



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 6 January 2025 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:15 P.M., 06 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

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

#### ■ Department for Business and Trade: Cost Effectiveness

**Andrew Griffith:**

[\[21250\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of potential efficiency savings (a) his Department and (b) in arms length bodies for which his Department is responsible.

**Justin Madders:**

At the announcement of Phase 2 of the 2025 Spending Review, departments have been set a target of identifying efficiency savings of 5% by 2029. Through the spending review process my department will be carrying out the required work to identify options for delivering my priorities while maximising value for money for the taxpayer.

Phase 2 will focus on supporting the government's missions by utilising technology and reforming public services to support delivery of the government's plans for a decade of national renewal.

#### ■ Department for Business and Trade: Equality

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[21127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many and what proportion of officials in his Department were hired via positive action schemes in the last financial year.

**Justin Madders:**

All Civil Service departments work within the Recruitment Principles, as regulated by the Civil Service Commission, to recruit using a fair and open process and appoint on Departments will only limit a campaign to a specific group as a form of positive action as a proportionate response to achieve a legitimate aim as defined in section 159 of the Equality Act 2010.

The Civil Service is committed to a diverse workforce and culture of openness and inclusivity - not as ends in themselves but as means of delivering better outcomes to the citizens we serve.

The Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-25 Promoting Fairness and Performance, published in February 2022, is positioned as an essential lever to deliver a Modern Civil Service, where our values are to serve with integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality; driving our vision to be a skilled, innovative and ambitious Civil Service

equipped for the future. This strategy sets out a broader definition of diversity, to include geographical, social and career backgrounds alongside the protected groups. As set out in the Civil Service People Plan 2024 - 2027, we are committed to ensuring we attract, develop and retain talented people from a diverse range of backgrounds, to create a modern Civil Service, now and for the future.

#### ■ **Department for Business and Trade: UK Relations with EU**

**Andrew Griffith:**

[\[21248\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what meetings officials in his Department have had with representatives from the European Union since 5 July; and for what purpose.

**Justin Madders:**

My officials meet regularly with their counterparts in the European Commission to discuss areas such as implementation of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the Competition Cooperation Agreement, and trade. Officials have also recently presented the Industrial Strategy Green Paper to the EU Delegation and Member State representatives.

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) officials also co-chair three UK-EU Trade Specialised Committees for Services, Investment and Digital, Regulatory Cooperation, and Technical Barriers to Trade, as well as the working groups that support them. The Committees last met in the autumn.

#### ■ **Engineering: Women**

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[17598\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to support women in the engineering sector.

**Sarah Jones:**

According to Engineering UK, the engineering and technology industry employed approximately 6.3m people in 2023, with approximately 15.7% women.

There are a number of services supporting women into engineering, for example, Royal Academy Engineering and the National Careers Services. However, there is clearly more to be done.

I will be convening a group of senior energy leaders in early 2025 to discuss how diversity can be improved to help deliver the clean energy superpower mission, which will need significantly more engineers.

#### ■ **Fair Work Agency: Finance**

**Andrew Griffith:**

[\[21251\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what is the projected annual budget of the Fair Work Agency.

**Justin Madders:**

The Employment Rights Bill is the first phase of delivering our plan to Make Work Pay, supporting employers, workers, and unions to get Britain moving forward.

Establishing the Fair Work Agency will create a strong, recognisable single brand so individuals know where to go for help and lead to a more effective use of resources

We are committed to ensuring that the Fair Work Agency is established on a sound financial footing and operates effectively in fulfilling its mandate. Detailed annual budgets for the proposed Fair Work Agency are currently under development and will be communicated in due course.

**■ Horizon Compensation Advisory Board****Andrew Griffith:** [\[19433\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he had discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer prior to sending his letter dated 21 November 2024 to the Horizon Compensation Advisory Board.

**Gareth Thomas:**

My Rt. Hon. friend the Secretary of State works closely with all his Cabinet colleagues and has regular discussions with them, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

**■ Infrastructure: Climate Change****Chi Onwurah:** [\[20611\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the Institution of Civil Engineers' report entitled ICE policy position statement: How can the UK's infrastructure system be made more climate resilient?, published in March 2023, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of using digital twins to improve understanding of risks to infrastructure assets.

**Sarah Jones:**

The National Digital Twin Programme aims to determine how digital twins can support improvements in all aspects of the operation and performance of individual infrastructure assets, as well as networks and systems. This includes climate resilience in relation to both specific events, as well as the longer term impacts of changing weather patterns. Information about the NDTP can be found at [National Digital Twin Programme NDTP](#) - GOV.UK.

**■ Insurance and Small Businesses: Shoplifting****Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[18644\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact on (a) small businesses and (b) insurance premiums of changes in the levels of high street thefts.



**Gareth Thomas:**

Shop theft continues to increase at an unacceptable level, with more and more offenders using violence and abuse against shopworkers to do this. We will not stand for this, everybody has a right to feel safe on the job.

We will end the effective immunity, introduced by the previous Government, granted to low level shoplifting of goods under £200.

We have announced £100 million of new funding to kickstart the recruitment of 13,000 additional neighbourhood officers, community support officers and special constables into neighbourhood policing teams, as announced by the Prime Minister earlier this month.

Whilst Government does not generally intervene in the commercial pricing decisions of insurers, we are determined that insurers should treat customers fairly and firms are required to do so under Financial Conduct Authority rules.

## ■ Trade Unions

**Nick Timothy:**[\[21073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what estimate he has made of the number of employers in the (a) private and (b) public sector that have recognised a trade union in 2024.

**Justin Madders:**

The Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey estimates the percentage of employers with recognised unions and employers with union members included within the table below:

ESTIMATED EMPLOYER SIZE (NUMBER OF WORKERS) WITH RECOGNISED UNIONS AND WORKERS IN UNIONS	% OF EMPLOYERS WITH RECOGNISED UNIONS
5 to 9	4%
10 to 19	5%
20 to 49	15%
50 to 99	20%
100 to 249	46%
250 to 499	62%
500 or more	73%

**■ UK Internal Trade: Northern Ireland****Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[20574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will have discussions with (a) eBay, (b) Etsy, (c) Folksy and (d) other online suppliers and platforms on steps to help ensure that consumers placing orders in Northern Ireland are not disadvantaged compared to other UK based consumers.

**Justin Madders:**

We continue to support businesses in ensuring a smooth flow of goods between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, including through regular engagement with online suppliers and platforms.

DBT regularly talks to online suppliers and platforms, and works with the NI Department for the Economy to support people in Northern Ireland.

**■ Xinjiang: Uyghurs****Dr Neil Hudson:** [\[19076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on forced labour involving Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang; and what steps he is taking to help prevent goods produced by forced labour entering the UK market.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The UK will stand firm on human rights, including China's repression of the peoples of Xinjiang. This has included raising concerns at the highest levels of the Chinese government. The Prime Minister raised human rights with President Xi at their meeting in the G20 Summit in November.

No company in the UK should have forced labour in its supply chain. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 requires businesses with a turnover of £36 million or more to report annually on steps taken to combat modern slavery. The Government continues to review how we can best tackle forced labour in supply chains.

**CABINET OFFICE****■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Ministers' Private Offices****Sir Ashley Fox:** [\[17336\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2024 to Question 12890 on Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Ministers' Private Offices, if she will published an itemised breakdown of that spending.

**Sir Ashley Fox:** [\[17337\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2024 to Question 12890 on Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Ministers' Private Offices, what items were purchased to equip the office of the additional Minister.

**Georgia Gould:**

All furniture and AV equipment has been, and must be, sourced from the GPA's Approved Supplier's catalogue.

An itemised breakdown of spending is as follows (all costs are excluding VAT unless otherwise specified):

Furniture for existing Ministerial Offices:

- Chairs x 6 - £7,384

Two of the chairs are in use within the Secretary of State's office and the other four are used in other areas of the office.

Furniture for new Ministerial Offices:

- Height adjustable desk - £1,566
- Armchair - £1,033
- Meeting Chairs x 14 - £12,964
- Furniture to house AudioAV equipment - £4,158.42
- Delivery, installation and dismantling and re-positioning of existing furniture - £1602.07 (including VAT)

The number of Ministers in DESNZ increased by one following the general election, the result of which was a higher than usual spend to facilitate the creation of an additional office.

Cost of Other Refurbishment of Ministerial Offices including moves:

- Porterage for over 5 days and rental of crates for 90 days - £13,387.93
- Floor power alterations within the Ministerial Office, their Private Office and Waiting Room - £2,241.24

Porterage was carried out between 5-15 July. All other work was commissioned on, or after, 15 July and completed by, or before, 19 October.

The Floor Power Alterations were to install additional power boxes within the floor due to the increased space utilisation. Please note this item was not correctly identified and included in the response to PQ UIN 12890.

**■ Ed Miliband****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[19415\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what information his Department holds on whether the former Leader of the Opposition, the Rt. hon. Member for Doncaster North, accepted a severance payment upon his departure as Leader of the Opposition via the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991.

**Georgia Gould:**

Certain office-holders, including the Leader of the Opposition, are entitled to a severance payment when they leave office under the Ministerial and other Pensions

and Salaries Act 1991. Under this provision, the Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP received a severance payment when he left the office of Leader of the Opposition in 2015.

Severance payments to office-holders are paid from the Consolidated Fund and published in the Consolidated Fund Annual Account. The relevant account is available on gov.uk at the following address:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a75a0dfe5274a545822cfbe/consolidated\\_funds\\_web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a75a0dfe5274a545822cfbe/consolidated_funds_web.pdf).

## ■ Film: Marketing

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[21256\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Prime Minister's speech of 5 December 2024 on Plan for Change at Pinewood Studios, what the cost to the public purse was of that event, including the cost of the backdrop and branding.

**Georgia Gould:**

In line with successive governments, departmental spending on official events that meet the criteria are published online quarterly.

## ■ Foreign Investment in UK: National Security

**Alex Burghart:** [\[20698\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many and what proportion of transactions under review under the National Security and Investment Act 2021 relate to links to a company owned in (a) part and (b) whole by a foreign state.

**Alex Burghart:** [\[20699\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many reviews under the National Security and Investment Act 2021 have resulted in the Government requiring companies to take mitigation measures since 5 July 2024.

**Alex Burghart:** [\[20700\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will publish an updated transparency report on decisions made under the National Security and Investment Act 2021.

**Alex Burghart:** [\[20701\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many acquisitions of UK firms in the (a) defence, (b) cybersecurity and (c) AI sectors have been referred to his Department under the National Security and Investment Act 2021 since 5 July 2024.

**Alex Burghart:** [\[20702\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many referrals to his Department under the National Security and Investment Act 2021 of acquisitions of UK firms in the (a) defence, (b) cybersecurity and (c) AI sectors have resulted in a transaction being (i) modified, (ii) delayed and (iii) blocked since 5 July 2024.

**Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:**

Transparency is a crucial part of the National Security and Investment (NSI) Act, whilst also balancing commercial and reputational considerations.

Information related to publication of final orders is available on GOV.UK. The Government also publishes annual reports to provide information about the transactions that it has been notified about and those it subsequently called in for a national security assessment. The NSI Annual Report 2023-24 was published on 10 September 2024. The period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 will be covered in next year's annual report.

The annual reports include the proportion of notifications for each sector, however, cybersecurity falls under the artificial intelligence sector and is not reported separately.

The reports do not specifically include the number or proportion of transactions that relate to links to a company owned in (a) part or (b) whole by a foreign state, however, they include the number of accepted notifications, call-in notices issued, final notifications issued, withdrawals from a called in acquisition and final orders issued by origin of investment.

**■ Infrastructure and Projects Authority: Annual Reports****James Cartlidge:**[\[20671\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he plans to publish the Infrastructure and Projects Authority annual report for 2023-24.

**James Cartlidge:**[\[20677\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what his timetable is for publishing the Infrastructure and Projects Authority annual report for 2023-2024.

**Georgia Gould:**

The IPA Annual Report is due to be published in early 2025.

**■ UNRWA****Nick Timothy:**[\[21093\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister and the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East discussed (a) delivering UNRWA operations in Hamas-controlled areas and (b) steps UNRWA is taking to ensure the political neutrality of its staff during their meeting on 11 December 2024.

**Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:**

I refer the Hon Member to the read-out of the meeting on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

**■ Working Hours: Floods and Temperature****Alex Mayer:**[\[20349\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make an estimate of the number of working hours lost as a result of (a) extreme heat and (b) flooding in 2024.

**Georgia Gould:**

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

A response to the Hon. Lady's Parliamentary Question of 16 December is attached.

**Attachments:**

1. Letter from the National Statistician [PQ20349.pdf]

**CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT****■ Football: Regulation****Mr Louie French:**[\[20877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will take steps with the shadow Football Regulator to prevent English football clubs from joining breakaway leagues.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Football Governance Bill will create a Regulator that will be able to prevent English clubs from joining a future breakaway competition, taking into account factors like sustainability, heritage, fairness and meritocracy.

The Regulator will be obliged to gather the views of fans and consult the FA before it prohibits a competition.

This approach is the most effective way of stopping unwanted competitions that do not adhere to the principles of how sport operates in this country, are not supported by fans, and that risk undermining the English football pyramid.

The Shadow Football Regulator is a transition team that is working in parallel with the passage of the Football Governance Bill to set up the Independent Football Regulator. It does not have powers to regulate or take forward the provisions in the Football Governance Bill until after Royal Assent.

**■ Gambling****Mr Louie French:**[\[21220\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to support the gambling research, education and treatment sector; and what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the new statutory levy on that sector.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

Ministers and officials have undertaken significant engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including those with lived experience of gambling-related harm, to

inform the government's work to reduce gambling harm in line with its manifesto commitment.

As set out in the Government's [response](#) to the consultation on the statutory levy, it is a priority that in this crucial transition period, the valuable experience and services in the current system, particularly treatment and support services which help people in need across Great Britain, are protected. We are clear that operators must continue to provide financial contributions at their current levels until the levy is in force, and have received reassurances from the industry that this will be delivered. The Government is also clear that the third sector, which has delivered important work to tackle gambling harm, will continue to play a key role in the future system and contribute to the research, prevention and treatment supported by levy funding.

### ■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

**Valerie Vaz:** [\[20958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 18 October 2024 to Question 8623 on Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, whether she plans to make a statement on continued funding of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme before March 2025.

**Mr Calvin Bailey:** [\[21074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what plans she has for the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

**Chris Bryant:**

Yes, we will announce the outcomes of the Business Planning process, including any implications for the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme soon.

## DEFENCE

### ■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

**Douglas McAllister:** [\[901985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he plans to take through the Defence Industrial Strategy to grow the defence sector.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Government is delivering for defence by increasing defence spending and recognises the defence sector as a strategic resource. The Defence Industrial Strategy will provide clear signals to encourage firms to take long-term investment decisions in the UK and grow onshore production capability in priority areas that will drive growth and productivity across the UK economy, while strengthening our national security. The nearly £3 billion increase in spending next year will help us do this.

**■ Afghanistan: Armed Conflict****Alberto Costa:** [\[20017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of awarding the (a) Op Herrick Operational Service Medal and (b) Civilian Service Medal (Afghanistan) to (i) personnel of the 908 Labour Support Unit RLC and (ii) other Afghan locally employed civilians.

**AI Carns:**

Under the qualifying criterion for the Operational Service Medal for Afghanistan and the Civilian Service Medal (Afghanistan), locally employed civilians working for the 908 Labour Support Unit, and other Afghan locally employed civilians, are not eligible for either Medal.

Whilst we value greatly the support provided by locally employed civilians, the long-established position is that local nationals are not eligible for UK medallion recognition, and the Ministry of Defence has no plans to recommend that this position is reviewed.

**■ Annington Homes****Mr Mark Francois:** [\[20577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, which departmental budgets will provide the funds to complete the purchase of the Annington estate; and what assessment he has made of the potential impact of that spending on other defence priorities.

**AI Carns:**

Funding for the deal is being provided by His Majesty's Treasury, not the Ministry of Defence budget.

As the purchase has no impact on other Defence priorities, no financial assessment has been made.

**■ Armed Forces: Housing****Mr Mark Francois:** [\[20578\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to his Department's press release entitled Government buys back 36,347 military homes to improve housing for forces families and save taxpayers billions, published on 17 December 2024, what his planned timetable is for the (a) construction and (b) refurbishment of service family homes.

**AI Carns:**

It is too early to provide a timetable for the construction and refurbishment of Service Family Accommodation (SFA).

The recent announcement comes as the Government kickstarts work on a new military housing strategy, to be published this year.

Key principles of the strategy will include: a generational renewal of Armed Forces accommodation; new opportunities for forces homeownership; and better use of



Ministry of Defence land to support the delivery of affordable homes for families across Britain.

The first steps in the strategy will include the rapid development of an action plan to deliver on the “once in a generation” opportunities unlocked by today’s deal. This work will involve independent experts, forces families and cross-Government input.

**Chris Evans:** [\[20603\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of standards of (a) maintenance and (b) repair work to (i) Single Living and (ii) Service Families Accommodation.

**Al Carns:**

Within each Future Defence Infrastructure Services (FDIS) contract, there is an embedded assurance and verification process to check the adequacy of the maintenance and repair service provided to Single Living and Service Families Accommodation. The assessments are made against Acceptable Levels of Performance (ALP).

We continue to robustly challenge supplier performance against agreed levels. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation Chief Executive and his Officials hold monthly scrutiny meetings with contractor Chief Executives to continue to hold them to account, drive performance improvements and deliver the best possible service to Service personnel and their families.

Where performance falls short of that ALP, specific performance Rectification Plans are put in place to recover performance and any subsequent contractual performance withholds applied. Each Region manages this performance rectification with suppliers back to an acceptable level of performance with oversight from the Health Check Forum.

**Helen Morgan:** [\[20906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many of the houses bought from Annington are in (a) North Shropshire constituency, (b) Shropshire, (c) Staffordshire and (d) Telford and Wrekin.

**Al Carns:**

The table below shows the number of properties bought by the Ministry of Defence from Annington Property Ltd located in North Shropshire, South Shropshire, Staffordshire, Telford, and Wrekin constituencies.

LOCATION	NUMBER OF PROPERTIES PURCHASED FROM ANNINGTON PROPERTY LTD
North Shropshire	140
South Shropshire	0
Stafford	190

LOCATION	NUMBER OF PROPERTIES PURCHASED FROM ANNINGTON PROPERTY LTD
Telford	0
Wrekin	600

### ■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty

**David Mundell:** [\[901991\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the agreement with Mauritius on the sovereignty of the British Indian Ocean Territory on global security.

**Luke Pollard:**

For decades, Diego Garcia has played a critical role in global security. It is a critical enabler of our ability to respond to crises and counter complex, challenging security threats. This agreement will safeguard the strategic security interests of the United Kingdom, Mauritius, and the United States, as well as our other regional partners, well into the next century.

### ■ Combined Cadet Force: Havering

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[20160\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of changes in the level of funding for the Combined Cadet Force Association on its operation in the London Borough of Havering.

**Al Carns:**

This Government's commitment to supporting the school-based Combined Cadet Force and the Cadet Expansion Programme in schools remains unchanged. Therefore, we continue to invest £3.6 million per year in the programme so that more young people can enjoy the benefits of the cadet experience.

In light of this, I have also directed that a review be undertaken to ascertain how we can deliver more cadet activity, and to do more for our cadets, both in schools and in wider communities.

### ■ Defence: EU Countries

**Andrew Lewin:** [\[R\] \[901982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to improve defence relationships with European allies.

**Luke Pollard:**

Deepening our defence relationships with European allies continues to be a priority.

Since July 2024 we have signed several new agreements to deepen cooperation, including the UK-Germany Trinity House Agreement and the UK-Estonia roadmap. During 2025 we will also reinvigorate the UK-France Lancaster House Agreement.

Our NATO first approach will complement this work. Investing in our collective defence and security is crucial to further improving our defence relationship with Europe as a whole.

#### ■ **Estonia: Military Aid**

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[20670\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much funding he has allocated for urgent capability requirements for Estonia in (a) this financial year and (b) each of the next three financial years.

**Luke Pollard:**

Urgent Capability Requirements (UCRs) are rapidly implemented capabilities delivered to the front line to meet urgent operational needs. The department cannot comment publicly on the specific costs associated with operations in Estonia, as the Ministry of Defence continues to deploy to this location and must protect operationally sensitive information. UCRs are reviewed on a rolling monthly basis to ensure the capability is still required and provides value for money.

#### ■ **Guided Weapons: Finance**

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[20684\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to allocate additional funding for the Long-Range Area Effects Programme in financial year (a) 2024-25 and (b) 2025-26.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Long-Range Area Effects (LRAE) project is currently pre-concept. Defence is considering its wider Deep Fires options subject to outcomes of the Strategic Defence Review.

#### ■ **Middle East: Military Aid**

**Bobby Dean:**

[\[901981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the provision of military support in the context of conflict in the Middle East.

**Luke Pollard:**

We keep our military engagement in the Middle East under continuous review and any changes are discussed with relevant Departments as appropriate.

**■ Military Aircraft: Helicopters****Adam Dance:** [\[20867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2024 to Question 16219 on Military Aircraft: Helicopters, what the timetable is for introduction into service of the New Medium Helicopter.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Ministry of Defence is continuing with the established procurement process, managed by Defence Equipment and Support, for the New Medium Helicopter programme. The competition remains commercially sensitive, and the evaluation and approval process must complete before further details, including the timetable for introduction into service, can be confirmed. The proposal will be evaluated through 2025 when, subject to Government approvals, a contract award is anticipated.

**■ Ministry of Defence: Media****John Cooper:** [\[20492\]](#)

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

**Al Carns:**

The Directorate of Defence Communications in the Ministry of Defence Head Office spend on media and voice training for Ministers since 5 July 2024 is nil.

**■ Ministry of Defence: Waste****Louise Jones:** [\[901984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to reduce levels of waste in his Department.

**Maria Eagle:**

We are committed to securing value for money for taxpayers and cutting waste. We have curbed the previous Government's out of control spend on consultants by nearly £300 million by stopping all non-essential Government consultancy spending this year. We have also better aligned spending to Departmental priorities by accelerating the retirement of ageing capabilities.

**■ Strategic Defence Review****James Cartlidge:** [\[20669\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the response of Lord Robertson to Question 1 in the Defence Committee Session on the Strategic Defence Review, HC 484 on 3 December 2024, if he will list the political parties that have made a formal written submission to the Strategic Defence Review.

**Luke Pollard:**

In the Review's initial evidence-gathering phase, the Reviewers set out to consult widely, including with Parliament, the Defence community, academia, industry and

our closest Allies and Partners, including NATO. We received several responses from UK political parties and cross-party committees with membership across several parties.

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[20679\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December to Question 19375 on Strategic Defence Review, whether he plans to report the Strategic Defence Review to Parliament before 30 June 2025.

**Luke Pollard:**

The Reviewers are reporting regularly on progress to the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Defence Secretary and will make their final report to them in the spring of 2025. The Secretary of State for Defence will subsequently publish a version of that report to Parliament. It will then be implemented by the Ministry of Defence.

■ **Veterans: Housing**

**Tom Hayes:**

[\[901992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the delivery of Homes for Heroes.

**Al Carns:**

The Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister have made clear that ensuring veterans and their families can access housing support is a priority.

At a roundtable in November with the Housing Minister and veteran housing organisations, we discussed the removal of the local connection and residency test for veterans applying for social housing in England, which is now in force.

I also attend the Inter-Ministerial Group on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping, driving progress on our cross-Government homelessness strategy.

■ **Veterans: Northern Ireland**

**Mr Mark Francois:**

[\[19257\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps the Government is taking to ensure that veterans residing in Northern Ireland receive the same level of support as those in Great Britain (a) in (i) health, (ii) housing, (iii) welfare, (iv) education and (v) employment and (b) generally.

**Mr Mark Francois:**

[\[19258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of maintaining an independent body such as the Veterans Support Office to (a) coordinate and (b) deliver support services for veterans in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Mark Francois:** [\[19259\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions his Department has had on the potential implications of Section 75 of the Belfast Agreement for (a) identifying and (b) supporting veterans in Northern Ireland; and whether he is taking steps to (i) ensure parity of care with veterans in Great Britain and (ii) adhere to the Agreement.

**Mr Mark Francois:** [\[19260\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of disparities in healthcare waiting times for veterans in Northern Ireland compared to those in Great Britain; and what steps he plans to take to help ensure timely access to critical care for veterans in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Mark Francois:** [\[19261\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the (a) Veterans Welfare Service and (b) Office of Veterans Affairs (i) operate independently and (ii) are trusted by veterans in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Mark Francois:** [\[19262\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to help tackle challenges faced by veterans in Northern Ireland in accessing support services.

**Mr Mark Francois:** [\[19263\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he is taking steps to establish pathways for veterans in Northern Ireland to access healthcare services in Great Britain where suitable care is unavailable locally.

**Mr Mark Francois:** [\[19264\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to improve coordination between (a) the Northern Ireland Office, (b) other government Departments and (c) support charities to ensure comprehensive care for veterans in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Mark Francois:** [\[19265\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what support is available for families of veterans in Northern Ireland; and if he will supply additional resources for such needs.

**Al Carns:**

The Government is committed to ensuring that veterans are able to access appropriate support wherever they live in the UK and is working to coordinate and cohere the range of support available, including in Northern Ireland, more effectively.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome David Johnstone to his new role as Northern Ireland Veterans' Commissioner. David will play a crucial role in supporting veterans across Northern Ireland. I look forward to working with him, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, other Government Departments and across society to ensure veterans and their families in Northern Ireland receive the best possible support.

The Armed Forces Covenant continues to be a key Government priority, with a commitment to fully implement the Covenant in law. The Armed Forces Covenant ensures that the Armed Forces community is treated fairly across the UK, although its delivery is shaped by local and regional factors and jurisdictions. We are making good progress in delivering the Covenant in Northern Ireland, where unique circumstances require a different approach to be taken, and the new Duty will apply in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Extensive engagement has taken place on the new Covenant duty with a range of stakeholders, including the Devolved Governments, with whom the UK Government will continue to work proactively on tailored approaches.

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT), a charity and Non-Departmental Public Body of the Ministry of Defence (MOD), supports the Thrive Together programme. In Northern Ireland, this is led by the charity Brooke House and brings together a range of local service providers to establish sustainable and resilient networks that ensure veterans and their families receive prompt, effective and tailored support in Northern Ireland. The initiative builds on the first iteration of the AFCFT's Veterans' Places, Pathways and People programme and the ongoing work of the 11 Veterans' Champions in councils across Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister recently announced an additional £3.5 million funding to continue the UK-wide Reducing Veteran Homelessness (RVH) Programme, which includes Op FORTITUDE, a Government-backed centralised referral pathway designed to support veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In March 2024, Beyond the Battlefield were awarded £100,000 by the RVH programme to provide services for veterans in Northern Ireland who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

A range of cross-Government employment support is also available to veterans and their families after their time in service. This includes the Ministry of Defence (MOD)-hosted Career Transition Partnership, which is the initial point of resettlement provision for veterans leaving military service, with directly provided support usually available for two years before and two years after leaving service. In addition, a government-backed veterans' sector-based employment scheme supports veterans to access employment opportunities across the UK, including enabling access to qualifications and training, to veterans and their families at any stage in their lives after leaving service.

The Office for Veterans Affairs' (OVA) in the MOD has recently established a presence in Northern Ireland to support strategic coordination of organisations, programmes and initiatives for veterans' wellbeing. The OVA works closely and routinely with the Northern Ireland Office, the Veterans Welfare Service Northern Ireland (VWS NI) and the Office of the Northern Ireland Veterans' Commissioner to ensure alignment of effort where possible and as appropriate.

The Veterans' Support Office (VSO) played a role in coordinating and signposting to statutory and charity provision. It closed in June 2024 as the way support for veterans is provided in Northern Ireland continues to evolve. Veteran support services have

continued, including those grant-funded posts and projects previously facilitated by the VSO.

MOD representatives from the OVA and VWS NI additionally co-chair the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Committee, a voluntary coalition of organisations that specialise in delivering support services to veterans and their families in Northern Ireland, and the quarterly NI Veterans' Champion Committee. There are now Veterans' Champions in all eleven local authorities. Both committees help further situational awareness, facilitate better coordination of effort, and provide an effective pool of subject matter expertise to drive continuous improvement in service delivery for veterans in Northern Ireland.

VWS NI is a trusted statutory provider of specialist and holistic support for service leavers, veterans, their families and the bereaved in Northern Ireland. Following the merger in April 2023 of the UDR and R IRISH Home Service Aftercare Service with Defence Business Services, VWS NI successfully retained the unique medical services it offers eligible veterans in Northern Ireland, whilst expanding the provision of guidance, information and support to all service personnel transitioning into civilian life, veterans, their families and the bereaved across Northern Ireland. This includes physiotherapy and psychological therapies for eligible veterans. VWS NI's Welfare Managers - many of whom previously worked in the Aftercare Service - work exceptionally hard to build a good rapport with clients, and this is demonstrated by the consistently positive feedback the service receives at every level.

In addition, the £500,000 Defence Medical Welfare Service pilot, which supports veterans' health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland, provides timely assistance and guidance to veterans who require healthcare. This is achieved by linking veterans with local services to ensure they are receiving the help available; advising on physical health issues such as musculoskeletal problems, pain management and lifestyle; and providing help with anxiety, depression, PTSD and bereavement. The pilot works closely with VWS NI and is providing valuable insight to improve our understanding of veterans' health needs locally.

## ■ Veterans: Radiation Exposure

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[19997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 12 December 2024 to Question 17507 on Veterans: Radiation Exposure, when (a) Ministers and (b) officials in his Department have met (i) nuclear veterans and (ii) campaigners to update them on the progress of his review since 13 September 2024.

**AI Carns:**

The Government is deeply grateful to all those who participated in the UK nuclear testing programme. We recognise their Service and the huge contribution they have made to the UK's security.

That is why I have already met with representatives of the nuclear test veteran community in September and December to discuss a range of topics relating to their



experiences and the challenges they face. Ministry of Defence officials regularly engage and meet with representatives, and have done so every month since September 2024 to update them on the work currently being done.

## EDUCATION

### ■ Financial Services: Education

**Lisa Smart:** [21188]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department plans to take to create a strategy for embedding financial literacy within the primary and secondary education curricula.

**Lisa Smart:** [21189]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the impact of financial education on young people at (a) primary and (b) secondary school level.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Financial education is currently taught through the national curriculum for mathematics at key stages 1 to 4 and citizenship at key stages 3 and 4, which together cover personal budgeting, saving for the future, managing credit and debt and calculating interest.

High and rising school standards are at the heart of the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best start in life. That is why the government announced a Curriculum and Assessment Review on 19 July 2024, which is being chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE.

Following the independent review, the government will, through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, legislate to require all state schools to teach the reformed national curriculum. This will give parents certainty over the core of their children's education.

The review group will publish an interim report early in 2025, setting out their interim findings and confirming the key areas for further work. The final report, with recommendations, will be published in autumn 2025.

The Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) has a statutory role to coordinate the UK Strategy for Financial Wellbeing, which is underpinned by their robust data collection, including the impact of financial education on young people. The department works closely with MaPS to monitor the evidence for financial education. MaPS's published research can be found here: <https://maps.org.uk/en/publications/research>.

**Higher Education: Reform****Chi Onwurah:** [\[20617\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what her plans are for higher education reform; and what the role is of innovation in that process.

**Janet Daby:**

The government is committed to setting out a plan for reform of the higher education (HE) sector by the summer, focused on five priorities. We will expect our HE providers to:

- Play a stronger role in expanding access and improving outcomes for disadvantaged students.
- Make a stronger contribution to economic growth.
- Play a greater civic role in their communities.
- Raise the bar further on teaching standards, to maintain and improve our world leading reputation and drive out poor practice.
- Drive a sustained efficiency and reform programme.

My noble Friend, the Minister for Skills, is working closely with Lord Vallance to build on HE providers' already significant contribution to innovation, increasing their contribution to the UK economy.

**Holiday Activities and Food Programme****Valerie Vaz:** [\[20959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 17058 on Holiday Activities and Food Programme, whether she plans to make a statement on continued funding of the Holidays Activities and Food Programme before March 2025.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The department's budgets for 2025/26 will be confirmed in due course, including the exact funding available for this type of support for children, young people and families during the holidays.

**Pupils: Allergies****Mark Pritchard:** [\[20945\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring schools to have mandatory allergy and anaphylaxis policies.

**Mark Pritchard:** [\[20946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will require schools to have adrenaline auto-injectors on site to treat anaphylaxis.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units to make arrangements for supporting pupils with medical conditions. The accompanying statutory guidance, 'Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school', makes clear to schools what is expected of them in taking reasonable steps to fulfil their legal obligations and to meet the individual needs of pupils with medical conditions, including allergies. Schools should ensure they are aware of any pupils with medical conditions and have policies and processes in place to ensure these can be well managed. The guidance can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3>.

The guidance is clear that policy should include how it will be implemented, what should happen in an emergency situation and the role individual healthcare plans play in supporting pupils. The policy should set out how staff will be supported in carrying out their role to support pupils, including how training needs are assessed and how training is commissioned and provided. Any member of school staff providing support to a pupil with medical needs should have received suitable training.

Regarding equipment, in 2017 the Department of Health published non-statutory guidance to accompany a legislative change to allow schools to purchase spare adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs) from a pharmacy without a prescription and for use in an emergency situation. This guidance is kept under review and gives clear advice to schools on the recognition and management of an allergic reaction and anaphylaxis, and outlines when and how an AAI should be administered for pupils in schools.

**■ Students: Assessments****Alex Mayer:**[\[21235\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will commission research on the potential impact of room temperature during examinations on student performance.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department is not currently considering commissioning research on the effect of room temperature during examinations on student performance, although we continue to keep abreast of research in this area. The department has provided advice for schools about how they can manage the learning environment during hot weather.

**ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO****■ Warm Home Discount Scheme: Pensioners****Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:**[\[20623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many pensioners are eligible for the Warm Homes Discount in each region.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Warm Home Discount statistics (published at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/warm-home-discount-statistics-2023-to-2024>) provide data on the number of rebates received by region (table 2), by the benefits claimed which make recipients eligible (including pension credit, table 12) and by the age of the lead beneficiary (table 14). These statistics reflect rebates paid rather than eligibility.

**ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS****■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax****Blake Stephenson:****[19115]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the potential impact of her policies on (a) agricultural and (b) business property relief on ancient woodlands.

**Mary Creagh:**

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a range of issues, and Cabinet discussions are considered confidential.

**■ Biodiversity: International Cooperation****Barry Gardiner:****[20560]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what his priorities are for the 68th Global Environment Facility Council Meeting in relation to target (a) 5 and (b) 18 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

**Mary Creagh:**

The 68th Global Environment Facility Council meeting will discuss a programme of work to fund projects that will deliver environmental benefits, including contributing to achieving the targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework. The UK's priorities will be to support improved access to GEF finance for recipient countries.

The 3rd Council meeting for the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) will discuss the programming of the GBFF in its first year of operation. The UK will reconfirm the additional pledge of £45 million to the GBFF made at CBD COP16.

**■ Carbon Emissions: Agriculture and Land Use****George Freeman:****[R] [18535]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to use earth observation data to help support the (a) measurement, (b) monitoring and (c) setting of (i) agricultural, (ii) landfill and (iii) land use contributions to the UK's net zero emissions targets.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Remote sensing technologies have increasing potential to provide cost-effective solutions for monitoring land use changes, gas leaks, and population density. Defra is examining the feasibility of employing Earth observation techniques for the monitoring and measurement of point source greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture, landfills, and other land uses.

We will continue to follow advances in this technology and investigate opportunities for its deployment, including via satellite-based Earth observation, and other remote sensing technologies such as drones and handheld equipment, which are crucial for ground truthing and establishing baseline measurements.

**■ Cycling and Walking****Andrew Cooper:**[\[18275\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the (a) adequacy of the condition of the canal towpath network and (b) potential merits of enabling higher levels of use of the canal towpath network for (i) walking and (ii) cycling.

**Emma Hardy:**

Use of towpaths by walkers and cyclists is an operational matter for individual navigation authorities, and Government does not have a role in that. However, Defra provides an annual grant of £52.6 million to the Canal and River Trust, which is the largest navigation authority in England and Wales with 2,000 miles of waterways. The Trust reports that towpath user satisfaction in 2023/24 was 91%.

**■ Dangerous Dogs****Sojan Joseph:**[\[20842\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of adding XL Bullies to the list of prohibited dogs under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 on the number of attacks by XL Bullies.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Defra is continuing to engage closely with the Police, local authorities, and rescue and rehoming organisations to monitor the impacts of the XL Bully dog ban. These measures are vital to protect the public and we expect all XL Bully owners to comply with the conditions.

**■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Unpaid Work****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[21057\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what is (a) his Department's and (b) the Environment Agency's policy on the use of positive discrimination in the recruitment process for internships.

**Emma Hardy:**

The core department, Defra, and its Non-Departmental Public Bodies, including the Environment Agency, comply with all legislation relevant to recruitment and will only target an internship recruitment campaign to a specific group as a proportionate form of positive action to address known workforce gaps, undertaken to achieve a legitimate aim in accordance with section 159 of the Equality Act 2010.

**Farming Recovery Fund**

**Helen Morgan:** [\[20323\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the effectiveness of the methodologies used by the Rural Payments Agency for deciding which areas of farmland are eligible for the Farming Recovery Fund.

**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.](#)

**Helen Morgan:** [\[21076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether changes have been made to the criteria of the Farming Recovery Fund since Storms Ashley and Bert.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

October 2023 to March 2024 has been recorded as the wettest six-month period ever recorded. The Farming Recovery Fund used data from Environment Agency and remote imagery on high river levels during Storm Babet (October 2023) and Storm Henk (January 2024). These were the two largest storms in this period. Met Office data was used to identify local authority areas in England which experienced exceptional rainfall. These data were used to identify eligibility for the Farming Recovery Fund which has now made one off recovery payments of £57.5 million to over 12,700 farm businesses to help farmers most affected by the exceptional flooding and wet weather. Eligibility for the Farming Recovery Fund does not include Storms Ashley nor Bert.

**Fisheries: Monitoring**

**Barry Gardiner:** [\[20558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2024 to Question 17501 on Fisheries: Monitoring, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of making it a mandatory requirement for vessels

over 24 metres to have cameras onboard under the Remote Electronic Monitoring roll out.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Defra have already assessed which fisheries should have mandatory Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) and published [the results in 2023](#).

The assessment concluded that over 24 metre pelagic trawlers in English waters should be a priority. Implementation began in summer 2024.

A further four fisheries were also identified as priorities. In those fisheries, REM will be mandatory for vessels over 10 metres.

■ **Flood Control: Finance**

**Helen Morgan:**

[\[20857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department plans to announce new projects funded by the Frequently Flooded Allowance in the next year.

**Emma Hardy:**

We are investing £2.4 billion in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences. The list of projects to receive government funding in 2025/26 will be consented in the usual way through Regional Flood and Coastal Committees with local representation.

Longer term funding decisions will be made at the next Spending Review.

**Helen Morgan:**

[\[21075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the eligibility criteria for the Frequently Flooded Allowance on flood risks in low population rural areas.

**Emma Hardy:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer to their previous question [20325](#) on 2 January.

■ **Food Supply**

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**

[\[20455\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if his Department will publish a strategic plan for food security.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Government is currently considering an ambitious food strategy that 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. More details will be made available in due course.

### ■ Land Drainage and Roads: Regulation

**Helen Morgan:** [\[20860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has made a recent assessment of the adequacy of existing (a) culvert and (b) land drainage responsibility legislation.

**Emma Hardy:**

Defra keeps all legislation under review. Between 2022 and 2024, Defra undertook a review of the statutory powers and responsibilities to map, monitor, inspect and maintain all flood and coastal erosion risk assets, including culverts. This review also considered powers within the Land Drainage Act 1991. The review will be examined by the new Government and likely published in early 2025.

We expect those responsible for all assets including risk management authorities, other public and community organisations, the private sector and riparian owners to invest in ongoing maintenance and ensure timely repairs where necessary.

### ■ Marine Protected Areas: Fisheries

**Barry Gardiner:** [\[20559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2024 to Question 17500 on Marine Protected Areas: Fisheries, for what reason he was not able to provide a timescale.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Department has not yet been able to provide a timescale for these measures due to the need to follow due process and consider how we can best meet the Government's priorities. The Government recognises the need for action to protect and restore our marine environment, while supporting a sustainable fishing industry.

### ■ National Parks: Pollution Control

**Sarah Hall:** [\[20876\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to prevent companies from polluting (a) Lake Windermere and (b) other national parks.

**Emma Hardy:**

Labour introduced National Parks 75 years ago, and introduced the Rights of Way Act that secured public access and preserved natural beauty.

A thriving natural world underpins our economy, health and society. That's why this Government is investing £400 million to protect and restore nature, including in our National Parks.

This Government is committed to making Protected Landscapes, such as the Lake District National Park which contains Windermere, greener, wilder and more accessible. We have just announced our intent to strengthen legislation when



parliamentary time allows. We will develop the details of the new legislation with partners, with the intention of ensuring that public bodies deliver better outcomes for people and nature in Protected Landscapes.

The Government is committed to taking action to address water pollution in Lake Windermere and in National Parks. The Water (Special Measures) Bill will deliver on the Government's commitment to put water companies under special measures. The 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.

Ofwat has recently published final determinations on PR24. United Utilities' will invest approximately £200 million in Lake Windermere, with improvements planned at all six storm overflows and nine wastewater treatment works impacting the lake.

Ofwat are also supporting a reduction in phosphorous in Lake Windermere by United Utilities. This includes ensuring United Utilities engage third parties to reduce the phosphorus entering the catchment and improve the water quality.

## ■ Nitrogen Oxides: Pollution Control

**Carla Denyer:**

**[21149]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 7788 on Air Pollution, what guidance his Department provides on safe limits of NO<sub>x</sub>.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Air Quality Standards Regulations (2010) set a limit of 40µg/m<sup>3</sup> for the annual average concentration of NO<sub>2</sub> (a component of NO<sub>x</sub>). This threshold, determined with consideration of pertinent health guidelines, aims to safeguard human health.

NO<sub>x</sub> is extensively monitored across the UK, and monitoring data is made available to the public in near real-time on Defra's UK-AIR website. Defra annually publishes Air Quality Accredited Official Statistics, available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/air-quality-and-emissions-statistics>.

Through the NO<sub>2</sub> programme, Defra is working closely with local authorities to deliver air quality measures to meet legal limits for NO<sub>2</sub> and improve the health of their residents.

Further to this, in 2022, Defra updated the statutory policy and technical guidance for local authorities on their responsibilities for Local Air Quality Management, including achievement of legal air quality limits for local communities.

## ■ Northern Ireland Water

**Robin Swann:**

**[20749]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will hold discussions with the Northern Ireland Executive on the regulation of Northern Ireland Water.

**Emma Hardy:**

Water policy and regulation in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in the Northern Ireland Executive.

However, there are regular opportunities for ministerial discussions on a wide range of issues where there are shared challenges and opportunities.

**■ Pigs: Animal Welfare****Steve Darling:**[\[21099\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 6270 on Poultry and Pigs: Animal Welfare, if he will publish a public consultation on the use of farrowing crates for pigs.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

We are firmly committed to maintaining and improving animal welfare and want to work closely with the farming sector to deliver high standards.

The use of farrowing crates for pigs is an issue we are currently considering very carefully.

**Steve Darling:**[\[21100\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to support indoor pig farmers to adopt free farrowing systems.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

We are firmly committed to maintaining and improving animal welfare and want to work closely with the farming sector to deliver high standards. The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway supports farmers to improve their animals' health and welfare through funded vet visits as well as targeted grants. We continue to work with the industry on how the Pathway can encourage improvements in indoor pigs' welfare.

**■ Recycling: Rural Areas****Sir John Hayes:**[\[20918\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to make recycling easier for residents in (a) Lincolnshire and (b) other rural areas.

**Mary Creagh:**

The Government's Simpler Recycling reforms will ensure that across England, every citizen will be able to recycle the same materials, no longer needing to check what their council will accept for recycling. This policy will make recycling easier and ensure there is a comprehensive, consistent service across England. This will reduce confusion with recycling to improve recycling rates, ensuring there is more recycled material in the products we buy, and that the UK recycling industry will grow.

Every household and non-household municipal premises (such as businesses, schools, and hospitals) across England will be able to recycle the same materials in the following core groups: metal; glass; plastic; paper and card; food waste; garden waste (household only). Simpler Recycling will be implemented on a phased timeline,

beginning from 31 March 2025 for non-household premises and 31 March 2026 for households.

## ■ Rights of Way

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[21112\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to reform the current right to roam regime.

**Mary Creagh:**

Our countryside and green spaces are a source of great national pride, but too many across the country are left without access to the great outdoors. That is why the last Labour Government expanded public access by introducing the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which provided the public a right of access to large areas of mountain, moor, heath, down, registered common land and coastal margin in England. 2024 marked 75 years since the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, which secured public access and preserved natural beauty.

This Government will continue to increase access to nature for families to enjoy, boosting people's mental and physical health and leaving a legacy for generations to come. We will create nine new National River Walks, plant three new National Forests and empower communities to create new parks and green spaces in their communities with a new Community Right to Buy. We will announce further details on our plans for improving access to nature in due course.

## ■ Sewage: Pollution

**Dr Al Pinkerton:**

[\[20776\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what specific steps he is taking to (a) monitor and (b) mitigate the environmental impact of sewage spills on (i) waterways and (ii) broader ecosystems.

**Emma Hardy:**

From 1 January 2025, water companies will be required to publish data related to discharges from all storm overflows within one hour of the discharge beginning (under section 141DA of the Water Industry Act 1991 as inserted by section 81 of the Environment Act 2021).

In addition to this, the Water (Special Measures) Bill will introduce a duty for water companies to publish data related to discharges from all emergency overflows within one hour of the discharge beginning.

This will create an unprecedented level of transparency, enabling the public and regulators to see where, and how often, overflows are discharging, and hold water companies to account. This will meet the Government commitment to ensure monitoring of every outlet.

The Water (Special Measures) Bill will also introduce a statutory duty for all water companies in England and Wales to publish annual Pollution Incident Reduction Plans.

The measures in this Bill will provide the most significant increase in enforcement powers for the regulators in a decade, giving them the teeth they need to take tougher action against water companies in the next investment period, which is due to start in April next year.

### ■ **Small Businesses: Floods**

**Matt Bishop:**

[\[17717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he is taking steps to support small businesses with flood damage (a) prevention and (b) mitigation.

**Emma Hardy:**

Protecting communities and small businesses around the country from flooding is one of the Secretary of State's five core priorities.

That is why we have committed £2.4 billion to invest over the next two years to bolster the nation's resilience, which is vital if we are to protect homes and business across the country.

As part of this investment, we are prioritising repairing and restoring critical assets to get our defences back on track and our new Flood Resilience Taskforce will play a key role in coordinating national and local flood preparation ahead of the winter flood season.

### ■ **Water Companies: Environment Protection**

**Clive Lewis:**

[\[20989\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the (a) governance and (b) performance of the water industry in England meets the UK's obligations under the Aarhus Convention.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Government is committed to the effective implementation of our international obligations under the Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters.

The United Kingdom is not currently subject to any water industry related compliance recommendations concerning its obligations under the Convention.

### ■ **Water: Conservation**

**Adrian Ramsay:**

[\[21070\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to roll out mandatory water efficiency labelling.

**Emma Hardy:**

On 5 September 2024, the Secretary of State reaffirmed the Government's intention to rollout a Mandatory Water Efficiency Label (MWEL). We will introduce the MWEL in the UK via [Secondary Legislation under Section 52 and Schedule 6 of the Environment Act 2021](#).

We are working with the Environment Agency to engage manufacturers and other stakeholders to keep them informed about the regulations as they develop. As this is a devolved matter, we are also working closely with colleagues in the devolved governments to deliver the legislation.

**FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE****■ Afghanistan: Women's Rights****Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:****[20688]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to support the rights of women in Afghanistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We have repeatedly condemned Taliban restrictions on women and girls' rights, including through UN Security Council and Human Rights Council resolutions. As the Foreign Secretary has said, exclusion of women from all aspects of public life is a tragic setback for Afghanistan. Officials from the Doha-based UK Mission to Afghanistan continue to press Taliban acting ministers and Afghan officials on human rights abuses in Afghanistan, including the most recent ban on female medical education. Our current £161 million aid programme provides vital life-saving support to the country's most vulnerable people, including access to healthcare and education. We are committed that at least 50 percent of people reached with UK aid in Afghanistan will be women and girls.

**■ Cabinet Office: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution****Mr Richard Holden:****[19413]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 18 November 2024 to Question 13746 on FCDO: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution, for what reason the Cabinet Office postponed the September 2024 transparency publication.

**Catherine West:**

The data relating to Government Procurement Card (GPC) covering June 2022 - October 2024 was published on 28 November and is available [here](#). The FCDO interpreted the communication regarding the postponement to also apply to GPC spend, as the FCDO's general approach is to link GPC publications with wider transparency returns.

**■ China: Mauritius****James Cartlidge:**[\[18987\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 16475 on China: Mauritius, whether he plans to monitor the (a) implementation and (b) potential implications for his policies of paragraph 3.4.4.2 of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan 2025-27; and what information his Department holds on the commitment of the government of Mauritius to these aims for Diego Garcia.

**Stephen Doughty:**

As with previous FOCAC commitments we will monitor their implementation and implications for UK policy. The UK will take a consistent and pragmatic approach to China's role in Africa - we will cooperate where we can, compete where we have different interests, and challenge where we must.

The UK continues to support the principle and practice of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones as a way to build confidence between regional states, and as a successful tool of non-proliferation. This includes the Pelindaba Treaty, of which we have signed and ratified the first and second Protocols, giving legally binding Negative Security Assurances to all signatory states in the region.

It is for Mauritius to comment on its own national approach.

The British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) agreement between the UK and Mauritius protects the long-term secure operation of the UK-US base that plays a vital role in regional and international security.

**■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution****Emily Thornberry:**[\[19652\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development 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.

**Catherine West:**

We are unable to provide data as at the end of the calendar years requested, but in mid-January 2023 and 2024 respectively:

- Core Department Government Procurement Cards (GPCs) held = i) 4,590 ii) 5,472
- Executive Agencies of department GPCs held = i) nil ii) nil

Government Procurement Cards provide an efficient route to enable key staff to procure goods and services, necessary to the promotion of British interests overseas and the maintenance of our embassies and high commissions. All purchases are subject to authorisation by managers and audit checks.

## ■ Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

**Sarah Hall:**

[\[20888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps he has taken to push for greater humanitarian access to Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

As the Prime Minister has said, the world will not tolerate any more excuses on humanitarian assistance. We continue to press Israel to end its aid restrictions and ensure that the UN and humanitarian partners can work safely and effectively. The Foreign Secretary recently wrote to Israeli Foreign Minister Sa'ar, alongside French and German counterparts, calling on Israel to urgently increase aid, and implement the UN's plan to prepare the civilian population for winter. I raised these issues with Deputy Foreign Minister Haskel on 5 December and the Foreign Secretary raised this again with Foreign Minister Sa'ar in their call on 8 December. We continue to work alongside our international partners to press for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of the hostages, better protection of civilians and a significant increase in aid to Gaza. At a UN Security Council meeting on 18 November, the Foreign Secretary reiterated that there is no excuse for Israeli restrictions on humanitarian aid and that they must be lifted.

## ■ Gaza: Israel

**Chris Hinchliff:**

[\[20753\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in Israel on hostages in Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Securing an immediate ceasefire and the safe release of all hostages, including Emily Damari and three other hostages with strong UK links, remains the UK's top priority. We have continuously supported hostage talks, and continue to work alongside our allies and partners in the region, exercising every possible diplomatic lever to see the hostages immediately released. On 8 December, the Foreign Secretary spoke with his Israeli counterpart, Gideon Sa'ar, and stressed the importance of securing a ceasefire to enable the safe return of Emily Damari and the three other UK-linked hostages and see an end to the war in Gaza.

**Brian Leishman:**

[\[21152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the attack on the World Central Kitchen convoy in Gaza on 1 April 2024 was (a) reviewed as and (b) found to be a potential violation of International Humanitarian Law by his Department.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The killing of seven World Central Kitchen aid workers, including three British nationals, in an Israeli airstrike in Gaza on 1 April was appalling. We continue to press the Government of Israel to improve the safety environment for aid workers in

Gaza, which is the deadliest in the world. Over 320 aid workers have been killed in Gaza since the conflict began on October 7. I most recently raised this with Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Sharron Haskel on Friday 29 November. We continue to keep Israel's compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in Gaza under review through regular assessments.

## ■ Imran Khan

**Zarah Sultana:** [\[20729\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to the Pakistani government to secure the safe release of Imran Khan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Foreign Secretary met with Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on 24 October to discuss a range of key issues, including Pakistan's domestic political situation and Imran Khan's detention. I also raised this on my recent visit to Pakistan. While Pakistan's judicial processes are a domestic matter, we have been very clear that the Pakistani authorities need to respect fundamental freedoms, including the right to a fair trial, due process and humane detention. This applies to Imran Khan as it does to all Pakistan's citizens.

## ■ Pakistan: Human Rights

**Zarah Sultana:** [\[20714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the human rights situation in Islamabad, in the context of reports of deaths and mass detentions of protesters from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf on 26 and 27 November 2024.

**Zarah Sultana:** [\[20715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make representations to his Pakistani counterpart for an independent investigation into the deaths of civilians in Islamabad on 26 and 27 November 2024.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK strongly supports individuals' rights to expression without censorship, intimidation or unnecessary restriction. We will continue to urge the Government of Pakistan to respect these fundamental freedoms, underlining that any human rights violations should be fully investigated in line with international human rights law. I raised the importance of upholding civil and political rights with senior Ministers, including the Minister for Human Rights and Interior Minister, on my visit to Pakistan last month. The British High Commission also regularly raises these issues with the Pakistani authorities at a senior level.



## ■ Russia: Liquefied Natural Gas

**Carla Denyer:**

[\[21159\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps to sanction the shipping of Russian Liquefied Natural Gas by UK-based businesses to (a) the EU and (b) other third countries.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The UK has taken extensive action to limit energy revenues that fund Russia's war in Ukraine. This includes Russian Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). UK persons are prohibited from importing Russian LNG and acquiring Russian LNG with the intention of entering the UK. This prohibition also covers the provision of certain services relating to the import or acquisition of LNG with the intention of entering the UK. In September 2024 we used new powers to specify carriers transporting Russian LNG, followed by a second set of vessels in October. It would not be appropriate to speculate about potential future sanctions.

**Carla Denyer:**

[\[21160\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps to sanction UK based insurance firms providing insurance to tankers engaged in shipping Russian Liquefied Natural Gas.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The UK has taken extensive action to limit energy revenues that fund Russia's war. UK persons are prohibited from importing Russian Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and acquiring Russian LNG with the intention of entering the UK. This prohibition also covers the provision of certain services relating to the import or acquisition of goods with the intention of entering the UK. The categories of services include financial services and funds which includes insurance-related services, brokering services and technical assistance.

## ■ Ryan Cornelius

**Mike Martin:**

[\[20383\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to raise the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's ruling that the United Arab Emirates has unlawfully detained Ryan Cornelius with the government of that country.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The FCDO takes the opinions of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention seriously. We continue to provide consular assistance to Mr Cornelius and his case has been raised at senior levels, highlighting the Government's support for his appeal for clemency.

**■ Syria: Development Aid****Phil Brickell:** [\[20819\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps to use UK-based assets that were expropriated by the Assad regime for (a) aid and (b) re-development projects to help the Syrian people.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

UK-based assets expropriated by the Assad regime remain frozen. As with all our sanctions, we keep our approach under review.

We do not comment on future designations as to do so lessens their potential impact.

**■ Syria: Embassies****Mark Pritchard:** [\[20188\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has plans to re-open the British Embassy in Syria.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Currently, there are no plans to reopen our embassy in Damascus. We will keep this under review.

**■ Syria: Humanitarian Aid****Chris Law:** [\[20636\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to support (a) humanitarian aid efforts and (b) rescue efforts for Syrians still trapped in prisons.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK is working closely with humanitarian and other partners to monitor the humanitarian situation, assess impacts and needs, and determine how best to respond. We continue 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 27 November 2024 to support vulnerable Syrians in Syria and the region.

Following the regime's retreat from Aleppo in early December, I announced an additional £300,000 to the White Helmets to expand their operations into areas formerly controlled by the regime. The White Helmets play a key role in search and rescue operations, including in prisons.

**■ Syria: Humanitarian Situation and Religious Freedom****Jim Shannon:** [\[20213\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his Syrian counterpart on the (a) humanitarian

situation in that country, (b) treatment of religious minorities in that country and (c) stability of the region.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Foreign Secretary does not have an official counterpart in Syria. He has not had discussions with the interim authorities.

The UK has been at the forefront of the response to fast moving events in Syria. The UK Special Envoy for Syria and I are speaking regularly to regional and other partners about the situation. The UK joined talks in Aqaba on 14 December, hosted by Jordan, with Arab, US, UN and EU partners during which we collectively expressed commitment to supporting a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition process based on the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, leading to an inclusive, non-sectarian and representative government.

The FCDO has consistently underlined the importance of protecting all civilians, including religious and ethnic minorities, publicly and in our engagement with regional and international partners. During a meeting with the new interim Syrian authorities earlier this week in Damascus, senior FCDO officials underlined the importance of an inclusive transitional political process which protects the rights of all Syrians. We will continue to advocate for the right of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Syria and for an inclusive political transition.

The UK is working closely with humanitarian and other partners to monitor the humanitarian situation, assess impacts and needs, and determine how best to respond. We continue 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 27 November 2024 to support vulnerable Syrians in Syria and the region.

■ **Syria: Politics and Government**

**Chris Law:**

[\[20633\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he is taking steps to help ensure (a) stability and (b) continuity of (i) governance and (ii) institutions in Syria.

**Chris Law:**

[\[20637\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to (a) promote stability and (b) safeguard institutions of governance in Syria in preparation for a transition to democratic elections.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK has been at the forefront of the response to fast moving events in Syria. The UK Special Envoy for Syria and I are speaking regularly to regional and other partners about the situation. The UK joined talks in Aqaba on 14 December, hosted by Jordan, with Arab, US, UN and EU partners during which we collectively expressed commitment to supporting a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political

transition process based on the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, leading to an inclusive, non-sectarian and representative government. We also advocated for preserving state institutions that serve the interests of, and provide critical services to, the people of Syria.

**Chris Law:** [\[20634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he is taking steps to help ensure a United Nations led process that restores democratic institutions of governance in Syria.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK has been at the forefront of the response to fast moving events in Syria. The UK Special Envoy for Syria and I are speaking regularly to regional and other partners, including the UN Special Envoy for Syria, about the situation. The UK joined talks in Aqaba on 14 December, hosted by Jordan, with Arab, US, UN and EU partners during which we collectively expressed commitment to supporting a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition process based on the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, leading to an inclusive, non-sectarian and representative government.

**Chris Law:** [\[20635\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help ensure implementation of UN Security Council resolution 2254.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK joined talks in Aqaba on 14 December, hosted by Jordan, with Arab, US, UN and EU partners during which we collectively expressed commitment to supporting a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition process based on the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, leading to an inclusive, non-sectarian and representative government.

## ■ Syria: Religious Freedom

**Mark Pritchard:** [\[20586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will have discussions with the new government of Syria on protecting the human rights of (a) Muslim minorities and (b) Christian minorities.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The FCDO has consistently underlined the importance of protecting all civilians, including religious and ethnic minorities, publicly and in our engagement with regional and international partners. The UK joined talks in Aqaba on 14 December, hosted by Jordan, with Arab, US, UN and EU partners during which we collectively expressed commitment to supporting a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition process based on the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, and leading to an inclusive, non-sectarian and representative government. We also underlined the importance of respect for human rights, including for minorities.

During a meeting with the new interim Syrian authorities earlier this week in Damascus, senior FCDO officials underlined the importance of an inclusive transitional political process which protects the rights of all Syrians.

We will continue to advocate for the right of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Syria and for an inclusive political transition.

## ■ Syria: Women

**Mark Pritchard:**

[\[20587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will hold discussions with the new government of Syria on including women in senior roles in the (a) government, (b) judiciary, (c) peace and reconciliation dialogue, (d) inter-faith dialogue and (e) Syrian business and industry associations.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

In the UK's engagement with international partners and Syrian contacts, we have stressed the importance of inclusivity and respect for human rights, including for women and minorities.

Senior FCDO officials recently travelled to Damascus, where they discussed the importance of an inclusive transitional political process, protecting the rights of all Syrians. The UK joined talks in Aqaba on 14 December, hosted by Jordan, with Arab, US, UN and EU partners, during which we collectively underlined the importance of respect for human rights, including for women.

**Claire Hanna:**

[\[20791\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he plans to take to help ensure the representation of women in political institutions in Syria.

**Claire Hanna:**

[\[20792\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he plans to take to help ensure that women's rights are protected in Syria.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

In the UK's engagement with international partners and Syrian contacts, we have stressed the importance of inclusivity and respect for human rights, including for women.

Senior FCDO officials recently travelled to Damascus, where they discussed the importance of an inclusive transitional political process, protecting the rights of all Syrians. The UK joined talks in Aqaba on 14 December, hosted by Jordan, with Arab, US, UN and EU partners, during which we collectively underlined the importance of respect for human rights, including for women.

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.

**■ Turkey: Gulen Movement****Ben Lake:** [\[20703\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Turkish counterpart on upholding the human rights of members and those associated with the Gulen Movement.

**Stephen Doughty:**

We fully recognise how seriously the Turkish Government takes the Gülen movement which they proscribe as a terrorist organisation. We consistently encourage Turkey to uphold the rule of law. The UK Government believes that all legal cases should be treated in accordance with international human rights standards, including the right to a fair trial and access to lawyers. Our Embassy in Ankara regularly engages with political parties, civil society organisations and diplomatic counterparts on this issue.

**HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE****■ Ambulance Services: Bude****Ben Maguire:** [\[21122\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve ambulance waiting times in Bude.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government has committed to supporting the National Health Service to improve performance and achieve the standards set out in the NHS Constitution, including for ambulance response times.

As a first step, my Rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, appointed Professor Lord Darzi to lead an independent investigation of the NHS' performance. The investigation's findings were published on 12 September 2024 and will feed into the Government's work on a 10-Year Health Plan to radically reform the NHS and build a health service that is fit for the future.

Ahead of this winter, NHS England has set out the priorities for the NHS to maintain and improve patient safety and experience, including actions to support patient flow and ensure ambulances are released in a timely way. NHS England's winter letter, sent to all integrated care boards including NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Integrated Care Board which serves Bude, is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/winter-and-h2-priorities>

**■ Blood Cancer: Diagnosis****Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[21023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to tackle (a) delays to diagnosis and (b) emergency presentation rates for blood cancer patients.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave to the Hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam on 2 December 2024 to Question [16329](#).

■ **Blood: Contamination****Nick Timothy:**[\[21113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether there is specific support for haemophiliacs impacted by the infected blood scandal.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The victims of the infected blood scandal have suffered immeasurably. It is the Government's utmost intention to deliver what justice and compensation it can to all those impacted, as quickly as possible.

Haemophiliacs infected via National Health Service blood or blood products are eligible for financial and psychological support from the United Kingdom's infected blood support schemes, as well as a bespoke Infected Blood Psychological Service that has been introduced by NHS England. They may also apply for comprehensive compensation from the Infected Blood Compensation Authority.

As set out in the Government's response to the inquiry's recommendations on protecting the safety of haemophilia care in their final report, NHS England is undertaking work on a peer review of haemophilia centres, networks for haemophilia care, recombinant products, and a national haemophilia database. Work is also underway in the Department to review the support being offered to the relevant charities for the infected and affected community in England.

■ **Coeliac Disease: Diagnosis****Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**[\[19649\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve access to initial diagnostic blood tests for coeliac disease in primary care settings.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**[\[19650\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the impact of diagnostic delays on the long-term health of patients with undiagnosed coeliac disease; and what steps he is taking to reduce those delays.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**[\[19651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to raise awareness of the average waiting time of 13 years for a diagnosis of coeliac disease.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has guidance on the recognition, assessment, and management of coeliac disease, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng20>

The guidance outlines a number of symptoms which are suggestive of coeliac disease and suggests that any person with these symptoms should be offered serological testing for coeliac disease. The guidance also states that first-degree relatives of people with coeliac disease should also be offered serological testing.

No formal assessment has been made of the impact of diagnostic delays on the long-term health of patients with undiagnosed coeliac disease, but the Government does recognise that patients, including those with coeliac disease, 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 coeliac disease. 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.

The Royal College of General Practitioners has an e-learning module on the diagnosis and management of coeliac disease and its immunological comorbidities, which is designed to raise awareness and understanding of the symptoms of coeliac disease amongst general practitioners and primary care professionals, and support early diagnosis. The e-learning module highlights that untreated coeliac disease can have important consequences, including small bowel lymphoma and osteoporosis.

The National Health Service website is also a key awareness tool and contains useful information for the public about coeliac disease, its symptoms, and how it is diagnosed and treated.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coeliac-disease/>

## ■ Congenital Abnormalities

**Richard Tice:**

**[20090]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many birth defects were reported among children born to couples who are first cousins in each of the last three years, broken down by the nationality of the parents.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government does not hold this data. We continue to work with the National Health Service as it delivers its three-year maternity and neonatal plan to grow our maternity workforce, develop a culture of safety, and ensure that women and babies receive safe, personalised, and compassionate care.



## ■ Cystic Fibrosis: Research

**Julia Lopez:**

[\[21004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to reinstate funding for the National Institute for Health and Care Research Bioresource project providing infrastructure for the development of novel non-CFTR treatments for cystic fibrosis.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) BioResource worked with the Cystic Fibrosis Trust to establish the Cystic Fibrosis BioResource project, which began recruiting participants in 2021. In October 2024, the NIHR BioResource altered its participant recruitment strategy to focus on two cohorts, and to put greater resources towards its recall strategy.

1,358 participants have been recruited to the Cystic Fibrosis BioResource to date, all of whom will continue to be approached, via recall, to research studies. The NIHR BioResource plans to re-open recruitment to other cohorts, including the cystic fibrosis project, if additional funding can be sourced, for example from industry or charity partners.

The Department does not fund specific disease cohorts within the NIHR BioResource. The Department will be working closely with the NIHR BioResource as they develop their future strategies for participant engagement, recruitment, and retention, to ensure this is appropriate for each cohort and supports the best science.

## ■ Department of Health and Social Care: Media

**John Cooper:**

[\[20488\]](#)

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

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department has spent at total of £840 including VAT on media training for ministers, since 5 July 2024.

## ■ Department of Health and Social Care: Ministers' Private Offices

**Emily Thornberry:**

[\[20177\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 4 November 2024 to Question 9621 on Department of Health and Social Care: Ministers' Private Offices, 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.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department spent £140,000 in 2023 to remove a suite of individual ministerial offices and replace these with a flexible co-working space. The Department spent £321,000 between January and 4 July 2024 to build new ministerial offices.

## ■ Disability Aids: Recycling

**Ian Sollom:** [\[21171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of compulsory walking aid return and reuse schemes for NHS trusts.

**Ian Sollom:** [\[21172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) promote patient awareness of walking aid return and reuse schemes, (b) promote NHS staff awareness of the possibility of establishing those schemes and (c) encourage NHS trusts to set up those schemes.

**Karin Smyth:**

The National Health Service is committed to reducing its environmental impact, and in 2020, published its Delivering a Net Zero NHS strategy, committing to reach net zero by 2045.

The NHS recognises that reusing walking aids, such as crutches, frames, and walking sticks, provides an excellent opportunity for carbon savings due to the high greenhouse gas intensity of aluminium manufacture. As part of its commitment to reach net zero by 2045, NHS England is working to expand walking aid refurbishment and reuse schemes, and has made a range of resources and tools available to support NHS staff starting new schemes or boosting existing schemes. The most recent support for staff being the inclusion of walking aids in the net zero product savings calculator, available to all NHS staff. NHS Supply Chain's Aid for Daily Living framework has also been designed to maximise the return and reuse of such devices with the inclusion of a refurbishment service.

## ■ Drugs

**Alex Easton:** [\[21121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps the Government is taking to review the regulations surrounding the sale of potent medications such as (a) finasteride, (b) dutasteride, and (c) selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors via telehealth companies, in the context of the correlation between these medications and long-term health conditions.

**Karin Smyth:**

There are no current plans to review the legal avenues of online prescribing and the dispensing of prescription-only medications.

Decisions about what medicines to prescribe are made by the doctor or healthcare professional responsible for that part of the patient's care, and prescribers are accountable for their prescribing decisions, irrespective of the forum in which these decisions are made.

Clinicians are expected to work with patients to make decisions about their care and treatment as part of shared decision making, including discussing risks, benefits, and

possible consequences of different options, in line with professional guidelines laid down by the General Medical Council, which are available at the following link:

<https://www.gmc-uk.org/professional-standards/the-professional-standards/good-practice-in-prescribing-and-managing-medicines-and-devices>

## ■ Family Hubs

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [21142]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to expand the reach of Start for Life services to (a) Poole and (b) other local authorities.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Prime Minister's Plan for Change outlined that there will be investment to continue to build up the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. In 2025/26, this investment will fund the 75 local authorities in England with high levels of deprivation that are part of the existing programme.

We will continue to evaluate the programme and assess evidence to support wider rollout in future financial years.

## ■ Family Hubs: Oxfordshire

**Freddie van Mierlo:** [20871]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to extend Start for Life and Family Hub funding to include Oxfordshire.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Prime Minister's Plan for Change outlined that there will be investment to continue to build up the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. In 2025/26, this investment will fund the 75 local authorities in England with high levels of deprivation that are part of the existing programme.

Family Hubs funding is the responsibility of the Department for Education, with Start for Life funding sitting with the Department of Health and Social Care. Due to the challenging fiscal context, we have had to make difficult decisions for 2025/26, and only those areas currently in the scheme will receive funding. We will continue to evaluate the programme and assess evidence to support wider rollout in future financial years.

## ■ Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People Independent Review

**Ben Obese-Jecty:** [19863]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent progress the Government has made on implementing the recommendations of the report by Dr Hilary Cass entitled Independent review of gender identity services for children and young people, published in April 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government and NHS England are fully committed to implementing the recommendations of the Cass Review. My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care updated the House on the progress to implement the Cass Review on 11 December.

In line with NHS England's ambitious two-year implementation plan, three new Children and Young People's Gender Services have opened in the North-West, London, and the South-West. These services operate under a fundamentally different model, where children and young people get the tailored and holistic care they need from multi-disciplinary teams of experts in paediatrics, neurodiversity, and mental health. NHS England remains on schedule to open a Children and Young People's Gender Service in each region of England by 2026.

NHS England has updated its service specification in line with the recommendations from the Cass Review. A referral to the specialist Children and Young People's Gender Service can now be made only by a National Health Service-commissioned, secondary care-level paediatric service, or a children's and young people's mental health service. This will ensure that the needs of these children and young people are met holistically

The Government is supporting NHS England to set up a study into the potential benefits and harms of puberty suppressing hormones as a treatment option for children and young people with gender incongruence.

The study team's application for funding is going through all the usual review and approval stages, including peer review and National Institute for Health and Care Research funding committee consideration, and full ethical approval processes ahead of set up. The trial will be uncapped and aims to begin recruiting participants in early 2025.

As recommended by the Cass Review, NHS England has commissioned a comprehensive study of adult gender services, which is currently underway.

**Health Professions: Ukraine****Caroline Voaden:**[\[21177\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure the recognition of overseas medical qualifications of Ukrainian refugees.

**Karin Smyth:**

The General Medical Council (GMC) is the independent regulator of doctors, physician associates, and anaesthesia associates in the United Kingdom. It is responsible for setting standards that must be met by both domestic and international applicants wishing to be added to their registers to ensure registrants are safe to practise.

A page has been published on GOV.UK specifically for Ukrainian refugees which aims to provide an overview of the processes required by specific healthcare professional regulators, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-in-healthcare-in-the-uk-homes-for-ukraine>.

The GMC provides help with fees associated with registration. Individuals can seek further information from the GMC's website.

It is our ambition that all Ukrainian refugees who are healthcare professionals in their home country and meet the standards required in the UK are able to achieve registration efficiently and use their skills within our National Health Service.

## ■ Health Services

**Maureen Burke:**

[21123]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to simplify health treatments between the UK nations.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

While health is predominantly devolved, the Department holds some reserved functions, and working together across the United Kingdom on health and social care is ingrained in the values of our National Health Service and social care sector.

The Department works collaboratively with the devolved administrations to drive forward our objective of supporting people to lead more independent, healthier lives for longer, and to simplify health treatments between the nations of the UK.

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and I met with health ministers from the devolved administrations on 11 December at the Interministerial Group for Health and Social Care, where we discussed a range of issues and approaches to drive reform and tackle the common challenges in our healthcare systems.

## ■ HIV Infection: Health Services

**Claire Hanna:**

[21067]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions his Department has had with the devolved administrations on development of a new HIV Action Plan.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Health is a devolved matter and it is the responsibility of individual governments to commission comprehensive healthcare based on population need. All four nations, however, are committed to reducing HIV transmissions.

The new HIV Action Plan, which is due to be published in summer 2025, will apply to England only. Government officials in England meet regularly with their counterparts in the devolved governments, to share information and best practice on our response to HIV.

**■ Influenza: Vaccination****Jim Shannon:**[\[20969\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he has taken to encourage uptake of the flu vaccination in 2024.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

This year's national communications campaign to encourage the uptake of essential winter vaccinations, including for influenza and COVID-19, launched on 30 September 2024. The campaign, called Get Winter Strong, targets eligible cohorts where uptake has historically been lower, and has involved a range of national media engagement activities, paid marketing, social media, and stakeholder engagement. The marketing campaign was complemented by NHS England's national call and recall programme, and communications from general practices and pharmacies. The campaign's resources can be viewed on the Campaign Resources Centre, which is available at the following link:

<https://campaignresources.dhsc.gov.uk/campaigns/get-vaccinated-get-winter-strong/>

There is also a comprehensive range of information leaflets, promotional materials, and other resources to inform members of the public and health care professionals, to raise awareness of the programme, and support decisions in relation to consent. This includes leaflets, translated versions, in over 30 languages, simple text, easy read, large print, braille and British Sign Language. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.healthpublications.gov.uk/Home.html>

**■ Mental Health Services: Children and Young People****Dr Simon Opher:**[\[21174\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to commission further waves of the Mental Health of Children and Young People in England report.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Department recognises the importance of the Mental Health of Children and Young People in England Report. We will publish plans in due course.

**■ Mental Health Services: Finance****Dr Neil Hudson:**[\[21068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of (a) the adequacy of funding for mental health services and (b) the potential impact of the level of that funding on waiting lists for such services.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Adequate funding for mental health services is important. While funding for reforms and improvements to mental health services will be decided at the Spending Review,

the Autumn Budget provided an extra £26 million to open new mental health crisis centres, and funding to provide NHS Talking Therapies services for an extra 380,000 patients.

We remain committed to recruiting an additional 8,500 mental health workers to reduce delays and provide faster treatment, which will also help ease pressure on busy mental health services.

### ■ **Neurodiversity: Schools**

**Alex Mayer:** [\[21232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Education on neurodiversity-affirmative approaches in schools.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has regular discussions on a wide range of matters with Cabinet colleagues, including my Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education.

### ■ **NHS: Staff**

**Clive Jones:** [R] [\[21214\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what percentage of the increase in NHS England funding will be dedicated to staffing budgets.

**Karin Smyth:**

Decisions on the allocation of resources for 2025/26 have not yet been finalised. NHS England will continue to prioritise the allocation of funding to support frontline services.

### ■ **NHS: Weather**

**Edward Argar:** [\[20626\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he has met NHS England's (a) National Clinical Director for Urgent and Emergency Care and (b) Deputy Chief Operating Officer on NHS winter preparedness.

**Karin Smyth:**

Ministers in the Department engage with NHS England regularly on a variety of issues, including, but not limited to, winter preparedness.

### ■ **Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy**

**Mike Martin:** [\[20760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a British supplier of Creon.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department has been working with suppliers to address current supply issues with Creon, which is a brand of pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT) used by patients with conditions such as cystic fibrosis and certain cancers, including pancreatic cancer. The supply issues with Creon are impacting countries throughout Europe and have been caused by the limited availability of raw ingredients and manufacturing capacity constraints to produce volumes needed to meet demand. These issues have resulted in knock-on supply disruptions of alternative PERT medications.

The Department is continuing to work with all suppliers of PERT to help resolve the supply issues in the short and longer term by asking that they expedite deliveries, source stock from other markets, and increase production. The Department has also reached out to specialist importers of unlicensed medicine to understand whether they can source unlicensed imports of Creon to help mitigate this supply issue. Where such imports have been sourced, the Department has worked with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to expedite regulatory processes.

There are no plans to make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a British supplier of Creon. However, we have established incentives to encourage United Kingdom life sciences manufacture, including via the Life Science Innovative Manufacturing Fund. The Government has committed up to £520 million to support businesses investing in life science manufacturing projects in the UK, and this would be open to applicants interested in setting up PERT manufacture in the UK.

**■ Prostate Cancer: Screening****Luke Murphy:**[\[20722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of introducing a national prostate-specific antigen screening programme for prostate cancer in the UK.

**Luke Murphy:**[\[20723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that men with risk factors for prostate cancer are encouraged to receive regular prostate-specific antigen tests.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Screening for prostate cancer is currently not recommended by the UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC). This is because of the inaccuracy of the current best test, called the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA). A PSA-based screening programme could harm some men as many would be diagnosed with a cancer that would not have caused them problems during their life. This would lead to additional tests and treatments which can also have harmful side effects, for example sexual dysfunction and incontinence.



The UK NSC regularly reviews its recommendations. The evidence review for prostate cancer screening is underway and will conclude at the end of 2025.

The Prostate Cancer Risk Management Programme (PCRMP) provides general practitioners (GPs) with information and guidance to counsel men who have no symptoms but wish to have a PSA test. It highlights the potential benefits and harms of PSA testing so that men, including those at higher risk, can make an informed decision about whether to have the test. Based on the current evidence, the PCRMP guidance is for GPs not to proactively offer a PSA to men without symptoms, due to high level of inaccuracy of the PSA test.

**Mr Calvin Bailey:** **[21233]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when the UK National Screening Committee's public consultation on prostate cancer screening will open.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) review for prostate cancer screening is currently underway. The evidence review will cover modelling the clinical effectiveness and cost of several approaches to prostate cancer screening. This will include different potential ways of screening the whole population from 40 years of age onwards and targeted screening aimed at groups of people identified as being at higher than average risk, such as black men or men with a family history of cancer.

This work is detailed and complex. Once the modelling and evidence review are complete it will be considered by the UK NSC. Subject to no further revisions being required, the UK NSC plans to hold a public consultation towards the end of 2025.

Further details of the UK NSC's evidence review process is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nsc-evidence-review-process/uk-nsc-evidence-review-process>

## ■ Respiratory Diseases

**Jim Shannon:** **[20968]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people have presented at Accident and Emergency with respiratory concerns in the last six months.

**Karin Smyth:**

The following table shows the number of type 1 and 2 accident and emergency attendances, as well as the percentage and number of those with a chief complaint relating to airway and breathing, in each of the last six months:

MONTH	NUMBER OF TYPE 1 AND 2 ATTENDANCES	PERCENTAGE OF TYPE 1 AND 2 ATTENDANCES WITH A CHIEF COMPLAINT RELATING TO AIRWAY AND/OR BREATHING	CALCULATED NUMBER OF ATTENDANCES WITH A CHIEF COMPLAINT RELATING TO AIRWAY AND/OR BREATHING
November 2024	1,409,807	10.7%	150,245
October 2024	1,473,046	9.4%	137,925
September 2024	1,379,834	8.1%	111,450
August 2024	1,334,803	6.1%	81,990
July 2024	1,453,043	7.2%	105,251
June 2024	1,444,539	7.5%	107,971
Total	8,495,072	8.2%	694,832

Source: data is published by NHS England, and is available at the following link: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ae-waiting-times-and-activity/ae-attendances-and-emergency-admissions-2024-25/> Note: the data for November 2024 is provisional.

## ■ Sipavibart: Licensing

**Alison Bennett:**

**[21239]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has had discussions with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on the licensing process for the drug sipavibart.

**Karin Smyth:**

Department officials regularly discuss a range of topics with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), including progress with specific appraisals, such as for sipavibart.

The NICE started its appraisal of the medicine sipavibart for preventing COVID-19, ahead of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's (MHRA) decision on whether it should be licensed in the United Kingdom, with the aim of publishing guidance as soon as possible, if a licence was granted. At present, the NICE appraisal is suspended as AstraZeneca has been unable to provide an evidence submission as planned. The NICE is currently awaiting notification from AstraZeneca on when it can make a submission, and will update stakeholders in due course.

If sipavibart is recommended as clinically and cost effective by the NICE, the National Health Service in England will be legally required to fund sipavibart for eligible

patients in line with the NICE's recommendations, normally within three months of final guidance being published.

## ■ Smoking: Northern Ireland

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**

[\[20575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has held discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the impact of the Windsor Framework on any proposed UK wide smoking ban in Northern Ireland.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill, introduced on the 5 November 2024, has been developed in partnership with the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, and the Northern Ireland Executive, as well as with other departments across the wider Government. We intend the smoke-free generation policy to apply United Kingdom-wide.

## ■ Spinal Injuries: Health Services

**Gill Furniss:**

[\[19748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure access to (a) comprehensive healthcare guidance and (b) specialised gynaecological support for people with spinal cord injury including (i) management of menstruation, (ii) contraception options and (iii) safe pregnancy care.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 17 December 2024]:* NHS England Specialised Commissioning has a Clinical Reference Group (CRG) for specialised women's services that provides clinical advice and leadership for complex obstetrics and maternity, and complex gynaecology and fertility preservation services. Specialist gynaecological services are commissioned in line with the service specification published by the CRG.

Furthermore, there is a CRG for rehabilitation and complex disability and spinal cord injury services. Specialist services for spinal cord injuries are commissioned in line with the service specification published by the CRG. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence also has guidance on the assessment and early management of spinal cord injuries, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng41>.

Spinal cord injury centres provide life-long services and support, providing ongoing advice and management for those under their care. The service provides advice to general maternity services in managing pregnancy in line with individual need.

We recognise that having a spinal cord injury can create additional challenges for women and girls when it comes to managing their period. Women with spinal cord injuries are provided with menstruation and contraception information and advice during their first inpatient episode of care, and details are included in their discharge plan, which is shared with their general practitioner (GP) or primary care team.

Through the spinal cord injury centres and voluntary sector, women have access to female discussion forums.

Both the Multidisciplinary Association of Spinal Cord Injury Professionals and the Spinal Injuries Association have provided free webinars for staff and those with spinal cord injuries, called Menstruation to Menopause.

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) has published a Women's Health Library, which brings together educational resources and guidelines on women's health from the RCGP, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare. This resource is continually updated to ensure GPs and other primary healthcare professionals have the most up-to-date advice, to provide the best care for their patients.

The Government 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, compassionate care. In the three-year delivery plan for maternity and neonatal services, NHS England set out their ambition that all women should receive personalised, joined-up, high-quality care during pregnancy, birth, and the postnatal period, including access to specialist care when required. Providers should ensure that women with spinal cord injuries have a personalised care and support plan that is tailored to their specific needs and choices and made in conjunction with appropriate specialist input.

## ■ Spinal Injuries: Women

**Gill Furniss:**

**[19749]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase access to (a) preventative care, (b) diagnosis and (c) long term management strategies for women with spinal cord injury who are at increased risk of (i) uterine prolapse and (ii) osteoporosis.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 17 December 2024]:* The Government will prioritise women's health, placing women's equality at the heart of our agenda and ensuring women's health is never again neglected. Symptoms of uterine prolapse can usually be improved with pelvic floor exercises and lifestyle changes, but sometimes medical treatment is needed. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has produced guidance on the management of pelvic organ prolapse in women, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng123>

For patients who need surgery for uterine prolapse, NHS England's Specialised Commissioning Clinical Reference Group (CRG) for specialised women's services has produced a service specification for specialised complex surgery for urinary incontinence and vaginal and uterine prolapse, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/service-specification-specialised-complex-surgery-for-urinary-incontinence-and-vaginal-and-uterine-prolapse-16-years-and-above/>

MSK conditions, such as osteoporosis, disproportionately impact women. One in three women will experience an osteoporotic fracture in their lifetime, compared to one in five men. Women are more at risk of developing osteoporosis due to hormone changes that happen at menopause, and which directly affect bone density.

For all people, including those with spinal injuries, regular exercise and healthy eating are important factors in preventing osteoporosis. Weight-bearing exercise and resistance exercise can improve bone density and help to prevent osteoporosis. Eating foods rich in calcium and vitamin D, or taking vitamin D supplements, is also an important way people can maintain their bone health and reduce their risk of osteoporosis.

The drug Raloxifene is also recommended by the NICE for the primary prevention of osteoporotic fragility fractures in postmenopausal women. In addition, the Government is committed to expanding access to Fracture Liaison Services, a globally recognised secondary fracture prevention model for those with osteoporosis, which can reduce the risk of refracture by up to 40%. With NHS England, we are considering a range of options to identify the most effective ways of improving the quality of, and access to, the Fracture Liaison Service model and the interventions it provides.

To support early diagnosis of osteoporosis, including in those with spinal cord injuries, the Government is investing £1.5 billion of capital funding in 2025/26 for new surgical hubs and diagnostic scanners to build capacity for over 30,000 additional procedures and over 1.25 million diagnostic tests as they come online.

Specialist services for spinal cord injuries are commissioned in line with the service specification published by NHS England's Specialised Commissioning CRG. Spinal cord injury centres provide life-long services and support, providing ongoing advice and management for those under their care. Through the spinal cord injury centres and voluntary sector, women have access to female discussion forums.

**Gill Furniss:**

**[19750]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that women with spinal cord injuries receive adequate (a) breast feeding assistance, (b) breast feeding assistance and (c) other postnatal support.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 17 December 2024]:* The Government will prioritise women's health, placing women's equality at the heart of our agenda and ensuring women's health is never again neglected. Spinal cord injury centres provide life-long services and support, providing ongoing advice and management for those under their care. They provide advice to general maternity services in managing pregnancy in line with

individual need, as well as information, advice, and support to women regarding the practical elements of breast feeding, as required.

The Three-Year Delivery plan for Maternity and Neonatal services sets out the vision for women to experience personalised, joined-up, high-quality care right through to the postnatal period with handover to health visiting services and general practices (GPs). According to NHS England guidance, all women who have given birth should be offered a check-up with their GP six to eight weeks after giving birth. The check-up will cover a range of topics such as mental health, physical recovery, breastfeeding, and support with family planning. Women should be provided with practical support and information that reflects how they choose to feed their babies. Providers should ensure that, for women with spinal cord injuries, care is tailored to their individual needs.

NHS England is also rolling out perinatal pelvic health services to reduce rates of perineal tears, and maternal mental health services to provide additional mental health support and improve outcomes for women.

The Department is working closely with 75 local authorities across England, including Sheffield, to improve their infant feeding services, including breastfeeding support, through the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. These services are helping families to access face-to-face and virtual infant feeding support whenever they need it, and in a location that suits them. This could be at home, in their family hub, or in a hospital setting.

At a national level, families across the United Kingdom can access round-the-clock support and advice on breastfeeding through the National Breastfeeding Helpline.

## ■ Surgical Mesh Implants

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**

[\[20165\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he expects the retrospective audit of all pelvic floor surgery completed between 2006 and 2011 to be published by NHS England.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department accepted the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review's recommendation to undertake a selective retrospective audit of a defined cohort of women who have undergone mesh procedures. NHS Digital, now NHS England, has audited all pelvic floor surgeries completed between 2006 and 2011 to generate a historical baseline of outcomes by procedure type, and to support further research and analysis. This audit was conducted using initial procedures, and re-operations and follow up procedures recorded within Hospital Episode Statistics data. The results are currently undergoing peer review and will be published by NHS England at the earliest opportunity.

## ■ Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme

**Charlotte Nichols:**

[21050]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding has been allocated to the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

For 2024/2025, the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme was allocated a budget of £40 million. This covers funding for payment awards, and administration costs associated with assessing the claims and managing the scheme.

## HOME OFFICE

### ■ Motor Vehicles: Theft

**Sir John Hayes:**

[20916]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate her Department has made of the number of vehicles stolen in (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire in each of the last three years.

**Sir John Hayes:**

[20917]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many (a) reports of and (b) convictions for shoplifting there were in (i) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (ii) Lincolnshire in each of the last three years.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Home Office collects and publishes information on the number of notifiable offences, including motor vehicle theft and shoplifting offences, recorded by the police in England and Wales, at the Police Force Area level and the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Area level. This information is published on a quarterly basis, and can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables>

The Home Office does not collect information at the Parliamentary Constituency level.

## HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### ■ Almshouses: Affordable Housing

**Neil Coyle:**

[20627]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to allow almshouses to secure funding as affordable housing providers.

**Neil Coyle:** [\[20628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to ensure almshouse providers who do not have 1,000 homes but are willing to become registered social landlords are able to do so.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

As part of the recent consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, the government sought views on whether changes were needed to the definition of 'affordable housing for rent' to make it easier for organisations that are not Registered Providers, including almshouses, to develop new affordable homes.

While the government are committed to making it easier for almshouses to develop new affordable homes, we ultimately decided against extending the definition to capture almshouses for the reasons set out in our response to the consultation which can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

Informed by the points raised in the consultation, the government will actively explore options in future changes to national policy related to decision making.

For those landlords who wish to register with the Regulator of Social Housing, there is no bar to registration because of size. Registered providers of social housing must meet standards that ensure tenants live in homes that are good quality and well-maintained and that landlords are well-managed and remain financially viable. The Regulator is operationally independent and has designed a registration process that seeks to ensure providers are able to meet its standards once registered.

## ■ Housing and Population

**Sir John Hayes:** [\[20000\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has had recent discussions with the Migration Advisory Committee on (a) population growth projections and (b) her Department's housebuilding targets.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

MHCLG ministers have had no recent discussions with the Migration Advisory Committee about the government's ambitious milestone of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes in England this parliament.

## ■ Housing: Construction

**Rupert Lowe:** [\[19935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an estimate of the proportion of houses planned to be built during this Parliament that will home new arrivals to this country.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

My Department does not collect data on the nationalities of people buying homes for private sale on the open market.



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.

## ■ Housing: Migrants

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[20655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of higher levels of immigration on (a) house prices and (b) rental costs.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government is determined to address the dire inheritance left by its predecessor and restore order to the asylum and immigration systems, delivering lower net migration.

Boosting the supply of homes of all tenures must be at the heart of any strategy to improve housing affordability which is why 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.

The Renters' Rights Bill will empower private rented sector tenants to challenge unreasonable within-tenancy rent increases.

## ■ Local Plans: Horsham

**John Milne:**

[\[20812\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if (a) she and (b) the Minister for Housing and Planning will meet the hon. Member for Horsham to discuss Horsham's Local Plan, the hearing process and water neutrality.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Due to the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in the planning system, it would not be appropriate for me to discuss the details of the Horsham Local Plan and its progress through examination. However, I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss general principles in relation to local development plans and water neutrality and I have asked my officials to contact his constituency office with a view to finding a mutually convenient date and time.

## ■ Mayors

**Mr Clive Betts:**

[\[20571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to allow elected Mayors outside London to appoint Deputies in the same way as the Mayor of London.

**Jim McMahon:**

The English Devolution White Paper sets out that the government will legislate so that Mayors are able to appoint and remunerate 'Commissioners' who would be able to support the delivery of key functions with portfolios to be determined by Mayors.

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Expenditure****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[18961\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2024 to Question 16736 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Expenditure, if she will list the activities previously undertaken by her Department that have been (a) curtailed, (b) suspended and (c) discontinued, in the context of the efficiency savings of £5 million.

**Alex Norris:**

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [16736](#) on 6 December 2024. Departmental budgets are currently under review and will be announced by His Majesty's Treasury in due course.

**Planning: Powers****Mr Clive Betts:**[\[20570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what differentiating powers she plans to provide to (a) unitary authorities and (b) mayors in (i) considering individual planning applications and (ii) developing local and spatial plans.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The English Devolution Bill will create in law the concept of a strategic authority, which will include all combined authorities and combined county authorities, both mayoral and non-mayoral, as well as the Greater London Authority.

The Bill will place a duty on all strategic authorities to produce a spatial development strategy. Strategic authorities with mayors will also receive development management powers like those enjoyed by the Mayor of London. This will include powers to 'call in' and determine applications of potential strategic importance and make Mayoral Development Orders.

Local authorities, including unitary authorities, will remain the local planning authorities for their areas and will continue to have a duty to produce a local plan and to determine planning applications.

The establishment of strategic authorities across England will be a gradual process. Our aim is to have a universal system of strategic planning in place by 2030, so the Planning & Infrastructure Bill will place a duty on all combined authorities and combined county authorities, both mayoral and non-mayoral, to produce a spatial development strategy.

Outside of these areas county councils and unitary authorities will also be required to produce a spatial development strategy, either individually or in defined groupings. In

some instances, they may also be grouped with a non-mayoral combined authority or combined county authority. The Mayor of London will continue to produce a spatial development strategy for the capital.

The precise geographical extent of these groupings is yet to be determined, but the government believes that they should be based on the sensible geography criteria set out for agreeing devolution deals in the English Devolution White Paper, in anticipation of these groupings forming the basis for future strategic authorities.

## ■ Radicalism

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[20654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has contributed to the extremism review.

**Alex Norris:**

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [15694](#) on 2 December 2024. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has supported the rapid review ordered by the Home Secretary, and the government will set out its approach to countering extremism in due course.

## ■ UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Walsall

**Sarah Coombes:** [\[20816\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of funding provided by her Department to Steps to Work in Walsall through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

**Alex Norris:**

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is committed to evaluating the impacts and effectiveness of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The [UKSPF evaluation strategy](#) sets out the approach to evaluation. The department has committed to publish evaluation findings on an ongoing basis as they are available.

## JUSTICE

### ■ Courts

**Nick Timothy:** [\[21092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the size of the current court case backlog is in England and Wales.

**Sarah Sackman:**

We publish court open caseloads across the criminal court, family court, and tribunals jurisdictions in the following publications:

[Criminal court statistics quarterly: July to September 2024 - GOV.UK.](#)

[HMCTS management information - September 2024 - GOV.UK.](#)

[Tribunals statistics quarterly: July to September 2024 - GOV.UK.](#)

■ **Domestic Abuse: Family Proceedings**

**Munira Wilson:** [\[21025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of the recommendations by Resolution in its report entitled Domestic Abuse in Financial Remedy Proceedings, published in October 2024.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

Tackling violence against women and girls is a top priority for this Government, which includes addressing issues of domestic and economic abuse in financial remedy proceedings. The Government will consider Resolution's recommendations alongside the Law Commission's recently published scoping report on financial remedies.

■ **Domestic Abuse: Victim Support Schemes**

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[21176\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to help protect funding streams for specialist domestic abuse services.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

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

As such, I have decided to protect VAWG victims' spending in the Department by maintaining the same levels of funding for domestic abuse and sexual violence support for the next financial year (2025/26). Furthermore, in addition to providing a 'core' grant for services to support victims of all crime, I am providing ringfenced funding for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to commission domestic abuse and sexual violence support services, according to local need.

■ **Electronic Tagging**

**Ann Davies:** [\[20907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she has made an assessment of the adequacy of the sizing of electronic monitoring equipment.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The Ministry of Justice set out its requirements relating to Electronic Monitoring devices as part of a procurement process that saw contracts awarded in October 2023 for the provision of Electronic Monitoring services. The Secretary of State is satisfied that the devices in use meet the standards required whilst acknowledging there will be circumstances when Electronic Monitoring is not a viable option.

To maintain the integrity of the equipment, including anti-tamper measures, and taking account of the necessarily robust nature of the equipment, there is a minimum

strap size for the secure and safe fitting of monitoring devices. Field staff carry a range of strap sizes with them when conducting installation visits.

Ministry of Justice staff continue to work with suppliers to develop innovations and solutions in both technology and processes to expand the use of Electronic Monitoring.

## ■ Injunctions

**Mr Richard Holden:**

[\[21058\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of the reform of super-injunctions; and whether she has had recent discussions with 10 Downing Street on the matter.

**Sarah Sackman:**

There are no plans to reform the law. The courts determine individual applications for interim injunctions to restrain publication of confidential information (and the existence of the injunction) on the merits of each case, and in accordance with the law and specific Practice Guidance.

The Practice Guidance on Interim Non-Disclosure Orders was issued by the then Master of the Rolls as part of the implementation of the Superinjunctions Committee's recommendations, which he chaired and whose final report was published in 2011. It provides detailed guidance on the law, principle of open justice and model court orders.

The Ministry of Justice has had no recent discussions with the Prime Minister's Office on this matter.

## ■ Matrimonial Proceedings and Separation

**Munira Wilson:**

[\[21026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what her planned timescale is for responding to the Law Commission's scoping report on Financial remedies on divorce and dissolution, published on 18 December 2024.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The Government is grateful to the Law Commission for its work on this important and complex area. We will carefully consider the details and will provide a response in due course.

## ■ Ministry of Justice: Equality

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[21141\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of officials in her Department were hired via positive action schemes in the last financial year.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The Ministry of Justice works within the Civil Service Recruitment Principles, as regulated by the Civil Service Commission, to recruit using a fair and open process

and appoint on merit. The Department will only limit a campaign to a specific group as a form of positive action as a proportionate response to achieve a legitimate aim as defined in section 159 of the Equality Act 2010.

The Ministry of Justice does not currently utilise any positive action schemes, as defined by the Equality Act, to support the hiring of those with protected characteristics.

The Civil Service is committed to a diverse workforce and culture of openness and inclusivity - not as ends in themselves but as means of delivering better outcomes to the citizens we serve.

The Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-25 Promoting Fairness and Performance, published in February 2022, is positioned as an essential lever to deliver a Modern Civil Service, where our values are to serve with integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality; driving our vision to be a skilled, innovative and ambitious Civil Service equipped for the future. This strategy sets out a broader definition of diversity, to include geographical, social and career backgrounds alongside the protected groups.

As set out in the Civil Service People Plan 2024 - 2027, we are committed to ensuring we attract, develop and retain talented people from a diverse range of backgrounds, to create a modern Civil Service, now and for the future.

## ■ Personal Independence Payment

**Catherine Fookes:**

**[21216]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessments her Department has made of the adequacy of Personal Independence Payment tribunal wait times; and what steps she is taking to reduce them.

**Sarah Sackman:**

We are working to reduce the outstanding caseload in the Social Entitlement Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal. Reducing the outstanding caseload is the key measure to bringing down the waiting times for tribunal hearings.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service continues to invest in improving tribunal productivity through the recruitment of additional Judges, deployment of Legal Officers to actively manage cases, the development of modern case management systems and the use of remote hearing technology as appropriate. If an expedited hearing is requested, a Judge or Legal Officer will make a decision on that issue, taking all the circumstances into account.

Data on Tribunals performance is published by the Ministry of Justice on a quarterly basis. Receipts, disposals and the outstanding caseload for individual Chambers in the First-tier Tribunal and Upper Tribunal, the Employment Tribunal and the Employment Appeal Tribunal can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics>.

## ■ Prisons: Norfolk

**Clive Lewis:**

[\[20988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many times prisons in Norfolk operated an (a) amber and (b) red regime in each the last 10 years.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

As this information demonstrates, the new Government inherited a criminal justice system in crisis, with prisons on the point of collapse.

All public sector prisons have systems in place for the day-to-day management of staff resources and regime delivery, to ensure that regimes are safe, decent, secure, resilient and sustainable.

The recorded information relating to regimes in prisons in Norfolk is available from September 2022 onwards, and is as follows:

Red Regime – None

Amber/Red – 151 times

Green/Amber – 450 times.

## ■ Tribunals

**Dr Ben Spencer:**

[\[20713\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to reduce waiting times for Tribunal cases to be heard for (a) Social Security and Child Support, (b) Immigration and Asylum and (c) SEN appeals.

**Sarah Sackman:**

We are working to reduce the outstanding caseload in the Social Entitlement Chamber, the Immigration and Asylum Chamber and the Health, Education and Social Care Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal. Reducing outstanding caseloads is the key measure to bringing down the waiting times for tribunal hearings.

HMCTS continues to invest in improving tribunal productivity through the recruitment of additional Judges, deployment of Legal Officers to actively manage cases, the development of modern case management systems and the use of remote hearing technology as appropriate. If an expedited hearing is requested, a Judge or Legal Officer will make a decision on that issue, taking all the circumstances into account.

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

This Government wants a justice system that is effective, efficient, and sustainable, and this funding boost is an important step towards that.

Data on Tribunals performance is published by the Ministry of Justice on a quarterly basis. Receipts, disposals and the outstanding caseload for individual Chambers in the First-tier Tribunal and Upper Tribunal, the Employment Tribunal and the Employment Appeal Tribunal can be found at the link below:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics.](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics)

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### ■ Intertrade UK

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[20573\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the Answer of 12 November 2024 to Question 12917 on InterTrade UK, when he plans to announce the (a) remaining membership appointees and (b) first and subsequent meetings of InterTrade UK.

**Hilary Benn:**

Preparatory work necessary to establish Intertrade UK is ongoing. I expect to be in a position to announce the membership of the body and the date of the first meeting at the earliest opportunity in the New Year.

### ■ Teachers: Northern Ireland

**Jim Shannon:** [\[20965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he has had discussions with the Northern Ireland Executive on trends in the level of teachers pay in Northern Ireland.

**Hilary Benn:**

It is for the Northern Ireland Department of Education to set pay policy for teachers.

This Government has provided a record £18.2bn funding settlement for 2025-26 to the Northern Ireland Executive. This represents a £1.5bn increase and the largest settlement in real terms spending in the history of devolution. It is for the Northern Ireland Executive to use this money effectively and deliver good public services for the people of Northern Ireland.

## SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

### ■ UK Research and Innovation: Finance

**Chi Onwurah:** [\[20612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to page 69 of the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, how much funding will be available to UK Research and Innovation to extend regional partnerships.



**Feryal Clark:**

Our ambition through the innovation commitments announced in the English Devolution White Paper is to generate innovation-led growth across the country, and help places make stronger contributions to a thriving national innovation ecosystem. Through UK Research and Innovation, we will support more local leaders, working in partnership with businesses and universities, to unlock their regions' innovation potential.

The Spending Review settlement set out the overall R&D budget for my department, which is £13.9 billion for 2025/26. Further details of how this funding will be allocated will be announced in due course, and the next phase of the spending review will confirm multi-year budgets for innovation funding.

**TRANSPORT****■ Bus Services: Company Liquidations****Alex Mayer:**[\[21227\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an estimate of recent trends in the number of coach companies that have ceased trading.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Department recognises the importance of good transport links and this Government aims to improve connections between towns and cities across the country. We recognise the important role the coach sector can play in making these connections across the country for education, business and leisure travel.

Coaches are a deregulated sector, so commercial decisions, such as whether to cease trading, are a matter for the operators concerned. The Department does not have the data to estimate the number of coach companies that have ceased trading. We are, however, working with the sector to hear their concerns and address the challenges they face.

**■ Bus Services: Standards****Alex Mayer:**[\[21230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department issues guidance to local authorities on running good-quality bus stops.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Department for Transport has published Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/24 Bus User Priority which provides guidance on good practice in the design of bus stops. The Department has also published guidance to Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) and bus operators on developing Bus Service Improvement Plans. This guidance encourages all LTAs to set priorities for improving their bus stops, stations and interchanges.

On 17th December 2024, the Government introduced a new Bus Services Bill that will give local leaders the freedom to take decisions to deliver their local transport priorities and ensure networks meet the needs of the communities who rely on them. The Bill will provide powers for the Secretary of State to issue statutory guidance on the inclusivity of the design of bus and coach stations and stops, and to require authorities commissioning work to provide new or upgrade existing facilities to have due regard to this guidance.

### ■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[20964\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of access to public electric vehicle charging points.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

As of 1 December 2024, the Government and industry have supported the installation of over 72,271 publicly available charging devices.

The Government is committed to accelerating the roll-out of charging infrastructure so that everyone, no matter where they live or work, can make the transition to an electric vehicle. Through the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund almost £400m government funding is being provided to local authorities in England to support the delivery of over 100,000 public chargepoints. These chargepoints will transform the public charging network to ensure that everyone can access and charge their electric vehicle.

### ■ Motor Vehicles: Exhaust Emissions

**Greg Smith:**

[\[21028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will conduct modelling on the potential impact of increases in the use of (a) low carbon-emitting and (b) synthetic fuels by vehicles in the logistics sector on carbon emissions.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Low carbon fuels, including synthetics, are helping decarbonise the logistics sector and are supported by the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation. Any future policy decisions on the support for low carbon fuels in transport will be developed and informed by modelling potential impacts.

In the logistics sector, delivering net zero will require the adoption of zero emission vehicles and this is why we are turbocharging the rollout of zero emission HGVs and their charging and fuelling infrastructure through our Zero Emission HGV and Infrastructure Demonstrator programme.

The logistics sector is vital to drive economic growth and achieve net zero and we are committed to working with the sector to achieve these aims.

## ■ Parking: Parents

**Dan Tomlinson:**

[\[21173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of introducing regulations similar to disabled parking on parent and child parking spaces.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department for Transport has no current plans to regulate the use of parent and child parking spaces, which typically operate in privately owned car parks such as supermarkets.

The Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019, for which the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has responsibility, 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.

## ■ Public Transport: Disability

**Matt Bishop:**

[\[21109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help improve accessibility for disabled passengers on public transport in Forest of Dean constituency.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The government is committed to improving public transport services so they are more inclusive and enable disabled people to travel safely, confidently and with dignity. On 1st October 2024, the first phase of the Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023 came into force, meaning that newer vehicles providing local services must provide audible and visible information on stops, destinations and diversions. The majority of services will need to comply by October 2026.

On 17th December, the government introduced a new Bus Services Bill that will give local leaders the freedom to take decisions to deliver their local transport priorities and ensure networks meet the needs of the communities who rely on them, including for disabled people. The Bill includes measures which will make bus travel more accessible and inclusive.

Ensuring the rail network is also accessible is at the heart of our passenger-focused approach to improving rail services. We know that the experience for disabled people when traveling by rail too often falls short of what is expected and what passengers deserve. We are committed to improving the experience for disabled passengers and have committed to publishing an accessibility roadmap to explain the actions we are taking to improve accessibility ahead of Great British Rail.

**■ Roads: Birmingham****Laurence Turner:** [\[20774\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what payments her Department has made to Birmingham City Council in support of the Birmingham roads PFI contract in each financial year from 2020-21 to 2024-25; and what was the total value of payments to the primary contractor under that contract in each of those years.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department has paid Birmingham City Council (BCC) a little over £50 million a year, broken down into quarterly payments of £12.6 million, from 2020-21 to 2024-25 in support of its PFI contract for its local highways. Payments from the council to its primary contractor are a matter for BCC.

**■ Rolling Stock: Manufacturing Industries****Mr Paul Kohler:** [\[21219\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the lack of clarity on the northern leg of HS2 on the the train manufacturing industry in the UK.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department for Transport is developing a Rolling Stock Strategy. This will align with the wider objectives of the industry in ending the current variability in production rates and ensuring a stable pipeline of work for the rolling stock supply chain.

Once established, Great British Railways will take the strategy forward providing a long-term approach to future rolling stock needs and helping to secure better value from the private rolling stock market.

**TREASURY****■ Business Rates: Greater London****John Glen:** [\[20948\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will publish a list of the number of hereditaments in each local authority in Greater London categorised by Special Category Code (a) 303 Bars (Valued on Floor Space), (b) 199 Night Clubs and Discotheques and (c) 226 Public Houses/Pub Restaurants (National Scheme) in each of the last 10 years.

**James Murray:**

As part of its official statistics, the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) publishes the number of hereditaments by Special Category Code and local authority. This is published for England and Wales between 2020 and 2024 within the stock of non-domestic properties collection: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/non-domestic-rating-stock-of-properties-collection](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/non-domestic-rating-stock-of-properties-collection).

The requested information can be found under 'Stock SCat Tables by region, county, local authority district and rateable value band'.

Prior to 2020, the official statistics did not separate the data at local authority level. There are no current plans to revisit previous publications of official statistics.

## ■ Digital Technology: Taxation

**James Wild:**

[\[21048\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much tax revenue the Digital Services Tax has raised since 2020.

**James Murray:**

The requested information is available in the statistics table published at the following link <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hmrc-tax-and-nics-receipts-for-the-uk>

The information can be found in column S of Table 2. For ease, the relevant data has been pasted below:

TAX YEAR	TAX RECEIPTS, £M
2021/22	380
2022/23	567
2023/24	678

## ■ Productivity

**James Wild:**

[\[21042\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to help improve (a) public and (b) private sector productivity.

**James Murray:**

The government's growth mission is dedicated to boosting productivity growth nationwide. After fourteen years of weak productivity growth, we are reforming the economy to increase productivity in both the public and private sectors.

Public sector productivity rates in June 2024 were 8.5% below pre-pandemic levels — this is not sustainable. We have taken decisive action in the Autumn Budget to address this issue. Government departments are now required to meet a 2% target for productivity, efficiency, and savings as part of Phase 1 of the Spending Review, covering 2025-26. For the NHS, our Autumn Budget included over £2 billion of investment in technology to improve productivity and patient access, alongside over £1 billion to tackle the maintenance backlog.

We have introduced significant to improve private sector productivity. As part of the Get Britain Working package, the government is integrating health, employment, and skills services in eight trailblazer areas to help out of work individuals to rejoin the

workforce. The government will invest £40 million to transform the Apprenticeship Levy into a more flexible Growth and Skills Levy to deliver new foundation apprenticeships and shorter apprenticeships. Skills England will provide a comprehensive national overview of skills gaps and strategies to address them.

The government is also protecting record levels of R&D investment, committing over £20.4bn for R&D in 2025/26 to turn cutting-edge innovation into real-world productivity gains.

### ■ **Royal Mint: Fraud**

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**

[\[20572\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2024 to Question 17516 on Royal Mint: Fraud, whether any of the fraudulent transactions were traceable to (a) people and (b) agencies based outside the United Kingdom.

**Tulip Siddiq:**

The Royal Mint engaged the relevant law enforcement agencies as part of the fraud incident detailed in their Annual Report and Accounts for 2022-23. These investigations are confidential and as such, we cannot comment on whether the transactions were traceable or the location of the perpetrators of the fraud.

## WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

### ■ **Gender Recognition: Germany**

**Claire Coutinho:**

[\[20748\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will remove Germany from the Gender Recognition Certificate: list of approved countries and territories.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The Gender Recognition (Approved Countries and Territories and Saving Provision) Order 2023 was approved by Parliament in April 2024, the first update to the list of approved countries in 13 years.

We are committed to more regularly updating the list of approved countries and territories when applying for gender recognition in the UK. We continue to work with our counterparts in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to ensure that any changes internationally are monitored and noted for future updates.

### ■ **Unpaid Work: Discrimination**

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[20911\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will take steps to ensure that employers offering internship programmes do not discriminate against applicants based on (a) sex, (b) ethnicity and (c) sexual orientation.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

Part 5 of the Equality Act 2010 provides protection against direct and indirect discrimination in employment and makes it unlawful for an employer or a recruitment agency to discriminate against an employee or someone applying for employment because of a protected characteristic.

Interns with, or applying for, a contract of employment that falls within the definition of “employment” are covered by the Equality Act 2010’s protections against discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, amongst other protected characteristics.

There are some circumstances in which employers may provide additional help to groups of people who share a protected characteristic, including interns. This is permitted by the positive action provisions in the Equality Act 2010. Whether positive action is permitted will depend on whether the test in those provisions is met.

Government guidance to help employers understand the difference between positive action and positive discrimination can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/positive-action-in-the-workplace-guidance-for-employers>. The Equality and Human Rights Commission’s Code of Practice provides employers with support and can be found at:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/equality/equality-act-2010/codes-practice/employment-code-practice-0>.

**WORK AND PENSIONS****■ Budgeting Loans****Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:****[20624]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much her Department spent on Budgeting Loans (a) overall and (b) in each category in the 2023-24 financial year.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The total spent on Budgeting Loan awards in the 2023/24 financial year was £260.6 million.

A category breakdown for budgeting loans will be published in due course in the 2023/24 Social Fund annual report. This will include the breakdowns by regions, claimant group, family composition and reason for refusal by application group.

Please see for more information the 2023/24 Social Fund Annual Accounts- [Social Fund Account 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

And previous Social Fund Annual reports- [Social Fund accounts and reports - GOV.UK](#)

## ■ Carer's Allowance: Income

**Jessica Toale:**

[\[21244\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason her Department has set a limit for the amount of income that someone in receipt of carer's allowance can earn.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The primary purpose of Carer's Allowance is to provide a measure of financial support to those whose ability to work is constrained by providing care for someone else for at least thirty-five hours per week. The eligibility conditions for the benefit use income as a proxy for ability to work.

We know that some carers are keen to maintain contact with the labour market, so we want to encourage carers to combine some paid work with their caring duties wherever possible.

This is why the Government has announced that from April 2025 the weekly Carer's Allowance earnings limit will be pegged to the level of 16 hours work at the National Living Wage (NLW) and in future it will increase when the NLW increases. This means that unpaid carers will be able to earn up to £196 per week net earnings and still receive Carer's Allowance compared to £151 now.

## ■ Department for Work and Pensions: Fraud and Maladministration

**Helen Whately:**

[\[20686\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question 16391 on Department for Work and Pensions: Fraud and Maladministration, what progress she has made on the (a) recruitment and (b) training of additional staff in fraud and error.

**Andrew Western:**

Funding for 3,000 new roles within the department's Counter Fraud, Compliance and Debt (CFCD) division, allocated in the Government's Spending Review, will take effect from April 2025. CFCD has also secured an uplift in staffing costs for Q4 of the financial year and will recruit an additional 300 FTE to build momentum heading into Q1. This is in addition to CFCD reaching its upper headcount limit of 9,923 Full Time Equivalent for 2024/25. Training resources and learning journeys for all new starters are robust and clearly defined. Most of our new starters will also align and be assured against Government Counter Fraud Profession (GCFP) cross-gov counter-fraud standards.

## ■ Employment

**Helen Whately:**

[\[20687\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the timeframe is for the 80 per cent employment rate target.



**Alison McGovern:**

The trend of economic inactivity is a long-term challenge; the UK is the only country in the G7 with an inactivity rate higher than before the pandemic. We want to raise productivity and improve the quality of work to help more people get into and on in work. Achieving an 80% employment rate would mean over two million more people in work across the UK and would place the UK among the highest performing countries in the world.

The Get Britain Working White Paper set out that the Labour Market Advisory Board will support our work on the exact definition and measurement of our ambitions on employment and labour force participation. The timeframe for this long-term ambition will be determined following this work.

**Local Housing Allowance****Helen Maguire:**[\[21111\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of not increasing Local Housing Allowance rates in 2025-2026 on families.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The decision to maintain Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates at current levels for 2025/26 considered a range of factors such as, rental data, the impacts of LHA rates, the Government's missions and wider fiscal context and the fact that rates were increased in April.

We are also investing £1bn in funding for both the Household Support Fund (HSF) and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) (including Barnett impacts) for 2025/26 and will be ensuring DHP funding is maintained at current levels. DHPs are available from local authorities for those unable to meet a shortfall in their rent.

We are publishing a Long-Term Housing Strategy in the Spring, to reform the housing market so that it works better for communities, to build 1.5 million high-quality homes, and deliver the biggest increase in affordable housing for a generation, this includes an extra £500m in new funding for the Affordable Homes Programme.

**Personal Independence Payment: Appeals****Catherine Fookes:**[\[21217\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what support is available to people waiting for a Personal Independence Payment tribunal.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 4 November 2024 to Question [11735](#).

**■ Social Security Benefits: Leicester****Shivani Raja:**[\[21071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of proposed changes to disability benefits on vulnerable individuals in Leicester; and what steps she will be taking to ensure those most in need are adequately supported during this period of fiscal adjustment.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

We want to change the system of health and disability benefits across Great Britain to enable people better to enter and remain in work, and to respond to the complex and fluctuating nature of the health conditions many people live with today.

We will bring forward a Green Paper in the spring. We will listen to and engage with disabled people as we develop proposals for reform in this area and across the employment support system. No decisions have yet been made.

To support those most in need, the Government has provided funding of £742 million to extend the Household Support Fund in England by a further year, from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2026. This will ensure low-income households can continue to access support towards the cost of essentials, such as food, energy and water.

Local Authorities also have the discretion to design their own local schemes within the parameters of the guidance and grant determination for the fund. We encourage Authorities to consider how they may support a wide range of low-income households in need, including households with disabled people.

## MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

### WORK AND PENSIONS

#### ■ Carers: Bedfordshire

**Blake Stephenson:**

[\[16289\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if her Department will make an assessment of the adequacy of financial support available to unpaid carers in Bedfordshire.

**An error has been identified in the written answer given on 2 December 2024. The correct answer should have been:**

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

Unpaid carers play a vital role in supporting elderly or disabled relatives or friends. Sometimes unpaid carers will need to turn to the benefit system for financial support, so it is right that we keep Carer's Allowance under review, to see if it is meeting its objectives, and giving unpaid carers the help and support they need and deserve.

Unpaid carers may be able to receive financial and/or employment support from the department depending on their circumstances. Carer's Allowance provides a measure of financial support and recognition for people who are not able to work full time due to their caring responsibilities. The rate of Carer's Allowance is £81.90 a week in 2024/25, and from April 2025 this will increase by 1.7% to £83.30 a week ~~net of allowable expenses.~~

Spending on Carer's Allowance in the mid-Bedfordshire parliamentary constituency in 2023/4 was £3.6 million. 912 people in mid-Bedfordshire were in receipt of Carer's Allowance in May '24.

In addition to Carer's Allowance, carers on low incomes can claim income-related benefits, such as Universal Credit and Pension Credit. These benefits can be paid to carers at a higher rate than those without caring responsibilities through the carer element and the additional amount for carers respectively. Currently, the Universal Credit carer element is £198.31 per monthly assessment period. The additional amount for a carer in Pension Credit is £45.60 a week. These additional amounts are worth around £2400 a year.

## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### DEFENCE

#### ■ Contingency Fund Advance: Annington Homes

**Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):**

[\[HCWS350\]](#)

Further to my statement HCWS323 on 17 December 2024 on developments in military housing, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has a new cash requirement to fund the transaction to purchase 36,347 properties from Annington Property Ltd.

The deal represents a decisive break with the failed approach of the past and reverses a privatisation that currently costs the MOD £230 million a year in rent. It offers excellent value for money, as well as opening up the “once in a generation” opportunity for a new military housing strategy which will provide service families with a better standard of accommodation while contributing to wider Government objectives on house building and growth.

The agreed purchase price is nearly £6 billion however eliminating the liabilities associated with the leases creates budgetary headroom to partially fund this purchase, meaning that the public expenditure impact of this measure, and the impact on public sector net debt, is confined to £1.7 billion. The ONS have agreed this fiscal impact approach. Funding for the deal is being provided by HMT. The Treasury scored additional funding to the Reserve at Autumn Budget for this purpose.

Parliamentary approval for additional capital of £1,698,300,000 for this new expenditure and additional cash of £4,296,200,000 will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for the MOD. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £5,994,500,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

This is funding for a one-off financial transaction, and therefore does not reflect the MOD’s cash management position.

### ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

#### ■ Neonicotinoid pesticides

**Minister for Water and Flooding (Emma Hardy):**

[\[HCWS352\]](#)

The UK Government is setting out its plans to deliver its commitment to end the use in England of toxic neonicotinoid pesticides that threaten vital pollinators.

Bees and other insects are critical pollinators. They play a key role in food production, with the economic benefits of pollination to crop production in the UK estimated at £500 million each year. Pollinators also support the wider environment and the beauty of our rural and urban spaces. Pollinators face many pressures - including loss of habitat, pests and pathogens and climate change - and their numbers and diversity have declined as a result. It is our responsibility to act now to reverse this trend.

One of the pressures on pollinators is the use of certain pesticides. Three specific neonicotinoid pesticides (clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam) have already been removed from general use because of evidence that their use can harm pollinators. Even at doses that are not directly fatal to bees they can cause cognitive problems, impacting foraging abilities and the productivity of colonies.

Despite this, the last Government continued to allow the use of a neonicotinoid (thiamethoxam) seed treatment on sugar beet crops in England under emergency authorisation arrangements. Emergency authorisations are temporary measures intended to protect crops in exceptional circumstances. We do not consider that they should be used to perpetuate the use of neonicotinoids that can have a long-term effect on biodiversity.

We will break free from this cycle. We will identify and assess potential changes to legislation that would stop the use of emergency authorisations for products containing clothianidin, imidacloprid or thiamethoxam.

We will also review and update the approach to decisions on applications for emergency authorisations in England. The revised approach will be set out in published guidance which will clearly state how future decisions on emergency authorisation will take full account of the importance of pollinators and of the risks they may face if emergency authorisation is granted.

These commitments are made by the UK Government in respect of the position in England only, because pesticide policy and regulation is devolved. A common approach to delivering on this issue is, however, highly desirable. The UK Government will therefore look to work with the devolved Governments in Northern Ireland (recognising the provisions of the Windsor Framework), Scotland and Wales to seek a consistent way forward across the UK.

These measures come ahead of the publication of a new UK National Action Plan (NAP), which will set how pesticides can be used sustainably. The Government is committed to supporting farmers to protect their crops in more sustainable ways. This includes funding for research into precision breeding for virus-resistant varieties of sugar beet.

The plans are outlined in more detail in a document entitled "A new approach to the use of certain neonicotinoids on crops grown in England" which the Government is placing today in the House libraries. This document is also available on GOV.UK.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ General practice investment and reform package 2025-26

**Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting):**

[\[HCWS351\]](#)

General practice is the cornerstone of our national health service, providing essential care to communities day in, day out, managing pressures across the healthcare system, and playing a pivotal role in delivering care closer to home.

On Friday 20 December 2024, I wrote to general practices to update them on proposals for the GP contract for 2025-26. I was pleased to confirm that general practice will receive a funding uplift of £889 million in 2025-26, representing a 7.2% cash growth and estimated real terms growth of 4.8%. This marks the largest funding uplift for general practice since the start of the 5-year framework and demonstrates this Government's commitment to delivering a neighbourhood health service—one of our key Manifesto pledges.

I fully recognise the financial pressures general practice has faced in recent years. Despite the challenging fiscal backdrop this Government inherited, we have made the necessary decision to ensure additional resources are allocated to primary care. This uplift to general practice reflects this Government's commitment to bring back the family doctor, end the 8am scramble and put general practice at the heart of the neighbourhood health service. It will support critical reforms which will make it easier for patients to get an appointment with the same doctor - particularly those with long term conditions - and help us shift from treatment to prevention, by going harder on tackling the biggest killers. I also wanted to take the opportunity to reassure newly qualified GPs employed through the ARRS scheme, announced last year, that they will continue to be supported throughout 2025-26 to sustain care delivery.

General practice is central to our plans for health service reform with the patient at the centre. This funding uplift represents a vital step towards the 'left shift' in care, ensuring that primary and community care receive a greater share of NHS funding and are able to deliver more care closer to home. There are already hundreds more full-time GPs in post than when the Government took office, reflecting the progress made in strengthening the workforce and meaningful progress towards improving access and outcomes for all.

Alongside the announcement of the funding uplift, the consultation with the General Practitioners Committee in England (GPC England) of the British Medical Association (BMA) on the 2025-26 GP contract began in December. This consultation provides a forum to discuss important proposed changes aimed at improving patient care and experience, by reducing inefficiencies, streamlining processes, and enabling general practice to deliver improved patient outcomes. The final reforms will be announced following the conclusion of the consultation in 2025, and I will keep the House updated.

These actions reflect our commitment to addressing the immediate pressures facing general practice while also laying the foundations for long-term reform. Through increased investment and meaningful changes, we expect GPs to deliver better access, improved continuity of care, and strengthened support for elective recovery.

## HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### ■ Community Ownership Fund Round 4 Announcement

**Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local Growth and Building Safety (Alex Norris):** [\[HCWS353\]](#)

The English Devolution White Paper set out the government's commitment to work in partnership with communities, to transfer power out of Westminster and put local decisions back in the hands of the people affected by them. The loss in recent years of shared community forums, places and institutions – whether it be local news outlets, community cafes, youth clubs, pubs, historic buildings, libraries or sport facilities – has eroded a sense of local civic pride and contributed to a feeling of decline in neighbourhoods and high streets. The government's approach to community empowerment will focus on putting people in control of these important assets. We will create new opportunities for communities to have a say in the future of their area and play a part in improving it, while acknowledging that this means nothing if people are not supported to contribute to this decision-making.

We recognise that community groups play a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and providing services which improve health and wellbeing, reduce anti-social behaviour, protect nature and offer support to groups in need. That's why, despite the difficult financial circumstances that we have inherited from the previous government, we have taken the decision to prioritise funding for community ownership. **On 23 December 2024, during the Christmas recess, we announced the outcome of Round 4 of the Community Ownership Fund (COF), with 85 projects from across the UK receiving £36.2m in funding. This represents the largest ever COF announcement to date.**

Projects such as Elmfield Hall in Lancashire, St Dunstan's House in Glastonbury, Caerphilly Rugby Football Club in Wales and the Mourne Mountain Rescue Base and Education Centre in Northern Ireland, have been awarded the crucial funding that will keep them in the hands of the communities they serve.

A total of £25.5m has been awarded to 57 projects in England, £5m has been awarded to 11 projects in Scotland, £2.1m has been awarded to 7 projects in Wales and £3.7m has been awarded to 10 projects in Northern Ireland.

**The Community Ownership Fund is now closed. There will be no further application windows on the COF programme.** We have taken this difficult decision due to the challenging inheritance left by the previous government.

While we are closing the Community Ownership Fund, this government remains committed to the communities' sector and community empowerment. We will deliver on the manifesto commitment to replace the community 'Right to Bid' with a strengthened 'Right to Buy' Assets of Community Value, creating a more robust pathway to community asset ownership. And we will seek to support high streets by strengthening Business Improvement Districts, which have helped to improve town and city centres across the

United Kingdom for 20 years, while ensuring they operate to high standards and are accountable to their communities.

We have also implemented new High Street Rental Auction regulations, providing local communities and businesses with a right to rent premises that have long sat vacant, casting a cloud over the local area. The power will help to provide new shops and community spaces, supporting businesses and communities to access the high street and create vibrant, bustling spaces they can be proud of.

We encourage any community groups seeking funding to preserve community assets, including those who may have submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) in the Community Ownership Fund but did not submit a full application, to continue to use the guidance and tools available through our development support provider on the [MyCommunity](#) site. These tools have been designed to help any organisation seeking to save an asset that is important to them and their local community and will remain available beyond the COF programme. The development support provider may also be able to help to suggest alternative sources of funding that organisations could look to secure.

Building on plans outlined in the English Devolution White Paper, there will be further announcements relating to communities in the new year, including on the community ownership of assets.

## TRANSPORT

### ■ Phasing out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030 and support for the zero emission vehicle (ZEV) transition

**Secretary of State for Transport (Heidi Alexander):**

[\[HCWS349\]](#)

Government has commenced a consultation on phasing out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030, driving forward the commitment made in our manifesto, supporting delivery of both our clean energy mission and our economic growth mission

The previous Government caused significant harm to the industry by moving goalposts on phase out dates, creating doubt in the minds of investors and boardrooms and putting at risk the billions of pounds of committed investment in the automotive sector and in the chargepoint sector. Our plans will restore clarity for manufacturers, provide renewed confidence for charging infrastructure investors and give confidence to consumers considering making the switch. No new petrol or diesel cars will be sold after 2030. All new cars and vans will need to be 100% zero emission by 2035.

The need to transition away from a reliance on fossil fuels has never been clearer, and the transition to zero emission vehicles will play a critical role in quickly reducing carbon emissions and improving our energy security. It is not just an environmental necessity but an opportunity for the UK to lead in cutting edge technologies, representing a significant industrial opportunity for the UK. This shift promises cleaner air and quieter streets, enhancing quality of life in our communities. British people and businesses are already



embracing electric vehicles because they are cheaper to run, great to drive and simpler to maintain.

This consultation marks a new phase of collaboration between the Government and the automotive and charging sectors as we support and work together with industry to grasp the opportunities of this ambitious and transformative shift - ensuring the prosperity and security of our nation, with higher growth, better jobs, and cheaper bills. This transformation is a challenge we can meet by working together.

The consultation is an opportunity to consider stakeholders' preferences on technology choices and the types of vehicles permitted between 2030 and 2035 alongside ZEVs. It commits to maintaining the trajectories in the ZEV mandate, while considering how the current arrangements and flexibilities are working, and what steps can be taken to support domestic manufacturing, and cement the UK's position as one of the major European markets for ZEVs.

In order to support the transition, we need to continue to accelerate the rollout of charging infrastructure right across the country, building on significant deployment to date. I have therefore also announced a broad package of measures that will make charging infrastructure quicker and easier to install, supporting £6 billion of private investment out to 2030. This includes simplifying planning rules, publishing our review to speed up grid connections, and continuing to provide resource funding for local councils up and down the country.

These new policies build on over £2.3 billion of government support to UK manufacturers and consumers to transition to zero emission vehicles.

We will work in partnership with the sector to harness the opportunity this transition represents to support thriving automotive and charging sectors, achieve our clean energy superpower mission, and build a prosperous, sustainable future.