



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 7 January 2025 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:31 P.M., 07 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

■ Aerospace Industry: Finance

Gavin Robinson:

[\[20971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the press release of 14 November 2024 entitled PM boosts UK aerospace industry with £975 million to drive growth and jobs, how much of that funding will be spent in each of the devolved administrations.

Sarah Jones:

The Budget confirmed £975m over 5 years to the Aerospace sector, which will be delivered through the Aerospace Technology Institute Programme. UK based industry applications for R&D co-investment from the Programme enter a competitive process. Competition for funding is fierce and only the best projects are selected: those that offer real innovation, reduced emissions, and tangible UK economic benefits. As the Programme is industry led and competitive the budget is not pre-allocated to regions or devolved administrations.

■ Artificial Intelligence: Employment

Colum Eastwood:

[\[21537\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has held discussions with trade unions on the potential impact of (a) artificial intelligence and (b) automation on workers.

Justin Madders:

New technologies such as artificial intelligence and automation have the potential to transform businesses of all sizes, supporting productivity and growth.

The government's approach is to protect good jobs, enable good future jobs, ensure rights and protections keep pace with technological change and to safeguard against discrimination.

As the Plan to Make Work Pay makes clear, workers' interests will need to inform the digital transformation that is taking place in the workplace.

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) ministers continue to engage positively with all relevant stakeholders in relation to the potential impacts of new technologies on the workplace, including trade unions and business.

■ Business: Rural Areas

Helen Morgan:

[\[21242\]](#)

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

Gareth Thomas:

Rural businesses offer significant potential for growth and are central to our economy. As with all places, fulfilling the needs of people and businesses in rural areas is at the heart of our policymaking.

The Government has just launched the Business Growth Service (BGS), a national service with local delivery at its heart. It will bring a range of existing core services under the BGS banner, working hand in glove with local and devolved governments and the Growth Hubs network.

All businesses can access their Local Growth Hubs, which provide advice and support throughout the business journey, shaping their offer around the unique needs, whether town or country.

Department for Business and Trade: Public Expenditure**Dame Harriett Baldwin:**[\[21301\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what underspends are projected in (a) his Department and (b) each of its arms length bodies in this financial year.

Justin Madders:

Final 2024-25 budgets for the Department and its arm's length bodies will be confirmed through the Supplementary Estimate process.

The Department has requested budgets at Supplementary Estimate that minimise underspends whilst enabling it to manage risks and the inherent volatility in its Annually Managed Expenditure and Financial Transactions budgets.

Any underspends this financial year will be confirmed once the 2024-25 Annual Report and Accounts are finalised and published.

Shops: Opening Hours**Sarah Smith:**[\[21480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what guidance her Department issues for local authorities on authorising the opening of shops for 24 hours a day.

Justin Madders:

There are no general restrictions on shop opening hours aside from Sunday trading restrictions on large shops, which the Government has no plans to change. However, for new properties or those selling alcohol, additional restrictions may apply subject to the planning system and the licensing regime.

Sarah Smith:[\[21481\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will take steps to ensure that local authorities consult local communities on authorising the opening of shops operating for 24 hours a day.

Justin Madders:

There are no general restrictions on shop opening hours aside from Sunday trading restrictions on large shops, which the Government has no plans to change. However, for new properties or those selling alcohol, additional restrictions may apply subject to the planning system and the licensing regime.

CABINET OFFICE■ **Cabinet Office: Staff****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[21399\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to Question 70 of the oral evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee on 4 December 2024 on The work of the Cabinet Office, HC 463, what the (a) current and (b) target size is for the number of staff in the EU Relations Secretariat.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

On 24 July 2024, the Prime Minister announced via a Written Ministerial Statement that responsibility for the UK's relationship with the EU, including co-chairing the ministerial structures under the UK's treaties with the EU, would move to the Cabinet Office.

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

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

■ **Diego Garcia****Mr Mark Francois:**[\[20932\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister has had discussions with Philippe Sands KC on Diego Garcia since 4 July 2024.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Details of ministerial meetings with external organisations are published on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) as part of the government's transparency agenda.

■ **Eurostat: Office for National Statistics****Alex Burghart:**[\[21344\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the press release entitled New partnership between statistical authorities of the UK and the EU, published by the

Office for National Statistics on 9 October 2024, whether the agreement with Eurostat was approved by Ministers in his Department.

Alex Burghart:

[\[21345\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the press release entitled New partnership between statistical authorities of the UK and the EU, published by the Office for National Statistics on 9 October 2024, if he will publish the agreement between the Office for National Statistics and Eurostat.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

On 9 October 2024, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Eurostat signed an agreement on statistical cooperation. This arrangement is provided for under Article 730 of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement. The publication of the text is a matter for the UK Statistics Authority, which operates independently as a Non Ministerial Department. I refer the honourable gentleman to Parliamentary Question 13803.

■ **Intelligence Services: Finance**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21400\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to page 14 of his Department's report entitled Security and Intelligence Agencies Financial Statement 2023-24, published on 2 December 2024, if he will publish the (a) reasons for and (b) nature of the 870 losses and special payments; and what steps he is taking to help prevent such losses.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

As has been the policy of successive governments, the government does not comment on matters relating to the intelligence agencies. The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament scrutinises the policies, expenditure, administration and operations of the intelligence agencies on behalf of Parliament.

■ **Ministers: Official Cars**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21392\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question HL2999 on Ministers: Official Cars, to which Department each of the (a) electric and (b) hybrid cars was allocated.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Departments are allocated a combination of electric and hybrid vehicles based on operational and security requirements. However, details of the specific vehicles allocated to individual Ministers or departments are not disclosed. Sharing this information, particularly when combined with other publicly available details, could compromise the security of Ministers and their transport arrangements.

■ National Security Adviser

James Cartlidge: [\[21001\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December to Question 19728 on National Security Adviser: Pay, whether the contract for the National Security Adviser differs from the Model Contract for Special Advisers.

Georgia Gould:

All special advisers, including the National Security Adviser, are employed under the terms of the Model Contract for Special Advisers, available on GOV.UK.

■ National Security Adviser: Pay

James Cartlidge: [\[21003\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December to Question 19728 on National Security Adviser: Pay, whether the remuneration package for the National Security Adviser has been approved yet by HM Treasury.

Georgia Gould:

Special advisers' salaries are determined by the Special Adviser People Board, in line with the special adviser pay framework.

James Cartlidge: [\[21331\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December to Question 19728 on National Security Adviser: Pay, whether the current NSA salary will be more than that paid to the previous NSA.

Georgia Gould:

As a special adviser, the National Security Adviser's salary is determined by the Special Adviser People Board, in line with the special adviser pay framework. Information on Special Adviser pay will be published in the Annual Report on Special Advisers as per the requirements of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, as was the case under the previous Administration.

■ National Security Adviser: Workplace Pensions

James Cartlidge: [\[21332\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December to Question 19728 on National Security Adviser: Pay, whether if the pension package will differ to that offered to the previous NSA.

Georgia Gould:

As are all special advisers, the National Security Adviser is entitled to membership of the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

■ UK Relations with EU

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[21018\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many infringement proceedings the EU is pursuing against the Government; and whether the Government plans to propose remediation to prevent further infringement proceedings.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

The EU is pursuing 8 infringement cases against the Government, as provided for under the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement. We are committed to full and faithful implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Arts: Artificial Intelligence and Copyright

Dan Carden: [\[21005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the Government's consultation on Copyright and Artificial Intelligence, published 17 December 2024, what assessment has she made of the potential impact on the UK's creative industries of the proposals included in that consultation.

Chris Bryant:

The government's consultation on Copyright and AI, launched 17 December and closing 25 February, was published alongside an accompanying options assessment. One of the main reasons for the consultation is to gather further evidence on the potential impact on the creative industries of any change to the copyright regime in the context of AI training.

Following the consultation, if legislative changes are needed to bring clarity to the UK copyright regime, a full economic impact assessment will be undertaken.

■ Gambling: Reform

Mr Louie French: [\[21218\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions her Department has had with people recovering from gambling addiction on reform of the gambling industry.

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.

■ Media: Vacancies

Colum Eastwood:

[21539]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has made an assessment of the reasons for a decrease in the number of jobs filled in the (a) film, (b) television, (c) video, (d) radio and (e) music digital subsector in 2022-23.

Chris Bryant:

There are a multitude of factors affecting the number of filled jobs across the creative industries in any given year. Recently this has included the recession in the TV advertising market; streaming services reducing content budgets as they prioritise profitability; and the impact of the US writers strike. Major companies in the digital music industry have also cut staff or relocated employees outside the UK, partly due to the maturation of streaming services and a need to streamline their global operations.

Despite these challenges, the creative industries remain one of the fastest growing sectors in the UK economy. They have been identified as a priority sector in the Government's Industrial Strategy based on their significant potential for supporting opportunity and growth in the country.

To address skills shortages and support long-term development, Skills England, a new arm's-length body, will form a coherent national picture of where skills gaps exist and collaborate with key partners to meet the skills needs of the next decade.

■ Rugby: Finance

Mr Louie French:

[21221]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to help ensure the financial sustainability of rugby union in England.

Stephanie Peacock:

Rugby Union has a vital role to play in our national identity. I recently met with the Rugby Football Union and Premiership Rugby to discuss the future of the sport. The RFU is independent of the Government and is responsible for the regulation of rugby union, and for protecting and promoting the financial sustainability of the sport.

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

DEFENCE**■ Defence: Manufacturing Industries**

Stuart Anderson: [\[20712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to help increase the sustainability of supply chains in the defence industry.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has a long-standing commitment to improve its engagement with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in order to broaden and strengthen its supply-base. The recently published Defence Industrial Strategy Statement of Intent recognises our intention to foster a more diverse community of suppliers, and will prompt a refresh of our SME Action Plan. Alongside this, the department is undertaking other initiatives to strengthen its supply-chain resilience, including securing access to critical materials, components and technologies, and a first-of-its-kind wargame to explore how industry and the MOD could sustain personnel on the frontline when faced with constant supply chain disruption.

■ Royal Fleet Auxiliary: Industrial Disputes

Mike Amesbury: [\[20251\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent steps he has taken to resolve the industrial dispute in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Maria Eagle:

Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) personnel are highly valued specialists. We are dedicated to hearing their concerns and maintaining an ongoing dialogue to address the issues raised during the current pay dispute. As negotiations are still in progress, it would be inappropriate to comment further on the specifics of our discussions with the Maritime Trade Unions.

■ Veterans

Mr Mark Francois: [\[21272\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question 16769 on Veterans, if he will review his Department's data collection processes to enable it to make an estimate of the number of veterans who are (a) eligible for Pension Credit and (b) have an income of less than £12,500 a year.

Mr Mark Francois: [\[21273\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question 16769 on Veterans, whether his Department is taking steps to gather the data required to estimate the number of veterans who are (a) eligible for Pension Credit and (b) have an income of less than £12,500 a year.

AI Carns:

The Ministry of Defence is already working across Government to improve data collection on veterans. At this time, we do not have data to enable us to make an estimate on the number of veterans who are eligible for pension credit and have an income of less than £12,500 but we will continue to keep this under review.

EDUCATION**■ Academies**

Neil O'Brien: [\[21008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will list each open sponsored academy with (a) its date of conversion to sponsored status, (b) its Unique Reference Number, and (c) the Unique Reference Number of its predecessor school.

Catherine McKinnell:

As of 1 November 2024, there are 2,753 open sponsored academies. Their names, unique reference numbers, open dates and unique reference numbers of predecessor schools, where applicable, is detailed in the attached spreadsheet.

Attachments:

1. Sponsored academies with date opened and URNs
[21008_Sponsored_Academies_Date_Of_Conversion_URN_and_Predecessor_URN.xlsx]

Neil O'Brien: [\[21009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will list each open converter academy with its (a) date of conversion to academy status, (b) Unique Reference Number, and (c) previous Unique Reference Number where different.

Catherine McKinnell:

As of 1 November 2024, there are 7,671 open converter academies. Their names, unique reference numbers, open dates and unique reference numbers of predecessor schools, where applicable, is detailed in the attached spreadsheet.

Attachments:

1. Converter academies with conversion date and URNs
[21009_Converter_Academies_Date_Of_Conversion_URN_and_Previous_URN.xlsx]

■ Apprentices: Finance

Sarah Gibson: [\[21115\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of proposed changes to funding for Level 7 apprenticeships from the Growth and Skills Levy on the availability of talent in professions such as architecture.

Sarah Gibson: [\[21116\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether all Level 7 apprenticeships will be included within the scope of the Growth and Skills Levy.

Sarah Gibson:

[\[21117\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to continue funding for apprentices undertaking a Level 7 apprenticeship.

Janet Daby:

The government is committed to spreading opportunities and economic growth with the support of a strong skills system.

This government had a dire fiscal inheritance which has made tough choices necessary to fix the foundations of our economy and prioritise in order to generate opportunities for young people that enable them to make a start in good, fulfilling careers. The department will therefore be asking more employers to step forward and fund Level 7 apprenticeships, outside of the levy-funded growth and skills offer.

The department will take advice from Skills England, who have been engaging with employers on this, and expects to make a final decision on affected apprenticeships in the new year.

Learners who have started these apprenticeships will be funded through to completion.

■ **Children: Gender Dysphoria**

Neil O'Brien:

[\[21010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she plans to reply to the consultation on Guidance for Schools and Colleges: Gender Questioning Children.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department is currently reviewing the draft non-statutory guidance for schools and colleges on gender questioning children, in addition to draft guidance on relationships and sex education and health education.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has been clear that children's wellbeing must be at the heart of this guidance and, as such, the government is looking carefully at the consultation responses, discussing with stakeholders and considering the relevant evidence, including the Cass Review which has since been published, before setting out next steps.

We expect the results of the consultation and our response to be published on GOV.UK in 2025.

■ **Classics: Education**

Laura Trott:

[\[21029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what her policy is on the future of the Latin Excellence Programme.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government is delivering on its commitment to put education back at the forefront of national life and break down barriers to opportunity for all children and young people.

This government inherited a £22 billion blackhole in our country's finances and is taking the difficult decisions necessary to fix the foundations and get our economy back on track. This means prioritisation on how money is spent right across the public sector to ensure we deliver on our priorities, including protecting core funding for schools.

Given this, the department has made the difficult decision not to extend the Latin Excellence Programme beyond the end of the three year contract, which will end on 28 February 2025. The department is grateful for the excellent work of the Centre for Latin Excellence and that of the schools who have participated in the programme.

■ Department for Education: Equality**Rupert Lowe:****[21129]**

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

Janet Daby:

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 merit.

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 to 2025 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. This strategy can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2022-to-2025>.

As set out in the Civil Service People Plan 2024 to 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. This plan can

be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-people-plan-2024-2027/civil-service-people-plan-2024-2027-html#recruitment-retention--talent>.

■ Educational Psychology

Sarah Bool: **[20463]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of waiting times for the commissioning of educational psychologists; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing assessments by educational psychologists arranged and paid for by parents to be used.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

Educational psychologists play a critical role in the support available to children and young people, providing statutory input into education, health and care (EHC) assessments and advising the school workforce on how to support children and young people with SEND.

As set out in the SEND Code of Practice, when carrying out an EHC needs assessment, local authorities are required to seek psychological advice and information from an educational psychologist, who should normally be employed or commissioned by the local authority.

As the employers of educational psychology services, local authorities are responsible for ensuring that their services are adequately staffed. The department does not hold data on waiting times for the commissioning of educational psychologists.

However, the department is taking measures to support local authorities by investing in building the pipeline. We are investing over £21 million to train 400 more educational psychologists from 2024. This is in addition to the £10 million currently being invested in the training of over 200 educational psychologists who began their training in September 2023.

To support retention, following graduation, trainees who have had their training funded by the department are required to remain in local authority employment for a minimum period. For trainees beginning their course in September 2024, this requirement has increased to three years.

■ Financial Services: Education

Lisa Smart: **[21184]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make it her policy to ensure England's participation in the OECD's PISA financial literacy assessment in 2025.

Lisa Smart: [\[21186\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions she has had with her counterparts in the devolved Administrations on encouraging participation in the OECD's next PISA financial literacy assessment, scheduled for 2025.

Janet Daby:

Financial literacy is not an option offered by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation (OECD) in the current (2025) cycle of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) as it has been replaced for this cycle with a foreign-language assessment, so a decision on participation is not imminent.

Departmental officials engage with the devolved governments on a range of areas, including on PISA. We have had initial discussions about the timeline for a decision on participation in future PISA financial literacy assessments and will continue to actively engage with them on this topic as more information is provided by the OECD.

Lisa Smart: [\[21190\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to improve the teaching of financial literacy through (a) enhanced teacher training programmes, (b) increased funding for financial education (i) resources and (ii) initiatives and (c) other steps.

Catherine McKinnell:

In general, decisions relating to teachers' professional development rightly rests with schools, headteachers, and teachers themselves, as they are in the best position to judge their own requirements. The government has committed to introducing a Teacher Training Entitlement which would support teachers to access more high quality continuing professional development across a range of topics.

The Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) has a statutory duty to coordinate the UK Strategy for Financial Wellbeing 2020. In 2022, MaPS launched a grant-funded programme totalling £1.1 million to test approaches to supporting teachers and practitioners working with children and young people in vulnerable circumstances and to deliver financial education. The evaluation of this programme can be found here: <https://maps.org.uk/en/publications/research/2024/evaluating-grants-improving-financial-education-for-vulnerable-young-people>.

The department will work with MaPS to use the findings to promote consistent and evidence-informed practice. MaPS has also published financial education guidance for schools, which can be found here: <https://maps.org.uk/en/work-with-us/financial-education-in-schools>.

Oak National Academy (Oak) is a non-departmental public body which provides free, optional, and adaptable high quality digital curriculum and lesson resources. Oak has completed its initial curriculum resources in mathematics and will produce additional lessons on financial education and applying mathematics in real life contexts across key stages 1 to 4, which is expected from spring 2025. Lessons on finance and the economy also feature in Oak's new citizenship curriculum, which was launched

earlier this academic year, with lessons to be released by autumn 2025. Oak's resources are available here: <https://www.thenational.academy/>.

The department continues to work closely with MaPS, and in partnership with others, to monitor the evidence for financial education and assess school support needs.

■ Free School Meals

Mary Glendon: [\[20963\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to increase the uptake of free school meals by eligible children.

Stephen Morgan:

The department recognises the vital role played by free school meals (FSM) and encourages all eligible families to take their entitlement up. There are currently around 2.1 million pupils eligible for and claiming FSM.

The department provides the Eligibility Checking System, allowing local authorities to quickly verify eligibility for FSM and ensure FSM are easily received.

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

The government is committed to delivering an ambitious strategy to reduce child poverty by tackling the root causes and giving every child the best start at life. To support this, a new ministerial taskforce has been set up to develop a Child Poverty Strategy, which will be published in spring 2025. The taskforce will consider a range of policies, assessing what will have the greatest impact in driving down rates of child poverty.

As with all government programmes, the department will keep its approach to FSM under continued review.

■ Graduates: Employment

Neil O'Brien: [\[21011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on research projects undertaken by the Institute of Fiscal Studies on behalf of her Department on labour market returns by degree subject in each year since 2022.

Janet Daby:

Since 2022, the department has commissioned one research project, undertaken by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), that includes evidence about labour market returns to undergraduate degrees by degree subject. This is described below.

In 2023, the department put out to open tender a research project called, 'Developing an earnings metric to assess the quality of higher education (HE) provision'. The IFS bid for and were awarded this project. This project included modelling of graduate

earnings by degree subject and HE provider. Its purpose was to produce a report advising on options for how graduate earnings could be used by the Office for Students as part of their regulatory activity. This work began in November 2023 and the report was delivered to the department in September 2024. The report has not yet been published but will be in the future.

■ Reading

Valerie Vaz:

[\[20960\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the 2008 National Year of Reading, if she will make it her policy to organise a Year of Reading in 2026.

Catherine McKinnell:

Excellent foundations in reading and writing are at the heart of the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best start in life.

We know that reading for pleasure is hugely important and brings a significant range of benefits. As well as strong links with attainment, wide recreational reading expands pupils' knowledge about the world and about language, as well as their understanding of subject-specific academic and technical vocabulary. Pupils who read regularly also report heightened levels of social and emotional wellbeing. Reading allows readers to adopt new perspectives, develop empathy and become more socially conscious.

In recognition of this, the department has implemented a range of measures to support reading for pleasure. The English Hubs programme supports the teaching of phonics, early language development and reading for pleasure, with a further £23 million committed for the 2024/25 academic year to support this work. Furthermore, the government's reading framework provides guidance on improving the teaching of reading, to ensure that every child is not only able to read proficiently but also develops a genuine love of reading.

■ School Libraries: Finance

Satvir Kaur:

[\[21170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what additional (a) funding and (b) support is being provided to help schools improve library facilities.

Catherine McKinnell:

School libraries complement public libraries in giving pupils access to a range of books and other kinds of texts, both in and out of school.

It is for individual schools to decide how best to provide and maintain a library service for their pupils, including whether to employ a qualified librarian, and we give headteachers autonomy to decide how best to spend the core schools funding that is allocated to them by the department. The Autumn Budget announced an additional £2.3 billion for schools for the 2025/26 financial year, compared to 2024/25, bringing the total core schools budget to almost £63.9 billion in 2025/26.

The government's reading framework offers non-statutory guidance for teachers and school leaders, including helpful guidance for schools on how to organise their school library, book corner or book stock to make reading accessible and attractive to readers.

■ Schools: Food

Ian Byrne:

[\[21414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of updating school food standards to promote (a) healthier and (b) more sustainable diets.

Stephen Morgan:

The department is committed to raising the healthiest generation ever. The school food standards regulate the food and drink provided throughout the school day. They aim to ensure that the right foods are available for children. For example, one or more portions of vegetables as an accompaniment and one or more portions of fruit must be provided every day. The standards also restrict foods high in fat, salt and sugar, as well as low quality reformed or reconstituted foods, and ensures that pupils always have healthy options.

The department has committed to supporting schools to drive up their sustainable practices on food. Schools can voluntarily follow the government buying standards, which includes advice around sustainable sourcing.

As with all policies, the department will keep its approach to school food under continued review.

■ Special Educational Needs: Rural Areas

Cameron Thomas:

[\[18331\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will take steps to ensure that additional funding for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in mainstream schools is equitably distributed in rural areas.

Catherine McKinnell:

Local authorities are responsible for allocating additional funding from their high needs budgets to mainstream schools for their pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The department is providing an increase of almost £1 billion for high needs budgets in the 2025/26 financial year, bringing total high needs funding for children and young people with complex SEND to £11.9 billion. Of that total, Gloucestershire County Council is being allocated a provisional funding amount of over £104.8 million in the 2025/26 financial year through the high needs national funding formula (NFF), which is an 8.3% increase per head of their 2 to 18 year old population, on their equivalent 2024/25 financial year NFF allocation.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO**■ Department for Business and Trade: Carbon Emissions**

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[21306\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what targets his Department has set to help achieve the Government's commitments to net zero.

Kerry McCarthy:

The Climate Change Act sets our commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050 in law. The UK has halved its emissions, having cut them by around 53% between 1990 and 2023.

As my Rt hon Friend the Prime Minister announced on 12th November, the UK has pledged to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by at least 81% on 1990 levels by 2035, excluding international aviation and shipping.

■ Electricity and Natural Gas: Standing Charges

Lee Anderson: [\[21374\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that standing charges for (a) electricity and (b) gas reflect actual service costs.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Although standing charges are a commercial matter for suppliers, and are regulated by Ofgem, we know that too much of the burden of the bill is placed on them. The Government has worked constructively with the regulator on the issue of standing charges, and we are committed to lowering the cost of them.

Standing charges recover the 'fixed' costs of the system, meaning costs that do not vary by energy use. This includes suppliers' fixed operational costs of serving each customer, the cost of network upgrades and maintenance necessary to keep all consumers connected and fund the technologies to drive progress towards net zero targets. It also includes the cost of providing Warm Home Discount payments to eligible customers.

■ Energy: Conservation

James Naish: [\[21497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what his timeline is for (a) the consultation on the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard and (b) implementation of the new standard following the consultation.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government will shortly consult on increasing minimum energy efficiency standards in the domestic private rented sector. The consultation will include proposals for rented homes to achieve Energy Performance Certificate C or

equivalent by 2030. We will consult on introducing minimum energy efficiency standards for the social rented sector in due course.

■ Insulation: Social Rented Housing

Mr Calvin Bailey:

[\[21254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to increase the rate of retrofitting insulation in social housing in London.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund (WH:SHF, formally SHDF) provides grant funding for social housing landlords to improve the energy performance of their properties through the installation of energy efficiency measures and low carbon technologies. The WH:SH will upgrade a significant amount of the social housing stock currently below EPC C up to that standard. £1.29 billion has been allocated as part of the Autumn 2024 Budget for the WH:SHF Wave 3, to be delivered from 2025 until 2028 by eligible social housing landlords.

Additionally, the National Wealth Fund has worked with leading banks to make £1bn available to help housing associations provide warmer, more energy efficient homes to tenants across the country.

■ Renewable Energy

Calum Miller:

[\[20890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the proposed community financial benefit from the Botley West Solar Scheme; and if he will introduce a mandatory minimum level of community benefit from new renewable schemes.

Michael Shanks:

There is currently no legal obligation for developers in the UK to provide community benefits. However, in the Clean Power Action Plan, we have made clear that in the future where communities host clean energy infrastructure, we will ensure they benefit from it. There are many options in this area including community funds and direct support for households, and we are exploring all options to ensure communities can benefit from our clean power mission. We hope to have more to say on this in due course.

■ Renewable Energy: Finance

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[21019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential role of the oil and gas industry in (a) contributing to international climate finance pledges and (b) contributing funds to the just transition of works into green industries.

Michael Shanks:

The Government has made several spending announcements since July to deliver the UK's 2019 pledge to spend £11.6bn in International Climate Finance between April 2021 and March 2026, and is supporting workers to move from carbon-intensive sectors to clean energy industries with initiatives like the Energy Skills Passport.

Additionally, the temporary Energy Profits Levy, which applies to upstream oil and gas producers, is expected to raise £12.6bn between now and 2030. This revenue will help support the transition, enhance energy security and independence, provide sustainable jobs, and help protect electricity bills against price shocks.

■ Wind Power: Aviation**Ruth Jones:**[\[21014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of aviation objections on the deployment of new onshore wind in Wales.

Michael Shanks:

Wales will play an important role in increasing the UK's onshore wind capacity and meeting our Net Zero Ambitions.

The Government has set up an Onshore Wind Industry Taskforce to identify and address the barriers to increased onshore wind deployment, including in relation to airspace management and aviation. As a reserved matter, we recognise that this will have implications for onshore wind projects being built in the Devolved Administrations. We engage regularly with the Welsh Government, who are represented on the Onshore Wind Industry Taskforce.

■ Wind Power: Celtic Sea**Jayne Kirkham:**[\[21080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he plans to take to ensure that the delivery of floating offshore wind demonstration projects in the Celtic Sea.

Michael Shanks:

The Government is working with industry to accelerate ways the Contracts for Difference scheme and other energy policies can be expanded to deliver the clean energy superpower mission. The Government recognises the important role that Test and Demonstration projects, including in the Celtic Sea, could play in securing learnings, developing infrastructure, and building sector confidence to enable cost-effective commercial scale floating offshore wind projects in future.

The Clean Industry Bonus further underscores the Government's commitment to the technology, in particular the minimum budget to be set aside for investment in floating offshore wind supply chain to help drive investment into the sector.

Jayne Kirkham: [\[21081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what body is responsible for (a) coordination and (b) delivery of floating wind farms in the Celtic Sea.

Michael Shanks:

The Crown Estate's Leasing Round 5 will bring forward up to 4.5GW of floating offshore wind capacity in the Celtic Sea in addition to the five Test and Demonstration projects currently in development.

The partnership between Great British Energy and The Crown Estate announced the potential to deploy up to a further 12GW of floating offshore wind in the Celtic Sea, of which 4-10GW could be leased to developers by 2030.

The Government will work closely with developers and The Crown Estate to support the delivery of floating offshore wind projects across the UK, including in the Celtic Sea.

■ Wylfa Power Station

Llinos Medi: [\[21108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will publish details of any plans held by his Department for the development of a nuclear power station at Wylfa.

Michael Shanks:

Great British Nuclear (GBN) completed its purchase of the sites at Wylfa (in Ynys Mon / Anglesey) and Oldbury-on-Severn (Gloucestershire) in June 2024.

As a site which has previously hosted a nuclear power station, and is now owned by GBN, we want Wylfa to play an important role in new nuclear in the UK. The Government is examining the legacy left to us by the previous government and decisions have yet to be taken on projects and technologies to be deployed at specific sites. As GBN progress the Small Modular Reactor competition toward final decisions in the spring, we will set out our plans in due course.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax

Helen Whately: [\[17856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the changes to inheritance tax on the financial viability of small family farms in (a) Kent and (b) Faversham and Mid Kent constituency.

Daniel Zeichner:

Assessing the impact of the new Inheritance Tax policy, which comes into force from 6 April 2026, relies on a number of factors such as ownership structure and debt

levels. Without such information, which the Government does not hold at that level, area level assessments cannot be made.

This Government is aware that each farm is different, and so we encourage farmers to speak to their tax advisors and agents to understand how these changes may impact their specific situation and how to plan for the future.

As an outcome of the recent Spending Review, we have also committed £5 billion in the agricultural budget over the next two years – the biggest ever budget for sustainable food production and nature recovery in this country's history. This enables us to keep momentum on the path to a more resilient and sustainable farming sector.

■ Agriculture: Subsidies

Tim Farron:

[\[21276\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to provide top-up payments to farmers to compensate for the loss of direct payments.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government announced the reductions it intends to apply to delinked payments for 2025. The Government is accelerating the end of the era of payouts to large and wealthy landowners simply for owning land. The fastest reductions in subsidies will be to those who historically received the largest payments. Our commitment to farmers remains steadfast, with £5 billion committed to the farming budget over two years – the most ever for sustainable food production and nature's recovery. This keeps momentum to a more sustainable farming sector, with the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery all continuing.

■ Air Pollution

Carla Denyer:

[\[21148\]](#)

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 discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the (a) legal threshold for future levels of NO_x and (b) planning time required for councils with Clean Air Zones.

Emma Hardy:

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a range of issues, and Cabinet discussions are considered confidential. The Government remains committed to meeting legal targets for air quality and continues to review the policy measures needed to achieve them. The NO₂ programme is working closely with local authorities to deliver air quality measures, including Clean Air Zones, to meet legal limits for NO₂ and improve the health of their residents.

■ Animal Welfare: Trapping

Jo Platt:

[\[21362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made implications for his policies of the risks to companion animals in England posed by the use of snare traps.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 prohibits the setting of snares in England where they are likely to catch non-target species such as companion animals. Anyone using snares also has a responsibility under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to ensure that their activities do not cause any unnecessary suffering. Defra is aware however that snares can capture a wide range of non-target species including companion animals such as pet cats and pet dogs. Many instances have been reported by the RSPCA for example.

The Government is to introduce the most ambitious programme for animal welfare in a generation and as outlined in our manifesto, we will bring an end to the use of snare traps. We are considering the most effective way to deliver this commitment and will be setting out next steps in due course.

■ Animals: UK Trade with EU

Dr Danny Chambers:

[\[21103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the UK's exit from the EU on the movement of animals between the UK and the EU for breeding programmes; and what steps his Department is taking to mitigate any post-Brexit regulatory barriers between the UK and the EU affecting these movements.

Daniel Zeichner:

The UK's departure introduced new rules and procedures for GB exporters, including compliance with EU import controls. Since being granted third country listed status by the EU on 28 December 2020, the UK has continued to export live animals for breeding purposes under these rules.

The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) provides a framework to manage sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) controls proportionate to biosecurity risks. Defra keeps the movement of animals for breeding programmes under review and works with stakeholders and EU Member States to identify and mitigate challenges in SPS requirements and reduce unnecessary trade barriers. This includes efforts to streamline SPS checks, ensuring efficient and safe animal movements.

EU import controls require livestock to enter via designated Border Control Posts (BCPs), which can limit capacity for live animal exports. To address this, Defra regularly engages in technical discussions with EU Member States to resolve practical issues, advocate for increased BCP capacity, and improve routes for live

animal exports. These efforts aim to safeguard biosecurity while supporting GB exporters and maintaining trade flows.

■ **Biodiversity: Coastal Areas**

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[21433\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support active restoration of coastal ecosystems; and if he will take steps to amend the licensing framework for that restoration.

Emma Hardy:

The Government recognises that protecting, restoring, and sustainably managing coastal and marine habitats – such as saltmarsh, seagrass and native oyster reefs – can provide biodiversity, climate adaptation and climate mitigation benefits.

Defra has funded restoration of coastal ecosystems through schemes such as the Water Environment Improvement Fund and the Environmental Land Management Countryside Stewardship scheme. Defra is also funding the development of a Saltmarsh Code to enable saltmarsh carbon to be traded as a carbon offset and help drive private finance towards nature restoration.

The Environment Agency's Restoring Meadow, Marsh and Reef initiative is working to restore seagrass meadows, saltmarsh and native oyster reefs. It is working in partnership with environmental non-government organisations, industry, community groups, and academia to identify innovative funding opportunities, streamline regulatory processes, build capacity and share knowledge with partners to facilitate a larger programme of restoration.

Defra officials are working with arms-length bodies to understand whether improvements could be made to the marine licensing regime to ensure that it appropriately enables habitat restoration.

■ **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Equality**

Rupert Lowe: [\[21131\]](#)

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

Daniel Zeichner:

The core department complies with 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 Government and Civil Service is committed to a diverse workforce and culture of openness and inclusivity as a way of reflecting the experiences of the citizens we serve and delivering better outcomes for them in turn.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Unpaid Work**Rupert Lowe:**[\[20087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to ensure that the Summer Development Internship Programme 2025 is open to all applicants.

Emma Hardy:

As a public body, the Environment Agency (EA) is committed to meeting the obligations set out in the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty. These require public bodies to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people with different protected characteristics. The EA recruits using a fair and open process and appoints on merit, and 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 EA is focused on addressing known gaps in its workforce, and its Summer Development Internship Programme aims to widen access to careers and attract talented individuals from underrepresented ethnic groups. The latest data (Q2 2024-2025) from the EA shows that 6.4% of Agency staff are from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background, against a representation goal of 7.6% this year and a 2021 Census representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic respondents in England and Wales of 18.3%. The EA also offers various different career entry programmes which are open to all and is committed to supporting other underrepresented communities, including those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds.

■ Flood Control: Lambourn**Mr Lee Dillon:**[\[21438\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent progress has been made on Project Groundwater in Lambourn Valley.

Emma Hardy:

Project Groundwater is funded by the £150 million Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation programme, managed by the Environment Agency (EA). The programme includes 25 local projects around the country that are testing practical ways of bolstering resilience to flooding and coastal change.

Project Groundwater has produced a new community-level, automated groundwater flood warning system, www.projectgroundwater.co.uk/floodwarning. This went live as a trial in the Lambourn Valley on 4 December and the EA are currently collating feedback for the next phase of improvements. The next key output will be new improved groundwater flood risk maps which are expected to be published in February. The project has also been gathering data via a Flood Experience Questionnaire, to target invitations for property flood resilience surveys in the new year, helping us to develop trials of community flood resilience measures. The project

is also seeking to identify locations for nature-based solutions to help with groundwater flooding.

Collectively all aspects of Project Groundwater will have longer term benefits to the Lambourn Valley. These include ensuring groundwater is robustly addressed in planning applications whilst better understanding the mental health impacts of groundwater flooding.

■ **Furs: Trade**

Sarah Champion: [\[21313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress he has made in building an evidence base on the fur sector.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra is continuing to build the evidence base on the fur sector in Great Britain. This includes commissioning our expert Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) to produce a report on what constitutes responsible sourcing of fur. The AWC report will add to our understanding of the fur industry and help inform our next steps.

■ **Hedges and Ditches: Environment Protection**

Jayne Kirkham: [\[21082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will (a) bring forward legislative proposals to (i) formally recognise, (ii) protect and (iii) otherwise support the management of Cornish hedges and (b) provide funding for such hedges in the form of (A) Sustainable Farming Incentives and (B) capital grants.

Daniel Zeichner:

Certain hedgerows are protected from removal under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 if they meet specific criteria. The Management of Hedgerows (England) Regulations 2024 introduced management rules into domestic legislation to protect hedgerows on land used for agriculture in England.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive was developed to recognise the large variety of locally and nationally important hedges and hedgerows we see across England. In 2023, the hedgerow offer was launched and expanded in 2024. This includes an offer to maintain earth banks or stone-faced hedge banks (BND2). Those with Cornish hedges will be eligible to apply for both offers to ensure their hedgerow is maintained. We will continue to review what additional policies may be required to protect and enhance the ecological and cultural value of hedges and hedgerows in England.

Grants have been made available to support Cornish hedges under the Capital Grants offer. In 2024 the scheme supported agreements to plant over 4,000 miles of new hedgerows across England, creating essential habitats for at-risk species of birds and mammals. In November, the Capital Grants scheme was closed to new agreements following unprecedented demand this Autumn. We are forecast to spend more on capital grants this year than ever before. We currently are reviewing the Capital Grants offer to ensure funding goes further to improve outcomes for food

security and nature conservation and will provide an update in early 2025. We have allocated the largest ever budget for sustainable food production through the farming budget.

■ Land Drainage

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:

[\[21258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the recommendations of the review entitled The review for implementation of Schedule 3 to The Flood and Water Management Act 2010, published in January 2023, what steps his Department is taking to implement Schedule 3 to The Flood and Water Management Act 2010, published by Defra in January 2023; and what his Department's timetable is for the full implementation of that Schedule.

Emma Hardy:

The Government is strongly committed to requiring standardised Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) in new developments. These should be to designs that cope with changing climatic conditions as well as delivering wider water infrastructure benefits, reduce run off and help to improve water quality, amenity and biodiversity. It is also important to ensure appropriate adoption and maintenance arrangements are in place.

We believe that these outcomes can be achieved through either improving the current planning led approach using powers now available or commencing Schedule 3 to the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. A final decision on the way forward will be made in the coming months.

We have made some immediate changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to support increasing SuDS. The NPPF now requires all development to utilize SuDS where they could have drainage impacts. These systems should be appropriate to the nature and scale of the proposed development.

We will review the planning system holistically and consider whether further changes are required to address SuDS when we consult on further planning reform, including national policy related to decision making, in 2025.

■ Marine Environment: Carbon Capture and Storage

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[21434\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to (a) incorporate marine ecosystems into the Greenhouse Gas Inventory and (b) ensure that (i) land and (ii) sea are integrated into the carbon capture strategy.

Emma Hardy:

Defra is working in partnership with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Devolved Administrations – through the UK Blue Carbon Evidence Partnership – to address evidence gaps that currently prevent the inclusion of coastal and marine habitats in the Greenhouse Gas Inventory.

Defra Group have funded five flux towers to provide important carbon emissions data for saltmarsh habitats. Alongside investment to deliver a roadmap setting out the steps needed for potential inclusion of saltmarsh in the Greenhouse Gas Inventory. Other marine habitats will be kept in consideration as the evidence base around them develops.

Defra is committed to developing nature-based solutions to climate change on both land and sea. As demonstrated by the inclusion of both saltmarsh and seagrass as habitats in our net zero pathway, alongside a commitment of over £400 million of support for tree planting and peatland restoration in the Autumn Budget.

Carbon Capture Usage and Storage (CCUS) will be essential to meeting our climate commitments. CCUS is used for the deep decarbonisation of certain industries – such as cement and chemicals – which have no alternative to decarbonise. In developing its thinking the Government will consider options and implications for delivering CCUS on both land and sea.

■ Nuisance

Sarah Smith:

[\[21483\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to ensure that local communities are consulted on statutory nuisances.

Emma Hardy:

The Statutory Nuisance Regime under Section 79 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA) is designed to provide protection from nuisances including noise, odour, smoke, fumes, artificial light, infestations and accumulations. Local authorities are responsible for investigating nuisance problems brought to their attention under the EPA.

If they agree that a statutory nuisance is happening, has happened or will happen in the future, councils must serve an abatement notice (usually on the person responsible). This could result in an unlimited fine if the recipient does not follow the rules of the abatement notice. It could also result in prosecution and an additional fine if found guilty in a Magistrates Court.

Local Authority Environmental Health Officers are qualified to make decisions on what can be considered a statutory nuisance within the local context and issue an abatement notice immediately. At this present time, there are no current plans to change the regime to include local consultation.

■ Thames Water

Mr Lee Dillon:

[\[21443\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will hold discussions with Ofwat on the potential impact of the levels of Thames Water's (a) debt and (b) dividend payments on its customers.

Emma Hardy:

Water companies are commercial entities, and it would be inappropriate to comment further on the specific situation of any individual company.

We understand the financial pressures hardworking families are currently facing and we are pushing the sector to ensure support is available for vulnerable customers who are struggling to pay their bills.

We have also been clear that the payment of dividends that do not take into account performance and service delivery for customers and the environment is disgraceful, and we share the public's anger on this.

■ Water Charges: Poverty**Lee Anderson:**[\[21373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to tackle water poverty among older people.

Emma Hardy:

The Government is committed to taking action to address water poverty and help vulnerable customers including older people.

All water companies have measures in place for people who struggle to pay for their water and wastewater services, including measures such as WaterSure, social tariffs, payment breaks and holidays, and debt management support. We expect all companies to make sure households are aware of the measures available to them and do everything they can to support all customers who are vulnerable, including having regard to the interests of individuals of pensionable age.

Government is also improving protections for customers, including introducing new compensations payments for failing to provide additional support for vulnerable customers on the Priority Services Register.

As the independent economic regulator, Ofwat independently scrutinises water company business plans and ensure the prices water companies charge their customers are fair and proportionate. Ofwat published their final determinations for Price Review 2024 on 19 December, which sets company expenditure and customer bills for 2025-2030. We support the action Ofwat is taking to clamp down on poor performance in the water sector to ensure they are delivering for customers.

Furthermore, we expect companies to hold themselves accountable for their public commitment to end water poverty by 2030 and will work with the sector to ensure appropriate measures are taken to deliver this.

■ Water Charges: South West**Ben Maguire:**[\[18326\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of financial support for people paying increased water bills in the South West.

Emma Hardy:

For too long, sewage systems were allowed to deteriorate. The previous Government allowed water companies to divert customers' money to unjustified bonuses and shareholder payouts rather than fixing our water and sewage systems. Now, to fix this mess we need to invest in our aging infrastructure and deliver clean water. That has meant that bills have had to rise across the country.

Ofwat, as the independent regulator, is responsible for ensuring the prices water companies charge their customers are fair. The Water (Special Measures) Bill will deliver on the Government's commitment to deliver for customers by driving 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.

We will always protect the most vulnerable and this Government expects water companies to put robust support in place for customers that are struggling to pay their bills to address water poverty. All companies have measures in place for people who struggle to pay their bills, including WaterSure, social tariffs, payment breaks, and debt management support. We are also continuing to explore what more can be done to support families at risk of being unable to pay future water bills.

■ Water: Prices**David Taylor:**[\[21107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of Affinity Water's recent price changes on the financial security of residents in Hertfordshire.

Emma Hardy:

As the independent economic regulator, Ofwat independently scrutinises water company business plans and ensure the prices water companies charge their customers are fair and proportionate. Ofwat published their final determinations for Price Review 2024 on 19 December, which sets company expenditure and customer bills for 2025-2030.

The Government is committed to taking action to address water poverty and help vulnerable customers with their water bills. All water companies, including Affinity Water, have measures in place for customers who struggle to pay for their water and wastewater services, including measures such as WaterSure, social tariffs, payment breaks and holidays, and debt management support.

Furthermore, we expect companies to hold themselves accountable for their public commitment to end water poverty by 2030 and will work with the sector to ensure appropriate measures are taken to this end.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE■ **Asylum: Sri Lanka****Chris Philp:**[\[20991\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 18968 on Asylum: Sri Lanka, what accommodation is available on St Helena to house migrants; what the maximum capacity is of this accommodation; how much funding will be provided for this accommodation; whether people with granted applications will remain on the island; whether his Department made an assessment of the views of local people; and if he will publish an Impact Assessment.

Stephen Doughty:

The Government of St Helena is responsible for determining what accommodation should be provided to any migrants transferred, and is currently exploring options. We understand that initially they plan to use an existing facility as temporary accommodation while more suitable longer-term housing is matched to the make-up of any migrant cohort. Funding requirements have not yet been determined.

Immigration is the responsibility of the St Helena Government, which will be responsible for processing any applications for protection or settlement. The Government of St Helena is also responsible for any local consultation and impact assessments. The UK Government continues to work in partnership with the Government of St Helena and as agreed in the MOU between both parties the UK will continue to provide the additional training, expertise and funding required to ensure the Government of St Helena is able to respond if any migrants do arrive on BIOT.

■ **Bahrain: Political Prisoners****Andy Slaughter:**[\[20944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department plans to take in response to (a) the case of Sayed Hassan Jawad, (b) reports that political detainees in Jaw Prison had to be transferred to hospital and (c) other allegations of ill-treatment of political prisoners in Bahrain.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK maintains a dialogue with Bahrain on issues including detention and prison conditions at Jau. We encourage individuals alleging concerns about treatment in detention to report them to Bahrain's oversight bodies, which are established to deal with such matters. The FCDO has not raised the case of Sayed Hassan Jawad.

■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty****Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[20576\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when the Government expects to conclude revised negotiations with the Mauritian Government on the future of the Chagos Islands.

Stephen Doughty:

The negotiations with Mauritius have been ongoing for over two years.

On 20 December the UK and Mauritius issued a joint public statement which made clear that Mauritius and the UK have held a series of productive, ongoing conversations and exchanges on finalising a historic Treaty on the exercise of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago.

Both countries reiterated their commitment to finalising a treaty as quickly as possible, whose terms will agree to ensure the long-term, secure and effective operation of the existing base on Diego Garcia and that Mauritius is sovereign over the Archipelago.

Mr Mark Francois:[\[20931\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions his Department has had with the Indian government on (a) British Sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory, (b) the operation of Indian bases on Mauritian territory and (c) the use of Diego Garcia or the rest of the archipelago by (i) the Indian Navy and (ii) other Indian forces.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign Secretary last spoke to Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar on 25 November 2024 about a range of issues, including BIOT. UK officials also regularly engage with the Indian government about the agreement. Our primary goal in negotiations has been to protect the joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia. The agreement reached contains robust security arrangements, ensuring the base can continue to operate securely and effectively as it has done, well into the next century. It has been strongly supported by our closest allies and partners, including the US and India. We would not have signed off any agreement that compromised any of our security interests or those of our allies.

China: Press Freedom**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:**[\[20915\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made representations to his counterparts in the People's Republic of China on the expulsion of the British press corps from the room in which Xi Jinping and the Prime Minister were meeting in Rio de Janeiro on November 18 2024.

Catherine West:

Members of the press were present at the start of the meeting between the Prime Minister and President Xi Jinping on November 18. It is standard practice in diplomatic meetings for the press to remain in the room for opening remarks only, as was the case when the PM met President Biden in September. The subsequent, private, conversation allows space for honest and frank discussion.

■ Syria: Human Rights

David Taylor:

[\[21197\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to help protect the safety and wellbeing of all Syrians including (a) religious minorities, (b) women and (c) ethnic minorities following the fall of the Assad regime.

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 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.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Baby Care Units

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[21452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when NHS England next plans to update its publication entitled Health Building Note 09-03: Neonatal units, first published in March 2013.

Karin Smyth:

Guidance related to the National Health Service Estate is reviewed, prioritised and updated to reflect changing legislative, regulatory, technological and policy requirements. As part of the three-year delivery plan and subsequent for maternity and neonatal service survey, NHS England plans to start the update of this Health Building Note in 2025/26. Usually, guidance notes take between 18 and 24 months to update and so NHS England plans to publish this in 2027/28.

■ Blood Cancer: Medical Treatments

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[21022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of NHS preparedness for the next generation of blood cancer treatments.

Andrew Gwynne:

We are committed to implementing the recommendations of the Lord O'Shaughnessy review into commercial clinical trials, to ensure that innovative, lifesaving treatments are accessible to National Health Service patients, including those with blood cancer.

The Government has also stated that £70 million will be spent on new radiotherapy machines, which will help ensure that the most advanced treatment is available to patients who need it.

In September 2024, Lord Darzi concluded an immediate and independent investigation of the NHS. These findings will help to support improvements across the healthcare system, including through the new 10-Year Health Plan. A core part of this will be our workforce, including the cancer workforce, and how we ensure we train and provide the staff, technology, and infrastructure the NHS needs to care for patients across our communities.

In addition, we will develop a new national cancer plan, which will include further details on how we will improve outcomes for cancer patients, including blood cancer.

Brain: Tumours**Matt Bishop:**[\[902071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support the families of people diagnosed with brain tumours.

Andrew Gwynne:

I know that treatment for all cancers is a difficult time for patients and their families.

This government will shift more healthcare out of hospitals and into the community, to support patients and their families with more personalised care in the most appropriate setting.

We will also get the NHS diagnosing and treating cancer earlier, including through investment in MRI and CT scanners, and improve patients' and families' experience.

Cancer: Mortality Rates**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**[\[21021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to set a target of reducing overall cancer mortality in the UK by 15% by 2040.

Andrew Gwynne:

Professor Lord Darzi's report set out that the United Kingdom has higher mortality from cancer than neighbouring countries, the Nordic countries, and other English-speaking countries, using data published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The Government's Health Mission sets the objective of building a National Health Service fit for the future and reducing lives lost to the biggest killers, including cancer.

We have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS and make it fit for the

future. The plan will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts needed to move healthcare from hospital to the community, analogue to digital, sickness to prevention and will be co-designed with the public, staff, and patients.

My rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, has been clear that there should be a National Cancer Plan. The National Cancer Plan will include further details on how we will improve outcomes for cancer patients, by speeding up diagnosis and treatment and ensuring patients have access to the latest treatments and technology. We are now in discussions about what form that Plan should take, what the overarching goal should be, and what its relationship to the 10-Year Health Plan and the Government's wider Health Mission should be.

■ Carers: Employers' Contributions

Jo Platt: [\[21359\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the rise in employer National Insurance Contributions on (a) local carer support organisations and (b) their ability to provide support to unpaid carers in their area.

Stephen Kinnock:

To enable local authorities to support key services such as adult social care, the Government will make up to £3.7 billion of additional funding available for social care authorities in 2025/26, which includes an £880 million increase in the Social Care Grant.

The Government is also committed to ensuring that families have the support that they need. To support unpaid carers, from April 2025 the Government will increase the Carer's Allowance weekly earnings limit from £151 a week to £196. This means carers can earn up to £10,000 a year whilst still retaining Carer's Allowance, which is approximately an additional £2,000 a year.

■ Continuing Care

Alison Hume: [\[21203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of continuing care assessments resulted in eligibility in (a) the Yorkshire and Humber Integrated Care Board and (b) England in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Alison Hume: [\[21207\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of continuing care assessments that result in eligibility in (a) the Yorkshire and Humber Integrated Care Board area and (b) England are subsequently removed at a later stage.

Stephen Kinnock:

The following table shows the number of NHS Continuing Healthcare (CHC) standard assessments completed, as well as the number and proportion assessed as eligible,

in 2023/24, for England and the NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board:

AREA	STANDARD CHC ASSESSMENTS COMPLETED	NUMBER ASSESSED AS ELIGIBLE	PERCENTAGE ASSESSED AS ELIGIBLE
England	51,165	10,791	21%
NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board	1,548	272	18%

It is not possible to calculate the proportion of cases that became no longer eligible as a specific sub-set of the cases found eligible in that same year. The number of no longer eligible cases in 2023/24 will relate to all cases that became no longer eligible during 2023/24, which could include cases that were eligible before that year, as well as cases that became eligible in that year.

The following table shows the number of those eligible for standard CHC, as well as the number and proportion of cases no longer eligible, for the year 2023/24 to date, for England and the NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board:

AREA	NUMBER ELIGIBLE FOR STANDARD CHC	NUMBER NO LONGER ELIGIBLE FOR NHS CHC	PERCENTAGE OF ELIGIBLE CASES NO LONGER ELIGIBLE FOR STANDARD CHC
England	47,871	13,669	29%
NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board	1,451	367	25%

Note: no longer eligible may be for a variety of reasons, including individuals no longer meeting the criteria, the client being deceased, the client or family withdrawing, etc.

■ Dental Services: Standards

Dr Simon Opher:

[21499]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department plans to take to deliver 700,000 additional urgent dental appointments each year.

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[21500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to begin rolling out measures to deliver the 700,000 additional urgent dental appointments this financial year; and how many such appointments he plans to deliver within the same period.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government is committed to tackling the challenges for patients trying to access National Health Service dental care. We are working to ensure that patients can start to access 700,000 additional urgent dental appointments as soon as possible, targeting areas that need them most. We will set out further information on this commitment, including how this will be measured, in due course.

■ **Epilepsy and Parkinson's Disease: Drugs**

Ian Byrne:

[\[21522\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of supplies of (a) epilepsy and (b) Parkinson's medication.

Karin Smyth:

The Department is working hard with industry to help resolve intermittent supply issues with some epilepsy medications. As a result of ongoing activity and intensive work, including directing suppliers to expedite deliveries, some issues, including with some carbamazepine, lamotrigine, and oxcarbazepine presentations, have been resolved.

We are aware of an ongoing supply issue with all strengths of topiramate tablets with the resupply date to be confirmed. Other manufacturers of topiramate tablets can meet the increased demand during this time.

The Department is aware of supply constraints with one supplier of amantadine 100 milligram capsules used in the management of Parkinson's disease, however stocks remain available from alternative suppliers to cover this demand.

The Department continues to work closely with industry, the National Health Service and others to help ensure patients continue to have access to an alternative treatment until their usual product is back in stock.

■ **General Practitioners: Surrey**

Dr Al Pinkerton:

[\[21491\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he has made an assessment of the potential merits of standardising the GP appointment application process in Surrey.

Stephen Kinnock:

The GP Contract requires all practices to offer patients an assessment of need, or signposting to an appropriate service, on the day they contact the practice, or the next day if they contact the practice in the afternoon. They will not be asked to phone back another day.

As independent businesses, practices have autonomy in the way that they function operationally, including the implementation of digital services and how they manage appointments and related processes. Therefore, each practice will have its own approach to managing appointment bookings in order to best meet the needs of the local population.

■ Health: Coastal Areas

Chris Webb:

[\[902074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to tackle health inequalities for people living in coastal communities.

Andrew Gwynne:

The healthy life expectancy for men in Blackpool is just 51.7 years - the lowest in England and up to 18 years lower than some areas.

These statistics are shocking. We are taking action across Government to address the environmental and socio-economic determinants of health, and aiming to halve the gap in healthy life expectancy between the richest and poorest regions.

We know that targeted action to tackle health inequalities will facilitate economic opportunities, and support an NHS fit for the future.

■ Health: Food Poverty

Luke Murphy:

[\[21416\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of food poverty on (a) malnutrition, (b) obesity and (c) other health conditions in (i) Basingstoke, (ii) Hampshire and (iii) England in the past 10 years.

Andrew Gwynne:

The relationship between food poverty, or food insecurity, nutritional intake, and physical and mental health in the United Kingdom is currently unclear. However, international evidence suggests that in the long-term, food insecurity may be associated with poorer diets and poorer mental and physical health, including a higher risk of overweight and obesity. The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs' UK Food Security Report 2024, which pulls together data from a range of sources, including the Department of Work and Pensions' Family Resources Survey, found that 90% of UK households were food secure in the financial year ending 2023. Further information on the international evidence relating to food insecurity, poorer diets, and mental and physical health, and the UK Food Security Report 2024 is available, respectively, at the following two links:

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6426124/#:~:text=In%20a%20longitudinal%20study%2C%20the,admissions%2C%20and%20length%20of%20stay.>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2024/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2024-theme-4-food-security-at-household-level#healthy-diet>

Data is not available specifically for Basingstoke and Hampshire. However, the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs' report notes that geographical differences remain across the UK, with food security highest in the East, South East, and South West of England, where 92% of households were food secure in all three regions. 10-year trend data is not available as the Family Resources Survey first measured household food security in 2019/20, when the percentage of households classified as food secure was 93%, compared with 90% in 2022/23.

Direct data on the relationship between food insecurity and obesity in the UK is not available. Household level food insecurity is associated with broader deprivation, which is in turn associated with an increased likelihood of overweight and obesity. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/update-to-the-obesity-profile-on-fingertips/obesity-profile-short-statistical-commentary-may-2024>

Most cases of malnutrition will be secondary to another health condition which may impact on nutritional needs or impact on a person's ability to eat and drink, rather than it solely being caused by poor or inadequate dietary intake.

The term malnutrition is sometimes incorrectly used to refer to a poor diet, although this may put someone at increased risk of malnutrition, this would not necessarily meet the criteria for malnutrition. Malnutrition is a clinical condition that is assessed using specific tools.

The Child Poverty Taskforce, made up of ministers from across Government, will be publishing its strategy to reduce child poverty in Spring 2025.

■ Hospitals: Discharges

Edward Argar:

[19319]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on the number of patients who (a) were medically fit to be discharged and (b) were not discharged from hospital on 1 December 2024.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: The number of patients who were medically fit to be discharged, those who no longer met the criteria to reside, in England on 1 December 2024 was 17,646, compared to 25,896 in December 2023. The number of patients who no longer met the criteria to reside but who were not discharged from hospitals in England on 1 December 2024, was 12,086, compared to 12,989 in December 2023.

■ Immunosuppression: Health Services

Alison Bennett:

[21237]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will have discussions with representatives of Forgotten Lives UK on access to (a) preventative treatments and (b) support services for immunosuppressed people.

Andrew Gwynne:

Ensuring that the United Kingdom is prepared for a future pandemic is a top priority for the Government, and we are embedding lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic within our approach to pandemic preparedness.

Whilst we cannot predict the exact timing or characteristics of a future pandemic, the Department acknowledges the disproportionate impact of pandemics on particular groups, including the immunocompromised and those who are otherwise clinically vulnerable.

The Department's new strategic approach to pandemic preparedness recognises that pandemic planning needs to take account of all health inequalities.

COVID-19 tests and treatments are a National Health Service role at the present time. The UK Health Security Agency and NHS partners have met recently to discuss system wide communications on the testing and treatment pathways for COVID-19, to ensure that those who are eligible can access these without delay.

There are currently no discussions planned with representatives of Forgotten Lives UK.

■ Long Covid: Health Services**Mike Martin:**[\[902075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that people with long covid are adequately supported.

Andrew Gwynne:

I know firsthand how complex and debilitating long COVID can be.

Since 2020, specialist long COVID services have been made available in England, and NHS England is now completing a stocktake of these services.

This will provide an accurate national picture, identify key challenges and make strategic recommendations for future service improvement, development and assurance.

We have also invested over £57 million in long COVID research.

■ Medical Records: Databases**Sir John Hayes:**[\[21260\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing patient records of diagnostic results held by charities to be consolidated in a central NHS database.

Karin Smyth:

Patient records in the National Health Service are held in different systems, including general practice IT systems, and electronic patient records held by trusts.

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has announced the intention for there to be a single patient record that both empowers patients by

giving them access to their records, and gives professionals access to the information they need to make the best-informed decisions when delivering care and treatment. We have begun engaging with the public to help shape our plans, including what information they would want to see included in a single record.

■ Mental Health Services: Recruitment

Dr Danny Chambers:

[\[21119\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help increase the number of (a) counsellors and (b) psychotherapists in the mental health workforce.

Stephen Kinnock:

The National Health Service workforce has been overworked for years, leading to staff becoming burnt out and demoralised and, while there has been growth in the mental health workforce over recent years, more is needed. That is why, as part of our mission to build an NHS that is fit for the future, we will recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers to reduce waiting times and provide faster treatment. We recognise that bringing in the staff needed will take time. We are working with NHS England on options to deliver this expansion of the mental health workforce.

More broadly, we have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS. This plan will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts needed to move healthcare from hospital to the community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention. A central part of this will be our workforce and how we ensure we train and provide the staff, technology, and infrastructure the NHS needs to care for patients across our communities.

This summer we will publish a refreshed Long Term Workforce Plan to deliver the transformed health service we will build over the next decade and treat patients on time again. We will ensure the NHS has the right people, in the right places, with the right skills to deliver the care patients need, when they need it.

■ Mental Health Services: Standards

Charlotte Cane:

[\[21799\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department plans to take to improve access to mental health services.

Stephen Kinnock:

Too many people are not receiving the mental health care they need, and we know that waits for mental health services are too long. As part of our mission to build a National Health Service that is fit for the future and that is there when people need it, we will recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers across children and adult mental health services in England to reduce delays and provide faster treatment.

We will also provide access to a specialist mental health professional in every school and roll out Young Futures Hubs in every community.

■ Multiple Sclerosis: Drugs

Lee Anderson:

[\[21377\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, What steps his Department is taking to help ensure that (a) Sativex and (b) other medications for MS patients are (i) affordable and (ii) funded in (A) Nottinghamshire and (B) other areas.

Karin Smyth:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is the independent body responsible for developing authoritative, evidence-based recommendations for the National Health Service on whether new medicines represent a clinically and cost-effective use of resources.

The NICE has been able to recommend several medicines for the treatment of multiple sclerosis, including ublituximab, which has recently been recommended for treating relapsing multiple sclerosis in guidance published on 18 December 2024. The NHS in England is legally required to fund medicines recommended in a NICE appraisal, usually within three months of final guidance.

The NICE guideline on cannabis-based medicinal products recommends that Sativex, a licensed cannabis-based product, should be offered for the treatment of moderate to severe spasticity in adults with multiple sclerosis, if other pharmacological treatments for spasticity are not effective. As Sativex has not been evaluated through the NICE's technology appraisal programme, it is not subject to a funding requirement. Therefore, the decision on whether to prescribe must be taken by a specialist clinician on a case-by-case basis, and funding of this medicine is subject to local National Health Service decisions.

On 6 September 2021, NHS England issued a reminder to NHS trusts and commissioners, now integrated care boards, of the NICE's guidance relating to Sativex, and their responsibilities. This resulted in an increase in the prescribing of this drug, and NHS England is monitoring uptake of prescribing, in-line with the NICE's recommendations.

■ NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight: Expenditure

Luke Murphy:

[\[20737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what funding the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board received in each of the last ten years; and what (a) that funding and (b) the national average in England was per capita.

Karin Smyth:

The Integrated Care Boards (Establishment) Order 2022 legally established 42 integrated care boards (ICBs), with effect from 1 July 2022. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/integrated-care-boards-in-england/>

NHS England is responsible for funding allocations to ICBs. This process is independent of the Government, and NHS England takes advice on the underlying

formula from the independent Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation. These ICB boundaries do not map exactly onto those of the previous clinical commissioning groups, therefore, accurate data cannot be provided for before the 2022/23. The following table shows the allocations for the Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICB, for 2022/23, 2023/24, and 2024/25:

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Core allocation	£2,902,596,000	£3,229,637,000	£3,433,320,000
Primary care	£296,630,000	£307,704,000	£345,060,000
Other primary care		£164,382,000	
ICB running costs	£34,941,000	£35,838,000	£30,367,000
Specialised services			£431,776,000
Pharmaceutical, ophthalmic, and dental services			£171,726,000
Total allocation	£3,234,167,000	£4,060,121,000	£4,412,249,000

Source: data is from NHS England, and is available at the following link: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/allocations/>.

In addition, the following table shows the national average ICB allocation in England per capita, for core services:

YEAR	AVERAGE RECURRENT ALLOCATION PER HEAD IN ENGLAND	AVERAGE RECURRENT ALLOCATION PER HEAD IN THE HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT ICB
2022/23	£1,543	£1,519
2023/24	£1,636	£1,616
2024/25	£1,732	£1,709

■ NHS: Staff

Mary Glendon:

[20962]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to hold a separate consultation on the NHS workforce plan in addition to the consultation on the 10-Year Health Plan.

Karin Smyth:

The refreshed Long Term Workforce Plan will deliver the transformed health service we will build over the next decade, and will ensure that patients get the treatment they need, when and where they need it.

In the development of the plan, we will engage with a range of stakeholders to ensure the needs of staff and patients are considered.

Obesity: Children**James Asser:**[\[902070\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help prevent childhood obesity.

Andrew Gwynne:

Obesity robs our kids of the best possible start in life, and is particularly concentrated in the most deprived areas.

Supporting people to stay healthier for longer is at the heart of our Health Mission. We face a childhood obesity crisis and this government is taking action.

We have acted to end the targeting of junk food ads at children. We've also given local authorities stronger powers to block applications for unhealthy takeaways near schools to put children first.

Dr Beccy Cooper:[\[902076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help prevent childhood obesity.

Andrew Gwynne:

Obesity robs our kids of the best possible start in life, and is particularly concentrated in the most deprived areas.

Supporting people to stay healthier for longer is at the heart of our Health Mission. We face a childhood obesity crisis and this government is taking action.

We have acted to end the targeting of junk food ads at children. We've also given local authorities stronger powers to block applications for unhealthy takeaways near schools to put children first.

Radiotherapy: Finance**Paul Davies:**[\[21458\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department plans to take to ensure that funding allocated for radiotherapy is distributed equally across England, taking into account existing regional inequalities in radiotherapy access.

Paul Davies: [\[21459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what criteria his Department plans to use to determine which trusts or hospitals will receive new radiotherapy machines.

Andrew Gwynne:

The funding for new radiotherapy machines will be used to replace outdated machines, and allocated to trusts using criteria that NHS England is currently developing. The new machines will support the recovery of cancer waiting times and help ensure that patients have access to the most up-to-date treatments. These criteria will be shared with providers in due course.

Lisa Smart: [\[21489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his planned timetable is to spend the additional funding allocated for new radiotherapy machines on 28 October 2024.

Lisa Smart: [\[21492\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure the new additional funding for new radiotherapy machines aligns with the (a) NHS Long-Term Plan and (b) the upcoming 10-year cancer strategy.

Andrew Gwynne:

The £70 million investment in new radiotherapy machines will ensure that the most advanced treatment is available to patients. Following publication of the 10-Year Health Plan, we will publish the new national cancer plan, which will include further details on how we will improve outcomes for cancer patients, including improving waiting times for patients.

The funding will be spent in 2025/26, with the exact timetable and allocation of machines still to be determined. The funding will be used to replace outdated machines, and allocated to trusts using criteria that NHS England is currently developing. These criteria will be shared with providers in due course.

■ Sepsis: Preventive Medicine

Satvir Kaur: [\[21468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase awareness of sepsis prevention (a) nationally and (b) in each local NHS trust.

Andrew Gwynne:

Sepsis has no specific diagnostic test and presentation can vary, making it difficult to diagnose. Early intervention can prevent further deterioration of acutely unwell patients, to help mitigate negative outcomes.

Recent evidence suggests that there is high awareness of sepsis among the general public. The Government and its Arm's Length Bodies are therefore focused on improving the clinical awareness and recognition of sepsis by healthcare

professionals, so that unwell and deteriorating patients are identified promptly and started on life-saving treatment. NHS England has launched several training programmes aimed at improving the diagnosis and early management of sepsis. These programmes are regularly reviewed and revised with support from subject matter experts, as new national sepsis guidance is implemented.

Individual National Health Service trusts may also choose to implement additional initiatives on sepsis locally. NHS England is leading the rollout of Martha's Rule within 143 hospital sites by March 2025. Martha's Rule will give staff, patients, and families the ability to initiate a rapid review for acute physiological deterioration, which will inform whether further actions are required to give the patient the most appropriate and safe care.

■ Surgical Mesh Implants

Mrs Sharon Hodgson:

[\[20166\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to resolve the data challenges encountered in the NHS audit from 2006-2011 of the retrospective audit of pelvic mesh.

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. NHS England expects to be able to notify users of a date for the publication via their publications calendar. Subject to peer review, the publication is expected to include information around data quality.

■ Urgent Treatment Centres

Helen Whately:

[\[21339\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to ensure Urgent Treatment Centres remain open.

Karin Smyth:

No such assessment has been made. Integrated care boards are responsible for the commissioning of local services, including urgent treatment centres and their operational hours.

HOME OFFICE■ **Asylum: Sri Lanka****Chris Philp:**[\[20993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 18968 on Asylum: Sri Lanka, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of relocating to St Helena asylum seekers who have travelled to the UK by small boat across the English Channel.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The specific purpose of the Memorandum of Understanding with St Helena was to deal with the risk of further migrants attempting to travel to the British Indian Ocean Territory, prior to the sovereignty agreement with Mauritius being formally completed. There are no plans to extend that agreement beyond its current remit.

■ **Community Policing: Lincolnshire****Sir John Hayes:**[\[20919\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many of the extra 13,000 neighbourhood police will serve in Lincolnshire.

Dame Diana Johnson:

As part of our Safer Streets Mission we will restore neighbourhood policing by putting police back on the beat, with 13,000 additional police officers, PCSOs and special constables in neighbourhood policing roles across England and Wales.

Every part of the country will benefit from this pledge, including Lincolnshire. Further details will be announced in the normal way in due course.

Sir John Hayes:[\[20920\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's plan to include a named, contactable police officer in each neighbourhood, how her Department defines neighbourhood.

Dame Diana Johnson:

As part of the Government's Safer Streets mission, the Home Secretary has made a clear commitment to strengthen neighbourhood policing through the introduction of a Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. This will set out what communities can expect from neighbourhood policing teams in every local area including intelligence-led and visible patrols.

The Home Office is working closely with policing and other key stakeholders to implement the Guarantee, and is clear that everyone, wherever they are in the country, will benefit from it and will have a named officer to contact when things go wrong.

■ Crime: Women

Helen Grant: [\[21288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many crimes were committed against (a) women and (b) girls in each of the last five years by crime type.

Jess Phillips:

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) regularly publishes estimates, from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), on the proportion of women and girls who have been victims of crime. Information from the 2023/24 survey, for 16+ year olds and 10-15 year olds, and for previous years can be accessed in the annual demographic tables here:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalesannualtrendanddemographicstables>

Experiences of several crimes which are disproportionately experienced by women and girls are also covered by the CSEW in a separate self-completion section of the survey and presented separately by ONS. The latest prevalence estimates for domestic abuse, sexual assault, stalking and harassment, for people aged 16 and over broken down by sex, are presented in the ONS Annual supplementary tables, which can be accessed here:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalesannualsupplementarytables>

■ Fraud: Victims

James McMurdock: [\[21151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what legal protections are available to fraud victims to prevent further (a) exploitation and (b) financial loss.

James McMurdock: [\[21153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what processes are in place to help victims of fraud recover lost (a) funds and (b) assets when the fraud is committed (i) online and (ii) by international scammers.

James McMurdock: [\[21154\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an assessment of the adequacy of (a) legal and (b) financial advice for victims of fraud.

James McMurdock: [\[21155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to raise awareness of (a) fraud and (b) fraud prevention.

James McMurdock: [\[21158\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what long-term programs are available to help fraud victims regain financial stability after a fraud incident.

James McMurdock: [21161]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure police officers have training specifically on (a) tackling fraud and (b) fraud prevention.

James McMurdock: [21162]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department coordinates with the Solicitor General to ensure victims of fraud receive the financial protection and support they need during criminal investigations.

James McMurdock: [21163]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the impact of fraud on the economy.

James McMurdock: [21164]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will hold discussions with the Sentencing Council on the adequacy of sentencing guidelines in relation to perpetrators of fraud.

James McMurdock: [21165]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many instances of online fraud were reported to the police in the 2023-24 financial year.

Dan Jarvis:

This Government is committed to working with law enforcement, civil society and industry to better protect the public and businesses from this appalling crime.

Frauds with a total financial loss of £2.4 billion were reported to Action Fraud between November 2023 and November 2024. [NFIB Dashboard \(Public\) \(arcgis.com\)](#) This is likely to underestimate the full impact of fraud to the economy as fraud is underreported.

According to the Action Fraud Dashboard as of the 20th of December 2024, in its reporting period of 13-months, 64% of reported fraud was cyber enabled. This means that in the last 13-months, roughly 223,000 reported frauds were cyber-enabled. The Action Fraud dashboard only provides data for the last 13-months therefore does not cover the whole of the 23/24 period. [NFIB Dashboard \(Public\)](#)

Victims of fraud can suffer both serious financial and emotional harm. The Code of Practice for Victims sets out the services and a minimum standard of services that must be provided to victims of crime by organisations in England and Wales.

In addition to support offered by investigating offers, the Home Office has supported the rollout of the National Economic Crime Victim Care Unit (NECVCU). This is a focused and targeted service providing victims of fraud and cyber crime, with not only a consistent and high-quality response, but also a national standard of care and support. The aim of NECVCU is for victims to feel safe and more confident following contact, whilst assisting them to cope and recover from the crime and significantly

reduce the likelihood of repeat victimisation. Since its inception in 2018, NECVCU has supported 440,994 victims of fraud. Since January 2021, NECVCU has also helped victims recover £3,685,201.

The Home Office has provided funding to City of London Police to create a coordinated police Fraud Protect Network. The network is made up of local, regional and national law enforcement officers and is designed to reduce the threat of fraud and revictimisation by providing consistent protect messaging and safeguarding advice to the public.

Authorised Push Payment scams came into force in October, ensuring more victims get their money back. Reimbursement was already in place for victims of unauthorised fraud.

In addition, the Proceeds of Crime Act ('POCA') allows the recovery of the proceeds of crime from criminals and returns the funds to victims, or back into law enforcement and prosecution agencies. Seized assets can be returned to victims at sentencing through a 'compensation order' that compensates loss or damage caused by the convicted person, including for fraud offences. Victims can also apply for any criminal funds that have been seized by law enforcement to be returned to them where they are the original owner.

The Home Office also continues to engage with banks, trade organisations and third sector organisations to ensure proper advice and support for victims of fraud. Our "Stop! Think Fraud" campaign helps people spot and avoid fraud, and provides fraud prevention and recovery advice. [Stop! Think Fraud - How to stay safe from scams](#)

The Home Office and College of Policing are reviewing the fundamental training offered to police officers with regards to tackling fraud, including digital skills, to identify opportunities for improvement. The Home Office is also working across law enforcement and the public sector to develop and deliver a "Workforce Strategy" for Economic Crime. This will address recruitment and retention challenges for Economic Crime, including fraud. This will also consider opportunities to exchange people and counter-fraud skills across the public and private sectors.

Sentencing guidelines are developed by the Sentencing Council for England and Wales. The Council is independent of Parliament and Government. As an independent body, the Council decides on its own priorities and work plan for producing and reviewing guidelines. The Lord Chancellor or the Court of Appeal can ask the Council to consider reviewing or producing guidelines in a particular area, but the Council is not required to agree to any such requests.

The Sentencing Guidelines for Fraud Offences were published in 2014. The Council monitors and evaluates all definitive guidelines, as per its statutory duty to do so.

■ Police: Civil Disorder**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[20930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will have discussions with the devolved administrations on potential changes to the (a) criteria for and (b) duration of short term deployment of police officers to deal with unexpected civil disorder.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Operational matters – including requests for and provision of Mutual Aid in response to public disorder – are primarily a matter for police forces who are operationally independent of government.

■ Sexual Harassment**Ms Stella Creasy:** [\[20961\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 22 July 2024 to Question 66 on Sexual Harassment, what progress she has made on implementation of the Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023.

Jess Phillips:

The Government is committed to halving levels of violence against women and girls in a decade. An important part of this ambition is tackling public sexual harassment which often leaves people, disproportionately women, feeling very unsafe. The Protection from Sex-Based Harassment in Public Act 2023 will make this type of harassment a specific offence and could see perpetrators face a custodial sentence of up to 2 years. We will confirm next steps on implementation of the Act at the earliest opportunity.

■ Violence: Women**Helen Grant:** [\[21290\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the definition of violence against women and girls.

Jess Phillips:

The Government's definition of violence against women and girls (VAWG) covers violence and abuse which disproportionately, but not exclusively, affect women and girls. Crimes and behaviours include sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and can occur online, as well as offline. This is evidenced by prevalence data that shows women and girls are far more likely to experience these crimes.

■ Visas: Palestinians**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[21088\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an assessment of the feasibility of Palestinians in Gaza seeking to make a UK visa application enrolling their biometrics in a Visa Application Centre in (a) Ramallah and (b) Jerusalem.

Seema Malhotra:

Biometrics underpin the UK immigration system to support identity assurance and suitability checks on foreign nationals who are subject to immigration control.

In most circumstances, foreign nationals who are required to apply for entry clearance to come to the UK are required to enrol their biometrics in the form of a facial image and fingerprints as part of the application process at a visa application centre.

We will accept applications from those in Gaza, at any of the UK's Visa Application Centres. Customers can visit [Welcome to VFS Global | vfsglobal](#) for an up to date list of Visa Application Centres in the region.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION**■ New Palace Yard: Repairs and Maintenance****Greg Smith:****[20032]**

To ask the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney, representing the House of Commons Commission, whether the work for vehicle entry and exit in New Palace Yard is on (a) time and (b) budget.

Nick Smith:

The most recently approved Business Case for the works in New Palace Yard anticipated a completion date of between October 2024 and March 2026. This range takes into account identified risks that may occur over the life span of the project, for example material shortages, unexpected discoveries during excavation, or unexpected events. The works are currently expected to complete in October 2025, which is within the approved range. The works are anticipated to complete within the overall budget set out in the Business Case.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ Agriculture: Land****Helen Whately:****[21340]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many hectares of the Best and Most Versatile agricultural land are (a) protected, (b) under consideration for development and (c) approved for consent in each (i) local authority area and (ii) constituency.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [17576](#) 11 December 2024.

■ Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[17565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, (a) when and (b) how her Department became aware of the new planning application for the proposed new Chinese Embassy near the Tower of London.

Matthew Pennycook:

Decisions on whether to call in a planning application routinely arise following a representation or notification from a third party. In this instance, the Department were notified of the new planning application by Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office officials.

■ Empty Property

James MacCleary: [\[21469\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether his Department is taking steps to (a) identify and (b) track the ownership of long-term empty properties.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to the Question UIN [HL3269](#) on 20 December 2024. The statistics in question are published annually and include a breakdown of vacant dwellings by local authority district. They can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

■ Flats: Construction

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many and what proportion of new dwellings built in (a) England and (b) London were flats in the last year for which figures are available.

Matthew Pennycook:

Annual estimates of the proportion of building control reported new build purpose-built flats in England and London are shown in Live Table 254, which can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

■ Housing: Construction

Andy McDonald: [\[21318\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of (a) developing and (b) approving a single mandatory consumer code for all housebuilders.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government is committed to improving upon existing means of redress for new build homebuyers for when things go wrong. The government responded to the CMA

Housebuilding Study in October 2024 and committed to implementing recommendation 2.1, namely a single mandatory consumer code for housebuilders.

■ Housing: Infrastructure

Andy McDonald: [\[21315\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of implementing common adoptable standards for public amenities on new housing estates.

Andy McDonald: [\[21316\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of improving protections for residential freeholders from unnecessary costs charged by estate management companies.

Andy McDonald: [\[21317\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of prohibiting new embedded management arrangements in residential developments.

Andy McDonald: [\[21319\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help prevent delays by relevant authorities in the adoption of public amenities on housing estates.

James Naish: [\[21496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to implement the recommendations of the Competition and Markets Authority Housebuilding Market Study on private estate management.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer my hon. Friend to the Written Ministerial Statement I made on 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)).

■ Infrastructure: Planning

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's press release on building, published on 5 December 2024, what the mechanism is by which she plans to meet the target of 150 infrastructure decisions to be decided; and whether this target relates to (a) national infrastructure planning and (b) major developments under the Town and Country Planning Act.

Matthew Pennycook:

As part of its Plan for Change, the government has pledged to make decisions on at least 150 major infrastructure projects within this parliament. This target is aimed at projects of a certain type and over a certain size as set out under the Planning Act 2008, which are considered by government to be of national importance and

therefore should be consented at a national level through the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects regime.

■ Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[17124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, which provisions of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2024 have (a) been and (b) are due to be commenced.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[17127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans not to commence provisions of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

Matthew Pennycook:

Following Royal Assent of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) in October 2023, a small number of provisions were commenced by the previous government, for example relating to pavement licensing, planning enforcement and certain reforms to the compulsory purchase process.

Building on these measures, in September last year, a power enabling local authorities to bring forward affordable housing, national health or educational facilities through the use of compulsory purchase without paying 'hope value' compensation was fully commenced.

We have also made clear that we intend to commence powers contained in the LURA to improve the transparency of build out rates for residential development, including the introduction of commencement notices and progress reports. This was announced alongside the government's response to the National Planning Policy Framework consultation, published on 12 December.

We do not intend to commence provisions from the LURA that would cut across our commitments to streamline the planning process and unlock development, such as the Infrastructure Levy.

■ Local Government Finance

Mr Clive Betts: [\[20568\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to provide (a) mayors and (b) councils with additional fundraising powers, in addition to the planned infrastructure levy.

Jim McMahon:

The English Devolution White Paper has provided powers for local leaders to deliver for their places and support economic growth. The government keeps all taxes under review.

■ Local Government: Reform

Neil O'Brien: [\[21007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the evidential basis is for the expectation that reformed local authorities should generally have a population of 500,000 or more.

Jim McMahon:

The overall case for local government reorganisation is set out the English Devolution White Paper. New unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. For most areas this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more, but there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including for devolution, and decisions will be on a case-by-case basis.

■ Local Plans

Lewis Cocking: [\[R\] \[20841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's Planning Newsletter issued to local authorities on 13 December 2024, what steps local planning authorities will need to take as part of the requirement to update their Local Development Scheme within 12 weeks of the publication of the revised National Planning Policy Framework; and whether this will require amendments to an existing Local Plan.

Matthew Pennycook:

Local Planning Authorities have a statutory obligation to produce a Local Development Scheme and to keep it up-to-date and publicly available. As the Secretary of State set out in her letter of 12 December 2024, we are asking all Local Planning Authorities to review and update their Local Development Scheme in light of the revised National Planning Policy Framework and transitional arrangements by no later than 6 March 2025.

Lewis Cocking: [\[R\] \[20870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 12 December 2024, Official Report, HCWS308, whether local authorities with existing Local Plans produced under the previous standard method will now be required to update their Local Plans (a) as a consequence of the new housing need requirements and (b) in order to deliver the extra year's worth of homes in their five year housing pipeline.

Matthew Pennycook:

Having an effective up-to-date plan in place is essential to planning for, and meeting, development needs.

Whether a local authority is required to update their Local Plan as a consequence of the new housing need requirement will depend on the stage a draft plan has reached. This is set out in Annex 1 of the NPPF, particularly paragraphs 234-237.

Authorities that do not have an emerging plan at an advanced stage will need to use the revised NPPF and new housing requirement when preparing their next plan.

The 5-year housing land supply policy is a crucial mechanism in the planning system that ensures local authorities maintain a pipeline of sites for housing. The requirement introduced in para 78 c) in the NPPF means some LPAs will have to add a 20% buffer to their five-year housing land supply requirement. It does not necessitate LPAs producing a plan update.

■ National Landscapes

Freddie van Mierlo: [\[19819\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 26 November 2024 to Question 14870 on National Landscapes and with reference to section 245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, for what reason that Answer states that local authorities should have regard to rather than seek to further the purposes of national landscapes.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer, as corrected, given to Question UIN [14870](#) on 26 November 2024.

■ Parking: Regulation

Ruth Jones: [\[21015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to improve the regulation of car parking management companies.

Ruth Jones: [\[21016\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her planned timetable is for introducing a new private parking code of practice.

Alex Norris:

The Government is determined to drive up standards in the private parking sector.

The Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019 places a duty on the Government to prepare a code of practice containing guidance about the operation and management of private parking facilities.

At this time the Government is not able to share any further details but please be assured we will announce our plans for the new Code in due course.

JUSTICE**■ Courts: Interpreters and Translation Services****James Naish:**[\[21509\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she is taking steps to improve the (a) quality and (b) performance of court language service providers: and whether she has had discussions with relevant stakeholders on the future insourcing of those services.

Sarah Sackman:

The Ministry of Justice is committed to ensuring the justice system is supported by a suite of high-quality language services that meet the needs of all those that require them.

Ministry of Justice language service contracts, which began on 31 October 2016, are subject to robust governance arrangements.

These include monthly meetings with suppliers and stakeholders to review the quality of the services being provided and performance against contractual performance indicators. The contracts also provide for the Ministry of Justice to audit the suppliers to verify the accuracy of contractual payments, management information, and compliance with contractual obligations.

In 2016, the Ministry of Justice also awarded a contract to an independent quality assurance provider. They review the Ministry of Justice's register of interpreters, conduct an annual audit of supplier processes for introducing new linguists, and conduct 'spot checks' of interpreters undertaking assignments.

The Ministry of Justice has regular conversations with stakeholders about the Department's approach to language service provision. The decision to continue with outsourcing beyond the current contracts was given careful consideration, based on service requirements and value for money for the taxpayer.

■ Courts: Opening Hours**Nick Timothy:**[\[21432\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many (a) days and (b) hours per week (i) county, (ii) family, (iii) magistrates and (iv) youth courts were open for in 2024.

Sarah Sackman:

Court opening times/hours are distinct from court sitting days/hours and are the hours in which the public can access HMCTS buildings. In practice in most ordinary working weeks, courts are open to the public for five days a week for a minimum of eight hours a day (40 hours a week), but each court building operates opening hours that suit the local operating environment. This differs for certain Magistrates Courts which hear remand cases on Saturday mornings (and some bank holidays) and are therefore open longer. We do not collect data on the specific days and hours that courts are open for. Opening hours usually start at some time between 08:30am and

09:30am and run to approximately 5:00pm. Court sitting hours, are normally 10.30am - 4.30pm but the timings of court sittings are a matter for the independent judiciary.

The Lord Chancellor has a statutory duty to ensure there is an effective and efficient system to support the carrying out of the businesses of the courts, and that appropriate services are provided for those courts. Opening hours in all courts are at the discretion of the Lord Chancellor under the Courts Act 2003.

■ Crimes of Violence: Women

Helen Grant: [\[21289\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many cases involved violence against (a) women and (b) girls in (i) criminal and (ii) family courts in each of the last five years.

Alex Davies-Jones:

Tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a top priority for this Government, which is why we have committed to halving the prevalence of VAWG within the decade. We will go further than before to deliver a cross-government transformative approach to halve violence against women and girls, underpinned by a new VAWG strategy to be published this year.

VAWG is defined as offences which predominantly, but not exclusively, affect women and girls. This includes sexual offences, stalking, harassment and domestic abuse.

Published data on the number of cases of stalking, harassment and sexual offences at criminal courts can be found in the Outcomes by Offence data tool published here: [Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: June 2024](#).

Data held centrally by the Ministry of Justice does not include detailed information about victims of offences and the nature of the offence. Therefore, information on some violence against women and girls and domestic abuse cases can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

■ Prisoners' Release: Homelessness

Kim Johnson: [\[21409\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people have been recalled to prison because of homelessness in each of the last 12 months.

Kim Johnson: [\[21410\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people serving an IPP sentence have been recalled to prison because of homelessness in each of the last 12 months.

Kim Johnson: [\[21411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of people serving an Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence have been recalled to prison by (a) category and (b) reason for recall, in each of the past eight quarters.

Kim Johnson:

[21412]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of people serving an Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence have been recalled to prison due to criminal allegations made against them which did not result in further police action, in each of the past eight quarters.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Data on the number of offenders recalled to custody after becoming homeless are not held centrally and could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

Information about the number of IPP recalls is published in quarterly offender management statistics - [Offender management statistics quarterly - GOV.UK.](#)

■ Prisoners' Release: Reoffenders

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[21437]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the (a) recall and (b) reoffending rates are for offenders who have been released under the SDS40 scheme since September 2024.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The number of people who have been recalled or have reoffended following release under the early release measure (SDS40) forms a subset of prison releases data which is scheduled for future publication. In accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, we may not give any early indication of the contents of this statistical report.

General reoffending rates are published regularly on an annual and quarterly basis. The most recent rates are available at the following link:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/proven-reoffending-statistics.

General recall statistics are published regularly on a quarterly basis. The most recent statistics are available at the following link:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly.

■ Prisons: Procurement

Kim Johnson:

[21413]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question HL3055, Prisons: Repairs and Maintenance, whether the public sector will be allowed to bid for new contracts for the provision of maintenance services for prisons.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Ministry of Justice will not be inviting public sector bids for the provision of maintenance services for prisons. A 2023 assessment undertaken in partnership with the Cabinet Office determined that a privatised solution was the preferred option for meeting prison maintenance service needs. This conclusion was approved by the previous administration.

In the interests of expediting the desired improvements in prison maintenance services, the Government is currently running a competitive tender process for these new contracts in line with the recommendations made.

SCOTLAND

■ Scotland Office: Equality

Rupert Lowe: [\[21145\]](#)

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

Ian Murray:

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 merit.

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.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

■ Electoral Commission

Adam Jogee: [\[21766\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, how many formal recommendations the Committee has made to the Electoral Commission since 12 December 2019.

Sir Jeremy Wright:

The Speaker's Committee has made no formal recommendations to the Electoral Commission since 12 December 2019.

The Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission is a statutory body established in part to examine performance and to review and approve the Electoral Commission's annual estimates, and five-year plan. The Committee also recommends the appointments of the Chair of the Electoral Commission and Electoral Commissioners.

As part of this statutory role, the Committee has reported on Commissioner appointments and the Commission's annual estimates.

The Committee does not have the power to direct or intervene in the Commission's operational work, but there is regular engagement to keep the Committee informed about ongoing activity.

TRANSPORT

■ **Great British Railways: Accountability**

Jerome Mayhew:

[\[21368\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to ensure that the work of Great British Rail is held to account.

Simon Lightwood:

Great British Railways' new passenger-focused culture will ensure passengers are at the heart of everything it does. It will be operationally independent of, but accountable to, the Secretary of State, as well as to the UK and devolved Parliaments, supported by the Office for Rail and Road and a new passenger watchdog, the Passenger Standards Authority. We will be consulting on our proposals for the legislation that will establish GBR as an arm's length body, in due course.

■ **Large Goods Vehicles: Concrete**

Mike Amesbury:

[\[21357\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an economic and environmental impact assessment of the potential impact of making temporary the (a) 38.4 and (b) 44 tonne weight limits on volumetric concrete mobile plants.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department ran a call for evidence from October to December 2023 seeking views on three potential options on weight limits for Volumetric Concrete Mixers (VCMs). Evidence was provided to the Department on both the pros and cons of allowing VCMs to continue to operate at higher weights. The Department has reviewed the evidence provided and will publish its findings shortly. Any potential changes to the current policy position on VCM weight limits will need to consider the implications for road safety, infrastructure, the environment, and maintaining fair competition in the market.

■ Motor Vehicles: Carbon Emissions**Clive Jones:** [\[21143\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what her planned timetable is for publishing the Government's consultation on the zero emission vehicle mandate.

Lilian Greenwood:

The consultation on Phasing out sales of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030 and supporting the ZEV transition launched on 24 December 2024 and is due to close on 18 February 2025. The Government is engaging intensively with interested stakeholders and a response will be published in due course.

■ Network Rail: Railway Stations**Alex Mayer:** [\[21228\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with Shadow Great British Railways on future management of the 20 railway stations directly managed by Network Rail.

Simon Lightwood:

The Secretary of State has not yet held any conversations with Shadow Great British Railways on the future management of stations.

The government has set Shadow Great British Railways several initial priorities, including being passenger focused - improving services for passengers and freight-customers, unlocking barriers to delivery and moving the rail network towards greater financial sustainability.

The government will shortly be setting out plans for how Shadow Great British Railways will be delivering on these priorities.

■ Railways: Floods**Mr Lee Dillon:** [\[21440\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department holds plans for supporting rail networks affected by flooding.

Simon Lightwood:

Network Rail and other operators are responsible for planning for flooding events and have contingency plans in place. The Department keeps in close contact with these operators in such events and would take appropriate action as necessary.

■ River Tyne: Bridges**Chi Onwurah:** [\[21308\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions her Department has had with the Port of Tyne on its responsibilities to the Swing Bridge.

Mike Kane:

The department engages actively with many UK ports, including the Port of Tyne. However, the department has had no recent discussion with the port of Tyne on those specific points.

Road Signs and Markings**Alicia Kearns:**[\[21683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of creating a new sign asking drivers to move to the right at short slip roads.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department has not made an assessment of introducing a sign asking drivers to move to the right at short slip roads. There are currently no plans to introduce this.

Royal Tank Regiment: Travel**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**[\[R\] \[20929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of expanding the Remembrance Day travel concession to include The Royal Tank Regiment parade.

Simon Lightwood:

The rail industry continues to offer free travel in the same way it has done historically, this includes free travel to Remembrance Sunday events. Eligible passengers can also apply for a Veterans Railcard which offers discounted prices on train fares for those who have served in the UK Armed Forces.

TREASURY**Agriculture: Inheritance Tax****John Glen:**[\[20954\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment has been made of the potential impact of proposed changes to Agricultural Property Relief on net carbon emissions.

James Murray:

The government is extending the existing scope of agricultural property relief from 6 April 2025 to land managed under certain environmental agreements. The expectation is that some individuals will now choose to enter into agreements who would not otherwise have done so and this will have a positive environmental impact.

The government has also announced it will reform agricultural property relief and business property relief further from 6 April 2026 as it is not fair or sustainable for a very small number of claimants each year to claim such a significant amount of relief.

In accordance with standard practice, a tax information and impact note will be published alongside the draft legislation before the relevant Finance Bill.

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

■ Business Rates

John Glen: [\[20951\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the new business rate multiplier on Rateable Values over £500,000 will apply to (a) railway, (b) communications and (c) utility hereditaments on the Central Rating List.

James Murray:

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government announced an intention to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality and leisure (RHL) properties with Rateable Values below £500,000 from 2026-27. This permanent tax cut will ensure that high street RHL properties benefit from much-needed certainty and support. This tax cut must be funded sustainably and so the Government intends to introduce a higher multiplier on all properties that have a rateable value (RV) of £500,000 and above.

The multiplier rates will be confirmed at Autumn Budget 2025.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: [\[21259\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many hereditaments used for (a) retail, (b) hospitality and (c) leisure in England have a rateable value of (i) £51,000 or below, (ii) between £51,001 and £499,999 and (iii) £500,000 or above.

James Murray:

The Valuation Office Agency's official statistics publication *Non Domestic Rating Stock of Properties* provides details of hereditaments by special category code and rateable value.

■ Crown Estate: Great British Energy

James Wild: [\[21049\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the press notice entitled New Great British Energy partnership launched to turbocharge energy independence, published on 25 July 2024, if her Department will publish the partnership agreement between GB Energy and The Crown Estate.

James Murray:

The partnership between The Crown Estate and Great British Energy is subject to the passing of The Great British Energy Bill. Once that Bill passes through its legislative

stages, partnership will be subject to an agreement with Great British Energy. Although the partnership agreement itself will not be published, given it will be commercially sensitive, The Crown Estate have committed to publish information relating to the partnership as part of its existing annual report. This will include a report on the activities of the Commissioners under that partnership and any effects or benefits resulting from the activities of the Commissioners under that partnership.

■ Cultural Heritage: Tax Allowances

Stuart Andrew:

[21293]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to (a) Business and (b) Agricultural Property Relief on the heritage sector.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief (APR) and business property relief (BPR) at www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms.

It is expected that up to around 2,000 estates will be affected by the changes to APR and BPR in 2026-27, with around half of those being claims that only involve AIM shares. Almost three-quarters of estates claiming agricultural property relief (or those claiming agricultural property relief and business property relief together) are expected to be unaffected by these reforms.

In some circumstances, relief from inheritance tax and capital gains tax is also available for national heritage assets when they pass to a new owner either as a result of a death or as a gift. HMRC determines which assets qualify for exemption on the advice of the government's heritage advisory agencies. No changes have been made to this relief at the Budget. Information about tax relief for national heritage assets can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tax-relief-for-national-heritage-assets>.

■ Employers' Contributions: Equality

John Glen:

[21295]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will place in the Library a copy of her Department's equality (a) impact assessment and (b) screening in relation to the changes to employers' National Insurance contributions in the Autumn Budget 2024.

James Murray:

A Tax Information and Impact Note (TIIN) was published alongside the introduction of Bill containing the changes to employer NICs. The TIIN sets out the impact of the policy on the exchequer; the economic impacts of the policy; and the impacts on individuals, businesses, civil society organisations and an overview of the equality impacts.

The Office for Budget Responsibility also published the Economic and Fiscal Outlook (EFO), which sets out a detailed forecast of the economy and public finances

■ **First Time Buyers: Stamp Duties**

John Glen: [\[20947\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the number of first-time buyers paying stamp duty in (a) 2024-25 and (b) 2025-26; and what the average amount of stamp duty a first time buyer will pay in each year is.

James Murray:

An estimate of the number of first-time buyers paying Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) and average amount of SDLT paid by first-time buyers is not available because there is limited information on first-time buyers. HMRC can only identify First Time Buyers that are claiming First Time Buyers' Relief in the SDLT return.

First Time Buyers purchasing a property for less than £250,000 do not need to claim First Time Buyers' Relief under current SDLT rates and those purchasing a property for more than £625,000 are not eligible to claim the relief.

■ **Fraud: Compensation**

James McMurdock: [\[21166\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a financial compensation scheme for victims of fraud who have been taxed on money stolen from them.

James McMurdock: [\[21167\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of HMRC's policies on supporting victims of fraud.

James Murray:

Where taxpayers may have been victims of fraud, HMRC considers the correct response for each taxpayer's case based on the unique set of circumstances they present. Where HMRC finds evidence of fraud, they work closely with the relevant authorities such as the police and the Serious Fraud Office and will share information to support their investigations.

HMRC has a range of options to support those who require extra help, including victims of fraud, and has guidance and training in place for all advisors on how to identify customers who need extra help.

Where appropriate, HMRC will also signpost taxpayers to voluntary and community organisations.

■ Large Goods Vehicles: Excise Duties

James Wild:

[21047]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the rules on the taxation of double cab pickup trucks on (a) consumers and (b) rural communities.

James Murray:

Double Cab Pick Up vehicles (DCPUs) are currently treated as goods vehicles for tax purposes, rather than cars, meaning they benefit from more generous tax treatment. A Court of Appeal judgement in 2020 determined that they must be treated as cars for capital allowances and Benefit in Kind treatment under the existing legislation.

The government will apply this judgement, as legislating to reclassify DCPUs as goods vehicles would be a significant tax break costing hundreds of millions per year for these generally higher CO2-emitting vehicles.

The transitional arrangements mean that this will not affect the capital allowances treatment of any business that already owns a DCPU, or that purchases one before April 2025; and businesses that purchase a DCPU after this date will still be able to deduct the cost from their taxable profits at 18% or 6% per year. Under the transitional arrangements for Benefit-in-Kind, anyone who has accessed a DCPU as a company car before April 2025 will not be impacted until the sooner of disposal of the vehicle, April 2029 or when their lease expires.

In addition, there are alternatives to DCPUs (such as Single Cab Pick Ups) that still benefit from the generous treatment as goods vehicles.

■ Music Venues: Business Rates

Mr Paul Kohler:

[R] [21241]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of changes in business rate relief for grassroots music venues on the (a) number of live music venues and (b) music industry.

Mr Paul Kohler:

[R] [21243]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the reduction in business rate relief for grassroots music venues on (a) the number of jobs in the music industry and (b) early-career musicians.

James Murray:

At the Autumn Budget, the Government announced that retail, hospitality and leisure (RHL) properties will receive 40% relief (up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business) for 2025-26.

The Culture, Media and Sport (CMS) Committee's report on grassroots music venues recommended that RHL relief should not be wholly withdrawn in April 2025. The Committee's report also highlighted the sector's desire for certainty and long-term

stability. That is why the Government intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for RHL properties with rateable values below £500,000 from 2026-27.

The Government's full response to the CMS Committee's report was published on 14 November 2024 and is available online:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8227/grassroots-music-venues/publications/>.

■ NHS: Employers' Contributions

Dr Luke Evans:

[20263]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what proportion of the revenue (a) raised by changes to employee national insurance contributions and (b) announced for the NHS at Autumn Budget 2024 will be allocated to fund non employee national insurance contribution related NHS activity.

James Murray:

At Autumn Statement, the Chancellor outlined the Government's commitment to ensuring the sustainability and productivity of the NHS. As part of this, HM Treasury have allocated £22.6 billion to the NHS to support productivity improvements, upgrade IT systems, enhance working conditions for staff, and address the maintenance backlog.

The Government will provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional Employer National Insurance Contributions cost, in line with the approach taken under the previous Government's Health and Social Care Levy. The Government will update Parliament on allocations in due course.

■ Pre-school Education: Employers' Contributions

Laura Trott:

[21031]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the number of early years providers eligible for Employment Allowance when proposed changes to employer National Insurance contributions come into force.

James Murray:

Estimates of the number of early years providers eligible for Employment Allowance when proposed changes to employer National Insurance contributions come into force are not available.

The eligibility of a specific employer will depend on the nature of their work, which can be determined by the employer according to HMRC guidance.

■ Private Education: VAT

Laura Trott:

[21030]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many applications for VAT numbers for private school fees her Department has (a) received and (b) granted since 5th July 2024.

James Murray:

HMRC publishes data on the VAT population by sector on an annual basis. The latest statistics can be found here: [Value Added Tax \(VAT\) annual statistics - GOV.UK](#).

VAT will apply to private school and boarding fees for terms starting on or after 1 January 2025. However, this does not mean that every school needs to have registered for VAT by this date. The exact date a school needs to register for VAT depends on the value of school fee payments for terms starting on or after 1 January 2025, and the date the school receives those payments. A significant number of schools were already registered for VAT prior to the confirmation of this policy at Budget.

HMRC has taken action to support private schools through the change: providing detailed guidance; running webinars; and allocating additional resource to process VAT registration applications. HMRC continues to engage with private schools and the organisations that represent them.

■ Rachel Reeves: Self-assessment**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[21387\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to her Department's publication entitled The Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt's schedule of taxable sources of income and gains, published on 9 February 2024, whether she plans to publish her tax return for 2023-24.

James Murray:

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

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

■ Swimming: VAT**Lee Anderson:**[\[21378\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential financial impact of VAT on private swimming schools.

James Murray:

VAT is a broad-based tax on consumption, and the 20 per cent standard rate applies to most goods and services. Tax breaks reduce the revenue available for public services, and must represent value for money for the taxpayer.

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government took a number of difficult but necessary decisions on tax, welfare, and spending to fix the public finances, fund public

services, and restore economic stability. This stability is critical to boosting investment and growth, and to making people across the UK better off.

One of the key considerations for any potential new VAT relief is whether the cost saving is likely to be passed on to consumers. Evidence suggests that businesses only partially pass on any savings from lower VAT rates.

■ Treasury: Equality

Rupert Lowe: [\[21137\]](#)

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

James Murray:

There have been no job opportunities restricted to certain groups through positive action schemes based around race, sex or other characteristics in the last financial year. HM Treasury 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.

WALES

■ Aviation: Wind Power

Ruth Jones: [\[21012\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what discussions she has had with the Welsh government on aviation objections to onshore wind in South Wales.

Jo Stevens:

I have regular discussions with the Welsh Government on renewable energy projects in Wales. Wales will play an important role in increasing the UK's onshore wind capacity and meeting our Net Zero and energy security ambitions.

The UK Government has set up an Onshore Wind Industry Taskforce to identify and address the barriers to increased onshore wind deployment, including in relation to airspace management and aviation. The government engages regularly with the Welsh Government, who are represented on the Onshore Wind Industry Taskforce. Welsh Government officials have been attending the Onshore Wind Industry Taskforce Working Group 4: Aviation and Defence. The group is discussing the challenges, opportunities and risks associated with accelerating onshore wind deployment to 2030, relevant to aviation and defence policy.

Ruth Jones: [\[21013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on aviation objections to onshore wind in Wales.

Jo Stevens:

I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on renewable energy projects in Wales. Wales will play an important role in increasing the UK's onshore wind capacity and meeting our Net Zero and energy security ambitions.

The UK Government has set up an Onshore Wind Industry Taskforce to identify and address the barriers to increased onshore wind deployment, including in relation to airspace management and aviation. The government engages regularly with the Welsh Government, who are represented on the Onshore Wind Industry Taskforce. Welsh Government officials have been attending the Onshore Wind Industry Taskforce Working Group 4: Aviation and Defence. The group is discussing the challenges, opportunities and risks associated with accelerating onshore wind deployment to 2030, relevant to aviation and defence policy.

Wales Office: Equality**Rupert Lowe:**[\[21146\]](#)

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

Jo Stevens:

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 merit.

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.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES**■ Equality Act 2010**

Mims Davies: [\[20662\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether she has conducted an impact assessment for enacting the socioeconomic duty in the Equality Act 2010.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Government is committed to commencing the socio-economic duty in the Equality Act 2010. We will give careful consideration to the impact of commencement on the public sector, business and charities or voluntary bodies, as well as undertaking an equality impact assessment.

■ Equality: Public Sector

Alex Mayer: [\[21226\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what her planned timetable is for updating her Department's guidance entitled Public Sector Equality Duty: guidance for public authorities, last updated on 18 December 2023.

Anneliese Dodds:

The government will uphold the Public Sector Equality Duty and ensure that all parties exercising public functions comply with its provisions. This includes ensuring effective guidance for these parties and updating it as the need arises.

■ Foster Care

Manuela Perteghella: [\[21104\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to make care experience a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Government recognises that care leavers have some of the worst long-term life outcomes in society. We are therefore committed to ensuring children leaving care have stable homes, access to health services, support to build lifelong loving relationships and are engaged in education, employment and training. Through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill we will be driving forward our commitments on children's social care, including improved support for care leavers. We have also established a care leaver Ministerial Board, which brings together Ministers from key Departments, to improve support for care leavers across Government.

We are determined to tackle stigma and discrimination faced by care-experienced young people. We want to create a culture where all those who play a role in the lives of children in care and care leavers are ambitious for them to reach their full potential. While we do not have plans to make care-experience a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010, we are committed to extending corporate parenting responsibilities

to government departments and relevant public bodies to ensure that services and support to children in care and care leavers better take account of the challenges they face.

■ Gender: Public Consultation

Claire Coutinho: [\[21051\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, with reference to the her Department's publication entitled Response to call for input on single-sex spaces guidance, published 17 December 2024, how many submissions were received in total.

Claire Coutinho: [\[21052\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, with reference to the Response to call for input on single-sex spaces guidance, published on 17 December 2024, if she will publish (a) a list of reasons for submissions being rejected for not meeting the submission criteria and (b) how many submissions were rejected for each reason.

Anneliese Dodds:

The call for input on single-sex spaces guidance asked specifically for examples of policy or guidance 'which states that people have a legal right to access single-sex spaces and services according to their self-identified gender'.

A total of 3,272 responses (excluding spam or 'bot' submissions) were received. Manual review of these responses found that many did not meet [the criteria outlined on the call for input gov.uk page under 'How to respond'](#). Some responses contained text which was irrelevant to the request (2,160). Some responses did not contain an attachment or a link to a policy or guidance (255). Some responses provided examples that were outside the criteria (196). Some responses met the criteria but provided examples of policies or guidance duplicated by other responses (257). The final sample comprised 404 responses which met the criteria.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Carers: Poverty

Jo Platt: [\[21360\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to assess levels of poverty among unpaid carers; and what steps she is taking to help reduce the number of unpaid carers who live in poverty.

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.

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.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Equality

Rupert Lowe:

[\[21134\]](#)

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

Andrew Western:

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 merit.

- 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.

■ Household Support Fund

Jo Platt: [\[21361\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to monitor the success of the Household Support Fund in reaching (a) unpaid carers and (b) other financially vulnerable households.

Alison McGovern:

Local Authorities have the discretion to design their own local schemes within the parameters of the guidance and grant determination that the Department for Work and Pensions have set out for the fund. This is because they have the ties and the knowledge to best determine how support should be provided in their local communities. We encourage Local Authorities to consider how they may support a wide range of low-income households in need, including unpaid carers and other financially vulnerable households.

Management information, including details of how the fund has been spent on households with children, pensioners, disabled people, and other vulnerable households, including but not limited to only financially vulnerable households, is available here: [Household Support Fund management information - GOV.UK.](#)

The Department for Work and Pensions is currently conducting an evaluation of the Household Support Fund that ran from April 2023 to March 2024, to understand the benefits of the awards made across England during this period. This will be published in due course.

■ Personal Independence Payment

Helen Morgan: [\[21238\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the longest waiting time was for a PIP application in each of the last five years.

Helen Morgan: [\[21240\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the longest waiting time was for a PIP application in each month of the last five years.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We are committed to ensuring that people can access financial support through Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in a timely manner and reducing customer journey times for PIP claimants is a priority for the department. We always aim to make an award decision as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to review all available evidence.

The longest waiting time for a PIP application is potentially disclosive, and the longest waiting times recorded may not be accurate. Therefore, the 99th percentile is provided.

Table 1 – 99th Percentile of End to end wait time, for the last five years up to October 2024.

YEAR OF CLEARANCE	99TH PERCENTILE END TO END WAIT TIME (WEEKS)
2020	45
2021	47
2022	53
2023	44
2024 (to October)	44

Table 1 – 99th Percentile of End to end wait time, by month for the last five years up to October 2024.

MONTH OF CLEARANCE	99TH PERCENTILE END TO END WAIT TIME (WEEKS)
Jan-20	40
Feb-20	37
Mar-20	37
Apr-20	43
May-20	41
Jun-20	46
Jul-20	47
Aug-20	51
Sep-20	49
Oct-20	52
Nov-20	51
Dec-20	47
Jan-21	46
Feb-21	46
Mar-21	42

MONTH OF CLEARANCE	99TH PERCENTILE END TO END WAIT TIME (WEEKS)
Apr-21	42
May-21	42
Jun-21	44
Jul-21	45
Aug-21	47
Sep-21	49
Oct-21	50
Nov-21	49
Dec-21	49
Jan-22	51
Feb-22	53
Mar-22	54
Apr-22	55
May-22	56
Jun-22	56
Jul-22	54
Aug-22	54
Sep-22	53
Oct-22	50
Nov-22	52
Dec-22	52
Jan-23	48
Feb-23	49
Mar-23	49
Apr-23	46
May-23	45

MONTH OF CLEARANCE	99TH PERCENTILE END TO END WAIT TIME (WEEKS)
Jun-23	43
Jul-23	42
Aug-23	42
Sep-23	43
Oct-23	41
Nov-23	40
Dec-23	41
Jan-24	42
Feb-24	43
Mar-24	42
Apr-24	42
May-24	43
Jun-24	42
Jul-24	43
Aug-24	43
Sep-24	47
Oct-24	46

Median PIP application clearance times are also available on a monthly basis as part of the PIP Official Statistics quarterly release. The latest release, with data to October 2024, is available here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/675bf09bb915d092055a01d8/tables-pip-statistics-to-october-2024-eng-wales.ods>

Table 1A in this release shows the median average clearance times for normal rules new claims.

Notes:

- Normal rules new claims only.
- England and Wales only.
- Figures rounded to the nearest whole week.

- It would be disproportionate costs to investigate whether the highest recorded rates were genuine or the result of incorrect recording that was later corrected.
- 99 th percentile means 'longer wait time than 99 other claims from a random sample group of 100 claims'.
- End to end wait time calculated as the time from PIP registration to DWP decision.

■ Social Security Benefits

Seamus Logan:

[\[21453\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of establishing an independent process to set benefit levels according to the cost of essential goods and services.

Sir Stephen Timms:

No such assessment has been made.

The Social Security Administration Act 1992 requires the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to review benefit and State Pension rates each year to see if they have retained their value in relation to the general level of prices or earnings. Where the relevant benefit or State Pension rates have not retained their value, legislation provides that the Secretary of State is required to, or in some instances may, up-rate their value.

Following this review, benefit and State Pension rates are increased in line with statutory minimum amounts and others are increased subject to Secretary of State's discretion.

Following the Secretary of States' up-rating decisions for 2025/26, DWP expenditure on state pensions and benefits will increase by £6.9 billion.

■ Social Security Benefits: Disability

Mr Lee Dillon:

[\[21895\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of benefits for disabled people.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The extra costs disability benefits, Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payment (PIP), provide a contribution towards the extra costs that may arise from a long-term disability or health condition.

The extra costs benefits are non-contributory, non-means-tested and can be worth over £9,500 a year, tax free. Individuals can choose how to use their benefit, in the light of their individual needs and preferences. The benefit can also be paid in addition to any other financial or practical support someone may be entitled to such as Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance, NHS services, free prescriptions, help with travel costs to appointments or the Blue Badge scheme. The

benefits have been consistently uprated in line with inflation since they were introduced and were, like other benefits, increased by 6.7% from 8 April 2024.

■ State Retirement Pensions: Uprating

Richard Burgon: [\[20987\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the number of pensioners that will receive the full increase to the State Pension.

Emma Reynolds:

From April 2025, around 12.5 million people receiving either the basic or new State Pension will see it increased by 4.1%, in line with our commitment to the Triple Lock. Some people will receive an increase of 1.7% (in line with price inflation) on other elements of their State Pension, including Protected Payments and additional State Pension.

Under both the basic and new State Pensions, the amount people are entitled to, and the annual increases, vary according to the individual's National Insurance record, but both reflect the National Insurance contributions they have made.

■ Universal Credit

Seamus Logan: [\[21454\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of (a) introducing a protected minimum floor for Universal Credit and (b) limiting the benefit cap so it cannot reduce the Standard Allowance by more than 15%.

Sir Stephen Timms:

No such assessment has been made. As part of the Universal Credit (UC) review, at the Autumn Budget the Chancellor announced the Fair Repayment Rate will be introduced from April 2025, reducing the UC deductions overall cap from 25% to 15%. This measure will help approximately 1.2 million of the poorest households benefit by an average of £420 a year.

■ Universal Credit: Reviews

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[21450\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking consult stakeholders during her Department's review of universal credit; and what plans she has for the format of such consultation.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We are committed to reviewing Universal Credit to make sure it is doing the job we want it to, to make work pay and tackle poverty. We have already begun this work with the announcement of the Fair Repayment Rate in the Budget, giving 1.2m of the poorest households an average of £420 per year.

I will lead this work and, over the next year, engage with people and invite views on how we can improve UC and take advantage of missed opportunities which it presents. We will continue to work closely with stakeholders as we undertake this review and will set out further details in due course. We will update Parliament regularly on progress and findings.

Seamus Logan:

[\[21455\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what (a) the scope and (b) her planned timeline is for the upcoming review into Universal Credit; whether this review will make an assessment of whether Universal Credit enables claimants to afford essential goods and services; and what steps she is taking to reduce dependence on emergency food aid.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Government is committed to reviewing Universal Credit to make sure it is doing the job we want it to, to make work pay and tackle poverty. We have already begun this work with the announcement of the Fair Repayment Rate in the Budget, giving 1.2 million of the poorest households an average of £420 per year. I will lead the review work, engaging with people over the coming year and inviting views on how to improve UC. We will regularly update Parliament on findings and progress.

We know that good work can significantly reduce the chances of people falling into poverty. This will be the foundation of our approach to tackling poverty, including reducing dependence on emergency food parcels. The Get Britain Working White Paper has set out how the Government will seek to grow the economy, using work as a route out of poverty and to improve living standards.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Steel Strategy Next Steps

Minister of State (Sarah Jones):

[\[HCWS355\]](#)

Today the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and I will convene the first meeting of the renewed Steel Council. This forum brings together leaders from across the sector to provide strategic guidance and external expertise in the development and implementation of our Steel Strategy.

Steel has for too long been a neglected industry in this country. Staggeringly, steel production has declined by more than 50% in the last 10 years. Internationally, unfair actions by some overseas nations have undermined free trade, meaning our steel companies aren't able to compete on a level playing field.

I believe steel should and could become a positive story. We are not naïve to the scale of the challenge, or the situation we inherited. We know these are tough circumstances and it will take time to make things better. This Government will not let the UK lose our steel industry.

In Victorian times, we were the country which invented the modern way of steel-production. Now is the time to find our next approach which enables steel growth and innovation. We are the Government determined to make the hardheaded decisions to make that happen. This is why we have committed to publishing a Steel Strategy in Spring 2025.

Such a Strategy will need to set a strong vision for the future, combat those factors which undermine competitiveness, and highlight the opportunities and future demand for green steel made in the UK.

As part of this steel Strategy, this Government will look seriously at options to improve steel capabilities across the supply chain, including in primary steelmaking. As such, I am also announcing today that the Materials Processing Institute, a not-for-profit research and innovation centre based in Teesside, will lead an independent review into the viability of technologies for primary steel production, including Direct Reduced Iron. MPI will produce a recommendation to Government on the viability of iron-making and primary steel production technologies in the UK with a view to the current and potential future market.

Our new Steel Council will help us develop the Strategy together. It will put the expertise of its members at the heart of our policy making process. It will provide a vital link between the Government, industry, workers, and our innovative thinkers.

Following the publication of the primary steel review and the Steel Strategy, we will continue to convene the Council throughout this Parliament so we can make sure we

drive implementation of the Strategy and we make great use of the up to £2.5bn of funding that we have committed to help rebuild the sector.

The Council will be chaired by the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and co-chaired by Jon Bolton, who has extensive experience of working in the sector both at home and abroad. Its membership includes representative from steel producers, the supply chain, research and development, Trade Unions and the Devolved Governments.

We have published the full membership on Gov.uk at the following link (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-sets-out-plan-to-secure-the-long-term-future-of-steelmaking-and-safeguard-steel-communities>). We will be uploading the Terms of Reference for the Steel Council and the Primary Production Review to this page in due course.

JUSTICE

■ Tackling Intimate Image Abuse and Sexually Explicit Deepfakes

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Davies-Jones):
[\[HCWS354\]](#)

Advances in technology have meant that intimate images can now easily be taken or shared without consent. The technology to create realistic deepfake sexually explicit images of any person, without their consent, is also readily available. These behaviours cause untold harm to victims' lives, particularly the women and girls who are so often targeted. We must ensure our criminal law is adequately equipped to protect victims and punish those responsible.

Today I can confirm that we will, in the Crime and Policing Bill which will be introduced later this year, introduce new offences for the taking of intimate images without consent and the installation of equipment with intent to enable the taking of intimate images without consent. These are crucial steps in delivering on our ambition to halve violence against women and girls within a decade. We must ensure our criminal law enables us to tackle perpetrators; better protect victims and survivors; and deliver effective justice.

To that end, we will repeal two existing voyeurism offences that relate to the recording of a person doing a private act, and recording an image beneath a person's clothing (the so-called 'upskirting' offence) in sections 67(3) and 67A(2) of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 respectively and replace them with three new offences that will cover a broader range of behaviour, improving the protection for victims.

Firstly, the legislation will create a "base" offence of taking or recording an intimate photograph or film without consent or reasonable belief in consent. Secondly, there will be an offence of taking or recording an intimate photograph or film without consent and with intent to cause alarm, distress or humiliation; and thirdly, an offence of taking or recording an intimate photograph or film without consent or reasonable belief in it, and for the purpose of the sexual gratification of oneself or another. Offenders who commit the latter offence may be subject to notification requirements, commonly known as being on the "sex offender's register". These new offences for taking an intimate photograph or film

without consent cover a broader range of behaviours than current offences, providing greater protection for victims. For example, is it not currently an offence for an abusive person to take an intimate photo of their partner, without their consent, to shock and upset them or humiliate them by taking the photo of them in that intimate state. Under our new legislation, this will be criminal.

We will also introduce new offences that criminalise someone if they install or adapt, prepare or maintain equipment, and do so with the intent of enabling themselves or another to commit one of the three offences of taking or recording an intimate photograph or film without consent. Victims of any of these new offences may qualify, where applicable, for anonymity and special measures. We will also amend the Sentencing Code to ensure Courts have the power to order, upon conviction, that the offender be deprived of any images in respect of which they were convicted of a taking or recording offence, as well as anything on which the images were stored (such as a computer or hard drive). The Courts already have this power in relation to offenders convicted of sharing intimate images without consent.

These offences are designed to complement, and in some respects mirror, the offences of sharing or threatening to share, intimate images in the Sexual Offences Act 2003, as inserted by the Online Safety Act 2023. Taken together, these measures give law enforcement a holistic package of offences to effectively tackle this abhorrent behaviour. They will offer victims whose images have been taken or shared without consent the clear and comprehensive protection they deserve.

It is already a criminal offence to share, or threaten to share, a sexually explicit deepfake without consent, but not an offence to make one. The Government made a clear manifesto commitment to ban the creation of sexually explicit deepfake images, a central aspect of our commitment to halve the prevalence of violence against women and girls (VAWG) within the decade. We are bringing forward legislation to honour that commitment in the Crime and Policing Bill which will be introduced later this year, making this behaviour criminal so that perpetrators can be brought to justice.