[19949\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of sentences handed out in open magistrates' courts were fines in each of the last five financial years.

Sarah Sackman:

The Ministry of Justice publishes data on the number of prosecutions at criminal courts in England and Wales between 2010 and June 2024 in the Outcomes by Offences data tool, that can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice Statistics landing page here: [Criminal Justice Statistics Quarterly: June 2024](#).

For prosecutions from the Magistrates' courts in England & Wales between 2010 and 2023, the Magistrates court tool can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice Statistics landing page here: [Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: December 2023 - GOV.UK](#).

The data requested can be accessed by navigating to the 'Sentence Outcomes' tab and using the 'Sentence outcome' filter to select 'Fine' in both the Magistrates' court tool and the Outcome by Offence tool.

Currently, in centrally collated sentencing data, it is only possible to identify cases recorded and processed on the Automated Track Case Management System as Single Justice Procedure (SJP) cases – this only reflects a portion of all SJP cases. There is work ongoing to improve this. Select the filter 'SJP Flag' to see number of these cases.

■ Ministry of Justice: Buildings

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[19965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many desks in 102 Petty France offices are made available for (a) HMCTS and (b) Ministry of Justice staff.

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[19966\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many departmental staff, expressed as a numeric headcount, assigned to 102 Petty France, occupied a desk in 102 Petty France, on average, in the last week for which figures are available.

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[19967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many HMCTS staff, expressed as a numeric headcount, assigned to 102 Petty France, occupied a desk in 102 Petty France, on average, in the last week for which figures are available.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The new Government has recently committed to keep to the current guidance on civil service office attendance. Office occupancy data for the period July - September has been published, with further publications to now happen on a quarterly basis. The data is published at: [Civil Service HQ occupancy data - GOV.UK](#).

■ Ministry of Justice: Media

John Cooper: [\[20494\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The Department carries out media training in-house and so did not spend any money on media or voice training for Ministers in this period.

■ **Ministry of Justice: Ministers' Private Offices**

Sir Ashley Fox:[\[19963\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 15 November 2024, to Question 12889 on Ministry of Justice: Ministers' Private Offices, if he will provide a breakdown of the (a) goods and services purchased and (b) cost of each.

Alex Davies-Jones:

As outlined in PQ 9269, the Ministry of Justice's total cost spent on refurbishments to Ministerial Private Offices, including new furniture and fittings, was £13,314.73, during the period requested.

The following table provides details of furniture purchased as part of the refurbishment of Ministerial offices:

ITEM PURCHASED	COST (£)
3 x large mirrors installed in the offices of the Minister of State and Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State	212.26
1 x freezer for kitchen area	193.32
2 x wooden bookcases for Minister's office	64.86

The following table provides a breakdown of refurbishment and redecoration works to Ministerial offices and surrounding areas. "Miscellaneous renovation works" refers to multiple works that cannot be disclosed individually, due to commercial sensitivity around pricing, but includes works such as hanging pictures on walls, and affixing blanking plates to where wires were removed from the wall.

GOODS OR SERVICES PROVIDED	COST (£)
Electrical works and cabling	4,107.52
Addressing wear and tear to Ministerial offices	7,240.66
Reconfiguring furniture on the Ministerial floor	651.02
Miscellaneous renovation works	579.11

Emily Thornberry:[\[20180\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 9269 on Ministry of Justice: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on

(a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Alex Davies-Jones:

This information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

■ Offences against Children: Sentencing

James McMurdock:

[\[20375\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether her Department has consulted victims' groups and charities on potential reforms to sentencing guidelines for child sexual offences.

James McMurdock:

[\[20380\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether her Department plans to reform sentencing guidelines for child sexual offences.

James McMurdock:

[\[20381\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of sentencing guidelines for child sexual offences in (a) reflecting the severity of the crime and (b) preventing reoffending.

Rupert Lowe:

[\[20462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing guidance on the sentencing of people committing offences on social media.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Sentencing guidelines are developed by the independent Sentencing Council for England and Wales, in fulfilment of its statutory duty to do so.

The Council is independent of Parliament and Government. As an independent body, the Council decides on its own priorities and work plan for producing and reviewing guidelines. The Lord Chancellor or the Court of Appeal can ask the Council to consider reviewing or producing guidelines in a particular area, but the Council is not required to agree to any such requests.

The Council monitors and evaluates all definitive guidelines, as per its statutory duty to do so. The assessment covers the operation and effect of the guideline. A report on the evaluation findings is published online. A variety of different methods of data collection and analysis may be used, as necessary: analysis of existing data on sentencing trends over time, collections of data from sentencers on factors that influence their sentencing of different offences, interviews and focus groups, analysis of Crown Court sentencing transcripts and media reports.

Sentencing guidelines for child sexual offences were first published in 2013. Following consultation, revised guidelines were published and came into force in May 2022.

James McMurdock: [20376]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what comparative assessment her Department has made between the sentencing for child sexual offences in the UK and sentencing in other Western nations.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The criminal law in England and Wales provides a range of offences to deal with the scourge of child sexual abuse and provides robust penalties that reflect the seriousness of this offending. Child sexual offences generally carry high maximum penalties; for example, the offences of rape of a child under 13 and assault of a child under 13 by penetration both carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own sexual offences. The sentencing framework across international jurisdictions varies widely.

The Government has delivered on a manifesto commitment to bring sentencing up to date by launching an Independent Review of Sentencing chaired by former Lord Chancellor, David Gauke. The Sentencing Review will be guided by the evidence on what works to keep the public safe from harm and rehabilitate offenders. This includes looking at evidence from the criminal justice system in England and Wales as well as other jurisdictions in the UK, and internationally.

James McMurdock: [20377]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of convictions for child sexual offences resulted in custodial sentences in (a) 2024, (b) 2014, (b) 2004 and (d) 1994.

James McMurdock: [20379]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the average length of sentences for child sexual offences was in (a) 1994, (b) 2004, (c) 2014 and (d) 2024.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Ministry of Justice publishes data on the sentencing outcomes of criminal offences in England and Wales between the year ending June 2010 and year ending June 2024, in the Outcomes by Offence data tool, that can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice Statistics page here: [Criminal Justice Statistics](#).

Although child sex offences are not a defined category within the tool, you can filter offences using the *HO Offence codes* listed in the attachment linked above.

The proportion of convictions for child sexual offences resulted in custodial sentences is listed below. A list of specific offences that comprise the data below can be found in the accompanying attachment. We advise caution when comparing the 1994 data with more recent data included in the time series. This is due to differences in the way child sexual offences were defined.

Year Proportion

1994 48%

2004 65%

2014 72%

2024 (January-June) 59%

The average length of sentences for child sexual offences is as follows:

Year Average Custodial Sentence Length (Months)

1994 23.6

2004 40.2

2014 66.1

2024 (January-June) 75.3

■ **Offenders: Deportation**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[20757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of foreign national offenders serving prison sentences have been transferred to prison in their country of origin in each of the last five years.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The table below shows the number of foreign national offenders removed under prisoner transfer agreements in each year since 2020, including 2024 to date:

2020	81
2021	73
2022	50
2023	33
2024	74

As the number of foreign national prisoners is constantly changing, it is not possible to represent the above figures as a proportion of the total.

■ **Parole**

Helen Grant:

[\[20192\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, for what reasons was there a reduction in Parole Board oral review hearings for imprisonment for public protection prisoners between (a) 2018-19 and (b) 2022-23; and what steps her Department is taking to increase the number of hearings.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

In 2018/19 there were 1,317 review oral hearings for IPP prisoners and in 2022/23 there were 792, a reduction of 40%. During a similar period, the unreleased IPP prisoner population reduced from 2,491 on 31 December 2018 to 1,227 on 31

December 2023, a reduction of 51%. As such, the number of IPP oral hearings has reduced by a smaller proportion than the reduction in the IPP prisoner population.

The Parole Board has taken a number of steps to continue to progress those IPPs referred for a parole review, where it is safe to do so, including:

- prioritising indeterminate prisoners, over determinate sentenced prisoners, when listing their oral hearings; and
- giving a future oral hearing date to over two thirds of the IPP prisoners who require an oral hearing, to allow professionals additional notice to prepare for the parole review and give the prisoner a date to work towards.

Officials in the Ministry of Justice, HMPPS and the Parole Board are working closely together to ensure the parole system is working as efficiently and effectively as possible.

■ **Prison Phoenix Trust: Contracts**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[20756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much the Prison Phoenix Trust has received from her Department for (a) prison contracts and (b) contracts relating (i) HMP Maidstone, (ii) HMP Huntercombe and (iii) HMP Morton Hall in the last financial year.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

In the last financial year (FY 23/24) Prison Phoenix Trust has received £54,663 from the Department for prison contracts. The Prison Phoenix Trust has received £0 for contracts relating to HMP Maidstone, HMPS Huntercombe and HMP Morton Hall in the last financial year.

■ **Prisoners on Remand**

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[\[19424\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of prisoners are on remand for (a) summary, (b) either way and (c) indictable offences, by (i) the date of custody and (ii) offence type.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The requested information has been provided in the attached data table. To note that the 'date of custody' represented in this data is '30 September 2024' (i.e. the individuals were in the remand prison population on this date) - this is in line with the most recent published prison population data available in the department's offender management statistics.

Attachments:

1. [Table](#) [2024-12-20 PQ 19424 table.xlsx]

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[19425]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what estimate she has made of (a) the total number and (b) the percentage of prisoners on remand of the total prison population in each of the next five years.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Ministry of Justice published prison population projections for 2024-2029 on 5 December 2024, which are available here: [Prison Population Projections: 2024 to 2029 - GOV.UK](#).

These include the number of people projected to be remanded into custody from September 2025 to September 2028. Under the central scenario, the projected total number and percentage of prisoners on remand over this period is as follows:

DATE	TOTAL	REMAND	PERCENTAGE
Sep-24	86,966	17,662	20%
Sep-25	89,100	19,300	22%
Sep-26	93,500	20,200	22%
Sep-27	97,300	20,800	21%
Sep-28	99,800	21,300	21%

The prison population projections are published annually and projections for after September 2028 will be available in subsequent publications.

■ Prisoners' Release

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[20395]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of offenders released from prison under the standard determinate sentence (SDS40) release scheme were (a) released in error and (b) subsequently recalled since September 2024.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

This Government inherited a criminal justice system on the brink of collapse and was therefore forced on 10 September 2024, to take the unavoidable step to move certain release points from 50% to 40%, with an initial tranche of eligible offenders released on this date, and a second tranche released on 22 October 2024.

There was an issue with a repealed Breach of Restraining Order offence which meant that some offenders were released in error in the first tranche because they were incorrectly sentenced. This affected 37 offenders and this specific cohort were all returned to custody. All prisoners in custody with this offence recorded against them were reviewed to ensure there were no further releases in error.

The number of people who have been recalled following release under the emergency measure (SDS40) forms a subset of prison releases data which is scheduled for future publication. In accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, we may not give any early indication of the contents of these statistical reports.

■ Prisoners' Release: Electronic Tagging

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[\[20392\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 11 November 2024 to Question HL2063 on Prisoners' Release: Electronic Tagging, how many visits for tag installation for SDS40 releases did not result in the offender being tagged.

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[\[20394\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 11 November 2024 to Question HL2063 on Prisoners' Release: Electronic Tagging, how many SDS40 prisoners requiring electronic tags were released without those tags; and what the average number of days was before those prisoners were fitted with tags.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

1,889 prisoners were released on day one of tranche 1 and 1,223 were released on day one of tranche 2 of SDS40 releases. All visits for the installation of tags for these offenders were completed by 4 November.

To provide the number of people who did not have a tag fitted following release under the early release measure (SDS40) may give an indication of the number of people released under SDS40 to date, which forms a subset of prison releases data which is scheduled for future publication.

In accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, we may not give any early indication of the contents of this statistical report.

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[\[20393\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 11 November 2024 to Question HL2063 on Prisoners' Release: Electronic Tagging, for what reason all SDS40 releases were not tagged before leaving prison.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

This Government inherited a criminal justice system on the brink of collapse, and as a result was forced to introduce the emergency SDS40 scheme which allows some individuals to be released 40% of the way through their custodial sentence rather than at 50%. Anyone released under SDS40 is subject to strict licence conditions, which can include electronic monitoring or curfews, and face being recalled to prison should they breach these conditions.

Serco had a backlog of visits to install tags and we were clear that their performance is currently below acceptable levels. We are having regular meetings to hold them to account and already imposing financial penalties given their performance to date and won't hesitate to trigger relevant contractual penalties if they do not improve. Serco

has prioritised the SDS40 releases requiring electronic monitoring and performance on the tranche 2 caseload was much improved. As of Monday 4 November, all visits to install tags for SDS40 cases had been completed. Where a tag was not fitted, a non-compliance notification was set to Probation to consider enforcement action.

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[20396]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many offenders released under the standard determinate sentence (SDS40) release scheme have re-offended since September 2024; and how many were not tagged when re-offending despite it being a condition of their SDS40 release.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The number of people who have reoffended following release under the early release measure (SDS40) forms a subset of prison releases data which is scheduled for future publication. In accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, we may not give any early indication of the contents of this statistical report.

General reoffending rates are published regularly on an annual and quarterly basis. The most recent rates are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/proven-reoffending-statistics>.

Our initial operational insights suggested there was not a significant change to the use and application of recall since the implementation of the SDS change, however we will continue to monitor this. Serco prioritised the SDS40 releases requiring electronic monitoring and performance on the tranche 2 caseload was much improved.

As of 4 November, all visits to install tags for SDS40 Tranche 2 cases had been completed.

■ Prisoners' Release: Reoffenders

Helen Grant:

[20191]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the reoffending rates are of (a) former Imprisonment for Public Protection prisoners following the termination of their licence period, (b) the general prison population and (c) prisoners released under the revised early release scheme since August 2024.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Reoffending rates for offenders released from an IPP sentence are measured from the point of prison release in line with the published methodology, not from the point of licence termination. The latest proven reoffending rate for offenders released from an IPP sentence was 8.4% in 2021/22.

The proven reoffending rate for the adult cohort who were released from custody was 37.0% in 2021/22.

The number of people who have reoffended following release under the early release scheme (SDS40) forms a subset of prison releases data which is scheduled for future

publication. In accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, we are not permitted to give any early indication of the contents of this statistical report.

Helen Grant: [\[20193\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the average length of time imprisonment for public protection prisoners spend in custody following a recall; and what assessment she has made of the potential impact of extended recall periods on trends in successful re-release rates.

Helen Grant: [\[20194\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many Imprisonment for Public Protection prisoners were (a) in custody and (b) in the community on licence in each of the last five years; and what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of these trends.

Helen Grant: [\[20195\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of prolonged imprisonment on the (a) mental health and (b) prospects for safe release of prisoners serving imprisonment for public protection sentences; and what steps her Department is taking to support those prisoners who have served more than 10 years beyond their tariff.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Ministry of Justice routinely publishes data on the average length of time Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) prisoners spent in custody following recall. The most recent data can be found in Table 5.Q.11: [licence-recalls-Apr-to-June-2024.ods](#).

The figures from the latest publication on the last five quarters of available data have been provided below:

PERIOD	AVERAGE TIME RECALLED (MONTHS)
Apr to Jun 2023	27
Jul to Sep 2023	28
Oct to Dec 2023	27
Jan to Mar 2024	28
Apr to Jun 2024	24

Where an offender on an IPP licence is recalled to custody, the Secretary of State must refer the offender to the Parole Board, and the Board will conduct a review in order to determine whether the offender may be safely re-released. The Ministry of Justice, HMPPS and the Parole Board are working together to improve the efficiency

of the parole system, including with a view to ensuring that the Board completes post-recall reviews as quickly as possible.

Following commencement of the majority of IPP provisions in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 on 1 November 2024, and as an alternative to review by the Parole Board, the Secretary of State now has a power to release recalled IPP prisoners – without the need for a release decision by the Parole Board – following a process known as Risk Assessed Recall Review (RARR). The Secretary of State must apply the same test as the Parole Board and therefore, must be satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public that they should stay in prison.

The Ministry of Justice routinely publishes data on the number of IPP prisoners and IPP offenders under probation supervision as part of its quarterly Offender Management Statistics publication. Prison figures can be found under 'Prison Population' in Table 1.Q.14 and community figures can be found under 'Probation' in Table 6.13: [Offender management statistics quarterly - GOV.UK](#). The figures from the last five years of available data have been provided below.

Table 1. Shows the number of IPP prisoners, at end of period, September 2020 to September 2024, England and Wales.

CASELOAD PERIOD	NUMBER OF IPP PRISONERS
30 Sep 2020	3,252
30 Sep 2021	3,018
30 Sep 2022	2,890
30 Sep 2023	2,921
30 Sep 2024	2,694

Table 2. Shows the number of offenders serving IPP sentences in the community on licence, at end of period, June 2020 to June 2024, England and Wales.

CASELOAD PERIOD	NUMBER OF IPP OFFENDERS IN THE COMMUNITY
30 June 2020	2,993
30 June 2021	3,202
30 June 2022	3,246
30 June 2023	3,098
30 June 2024	2,958

Please note:

(1) Includes offenders serving a Detention for Public Protection (DPP) sentence who are defined in the data as offenders serving an IPP sentence, but were aged under 18 at the time of sentencing.

(2) The data pipeline used to compile the figures in this table has been updated. This change was introduced from June 2024. More details can be found in the 'Probation data process transition' section of Chapter 6 of the Offender Management Statistics quarterly publication, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2024>.

The Government is committed to ensuring that implementation of the IPP Action Plan and its initiatives safely reduce the IPP population both in custody and the community, whilst still prioritising public protection.

On 1 November 2024, the Government implemented the first phase of IPP provisions in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, which saw licences terminated for 1,742 IPP offenders in the community. In addition to this, around 600 people will be referred to the Parole Board for consideration of licence termination on the commencement of phase two on 1 February 2025. We anticipate that these changes, once fully implemented, will reduce the number of people serving IPP sentences in the community by around two-thirds.

The Government recognises the specific challenges faced by those serving IPP sentences. We are committed to improving outcomes for individuals with mental health needs, including IPP prisoners, and recognise the importance of providing the right interventions at the right time. This is reflected in the National Partnership Agreement on Health and Social Care in England which was published in 2023, which sets out a shared priority workplan to deliver safe, decent and effective care for offenders in prison and the community. The Chief Medical Officer has agreed to the Lord Chancellor's request to consider the IPP sentence as part of his independent review of offender health.

Health and justice partners provide an equivalent standard, range and quality of healthcare in prisons to that available in the community. If a prisoner has a severe mental health need to an extent that detention under the Mental Health Act 1983 may be appropriate, they will be referred and assessed by qualified clinicians to determine whether to transfer to a mental health hospital is warranted.

HMPPS operates a traffic light system for all never-released IPP offenders to identify those who are struggling to progress through their sentence plan, so that resources can be directed to offenders who need it most. HMPPS is rolling this system out to all IPP offenders, including those recalled to custody and those on licence in the community, in the first quarter of 2025.

■ Prisoners: Transgender People

Rebecca Paul:

[20297]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the HMPPS Offender Equalities Annual Report 2023-2024, published on 28 November 2024, how many of the

245 transgender prisoners who reported their legal gender as male were convicted of a sexual offence.

Rebecca Paul: [\[20298\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the HMPPS Offender Equalities Annual Report 2023-2024, published on 28 November 2024, how many of the 50 transgender prisoners who reported their legal gender as female were convicted of a sexual offence.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Of the 245 transgender prisoners who reported their legal gender as male (i.e. those who now identify as women, non-binary or gender-fluid) on 31 March 2024, 151 were convicted of a sexual offence. This includes both contact and non-contact sexual offences. Offence data was not available for 1 individual.

Of the 50 transgender prisoners who reported their legal gender as female on 31 March 2024, the number convicted of a sexual offence is five or fewer. We do not provide exact data for such small sample sizes as it risks identification of individuals. This approach is in line with our standards on data disclosure.

■ Prisons: Construction

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20225\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether any recent proposals to (a) build and (b) expand prisons have been affected by nutrient neutrality rules.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Within the prison expansion programmes, the Rapid Deployment Cells Programme has been affected by nutrient neutrality rules at four sites. Developments in these catchment areas need to either secure nutrient credits or other nutrient mitigation for planning permission to be granted. To date, mitigation has been secured at three of the four sites.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Planning and Infrastructure Bill proposes a more strategic approach to nature recovery, which we expect would streamline the process for nutrient neutrality mitigation.

■ Prisons: Crimes of Violence

Josh Babarinde: [\[20821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many assaults involving boiling water have been recorded within prisons in the last 12 months.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The information requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

■ Prisons: Electrical Goods

Josh Babarinde:

[\[20822\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of providing kettles in prison on (a) prisoner and (b) staff welfare.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Small travel kettles have been allowed in prisoners' possession for many years. HM Prison & Probation Service is aware of the risk of assaults by throwing of boiling water and works constantly to mitigate and reduce these risks.

All prisons carry out regular risk assessments relating to safety and security and implement associated safe systems of work. If a specific risk is identified in relation to use of a kettle, or intelligence is received that one may be used in an assault, the kettle will be withdrawn until it is assessed that it is safe to return it.

■ Prisons: Leicester

Shivani Raja:

[\[20060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to (a) ensure that current prison expansion plans are sufficient to meet projected demand and (b) prevent potential overcrowding in prisons serving Leicester and the surrounding areas.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Our 10-year Prison Capacity strategy published on 11 December sets out plans to deliver 14,000 prison places the previous Government promised but failed to deliver. It also sets out our plans to maintain the places in our estate to ensure we have sufficient accommodation and explore the acquisition of land should we need to build more prison places. This will include a new 1,700-place prison in Leicestershire (next to HMP Gartree), in addition to HMP Fosse Way in Leicester which opened in 2023.

We have also launched an Independent Sentencing Review, chaired by former Lord Chancellor, David Gauke. The Review's aim is to ensure we are never again left in a position that this Government was, where we have more prisoners than places available.

■ Prisons: Mobile Phones

Rupert Lowe:

[\[20759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of prisoners in HMP (a) Maidstone, (b) Huntercombe and (c) Morton Hall have access to mobile phones.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Prisoners are not permitted to have mobile telephones, and stringent measures are in place to prevent the entry of mobile telephones into establishments.

■ Reoffenders

Andrew Cooper:

[\[20410\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment she has made of trends in the levels of reoffending rates in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England in each of the last five years; and what steps her Department is taking to help reduce reoffending rates in those areas.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The overall proven reoffending rate for England has decreased from 29.1% in 2017/18 to 25.0% in 2021/22 (the latest year for which reoffending data is available – see Table 1).

The overall proven reoffending rate for Cheshire has decreased from 29.6% in 2017/18 to 27.5% in 2021/22 (the latest year for which reoffending data is available – see Table 1).

We do not currently hold reoffending data broken down by parliamentary constituency.

TABLE 1: RATE OF REOFFENDING FOR THE REGIONS OF CHESHIRE, AND ENGLAND, ACROSS THE PAST 5 YEARS

Region	Apr 2017- Mar 2018	Apr 2018 - Mar 2019	Apr 2019 - Mar 2020	Apr 2020 - Mar 2021	Apr 2021 - Mar 2022
Cheshire	29.6%	27.8%	26.5%	25.7%	27.5%
England	29.1%	27.9%	25.4%	24.1%	25.0%

This Government is committed to reducing reoffending by giving people the tools they need to turn their backs on crime. To do that, we will increase prisoners' access to purposeful activity, including education and employment, which we know can reduce reoffending by up to 9 percentage points.

For example, we have recruited specialist education and employment roles in prisons to support and prepare prisoners for work on release, including Prison Employment Leads who match prisoners to jobs. Prison Employment Leads are currently in place at HMP Risley, HMP Styal and HMP Thorn Cross, three prisons located in Cheshire.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ Artificial Intelligence: Public Bodies

Chi Onwurah:

[\[19685\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to increase the transparency in the use of artificial intelligence by public bodies.

Feryal Clark:

The Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard (ATRS) establishes a standardised way for public sector organisations to publish information about how and why they are using algorithmic tools. The ATRS is mandatory for government departments and arm's-length bodies (ALBs), for algorithmic tools which have a significant influence on a decision-making process with public effect, or directly interact with the general public.

Business and Universities**Chi Onwurah:**[\[19684\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the State of the relationship report 2024, published by the National Centre for Universities and Business on 5 December 2024, what steps he is taking to increase the number of interactions between businesses and universities.

Feryal Clark:

The Government incentivises university-business interactions through funding for UKRI programmes. Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF), provided through Research England is the largest source of knowledge exchange funding to English universities, providing £280 million annually to support engagement with a range of partners, including businesses. HEIF includes a £20 million contribution specifically for university-business collaboration and commercialisation. Innovate UK's Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) programme links businesses with technical experts in UK universities. Currently, around 800 businesses, 100 knowledge bases (universities and other research organisations) and over 800 graduates are involved in KTPs.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Alcoholic Drinks**Cat Smith:**[\[19334\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how many alcohol industry representatives Ministers in his Department have met since July 2024.

Feryal Clark:

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 Science, Innovation and Technology: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**Emily Thornberry:**[\[19659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how many government procurement cards were held by staff within (a) his core Department and its predecessor departments and (b) executive agencies of those departments at the end of calendar years (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Feryal Clark:

Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT) only hold records for the core department and does not hold the requested information for 2022, as DSIT was established in February 2023. The DSIT cardholders at the end of 2023 calendar year total 35.

■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Equality**Chi Onwurah:**[\[19683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what training has been provided to civil servants in his Department on the public sector equality duty.

Feryal Clark:

In June 2024, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology published updated guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), available to all staff via the intranet. The guidance provides a clear framework on the principles of the duty, compliance expectations, and conducting equality impact assessments. Staff were encouraged to use this resource to support their work.

In addition, a PSED training video was included in the Policy Foundation Programme, run on DSIT's behalf by the Integrated Corporate Services. The first cohort took place on 18th November 2024.

■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Media**John Cooper:**[\[20484\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Feryal Clark:

The Department has spent no money on (a) media or (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

■ Government Departments: ICT**Chi Onwurah:**[\[18934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the oral evidence to the Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee of 3 December 2024, HC 504, whether the moratorium on government IT procurement decisions over £1 million is still in place; and how many requests for IT procurement have been (a) considered, (b) approved and (c) rejected since the implementation of the moratorium.

Feryal Clark:

The moratorium on government IT procurement decisions over £1m (now known as the Digital Assurance Gateway) is still in place. The Integrated Corporate Services Digital Assurance Team and Central Digital and Data Office have considered 11 spend requests for the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology and its

Arm's Length Bodies against the gateway criteria since it was introduced on 14 August 2024, and none were rejected.

■ Government Office for Technology Transfer

Chi Onwurah: [\[18935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether the Government Office for Technology Transfer has a role in supporting his Department to provide digital expertise to other Government Departments.

Feryal Clark:

No. GOTT works with government departments and Arm's Length Bodies to accelerate government's innovations towards the market, through guidance, direct practical expert support, grant funding for specific opportunities, and access to networks.

■ Hodgkin Lymphoma: Research

Peter Fortune: [\[19538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much funding the Government provided for research into Hodgkin lymphoma in the 2023-24 financial year; and through which public bodies that funding was provided.

Peter Fortune: [\[19539\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government investment in myelodysplastic syndrome research was in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that investment.

Peter Fortune: [\[19540\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into stem cell research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[19541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into haemophilia research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[19542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into sickle cell research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[19543\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into thalassaemia research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[19544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into human immunodeficiency disease research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[19545\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into vitamin B12 deficiency research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[19546\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into neural tube defect prevention research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[19547\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into malaria vaccination research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Feryal Clark:

DSIT funds medical research through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Department of Health and Social Care funds research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).

UKRI's Medical Research Council (MRC) supports the best scientific research to improve human health, with work ranging from molecular level science to public health medicine. MRC plays a key role in funding underpinning research which may not be attributable to a specific disease but will benefit medical research more generally.

UKRI delivers a substantial portfolio of researcher-led projects. This includes a wide variety of areas including physiological, biological and mechanistic aspects that are applicable to many diseases, disorders and other conditions.

Details of UKRI and NIHR funding on specific areas is provided in the table below:

	UKRI FUNDING COMMITTED IN 2023 AND 2024 TO DATE	NIHR FUNDING IN FY 2023/24
Hodgkin Lymphoma	UKRI did not commit any funding for Hodgkin lymphoma research in 2023-24.	NIHR has not allocated funding for research concerning Hodgkin Lymphoma during financial year 2023-24.

Myelodysplastic Syndrome	UKRI did not commit any new funding for Myelodysplastic Syndrome research in 2023-24.	NIHR has not allocated funding for research concerning Myelodysplastic Syndrome during financial year 2023-24.
Stem Cell	The total commitment in 2023/24 from UKRI for research concerning Stem Cells was £63,966,085 for 69 awards (14 awards from BBSRC; 4 awards from EPSRC; 6 awards from Innovate UK; 27 awards from MRC with a value of £28,347,161; 3 awards from NC3Rs; 15 awards from centrally managed UKRI schemes).	NIHR has not funded any research concerning Stem Cells during financial year 2023-24.
Haemophilia	UKRI did not commit any new funding for Haemophilia research in 2023-24.	NIHR allocated £154,000 for high-quality research concerning Haemophilia in 2023-24
Sickle Cell	UKRI did not commit any new funding for Sickle Cell research in 2023-24.	NIHR allocated £336,368 for high-quality research concerning Sickle Cell research in the financial year 2023-24
Thalassaemia	UKRI did not commit any new funding for Thalassaemia research in 2023-24.	NIHR allocated £158,900 for high-quality research concerning Thalassaemia in the financial year 2023-24
Human Immunodeficiency Disease	The total commitment from UKRI in 2023/24 was £13,983,734 for 13 awards (1 award from EPSRC; 8 awards from MRC with a value of £10,800,617 for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) research; 4 awards from centrally managed UKRI schemes).	NIHR allocated £5,620,876 for high quality research concerning Human Immunodeficiency Disease (HIV and AIDS) in 2023-24

Vitamin B12 deficiency	The total commitment across UKRI in 2023-24 for Vitamin B12 deficiency research was £470,348 for 2 awards from Innovate UK.	NIHR has not allocated any funds concerning Vitamin B12 Deficiency during financial year 2023-24.
Neural Tube Defect Prevention	The total commitment from UKRI in 2023/24 for research concerning Neural Tube Defect Prevention was £4,289,077 for 4 awards (2 awards from MRC with a value of £3,949,400; 1 award from ESRC; 1 award from centrally managed UKRI schemes).	NIHR has not allocated any funds concerning Neural Tube Defect Prevention research during the financial year of 2023-24.
Malaria vaccination	The total commitment from UKRI in 2023/24 for research concerning Malaria vaccination was £11,697,976 for 7 awards (2 awards from MRC with a value of £3,387,100; 5 awards from centrally managed UKRI schemes).	NIHR has not allocated any funds concerning Malaria Vaccination research during the financial year of 2023-24. The NIHR Oxford Biomedical Research Centre supports the development and testing of malaria vaccines, such as the R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine.

■ Innovation: Local Government

Chi Onwurah:

[\[20614\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of supporting non-Mayoral Strategic Authorities to increase regional innovation activity.

Feryal Clark:

Building on our experience of delivering the UK-wide Strength in Places Fund, Innovation Accelerators and Launchpads programmes, we will develop a new local innovation funding programme that will bolster high potential clusters across the UK, including in non-Mayoral Strategic Authorities. We will work with areas that choose not to adopt the mayoral model, to increase innovation activity in regions both with and without devolution.

■ Internet: Disinformation**Ruth Cadbury:** [\[20629\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps the Government is taking against individual service users whose online deceptions cause (a) non-trivial emotional and psychological damage, and (b) fall within the scope of coercive control.

Feryal Clark:

Individuals can be prosecuted if they commit offences online or offline. The Online Safety Act forces online platforms and search services to reduce the risk of illegal content being encountered on their services. Platforms must focus on 'priority offences', including content which amounts to controlling and coercive behaviour and must reduce the risk of priority offences being committed on their service. We know such offences disproportionately impact women and girls. This government has set an unprecedented mission to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. We will explore further measures as needed.

■ Internet: Rural Areas**Ben Maguire:** [\[20391\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to help (a) improve internet services for rural communities and (b) ensure that internet companies do not have monopolies in rural areas.

Chris Bryant:

The government helped create a competition-friendly environment which supports over 100 providers in the UK deploying broadband in commercially viable areas. Through Project Gigabit, the government is delivering gigabit-capable broadband to UK premises that are not included in suppliers' commercial plans, predominantly in rural areas, with nearly £2 billion of contracts now secured to connect over a million more premises.

Regulating monopolies is a matter for Ofcom, the independent telecoms regulator and it can impose pro-competition remedies on providers with significant market power (SMP). Currently, Ofcom has determined that only BT Group and KCOM have SMP.

■ Met Office: Equality**Sir John Hayes:** [\[19235\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the Met Office.

Feryal Clark:

The Met Office currently employs one full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion member of staff.

■ Mobile Phones and Television

Alex Easton: [\[20445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will hold discussions with Ofcom on the adequacy of (a) the competitiveness of pricing, (b) customer retention practices and (c) service standards in the (i) mobile and (ii) television service sector.

Chris Bryant:

I have held regular meetings with Ofcom, both on their own and with others, when these and many other issues have been discussed.

■ Research: Finance

George Freeman: [\[19674\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to paragraph 3.68 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC 295, what steps he plans to take to monitor the potential impact of the £20.4 billion R&D investment on economic and R&D business growth; and how much of that funding he plans to allocate to each (a) sector and (b) research and innovation cluster.

Feryal Clark:

R&D is fundamental to achieving the government's mission of kickstarting economic growth. DSIT regularly monitors economic and R&D business growth indicators and requires monitoring and evaluation to be undertaken as a condition of its funding. At the Autumn Budget, DSIT was allocated £13.9bn for R&D in 2025/26. The Secretary of State will announce further details of how this funding will be allocated in due course.

■ Research: Investment

Lauren Edwards: [\[20745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will make an estimate of the total value of investment made in research and development in the (a) public and (b) private sector in each of the last five years.

Feryal Clark:

The Office for National Statistics routinely publishes official statistics on Gross Expenditure on Research & Development (GERD), including breakdowns of expenditure by sector. These statistics show the total value of R&D performed, for each of the past five years for which data is available (2018 – 2022), was:

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
(a) Public (Government inc. UKRI)	2,604	2,662	3,080	3,366	3,619

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
(b) Private (Business Enterprise + Private Non-Profit)	41,775	43,007	44,893	47,902	50,802

Current prices (£m)

■ Science and Technology: New Businesses

Chi Onwurah:

[\[18936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of (a) housing costs and (b) the cost of living on (i) start-ups and (ii) innovation in the (A) science and (B) technology sectors.

Feryal Clark:

DSIT supports startups and innovation across the UK, including through the UK's innovation agency - Innovate UK. Over the last two years, Innovate UK has awarded £5.2 billion funding to more than 7,000 businesses across the UK.

Innovate UK published the [State of Innovation 2024 report](#) on 6 December. This draws on data from over 2,000 UK businesses, to provide a view of businesses' innovation activities, challenges and plans for the year ahead.

The report does not specifically assess housing costs and cost of living, but assesses trends in barriers to innovation, including the cost of doing business, which will include these areas.

■ UK Research and Innovation: Finance

Chi Onwurah:

[\[20615\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, within what timeframe UKRI expects to deliver a future regional innovation funding programme.

Feryal Clark:

We are developing a new local innovation funding programme to support high potential innovation clusters across the country, with delivery timelines subject to the outcome of the next phase of the Spending Review.

Our new programme will build on our experience of delivering initiatives such as the Innovation Accelerator pilots. At Budget, we announced these would be extended into 2025/26, delivering funding and bespoke support to bolster high-potential innovation clusters in Greater Manchester, Glasgow City Region, and the West Midlands.

■ UK Research and Innovation: Local Government**Chi Onwurah:** [\[20616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of including local universities in engagement between UKRI and Strategic Authorities.

Feryal Clark:

Universities are central to generating local economic growth. As magnets for talent and investment and anchors for clusters, they create centres of research and innovation excellence across the country. Enabling partnership working between local government, universities and businesses will be at the heart of our future regional innovation funding programme.

Enabling partnership working between local government, universities and businesses will be at the heart of our future regional innovation funding programme.

■ UK Research and Innovation: Staff**Chi Onwurah:** [\[20613\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how many full-time equivalent members of staff at UKRI work on (a) local and (b) regional innovation partnerships.

Feryal Clark:

UKRI's leadership and staff routinely engage with stakeholders across the UK. Additionally, UKRI has several teams focussed on regional engagement, including:

- Innovate UK's place engagement team, including a Director, Deputy Director and ten full time manager positions at Innovate UK, who work with around 400 regionally-organised business growth advisers.
- EPSRC has a team of eight regional managers.
- Research England has a team of five engagement leads.
- Members of staff focused on the investment delivery of place programmes, such as the Strength in Places Fund and Innovation Accelerators.

■ UK Safer Internet Centre**Steve Race:** [\[19481\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department plans to take steps to support the UK Safer Internet Centre after March 2025.

Feryal Clark:

The government recognises the important work of the three organisations that form the UK Safer Internet Centre (UKSIC) in improving online safety. We are committed to continued engagement with UKSIC in support of its aim to establish a sustainable funding model.

■ UK Space Agency: Equality**Sir John Hayes:**[\[19236\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the UK Space Agency.

Chris Bryant:

The UK Space Agency employs one member of staff in an Employee Experience Lead role, of which 0.5 FTE is allocated to equality, diversity and inclusion.

TRANSPORT**■ Aviation: Liquefied Petroleum Gas****Jim Shannon:**[\[20618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will encourage sustainable aviation fuel developers to additionally produce biopropane.

Mike Kane:

Biopropane is a low carbon alternative to liquid petroleum gas and is suitable for use in road vehicles and non-road mobile machinery, such as forklift trucks. Biopropane is eligible for support under the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) where it meets sustainability criteria and is for a relevant end use. This could include biopropane where it is a co-product of a sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) developer's production process.

■ Chiltern Railways**Greg Smith:**[\[20036\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of capacity on Chiltern Railways services.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department continues to work closely with Chiltern Railways to support the delivery of an improved passenger experience. In response to passenger demand and to reduce overcrowding, Chiltern periodically adjusts its timetable.

The Department is fully engaged with Chiltern's fleet renewal programme. We are considering the option to procure additional trains to increase capacity, whilst ensuring value for money for the taxpayer.

■ Department for Transport: Media**John Cooper:**[\[20485\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Mike Kane:

The Department has had no spend on media and voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

■ Driving Tests: Harpenden and Berkhamsted**Victoria Collins:**[\[20836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to increase the availability of practical driving tests in Harpenden and Berkhamsted constituency.

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 right across the country.

I announced to Parliament via a Written Ministerial Statement on 18 December DVSA's 7-point plan to reduce driving test waiting times. Details of that plan can be found on gov.uk (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/car-practical-driving-test-waiting-times>)

■ Motorcycles**Sammy Wilson:**[\[20592\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what meetings (a) she and (b) Ministers in her Department have had with motorcycle manufacturers.

Lilian Greenwood:

Ministers have not met with motorcycle manufacturers. Officials continue to meet with the Motorcycle Industry Association (MCIA), which represents and oversees the interests of motorcycle, moped, scooter and Powered Light Vehicle (PLV) industry.

Sammy Wilson:[\[20596\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to improve the uptake of (a) mopeds, (b) motorcycles and (c) other powered light vehicles.

Lilian Greenwood:

At present, the Government has no policy to encourage greater use of motorcycles, mopeds or other powered light vehicles.

The Government supports the purchase of zero emission motorcycles with the plug-in motorcycle grant for those who want to switch to an electric motorcycle. This is available until at least March 2025 and since 2016 has supported the purchase of over 12,000 mopeds and motorcycles.

Resolving the longstanding problems and missed opportunities of micromobility, including e-scooters, is a priority for the Department for Transport and we will work with colleagues across Government to tackle this as soon as possible.

In November, the Government launched its plan to develop an Integrated National Transport Strategy, which will set out how all modes of transport should be designed,

built and operated to better serve all the people who use it, and enable them to live fulfilling lives.

■ Old Oak Common Station: Construction

Max Wilkinson:

[\[20516\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to mitigate (a) cancellations and (b) delays to rail between Cheltenham and London during the construction period for Old Oak Common station.

Lilian Greenwood:

The department continues to work closely with HS2, Network Rail, GWR, TfL and Heathrow Express to mitigate the impacts of Old Oak Common construction. This aims to minimise disruption to passengers on the Great Western Main Line during the construction of the new station and during its operation, including through investing £30m to ensure that passenger services can continue to operate.

Max Wilkinson:

[\[20519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential economic impact of the disruption to rail services between Cheltenham and London during the construction of Old Oak Common station on affected (a) consumers and (b) businesses.

Simon Lightwood:

Old Oak Common is essential to support the Government's growth mission. We recognise the potential economic impact that disruption could have, and my department continues to work with Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies to align works and minimise disruption to passengers on the Great Western Main Line during the construction of the new station. We are also using standard industry precedents to manage enhancements on the network including compensating industry bodies.

■ Railway Stations: Disability

Adam Dance:

[\[20548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of steps to improve accessibility of train stations for disabled people.

Simon Lightwood:

We are committed to improving the accessibility of the railway for all users, including those with a range of disabilities. The Department for Transport recently completed an accessibility audit of all 2,577 stations across Great Britain. This data is being used to guide how the government and rail industry can most efficiently invest through programmes such as Access for All, which has delivered step free access at more than 250 stations since 2006.

Adam Dance:

[\[20551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to improve disabled access to railway stations in rural areas.

Simon Lightwood:

We are committed to improving the accessibility of the railway for all users, including those with a range of disabilities and in rural areas. The Department for Transport recently completed an accessibility audit of all 2,577 stations across Great Britain, including those in rural areas. This data is being used to guide how the government and rail industry can most efficiently invest through programmes such as Access for All, which has delivered step free access at more than 250 stations since 2006.

■ Railways: Cornwall

Ben Maguire:

[\[20125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many scheduled trains with destinations in Cornwall were cancelled due to lack of crew in the last 12 months.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department does not hold cancellation data at this level of detail. However, we acknowledge that performance is not where it needs to be on Great Western Railway or Cross-Country services. This is due to a range of issues including infrastructure and fleet reliability, as well as traincrew availability. The Department is working closely with both operators to improve performance.

■ Railways: East of England

James Cartlidge:

[\[20680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will take steps to expedite the approval process for (a) the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement and (b) upgrades to the Haughley Rail Junction.

Lilian Greenwood:

Despite its public statements of support, the previous government made no funding available for the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement (EACE) or upgrades to Haughley Junction.

The Chancellor has been clear about the state of the nation's finances and has launched a multi-year Spending Review. The Transport Secretary is conducting a thorough review of the previous government's transport plans to ensure that our transport infrastructure portfolio drives economic growth and delivers value for money for taxpayers. Decisions about EACE and upgrades to Haughley Junction will be informed by this review process and confirmed in due course.

■ Railways: Lobbying

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what restrictions she has placed on the Rail Delivery Group on attending (a) party political conferences, (b) international railway meetings overseas and (c) other lobbying activities.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19772\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if her Department will make an assessment of the value for money of (a) the Rail Delivery Group, (b) Network Rail and (c) other publicly funded railway bodies engaging public affairs agencies for lobbying purposes.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19773\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much (a) Network Rail and (b) the Rail Delivery Group spent on lobbying activities, including expenses related to attending party conferences and engaging public affairs consultancies, for financial years (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Simon Lightwood:

We do not hold this information; the Rail Delivery Group's (RDG's) structure reflects the role the organisation has played as a means of facilitating collaboration and delivering whole-system outcomes within a multi-operator sector. As a Non-Departmental Public Body, Network Rail strictly adheres to Cabinet Office rules which prohibit attendance at party conferences and the use of consultancies for lobbying activity.

The Secretary of State has not put any restrictions on RDG from attending party political conferences, international railway meetings overseas and other lobbying activities.

Furthermore, we have not carried out a value for money assessment in relation to RDG and Network Rail engaging public affairs agencies for lobbying purposes. RDG undertakes and provides a wide range of critical functions across the rail industry which deliver high value for money for the industry.

Network Rail has a profitable international consultancy arm which involves international travel and conferences; and also necessarily participates in international activities as railway standards and the railway supply chain are both international.

The Rail Delivery Group will be overtaken by GBR in due course which will be an arms-length body of the Department for Transport and therefore subject to Cabinet Office rules.

■ Railways: Mobile Broadband

Alex Mayer: [\[20348\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether there will be a minimum service requirement for broadband on train services under Great British Railways.

Simon Lightwood:

There have been no discussions around the minimum levels of service for wifi or broadband on trains under Great British Railways. However, officials are looking more widely into different solutions to improve passenger connectivity, such as a low earth orbit satellite and neutral host solutions to improve connectivity via Network Rail's 'Project Reach'.

Railways: Nationalisation**Chris Hinchliff:**[\[20546\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has prepared improvement action plans for rail franchises due to be brought back into public ownership.

Simon Lightwood:

There will be no immediate changes to the specifications of services at the point of transfer. All operators will continue to go through an annual planning process with the Department to agree plans for changes to service specifications, performance improvements and other deliverables.

Once transferred, publicly owned operators will be managed by DfT Operator. DfT Operator works closely with its train companies to drive forward improvements for passengers and rail employees through its reform initiatives and it will ensure that its operators continually find better ways to make rail accessible for all.

The Government will not tolerate poor performance and will continue to hold all operators to account, regardless of ownership.

Railways: South West**Steve Darling:**[\[20052\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what projects the full-time equivalent civil servants working on rail projects in the South West are working on; and what proportion of their time is spent on each project.

Simon Lightwood:

Civil servants working on rail projects in the South West are predominantly focused on supporting the South West Rail Resilience Programme, Mid-Cornwall Metro, Wellington and Cullompton stations, MetroWest Phase 1b, also known as the Portishead line, and Charfield station, with many other projects in the area being worked on as and when required. Resources are allocated flexibly according to business requirements.

Roads: Ipswich**James Cartlidge:**[\[20681\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the time taken for a decision to be made in relation to (a) the Ely Area

Capacity Enhancement and (b) upgrades to Haughley Rail Junction on the (i) Orwell Bridge, (ii) Copdock Interchange and (iii) wider road networks in the Ipswich area.

Simon Lightwood:

The 2022 Outline Business Case for the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement (EACE) forecast that the scheme would lead to 98,000 fewer lorry journeys every year, implying benefits to the Ipswich road network. Despite its public statements of support, the previous government made no funding available for EACE or upgrades to Haughley Junction.

The Chancellor has been clear about the state of the nation's finances and has launched a multi-year Spending Review. The Transport Secretary is conducting a thorough review of the previous government's transport plans to ensure that our transport infrastructure portfolio drives economic growth and delivers value for money for taxpayers. Decisions EACE and upgrades to Haughley Junction will be informed by this review process and confirmed in due course.

■ **Roads: Suffolk**

James Cartlidge:

[\[20682\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of MAERSK's decision to relocate all UK operations from the Port of Felixstowe on (a) the surrounding road network, (b) Orwell Bridge and (c) Copdock Interchange.

Mike Kane:

Changes to shipping schedules and ports of call is standard practice within the shipping and ports market, with changes to shipping alliances being cyclical. At this time, it is not clear that the relocation of Maersk's 2M Alliance operations away from Felixstowe will lead to any overarching change in cargo volumes, as their 2M partner, MSC, undertook many of the services and continues to call at the port. Additionally, some cargo is route based and does not automatically move when a shipping provider does. Finally, the potential opening of capacity at the port provides commercial opportunities for other shipping lines. Until there has been a period of re-adjustment within the market it is too early to understand the impacts on road links serving Felixstowe. The Department and National Highways will always consider relevant wider impacts in the operation, maintenance and plans for future enhancements on specific key infrastructure serving our ports.

TREASURY

■ **Agriculture: Inheritance Tax**

James McMurdock:

[\[19631\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of inheritance tax changes on the long-term sustainability of family farms in (a) South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency and (b) Essex.

James Murray:

I refer the Honourable Member to the PQ referenced 12250 published on 11th November 2024 at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-11-01/12250>.

The Chancellor also recently wrote to the Chair of the Treasury Select Committee on this issue, and her letter may be of interest:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/45691/documents/226235/default/>

Ben Maguire:**[19797]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of applying a working farm test which would exempt estates actively being used for farming from changes to Inheritance Tax rules at the Autumn Budget 2024.

James Murray:

The longstanding rules already mean agricultural property relief is currently only available if the property includes agricultural land that is occupied for agricultural purposes. It may be occupied by the owners of the land or others, such as a tenant farmer. More information on the qualifying uses of land can be found at www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/inheritance-tax-manual/ihm24061.

Martin Wrigley:**[20074]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of proposed changes to (a) agricultural property relief and (b) business property relief on farm business productivity.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms.

It is expected that up to around 2,000 estates will be affected by the changes to APR and BPR in 2026-27, with around half of those being claims that involve AIM shares. Almost three-quarters of estates claiming agricultural property relief (or those claiming agricultural property relief and business property relief together) are expected to be unaffected by these reforms.

In accordance with standard practice, a tax information and impact note will be published alongside the draft legislation before the relevant Finance Bill.

Charlie Dewhirst:**[20405]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of proposed changes to Agricultural Property Relief on the profitability of farming businesses.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at

www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms.

It is expected that up to around 2,000 estates will be affected by the changes to APR and BPR in 2026-27, with around half of those being claims that involve AIM shares. Almost three-quarters of estates claiming agricultural property relief (or those claiming agricultural property relief and business property relief together) are expected to be unaffected by these reforms.

In accordance with standard practice, a tax information and impact note will be published alongside the draft legislation before the relevant Finance Bill.

■ Airports: Business Rates**Kevin Hollinrake:****[19700]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what changes have been made to the valuation of airports for business rates in the last 24 months; and what representations her Department has received on that issue in that period.

Kevin Hollinrake:**[19711]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment (a) her Department and (b) the Valuation Office Agency has been of the potential impact on airports of the (a) surcharge on business hereditaments above £500,000 Rateable Value from 2026-27 and (b) 2026 rates revaluation.

James Murray:

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) conducts analysis of changes in rateable value to prepare for regular revaluations. The VOA is currently working on a revaluation of all non-domestic properties, which will come into effect on 1 April 2026. The revaluation is not yet complete, and the VOA expect to publish draft valuations by the end of 2025. For the upcoming 2026 revaluation, as with other revaluations, the VOA is receiving ongoing representations from the airport sector.

As set out at Budget, the Government intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties, with rateable values below £500,000 from 2026-27. This permanent tax cut will ensure that they benefit from much-needed certainty and support. The Government intends to fund this by introducing a higher multiplier on all properties with a rateable value (RV) of £500,000 and above.

The Government will confirm the rates for the new multipliers at Budget 2025, taking account of the outcomes of the 2026 revaluation as well as the broader economic and fiscal context.

Tax policy and legislation is not subject to the Better Regulation Framework Guidance which requires an Impact Assessment to accompany policy decisions.

Nevertheless, when the new multipliers are set at Budget 2025, the Treasury intends to publish analysis of the effects of the new multiplier arrangements.

■ Bank Services: Aldershot

Alex Baker: **[20777]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department is taking steps to help secure free access to cash withdrawals and deposit facilities in Aldershot constituency.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government recognises that cash continues to be used by millions of people across the UK, including those in vulnerable groups, and is committed to protecting access to cash for individuals and businesses.

The most recent data from the Financial Conduct Authority shows that 97 per cent of people in urban areas live within 1 mile of a free-to-use cash access point offering deposits. In rural areas, 98 per cent of people live within 3 miles of a free-to-use cash access point offering deposits.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has recently assumed regulatory responsibility for access to cash, and its rules came into effect on 18 September 2024. These rules require the UK's largest banks and building societies to assess the impact of a closure of a relevant cash withdrawal or deposit facility and put in place a new service if necessary. Where a branch closure is announced and it is deemed that this closure will impact free access to cash, the branch cannot close until a replacement service is operational and any gap in provision has been filled.

Where a consumer, or anyone with a strong connection to a local area, feels access to cash in their community is insufficient, they can submit a request for a cash access assessment. Further information about submitting a cash access request can be found at the following link: <https://www.link.co.uk/helping-you-access-cash/request-access-to-cash>

■ Banking Hubs

Chris Curtis: **[20514]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department is taking to ensure new banking hubs will be opened in communities affected by bank branch closures.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government understands the importance of face-to-face banking to communities and is committed to championing sufficient access for all as a priority. This is why the Government is working closely with industry to roll out 350 banking hubs across the UK. The UK banking sector has committed to deliver these hubs by the end of this parliament. 176 hubs have been announced so far, and 100 are already open.

The specific location of these hubs is determined independently by LINK, the operator of the UK's largest ATM network. Criteria that LINK considers includes

whether another bank branch remains nearby, the local population, the number of cash-accepting businesses and the financial vulnerability of the community.

Alternative options to access everyday banking services can be via telephone banking, through digital means such as mobile or online banking and via the Post Office. The Post Office Banking Framework allows personal and business customers to withdraw and deposit cash, check their balance, pay bills and cash cheques at 11,500 Post Office branches across the UK.

■ Banks and Building Societies: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes:

[\[20132\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what information her Department holds on how many high-street branches of (a) banks and (b) building societies have closed in (i) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (ii) Lincolnshire in the last 10 years.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government does not hold bank branch closure data. However, according to consumer website Which?, South Holland and The Deepings constituency lost just over 60% of its branch network between January 2015 and November 2024, and has six branches remaining.

Guidance from the FCA sets out its expectation of firms when they are deciding to reduce their physical branches or the number of free-to-use ATMs. Firms are expected to carefully consider the impact of planned branch closures on their customers' everyday banking and cash access needs, and put in place alternatives, where this is reasonable.

The Government is working closely with banks to roll out 350 banking hubs, which will provide individuals and businesses up and down the country with critical cash and banking services. The Government also recognises the value that building societies bring to local communities, including through their 28% share of the UK's branch network.

■ Banks: Aldershot

Alex Baker:

[\[20779\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the number of bank branch closures in (a) Aldershot constituency and (b) Hampshire in each year since 2010.

Alex Baker:

[\[20780\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of bank closures on people in Aldershot constituency.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government does not hold bank branch closure data. However, according to consumer website Which?, Aldershot constituency lost just under 60% of its branch

network between January 2015 and November 2024, and has eight branches remaining.

Guidance from the FCA sets out its expectation of firms when they are deciding to reduce their physical branches or the number of free-to-use ATMs. Firms are expected to carefully consider the impact of planned branch closures on their customers' everyday banking and cash access needs, and put in place alternatives, where this is reasonable.

The Government understands the importance of face-to-face banking to communities and high streets in Aldershot and across the UK, and is committed to championing sufficient access for all as a priority. This is why the Government is working closely with banks to roll out 350 banking hubs, which will provide individuals and businesses up and down the country with critical cash and banking services.

■ Business: Tax Allowances

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[20258\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what account she took of (a) numbers of claimants of Business Property Relief and (b) reasons for Business Property Relief claims in the introduction of a £1m threshold to (a) Agricultural and (b) Business Property Relief.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms.

It is expected that up to around 2,000 estates will be affected by the changes to APR and BPR in 2026-27, with around half of those being claims that involve AIM shares. Almost three-quarters of estates claiming agricultural property relief (or those claiming agricultural property relief and business property relief together) are expected to be unaffected by these reforms.

In accordance with standard practice, a tax information and impact note will be published alongside the draft legislation before the relevant Finance Bill.

■ Child Benefit: Fraud

Sir John Hayes:

[\[20562\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to help prevent people from fraudulently claiming child benefit.

James Murray:

HMRC estimated the 2023-24 Child Benefit Error and Fraud (E&F) rate to be 1.6% (£200m) of total Child Benefit expenditure.

Child Benefit has strong pre-award controls. The emphasis of HMRC's compliance strategy remains on unreported changes in circumstance including improving detection through further data acquisition.

As part of this strategy the government announced in Autumn Statement 2024 that it is investing in 180 new counter-fraud staff to increase HMRC's capabilities to better tackle fraud and error in Child Benefit and Tax-Free Childcare. This is expected to deliver a net saving of £355 million from 2025-26 to 2029-30.

■ Coronavirus: Surrey Heath

Dr Al Pinkerton:

[\[20811\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she has taken to support people who have experienced long-term (a) financial difficulties and (b) mental health challenges as a result of not qualifying for financial support schemes during the COVID-19 pandemic in Surrey Heath constituency.

James Murray:

The Government is working to support people and improve living standards for everyone across the country. As part of this, the Government committed to making no increase in employee National Insurance, Income Tax or VAT as we want to keep taxes as low as possible for working people. The Government has also put growth as its number one mission, which will help families by boosting wages and putting more money in people's pockets.

The Budget announced a £240 million Get Britain Working package to help people into work which will help to tackle the root causes of economic inactivity and to get those who can work, off benefits and into good employment. Further details have been set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper, published on 26 November 2024.

On 1 April 2025, the new National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage rates will come into force, expecting to benefit over 3 million eligible workers. For a full-time worker on NLW, the 6.7% increase of the rate to £12.21 per hour will provide a £1,400 increase to their annual earnings. These increases will ensure that the lowest-paid workers are supported and marks a step towards the government delivering a genuine living wage for all adults.

In addition, the Government is also supporting those on low incomes through continuing the Household Support Fund, increasing the Carers' Allowance weekly earnings limit by nearly 30% from April 2025, and creating a new Fair Repayment Rate ensuring 1.2 million households claiming Universal Credit are on average better off by £420 per year, by capping the amount of debt deductions at 15% of the standard allowance.

On mental health, the Government has continued to expand access to mental health support to address the high levels of demand since the pandemic ended. This has included increasing the mental health workforce, treating more people through NHS Talking Therapies and improving urgent and emergency mental health care through new crisis houses and alternatives to A&E as well as making support available to those experiencing a crisis through the new 'mental health option' on 111.

■ Cost of Living: Aldershot

Alex Baker:

[\[20443\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the cost of living on the numbers of (a) businesses at risk of insolvency and (b) people in debt in Aldershot constituency; and what fiscal steps she is taking to support those (i) businesses and (ii) people.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government recognises the significant impact the cost of living has had on personal finances, and particularly for those struggling with debt. We regularly engage with the Bank of England, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) to monitor personal finances and debt levels. The Money and Pensions Service conducts an annual survey of people in financial difficulty. The results of their latest survey were published on 29 February 2024.

Given cost-of-living pressures, the Government remains committed to helping people that are in problem debt and vulnerable circumstances. For this reason, the Government offers a variety of debt advice services through the Money and Pensions Service to support individuals facing debt issues in England, including both national and community-based debt advice provision.

The Government has also put in place several measures to support the households who face the greatest hardships, including the Fair Repayment Rate for debt deductions in Universal Credit, which means approximately 1.2 million families will keep more of their award each month. The Household Support Fund has also been extended to 2025-26, which will help households facing financial crisis by supporting them with the cost of essentials such as food, energy and water.

We've also increased the National Living Wage to £12.21 per hour, an increase of 6.7% which is worth up to £1,4000 for a full-time worker.

With respect to business debt, this is principally a commercial matter. However, the Government is strongly supportive of the work of the British Business Bank as a critical tool to help ensure finance reaches those parts of the economy that otherwise may struggle to obtain the capital they need.

This is why at Autumn Budget, to help support the Government's mission to kickstart economic growth, the Department for Business and Trade's (DBT) settlement will allow them to invest over £1 billion across 2024–25 and 2025–26 for the BBB to enhance access to finance for small businesses, including over £250 million each year for small business loans programmes, including Start Up Loans and the Growth Guarantee Scheme.

■ Cryptocurrencies: Capital Gains Tax

Torsten Bell:

[\[20411\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many tax-payers were paying capital gains tax on crypto-assets in each of the last five financial years; what the size of the gains

made was; and how much revenue the Exchequer has received from capital gains tax levied on the sale of crypto-assets.

James Murray:

Income and gains in relation to cryptoassets are currently reported in the same sections with other incomes and gains on the Self-Assessment return pages, and therefore those amounts are not separately identifiable from the data collected via Self-Assessment.

From the tax year ending 2025, changes will be introduced to the Capital Gains pages of the Self-Assessment forms requiring amounts in respect of cryptoassets to be identified separately.

■ **Duchy of Cornwall and Duchy of Lancaster**

Mark Pritchard:

[20189]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will hold discussions with the (a) Duchy of Lancaster and (b) Duchy of Cornwall on creating a shared costs formula for local authorities within those Duchy areas when a Royal visit takes place.

James Murray:

The Duchies of Cornwall and Lancaster are private estates, and neither Duchy manages public money. The government has a limited number of functions in relation to their administration, prescribed by Acts of Parliament.

■ **Emergency Services: Business Rates**

Alicia Kearns:

[20279]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps to exempt emergency service providers from business rates.

James Murray:

Certain properties are exempt from business rates. Details on exemptions can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-business-rate-relief/exempt-properties>.

Any decisions on future tax policy will be announced by the Chancellor at a fiscal event.

■ **Employers' Contributions**

Damian Hinds:

[19673]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 12 December 2024 to Question 17780 on Employers' Contributions, if she will make an estimate of the (a) median and (b) mean average number of people employed by the employers that she expects will pay (i) the same and (ii) less in employer National Insurance contributions.

James Murray:

A Tax Information and Impact Note that covers the employer NICs changes was published by HMRC on 13 November. Around 250,000 employers will see their

Secondary Class 1 NICs liability decrease and around 820,000 employers will see no change.

■ Exports: Carbon Emissions

Nick Timothy: [\[19990\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if her Department will publish an impact assessment for a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism on UK exporters.

James Murray:

The aim of the UK CBAM is to ensure imported products are subject to a carbon price comparable to that incurred by UK production, mitigating the risk of carbon leakage. By its very nature, a CBAM can only apply to imported goods, so it cannot mitigate any risk of carbon leakage in export markets.

The government will continue to consider whether there is a role for existing or future carbon leakage policies to address the risk associated with exports. Any policies applied to exported products would need to be compliant with the UK's WTO obligations and our commitment to free and open trade.

A more detailed assessment of CBAM impacts on the economy and carbon leakage will be provided before legislation is introduced.

■ Film: Business Rates

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19355\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the higher business rate surcharge on hereditaments above £500,000 Rateable Value will apply to film studios; and how this change will interact with film studio rate relief.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19715\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans she has to continue the 2024 to 2034 film studio business rate relief announced in March 2024 at the rate announced at that time.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[19716\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the forecast gross cost is of film studio business rate relief in (a) 2024-25, (b) 2025-26 and (c) 2026-27.

James Murray:

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government announced that it intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties, with rateable values below £500,000, from 2026-27. This permanent tax cut will ensure that they benefit from much-needed certainty and support. The Government intends to fund this by introducing a higher multiplier on all properties, including film studios, with a rateable value (RV) of £500,000 and above.

The Government has announced that it is proceeding with 40 per cent relief for eligible film studios in England on their gross business rates bills until March 2034. The costing was published at Spring Budget 2024 - .

Business rates bills are calculated by applying the relevant multiplier first and so film studios will receive 40 per cent relief on their total liability.

The Government will confirm the rates for the new multipliers at Budget 2025.

■ Hospitality Industry and Leisure: Business Rates

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20222\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 16139, on Hospitality Industry and Leisure: Business Rates, and to the Answer of 10 December 2024, to Question 17139, on Business Rates, on what basis and using what methods her Department has determined that the majority of large distribution warehouses, including those used by online giants, will be subject to the higher multiplier which her Department plans to apply to properties which have a Rateable Value above £500,000.

James Murray:

To deliver our manifesto pledge, from 2026-27, the Government intends to protect the high street by introducing permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties with Rateable Values below £500,000. This permanent tax cut will ensure that RHL properties benefit from much-needed certainty and support.

This tax cut must be sustainably funded, and so the Government intends to introduce a higher rate on the most valuable properties from 2026-27, that is, 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 Valuation Office Agency publishes a breakdown of the Non-domestic Rating Stock of Properties by Sector, Sub-Sector and Special Category (SCat). This includes a 'large distribution warehouses' category, which is SCat 151.

■ Individual Savings Accounts: Young People

Jim Shannon: [\[19296\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many people aged under 21 have opened lifetime ISAs in the last 12 months.

James Murray:

Information on Lifetime ISAs can be found in HMRC's Annual Savings Statistics, available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-savings-statistics>

■ Low Incomes and Pensioners: Tax Allowances

Ben Maguire: [\[20835\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of maintaining the personal tax allowance on (a) pensioners and (b) low-income households in each of the next three years.

James Murray:

This Government is committed to keeping taxes as low as possible for working people and pensioners while ensuring fiscal responsibility, which is why it is not extending the freeze on personal tax thresholds that was implemented by the previous Government and is instead allowing them to rise with inflation from April 2028.

The Government provides additional support for both pensioners and low-income households. At the Autumn Budget, the Government announced that the basic and new State Pension will increase by 4.1% from April 2025. This means those on a full new State Pension will be getting an additional £470 a year. The Government also announced a 6.7% increase to the National Living Wage (NLW) from April 2025. This represents an increase of £1,400 to the annual earnings of a full-time worker on the NLW and is expected to benefit over 3 million low-paid workers.

■ Marginal Tax Rates

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[19379\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the highest possible marginal tax rate is.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[19380\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many people were subject to a marginal tax rate (a) at and (b) above 100% in the last financial year.

James Murray:

For individuals with income between £100,000-£125,140, the income tax Personal Allowance is tapered by £1 for every £2 earned above this limit, until it has been completely withdrawn at £125,140. Taxpayers with incomes within the taper band face a higher effective marginal tax rate of 60%, compared to 40% below £100,000 and 45% above £125,140. Income tax rates and thresholds are devolved in Scotland, so marginal rates within the taper band will vary based on the registered address of the taxpayer.

■ Mortgages: Aldershot

Alex Baker: [\[20775\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if her Department will make an estimate of the number of mortgage defaults in Aldershot constituency in each of the next twelve months.

Alex Baker:

[\[20781\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of trends in the level of households in arrears with mortgage payments in Aldershot constituency in the last (a) six and (b) 12 months.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government closely monitors levels of mortgage arrears, which remain low by historical standards. UK Finance has predicted mortgage arrears will fall in 2025.

There are significant measures in place to protect vulnerable mortgage borrowers. Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) rules require lenders to engage individually with their customers who are struggling or who are worried about their payments, and the Mortgage Charter also remains in place providing additional flexibilities to help customers manage their mortgage payments over a short period.

■ Mortgages: Interest Rates

Alex Baker:

[\[20444\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the impact of trends in the level of mortgage interest rates on the levels of household disposable income in (a) Aldershot constituency, (b) Hampshire and (c) England.

Tulip Siddiq:

Average offered interest rates on 2-year and 5-year fixed rate mortgages have fallen from their peak in the Summer of 2023.

The pricing and availability of mortgages is a commercial decision for lenders in which the Government does not intervene. Mortgage interest rates are in part driven by Bank Rate, set by the independent Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Bank of England. The MPC continues to have the Government's full support as it takes action to return inflation to target through its independent monetary policy decisions.

This government's missions to deliver growth, restore stability, increase investment and reform the economy will support price stability and drive up prosperity and living standards across the UK.

In their October 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Office for Budget Responsibility forecast real household disposable income (RHDI) per capita to grow by an annual average of 0.5% over this parliament. This is more than double the pace of RHDI per capita growth observed in the 2019-2024 parliament.

RHDI per capita is only reported at a national level, but to ensure growth is felt by everyone we are also monitoring GDP capita on a regional basis.

■ Motor Vehicles: Excise Duties

Cameron Thomas:

[\[20883\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what reason the Government has increased vehicle excise duty for (a) electric and (b) low emission vehicles; and whether she has

made an assessment of the potential impact of this on trends in the level of consumers switching from (i) petrol and (ii) diesel vehicles to electric vehicles.

James Murray:

Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) is a tax on car ownership from which electric vehicles are currently exempt. As announced by the previous Government at Autumn Statement 2022, from April 2025, electric and hybrid cars, vans and motorcycles will begin to pay VED alongside petrol and diesel vehicles.

The Policy Costings document published alongside Autumn Statement 2022 when the change was announced estimates the impact on electric vehicle take-up to be “negligible”.

The Government is committed to supporting the transition to Zero Emission Vehicles and announced a number of measures at Budget to support EV take-up. VED First Year Rates are changing from 2025-26, with higher rates for polluting hybrid, petrol and diesel vehicles. In addition the Government maintained incentives for the purchase of EVs within the Company Car Tax and Salary Sacrifice regimes, and extended the 100% First Year Allowances for businesses purchasing zero emission cars and installing chargepoint infrastructure.

Revenue from motoring taxes helps ensure we can continue to fund the vital public services and infrastructure that people and families across the UK expect.

■ **National Insurance Contributions: Aldershot**

Alex Baker:

[\[20783\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many people paying National Insurance contributions in Aldershot constituency were earning under £25,000 in the 2022-23 financial year.

James Murray:

This information on taxpayer numbers is not available at levels lower than Government Office Regions.

In 2022-23 there are projected to be 1.59m individuals paying individual National Insurance Contributions (Class 1, 2 or 4) with total income under £25,000 in the South East, which includes the Parliamentary Constituency of Aldershot.

These estimates are based on the 2021-22 Survey of Personal Incomes, projected using economic assumptions consistent with the Office for Budget Responsibility's March 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

■ **Offshore Industry**

Gareth Davies:

[\[19422\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 5.76 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, published on 30 October 2024, when the next bi-annual fiscal forum with the Oil and Gas sector will take place; where that forum will take place; and who will attend on behalf of the Government.

James Murray:

The government is committed to maintaining an open and constructive dialogue with the oil and gas sector to support our energy security and ensure the sector plays its role in our clean energy ambitions.

In line with this I will chair the next Oil and Gas Fiscal Forum in the first quarter of next year. The date and location of the forum has not yet been confirmed.

■ **PAYE****Rupert Lowe:**[\[20466\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many people were (a) added and (b) removed from PAYE each day in 2024.

Rupert Lowe:[\[20467\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many sole traders (a) registered and (b) deregistered each day in 2024.

James Murray:

HMRC does not hold the data requested relating to people added to and removed from PAYE. The PAYE population is made up of around 35 million individuals, and precise numbers change frequently as customers take up their first PAYE employment or pension, start new employments or pensions, and leave old ones. Increasing numbers of customers also take up secondary or additional employments or pensions, and have other income sources which may or may not be taxed through PAYE.

HMRC does not hold the data requested relating specifically to sole traders registering for Self Assessment. There are around 12.1 million taxpayers who are expected to submit Self Assessment tax returns by 31 January 2025. That population includes sole traders, some of whom will have commenced or ceased trading during the 2023/24 tax year.

■ **Pensions: Advisory Services****Dame Harriett Baldwin:**[\[20610\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what information she holds on the number of people who have taken advantage of the ability to remove £500 from their pension scheme to pay for financial advice in each of the last five financial years.

James Murray:

We do not hold the information requested. Neither schemes nor individuals are required to provide HMRC with this information.

■ Private Education: VAT**Esther McVey:****[20009]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the (a) effectiveness of the processes put in place by HMRC to register private schools for VAT and (b) adequacy of the time taken for those schools to receive a VAT number.

James Murray:

The government is committed to supporting private schools to ensure that the VAT registration process is as smooth as possible for them, and to ensuring they have the necessary support in order to be able to correctly charge VAT and remit it to HMRC.

HMRC has put in place additional resource to process VAT registrations and, on 10 October, published bespoke guidance for schools, which can be found on GOV.UK. HMRC published initial guidance ahead of the Budget to maximise the amount of time schools had to prepare for this policy taking effect.

Currently more than 80% of VAT registration applications are being processed within 20 working days, exceeding HMRC's published service standard of 80% within 40 working days

HMRC has also hosted online webinars to answer any queries that schools may have and can be contacted via a dedicated mailbox in the event of any technical queries about registering.

■ Public Houses: Business Rates**Kevin Hollinrake:****[19713]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what information other than address and rateable value the Valuation Office Agency holds on pubs for business rate purposes.

James Murray:

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) holds information about pubs to assess them for non-domestic rating purposes, one of the VOA's statutory duties.

The vast majority of the information held is sent by occupiers of pubs following a statutory request for information. The form sets out the information requested and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vo-6010-request-for-rental-information-public-houses>.

In some cases, the VOA may hold other records relating to the property, including the age, area, and information about heating, car parking and any modernisation carried out.

■ Retail Trade: Business Rates**Kevin Hollinrake:****[20224]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many hereditaments were classified per individual special category codes within the shops sub-sector special category code

grouping by the Valuation Office Agency in each of the last ten years for which figures are held.

James Murray:

As part of its official statistics, the Valuation Office Agency publishes the number of hereditaments by special category code under the shops sub-sector for England and Wales for the past 10 years. This can be found under the stock of non-domestic properties collection here: www.gov.uk/government/collections/non-domestic-rating-stock-of-properties-collection

For each year from 2019 onwards, the table 'Stock Scat' shows the data as at 31 March each year. Prior to 2019, the data is shown within the 'NDR Stock of Properties' tables.

■ **Sales: Competition**

Paul Holmes:

[19407]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make it her policy to extend deemed reseller rules to cover UK-established sellers to help mitigate potential risks of unfair competition from overseas sellers.

James Murray:

Since 1 January 2021 overseas sellers, or online marketplaces where they facilitate the sale, are required to be registered and account for VAT for supplies of low value imports of £135 or less. Where an overseas seller sells goods located in the UK at the point of sale via an online marketplace, the online marketplace is liable for the VAT for goods of any value.

The changes were introduced to ensure a level playing field for UK high street and online retailers, ensure the continued flow of goods at the border and improve compliance.

Certified analysis by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) estimates the changes will raise £1.8 billion per annum by 2026-27.

The Government keeps all taxes under review as part of the policy making process.

■ **Small Businesses: Business Rates**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[19352]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to maintain small business rate relief from 2026-27.

James Murray:

Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) provides 100% rate relief for eligible properties with rateable values below £12,000 with tapered relief available for eligible properties with rateable values between £12,000 and £15,000. Further details can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-business-rate-relief/small-business-rate-relief>

The government has no plans to withdraw SBRR. The discussion paper on business rates, published at Autumn Budget 2024, invites views on how it might best create a fairer business rates system that protects the high street, supports investment, and is fit for the 21st century.

The discussion paper invites views on incentivising investment and growth and specifically invites views on potential ways in which SBRR might be improved. The discussion paper is available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/675197b95692dd4c0c8d1dac/Transforming_Business_Rates_2_.pdf

Any decisions on future tax policy will be announced by the Chancellor at a fiscal event.

■ Sovereign Grant: Reviews

Mark Pritchard: [\[20190\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will review the Sovereign Grant annually on audited and published Crown Estate profits.

James Murray:

The rules governing the Sovereign Grant are set out in the Sovereign Grant Act 2011. This Act requires a review following every five-year period to ensure the percentage of Crown Estate profits used in the calculation of the Grant remains appropriate.

In addition, any unspent surplus from the Sovereign Grant goes into a reserve fund. If this reserve fund goes above 50 per cent of annual expenditure, the level of the Sovereign Grant can be reduced, requiring the Household to draw down this reserve rather than receive excessive additional funding.

■ Special Educational Needs: Employers' Contributions

James McMurdock: [\[20800\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to provide (a) grants and (b) compensation payments to mitigate the impact of proposed changes to employer National Insurance contributions to (i) public sector workers and (ii) (A) drivers and (B) passenger assistants who provide transportation for school children with special educational needs.

James Murray:

The Government will provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional Employer National Insurance Contributions costs. This funding will be allocated to departments, with the Barnett formula applying in the usual way. This is in line with the approach taken under the previous Government's Health and Social Care Levy. Details of the funding set aside for 2025-26, including its allocation, will be published in due course.

Local authorities are responsible for arranging home to school transport for children with special educational needs, and deliver this through both in-house services and a

range of external providers. As such, the Government does not hold central estimates of the impact that the increase in Employer National Insurance Contributions may have on the cost of home to school travel to local authorities. Officials engage regularly with local authorities to understand the challenges they face across the services they deliver.

■ **Steiner Schools Foundation: VAT**

Dr Scott Arthur:

[\[20390\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential impact of VAT on Steiner School kindergartens.

James Murray:

The Government ran a technical consultation on the VAT policy for seven weeks from 29 July to 15 September. During the consultation period, my officials and I also held a series of meetings with stakeholders to complement written responses. This included written submissions from Steiner Schools.

Following that consultation the Government made changes to the treatment of nursery classes, so that those attached to private schools will continue to be exempt from VAT as long as they are wholly (or almost wholly), rather than completely, composed of children under compulsory school age who wouldn't be expected to turn compulsory school age that year.

Classes where the vast majority of children are below compulsory school age will remain exempt from VAT. Where mixed classes have a high proportion of children over compulsory school age the Government believes it is fair to treat these classes the same way entire classes of children over compulsory school age are treated. This means that classes like "kindergarten classes" in Steiner schools will be within scope of this policy.

■ **Swimming Pools: Business Rates**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[19714\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Valuation Office Agency holds data on the average rateable value of municipal swimming pools.

James Murray:

The Valuation Office Agency publishes this data as part of its official statistics on the stock of non-domestic properties:

www.gov.uk/government/statistics/non-domestic-rating-stock-of-properties-2024.

The mean rateable value for municipal swimming pools in England and Wales are published on rows 229 and 238 under column E in the [Stock Scat, 2024 spreadsheet](#).

Please note, figures show the mean rateable value in thousands of pounds.

■ Taxis: VAT**Mr Louie French:** [19450]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what reason it is her policy to exclude accessible taxi vehicles from the VAT exemption for disability-adapted motor vehicles.

James Murray:

Wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) are subject to a zero rate of VAT when purchased by a disabled person for their personal use, or by a charity that will make the vehicle available to disabled people.

Although taxis provide transportation services to disabled customers, they are not charities and not all their customers are wheelchair users. Therefore, this VAT relief does not extend to taxis that are WAVs.

However, if a taxi driver is VAT registered, they are eligible to reclaim the VAT paid on their vehicle.

■ Travel: Tax Allowances**Mark Swards:** [20850]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to review the Overseas Scale Rates.

James Murray:

As with all taxes and allowances, the Government keeps flat rate expenses, including Overseas Scale Rates, under review.

■ Treasury: Alcoholic Drinks**Cat Smith:** [19342]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many alcohol industry representatives Ministers in her Department have met since July 2024.

James Murray:

Treasury ministers have meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery.

Details of ministerial meetings with external organisations on departmental business are published on a quarterly basis and are available at the link here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmt-ministers-meetings-hospitality-gifts-and-overseas-travel>

■ Treasury: Media**John Cooper:** [20489]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

James Murray:

Since 5 July 2024, the Department has spent £9.7k on media training for members of the Ministerial team. No costs on voice training for Ministers have been incurred since the 5th July 2024.

■ Treasury: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:**[\[20175\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 12 November 2024 to Question 9057, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

James Murray:

The Department spent c.£56.5k on new furniture, fittings, and other refurbishments between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024. This expenditure includes costs for new office furniture, the maintenance of antique furniture and fittings.

■ Treasury: Statistics**Laurence Turner:**[\[20335\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her Department's policies of the Office for Statistics Regulation's publication entitled OSR's statement on the Labour Force Survey-derived estimates and Annual Population Survey-derived estimates, published on 12 December 2024.

Tulip Siddiq:

Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) remains subject to a number of quality concerns following a fall in response rates and are currently badged as official statistics in development.

As set out in its December 2024 Labour Market Overview,[1] the Office for National Statistics (ONS) recommend using LFS data alongside other labour market indicators, including Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real-Time Information (RTI) and Workforce Jobs (WFJ).

The ONS are continuing to improve the quality of the LFS, as described in its latest report LFS performance and quality monitoring report,[2] and have carried out a reweighting of LFS estimates, detailed in its December 2024 article[3], that has brought them into line with the ONS' latest population numbers. The ONS is continuing to develop the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) as the long-term solution for collecting labour market data [4].

1

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/december2024>

2 [LFS performance and quality monitoring report: July to September 2024](#)

3

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/impactofreweightingonlabourforcesurveykeyindicators/december2024>

4

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarkettransformationupdateonprogressandplans/july2024>

WALES

■ Wales Office: Media

John Cooper: [\[20497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Jo Stevens:

The Department has not spent any money on either media or voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Carer's Allowance: Pensioners

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[20793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will allow people in receipt of a state pension to claim carer's allowance.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Pensioners can claim Carer's Allowance, but under overlapping benefit rules it is not normally payable. I refer the honourable member to the answer I gave on 17 December 2024 to question UIN [18844](#) which sets this out.

■ Child Maintenance Service

Jim Shannon: [\[20209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to (a) identify and (b) address barriers to separated families setting up maintenance arrangements through the Child Maintenance Service.

Andrew Western:

The Child Maintenance Service (CMS) supports separated parents to work together in the interests of their children and to set up a child maintenance arrangement that is right for them.

Get Help Arranging Child Maintenance is an online service that provides free information and support to help parents make decisions about CM and make a CMS application if they choose to.

Applications to the CMS have been increasing. In the 12 months to September 2024, there has been a 13% increase in applications compared to the previous 12 months.

Legislation to remove the £20 application fee was introduced in February 2024, removing a financial barrier to parents wishing to access the CMS.

A consultation on proposed reforms to the CMS was published by the previous Government on 8 May 2024. This included removing Direct Pay and managing all CMS cases in one service to allow the CMS to tackle non-compliance faster and explore how victims and survivors of domestic abuse can be better supported.

The consultation also sought views on how we can ensure parents can access resources and support to help separated families agree on child support arrangements.

The consultation was extended by the Government at the end of July and ran until 30th September 2024.

We are analysing the responses we have received, and the Government will publish a response in due course.

■ Child Maintenance Service: Courts

Ian Sollom:

[20785]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question 15843 on Child Maintenance Service: Courts, how many liability orders have been (a) applied for by the Child Maintenance Service and (b) granted by the courts in each of the last three years.

Andrew Western:

In response to question (a) the Child Maintenance Service applied for approximately;

- 17,800 liability orders between October 2023 and September 2024,
- 15,100 liability orders between October 2022 and September 2023, and
- 11,300 liability orders between October 2021 and September 2022.

In response to question (b) the courts granted;

- 15,300 liability orders between October 2023 and September 2024,
- 13,600 liability orders between October 2022 and September 2023, and
- 10,000 liability orders between October 2021 and September 2022.

(Please note that the figures exclude Scotland).

The Department publishes quarterly statistics for the Child Maintenance Service [Child Maintenance Service statistics: data to September 2024 - GOV.UK](#). Please see

Tables no. 6.1, Rows 21 and 22 for more information on liability orders. [national-tables-child-maintenance-service-to-september-2024.ods](#)

■ Child Maintenance Service: Staff

Ian Sollom: [\[20448\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she is taking steps to improve staffing levels in the Child Maintenance Service.

Andrew Western:

As more customers apply to the Child Maintenance Service (CMS), demand for the service increases. To allow us to meet this demand and provide an efficient service we continuously look at the resources we have and where we should focus our efforts to get the greatest value for money and deliver the best service to our customers. We review our overall resource supply twice yearly and take the appropriate steps to ensure that the CMS staffing levels meets the current demand.

CMS has an ongoing recruitment campaign; this will continue into 2025. This will ensure that CMS is resourced to meet current and future forecasted demand. Additionally, through extensive modernisation to both telephony and digital channels, and by promoting self-service online, we are ensuring customers use the most appropriate and efficient contact method to quickly resolve their queries and reduce demand on our services. Furthermore, we have taken timely action to further train, support and redeploy resources within CMS to where it is needed most.

Every change and improvement made to our processes, systems, and resourcing are all part of modernising our service. This will be an ongoing process of regular review and improvement to ensure CMS has the capability to deliver a service which is accessible to all parents.

■ Children: Poplar and Limehouse

Apsana Begum: [\[20268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of extending access to benefits for families with children who have no recourse to public funds on levels of child poverty in Poplar and Limehouse constituency.

Alison McGovern:

In developing a Child Poverty Strategy, the Child Poverty Taskforce is considering all children across the United Kingdom. We recognise the distinct challenges of poverty faced by migrant children. The causes of child poverty are deep-rooted, with solutions that go beyond government, and the Taskforce is exploring all available levers in response.

The Home Office sets the immigration rules and grants immigration leave to individuals which allows them to live and work in the UK. DWP cannot pay public funds benefits to individuals where the Home Office has applied a 'No Recourse to Public Funds' condition to their immigration status.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**Emily Thornberry:** [\[19663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, 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.

Andrew Western:

a.) We do not hold this data historically, as the system (Smart Data Online SDOL) that we use to record ePCS management information will only give us a list of active cardholders' data as of today's date; we do not have the capability to look back as of the time required.

b.) After confirming the numbers for executive agencies bodies, the numbers of active cardholders were:

Health and Safety Executive:

2022 – 47

2023 – 38

Office for Nuclear Regulation:

2022 – 8

2023 – 11

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Media**John Cooper:** [\[20486\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much their Department spent on (a) media and (b) voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024.

Andrew Western:

At the time of writing, there has been NIL spend on this type of training for ministers.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Sexual Harassment**Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:** [\[20868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what specific (a) care, (b) counselling and (c) support services are made available to staff who have been victims of sexual harassment within her Department.

Andrew Western:

DWP offers the provision and delivery of a comprehensive Employee Assistance Programme delivered by People Asset Management (PAM). The provision is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and can be accessed either via telephone or email for in the moment support and referrals for counselling by trained personnel.

DWP also has:

- A community of 600 trained Ambassadors for Fair Treatment, who are trained volunteers and whose remit is to be approachable at a time of need, to listen in confidence and to empathise with anyone who believes they are facing bullying, harassment or discrimination, as well as anyone who has been accused of it, and to signpost to further support where appropriate.
- A community of 1600 trained Mental Health First Aiders who are a point of contact for any DWP colleague in need, offering initial help, to listen and reassure, and guide a person towards the right support.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:

[\[20873\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what training her Department provides to investigators handling sexual harassment cases to ensure investigations are (a) trauma-informed and (b) compliant with best practices.

Andrew Western:

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ensures that its investigators handling sexual harassment cases are accredited and equipped with the necessary skills to conduct trauma-informed investigations, compliant with best practice. All DWP investigators assigned to these sensitive cases have undergone specialised training and have successfully completed the Advanced Professional Certificate in Investigative Practice.

This certification ensures they are proficient in best practices for handling complex and sensitive investigations, including:

- Trauma-Informed Approaches: Understanding the impact of trauma on individuals, employing empathetic and non-judgmental communication, and avoiding re-traumatisation during interviews.
- Compliance with Legal and Procedural Standards: Adhering to relevant laws, such as the Equality Act 2010, and ensuring fair, impartial, and thorough investigations.
- Advanced Interview Techniques: Using open-ended, non-leading questions to gather accurate information while being sensitive to the needs of all parties involved.
- Impartial Analysis and Reporting: Maintaining objectivity throughout the investigation, analysing evidence comprehensively, and delivering well-structured and unbiased reports.

By requiring this certification, DWP demonstrates its commitment to fostering a respectful and supportive environment, ensuring that all investigations are handled with the highest standards of professionalism and care.

■ Disability

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[19874\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what progress she has made on implementing the Disability Action Plan.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Disability Action Plan and the National Disability Strategy were both initiatives of the previous administration. The National Disability Strategy was delayed as it was originally declared unlawful, due to a challenge as to whether an information gathering exercise constituted a consultation. The Court of Appeal later overturned the original High Court declaration. This Government is committed to championing the rights of disabled people. We will build on the insights shared by disabled people and their representative organisations, working closely with them so that their views and voices are at the heart of everything we do.

We will provide further updates on the Government's priorities for disability policy in due course.

■ Employment Schemes: Lincolnshire**Sir John Hayes:**[\[20134\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire will receive additional funding as a result of the Youth Guarantee in the Get Britain Working White Paper, published on 26 November 2024.

Alison McGovern:

The Get Britain Working White Paper announced £45 million funding for eight trailblazer areas to test delivery of the Youth Guarantee. The results from these trailblazers will help us to develop the most effective offer for all young people in England, including those in South Holland and the Deepings constituency and the rest of Lincolnshire.

Young people in South Holland and the Deepings constituency will also continue to have access to the Department's Youth Offer, which provides individually tailored Work Coach support to young people aged 16 to 24 who are claiming Universal Credit. This will include a new Youth Hub at Pescod Hall, in partnership with Tonic Health & Boston Brilliance, due to launch in February 2025. The hub will provide employment and wellbeing support for young people in the area.

The Department will also be supporting and providing funding to develop local Get Britain Working plans to tackle inactivity, working with Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, and North East Lincolnshire Councils and, once established, the Greater Lincolnshire Strategic Authority.

■ Employment: Cancer**Clive Jones:**[\[20826\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to support (a) young cancer patients and (b) their families in into employment.

Alison McGovern:

NHS England is committed to ensuring that all cancer patients are offered Holistic Needs Assessment and Personalised Care and Support Planning, ensuring care is

focused on what matters most to each person. This is being delivered in line with the NHS Comprehensive Model for Personalised Care, empowering people to manage their care and the impact of their cancer and maximise the potential of digital and community-based support.

The Children and Young People Cancer Taskforce will be relaunched in 2025 to identify ways to improve the experience and outcomes for children and young people with cancer. We will set out further details on next steps in due course.

Access to the right work and health support, in the right place, at the right time, is key to supporting a successful return to work. We, therefore, have a range of specialist initiatives including support from Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentres and Access to Work grants, as well as joining up health and employment support around the individual.

Employers also play a key role in supporting people with health conditions to thrive as part of the workforce. Our support to employers includes increasing access to Occupational Health, Support with Employee Health and Disability service, [a digital information service for employers](#), and the Disability Confident scheme.

The Department's Youth Offer also provides individually tailored Work Coach support to young people aged 16 to 24 who are claiming Universal Credit. This support includes the Youth Employment Programme, Youth Employability Coaches for young people with additional barriers to finding work, and Youth Hubs across Great Britain.

To support unpaid carers to remain in work, DWP has launched Jobhelp, to provide advice and information, all in one place, to existing, new and potential unpaid carers to help them make informed decisions about combining work and care.

■ Employment: Sexual Harassment

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:

[20872]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to (a) encourage victims of sexual harassment in the workplace to come forward and (b) ensure their protection during the reporting process.

Andrew Western:

DWP internal guidance encourages those experiencing sexual harassment to come forward via their choice of several available routes:

Line Managers

DWP colleagues can speak to their own or a trusted alternative manager.

Ambassadors for Fair Treatment

DWP has over 500 Ambassadors for Fair Treatment (AFTs) who support colleagues to speak up about all forms of bullying, harassment and discrimination. AFTs are ACAS-trained volunteers who provide confidential listening and signposting to any colleague who believes they are facing, have witnessed, or have been accused of bullying, harassment (including sexual harassment) or discrimination. AFTs also

deliver information sessions across the department to raise awareness of bullying, harassment and discrimination, and to signpost to further sources of support.

Speak Up Safely helpline

DWP operates a “Speak Up Safely” helpline, which colleagues can call, anonymously if they choose, and in confidence, for advice and signposting. From the 4th – 8th November 2024 DWP ran its annual Speak Up Safely week as part of the wider civil service Speak Up campaign. The week featured a range of events for colleagues across DWP focused on the important role of line managers in creating teams where colleagues feel safe to speak up on concerns and on demystifying the concern raising process in DWP to help colleagues understand the informal, formal and protected way colleagues can speak up on any concerns.

Whistleblowing helpline

Colleagues may raise concerns, including concerns relating to sexual harassment, by speaking to senior managers or through independent routes including the confidential Whistleblowers’ Hotline or via email to the Counter Fraud and Investigation team. Colleagues may choose to raise concerns anonymously.

To ensure protection during the reporting process, managers provide support including regular check-ins with colleagues reporting harassment, to ensure they are not experiencing any repercussions as a result of the report made, and that they feel adequately supported. There is a range of support available to colleagues including Mental Health First Aiders, counselling services, temporary or permanent relocations or change of role, and signposting to external support and advice bodies.

Confidentiality is guaranteed throughout the process.

As a public sector organisation, DWP have a duty to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). In line with this we regularly carry out mandatory PSED training across DWP. The most recent training data shows that almost 99% of the target audience completed this learning.

DWP policies are currently being reviewed in line with the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act.

■ **Housing Benefit: Social Rented Housing**

Ian Byrne:

[\[19859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent assessment has she made of the potential impact of the under occupancy charge on rates of poverty.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS), sometimes referred to as the underoccupancy charge, applies to claims for housing support - either Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit - where the claimant is living in the social rented sector in a property that has more bedrooms than their benefit entitlement.

Easements are available which allow an additional bedroom to support disabled people and carers, the families of disabled children, foster carers, parents who adopt, parents of service personnel and people who have suffered a bereavement.

We continue to keep all policies under review, considering them against a range of factors, including the wider fiscal situation and fit with government missions.

Those unable to meet the shortfall in their rent can seek a Discretionary Housing Payment from their local authority.

■ Industrial Injuries: Compensation

Dr Andrew Murrison:

[R] [\[20581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make a comparative assessment of the impact of (a) industrial injury compensation for civilians and (b) military service compensation on (i) the awarding of benefits and (ii) tax treatment.

Sir Stephen Timms:

There are no plans to make such an assessment.

The precise treatment of compensation payments depends on the details of the individual scheme (whether industrial, military or other) will depend on the benefit concerned. Tax treatment is a matter for HMRC not DWP.

■ Jobseeker's Allowance

Torsten Bell:

[\[20465\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to her Department's statistics on the ONS Nomis database on Jobseekers Allowance on-flows by occupation and age, what assessment she has made of the potential reason for changes in the number of on-flows to Jobseekers Allowance where the occupation is unknown since June 2024.

Sir Stephen Timms:

There have been some changes to the administrative instructions followed by the department's Work Coaches around recording occupation at the Initial Work Search Interview. This has led to the observed change in the levels of unknown occupations in the Jobseekers Allowance occupation data since June.

■ Kickstart Scheme

Caroline Voaden:

[\[19858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will relaunch the Kickstart scheme.

Alison McGovern:

There are currently no plans to relaunch The Kickstart Scheme.

The Kickstart Scheme was a time-limited response to the effects of the pandemic economic downturn on young people. The scheme came to an end in September 2022 with over 163,000 Kickstart jobs started by young people since its launch.

There continue to be a range of initiatives businesses can get involved in to give opportunities and experience to young people, including apprenticeships, mentoring circles, and work experience. Our Strategic Relationships Team continuously work to connect DWP with employers and partners to strengthen working relationships and to build new opportunities to support young people back to work. This will be strengthened with the introduction of the Youth Guarantee which was announced in The Get Britain Working White Paper.

The Youth Guarantee is for all 18-21 year olds to ensure that they can access quality training opportunities, an apprenticeship or help to find work to reduce the number of young people not earning or learning.

Learning from the evaluation of the Kickstart scheme is also being utilised in the design of other employment support.

■ Low Incomes

Shivani Raja:

[\[20061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to support low-income families by (a) improving access to opportunities for children to play and learn, and (b) enhancing financial independence and living standards.

Alison McGovern:

Through our Opportunity Mission, this Government will break the link between a child's background and their future success. We will deliver across four areas including helping every child to achieve and thrive through excellent teaching and high standards, with a focus on disadvantaged children and those with special educational needs and disabilities.

Worth over £2.9 billion in 2024/25, the pupil premium grant continues to support the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils. Furthermore, all local authorities in England continue to deliver the Holiday and Activities Food programme, providing healthy meals, enriching activities and free childcare places to children from low-income families throughout the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays.

Poverty limits children's opportunities and holds them back. The number of children living in poverty has gone up by 700,000 since 2010, with over four million children now growing up in a low-income family. This is why tackling child poverty is an urgent priority for this Government, and the Ministerial Taskforce is working to publish our child poverty strategy in Spring 2025.

As set out in the Taskforce's publication of 23 October 'Tackling Child Poverty: Developing our Strategy' our ambition is to deliver an enduring reduction in child poverty this parliament, as part of a 10-year strategy for lasting change. To deliver this, we will look at all available levers across four key themes of increasing incomes,

reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience; and better local support especially in the early years. This will build on the reform plans underway across government and work underway in Devolved Governments.

The vital work of the Taskforce comes alongside our commitments to triple investment in breakfast clubs to over £30 million, roll out free breakfast clubs at all primary schools, create 3,000 additional nurseries, and increase the National Living Wage to £12.21 an hour from April 2025 to boost the pay of 3 million workers.

■ Low Incomes: Aldershot

Alex Baker:

[\[20778\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to provide financial support to people on lower incomes in Aldershot constituency.

Alison McGovern:

We are committed to tackling poverty.

We know that good work can significantly reduce the chances of people falling into poverty so this will be the foundation of our approach. Backed by £240 million investment, the Get Britain Working White Paper launched on 26 November will target and tackle economic inactivity and unemployment and join up employment, health and skills support to meet the needs of local communities.

Alongside this, we are committed to reviewing Universal Credit to make sure it is doing the job we want it to do. We have begun this work with the announcement of the Fair Repayment Rate in the Budget and will continue to work with stakeholders closely as the review progresses. We will regularly update Parliament on progress.

We are taking the first steps to tackle poverty through our commitments to triple investment in breakfast clubs to over £30 million and increase the National Living Wage to £12.21 an hour from April 2025 to boost the pay of 3 million workers. Furthermore, our plan to Make Work Pay aims to create opportunities for all by tackling low pay, poor working conditions and job security.

To further support struggling families, £1 billion, including Barnett impact, will be invested to extend the Household Support Fund in England by a full year until 31 March 2026, on top of the six months already announced, and to maintain Discretionary Housing Payments in England and Wales.

■ Neurodiversity: Surrey

Dr AI Pinkerton:

[\[20807\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to (a) tackle discrimination and (b) enhance inclusion policies for neurodiverse people in the workforce in Surrey.

Alison McGovern:

Neurodivergent people bring many positive benefits to businesses but can face stigma and disadvantage. We understand the importance of tackling discrimination

and encouraging employers to adopt neuro-inclusive working practices so that everyone can thrive at work.

In our plan to Make Work Pay, we committed to raising awareness of neurodiversity in the workplace. We will be gathering expert evidence on how best to improve employment for all neurodivergent people and will be considering the Buckland Review of Autism Employment's findings.

Employers have a key role to play. Our support to employers includes [a digital information service for employers](#), and the Disability Confident scheme. Both help employers to understand their legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010. We will be considering how to enhance our work with employers in the months ahead, including in response to the independent employer review announced in the Get Britain Working White Paper.

■ Pension Credit

Mr Peter Bedford:

[\[20111\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many Pension Credit applications have been made in each region since 29 July 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

On 28 November we published national Pension Credit applications and award statistics. This publication provides application volumes from 29 July 2024 to 17 November 2024. Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - GOV.UK

These statistics show that 150,000 Pension Credit claims were received between 29 July 2024 and 17 November 2024.

Please note, the figures presented are from DWP's Pension Credit system which has previously been collected for internal departmental operations use only and has not been quality assured to Official Statistics publication standards.

We do not currently hold data at a regional level.

Amanda Martin:

[\[20509\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has taken steps to work with Portsmouth City Council to help increase pension credit take-up.

Emma Reynolds:

As part of our nationwide Pension Credit campaign, the Department has engaged with all councils in Great Britain, including Portsmouth City Council, via the regular LA Welfare Direct bulletins.

The [LA Welfare Direct 8/2024](#) bulletin in August featured a 'call to action', asking local authorities to help promote Pension Credit during the Pension Credit Week of Action and offering them the opportunity to request our promotional materials. The latest [LA Welfare Direct 12/2024](#) bulletin also included a reminder about the 21 December Pension Credit backdating deadline to qualify for either a Winter Fuel Payment or Pension Age Winter Heating Payment.

In response to our call to action over 160 councils across Great Britain have supported our Pension Credit campaign either on social media, or by distributing the promotional material we have provided. We know that Portsmouth City Council are one of the councils that has promoted Pension Credit on social media using our campaign messages.

The local DWP strategic relationship team have also shared the campaign promotional material directly with Portsmouth City Council and attended a recent Tackling Poverty Partnership event to help raise awareness of our campaign.

Ben Maguire:

[20831]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department is taking steps to ensure that people entitled to (a) Pension Credit uplifts and (b) other pension uplifts receive them automatically; and what assessment she has made of the potential merits of implementing a system that allows those uplifts to be applied without requiring additional claims from eligible recipients.

Emma Reynolds:

A Pension Credit award can include additional amounts for:

- Severe disability;
- Caring for a disabled person;
- Children that the claimant is responsible for; and
- Certain housing costs.

These additional amounts can increase or uplift the value of a Pension Credit award.

When a new Pension Credit claim is made, any additional amounts are applied to the award, as a matter of course, based on the claimant's circumstances. A separate claim for these additional amounts is not needed.

If an existing claimant's circumstances change, their Pension Credit award can be adjusted to reflect the change – for example including or removing additional amounts. A new claim is not required as the adjustment can be made either by the claimant reporting a change of circumstance or on the initiative of the Department.

Following the Secretary of State's statutory annual review of state pension and benefit rates in the Autumn, the rates for the basic and new State Pension and the Standard Minimum Guarantee in Pension Credit will increase by 4.1%. Other state pension and benefit rates covered by the statutory review will be increased by 1.7%. Subject to Parliamentary approval, the new rates will take effect from 7 April 2025 and will be applied automatically without the need for a claim.

The full list of proposed benefit and pension rates can be found at [Benefit and pension rates 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#).

■ Pensioners: Poplar and Limehouse

Apsana Begum: [\[20269\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of 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 in Poplar and Limehouse constituency.

Emma Reynolds:

It is not possible to provide poverty breakdowns at a constituency level. As such, no estimate has been made.

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 in the UK 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](#).

■ Personal Independence Payment

Helen Morgan: [\[20904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the mean average waiting time has been for PIP applications in each of the last five years.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We are committed to ensuring that people can access financial support through Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in a timely manner and reducing customer journey times for PIP claimants is a priority for the department. We always aim to make an award decision as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to review all available evidence.

The following figures are for normal rules new claims only.

YEAR	MEAN WAIT TIME (WEEKS)
2020	18
2021	22
2022	19
2023	15
2024 (to October)	15

Median PIP application clearance times are also available on a monthly basis as part of the PIP Official Statistics quarterly release. The latest release, with data to October 2024, is available here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/675bf09bb915d092055a01d8/tables-pip-statistics-to-october-2024-eng-wales.ods>

Table 1A in this release shows the median average clearance times for normal rules new claims.

■ Poverty: Children

Apsana Begum: **[20270]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the impact of the two-child benefit cap on trends in the level of child poverty in (a) the UK and (b) Poplar and Limehouse constituency.

Alison McGovern:

We published the framework 'Tackling Child Poverty: Developing Our Strategy' on 23 October and will explore all available levers to deliver an enduring reduction in child poverty in this parliament, as part of a 10-year strategy for lasting change.

The Child Poverty Strategy will look at levers across four key themes of increasing incomes, which includes considering social security reforms, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience, and better local support especially in the early years. This will build on the reform plans underway across government and work underway in Devolved Governments.

The Child Poverty Taskforce continues its urgent work to publish the Strategy in Spring 2025.

■ Sick Pay

Mr Calvin Bailey: **[20050]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the Trade Union Congress report entitled Sick pay that works, published February 2021, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of (a) current Statutory Sick Pay policies and (b) planned Statutory Sick Pay reforms on ethnic minority workers; and what steps her Department is taking to ensure Statutory Sick Pay covers those in insecure work.

Alison McGovern:

The pandemic exposed how precarious work and life is for those on low incomes, with many forced to choose between their health and financial hardship. This is why, through the Employment Rights Bill, we are removing the Lower Earnings Limit so that up to 1.3 million low-paid employees will become eligible for Statutory Sick Pay. We are also removing the waiting period so that all eligible employees will receive payment from the first day of sickness absence. This will ensure the safety net of sick pay is available to those who need it most.

The impact of planned changes to Strengthen Statutory Sick Pay on ethnic minority employees is set out in full in our Equality Impact Assessment, which we published on 7 November 2024 and can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/making-work-pay-strengthening-statutory-sick-pay/equality-analysis-for-statutory-sick-pay-reform-measures-in-the-employment-rights-bill>.

We know that employees in insecure work tend to be on lower incomes, and our planned changes to SSP will benefit millions of additional employees. The rate lower paid employees are entitled to will be based on their actual average weekly earnings, protecting those who work irregular hours.

■ Social Security Benefits

Patricia Ferguson:

[20092]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what guidance her Department has issued on people requiring emergency assistance while they wait for a benefit claim to be assessed.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Department for Work and Pensions seeks to identify individuals who have complex user needs and/or require additional support to enable them to access our benefit and services; this includes people who are vulnerable and are claiming, or need to claim, Universal Credit. We provide a tailored service that recognises those with complex needs at any point throughout their journey and aims to make appropriate support available quickly.

Advances are available to ensure those who need it can receive financial support as soon as possible. Financial support is important so customers are not reliant on high-cost lenders, but may be able instead to get some of their Universal Credit early, interest free, as an advance.

Apsana Begum:

[20272]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to conduct a public inquiry into (a) deaths and (b) serious harm linked to the social security system.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The department is fully supportive of the Work and Pensions Select Committee's 'safeguarding vulnerable claimants' inquiry, which is examining how the department supports vulnerable benefit claimants and whether its approach to safeguarding needs to change. The Committee has had valuable and constructive discussions with a diverse range of groups and specialist organisations representing people with lived experience, DWP customers, policy makers and legal experts. DWP Officials and Ministers have also given vital evidence, fully supporting the areas the Committee wish to explore, and I look forward to reading the Committee's report and recommendations when this inquiry concludes.

Gregory Stafford:

[20422]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will publish data on welfare claimants by (a) nationality and (b) immigration status.

Andrew Western:

Non-UK / Irish citizens can only access benefits like Universal Credit if they have an immigration status that provides recourse to public funds. Those without immigration status or with a no recourse to public funds condition on their status are not entitled. An individual's specific nationality is not relevant to their claim.

The Department checks immigration status when assessing eligibility, but this information is not collated centrally and hence not readily available. We are, however, exploring the feasibility of developing suitable statistics related to the immigration status of non-UK / Irish customers.

■ Social Security Benefits: Appeals**Steve Darling:****[20805]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the level of support available to people going through tribunals for claiming (a) Universal Credit and (b) other benefits.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Appeals are lodged directly with, and administered by, HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS). At the First-tier Tribunal, proceedings are designed to be straightforward and accessible to all. The tribunal panel is trained and experienced in dealing with a wide range of appellants with individual needs.

At the First-tier Tribunal, Legal Aid, which is administered by Ministry of Justice (MoJ) may be available through the exceptional case funding scheme, if failure to provide Legal Aid may risk a breach of an individual's human rights. Legal Aid is still available for advice and assistance on welfare benefits appeals to the Upper Tribunal, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court.

At all appellate stages, claimants are able to appoint a representative to assist with their appeal and there is helpful signposting to free support available on gov.uk at: <https://www.gov.uk/appeal-benefit-decision/submit-appeal>.

■ Social Security Benefits: Bank Services**Neil Duncan-Jordan:****[20436]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of proposals to allow investigators to access the bank accounts of people who claim benefits.

Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[20437]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to introduce further legal protections for people affected by proposals to allow investigators to access the bank accounts of people who claim benefits.

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[20438\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she plans to take to protect the privacy of people affected by proposals to allow investigators to access the bank accounts of people who claim benefits.

Andrew Western:

DWP investigators cannot access anyone's bank accounts, including under the proposed Eligibility Verification Measures within the Fraud, Error and Debt Bill.

■ Social Security Benefits: Children**Alex Easton:** [\[20511\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the two-child limit on recent trends in the level of child poverty; and whether the Government has made an assessment of the potential merits of ending the policy via the child poverty strategy.

Alison McGovern:

We published the framework 'Tackling Child Poverty: Developing Our Strategy' on 23 October and will explore all available levers to deliver an enduring reduction in child poverty in this parliament, as part of a 10-year strategy for lasting change.

The Child Poverty Strategy will look at levers across four key themes of increasing incomes, which includes considering social security reforms, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience, and better local support especially in the early years. This will build on the reform plans underway across government and work underway in Devolved Governments.

The Child Poverty Taskforce continues its urgent work to publish the Strategy in Spring 2025.

■ Social Security Benefits: Disability**Clive Jones:** [\[20824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking through the welfare system to support children and young people diagnosed with cancer.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The extra costs disability benefits available to children and young people, Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payment (PIP), provide a contribution towards the additional 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 cancer and other conditions.

The extra costs benefits are non-contributory, non-means-tested and can be worth over £9,500 a year, tax free. Individuals or Parent/guardians for DLA child cases can choose how to use the benefit, in the light of their individual needs and preferences. The benefit also acts as a gateway to other financial support such as Carer's

Allowance, disability additions in Universal Credit, Motability Scheme, Blue Badge Scheme and exemption from the benefit cap.

■ Social Security Benefits: Reform

Apsana Begum:

[\[20273\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the impact of welfare reforms since 2010 on (a) poverty, (b) child poverty, (c) disabled people, (d) women, (e) people of Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds and (f) older people.

Alison McGovern:

In 2022/23 there were 1.3 million more people in relative low income after housing costs than in 2010/11. The 1.3 million increase comprises 700,000 children, 300,000 working age individuals and 300,000 pensioners. During this period, there was a gradual upward trend in relative poverty (before and after housing costs) for pensioners driven by working age incomes growing at a faster rate than pensioner incomes despite uprating of State Pension and Pensioner benefits limiting this gap.

The table below provides employment rate/level data for disabled people, women, people from an ethnic minority and older people in 2010 and 2024. Employment level and rates rose for the groups between 2010 and 2024.

DISABLED PEOPLE		ETHNIC						
		WOMEN		MINORITIES		OLDER PEOPLE		
Level	Rate	Level	Rate	Level	Rate	Level	Rate	
April-June 2010	n/a	n/a	13.653m	65.50%	2.772m	59.30%	8.128m	38.40%
April-June 2024	5.534m	53.00%	16.312m	71.90%	5.459m	67.80%	10.891m	41.90%

We are committed to tackling poverty and raising living standards. We know that good work can significantly reduce the chances of people falling into poverty so this will be the foundation of our approach. Backed by £240 million investment, the Get Britain Working White Paper launched on 26 November will target and tackle economic inactivity and unemployment and join up employment, health and skills support to meet the needs of local communities.

The Child Poverty Taskforce also continues its urgent work to publish the Child Poverty Strategy and will explore all available levers to drive forward short and long-term actions across government to deliver an enduring reduction in child poverty in this parliament, as part of a 10-year Strategy for lasting change.

We are committed to reviewing Universal Credit to make sure it is doing the job we want it to do. We started this work with the announcement of the Fair Repayment Rate in the Budget and will continue to work with stakeholders as the review progresses.

Further steps to tackle poverty include our commitments to triple investment in breakfast clubs to over £30 million and to increase the National Living Wage to £12.21 an hour from April 2025 to boost the pay of 3 million workers.

It is Government provision through (and ongoing improvement of) the State Pension and benefits system – combined with key interventions for private pensions and the labour market – that forms the foundation of support for pensioners of today and tomorrow.

■ Social Security Benefits: Taiwan

Kate Osamor:

[\[20664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to negotiate a reciprocal social security agreement with Taiwan.

Sir Stephen Timms:

There are no current plans to negotiate a reciprocal social security agreement with Taiwan.

■ State Retirement Pensions: Death

Rupert Lowe:

[\[19135\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an estimate of the cost to the public purse of pension payments made to deceased recipients in each of the last ten years.

Andrew Western:

Due to data archiving in accordance with GDPR, we can only provide data from the last five financial years. Direct Payments made into an account after the death of a customer represent only around 0.1% of total annual expenditure on pensions. Although these are treated as non-recoverable and are not enforceable by law, we can request the money back as a voluntary payment. So far, we have recovered around half of the overpayments, to avoid this becoming a long-term cost to the taxpayer.

Year	STATE PENSION			PENSION CREDIT			TOTAL		
	Overpaid	Voluntary repayment	Net	Overpaid	Voluntary repayment	Net	Overpaid	Voluntary repayment	Net
2019/20	£71.8m	£43.3m	£28.5m	£8.6m	£4.0m	£4.6m	£80.4m	£47.3m	£33.1m
2020/21	£54.5m	£20.4m	£34.1m	£6.7m	£2.0m	£4.7m	£61.1m	£22.4m	£38.8m

	STATE PENSION		PENSION CREDIT			TOTAL			
2021/22	£106.6m	£53.8m	£52.9m	£13.4m	£5.4m	£8.0m	£120.0m	£59.1m	£60.9m
2022/23	£81.0m	£48.5m	£32.5m	£10.1m	£4.6m	£5.5m	£91.1m	£53.1m	£38.0m
2023/24	£143.9m	£67.3m	£76.7m	£15.2m	£5.9m	£9.3m	£159.2m	£73.2m	£86.0m

*Above table identifies the New Debt Value and the value of recoveries of RP & PC DPADs in each financial year.

The repayments in a specific year might not match the overpayments that occurred in that year, as repayment sometimes lags.

Data is GB only and classification information is current.

Payments may have later been reversed.

Debts have not necessarily all been fully recovered.

Net value has been identified using the following Overpaid - Voluntary repayment = Net.

■ Universal Credit: Agriculture

David Chadwick:

[\[20105\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many agricultural workers claim Universal Credit.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The requested information is not held. We do not systematically collect data on the employment sector background of Universal Credit (UC) claimants because this does not affect entitlement to UC.

■ Universal Credit: Students

Caroline Voaden:

[\[20716\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate her Department has made of the number of students whose Universal Credit has been affected by receipt of a student loan in the most recent period for which data is available.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The requested information is not readily available as student loan income is not separated in the data we have and to provide this would incur disproportionate cost.

■ Work Capability Assessment: Health

Apsana Begum:

[\[20271\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential link between the fitness for work test and (a) suicides, (b) other deaths and (c) harm.

Sir Stephen Timms:

DWP does not collect or record the cause of a customer's death and will not usually be made aware of how a customer died.

Cause of death is determined by a doctor or a coroner. There is no requirement for a Coroner to inform the department of the outcome of an inquest unless named as an Interested Person at that inquest - or the coroner decides to issue a Prevention of Future Deaths report to the department.

As a result, we are unable to collect information on or make any assessment on any potential links between the fitness for work test and suicides, other deaths and harm and only a coroner would be able to determine if one did exist on a case-by-case basis.

Attempted suicides and suicides are very complex issues. Where there is an allegation that the Department's actions, including any related to the fitness for work test, may have had an impact on a customer's circumstances, we take it very seriously and where appropriate we would undertake an Internal Process Review to establish if we could have done anything differently, to inform future learning and improve services. These reviews do not investigate the cause of a customer's death and are not undertaken as a result of every suicide or death and therefore would not provide the information to show if a link existed.

Internal Process Reviews themes are considered quarterly at the department's Serious Case Panel, which has an external Chair. Arrangements are being made to start publishing fuller minutes of the Panel's meetings from the new year.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ HIV Infection

Josh Babarinde:

[11360]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve NHS workforce training on HIV (a) awareness and (b) treatment.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 5 November 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Andrew Gwynne:

The standard of training for ~~health care professionals~~ **doctors** is the responsibility of the independent, statutory health care regulatory bodies and higher education institutions who set the outcome standards expected at undergraduate level and determine the content of their curriculum, in line with General Medical Council guidelines.

Individual National Health Service trusts are responsible for investing in post-registration training to ensure that staff can effectively deliver sexual and reproductive health services, including HIV treatment. In addition, NHS England's e-Learning for Healthcare includes a range of programmes and material which focus on HIV.

The Department, the UK Health Security Agency, NHS England, and a broad range of system partners are developing a new HIV Action Plan and considering the next steps needed for the workforce within it. We aim to publish this by summer 2025.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: HOPE not hate

Mrs Kemi Badenoch:

[8195]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether (a) officials, (b) special advisers and (c) Ministers have met representatives of Hope Not Hate since the general election.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 22 October 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Alex Norris:

(a) Officials have attended forums where Hope Not Hate have been present and have been sighted on reports generated by the organisation since the General Election, (b) details of meetings special advisers have with external organisations are published on gov.uk **in line with requirements set out in guidance [here](#)**, (c) details of ministerial meetings with external organisations are published on gov.uk.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Pentland Communications and Sovereign Strategy

David Simmonds:

[5420]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the answer of 4 September 2024 to Question 2973 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Pentland Communications and Sovereign Strategy, for what reason she has not provided the information requested on special advisers.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 11 October 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Alex Norris:

Details of meetings between special advisers and external organisations are published on gov.uk **in line with requirements set out in guidance** [here](#).

■ National Landscapes

Freddie van Mierlo:

[14870]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing protections for (a) the Chilterns national landscape and (b) other national landscapes under the national planning policy framework.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 26 November 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Matthew Pennycook:

The government is committed to ensuring that our most important and cherished landscapes are appropriately protected so they can be enjoyed by future generations.

Planning policy is clear that planning policies and decisions should recognise the character and beauty of the countryside, and local authorities are expected to protect heritage assets which can include landscape and setting of listed buildings.

Only local authorities, **national park authorities, or the Planning Inspectorate (acting on behalf of** ~~or~~ the Secretary of State), can give permission for development in, or affecting, a National Landscape (previously known as AONB). ~~Local planning~~ **Relevant** authorities must make sure that any proposals ~~have regard for~~ **seek to further** the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape.

The National Planning Policy Framework states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes, and that the scale and extent of any development in these areas should be limited.