



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 8 January 2025 and the information is correct at the time of publication (07:00 P.M., 08 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

■ Alcoholic Drinks: Small Businesses

Gavin Robinson: [\[21321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department plans to take to increase the market for small (a) artisanal brewers, (b) distillers and (c) vintners.

Gareth Thomas:

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) supports growth and increases the market for small brewers, distillers, and vintners by leveraging trade agreements, removing market entry barriers, and showcasing producers at global trade shows. We recently led a drinks trade mission to India and will support UK companies to participate in ProWein Dusseldorf in March 2025.

DBT's Export Academy launched a food and drink programme in October, which offers upskilling opportunities for emerging and experienced brewers, distillers and vintners looking to grow through exports. DBT also works closely with trade bodies in each sector to drive growth and signpost export opportunities.

■ Business: Rural Areas

Helen Morgan: [\[21463\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has made a recent assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the difficulties that rural businesses face.

Gareth Thomas:

Rural businesses offer significant potential for growth and are central to our economy. DBT works with other departments such as Defra, helping people living and working in rural areas to realise the full potential of rural businesses and communities placing them at the heart of our policymaking.

The Government will publish a Small Business Strategy Paper later this year, setting out the Government's vision for all small businesses, and has committed to funding for two key growth-driving programmes in 2025-26: Growth Hubs in England and Help to Grow: Management across the UK, which help businesses and entrepreneurs unlock their potential through bespoke support and resources

The Rural England Prosperity Fund is intended to support new and existing rural businesses, including farm businesses, to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy and to support new and improved community infrastructure that will provide essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy

■ Companies: Human Rights

Sarah Champion: [\[21314\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the effectiveness of the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The Government has noted the EU's adoption of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and has been in regular contact with the European Commission on this issue through the Trade Specialised Committee on Level Playing Field, which last met on 9th October 2024. The Directive will apply to UK companies with a turnover generated in the EU of more than €450 million.

We will continue to assess and monitor the effectiveness of the UK's existing measures, alongside the impacts of new policy tools that are emerging to ensure we can best promote responsible business practices, and take action where appropriate.

■ Department for Business and Trade: China

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[21304\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what meetings for what purpose (a) he and (b) Ministers in his Department have had with representatives of the People's Republic of China since 5 July 2024.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade met the Vice Minister of Commerce in the margins of the G20 trade summit in Brazil to discuss the UK-China trade relationship.

The Minister for Employment Rights, Competition and Markets met the Vice Minister of the State Administration for Market Regulation in the UK to discuss competition issues.

■ Department for Business and Trade: European Union

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[21303\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what meetings for what purpose (a) he and (b) Ministers in his Department have had with representatives of the European Union since 5 July 2024.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Since 5 July 2024, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade has held meetings with Commissioner Dombrovskis on three occasions: an introductory call on 10 July 2024; a meeting at the G7 Trade Ministerial in Italy; and a meeting at the G20 in Brazil. On each of these occasions the Secretary of State underlined the Government's commitment to reset our relationship with the EU.

■ Electric Vehicles: Batteries**Dr Simon Opher:** [\[21715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to ensure sufficient recycling facilities are available to process end-of-life electric vehicle batteries.

Sarah Jones:

The UK has the opportunity to boost its midstream processing and recycling of critical minerals, building on world-leading innovation and technical expertise in our chemicals and metals sectors.

We continue to work with industry via the Automotive Transformation Fund to support the creation of an internationally competitive electric vehicle supply chain in the UK including battery recycling. We will ensure continuity in HMG support, building on the announcement in the Budget of £2bn for zero emission vehicles manufacturing and their supply chains.

■ Fleet Solid Support Ships: Procurement**Andrew Griffith:** [\[21474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on the Fleet Solid Support Ship programme.

Sarah Jones:

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade has maintained regular communication with the Secretary of State for Defence on the Fleet Solid Support Ship programme. Together, they have worked closely with commercial partners Navantia UK and Harland and Wolff to facilitate an agreement that will ensure the delivery of these vital vessels for the Royal Navy. Both Departments agree this is a good deal for the Harland and Wolff shipyards, a good deal for its employees, and a good deal for the whole of British shipbuilding.

■ Flexible Working Taskforce**Laurence Turner:** **[R]** [\[21859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2024 to Question 20334 on Flexible Working, on what dates the Flexible Working Taskforce met in 2023.

Justin Madders:

The Flexible Working Taskforce met once in 2023, on April 24th. The government has continued to engage with stakeholders on a regular basis to discuss flexible working and related issues.

■ Foreign Investment in UK: India

Andrew Griffith:

[\[21520\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will publish the list of attendees of the Indian Business Leaders delegation meeting of 18 December 2024.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The delegation included Bharti Enterprises, Bharat Semi Systems, Biocon Group, Blue Star Limited, Essar Group, Hero Enterprise, Jet Synthesis, Piramal Group, Reliance Industries, Tata Steel, TVS Motor Company, TVS Supply Chain Solutions, and UPL Limited.

■ Harland and Wolff: Belfast

Andrew Griffith:

[\[21473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has visited Harland and Wolff in Belfast.

Sarah Jones:

The Secretary of State has not yet had the opportunity to visit the Harland and Wolff Belfast site but looks forward to doing so in the future. However, as the Minister for Industry, I had the privilege of visiting Northern Ireland on 19th December to observe first-hand the potential of the site for job creation and manufacturing growth. The recent agreement between Navantia UK and Harland and Wolff, which was announced that day, will enable us to maintain our essential sovereign shipbuilding capacity and capability both now and in the long term.

■ Industrial Strategy Council: Public Appointments

Andrew Griffith:

[\[21472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many people were considered for appointment to the Industrial Strategy Council.

Sarah Jones:

Appointments to the Industrial Strategy Advisory Council were made through direct ministerial appointment by the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Council's membership includes senior business leaders, policy experts and trade union representatives. Members have been appointed in a personal capacity and the Council will help to ensure our Industrial Strategy is informed by a broad and high-quality evidence base, and a diverse range of perspectives.

■ Industry: Logistics

Jim Dickson:

[\[21464\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether the industrial strategy will include measures to support growth in the logistics sector.

Sarah Jones:

I refer the member for Dartford to the answer I provided to UIN 9312 on 18 October 2024.

■ New Businesses: Rural Areas**Helen Morgan:**[\[21462\]](#)

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

Gareth Thomas:

Rural businesses offer significant potential for growth and are central to our economy. DBT works with other departments who provide funding for the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) supporting new and existing rural businesses and improved community infrastructure that will provide essential community services.

The Government has just announced the Business Growth Service (BGS), with local delivery at its heart to bring a range of existing core services under the BGS banner.

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.

■ Overseas Trade: France**Adam Jogee:**[\[21793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to help increase the (a) volume and (b) value of trade between the UK and France.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Reinvigorating the UK's relationship with our European partners is a top priority for this Government.

My officials regularly engage with counterparts in the French Government to identify opportunities to increase bilateral trade and investment, including the annual dialogue between DBT and France's DG Entreprises, which last took place in November 2024. The Secretary of State met his counterpart at the G20 Trade Ministerial Meeting in October, to discuss improving bilateral trade flows and collaboration. My honourable friend, the Minister for Services, Small Business and Exports will also be travelling to France to support UK exporters later this month.

■ Overseas Trade: Germany**Adam Jogee:**[\[21794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to help increase the (a) volume and (b) value of trade between the UK and Germany.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Reinvigorating the UK's relationship with our European partners is a top priority for this Government.

Germany is already the UK's largest trading partner within the EU. Last summer, we launched negotiations for a bilateral treaty that will aim to strengthen bilateral cooperation on economic growth, and in a range of sectors including energy, defence and technology. Negotiations will resume after the forthcoming elections in Germany.

■ Overseas Trade: Republic of Ireland

Adam Jogee:

[\[21795\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to help increase the (a) volume and (b) value of trade between the UK and Ireland.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Reinvigorating the UK's relationship with our European partners is a top priority for this Government.

As the Prime Minister has made clear, we are committed to building an ever stronger relationship with Ireland. The UK-Ireland Summit in March offers the opportunity to take forward key areas of mutual cooperation with Ireland, including increasing bilateral trade and investment in areas such as renewables, infrastructure and supporting small business. This will build on the meeting with Irish business leaders the Prime Minister and Taoiseach held in Dublin on 7 September, and my own visit to Dublin for bilateral talks with my counterpart and to speak at the British Irish Chamber of Commerce Annual Conference in October.

■ Royal Mail

Nadia Whittome:

[\[21706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the sale of Royal Mail on its (a) workforce and (b) customers.

Justin Madders:

The Government has ensured that the potential takeover of Royal Mail has been properly scrutinised and that appropriate guarantees have been put in place to protect the interests of the workforce, customers and the country. These guarantees include the bidder's agreements with the unions and commitments to the Government to ensure the ongoing provision of services and the protection of the network required to deliver those services. Additionally, the company has an ongoing requirement to fulfil its statutory and regulatory responsibilities, regardless of its ownership.

■ Small Businesses: Devolution

Andrew Griffith:

[\[21477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has had discussions with the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, about the potential impact of the Devolution White Paper on support for small businesses.

Gareth Thomas:

Ministers from the Department for Business and Trade regularly engage with colleagues from across Government, including from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, on support for small businesses.

As committed to in the English Devolution White Paper, the Government will set out a vision for a new approach to business support, including more devolution in England and greater alignment between national, local and devolved business support, in the upcoming Small Business Strategy. This will include further details on the Business Growth Service, a new national service with local delivery at its heart, which will make it easier and quicker for businesses across the UK to get the help, support and advice they need to grow and thrive.

Trade Union Recognition**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[21053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether (a) his Department and (b) the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service issue guidance on exemptions to trade union recognition.

Justin Madders:

Guidance on the trade union recognition scheme is at Gov.UK. This sets out that the scheme is available to unions where the workplace has 21 or more workers. Therefore the smallest workplaces that have 20 or less workers not in scope of the scheme.

The Central Arbitration Committee has also published detailed guides to the parties to enable both unions and employers to understand the recognition process.

CABINET OFFICE**Blood: Contamination****Clive Lewis:**[\[21637\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many compensation payments were made by the Infected Blood Compensation Authority between 17 October 2024 and 31 December 2024.

Clive Lewis:[\[21638\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many members of the infected blood community were invited to start their claim for compensation between 17 October 2024 and 31 December 2024.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

Between 17 October and 31 December 2024, the Infected Blood Compensation Authority invited 45 people to make a claim for compensation, comprising the initial group of 20 invitees and a further group of 25 at the end of December. The Authority

made the first compensation offers to 10 people with a total value of more than £13 million, and so far 4 of those offers have been paid out.

■ Civil Servants: Freedom of Information

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[22198\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 15229 on Senior Civil Servants: Freedom of Information, what best practice guidance does the (a) Cabinet Office FOI Clearing House Internal Review and (b) its successor provide to departments on the level of seniority at which information on civil servants should normally be disclosed in response to FOI requests.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Cabinet Office has not issued either internal or external guidance on whether Freedom of Information Act requests requesting information on senior civil servants should be disclosed. All requests are considered on their own merits in all circumstances.

■ Civil Service: Pensions

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21685\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what guidance he has provided to Government departments on publishing details of individual Civil Service pensions for senior officials under (a) Financial Reporting requirements and (b) the Freedom of Information Act.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

In relation to what guidance the Cabinet Office has provided to government departments on publishing details of individual Civil Service pensions for senior officials:

(a) Financial Reporting requirements - The Cabinet Office issues an 'Employer Pension Notice' (EPN) to government departments each year, so they can provide the disclosure of Senior Civil Servants' pensions under their Financial Reporting requirements.

(b) Under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) - I refer the right honourable member to the answer given in 15229 answered on 29 November 2024. The Cabinet Office has not issued either internal or external guidance on whether FOIA requests requesting information on senior civil servants should be disclosed. All requests are considered on their own merits in all circumstances.

■ Foreign Investment in UK: National Security

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[22202\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many transactions have been blocked under the National Security and Investment Act 2021 since 5 July 2024; and which transactions were blocked.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Government publishes notices of final orders made on GOV.UK - this includes cases that are blocked, unwound, or cleared subject to conditions. The Government also publishes annual reports to provide information about the transactions that it has been notified about and those it subsequently called in for a national security assessment.

The NSI Annual Report 2023-24 was published on 10 September 2024 and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-and-investment-act-2021-annual-report-2023-24>. The period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 will be covered in the next annual report, which will be published later this year.

Foreign Relations: USA**Sir John Hayes:**[\[21261\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many times Ministers across Government have communicated with the President-Elect's transition team since 6 November 2024.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The department does not intend to publish this information, for the purpose of safeguarding national security.

Former Prime Ministers: Convictions**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[18205\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Prime Minister's oral contribution of 4 December 2024, Official Report, column 291, on what evidential basis he stated that two of the Leader of the Opposition's predecessors had convictions for breaking covid rules.

Georgia Gould:

My Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister was referring to the Fixed Penalty Notices received by two former Prime Ministers for breaking COVID lockdown rules. The Prime Minister is happy to clarify that a Fixed Penalty Notice does not constitute a criminal conviction. He stands by the relevance of raising to the attention of the House that two former Conservative Prime Ministers were fined by the police for breaking the COVID rules that they put in place for others.

Infected Blood Compensation Scheme**Clive Lewis:**[\[20990\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he plans to introduce further regulations to enable the Infected Blood Compensation Authority to issue payments to the affected.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

Subject to Parliamentary approval, I am aiming for the second set of Infected Blood regulations to be in force by 31st March 2025.

Clive Lewis:

[\[21639\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on what date the Infected Blood Compensation Authority compensation scheme will open for members of the infected blood community to make claims.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

The Infected Blood Compensation Authority opened the compensation scheme to a small number of people in October 2024 as part of the initial development and testing of the compensation payment service. This will increase to around 250 people by March of this year, increasing to larger numbers after that. The Infected Blood Compensation Authority is responsible for the operational delivery of the scheme, including the management of the application process.

■ **Non-departmental Public Bodies**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[19414\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many non-departmental public bodies has the Government (a) announced it will open, (b) opened, (c) announced it will close and (d) closed since 4 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

Cabinet Office maintains records and oversight of formally established Arm's Length Bodies, including NDPBs. No NDPBs have been formally established since 4 July 2024. Similarly, there have been no formal closures of NDPBs since 4 July 2024.

■ **Official Cars: Electric Vehicles**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21393\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 2 December 2024 to Question 16598 on Ministers: Official Cars, whether he has a target date for the Government Car Service to move to a fully-electric fleet.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Government remains committed to its target for all government vehicles to be zero emission by the end of 2027. The Government Car Service will continue working towards this goal, aligning its transition plans with the broader objectives set for the fleet.

■ **Prime Minister: Pensions**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21054\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to (a) the Crown Prosecution Service, Annual Report and Accounts 2013–14, July 2014, HC6, page 73, and (b) The Pensions Increase (Pension Scheme for Keir Starmer QC) Regulations 2013, what the metric is by which the Keir Starmer QC Pension Scheme has been uprated by inflation each year; and if he will list the pension benefits offered to pension scheme's member.

Georgia Gould:

I refer the right honourable member to the answer given to PQ UIN 2321 on 2 September 2024. The uprating mechanism and benefits have not changed since the Scheme was made in 2013.

Special Advisers**James Cartlidge:** [\[21002\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December to Question 19728 on National Security Adviser: Pay, when he plans to publish the Annual Report on Special Advisers.

Georgia Gould:

The Annual Report on Special Advisers is published annually as per the requirements of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, as was the case under the previous Administration. The 2025 Annual Report on Special Advisers will be published later this year.

Tobacco: Sales**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[20933\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what estimate the Office of National Statistics has made of total spending on tobacco products in each of the last five years; and if they will make an estimate of what proportion of this spending is on illegal tobacco.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20934\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what estimate the Office of National Statistics has made of spending on (a) alcohol and (b) narcotics in each of the last five years; and what proportion of this spending is estimated as being illegal.

Georgia Gould:

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

A response to the Hon. Gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 18 December is attached.

Attachments:

1. Letter from the National Statistician [PQ20933_20934.pdf]

UK Integrated Security Fund**Priti Patel:** [\[21591\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the funding level of the Integrated Security Fund will be in (a) 2025/26 and (b) each of the following five years.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The ISF funding level in 2025/26 will be published shortly. Funding levels for future years will be considered as part of the second phase of the Spending Review.

■ Undocumented Migrants

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16332\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Office for National Statistics has made an estimate of the (a) number and (b) proportion of people who are potentially in the UK illegally.

Georgia Gould:

The Home Office publishes a statistical release with an overview of people who come to the UK irregularly. It includes those arriving on a small boat across the English Channel, along with some other groups arriving without prior lawful permission. The Office for National Statistics does not publish this information.

The most recent Home Office statistics, for the year ending June 2024, are available on gov.uk. As was the case under the previous administration, these statistics should not be used to infer the size of the irregular population in the UK, nor the total number of people entering the UK irregularly.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Cricket: Afghanistan

Gregory Stafford:

[\[21955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had discussions with the England and Wales Cricket Board on the scheduled Champion's Trophy match with Afghanistan.

Stephanie Peacock:

The UK Government condemns the appalling erosion of women and girls' rights in Afghanistan.

Participation in the ICC Champion's Trophy match is a matter for the England and Wales Cricket Board and the International Cricket Council. My officials are in contact with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on the wider issue of the Afghanistan women's cricket team. We welcome the ECB's strong representations to the ICC on this matter and will continue to work with them on what more can be done.

■ Football Index: Compensation

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[21381\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to help secure redress for victims of the collapse of Football Index.

Stephanie Peacock:

The collapse of BetIndex Ltd, the operators of the novel gambling product Football Index, had a significant impact on former customers, and we recognise that many people were affected, and that for some people financial losses were significant. The previous Government commissioned an Independent Review in June 2021,

conducted by Malcom Sheehan KC and which reported in September 2021. The review looked at how the company had been regulated, and identified areas for improvement for the Financial Conduct Authority and the Gambling Commission. All recommendations of the report have since been implemented.

The previous Government concluded that it would not be appropriate for the Government to use public funds to provide compensation for those who had lost money through the collapse of Football Index and BetIndex. Whilst the Government strongly sympathises with all who were impacted, we do not think this decision should be reopened.

■ **Gambling: Taxation**

Sir Iain Duncan Smith:

[\[21257\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what progress she has made on the prevention framework under the statutory levy; and if she will take steps to ensure that prevention work is undertaken independently from (a) the gambling industry and (b) organisations associated with that industry.

Stephanie Peacock:

As set out in the Government's response to the consultation on the statutory levy, further consideration of the evidence is needed in order to appoint an appropriate body to lead the prevention strand of the levy system. We will confirm our decisions in due course. Prevention is a critical part of the government's approach to tackling gambling-related harm and we need to take the time to get the policy right whilst ensuring that necessary legislation is passed to meet our commitment to having the levy in place by April 2025.

The Government is clear that the levy puts the independence of funding beyond doubt and industry will have no say over spending decisions. To guarantee sufficient accountability and transparency within the new system, including the use of funding allocated for prevention alongside research and treatment, we will establish appropriate governance arrangements consisting of a Levy Board for the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments to monitor the health and impact of the levy system, and an Advisory Group to provide informal advice to lead commissioning bodies regarding strategic and funding priorities. The UK government will also formally review the statutory levy system within five years with the first formal review expected by 2030.

■ **Historic Buildings: Energy**

Stuart Andrew:

[\[21292\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to Section 5.2 of Adapting historic homes for energy efficiency: a review of the barriers, what progress has been made on Historic England's review into the barriers to delivering the Level 3 Award in Energy Efficiency Measures for Older and Traditional Buildings.

Chris Bryant:

With reference to Section 5.2 of Adapting historic homes for energy efficiency: a review of the barriers, the findings showed that although requirements in retrofit standards are driving demand and increasing numbers of providers delivering the required standards, there has been concern in the sector about the quality of provision. Based on these findings, Historic England has been working with Cadw and Historic Environment Scotland to improve, revise and update the content of the award.

Religious Buildings**Ian Byrne:**[\[21530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support religious buildings of historic importance.

Chris Bryant:

There is a range of support available via DCMS and the Department's Arm's-Length Bodies for listed places of worship. These include the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme; the National Lottery Heritage Fund's £15m Heritage in Need: Places of Worship initiative, funded through the National Lottery between 2023 and 2026; the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT), which funds repairs and maintenance of over 350 churches in the CCT portfolio; and Historic England's Heritage At Risk grants, which support certain religious buildings such as cathedrals on the Heritage at Risk register.

School Games: Finance**Sarah Smith:**[\[21746\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether funding for the School Games Organiser network will continue beyond March 2025.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government has confirmed funding for the School Games Organisers (SGOs) until the end of the 2024/25 Academic Year. Funding beyond then will be confirmed ahead of the start of the 2025/26 Financial Year, with funding from April 2026 onwards subject to the ongoing Spending Review.

Welsh National Opera: Finance**Ann Davies:**[\[21528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions she has had with the Welsh Government on funding for the Welsh National Opera.

Chris Bryant:

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism has held a series of very productive meetings with the Wales Office, Welsh Government, Arts Council England, and Welsh National Opera to understand the issue in more detail and to see

how, within the parameters of the arm's length principle, DCMS can best help ensure a strong and secure future for the WNO.

The core point of agreement across all these meetings and across all partners was a recognition of the value of the Welsh National Opera and its work - both for the people of Wales, but also for people elsewhere in the UK. It was clear that all partners are keen to achieve a positive long-term future for the organisation, and are working towards that goal.

The Minister was pleased that this series of meetings was able to reassure everyone that all partners wanted to see a positive future for Welsh National Opera, that the funding bodies across the border will work more collaboratively in future and that the new leadership at the WNO have a clear idea of how to progress. Everyone wants to burnish and sustain the WNO so that as many people as possible in Wales and England have a chance to enjoy world class opera close to home. Funding decisions are for the Welsh Arts Council and Arts Council England, but I am confident that the WNO is in a strong place to succeed.

DEFENCE

■ Arctic: Defence

Graeme Downie: [\[21881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps NATO is taking to defend the High North.

Luke Pollard:

As a leading European Ally in NATO, the UK will defend and support our High North and Arctic Allies should the need arise, and contest malign and destabilising behaviours and activity in the region which threatens our interests, the interests of our Allies, and the stability of the region. We work with regional Allies and partners – including through NATO, the Joint Expeditionary Force, the Northern Group and the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable – to align policy, activity and capability where possible and across all domains.

NATO is accelerating the Alliance's ongoing military transformation to strengthen its collective deterrence and defence posture, with operational plans which cover every inch of Allied territory. This includes Allied territory in the High North. Allies will maintain a coherent Defence posture, presence and profile in the region.

■ Aviation: Fuels

Mr Richard Holden: [\[21065\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department collates information on (a) which flights use sustainable aviation fuel and (b) the proportion of sustainable aviation fuel used for flights (i) from a military airfield and (b) by a military vehicle.

Maria Eagle:

Due to the increasingly routine use of blended sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), the Department does not collate detailed information on which flights use blended SAF, nor the proportion of SAF used against individual flights. For example, alongside conventional fuel RAF Lossiemouth took delivery of over nine million litres of blended SAF in 2024 for routine use in refuelling all aircraft at the Station.

As part of the UK SAF mandate and the Government pathway to net-zero aviation, from 1 January 2025 all aviation fuel procured will include SAF.

Defence: Procurement**Mr Mark Francois:**[\[21267\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans he has to implement a NATO test for major defence projects procurement.

Maria Eagle:

We conducted a NATO test in the first 100 days of this Government.

As part of that work we are implementing a NATO test for major procurement decisions by mandating that NATO should be considered in all Ministry of Defence investment business cases. This is in the process of being implemented across the Department.

Electric Cables: Baltic Sea**Graeme Downie:**[\[21880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has offered support to Finland in protecting sub-sea cables in the Baltic Sea.

Luke Pollard:

Following recent damage to the Estlink2 undersea cable in the Baltic sea, the UK – acting as framework nation for the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) – has activated a JEF Response Option (JRO), known as NORDIC WARDEN, which will harness AI to track potential threats to undersea infrastructure and monitor the Russian shadow fleet, sending out real-time warnings of suspicious activity to JEF nations as well as NATO. This demonstrates both the UK and JEF nations' commitment to assuring critical undersea infrastructure and responding to potential threats.

Electric Cables: Baltic Sea and North Sea**Graeme Downie:**[\[21878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, he last had discussions with NATO allies on protecting sub-sea cables in the (a) Baltic and (b) North Sea.

Luke Pollard:

Recent incidents of damage to sub-sea cables underlines the importance of partners continuing to work together on shared challenges in the region.

The Government regularly discusses strengthening NATO's protection of critical undersea infrastructure in engagements with fellow Allies. The Defence Secretary directly engaged with affected Allies following reported damage to a major undersea cable in the Baltic Sea on 25 December 2024.

The Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) also activated a JEF Response Option (JRO), known as NORDIC WARDEN, which will harness AI to track potential threats to undersea infrastructure and monitor the Russian shadow fleet, sending out real-time warnings of suspicious activity to JEF nations as well as NATO. This JEF activity reinforces existing and planned NATO responses.

■ **Electric Cables: North Sea**

Graeme Downie: [\[21879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to help protect sub-sea cables in the North Sea from the Russian shadow fleet.

Luke Pollard:

The UK Government constantly monitors and regularly assesses the security of critical national infrastructure, including energy and telecommunications assets. Following the incident damaging the Estlink 2 undersea cable between Finland and Estonia on 25 December, the UK – as framework nation for the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) – activated NORDIC WARDEN which will harness AI to track potential threats to undersea infrastructure and to monitor the movements of the Russian shadow fleet, sending out real-time warnings of suspicious activity to JEF nations and to NATO, in support of NATO activity to help protect critical undersea infrastructure.

Our adversaries should be in no doubt of our steadfast determination and formidable ability to protect the UK and our interests. We have led the way in pursuing Russia's shadow fleet of vessels, sanctioning more oil tankers than any other nation and spearheading a 49-nation 'Call to Action' against the fleet.

■ **Fleet Solid Support Ships: Construction**

James Cartlidge: [\[21333\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, where the (a) final assembly and (b) systems integration of the Fleet Solid Support Ships being constructed by Navantia will take place.

Maria Eagle:

The overall build strategy for the Fleet Solid Support ships remains unchanged. All three ships will be assembled from blocks manufactured in Harland & Wolff shipyards in the UK and Navantia's shipyards in Spain. Final assembly and systems integration of the ships is planned to take place in Belfast.

■ Fleet Solid Support Ships: Procurement

Mr Mark Francois: [\[21268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the in-service date for the fleet solid support ships has been impacted by the changes to the Harland and Wolff contract.

Mr Mark Francois: [\[21269\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the total figure is for the changes to the value of the contract with Harland and Wolff for the Fleet Solid Support ships.

Mr Mark Francois: [\[21271\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether any part of the final assembly of the Fleet Solid Support ships is planned to take place in Spain under the revised Harland and Wolff contract.

Maria Eagle:

The Government has worked closely with Navantia UK (Prime Contractor) on the future of the Fleet Solid Support (FSS) programme and agreed with them the minimum changes to the contract necessary - on commercial terms - to ensure its continued delivery. This includes minimising disruption to the current schedule as much as possible, including the impact on in-service dates which is still being assessed.

We are unable to comment on the details of the contract due to commercial sensitivities. The deal, which is subject to regulatory approval, safeguards the delivery of the FSS programme and secures the future of all four Harland & Wolff (H&W) shipyards in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Devon.

The overall build strategy for the FSS ships remains unchanged. All three ships will be assembled from blocks manufactured in H&W shipyards in the UK and Navantia's shipyards in Spain. Final assembly and systems integration of the ships is planned to take place in Belfast.

■ Helicopters: Official Visits

Mr Richard Holden: [\[21062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 4 October 2024 to Question 6066 on Helicopters: Official Visits, what the budget is for the replacement service to the Rotary Wing Command Support Air Transport Helicopter Service.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence is not placing a contract for replacement of the Rotary Wing Command Support Air Contract. Future Ministry of Defence senior leader rotary wing transport will be met through a Cabinet Office administered Commercial Travel Contract and will use existing Department transport budgets.

■ Ukraine: Military Aid**James Cartlidge:** [\[21334\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2024 to Question 19740 on Ukraine: Military Aid, how many of the 4,000 drones were procured since 5 July 2024.

James Cartlidge: [\[21335\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2024 to Question 19738 on Ukraine: Military Aid, how many of the 15,000 anti-tank weapons were procured since 5 July 2024.

James Cartlidge: [\[21336\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December to Question 19737 on Ukraine: Military Aid, how many of the rounds of artillery ammunition delivered to Ukraine were procured since 5 July 2024.

Luke Pollard:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 19 December 2024 to Questions 19737, 19738 and 19740. For operational security reasons he will understand that it is not possible to provide more detailed procurement and delivery schedules.

This Government is steadfast in our commitment to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. On 10 July 2024 the Prime Minister announced that the UK will provide Ukraine with £3 billion a year of military support for as long as needed.

EDUCATION**■ Academies: Curriculum****Neil O'Brien:** [\[21666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of academy schools that do not currently comply with the duty in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to follow the national curriculum.

Catherine McKinnell:

I refer the hon. Member for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston to the answer of 29 July 2024 to Question [1038](#).

■ Academies: Facilities**Neil O'Brien:** [\[21665\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of academy schools' facilities to comply with the duty in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to follow the national curriculum.

Catherine McKinnell:

Every child deserves a cutting-edge curriculum taught by expert, qualified teachers, which sets them up with the knowledge and skills they need to achieve throughout life. The Bill will require all state schools to teach the reformed national curriculum, giving parents certainty of the high quality education their children will receive.

Many academies already choose to follow the national curriculum and have the facilities they need to deliver it. The department will not commence the new requirement until a reformed national curriculum is introduced following the advice of the independent Curriculum and Assessment Review. This will give all teachers and all schools, including academies, sufficient time to plan and prepare for the changes, including developing their facilities as needed.

■ Apprentices: Finance**Vikki Slade:**[\[21918\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of changing the funding for built environment Level 7 apprentices on the Government's commitment to build 1.5 million homes.

Janet Daby:

The government is committed to 1.5 million homes being built across this Parliament while spreading opportunities and economic growth supported by a strong skills system.

The department is working closely with industry and across Whitehall on this ambition, including with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Business and Trade and the Department for Work and Pensions to understand skill needs and how to address them.

The department has made early progress on expanding the skills offer with the announcement of Construction and Industry Training Board and National Housebuilding Council funding worth £140 million, to deliver up to 32 Homebuilding Skills Hubs and to make 5,000 more construction apprenticeships available, making use of existing flexibilities in our apprenticeships system to help businesses get the skilled workers they need more quickly.

There are 96 high quality apprenticeship standards in the construction and the built environment sector approved for delivery across levels 2 to 6 to support employers and apprentices to develop the skills they need, with three apprenticeship standards in the sector approved for delivery at level 7.

This government had a dire fiscal inheritance with a £22 billion blackhole in the nation's finances. We are taking difficult decisions to fix the foundations of our economy and prioritise government spending where it can be most impactful, including 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 a significant number of level 7 apprenticeships themselves outside of the levy-funded growth and skills offer.

The department is taking advice from Skills England, who have been engaging with employers and sector-representative organisations, including in construction, and expects to make a final decision on affected apprenticeships shortly. Learners who have started these apprenticeships will be funded through to completion and employers will continue to be able to offer these apprenticeships where they choose to do so.

■ Children: Protection

Tom Hayes:

[\[21089\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether there is a mandated process for social services to be informed when a child for whom there has been a (a) Child Protection Plan, (b) Child in Need plan and (c) safeguarding concern raised is removed from school.

Janet Daby:

Schools are legally required to notify the local authority of a child's removal from the school roll at a non-standard transition point. This relates to pupils removed from the admission register before completing the final year of education normally provided by the school, or pupils added to the admission register after the start of the first year of education normally provided by that school. Local authorities are legally responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children in their area, and for identifying children who are not receiving a suitable education if not in school. Where the latter is the case, they should commence the School Attendance Order process.

Statutory guidance is clear on how local authorities, schools and other agencies should work together to help, protect, and promote the welfare of children. Where a child of school age is not a registered pupil at a school and is not receiving suitable education at home, this could be an indicator of neglect, abuse, or exploitation. Local authorities should work closely with schools and other agencies to share information effectively, identify and respond to risks of harm, and ensure children and families receive the services they need.

The proposed Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, introduced on 17 December, contains new measures which, if the bill is passed, will require parents to obtain local authority consent before they can home educate if their child is subject to a child protection enquiry or has a child protection plan. Local authorities would also have new powers under the bill to require any home educated child to attend or remain in school if their home or learning environment is deemed unsuitable.

■ Class Sizes

Natasha Irons:

[\[21431\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure the financial viability of (a) single and (b) two-form entry schools in (i) urban areas and (ii) Croydon East constituency.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department has allocated £242 million in growth and falling rolls funding to local authorities through the 2024/25 dedicated schools grant (DSG). Local authorities' allocations of growth and falling rolls funding for 2025/26 was confirmed in December 2024 and information for Croydon is published here:

<https://skillsfunding.service.gov.uk/view-latest-funding/local-authority/statement/306>.

Local authorities can use their growth and falling rolls funding allocations to repurpose surplus space to create SEND units, resource bases, or wraparound childcare provision in mainstream schools, activity which the department knows some local authorities already undertake. This is intended to support schools with falling rolls where planning data shows that the surplus places will be needed. Local authorities now have additional flexibility to support schools through such falling rolls funds.

The forthcoming Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will introduce new duties for mainstream state schools and local authorities to co-operate regarding their respective school admissions functions and for mainstream, special and alternative provision state schools to co-operate with local authorities regarding their place planning functions. The onus will be on schools and local authorities to work together constructively on these issues so that their statutory responsibilities can be fulfilled.

■ Digital Technology: Curriculum**Dr Al Pinkerton:****[21476]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the current integration of digital literacy into school curriculums.

Catherine McKinnell:

Digital literacy is currently taught through the compulsory curriculum subjects of computing, relationships, sex and health education and, at key stage 3 and 4, citizenship.

Last summer, the government established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, covering ages 5 to 18, chaired by Professor Becky Francis. The review's aim is for every child and young person to access a cutting-edge curriculum which is rich and broad, inclusive and innovative. The terms of reference set out that the review will seek to deliver a curriculum that ensures children and young people leave compulsory education ready for life and work. This includes embedding digital skills in their learning.

The review's terms of reference can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-review>.

■ Further Education and Schools: Devolution

Mr Clive Betts:

[\[21264\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to give extra (a) powers and (b) responsibilities to (i) councils and (ii) mayors over (A) academies, (B) other schools and (C) further education.

Catherine McKinnell:

All our schools are crucial partners in breaking down the barriers to opportunities for children and young people so they all receive a brilliant education which sets them up to achieve and thrive.

Academies are directly accountable to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education. In the event that academies and their trusts are not meeting the required standards, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has powers to intervene. In the event that a local authority or mayor has concerns about the performance of an academy or trust in their area they can raise these with the department.

Maintained schools are accountable to their local authority, which also has powers to intervene where schools are seriously underperforming.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, introduced on 17 December 2024, contains proposals to extend certain powers of local authorities. They include powers relating to the admission of children to maintained schools and academies, to the range of bodies which can propose the opening of a new school and to the setting of a school's published admission number.

The department believes that further education has a crucial part to play in ensuring we have the skills needed for sustainable economic growth. That is why the government will continue to build an education system that prepares our students for life, work, and the future. All young people should have access to high quality education and training that meets their needs and provides them with opportunities to thrive.

The department recognises that mayors have a key role to play in ensuring that education and training pathways for young people provide clear routes into further education or employment. While the department remains committed to the principle of a national education system for those in compulsory education, including that every learner must have a wide range of choices in 16-19 study, the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, sets out areas for further devolution including on skills. Mayors will in future be jointly responsible for local skills improvement plans and have a key role developing the Youth Guarantee to ensure all young people under age 21 are earning or learning.

■ Further Education and Schools: Employers' Contributions

Neil O'Brien:

[21364]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether compensation for schools and colleges from changes to employer National Insurance contributions will be paid via a grant or the detailed schools grant.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department will receive compensation in recognition of the increase in National Insurance Contributions paid by state-funded schools and colleges. That compensation will be additional to the £2.3 billion increase for schools announced at the Autumn Budget 2024. Due to timing constraints, it will be provided as a separate grant for schools, outside the dedicated schools grant in the 2025/26 financial year.

■ Higher Education: Liability

James Naish:

[21514]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to (a) help clarify the duty of care owed by higher education providers to their students and (b) to ensure such standards are met.

James Naish:

[21515]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will meet with representatives of the ForThe100 to discuss the duty of care owed by higher education providers to their students.

Janet Daby:

The department is determined that children and young people receive the mental health care they deserve. This government is breaking down barriers to opportunity by providing young people with the mental health support they deserve. To support this, this government has committed to recruiting 8,500 additional staff across children and adult NHS mental health services.

The department continues to work closely with students, parents, mental health experts and the higher education (HE) sector to drive meaningful change in mental health practice through the HE Mental Health Implementation Taskforce. The Taskforce recently published its second stage report, which is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/higher-education-mental-health-implementation-taskforce>.

The department's position is that a duty of care in HE may arise in certain circumstances. Such circumstances would be a matter for the courts to decide, based on the specific facts and context of the case being considered, and will be dependent on the application by a court of accepted common law principles.

My noble Friend, the Minister for Skills, welcomes the opportunity to meet with members of ForThe100 regarding these issues.

■ Schools: Standards**Neil O'Brien:** [\[18999\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many people were working in the Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence team in (a) total, (b) the East of England, (c) the East Midlands, (d) the North West, (e) the North East, (f) the South East, (g) London, (h) the South West, (i) the West Midlands and (j) Yorkshire and the Humber on 10 December 2024.

Catherine McKinnell:

On 10 December 2024, the number of civil servants working in the Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence teams were as follows. These numbers represent staff headcount, not full time equivalent.

- a) Total: 35
- b) East of England: 4
- c) East Midlands: 4
- d) North West: 3
- e) North East: 4
- f) South East: 4
- g) London: 5
- h) South West: 4
- i) West Midlands: 4
- j) Yorkshire and the Humber: 3

■ Schools: Uniforms**Neil O'Brien:** [\[21662\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many schools will have to change their uniform policy to comply with the provisions in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Catherine McKinnell:

School uniforms can play a valuable role in creating a sense of common identity among pupils and reducing visible inequalities. However, too many schools require high numbers of branded uniform items costing families hundreds of pounds. That is why the department has introduced legislation to limit the number of branded items of uniform and PE kit that schools can require, to bring down costs for parents and remove barriers from children accessing sport and other school activities.

The department does not routinely collect school-level data on uniform requirements. However, based on the department's 2023 Cost of School Uniforms Survey of parents, we estimate that one third of primary schools and seven in ten secondary schools will have to remove compulsory branded items from their uniforms to comply

with the new limit. Many schools will only have to remove one or two items, although those with excessive numbers of branded items will have to remove more.

This research report can be accessed at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e2b4df6cc3c902a6e6fbcc/DfE_Cost_of_School_Uniform_Survey_Report.pdf.

■ Special Educational Needs: Extended Services

Lee Anderson:

[21376]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that children with Special Educational Needs have equal access to (a) before- and (b) after-school care in Ashfield.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government is determined to break down barriers to opportunity for all children and young people, ensuring they have access to the brilliant education and care they need to thrive. This includes ensuring that wraparound care is available and accessible. The government is improving access to before and after school care through the National Wraparound Childcare Programme.

The programme is being delivered through local authorities, given their existing sufficiency duty. The Childcare Act 2006 places a legal duty on local authorities to make sure that there are enough childcare places within its locality for working parents or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 to 14, or up to 18 for disabled children. All local authorities should be able to demonstrate how they have discharged this duty and should include specific reference to how they are ensuring there is sufficient childcare to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), as per the statutory guidance. This should be available from the local authority.

The National Wraparound Childcare Programme is helping local authorities discharge this duty, by distributing funding on the basis of anticipated need. Local authorities across England can decide how best to use the funding to set up or expand wraparound childcare in their area to meet the needs of their local community, including children with SEND. We have committed up to £3,990,920.18 between December 2023 to March 2026 to Nottinghamshire local authority to support delivery of additional wraparound places, including in Ashfield.

The government is also committed to making quick progress to deliver on our commitment to offer breakfast clubs in every primary school. Departmental officials are working closely with schools and sector experts to develop a programme that meets the needs of all children, including those with SEND.

On 23 September 2024, my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced that up to 750 state funded schools with primary aged pupils will begin delivering free breakfast clubs from April 2025. The funding will allow these schools to run free breakfast clubs for their pupils starting in the summer term as part of a

‘test and learn’ phase to inform delivery of a national rollout, this will include testing approaches to supporting children with SEND.

This government’s ambition is that all children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life. We are committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs, restoring parents’ trust that their child will get the support they need.

■ Teachers

Laurence Turner: [R] [\[21860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Answer of 11 December 2014 to Question 217660 on Teachers, whether the programme of talks referred to is ongoing.

Catherine McKinnell:

Following the 2024 general election, the Programme of Talks forum was stood down to enable the department to develop new and improved ways of working with employer organisations, unions and other key stakeholders. This government is committed to resetting the relationship with the sector, where we work together on priority areas for reform, building on decades of the sector’s experience and excellence. Tackling high workload for school staff remains a key focus for this government.

■ Teachers: Pay

James MacCleary: [\[21873\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to support college teachers who did not receive the 5.5% pay rise; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of tying pay increases for(a) college and (b) school teachers to a level above inflation.

Janet Daby:

Further education (FE) colleges, rather than government, are responsible for setting and negotiating pay within colleges. Colleges are not bound by the national pay and conditions framework for school teachers, but are free to implement their own pay arrangements in line with their own local circumstances. FE Colleges were incorporated under the terms of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, which gave them autonomy over the pay and contractual terms and conditions of their staff.

This government is committed to ensuring there is a thriving FE sector, which is vital to our missions to break down the barriers to opportunity and boost economic growth.

At the October Budget 2024, my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out an additional £300 million revenue funding for FE in the 2025/26 financial year to ensure young people are developing the skills this country needs. The department will set out in due course how this funding will be distributed.

This builds on our investment to extend targeted retention incentive payments of up to £6,000 after tax to eligible early career FE teachers in key subject areas. The department is also delivering funding to support those young people who do not pass mathematics and English GCSE at 16, who are predominantly studying in FE.

The department will continue to offer financial incentives for those undertaking teacher training for the FE sector in priority subject areas. For the 2024/25 academic year, FE training bursaries are worth up to £30,000 each, tax free. Additionally, we are supporting industry professionals to enter the teaching workforce through our 'Taking Teaching Further' programme.

The 5.5% pay award announced in the summer for the 2024/25 academic year was for school teachers only. School teachers' pay is set through an independent, statutory process each year, and for 2024/25 the department accepted the School Teachers' Review Body's (STRB) recommendation in full.

The process for determining the school teacher pay award for 2025/26 is currently underway. On 10 December, the department published its written evidence to the STRB, to inform their recommendations. The evidence sets out that in the context of the challenging national economic picture, a 2.8% pay award for school teachers would be appropriate, ensuring school teachers' pay remains competitive.

In making their recommendations for 2025/26 school teacher pay, the STRB have been asked to consider the impact of their recommendations on the FE teaching workforce in England. This does not change how pay is set in FE, but, as the FE and school workforces are closely related, it is important that the STRB consider the totality of the workforce when they look at the evidence.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Renewable Energy

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[21718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the role of energy storage and back-up systems in managing the intermittency of wind and solar power generation.

Michael Shanks:

The Government recognises the vital role of energy storage and back-up systems in delivering clean power. As set out in our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, we are committed to developing a flexible energy system that ensures security of supply through long term storage technologies which could include pumped hydro storage, CCUS, hydrogen to power, or liquid air energy storage.

Renewable Energy: Feed-in Tariffs**Ruth Jones:**[\[21667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he plans to investigate the business practices of rent-a-roof companies under the (a) Feed-In-Tariff and (b) Renewable Heat Incentive scheme.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Department is aware of allegations that have been made about the business practices of some companies that operated rent-a-roof or leasing models in the Feed-in Tariff and Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive schemes. Ofgem is currently looking into these allegations.

If Ofgem finds evidence of wrongdoing, then the Department will support Ofgem in using the full extent of its powers to address the issue.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**Biodiversity****Joe Morris:**[\[21732\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of biodiversity net gain in delivering for biodiversity as intended.

Mary Creagh:

Mandatory biodiversity net gain is an important means of ensuring development makes a net positive contribution to nature. It is in the early stages of implementation. The policy has been designed to achieve long-term benefits for biodiversity, with major biodiversity gains secured by legal contract for a minimum of 30 years. Because biodiversity net gain applies as a 'post-permission requirement', we are only now seeing the first permissions granted with the mandatory biodiversity gain condition.

Defra officials are monitoring the implementation of mandatory biodiversity net gain closely and regularly meet with local planning authorities, developers, and the land management sector, to ensure biodiversity net gain works effectively and proportionally.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:**[\[20174\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 25 November 2024 to Question 9618 on Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Ministers' Private Offices, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in his Department between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Daniel Zeichner:

Between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024 approximately £5,700 (inclusive of VAT) was spent on renovation and improvements to Ministerial Offices.

Incurred costs were:

- Reupholstery of 14 leather-seated meeting chairs - @ £3,450.00
- 2x Floor standing lamps - @ £2,194.20 for two.
- 2 x mounted mirrors - @ £59.90 for two.

■ Drugs: Packaging**Ben Maguire:**[\[22223\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to facilitate the recycling of blister packs.

Mary Creagh:

Waste is a devolved policy, and the devolved administrations have their own arrangements for household and business recycling and waste collections. There are currently no plans for blister packs to be included in the list of materials to be collected at kerbside through Simpler Recycling reforms.

Modulation of pEPR fees, which will be introduced in from year 2 of the scheme, will be used to disincentivise packaging formats that are not readily recyclable .

■ Flood Control: Madeley**Adam Jogee:**[\[21770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will hold discussions with the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme on taking steps to protect the residents of Mallard Close, Madeley, from the effects of repeated flooding incidents.

Emma Hardy:

To ensure we protect the country from the devastating impacts of flooding, we will invest £2.4 billion in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience, by building, maintaining, and repairing flood defences.

The issues in the Mallards Close, Madeley, are related to surface water flooding. The responsible flood authority for surface water flooding is Staffordshire County Council. The Environment Agency is aware they are already responding to this issue and will be happy to support the council where they are able to.

■ Incinerators: Waste Disposal**Peter Fortune:**[\[21837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Environmental permitting: standard rules consultation number 29, published on 9 December 2024.

Emma Hardy:

The Environment Agency (EA) uses existing Government websites to publish permit consultations, posting [a notification on GOV.UK](#) that points to a consultation on [the EA's Citizen Space website](#). The EA ensures its consultation information meets the accessibility requirements for these websites. The accessibility statement for the website is available [here](#). This sets out what steps have been taken to make the website as accessible as possible, including for people who rely on assistive technology. The accessibility statement for GOV.UK is found [here](#).

Renewable Energy: Infrastructure

Dr Simon Opher: [\[21716\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to develop recycling technologies for end-of-life wind turbine blades and solar panels.

Mary Creagh:

This Government is committed to transition to a circular economy. We are developing a Circular Economy Strategy for England including a series of road maps detailing the interventions that the Government will make on a sector-by-sector basis, supporting Government's Missions to kickstart economic growth and make Britain a clean energy superpower.

In our manifesto we also committed to forcing fly-tippers and vandals to clean up the mess that they have created as part of a crackdown on anti-social behaviours to ensure we can all take pride in our communities.

With regard to solar panels, they are electrical and electronic equipment (EEE). This is regulated to reduce the amount of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) incinerated or sent to landfill sites. [The WEEE Regulations 2013](#) require the producers of electrical equipment, including solar panels, to take financial responsibility for products they place on the market when they become waste.

Rights of Way: Walney Island

Peter Fortune: [\[21839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at Christy Pool to North Point: how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at South Walney: how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at Rape Haw to Creephaw Marsh: how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21842\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at North Scale (margin): how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at South Walney nature reserve: how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at Biggar (trail - winter): how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21845\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at Biggar (margin- summer): how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21846\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at North Scale (trail), published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at Biggar (trail- summer), published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at Walney airfield (trail), published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at North End Marsh: how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at Hare Hill (trail): how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at Walney airfield: how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at Biggar to Tummer Hill: how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Peter Fortune: [\[21853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Open access restriction at Biggar (margin - winter): how to comment, published on 11 December 2024.

Mary Creagh:

I refer the hon. Member to the answers given on 6 December 2024 to Questions [16894](#) and [16902](#).

These are the pages for the consultations referred to:

[Open access restriction at Christy Pool to North Point: how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at South Walney: how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at Rape Haw to Creephaw Marsh: how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at North Scale \(margin\): how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at South Walney nature reserve: how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at Biggar \(trail - winter\): how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at Biggar \(margin - summer\): how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at North Scale \(trail\): how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at Biggar \(trail - summer\): how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at Walney airfield \(trail\): how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at North End Marsh: how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at Hare Hill \(trail\): how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at Walney airfield \(margin\): how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at Biggar to Tummer Hill: how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

[Open access restriction at Biggar \(margin - winter\): how to comment - GOV.UK](#)

■ Slaughterhouses: Animal Welfare

Dan Norris:

[\[21552\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what animal welfare protections exist for farmed animals at slaughterhouses.

Daniel Zeichner:

[The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) and assimilated [Regulation \(EC\) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing](#) set out extensive requirements to protect the welfare of animals at slaughterhouses. Official Veterinarians of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) are present in all approved slaughterhouses to monitor and enforce these animal welfare requirements. The FSA has a zero-tolerance policy to animal welfare breaches and will take appropriate action where these occur.

Dan Norris:

[\[21556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has had discussions with the RSPCA on animal cruelty at RSPCA-approved abattoirs.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Department engages regularly with the RSPCA on a range of animal welfare topics.

■ Slaughterhouses: CCTV

Dan Norris:

[\[21557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many prosecutions there have been for slaughterhouses in England not having CCTV in the last five years.

Daniel Zeichner:

All approved slaughterhouses in England must have CCTV systems installed as required by the Mandatory Use of Closed-Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (England) Regulations 2018. There have been no prosecutions for slaughterhouses in England for not having CCTV in the last five years.

Where non-compliances with the legislation are identified the Food Standards Agency will apply their enforcement hierarchy, from verbal and written warnings to enforcement notices and referral to the Crown Prosecution Service for prosecution.

■ Water Companies: Accountability

Clive Lewis: [\[20660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 6 September 2024 to Question 2947 on Water Companies: Accountability, when he expects the consumer water panels to be established.

Clive Lewis: [\[20661\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department or water companies will appoint members to consumer water panels.

Emma Hardy:

For too long customers have not been at the heart of the objectives of water companies. This Government believes the interests of customers should be clearly represented and they should play a key role in holding water companies to account on their performance, which is why we have announced powerful new customer panels will be established.

Through the Water (Special Measures) Bill, for the first time in history, customers will get new powers to hold water company executives to account and companies will be required to include customers in decision making. Ofwat will monitor how companies implement this, and customer panels will be vital in delivering accountability and better customer outcomes.

An Ofwat statutory consultation in 2025 will finalise proposals, and further detail on when panels will be established will be set out in due course.

■ Wood-burning Stoves

Helen Hayes: [\[20994\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 18 September 2024 to Question 5227 on Wood-burning Stoves, what recent estimate he has made of when his Department will complete its assessment of options to (a) reduce the impact of wood burning stoves on people's health and (b) meet statutory targets for this pollutant.

Emma Hardy:

Officials are currently evaluating a number of options to reduce emissions of air pollutants, in particular fine particulate matter, from domestic burning, which I anticipate will be completed in spring this year. The Government launched a rapid review of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) to revise our plan for significantly improving the environment and deliver legally binding targets including for Air Quality and PM2.5. The Government concluded the review of the EIP at the end of last year and will publish a summary of findings in early 2025. This will be followed by publication of a revised EIP.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Asylum: Sri Lanka****Chris Philp:**[\[20992\]](#)

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, for what reason the migrants temporarily relocated to the UK were not relocated to St Helena.

Stephen Doughty:

The Memorandum of Understanding with St Helena signed on 15 October 2024 only applies to migrants who arrive on the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) after that date. The then existing group of migrants on BIOT were not included within the arrangement.

■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty**Mr Mark Francois:**[\[21270\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the content is of his response of 16 December 2024 to the Mauritian counterproposals to the UK/Mauritius draft agreement.

Stephen Doughty:

In a joint statement on 20 December, both the UK and Mauritius committed to finalising an agreement on the exercise of sovereignty over BIOT/Chagos as quickly as possible. It would not be appropriate to give a running commentary of ongoing engagement with Mauritius, however we will continue to work closely in good faith with the new Mauritian Government to conclude a deal that is in both sides' shared interests, including protecting the base on Diego Garcia. Both Houses of Parliament will have the opportunity to scrutinise the details of the Treaty in the usual way when it comes to Parliament before ratification.

■ North Korea: Russia**David Taylor:**[\[21510\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of (a) North Korean troops in Ukraine and (b) transactional support with Russia for those troops on the security of (i) Japan and (ii) South Korea.

Catherine West:

The direct participation of DPRK troops in combat operations is another dangerous expansion of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, with serious consequences for European and Indo-Pacific security. This is a grave error by DPRK, who have already begun to suffer significant casualties. In return, Russia's deepening cooperation with DPRK and increased political, military, and economic support further exacerbates tensions on the Korean Peninsula and poses a greater risk to stability in

the region and beyond. The Government will continue to consult and coordinate with our close partners in response to this dangerous development, including Japan and South Korea.

■ **Syria: Chemical Weapons**

Alicia Kearns:

[\[20901\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure UN Security Council Resolution 2118 on Syria is implemented.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK has been clear. Syria must fulfil its international obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 2118 and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), as we stated at the OPCW Executive Council meeting on 12 December and at the UN Security Council on 17 December. While we welcome HTS's commitments to protect chemical weapons sites and never use these weapons under any circumstances, Syria must now take the next step, which is to comply with its obligations under UNSCR 2118 and the Chemical Weapons Convention and engage with the OPCW to declare fully its chemical weapons programme. The UK has recently announced an additional £120,000 of funding to OPCW to support its work on Syria.

■ **Turks and Caicos Islands: Crimes of Violence**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[20939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the measures in place in the Turks and Caicos Islands to prevent the overspilling of violent crime from Haiti.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK Government is resolutely committed to supporting the security of the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI), including in addressing the impact of ongoing violent crime and its links to instability in Haiti. I visited TCI in November 2024 to understand better the security situation and I am in regular contact with colleagues in UK Government departments on how best we can collectively support TCI's response. The FCDO's support this past year has included: deploying privately contracted firearms officers; continuing to embed serious crime investigators within the police; and strengthening border security by procuring new marine assets due to arrive by February 2025, delivering advanced coastal sensors, and funding the accommodation of US air crews based in TCI to improve maritime surveillance. I personally met with the dedicated members of the Royal TCI Police and TCI Regiment and observed their teamwork at close hand, as did HMS Medway when she visited in November. We will continue to explore opportunities to work with the Governor and TCI Government on these challenges.

■ Turks and Caicos Islands: Immigration

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 14 November to Question 12402 on Turks and Caicos Islands: Illegal Immigration, if he would ask the Turks and Caicos Islands government to make available any data it holds on the number of citizens of) Haiti and b) Dominican Republic that are currently resident in Turks and Caicos.

Stephen Doughty:

In line with the Turks and Caicos (TCI) Constitution, immigration is a devolved matter for the TCI Government. Following a 2012 census, the latest published figures recorded the number of citizens from Haiti and the Dominican Republic as 10,928 and 1,541 respectively (or 34.7% and 5.9% of TCI's then population of 31,458).

■ Turks and Caicos Islands: Undocumented Migrants

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many small boats landed illegally in the Turks and Caicos Islands in (a) 2003 and (b) 2004.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has made an estimate of the number of small boats that will arrive in the Turks and Caicos Islands in 2025.

Stephen Doughty:

In line with the Turks and Caicos (TCI) Constitution, immigration is a devolved matter for TCI Government so the UK does not hold detailed statistics on the number of boats entering TCI waters illegally. In 2023, TCI law enforcement authorities confirmed they had intercepted a total of 4,016 irregular migrants at sea. As of 8 October 2024, they reported 1,142 irregular migrants had been intercepted. The FCDO is unable to provide an estimate of the number of small boat arrivals for 2025.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20937\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of taking further action to help reduce the number of small boats travelling illegally from Haiti to the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to enhance the capacity of border security forces in the Turks and Caicos Islands to prevent the illegal arrival of small boats.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20940\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to improve (a) communication and (b) coordination with the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands in response to small boat incursions.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking in the Turks and Caicos Islands to implement preventative measures against potential (a) human, (b) weapons and (c) drugs trafficking linked to illegal small boat arrivals.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[20942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the (a) adequacy of the capabilities and (b) effectiveness of support for the Turks & Caicos Islands relating to illegal small boats.

Stephen Doughty:

Whilst immigration is a devolved responsibility of the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) Government, the UK continues to support TCI in tackling irregular migration challenges and illicit maritime activity. I visited TCI in November 2024 and was briefed by National Security and Border Force leads, joined the maritime police patrol team and visited the maritime operations centre to see first-hand the impact of FCDO-funded advanced coastal sensors.

Further FCDO support on borders for TCI includes procuring new marine assets for the police that will arrive by February 2025 and funding the accommodation of US air crews based in TCI to improve maritime surveillance. HMS Medway, the Royal Navy's Offshore Patrol Vessel based in the Caribbean, visited the TCI in November 2024 to provide reassurance and exercise with TCI authorities, including the TCI Regiment. I continue to discuss with ministerial colleagues additional support to bolster the resilience of TCI agencies.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Blood Cancer: Medical Treatments

Clive Jones: [\[R\] \[21830\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to address the regional variation in (a) access and (b) uptake to timely treatments for blood cancer patients.

Andrew Gwynne:

We will get the National Health Service diagnosing blood cancer earlier and treating it faster. We will start by delivering an extra 40,000 operations, scans, and appointments each week, as the first step to ensuring early diagnosis and faster treatment.

The National Disease Registration Service, through the National Cancer Registration and Analysis Services, collects information on how many people in England have blood cancer, labelled as haematological neoplasms. This data supports service provision and commissioning in the NHS, clinical audits, and public health and epidemiological research, all of which contributes to improved outcomes and reduced treatment variation. Early cancer diagnosis is also a specific priority within the NHS's wider Core20Plus5 approach to reducing healthcare inequalities.

Professor Lord Darzi has undertaken an independent investigation into the state of the NHS, the findings of which will feed into the Government's 10-year plan to build a health service that is fit for the future. Following publication of the 10-Year Health Plan, we will publish a new national cancer plan, which will include further details on how we will improve outcomes for cancer patients, including blood cancer patients.

■ Cerebral Palsy: Children

Liam Conlon:

[\[22164\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve access to healthcare services for children with cerebral palsy.

Andrew Gwynne:

We want a society where every person, including those with a long-term condition such as cerebral palsy, receives high-quality, compassionate continuity of care, with their families and carers supported. We will change the NHS so that it becomes not just a sickness service, but able to prevent ill health in the first place. This will help us be better prepared for the change in nature of disease and allow our services to focus more on the management of chronic, long-term conditions like cerebral palsy.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has published guidance on care and support for children and young people with cerebral palsy, to support healthcare professionals and commissioners. The guidance recommends service providers develop clear pathways that allow patients with cerebral palsy access to multi-disciplinary teams, specialist neurology services and regular reviews of their clinical and functional needs. More information on the guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng62>

NHS England's Getting It Right First Time Programme aims to improve care for people with neurological conditions, including those with cerebral palsy, by reducing variation and delivering care more equitably across the country.

Most services for people with cerebral palsy are commissioned locally by integrated care boards, which are best placed to make decisions according to local need. Nevertheless, at a national level, the Government is working closely with NHS England to continue to improve services for people with neurological conditions, including those with cerebral palsy.

■ Dental Services: Contracts**Jessica Toale:**[\[21096\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the uplift will be to general dental service contracts for 2024-25; and what his planned timetable is to apply such uplift.

Stephen Kinnock:

The independent pay review body for doctors and dentists recommended a 6% pay uplift for 2024/25. The Government accepted the recommendation and has proposed that National Health Service primary care dentistry contract values be uplifted by 4.64%, net of pay (6%) and expenses (1.68%) elements.

The Government is acting to consider and implement the overall uplift to contract values as soon as possible.

Ben Maguire:[\[21950\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of reforming the NHS dental contract to (a) make appointments more accessible and (b) to tackle the backlog of people waiting for NHS dental appointments.

Stephen Kinnock:

To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contract, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of National Health Service dentists. There are no perfect payment systems and careful consideration needs to be given to any potential changes to the complex dental system so that we deliver a system better for patients and the profession.

■ Dental Services: Epilepsy**Victoria Collins:**[\[21823\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to extend free NHS dental repairs to teeth damaged by seizures from epilepsy.

Stephen Kinnock:

Free National Health Service dental care is available to people who meet the following criteria: under 18 years old, or under 19 years old and in full-time education; pregnant or have had a baby in the previous 12 months; being treated in an NHS hospital and the treatment is carried out by the hospital dentist, keeping in mind that patients may have to pay for any dentures or bridges; receiving low-income benefits, or under 20 years old and a dependant of someone receiving low-income benefits.

Support is also available through the NHS Low Income Scheme for those patients who are not eligible for exemption or full remission of dental patient charges. More information is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/who-is-entitled-to-free-nhs-dental-treatment-in-england/>

Community dental services provide specialised dental services to people with additional needs and are available in a variety of places to ensure everyone can have access to dental care. These include hospitals, specialists' health centres and mobile clinics, as well as home visits or visits in nursing and care homes. These services may be available to people with epilepsy, depending on their needs.

■ **Dental Services: Standards**

Charlotte Cane:

[\[21798\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of access to emergency dentistry.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Dental Statistics - England 2023-24, published by the NHS Business Services Authority on 22 August 2024, is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/statistical-collections/dental-england/dental-statistics-england-202324>

In England, in 2023/24, 3,674,731 urgent dental treatments in the National Health Service were delivered, which was 10.8% of all treatments delivered.

This Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access NHS dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contract with the sector, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. For Ely and East Cambridgeshire constituency, this is the NHS Cambridgeshire & Peterborough ICB.

■ **Department of Health and Social Care: Equality**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[21135\]](#)

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

Karin Smyth:

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 a culture of openness and inclusivity, not as ends in themselves, but as means of delivering better outcomes to the citizens we serve.

The Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy: 2022 to 2025, 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 is available at the following link:

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

As set out in the Civil Service People Plan 2024-2027, 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. Further information on this plan is available at the following link:

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

The Department has made hires from wider Civil Service schemes. The schemes supported by the Department for external hires in the last financial year 2023/2024 were the Civil Service Care Leaver Internship Scheme and Going Forward into Employment. Details on these schemes are available at the following link:

<https://www.civil-service-careers.gov.uk/gfie-schemes/>

Six such appointments were made from these schemes, representing 2% of the total new hires to the Department made in that financial year.

■ Electronic Cigarettes

Mary Glindon: [\[21310\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to help increase levels of awareness of the potential merits of switching to (a) vapes and (b) other alternatives to smoking among adult smokers, in the context of nicotine product display restrictions.

Mary Glindon: [\[21311\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of deterring adults who might otherwise smoke cigarettes from using flavoured vapes on public health.

Andrew Gwynne:

The youth vaping call for evidence, published in 2023, demonstrated that vape flavours are one of the main reasons that vapes appeal to children. However, we recognise that vape flavours can also be a consideration for adult smokers seeking to quit smoking.

That is why it is important we strike the balance between restricting vape flavours to reduce their appeal to young people, whilst ensuring vapes remain available for adult

smokers as a smoking cessation tool. Before laying any regulations in Parliament, we will undertake a full public consultation to ensure we get this balance right, and consider the views of a range of stakeholders. We will also undertake a full impact assessment on any future flavour restrictions.

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill includes regulation making powers to limit how nicotine products are displayed. These are also subject to consultation. Adult smokers will still be able to access vapes as well as other alternative methods to stop smoking. Vapes are commonly used alongside behavioural support within local Stop Smoking Services, helping thousands of adults each year to live healthier lives. In addition, our national Swap to Stop scheme is supporting adult smokers to swap cigarettes for vapes.

■ **Gender Dysphoria: Hormone Treatments**

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[21182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the oral statement entitled Puberty-suppressing Hormones of 11 December 2024, Official Report, column 914, what groups representing trans youth he consulted with before making his decision to extend the ban on puberty blockers.

Karin Smyth:

A full list of groups which represent trans youth and that were consulted as part of the Government's targeted consultation is available at the following link:

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

■ **General Practitioners and Pharmacy: Standards**

James Naish: [\[21498\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how (a) pharmacies and (b) GPs will be able to contribute to defining the best services to include in the planned expanded Pharmacy First scheme; and when he plans that the consultation will begin.

James Naish: [\[21501\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help upskill existing pharmacists to enable them to become independent prescribers, in the context that, from 2026, all newly qualified pharmacists will become prescribers from the point of registration.

James Naish: [\[21502\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to encourage (a) pharmacists and (b) independent prescribers to work in the community.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government is committed to expanding the role of pharmacies and to better using the skills of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. That includes embedding services such as Pharmacy First and making prescribing part of the services delivered by community pharmacists.

The current seven conditions covered by Pharmacy First clinical pathways were informed by guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and were designed with input from an expert panel of clinicians. NHS England will keep the clinical scope of this service under review.

The community pharmacy independent prescribing Pathfinder programme is currently piloting clinical models to inform a commissioning framework that can be used to deliver national and local National Health Service clinical services with a prescribing element.

NHS England is funding up to 3,000 existing pharmacists each year to become independent prescribers and upskill the existing workforce to play a greater role in multidisciplinary clinical teams. This ensures we have more independent prescribers working in the community than ever before and is expected to lead to more diverse and rewarding careers in the community providing direct care for patients.

To ensure adequate supervision during training, NHS England is also providing national funding of supervisors and Designated Prescribing Practitioners. This will ensure the NHS is ready to support and mentor the trainee pharmacists from 2025/26 alongside currently registered pharmacists learning to be independent prescribers.

■ General Practitioners: Contracts**Tim Roca:**[\[19565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of publishing details of the GP contract earlier in the year to improve forward planning.

Stephen Kinnock:

My Rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, wrote to general practices on 20 December 2024 to confirm an £889 million uplift to the contract for 2025/26 and set out the proposed areas of reform. The proposed changes to the contract bring about important reforms and make progress towards manifesto commitments. This announcement recognised the benefits in providing reassurance to the sector and supporting forward planning. The final details of the contract will be announced in the usual way following the close of the consultation with the General Practitioners Committee England in Spring 2025.

■ General Practitioners: Nottingham East**Nadia Whittome:**[\[21705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve the availability of GP appointments in Nottingham East constituency.

Stephen Kinnock:

We are committed to improving capacity and access to local services across the country, including in Nottingham East. That is why we have already begun recruiting 1,000 newly qualified general practitioners (GPs) through an £82 million boost to the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme, enabling the recruitment of 1,000 newly qualified GPs across England. This will increase the number of appointments delivered in general practice, which will benefit thousands of patients that are struggling to care the care they desperately need. This will also secure the future supply of GPs and take pressure off those currently working in the system.

Additionally, we have announced a proposed £889 million uplift to the GP contract, with a rising share of total National Health Service resources going to general practice. We are currently consulting on key proposals to improve access, continuity of care and GP recruitment.

General Practitioners: Patients**Alicia Kearns:**[\[22094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average maximum number of patients registered per GP practice in England is.

Stephen Kinnock:

The median number of patients registered at a general practice in England in December 2024 was 8,799.

Glioblastoma: Diagnosis**Claire Hanna:**[\[21702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve NHS diagnostic processes for glioblastoma brain tumours.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department is working with NHS England in taking steps to improve diagnostic processes in the National Health Service for all patients with cancer, including those with glioblastoma brain tumours.

We will get the NHS diagnosing cancer, including brain tumours, on time, diagnosing it earlier and treating it faster so more patients survive, and we will improve patients' experience across the system. We will address the challenges in diagnostic waiting times, providing the number of CT, magnetic resonance imaging and other tests that are needed to reduce cancer waits.

To do this, we set out expectations for renewed focus on cancer targets in the Elective Reform plan, published on 6 January 2025. We have asked systems and providers to identify local opportunities in both community diagnostic centres (CDCs) and hospital based diagnostic services to improve performance against the Faster Diagnosis Standard, to reduce the number of patients waiting too long for a confirmed diagnosis of cancer. Any new CDCs will be expected to include specific capacity for

cancer testing as part of activity plans, enabled either through direct provision or via freeing up acute hospital capacity for more complex cancer tests.

In September 2024, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) announced new research funding opportunities for brain cancer research, including glioblastoma, spanning both adult and paediatric populations. This includes a national NIHR Brain Tumour Research Consortium, to ensure the most promising research opportunities are made available to adult and child patients and a new funding call to generate high quality evidence in brain tumour care, support, and rehabilitation.

■ Gonorrhoea

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21698\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many cases of gonorrhoea have been diagnosed in each of the last 30 years.

Andrew Gwynne:

The following table shows the number of gonorrhoea diagnoses in sexual health services in England between 1994 and 2023:

YEAR	NUMBER OF GONORRHOEA DIAGNOSES
1994	9,631
1995	9,890
1996	11,828
1997	12,332
1998	12,457
1999	15,450
2000	20,297
2001	22,198
2002	24,123
2003	23,346
2004	20,669
2005	17,632
2006	17,191
2007	17,119
2008	14,985

YEAR	NUMBER OF GONORRHOEA DIAGNOSES
2009	16,141
2010	16,839
2011	21,090
2012	26,909
2013	31,200
2014	37,150
2015	41,290
2016	36,545
2017	44,839
2018	56,690
2019	71,133
2020	50,678
2021	49,321
2022	79,268
2023	85,223

Source: UK Health Security Agency

■ **Gonorrhoea: Health Services**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21699\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the (a) average and (b) maximum cost to the NHS was of untreated gonorrhoea in the latest year for which data is available; and what assessment he has made of the impact of this on the NHS.

Andrew Gwynne:

The information requested is not held centrally.

■ **Halton Haven Hospice and Hospice of the Good Shepherd**

Mike Amesbury:

[\[20247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to take additional steps to support (a) Halton Haven and (b) Good Shepard Hospice in Runcorn and Helsby constituency.

Stephen Kinnock:

Palliative care services are included in the list of services an integrated care board (ICB), such as the Cheshire and Merseyside ICB, which covers the Runcorn and Helsby constituency, must commission. This promotes a more consistent national approach and supports commissioners in prioritising palliative and end of life care. To support ICBs in this duty, NHS England has published statutory guidance and service specifications.

Whilst the majority of palliative and end of life care is provided by National Health Service staff and services, we recognise the vital part that voluntary sector organisations, including hospices like Halton Haven and the Good Shepard Hospice, also play in providing support to people at end of life and their loved ones.

On 19 December 2024, the Government announced the biggest investment in a generation for hospices in England, supporting the sector with a £100 million boost for adult and children's hospices to ensure they have the best physical environment for care, and £26 million revenue funding to support children and young people's hospices. We will set out the details of the funding allocation and dissemination in the coming weeks.

Health Services: Norfolk**James Wild:**[\[20797\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions his Department has had with Norfolk and Waveney Acute Healthcare Collaborative on its proposal to move to a group model of operation.

Karin Smyth:

The Department is aware that Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn NHS Foundation Trust, and James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust are considering the possibility of transitioning to a group model of operation from April 2025, with a single Chair and CEO across the three trusts.

The Department is not involved in approving group models. The trusts' proposal has been made locally and the Case for Change will be subject to approval from NHS England to ensure that all appropriate planning and safeguards are in place for the change to happen.

The group model is intended to strengthen collaboration, enabling optimal efficiency, sharing of resources, a unified approach to tackling large-scale challenges, and improved patient care and outcomes.

Heart Diseases: Young People**Helen Hayes:**[\[21640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of rolling out cardiac screening to young people.

Andrew Gwynne:

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) last reviewed screening for sudden cardiac death (SCD) in people under 39 years old in 2019 and concluded that screening should not be offered. More information on the review is available at the following link:

<https://view-health-screening-recommendations.service.gov.uk/sudden-cardiac-death/>

Research showed that current tests are not accurate enough to use in young people without symptoms, and that treatments and interventions were not based on good scientific evidence to prevent SCD.

To stop SCDs in young people, the current consensus is to focus on rapid identification and care of people who are likely to be at risk of SCD due to a family link or because they have had symptoms, and to train people to carry out cardio-pulmonary resuscitation and to use defibrillators.

NHS England has published guidance for inherited cardiac conditions which requires services to investigate patients with previously undiagnosed cardiac disease, suggestive symptoms or from families with sudden unexplained deaths. Where a genetic variation is identified, cascade testing is offered to relatives based on risk.

We are aware that the UK NSC has received a submission via its annual call process to consider SCD screening in young people aged between 14 and 35 years old engaging in sport. The UK NSC is currently reviewing all annual call proposals. More information on the annual call process is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nsc-annual-call-submitting-a-screening-proposal/uk-nsc-annual-call-how-to-submit-a-proposal>

Helen Hayes:**[21641]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure early identification of cardiac problems in young people.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS England has published a suite of national service specifications and standards for Paediatric Cardiac Services, which define the standards of care expected from organisations funded by NHS England, to support and improve the diagnosis and treatment of congenital cardiac problems in young people, with congenital heart disease constituting the bulk of paediatric cardiac cases. The specifications and standards cover all Paediatric Cardiac activity, including surgery and cardiology, taking place in the Specialist Children's Surgical Centres, Specialist Children's Cardiology Centres, and Local Children's Cardiac Centres, including activity undertaken by the Specialist Centres on an outreach basis where it is delivered as part of a provider network, with the aim of ensuring all patient care is of a consistent high quality.

NHS England has also published a national service specification for Inherited Cardiac Conditions (ICC), which covers young adults. The aim of ICC services is to improve

the diagnosis, treatment, and outcome of patients with inherited cardiac conditions. NHS England is currently reviewing this service specification, working with a broad range of stakeholders as part of the review, including clinical experts in the National Health Service, the Association of Inherited Cardiac Conditions, Cardiomyopathy UK, Heart Valve Voice and the British Heart Foundation.

The Fetal Anomaly Screening Programme also sets out standards for antenatal screening by ultrasound of serious congenital abnormalities, including which abnormalities should be screened for and expected detection rates, with 68% of serious abnormalities detected antenatally.

■ Hormone Treatments: Children

James Naish: [\[21512\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what reason Gonadotrophin-Releasing Hormone Analogues are permitted for treatment of precocious puberty but not gender incongruence.

Karin Smyth:

Gonadotrophin-releasing hormone analogues, puberty suppressing hormones, have been licenced by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) for the treatment of precocious puberty and certain types of cancer. In granting a licence for these purposes, the MHRA has made a robust assessment of safety and efficacy data for use in these specific indications.

The MHRA has not licenced these medications for use in gender incongruence. There is not enough evidence about the long-term effects of using puberty suppressing hormones to treat gender incongruence to know whether they are safe or beneficial.

This is why the Government is supporting NHS England to set up a study into the potential benefits and harms of puberty suppressing hormones as a treatment option for children and young people with gender incongruence. The trial aims to begin recruiting participants in spring 2025.

■ Hospices: Charitable Donations

Martin Wrigley: [\[21470\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to monitor the declining charitable income of hospices and the potential link to deterioration in service.

Stephen Kinnock:

Palliative care services are included in the list of services an integrated care board (ICB) must commission. This promotes a more consistent national approach and supports commissioners in prioritising palliative and end of life care. To support ICBs in this duty, NHS England has published statutory guidance and service specifications.

Whilst the majority of palliative and end of life care is provided by National Health Service staff and services, we recognise the vital part that voluntary sector organisations, including hospices, also play in providing support to people at end of life and their loved ones.

Individual ICBs oversee palliative care provision by NHS and non-NHS services, including charitable hospices, within each area.

The biggest investment in a generation for hospices has been announced by the Government, ensuring that hospices can continue to deliver the highest quality end of life care possible for their patients, families, and loved ones.

This was through a £100 million boost for adult and children's hospices to ensure they have the best physical environment for care, and £26 million of revenue to support children and young people's hospices. Further details of the funding allocation and dissemination will be set out in the new year.

We, alongside key partners NHS England, will continue to proactively engage with our stakeholders, including the voluntary sector and independent hospices, on an ongoing basis, in order to understand the issues they face.

■ **Hospices: Community Care**

Kevin McKenna:

[R] [\[902077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to shift care from hospitals into the community.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is vital to move services from hospital to community. The Chancellor made funding available for 380,000 more talking therapies for patients and put in place a £26 million capital investment scheme for mental health crisis centres. A lot of work has been done, but there is a lot more still to do.

■ **Hospices: Employers' Contributions**

Greg Smith:

[\[902073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the increase to employers' National Insurance contributions on hospices.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have taken necessary decisions at the Autumn Budget, which enabled a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department.

In December, we announced a £100 million capital funding boost for adult and children's hospices and an additional £26 million revenue funding for children's hospices. The biggest investment in a generation for hospices.

The employer National Insurance contribution rise will be implemented in April 2025 and the Department will set out further details on allocation of funding for hospices in England for next year in due course, including through the NHS planning guidance.

■ Hospitals: Admissions

Luke Murphy:

[\[20738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the rate of hospital readmissions within 30 days of discharge was for (a) Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital, (b) Hampshire and (c) England in each of the last ten years.

Stephen Kinnock:

The following tables show published experimental statistics by NHS England on the percentage of emergency admissions to any hospital in England within 30 days of the most recent discharge from hospital at a trust and national level:

YEAR	LEVEL DESCRIPTION	INDICATOR VALUE	BANDING (COMPARISON TO NATIONAL AVERAGE – SEE BELOW FOR DEFINITIONS)
2014/15	HAMPSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST	11.5	B1
2015/16	HAMPSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST	11.1	B1
2016/17	HAMPSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST	12.4	B1
2017/18	HAMPSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST	13.6	W
2018/19	HAMPSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST	14.4	W
2019/20	HAMPSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST	14.7	A5
2020/21	HAMPSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST	16.3	A1

YEAR	LEVEL DESCRIPTION	INDICATOR VALUE	BANDING (COMPARISON TO NATIONAL AVERAGE – SEE BELOW FOR DEFINITIONS)
2021/22	HAMPSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST	16.1	A1
2022/23	HAMPSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST	15.8	A1
2023/24	HAMPSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST	16.6	A1

YEAR	LEVEL DESCRIPTION	INDICATOR VALUE
2014/15	England	12.7
2015/16	England	13.0
2016/17	England	13.2
2017/18	England	13.6
2018/19	England	14.2
2019/20	England	14.3
2020/21	England	15.4
2021/22	England	14.3
2022/23	England	14.2
2023/24	England	14.8

Source: NHS England

Notes:

1. B1 = Significantly lower than the national average at the 99.8% level; B5 = Significantly lower than the national average at the 95% level but not at the 99.8% level; W = National average lies within expected variation (95% confidence interval); A5 = Significantly higher than the national average at the 95% level but not at the 99.8% level; A1 = Significantly higher than the national average at the 99.8% level.

2. Figures are indirectly standardised to adjust for variation in age, sex, method of admission and diagnosis/procedure between hospitals and over time.

Further statistics around discharge are available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/compendium-emergency-readmissions/current/emergency-readmissions-to-hospital-within-30-days-of-discharge>

■ Hospitals: Community Care

Deirdre Costigan:

[902069]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to shift care from hospitals into the community.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is vital to move services from hospital to community. The Chancellor made funding available for 380,000 more talking therapies for patients and put in place a £26 million capital investment scheme for mental health crisis centres. A lot of work has been done, but there is a lot more still to do.

■ Hospitals: Discharges

Luke Murphy:

[20732]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many delayed discharges there were (a) at Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital, (b) in Hampshire and (c) in England in each of the last ten years.

Stephen Kinnock:

The data collection used for monitoring delayed discharges was changed in 2020. In addition, the Department and NHS England do not hold data on the number of delayed discharges at hospital level, and trust level data was published from 2022 onwards. As such, we have provided data on the number of delayed discharges at trust and national level from 2021 to present.

The following table shows the average daily number of acute adult patients remaining in hospital at the end of the day despite being medically fit, that is, patients with no criteria to reside and not discharged, in each financial year since 2021/22:

YEAR	HAMPSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST	ENGLAND	COMMENTS
2021/22	n/a	9,891	Published data not available at trust level before April 2022. 2021/22 figures affected by Covid-19 pandemic (low bed occupancy rates)
2022/23	174	13,227	
2023/24	160	12,693	
2024/25	153	12,381	Average for the year so far up to 30 November 2024

Source: NHS England

■ Integrated Care Boards: Primary Health Care

Helen Whately:

[\[21338\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to support ICBs that are considering cuts to primary care services.

Stephen Kinnock:

Integrated care boards (ICBs) have a delegated responsibility for planning and commissioning healthcare services to meet the reasonable needs of the people for whom they are responsible. ICBs should evaluate the needs of the populations for which they are responsible and plan service provision as required.

NHS England will continue to develop national policy and guidance to support ICBs to discharge their primary care commissioning functions effectively, supporting primary care providers and Primary Care Networks to deliver high quality services for patients. The Government is providing the biggest investment into general practice (GP) for years, an additional £889 million on top of the existing budget.

In the event of any GP closure, it is the responsibility of these local commissioners to ensure that patients are able to register with and attend another GP, so that their health needs continue to be met. When a practice does close, patients are informed of the closure and advised to register at another local practice of their choice within their area. Commissioners must put in place appropriate measures to ensure that the affected patients have access to GP services.

■ Meat: Inspections**Dan Norris:** [\[21554\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to change meat inspection charges from April 2026.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) charges operators to recover costs of meat inspection across its geographic remit of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The FSA conducts an annual review of inspection charges ahead of each financial year. Charges applicable from April 2026 will be determined by means of the next annual review and will be published in early 2026.

■ Mental Health Services: Finance**Dr Danny Chambers:** [\[17708\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of extra NHS funding announced at the budget will be allocated to NHS mental health services.

Dr Danny Chambers: [\[17710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to maintain the Mental Health Investment Standard.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 6 December 2024]: The NHS Operational and Planning Guidance for 2024/25 makes clear that integrated care boards are expected to continue to meet the Mental Health Investment Standard by increasing their investment in mental health services in line with their overall increase in funding for the year.

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will set out expectations for mental health funding, including its share of overall National Health Service expenditure in 2025/26, in due course, as required under section 3(2) of the Health and Care Act 2022.

Lee Anderson: [\[17883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to tackle funding gaps between (a) mental and (b) physical health services.

Stephen Kinnock:

We know that too many people with mental health issues are not getting the support or care they need, which is why we will fix the broken system to ensure we give mental health the same attention and focus as physical health, and that people can be confident in accessing high quality mental health support when they need it.

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will set out expectations for mental health funding, including its share of overall National Health Service expenditure in 2025/26, in due course, as required under section 3(2) of the Health and Care Act 2022.

Neil Duncan-Jordan:[\[19627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions he has had with NHS England on the future of the mental health investment standard.

Stephen Kinnock:

Ministers and officials hold discussions regularly with NHS England on a range of issues. My Rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will set out expectations for mental health funding, including the share of overall National Health Service expenditure in 2025/26, in due course, as required under section 3(2) of the Health and Care Act 2022. NHS England is also expected to issue its priorities and operational planning guidance for the NHS for 2025/25 shortly.

Martin Wrigley:[\[20357\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding his Department plans to provide for meeting the Mental Health Investment Standard in the 2025-26 financial year.

Stephen Kinnock:

We remain committed to the Mental Health Investment Standard. My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, will set out expectations for mental health funding, including the share of overall National Health Service expenditure in 2025/26, in due course, as required under section 3(2) of the Health and Care Act 2022. NHS England is also expected to issue its priorities and operational planning guidance for the NHS for 2025/26 shortly.

■ Mental Health Services: Recruitment**Alex Mayer:**[\[21231\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his planned timetable is for recruiting 8,500 additional mental health workers.

Stephen Kinnock:

As part of our mission to build a National Health Service that is fit for the future, we will recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers to reduce waiting times and provide faster treatment.

We recognise that bringing in the staff needed will take time. The decision for the timetable of recruiting the 8,500 additional mental health workers is still ongoing. We are working with NHS England on options to deliver this expansion of the mental health workforce.

■ Mental Health Services: Students**Dr Danny Chambers:**[\[21120\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help integrate accredited (a) counsellors and (b) psychotherapists into mental health support teams for students.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 7 January 2025]: We know that too many children and young people are not receiving the mental health care they need, and that waits for mental health services are far too long. We will provide access to a specialist mental health professional in every school so that mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, can be identified early on and prevented from developing into more serious conditions in later life. We are working with our colleagues at NHS England and the Department for Education to consider options to deliver this commitment.

Department for Education guidance encourages mental health support teams to work with other existing professionals, such as school or college-based counsellors, educational psychologists, school nurses, pastoral care, educational welfare officers, voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations, local authority provision, primary care, and NHS Children and Young People Mental Health services.

■ Methylphenidate: Norfolk**Steff Aquarone:**[\[21526\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 16285 on Methylphenidate: Shortages, what estimate he has made of the number of prescriptions for methylphenidate (a) successfully and (b) unsuccessfully fulfilled in Norfolk in 2024.

Karin Smyth:

The Prescription Cost Analysis, produced by the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA), provides the total number of prescription items of each medicine dispensed in the community in England.

There were 28,249 National Health Service prescription items for the chemical substance methylphenidate dispensed by contractors in the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board, regardless of where prescribed, from January 2024 to October 2024. The NHSBSA does not hold data on unsuccessfully fulfilled prescriptions.

■ NHS: Employers' Contributions**Dr Luke Evans:**[\[20262\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate his Department has made of the percentage of funding announced in the Autumn Budget 2024 that will be allocated by NHS bodies to fund increases in National Insurance Contributions.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 7 January 2025]: We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at the Autumn Budget, and this enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department, from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26.

The Budget announced the increase to the National Insurance contribution, but additional funding will be agreed with HM Treasury for 2025/26 separately, which is not included in the £22.6 billion increase.

The Employer National Insurance rise will be implemented in April 2025, with the Department setting out further details on allocation of funding in due course, including through planning guidance.

■ NHS: Finance

Clive Jones:

[R] [\[21212\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much and what proportion of the funding for NHS England announced in the Autumn Budget 2024 will be spent on (a) National Insurance contribution increases and (b) existing overspends by (i) NHS England and (ii) his Department.

Karin Smyth:

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

The Department will set out further details on the allocation of funding for next year at the earliest opportunity, including through planning guidance. We are not planning for overspends in 2025/26 by either NHS England or the Department overall.

■ Orthopaedics

Victoria Collins:

[\[21524\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the availability of activity blades for amputees over 18.

Andrew Gwynne:

Prosthetics services are overseen by NHS England. They do not commission activity blades for amputees over 18 years old, and have no current plans change this.

Currently, NHS England provides adult amputees primary prostheses, activity limbs, and adaptations for non-competitive sports, but does not extend this support to high-end sports-specific prosthetics necessary for competitive-level participation.

■ Palliative Care: Vacancies

Susan Murray:

[\[17664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of workforce shortages on the delivery of palliative care services.

Stephen Kinnock:

The delivery of palliative and end of life care services is a devolved matter. We want to assure ourselves and the National Health Service in England that it has access to

the workforce it needs in the years ahead to ensure that patients, including those at end of life, are cared for by the right professional, when and where they need it. We will need to do this in light of the 10-Year Health Plan.

In England, palliative and end of life care is wide-ranging, provided by generalist as well as specialist healthcare professionals, and is not disease/diagnosis specific. A large proportion of palliative and end of life care is not provided by palliative care specialists and, therefore, it is difficult to quantify the totality of the NHS workforce providing palliative and end of life care.

■ Pharmacy

Sadik Al-Hassan: [\[21175\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps his Department has taken to implement the Hub and Spoke model for community pharmacy.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government is working towards introducing legislation to enable hub and spoke dispensing between different legal entities in 2025. This change will be enabled via amendments to both primary and secondary legislation, and is subject to the usual parliamentary processes.

Charlotte Cane: [\[21802\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support community pharmacies.

Stephen Kinnock:

Pharmacies play a vital role in our healthcare system. We are committed to expanding the role of pharmacies and to better using the skills of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. That includes making prescribing part of the services delivered by community pharmacists as part of the shift from hospital to community and from treatment to prevention.

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

■ Pharmacy: Newbury

Mr Lee Dillon: [\[21442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to support pharmacies in Newbury constituency with the increased cost of employers National Insurance contributions.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at Autumn Budget 2024, which enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26. The employer national insurance rise will be implemented April 2025, with

the Department setting out further details on allocation of funding for this year in due course.

■ Primary Health Care

Helen Whately:

[\[21337\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to safeguard primary care services.

Stephen Kinnock:

Work is already underway to ensure the safeguarding of primary care services. Neighbourhood Health Centres will be trialled to bring together a range of services, ensuring healthcare is provided closer to home. This is part of our broader ambition to move towards a Neighbourhood Health Service, with more care delivered in local communities to spot problems earlier.

The 10-Year Health Plan has been launched to reform the National Health Service 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, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention.

The Government is providing the biggest investment into general practice for years, an additional £889 million on top of the existing budget. We will make sure the future of general practice is sustainable by training thousands more general practitioners, guaranteeing a face-to-face appointment for all those who want one, and delivering a modern booking system.

We are committed to expanding the role of community pharmacies and better utilising the skills of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. That includes making prescribing part of the services delivered by community pharmacists as we shift care from hospital to the community.

We plan to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access NHS dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to the areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contract with the sector, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

NHS England is working to develop a long-term infrastructure strategy including anticipated primary care investment needed to meet demand over the next 10 years and beyond, as well as a detailed look at the quality of the estate.

■ Prostate Cancer: Diagnosis

Daisy Cooper:

[\[22083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department's cancer strategy will include (a) a prostate cancer screening programme and (b) alternative measures to improve prostate cancer diagnosis for people at higher risk.

Andrew Gwynne:

The National Cancer Plan will include further details on how we will improve outcomes for cancer patients, including those living with prostate cancer. The Plan will aim to speed up diagnosis and treatment, ensuring patients have access to the latest treatments and technology, and ultimately bringing this country's cancer survival rates back up to the standards of the best in the world. Updates will be provided in due course.

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) does not recommend screening for prostate cancer, because the current best test is inaccurate, offering insufficient benefits in relation to harms caused by misdiagnosis and overdiagnosis, such as invasive investigative procedures and unnecessary treatment. The UK NSC is now undertaking an evidence review into prostate cancer screening which is due to be completed this year.

The Department is also investing £16 million into the Prostate Cancer UK led Transform screening trial, which seeks to find better ways to detect prostate cancer. This trial will compare the most promising tests that look for prostate cancer in men that do not have symptoms and aims to address disparities in detection rates across different groups.

■ Prostate Cancer: Screening**Danny Beales:****[21924]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which body within the NHS will be conducting the review into the case for lowering the screening age for prostate cancer; what the scope of this review will be; and when he expects to receive recommendations.

Andrew Gwynne:

Screening for prostate cancer is currently not recommended in the United Kingdom, due to the inaccuracy of the current best test Prostate Specific Antigen.

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

Once the modelling and evidence review are complete, it will be considered by the UK NSC. Subject to no further revisions being required, the UK NSC plans to look at the findings towards the end of 2025.

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

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

■ Prostate Cancer: South West

Dan Norris:

[\[21558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of prostate cancer services in (a) Bath and North East Somerset, (b) Swindon and (c) Wiltshire.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department is committed to improving the adequacy of all cancer services including for prostate cancer, including cancer services in Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire.

NHS England has funded 10 clinical audits, including a national prostate cancer audit. Using routine data, collected on patients diagnosed with cancer in a National Health Service setting, the audit is looking at what is being done well, where it's being done well, and what needs to be done better. This will seek to reduce unwarranted variation in treatment and reduce inequalities across different groups.

The Government recognises that a cancer-specific approach is needed to meet the challenges in cancer care, and to improve all cancer services and outcomes for people living with cancer including those with prostate cancer. Following publication of the 10-Year Health Plan, we will publish a new national cancer plan, which will include further details on how we will improve cancer services across England.

We are now in discussions about what form that plan should take, and what its relationship to the 10-Year Health Plan and the Government's wider Health Mission should be and will provide updates on this in due course.

■ Shingles: Vaccination

Danny Beales:

[\[21926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make shingles vaccinations available to all people aged over 65.

Andrew Gwynne:

Shingles vaccination was originally routinely offered as part of the national immunisation programme to those aged 70, using the Zostavax vaccine. In 2019, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recommended that the programme should be changed to offer the Shingrix vaccine routinely at 60 years of age, that those aged between 60 and 70 years old should also be offered the vaccine, and that individuals would require two doses of Shingrix to complete the course.

Based on JCVI advice, the Department, the UK Health Security Agency and NHS England decided that the programme would be implemented in phases, with the first phase being that between 1 September 2023 and 31 August 2028, those who reach 65 or 70 years old should be called in on or after their 65th or 70th birthday. The second phase would be that from 1 September 2028 to 31 August 2033, those who reach age 60 or 65 years old should be called in on or after their 60th or 65th

birthday. From 1 September 2023 onwards, vaccination will be routinely offered to those turning 60 years of age on or after their 60th birthday.

The JCVI also recommended that all severely immunosuppressed individuals aged 50 years old and older should be eligible for shingles vaccination due to their higher risk of complications from shingles. This programme change was also implemented on 1 September 2023. These individuals have been prioritised as part of the early roll-out of the programme to ensure those who are most vulnerable are protected.

■ Slaughterhouses: Inspections

Dan Norris: [\[21553\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) official veterinarians and (b) meat hygiene inspectors there were as of 1 December 2024.

Dan Norris: [\[21555\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many Food Standards Agency welfare checks carried out by official veterinarians took place (a) on the farm, (b) during transport to the slaughterhouse, (c) upon arrival at the slaughterhouse and (d) whilst on site up to the point of slaughter in 2024.

Dan Norris: [\[21559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of animal welfare at abattoirs.

Andrew Gwynne:

As of 1 December 2024, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and their Service Delivery Partner between them employed 282 Official Veterinarians (OVs) and 596 Meat Hygiene Inspectors / Official Auxiliaries, as well as 12 Trainee Official Auxiliaries.

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and the Welsh Government have policy responsibility for animal welfare controls within approved slaughterhouses. Application of the controls is carried out by the FSA in England and Wales under a Service Level Agreement with the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and the Welsh Government.

FSA OVs that are based in approved slaughterhouses during operating periods monitor animal welfare. Animal Welfare checks are incorporated into the OVs daily Official Controls duties and are conducted at unloading, at ante mortem i.e. pre-slaughter, and during the slaughter operations for all animals being processed.

The FSA is responsible for enforcement of breaches of animal welfare legislation by the slaughterhouse operator or their operatives. In 2024, there were 190 slaughterhouse non-compliance cases in which FSA took enforcement action.

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and the Welsh Government have policy responsibility for animal welfare controls on farm or during transportation. The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and Local Authority (LA) animal welfare

teams are responsible for enforcement. Where checks by the OV at the slaughterhouse identify farm and transport breaches, they are referred to APHA and the LA. In 2024, there were 4,210 farm and transport non-compliance cases that FSA OVs referred to APHA and LAs to investigate and enforce.

Application of animal welfare controls at slaughterhouses are carried out by the FSA in England and Wales under a Service Level Agreement with the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and the Welsh Government.

Monitoring and reporting requirements are built into the Service Level Agreement between the FSA, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and the Welsh Government to provide assurance on the adequacy of animal welfare at abattoirs. This includes monthly reporting of all non-compliance cases, additional welfare assurance checks conducted by a specifically trained team of Meat Hygiene Inspectors, annual animal welfare themed audits undertaken by veterinary auditors, and biennial slaughter sector surveys. This reporting is supplemented by regular liaison over operational issues and formal quarterly review meetings.

■ **Social Services: Charities**

Joe Robertson:

[\[20893\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what representation not-for-profit social care providers will receive on the proposed Adult Social Care Negotiating Body.

Stephen Kinnock:

As currently drafted, the Employment Rights Bill requires that membership of the Adult Social Care Negotiating Body must include, “officials of one or more trade unions that represent the interests of social care workers” and “persons representing the interests of employers of social care workers”. Further details on membership of the Negotiating Body, including on employer representation, will be subject to engagement with the sector and then set out through secondary legislation.

■ **Social Services: Cumbria**

Tim Farron:

[\[902068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help recruit social care workers in Cumbria.

Stephen Kinnock:

We are launching a national recruitment campaign in February to encourage suitable candidates to apply for immediate vacancies by highlighting the varied and rewarding work available.

We have also introduced legislation to deliver the first Fair Pay Agreement in adult social care to empower worker representatives, employers, and others to negotiate pay and terms and conditions.

■ Suicide: Men**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[219854\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce suicide levels amongst men.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have committed to tackling suicide, as one of the biggest killers in this country. As part of this, the 8,500 new mental health staff we will recruit will be specially trained to support people at risk, to reduce the lives lost to suicide.

The Suicide Prevention Strategy for England, published in September 2023, identifies a number of groups for tailored or targeted action at a national level, including middle-aged men, and we are exploring opportunities to go further.

79 organisations have been allocated funding between 2023 and 2025, through the £10 million Suicide Prevention Grant Fund, and are delivering a broad and diverse range of activity that will prevent suicides and save lives. Organisations benefitting include the Lancaster Men's Hub, Mankind UK, and UK Men's Sheds Association.

■ Tobacco: Sales**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[21694\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill on the illegal sale of tobacco products in (a) non-grocery and (b) non-newsagent premises.

Mr Richard Holden:[\[21695\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether additional powers will be made available to law enforcement officers to penalise (a) barber shops, (b) off-licences, (c) bookmakers, (d) pubs and (e) other non-grocery and non-newsagent premises illegally selling tobacco products as a result of the implementation of a generational ban on tobacco sales.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill will put us on track to a smoke-free United Kingdom, helping to reduce around 80,000 preventable deaths and reduce the burden on the National Health Service and on the taxpayer.

Whilst the published impact assessment on the Bill makes no specific assessment of the potential impact on the illegal sale of tobacco products in non-grocery and non-newsagent premises, we expect most retailers who sell tobacco, regardless of the type of business, to comply with the new and existing measures in the Bill. Further impact assessments will be prepared in advance of secondary legislation, including for a future licensing scheme, which aims to crack down on rogue retailers.

The Bill takes bold action to strengthen enforcement and crack down on rogue retailers who break the law regardless of the type of business. It introduces new £200 fixed penalty notices (FPNs), in England and Wales, to support Trading Standards

Officers to take swifter enforcement action by issuing on-the-spot fines rather than needing to go through lengthy court processes. Trading Standards will be able to issue a £200 FPN for a range of offences, including to anyone who illegally sells tobacco products to someone underage.

The Bill also provides powers for Ministers in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland to introduce a licensing scheme for the retail sale of tobacco products, herbal smoking products, cigarette papers, vaping, and nicotine products. The licensing scheme will support legitimate businesses, act as a deterrent to rogue retailers and provide enforcement agencies with further opportunities to bring penalties against these retailers. We will consult on the details of the licensing scheme ahead of introducing regulations, including the types of business which may hold a licence and the licence conditions.

■ Tobacco: Smuggling

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21696\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the implementation of a generational ban on tobacco sales on trends in the level of (a) counterfeit cigarettes and (b) contraband cigarettes being consumed in the UK.

Andrew Gwynne:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bridlington and The Wolds on 11 December 2024 to Question UIN [17992](#).

HOME OFFICE

■ Asylum: Syria

Nadia Whittome:

[\[21709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she expects to resume processing asylum applications from Syrian nationals.

Dame Angela Eagle:

We keep all country guidance relating to asylum claims under constant review, so we can respond to emerging issues. Following the fall of the Assad regime in Syria, the Home Office has withdrawn the Country Policy Information Notes and Guidance relating to Syria.

Consequently, as the Home Office continues to assess the current situation in Syria, the Home Office has temporarily paused decisions on Syrian asylum claims.

We will provide a further update to Parliament as soon as possible.

■ Electronic Travel Authorisations: Northern Ireland**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[21567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she expects the first overseas visitors to Northern Ireland arriving via the Republic of Ireland to be impacted by the UK Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme.

Seema Malhotra:

We are introducing the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme to enhance our ability to screen travellers upstream and stop those who pose a threat from travelling to the UK. The scheme, which already applies to nationals of Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, has now being extended to all remaining non-visa nationals (except Europeans) and will be a requirement for this cohort for travel from 8 January 2025.

The Government appreciates that the introduction of ETAs represents a substantial change for millions of overseas visitors to the UK (including those intending to cross the land border from Ireland). We are communicating these changes across a range of channels to all those potentially in scope, and there has been regular engagement to that end with officials in the Northern Ireland tourism sector.

The application process is quick and simple. Applicants usually get a decision within three working days.

■ Home Office: Sanitation**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[21687\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to remove the gender-neutral toilets in her Department in Marsham Street.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The current number and location of gender neutral toilets in the Home Office's Marsham office was established under the previous government in October 2017, at a cost of £36,963.20, and has remained unchanged since that time.

There are no plans to spend further public money on the reconfiguration of the Home Office's toilets.

■ Members: Correspondence**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:**[\[21658\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to respond to the correspondence of 11 December 2024 from the hon. Member for Tooting, reference number RA60941.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office responded to the correspondence on 7 January.

■ Ministers: Private Property

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 1 November 2024, to Question 10992, on Ministers: private property, whether the Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention submitted a claim to the Department for the costs relating to the theft of her personal effects whilst on official duties at the Police Superintendents' Association conference in Kenilworth in September 2024.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention has not submitted a claim to the Department for the costs relating to the theft of her personal effects whilst on official duties at the Police Superintendents' Association conference in Kenilworth in September 2024.

■ Offences against Children

Alicia Kearns:

[\[21677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will launch an inquiry into grooming and rape gangs.

Jess Phillips:

The Government's priority is to take action on delivering against the recommendations of the final report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). The Home Secretary announced on 6th January that we will be bringing in mandatory reporting, making grooming an aggravating factor in CSA cases, and setting up a new panel to ensure victims' and survivors' voices are prioritised in future policy making.

The Government will continue to support further inquiries that are needed, which can expose failings and wrongdoings in local areas and institutions. It is right that these take place at a localised level so that those are responsible for delivering services work to ensure lessons are learnt and that local partners are doing all they can to improve their response. We support local areas like Oldham Council, who have confirmed that work to set up a further local inquiry is already underway.

The Government invest in the Child Sexual Exploitation Police Taskforce (or 'Grooming Gangs Taskforce') which provides practical, expert, on the ground support for local forces investigating complex, group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation, with a focus on grooming gangs.

The Taskforce collect and report on data on group-based offending quarterly. 'Group-based' offending in this context includes any offence with two or more perpetrators. This will include - but is not limited to - 'grooming gang' type offending; other 'group-based' offending includes intra-familial and peer-on-peer abuse, for example.

In November 2024, the Taskforce published 2023 data on group-based offending (available here: <https://www.hydrantprogramme.co.uk/publications/hydrant-publications#LatestNews>) which includes data on ethnicity. However, it is important to

note that ethnicity data is limited and should be treated with caution. The Government will be working with the Taskforce to improve data collection, including dealing with the issues around ethnicity.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Building Inspectors

Tom Hayes: [\[21098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the (a) resourcing and (b) powers of Local Authority building inspectors.

Tom Hayes: [\[21101\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to give local authorities primary responsibility for building inspections.

Alex Norris:

The Building Safety Regulator (BSR) registers and sets competency standards for all building inspectors. As part of that work, it is clear that there are capacity issues across the sector. We have invested £16.5 million to support capacity building in local authorities and continue to encourage all authorities to invest in this area.

We will keep the powers of building inspectors under review and are working to see if there are ways in which they should be strengthened. For all higher risk buildings, the BSR remains the building control authority.

The role of local authorities within the building control system is linked to recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 Report. The Government is carefully considering all such recommendations, and we will respond by March.

■ Civil Society: Islam

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[16499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her Department's policy is on (a) Ministerial and (b) official-level engagement with (i) the Muslim Association of Britain, (ii) Cage and (iii) MEND.

Alex Norris:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [20228](#) on 24 December 2024.

■ Housing: Construction

Mr Clive Betts:

[\[21266\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the responsibilities are of (a) unitary authorities and (b) mayoral combined authorities to deliver housing targets.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government have implemented a new mandatory standard method for assessing housing needs which aligns with our ambition to build 1.5 million new homes in this Parliament.

Delivering on that ambitious milestone requires local planning authorities to plan for sufficient homes, as well as commercial development and wider infrastructure, through local development plans.

Unitary authorities are local planning authorities for their area and therefore will need to take account of the standard method when updating their local plans.

Mayoral combined authorities (MCAs) are not local planning authorities. However, some MCAs currently have a duty to produce Spatial Development Strategies (SDS), which is a form of strategic level plan.

Further, through our English Devolution White Paper published on 16 December 2024 we were clear that in future, SDSs will be produced for all of England, and where there are MCAs, they will produce the SDS.

Therefore, MCAs will use the new standard method when producing their SDSs, which will set the housing requirement for each local planning authority within its area. Local Plans will then have to be in general conformity with the relevant SDS.

■ Local Government Finance: Greater London

Helen Hayes:

[\[21642\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate she has made of the funding gap for London councils in the next four years.

Helen Hayes:

[\[21646\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to ensure that the funding model for inner London boroughs meets local demand.

Jim McMahon:

The provisional Settlement for 2025-26 makes available £69 billion for local government, which is a 3.5% real terms increase in councils' Core Spending Power on 2024-25. The final Settlement will increase further, to incorporate the £515 million of funding announced for National Insurance Contributions.

The Department works closely with local government and other government departments to understand specific demand and cost pressures facing local

government on an ongoing basis. This involves looking at a range of cost and demand data, as well as regular engagement with local authorities.

The government is making good on the promise to reform the local government funding system. We are committed to pursuing a comprehensive set of reforms for public services to fix the foundations of local government, in partnership with the sector and on the principle of giving councils early certainty. From 2026-27, we want to fundamentally improve the way we fund councils and direct funding to where it is most needed through the first multi-year settlement in 10 years. We are inviting views on our principles and objectives for funding reform through a consultation (18 December – 12 February).

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

Emily Thornberry:

[\[19662\]](#)

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

Alex Norris:

As of 31 December 2022, 18 government procurement cards were held by staff within the core Department; 27 by staff at the Planning Inspectorate; 6 at the QEII Centre.

As of 31 December 2023, 25 government procurement cards were held by staff within the core Department; 28 by staff at the Planning Inspectorate; 6 at the QEII Centre.

■ Unitary Councils: Powers

Mr Clive Betts:

[\[21265\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what extra (a) powers and (b) responsibilities she plans to give unitary councils.

Jim McMahon:

As set out in the English Devolution White Paper, councils need to be empowered to take the right decisions to drive growth and improve services. This is an ongoing process but among our immediate steps to end micromanagement is working with the sector to review requirements for local authorities to seek Secretaries' of State consents for the use of their powers and removing these requirements unless absolutely necessary. This will apply to all local authorities as we receive proposals from all two-tier areas for reorganisation, as set out in the White Paper.

JUSTICE**■ Criminal Injuries Compensation: Birmingham****Laurence Turner:**[\[21861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people in Birmingham received awards under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what the value of those awards was.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The table below provides the number of compensation awards paid in each of the last five calendar years to applicants living in Birmingham.

Number of compensation awards paid to applicants living in Birmingham* **:

CALENDAR YEAR	NUMBER OF AWARDS PAID	TOTAL VALUE OF THOSE AWARDS
2020	340	£2,746,670
2021	294	£3,055,441
2022	248	£2,624,286
2023	347	£3,866,507
2024	294	£3,074,242

* The above table includes all awards where the applicant named Birmingham as the city in their home address in their application.

**The table does not include archived bereavement applications because the address of the applicant is not retained. In most cases, applications are archived three years after the case has been closed.

■ Offences against Children: Convictions**Alicia Kearns:**[\[21679\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many foreign nationals have been convicted for grooming.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Ministry of Justice publishes data on convictions for a wide range of offences, including grooming up to and including June 2024 in the Outcomes by Offences data tool, that can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice Statistics landing page here:

[Criminal justice statistics - GOV.UK.](#)

However, convictions data held centrally does not include if the offender is a foreign national. This information may be held in the court records but to examine individual court records would be of disproportionate cost.

■ Offences against Children: Sentencing

Alicia Kearns:

[\[21680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to make being (a) the leader of and (b) involved in a grooming gang a statutory aggravating factor during sentencing.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Child sexual abuse and exploitation are the most vile and horrific of crimes - involving rape, violence, coercive control, intimidation, manipulation, and deep long-term harm.

That is why this Government is determined to act – strengthening the law, taking forward recommendations from independent inquiries, supporting stronger police action and protection for victims.

As part of this package of measures, the Government has committed to legislate to make grooming an aggravating factor in the sentencing of child sexual offences, to ensure that this behaviour is reflected in the sentencing of perpetrators.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Consumer Goods: Safety

Dr Al Pinkerton:

[\[21504\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps he is taking to support small businesses in Great Britain with the new General Product Safety Regulation requirements to maintain market access to Northern Ireland.

Hilary Benn:

The updated GPSR largely formalises how businesses are already operating in the UK. Where businesses need to make changes, we expect that they will be adapting anyway to be compliant with the new Regulation to continue trading with the EU.

On 3 December, the Department for Business and Trade's Office for Product Safety and Standards published guidance for businesses on the application of the Regulation in Northern Ireland, which makes clear that authorities will continue to take a proportionate, risk-based, and intelligence-led approach to regulating the NI market, prioritising unsafe products.

DBT will continue to engage businesses directly to ensure they are familiar with the guidance and that the Government is supporting them to trade freely across the whole of the UK. My Department continues to have regular engagement with DBT on this new Regulation.

■ European Union (Withdrawal Arrangements) Bill**Alex Easton:**[\[21523\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December 2024 to Question 18801 on European Union (Withdrawal Arrangements) Bill, whether he received legal advice on that Bill.

Fleur Anderson:

I refer the Honourable Member to the Secretary of State's reply of 17 December 2024 to Question 18801.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]****John Grady:**[\[901952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to increase levels of innovation in Glasgow.

Feryal Clark:

This Government's record £20.4 billion investment in R&D for 2025/26 will help people across the UK enjoy the benefits from an innovation-led economy.

My Hon Friend will be pleased to hear, as part of this, we are extending the Innovation Accelerators, including in the Glasgow City Region to grow its globally competitive innovation centre.

An example of one of the many innovative firms we are supporting in Glasgow is Spire Global who were recently awarded over £3.5 million for a unique weather forecasting data project.

The Government is investing £106 million in five new quantum hubs across the UK as part of the National Quantum Technologies Programme. One hub, the UK Hub for Quantum Enabled Position, Navigation and Timing (QEPNT), will be based in Glasgow, leveraging the city's strengths in photonics and quantum.

These hubs aim to turn cutting-edge science into practical solutions, transforming sectors like healthcare and security, while fostering innovation and driving economic growth, including in Glasgow.

Dr Allison Gardner:[\[901953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to increase levels of innovation in Stoke-on-Trent.

Feryal Clark:

I set out in my previous answer to the Honourable Member for Stafford, that we are investing £29.8 million in research and innovation projects in Staffordshire.

For example, through the Strength in Places Fund, we are investing £18 million in the Midlands Advanced Ceramics for Industry 4.0 project. This is a consortium of

researchers, manufacturers and end-users led by the Lucideon Group, which has sites in Stoke-on-Trent and Stone. It will develop streamlined processes for proving and bringing new advanced ceramics technologies to market faster, with less energy usage and lower carbon emissions.

Sarah Dyke: [\[901954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle digital exclusion.

Chris Bryant:

It is shocking that the last government published no digital inclusion strategy for 10 years. This Government is determined to remedy that and I hope to be able to say more soon.

Mr Joshua Reynolds: [\[901955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle disinformation through AI-generated deepfakes.

Feryal Clark:

We have recently announced that we are delivering on our manifesto commitment to ban the creation of sexually explicit deepfakes through the Crime and Policing Bill.

Deepfakes more broadly are captured by the Online Safety Act where they are shared on social media platforms and are considered illegal content or content which is harmful to children.

For those who think that there are no repercussions for online activity, we saw convictions for illegal online activity following the summer riots, including under the new False Communications Offence.

Edward Morello: [\[901956\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to help ensure reliable mobile coverage in rural areas.

Chris Bryant:

This government wants people across the UK to benefit from reliable and good quality mobile coverage.

Through the Shared Rural Network, we are continuing to deliver 4G mobile connectivity to places where there is either limited or no coverage at all. Our ambition goes beyond this, and is for all populated areas, including rural areas, to have higher-quality standalone 5G by 2030 – and we want to support the industry to deliver this.

Gideon Amos: [\[901957\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of broadband coverage in rural areas.

Chris Bryant:

The latest data from the independent website Thinkbroadband.com shows that over 85% of UK premises can now access a gigabit-capable connection. We are committed to delivering nationwide gigabit coverage by 2030.

Earlier this week we announced the signing of four additional Project Gigabit contracts with Openreach to extend gigabit connectivity to over 130,000 premises, including in the Hon. Gentleman's constituency.

As a result, there is now more than £2 billion available in our live contracts to connect over a million premises with gigabit-capable broadband. These are premises that fall predominantly in rural areas.

John Milne:[\[901958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to fund research into lobular breast cancer.

Feryal Clark:

The Government doesn't ringfence funding for specific diseases but is committed to funding cancer research, including lobular breast cancer. The Department of Health and Social Care spent £121.8 million in 2022/23 on cancer research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research.

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology funds cancer research via UK Innovation and Research (UKRI). UKRI invests approximately £200 million annually into cancer research, of which £10m per year is for breast cancer research.

Office for Life Sciences' Cancer Healthcare Goals programme funds innovations at the earlier stages of the research and development pipeline. Such innovations will have the potential to diagnose multiple tumour types, including breast cancer.

We have allocated £1.3 million of funding for a National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) project that will assess the effectiveness of a new form of MRI scan to detect breast cancers that have been missed by mammograms.

Further NIHR research infrastructure funding supports Biomedical Research Centres and the NIHR Research Delivery Network, which has enabled delivery of 10 lobular breast-cancer studies.

Jessica Morden:[\[901959\]](#)

What steps his Department is taking with universities to support research and innovation.

Feryal Clark:

Research and innovation is key to delivering the government's missions, and universities are essential for this.

We are increasing Core Research funding to over £6.1bn to deliver on the government's research priorities and offer real terms protection to the UK's world leading universities.

This Government has committed to record funding of R&D in the recent budget. Total HMG investment in R&D is rising to a record allocation of £20.4bn in 2025/26

■ Animal Experiments

Josh Newbury: [\[21150\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to support the (a) development and (b) evaluation of (i) non-animal test methods and (ii) new approach methodologies to replace animal testing.

Feryal Clark:

The Government is committed to supporting the uptake, development and evaluation of alternative methods to the use of animals in science and new approach methodologies. It is not yet possible to replace all animal use due to the complexity of biological systems and regulatory requirements for their use.

We recognise that any work to support the transition to new approach methodologies must be science-led and in lock step with partners, and so we are meeting with key stakeholders to pursue this work. We will make any announcements on our plans in due course.

■ Broadband: Rural Areas

Freddie van Mierlo: [\[21460\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps is he taking to ensure that all villages are included the rollout of broadband infrastructure.

Chris Bryant:

The Government is committed to the rollout of fast, reliable broadband to all parts of the UK. So far we have over 30 Project Gigabit contracts in place, filling in gaps that are not being met commercially, predominantly in rural areas. This includes a contract across South Oxfordshire which will provide approximately 3,500 premises in the Henley and Thame constituency with access to gigabit-capable broadband.

Charlotte Cane: [\[21806\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of rural broadband coverage.

Chris Bryant:

According to Ofcom's December 2024 Connected Nations report, just 0.1% of properties are unable to get decent broadband coverage (defined as at least 10 Mbps download speed and 1 Mbps upload speed), with 89% of rural UK residential properties having superfast broadband coverage (≥ 30 Mbps). Clearly this still leaves a significant number of rural properties with inadequate broadband coverage.

Through Project Gigabit, more than £2 billion of contracts have been signed to connect over a million more premises with gigabit-capable broadband (>1000 Mbps). These premises predominantly fall in rural areas.

For those premises still unable to get a decent broadband connection, the Broadband USO provides consumers the right to request a decent broadband connection.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

■ Candidates: Expenditure

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[22034\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what guidance the Electoral Commission has provided on the use of single notional invoices in candidate returns made under the Representation of the People Act 1983 where multiple (a) elections are held concurrently and (b) candidates in different constituencies and council areas split their costs.

Sir Jeremy Wright:

The Electoral Commission provides guidance to support candidates to understand the law and their reporting obligations.

The guidance states that where candidates have split costs for an item of spending, each candidate must report the proportion of the costs that are attributable to their election campaign. Where multiple elections are held concurrently, candidates should make an honest assessment of the costs that are attributable to their campaign.

If a candidate has paid over £20 for the item, the invoice is required. If a candidate has received the item for free, this is likely to be notional spending, and the law does not require an invoice.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[22035\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, how many and what proportion of local authority returning officers have sent to the Electoral Commission copies of Parliamentary candidates' election expense returns from the 2024 general election under section 87A of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

Sir Jeremy Wright:

The Electoral Commission has received candidate spending returns from returning officers for all 650 constituencies contested at the 2024 UK parliamentary general election. To support transparency, the Commission plans to publish headline spending and donations totals from the most recent general election in due course.

The Commission has a legal remit to secure compliance with the rules on candidates' spending and donations, but has no role or sanctioning powers in respect of breaches. Enforcing the Representation of the People Act 1983 is the responsibility of the police.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[22036\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, whether the Electoral Commission has issued

guidance on whether the loan of accommodation to a Parliamentary candidate in the short campaign would be a declarable (a) notional expense and (b) donation under the Representation of the People Act 1983.

Sir Jeremy Wright:

The Electoral Commission's guidance sets out the law, which states that the loan of accommodation to a Parliamentary candidate during the election campaign would typically be notional spending and a donation.

However, if the accommodation provided is an individual's main residence and it is made available free of charge, this is exempt and would not need to be reported as election spending.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[22037\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, whether the Electoral Commission has issued guidance on whether a returning officer may levy a prescribed fee for the supply of an electronic copy of an (a) election return and (b) declaration under section 89 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

Sir Jeremy Wright:

The Electoral Commission provides guidance to support returning officers to deliver well-run elections that maintain public confidence, including on the inspection and supply of candidate spending returns and declaration.

The Commission's guidance states that the prescribed fee for the supply of copies of a return, declaration or accompanying document is 20p. This fee is intended to cover the administrative costs associated with providing these documents.

TRANSPORT

■ **Bicycles: Lighting**

Gregory Stafford:

[\[21954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989.

Lilian Greenwood:

All manufacturers must demonstrate that their vehicles and equipment comply with international vehicle approval requirements before they are permitted to offer their products for sale, and these include detailed provisions for vehicle lighting. The approval requirements are complemented by the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 to ensure that vehicles operating on the roads of Great Britain continue to have effective and safe lighting systems whilst in service.

All vehicle lighting requirements, including the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989, are kept under review and amended as necessary to account for advances in

vehicle lighting technologies and emerging evidence to ensure regulatory effectiveness is maintained.

■ **Driving Tests: Glasgow North East**

Maureen Burke:

[\[21124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to reduce the waiting list for practical driving tests in Glasgow North East constituency.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's (DVSA) main priority is upholding road safety standards while it works hard to reduce car practical driving test waiting times.

On the 18 December, DVSA set out further plans to reduce driving test waiting times. These steps include recruiting 450 driving examiners (DE) and improving rules for booking driving tests. [Full details](#) of these steps can be found on GOV.UK.

DVSA continues to aim to recruit new DEs into the driving test centres that serve the Glasgow North East constituency, and is currently working through the recruitment process from recent campaigns. From this, DVSA hopes to make offers to successful candidates in the new year.

■ **Electric Vehicles: Charging Points**

Alicia Kearns:

[\[21681\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans she has to provide funding for the expansion of electric vehicle chargers in (a) Rutland and South Kesteven and (b) other rural areas.

Lilian Greenwood:

Rutland County Council was allocated £569,000 and Lincolnshire County Council, which South Kesteven sits within, was allocated £6,380,592 combined capital and resource funding through the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund to expand public chargepoints.

The £381m LEVI Fund will accelerate public chargepoints for drivers without off-street parking across England, including rural areas. LEVI funding allocations considered the level of rurality in an area. This meant local authorities in rural areas were allocated additional funding compared to urban ones.

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[21717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to speed up the delivery of planned electric vehicle charging stations.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government is taking several steps to speed up the delivery of both private and public electric vehicle chargepoints. In December, the Government announced that it will make changes to planning legislation to facilitate off-street chargepoint installations and to allow the use of street works permits for quicker charger

deployment. As well as this, the Government published guidance to help local authorities with cross-pavement charging solutions and to address common issues around EV infrastructure and grid connections. In November, DESNZ and Ofgem also published a joint letter, setting out plans to reform the grid connections process.

Government also supports local authorities through the Local EV Infrastructure Fund to install tens of thousands of chargepoints and continues to offer electric vehicle chargepoint grants to flat owners, renters, small businesses, schools and charities to speed up rollout.

Charlotte Cane: [R] [21814]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help increase the availability of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund is providing local authorities in England with over £380m to support the installation of tens of thousands of public chargepoints.

As well as significant funding, the Government continues to make it easier, quicker and cheaper to install chargepoints. In December, the Government announced that it will make changes to planning legislation to facilitate off-street chargepoint installations and to allow the use of street works permits for quicker charger deployment. The Government also published guidance to help local authorities with cross-pavement charging solutions and the results of a review to address common issues around EV infrastructure and grid connections.

■ High Speed 2 Line: Euston Station

Mr Paul Kohler: [21106]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of reducing the proposed number of platforms for HS2 at Euston Station from 11 to 6 on the economic case for HS2.

Lilian Greenwood:

The decision to reduce the number of platforms at Euston formed part of the overall changes to the HS2 programme made under the Network North announcement. The accounting officer assessment details the impacts of these changes on the value for money case for HS2. The accounting officer assessment is publicly available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-major-projects-portfolio-accounting-officer-assessments/continuing-investment-in-hs2-phase-1-accounting-officer-assessment-october-2023>. Further clarification was provided to the Public Accounts Committee, which is publicly available at committees.parliament.uk/publications/42799/documents/212828/default/.

Mr Paul Kohler:

[\[21118\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether plans for the development of Euston Station for HS2 include (a) provisions and (b) reserved space for potential expansion from six platforms.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department for Transport is working with key partners to develop affordable plans for the Euston Station. This will include consideration of options to allow future expansion of the HS2 station. We will set out more details in due course.

■ **Motor Insurance: Standards**

Patrick Hurley:

[\[21723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to ensure better value for money for motor insurance customers; and what steps she is taking to make car insurers more accountable.

Lilian Greenwood:

We are committed to tackling the increased costs of motor insurance to deliver on our manifesto commitment, including how this impacts different demographics, geographies, and communities.

The cross-government Motor Insurance Taskforce, including the stakeholder panel, met for the first time on 16 October 2024. The Taskforce is currently exploring short- and long-term actions for departments that may contribute to stabilising or reducing premiums, while maintaining appropriate levels of cover.

As it takes this work forwards, the Taskforce will continue to work closely with the independent Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the Competition and Markets Authority. The FCA has launched a market study into the premium finance market and is undertaking work to analyse the cause of increased claims costs in the motor insurance market.

■ **Motor Vehicles: Excise Duties**

Dan Norris:

[\[21560\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many reports of untaxed vehicles the DVLA have sent to NSL Services Ltd in (a) Bath and North East Somerset, (b) South Gloucestershire and (c) England.

Dan Norris:

[\[21561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many enforcement visits NSL Services Ltd made in (a) Bath and North East Somerset, (b) South Gloucestershire and (c) England in (i) September, (ii) October, (iii) November and (iv) December 2024.

Lilian Greenwood:

The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost. A scan of both the Driver and Vehicle Licencing Agency's and the NSL Services Ltd databases

would be required. Subsequent manual scrutiny and organisation of the data would be necessary to obtain the information requested.

■ Motor Vehicles: Lighting

Graeme Downie: [\[21874\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the safety of LED headlights on (a) cars and (b) other vehicles.

Lilian Greenwood:

National collision statistics, which can record headlamp dazzle as a contributory factor, do not show any discernible trend to suggest that advances in lighting technology are contributing negatively to road vehicle collisions.

However, noting increased public concern, Government has commissioned independent research to better understand the root causes of headlamp glare and develop potential countermeasures. This work is underway and is due to deliver in summer 2025.

■ Motor Vehicles: Registration

Peter Fortune: [\[21835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled Registering historic, classic, rebuilt vehicles and vehicles converted to electric, published on 9 December 2024.

Lilian Greenwood:

The call for evidence on “Registering historic, classic, rebuilt vehicles and vehicles converted to electric” was published in line with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency’s accessible documents policy. This is available on <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/driver-and-vehicle-licensing-agency/about/accessible-documents-policy>.

The ‘How to respond’ section of the call for evidence, also offered a mailbox address to request the document to be provided in an alternative format, which includes a paper copy and an audio format.

■ Parking: Pedestrian Areas

James Naish: [\[22112\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the formal response to the public consultation on options for changing the way pavement parking is managed outside London, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to create a new category for vehicles that park four wheels on pavements.

Lilian Greenwood:

In 2020, the Department undertook a public consultation on measures for changing the way pavement parking is managed outside London. We are assessing all options

and will publish a formal response to the consultation, summarising the views received and announcing the Government's next steps for pavement parking policy.

The formal consultation response will be available to view at:

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/managing-pavement-parking.

■ River Tyne: Navigation

Chi Onwurah: [21307]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions her Department has had with the Port of Tyne on the navigability of the River Tyne and its performance as a navigation authority.

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.

■ Stansted Airport: Noise

Mike Martin: [21856]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the penalties are when the LAeq noise contour threshold at Stansted Airport is exceeded; and who enforces those noise restrictions.

Mike Kane:

Stansted Airport's noise contour limit has been set through a local planning agreement. Enforcement of local planning conditions at Stansted Airport is a matter for the local authority, Uttlesford District Council.

■ Train Operating Companies: Compensation

Laurence Turner: [21858]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the net cost to the public purse was of Schedule 4 and Schedule 8 compensation to operators for disruption on the rail network in 2023-24.

Simon Lightwood:

Schedule 4 and Schedule 8 compensation transactions are primarily between bodies whose costs and revenues are included in the Department for Transport's group budgets, therefore these have no net cost to the exchequer.

■ Transport: Carbon Emissions

Mike Reader: [21179]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of including in the integrated national transport strategy measures to (a) help increase efficiency and (b) support decarbonisation in the logistics sector.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Strategy will set the high-level direction for how transport should change to better serve people and is currently in early development. Government recognises the importance of the logistics sector in delivering its missions and transport priorities, including driving economic growth and achieving net zero. We are committed to working with the sector to achieve this and will set out next steps in due course.

Jim Dickson:[\[21461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the Integrated National Transport Strategy will include measures to support the(a) efficiency and (b) decarbonisation of the logistics sector.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Strategy will set the high-level direction for how transport should change to better serve people and is currently in early development. Government recognises the importance of the logistics sector in delivering its missions and transport priorities, including driving economic growth and achieving net zero. We are committed to working with the sector to achieve this and will set out next steps in due course.

TREASURY**■ BBC: Employers' Contributions****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[21406\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to support the BBC with the cost of employers' National Insurance contributions.

James Murray:

The Government will provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional Employer National Insurance Contributions costs. This funding will be allocated to departments, with the Barnett formula applying in the usual way. This will be in line with the approach taken under the previous Government's Health and Social Care Levy. Details of the funding set aside for 2025-26, including its allocation, will be published in due course.

■ Chelsea Football Club: Sales**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[21521\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much interest has accrued on the £2.5bn seized following the sale of Chelsea Football Club.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI), part of HM Treasury, is the authority for the implementation of financial sanctions in the UK.

An asset freeze does not involve a change in ownership of the frozen funds or economic resources, nor are they transferred to HM Treasury. The proceeds from the sale of Chelsea FC are therefore not held by the UK Government. They are currently

frozen in a UK bank account after OFSI issued a licence to permit the sale of the football club.

Any interest accrued on these assets is subject to the asset freeze, to be frozen immediately by the person in possession or control of them.

In the latest Annual Review published in December 2023, OFSI announced that £22.7 billion in Russian Assets has been reported as frozen as of October 2023. This figure is provided in aggregate so as not to disclose the value of any funds held by particular designated persons and is a cumulative total of assets reported.

■ Economic Growth and Public Expenditure

Liam Byrne:

[\[20928\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what role her Department's Enterprise and Growth Unit will have in supporting (a) the Government's Growth Mission and (b) the Spending Review next year.

Tulip Siddiq:

The growth mission is the government's central mission. The Enterprise and Growth Unit plays a key role in driving the mission forward. It is focused on policy development, in partnership with business, industry and other stakeholders, across the seven growth mission pillars outlined at the Autumn Budget. It works closely with other groups within HM Treasury, for example the International and Financial Services Groups and the new Growth Delivery Unit which is focused on delivery.

At the Spending Review, the Enterprise and Growth Unit is responsible for spending control for several departments and will work closely with departments to ensure spending plans are affordable and support the government's missions.

■ Employers' Contributions: Women

Mims Davies:

[\[20998\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of changes to the level of national insurance on women's shelters.

Mims Davies:

[\[20999\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the rise in National Insurance contributions on women's charities.

James Murray:

The Government publishes Tax Information and Impact Notes (TIINs) for tax policy changes. TIINs give a clear explanation of the policy objective and an assessment of the impacts including on the Exchequer, individuals and families, businesses including civil society organisations and others. The TIIN for the employer NICs changes was published on 13 November 2024.

■ Employment

Liam Byrne:

[20926]

To ask the Chancellor for the Exchequer, if she will publish the forecasts of the size of the UK labour force broken down by the net migration forecast by (a) the Office of Budget Responsibility and (b) other bodies for the forecast period used by that Office.

Tulip Siddiq:

The independent Office for Budget Responsibility is responsible for producing forecasts of the UK economy, including the size of the labour force and net migration. The OBR's latest forecasts, in the October 2024 Economic and fiscal outlook, are available at the OBR's website.¹

The Office for National Statistics publishes National Population Projections. For the purposes of producing these projections, the ONS produces assumptions for the projected growth in population due to net migration. The ONS's latest projections, published in January 2024, assume long-term net international migration of 315,000 per year from the year ending mid-2028 onwards. The projections are published on the ONS's website here: [National population projections - Office for National Statistics](#)

1. <https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-october-2024/>

■ Equitable Life Assurance Society: Compensation

Mr Joshua Reynolds:

[21417]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make it her policy to pay additional compensation to people impacted by the collapse of Equitable Life.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Equitable Life Payment Scheme has been fully wound down and closed since 2016 and there are no plans to reopen any decisions relating to the Payment Scheme or review the £1.5 billion funding allocation previously made to it. Further guidance on the status of the Payment Scheme after closure is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equitable-life-payment-scheme#closure-of-the-scheme>.

■ Motor Vehicles: Excise Duties

James Wild:

[21046]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of increases in (a) vehicle excise duty and (b) the HGV road user levy on the logistics industry.

James Murray:

As announced at Autumn Budget 2024, from 1 April 2025, Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) rates for Heavy Goods Vehicles and the Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) levy will be uprated by Retail Price Index for 2025-26. This means rates will remain unchanged in real terms for vehicle keepers.

The tax information and impact note published alongside the Budget when these changes were announced sets out the expected impact on businesses which own or sell HGVs, which is estimated to be “negligible”. The note also sets out expected economic, equalities and other impacts of the changes, which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vehicle-excise-duty-rates-for-heavy-goods-vehicles-and-heavy-goods-vehicles-road-user-levy-from-1-april-2025>

Revenue from motoring taxes helps ensure we can continue to fund the vital public services and infrastructure that people and families across the UK expect.

■ **Payment Methods: Visual Impairment**

David Chadwick: [\[21887\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps to ensure the accessibility of touch screens for (a) card payment machines and (b) other services for people with visual impairments.

Tulip Siddiq:

The government is committed to ensuring high standards of financial inclusion across the financial services sector.

The Treasury continues to engage with UK Finance, the Financial Conduct Authority, the Royal National Institute of Blind People, and other Government departments on the issue of accessibility of card payment terminals.

UK Finance, the leading trade association for the banking sector, maintains voluntary standards to help ensure point-of-sale technology remains accessible for those who are visually impaired. UK Finance will soon be assessing potential initiatives to drive improvements and adoption. The Government continues to closely monitor progress in this important area.

■ **Private Education: VAT**

Neil O'Brien: [\[21365\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether pupils enrolled on courses covered by the Music and Dance scheme will be exempt from VAT increases in the next financial year.

Neil O'Brien: [\[21366\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether pupils receiving dance and drama award funding will be exempt from increases in VAT in (a) this academic year and (b) subsequent financial years.

Neil O'Brien: [\[21367\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether pupils on the choir schools scholarship scheme will be exempt from increases in VAT in (a) this academic year and (b) subsequent financial years.

James Murray:

Performing arts schools that offer full-time education to children of compulsory school age and/or 16-19 year olds for a charge are in scope of the application of VAT to private school fees. This is to ensure fairness and consistency across all schools that provide education services and vocational training for a charge. It is the government's position, therefore, that carving these schools out of the policy would be unfair to other private schools.

The Department for Education provides means-tested bursaries for eligible families as part of the Music and Dance Scheme (MDS) if their child has a place at any one of eight MDS performing arts private schools. For this academic year 2024/25, lower income families will receive additional support to ensure the total cost of their parental contributions do not rise from January 2025 as a result of the VAT change. This means that almost half of eligible families will be receiving further support in addition to the bursary already provided.

As part of the MDS, the Department also provides a grant to the Choir Schools Association (CSA) for their Choir Schools Scholarship Scheme. This scheme provides means-tested support to choristers attending CSA member schools. Whether member schools charge VAT from 1 January 2025 on their education fee will vary, depending on whether schools are private or state-funded.

Public Sector: Employers' Contributions**Jim Allister:**[\[21957\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 19620 on Public Expenditure: Northern Ireland, if she will increase funding to Northern Ireland for the additional cost associated with changes to Employer National Insurance Contributions in the context of the higher proportion of public sector employees.

Darren Jones:

The UK Government has agreed to provide funding to the public sector to support them with the additional costs associated with changes to employer National Insurance Contributions policy.

The Northern Ireland Executive will receive funding through the Barnett formula for any additional support provided to UK Government departments in 2025-26 as a result of this policy change. This is the normal operation of the funding arrangements for the devolved governments as set out in the Statement of Funding Policy.

The Interim Fiscal Framework agreed by the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive recognises that Northern Ireland has a higher level of relative need compared to equivalent UK Government spending in the rest of the UK. A 24% needs-based factor is now included in the Barnett Formula for the Northern Ireland Executive, and the Executive is receiving over 24% more per person than equivalent UK Government spending in 2024-25 and 2025-26, including the 2024 restoration financial package.

■ Travel: Insurance

Matt Bishop:

[\[21192\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to help improve access to travel insurance for patients with long-term illnesses.

Tulip Siddiq:

The government is determined that everyone has access to suitable insurance products at the right price.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) is the independent body responsible for regulating and supervising the financial services industry, including firms providing travel insurance. Under FCA rules, insurers must offer products that provide fair value. This means that the price a consumer pays for a product or service must be reasonable compared to the overall benefits they can expect to receive. The FCA has robust powers to act against firms that fail to comply with its rules.

Under FCA rules introduced in 2021, if a travel insurance customer is declined cover, offered cover with an exclusion, or charged a significantly higher premium based on their pre-existing medical condition, insurers are required to signpost consumers to a directory of specialist providers who may be better placed to provide cover.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Artificial Intelligence

Chi Onwurah:

[\[21604\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 17 December 2024 to Question 19693 on Department for Work and Pensions: Artificial Intelligence, on what date her Department decided not to publish that equality impact assessment.

Andrew Western:

Machine learning is currently used to flag cases requiring further examination. Our equality analysis found no issues of concern as set out in the Annual Report and Accounts.

The most recent consideration of the release of this information took place following receipt of Question 19693 on 13th December 2024 where the department considered the balance between releasing information and protecting the effectiveness of our fraud prevention and detection methods.

■ Employment Schemes

Helen Whately:

[\[20685\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what measure her Department will use to determine whether devolved authorities have been successful in delivering employment support.

Alison McGovern:

[Holding answer 6 January 2025]: Within our Get Britain Working reforms, we committed to offering new responsibilities and funding to mayors and local areas in England because local leaders know their communities best. This includes supporting areas in England to produce Get Britain Working Plans that join up work, health and skills provision, as well as delivering Connect to Work and sixteen Youth and Inactivity Trailblazers, which will all be fully evaluated.

As part of the production of Get Britain Working plans the Department is working with local and combined authorities in England to capture meaningful evidence on local labour markets and progress made. For the first time, we have also recently published statistical information on the movement of people into work, which can be found as part of the analytical information accompanying the Get Britain Working white paper: [Get Britain Working White Paper: Analytical Annex - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper-analytical-annex). We will also publish further metrics in due course.

Connect to Work funding will be included in the integrated settlement from 2025/26, which applies to Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities. The integrated settlement will be monitored and governed using a single accountability framework and a single outcomes framework negotiated between authorities and the Government. Further guidance on Connect to Work can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/connect-to-work>,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/integrated-settlements-for-mayoral-combined-authorities>.

■ Jobcentres: Training**Mr Clive Betts:****[21263]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of transferring powers for (a) skills and (b) training for employment support from job centres to (i) mayors and (ii) unitary councils under devolution deals.

Alison McGovern:

As announced in the Get Britain Working White Paper, the Department for Work and Pensions will devolve funding for Connect to Work via grants to Strategic Authorities (including unitaries with a devolution agreement), and other agreed local authority clusters across the rest of England. This funding, in addition to the local Get Britain Working plans these areas will produce, will enable them to design and deliver an offer that is shaped around local priorities and provision. For Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities, Connect to Work funding forms part of their Integrated Settlement.

All Mayoral Strategic Authorities will have a role in co-designing any future non-Jobcentre Plus employment support. Their subsequent role in commissioning or delivery will be determined as part of agreeing the policy objectives, design and funding parameters of any future programme. Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will play an integral role in the design and delivery of this support, subject

to evaluation and readiness conditions being met, with a clear outcomes and accountability framework.

The Department for Education already devolves the Adult Skills Fund to all Strategic Authorities, including Mayoral ones.

Full details of the governments employment and skills devolution commitments are set out within the recently published English Devolution White Paper:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>

■ **Local Housing Allowance: Greater London**

Helen Hayes:

[21645]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to review the rates of the Local Housing Allowance to reflect housing costs in inner London boroughs.

Sir Stephen Timms:

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

LHA rates were last increased in April 2024 at a cost of £7bn over 5 years. The national maximum caps, which apply in London, were also increased. These caps protect taxpayer costs for exceptionally high rental prices.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are available from local authorities for those who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs and need further support.

■ **Pension Credit**

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[21659]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many applications for Pension Credit were (a) received, (b) processed and granted and (c) processed and not granted in each month between July and December 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

Statistics on Pension Credit application volumes were published on 28 November 2024. This includes numbers of applications that were received, awarded and not awarded, up to 17 November 2024. [Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - GOV.UK.](#)

Please note, the next publication of Pension Credit application statistics is due around the end of February 2025 and will cover the data up to week commencing 10 February 2025.

Dr Caroline Johnson: [\[21660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many pension credit claims received since 1 August 2024 have (a) not been paid to the claimant and (b) refused on grounds the claimant is ineligible.

Emma Reynolds:

Because of how we capture our operational data, information on claims received over that period which have not been paid to the claimant/refused on the grounds of the claimant being ineligible is not available and to provide it would incur disproportionate costs.

Statistics on Pension Credit award volumes were published on 28 November 2024. This publication includes numbers of applications that were received, awarded and not awarded, up to 17 November 2024. [Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - GOV.UK](#). Please note, the next publication of Pension Credit application statistics is due around the end of February 2025 and will cover the data up to week commencing 10 February 2025.

■ Pension Credit: Standards

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[21379\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to tackle delays in processing claims for pension credit.

Emma Reynolds:

We have deployed more than 500 additional staff to process the increase in Pension Credit claims.

Pensioners won't miss out on Winter Fuel Payments even if their Pension Credit claim takes longer to process than usual. Where the customer is eligible for a Winter Fuel Payment, the Department aims to make this payment within 2 weeks of the award of Pension Credit.

■ Pension Credit: Winter Fuel Payment

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[21084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average time is for a successful Pension Credit claimant to start receiving winter fuel payments.

Emma Reynolds:

The department does not hold data on the average time taken for a successful Pension Credit claimant to receive their winter fuel payment. However, where the customer is eligible for a Winter Fuel Payment, the department aims to make this payment within 2 weeks of the award of Pension Credit.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Fraud

Richard Burgon:

[\[21327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November 2024 to Question 14654 on Personal Independence Payment, what estimate her Department has made of the total amount lost to PIP fraud in financial year (a) 2020-21, (b) 2021-22 and (c) 2022-23.

Andrew Western:

Estimates of the levels of fraud and error in the benefit system for the financial years requested can be found at: [Fraud and error in the benefit system - GOV.UK](#)

Please see the requested information in the attached document.

Attachments:

1. Attachment [Attachment.docx]

■ Social Security Benefits: Appeals

Richard Burgon:

[\[21325\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 19366 on Social Security Benefits: Appeals, when she plans that waiting times for mandatory reconsideration processes will be back to December 2023 levels.

Richard Burgon:

[\[21326\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 19366 on Social Security Benefits: Appeals, what role Mandatory Reconsideration Decision Makers have in reducing clearance times for mandatory reconsiderations of Personal Independence Payment decisions.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Mandatory Reconsideration clearances can fluctuate for many reasons, but we expect to recover the current backlog of cases by March 2025.

The role of a Mandatory Reconsideration (MR) decision maker is to make a robust decision, supported by the law and available evidence.

In law there is no time limit within which a MR decision must be made. This reflects the overarching policy that the focus should be on making the right decision and not the speed of clearance. Decisions should always be made without delay, but if the decision maker considers that more time is needed to gather or consider evidence, then they will give themselves that time to ensure they are confident that the decision made is correct.

■ State Retirement Pensions**Jessica Toale:** [21245]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of equalising the (a) basic and (b) new State Pension.

Emma Reynolds:

We are absolutely committed to supporting pensioners and giving them the dignity and security they deserve in retirement.

We have made no such assessment. It is not possible to make direct, like for like comparisons between State Pension amounts received under the pre 2016 State Pension system and the new State Pension. Under both systems, the amount people are entitled to varies according to their National Insurance record. It is not the case that everyone in the new system receives more than everyone in the pre 2016 system.

■ State Retirement Pensions: Women**Kirsty Blackman:** [21320]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many written representations on compensation for women affected by changes to the state pension age she has received from Labour (a) hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies and (b) Members of the Scottish Parliament since 5 July 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

The Department does not keep this information centrally and therefore it is not readily available. Providing the information that the Department does hold would incur disproportionate costs.

Steve Darling: [21727]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will publish all Departmental research undertaken in relation to the Government's response to the PHSO report on communication of Women's State Pension age on 17 December 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

The research that has been used to inform the response is published, available online and is referenced within the response.

The response itself has been deposited in the House of Commons Library and published on Gov.uk at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-parliamentary-and-health-service-ombudsmans-investigation-into-womens-state-pension-age-communications-and-associated-issues>

Steve Darling: [21728]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of State Pension age changes on the six sample cases in the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's report entitled Women's State Pension

age: our findings on injustice and associated issues, HC 638, published on 21 March 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

The six sample complainants were impacted by State Pension age changes introduced by both the Pensions Act 1995 and the Pensions Act 2011.

The Ombudsman did not investigate the decisions to increase the State Pension age for women in 1995, or to accelerate that increase in 2011. The Ombudsman are clear that policy decisions to increase the State Pension age in 1995 onwards were taken by Parliament and considered lawful by the Courts and were not within their remit to consider.

■ **Winter Fuel Payment**

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[21085]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the potential savings to the public purse of means testing the winter fuel payment.

Emma Reynolds:

It is estimated that the changes to Winter Fuel Payments in England and Wales will save around £1.3 billion in 2024/25, rising to £1.5 billion by 2029/30.

This figure has been published in the Office of Budget Responsibility's Economic and Fiscal Outlook (October 2024), available here:

https://obr.uk/docs/dlm_uploads/OBR_Economic_and_fiscal_outlook_Oct_2024.pdf

■ **Winter Fuel Payment: Poverty**

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[21380]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment has she made of the potential impact of delays in winter fuel payments on pensioners experiencing poverty.

Emma Reynolds:

No such assessment has been made.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ UK and Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council 2024

Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories (Stephen Doughty):

[\[HCWS356\]](#)

The twelfth UK-Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council was held from 19 – 21 November 2024 in London. The Council was attended by elected leaders and representatives from Anguilla, Ascension Island, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, the Pitcairn Islands, St Helena, the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia, Tristan da Cunha and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The Overseas Territories are an invaluable part of the British family. The UK has a responsibility to ensure security and good governance of the Overseas Territories and their peoples.

The JMC is the highest forum for political dialogue and consultation between the elected Leaders of the Overseas Territories and UK Ministers. We met under the strapline of ‘*Listen, Transform, Deliver – Together*’. This reflects the UK’s desire to build closer relationships, based on mutual respect and inclusion, and to transform the UK’s relationship with the Overseas Territories for us both to deliver greater security and prosperity.

In my capacity as Minister for the Overseas Territories, I chaired the Council. Other Ministerial colleagues who attended the discussions included the Home Office Minister (Lord Hanson), the Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard MP), the Minister for Climate (Kerry McCarthy MP), the Minister for Public Health and Prevention (Andrew Gwynne MP), and the Minister for Early Education (Stephen Morgan MP).

Representatives from UK Export Finance and the Joint Maritime Security Centre also joined us. His Majesty the King also spent time meeting with representatives of the OTs at the annual reception for the Diplomatic Corps at Buckingham Palace.

The key themes of discussion at this year’s Council were: resetting the relationship between the UK and the Overseas Territories; security and irregular migration; economic diversification and resilience; tackling illicit finance; environment and climate change, overseas development assistance; and, breaking down barriers to opportunity for citizens. Discussions were positive and constructive, reflecting a shared desire to transform the relationship.

The elected Leaders of the Overseas Territories warmly welcomed the five principles I set out to guide the UK’s relationship with the elected Governments of the Overseas Territories:

1. devolution and democratic autonomy for the Overseas Territories;

2. listening to the Overseas Territories, following the principle of “nothing about you without you”;
3. partnership with the Overseas Territories based on mutual respect and inclusion—rights come with responsibilities;
4. good governance and ensuring proper democratic accountability and regulation; and,
5. defending the Overseas Territories’ security, autonomy and rights, including the right of self-determination.

The Council agreed priorities and set out commitments and areas for joint work in the year ahead. Representatives welcomed that each UK Government Department has an assigned minister with responsibility for the Overseas Territories. I convene and chair this group to ensure mission-driven focus on the Overseas Territories. Representatives welcomed the extension of access to the Leadership College for Government for permanent secretaries (or equivalents) of the Overseas Territories. This will build expertise and help develop senior peer relationships between the Overseas Territories and the UK. We discussed the complex and varied security and irregular migration challenges of the Overseas Territories. The UK and the Overseas Territories’ Governments expressed their solidarity with the Government and people of the Turks and Caicos Islands in respect of the security challenges they currently face and committed to working together across the British family to assist where possible.

We discussed the vital role of the Overseas Territories’ stewardship of internationally important and unique environments and ecosystems, including protecting 94% of unique British biodiversity. Representatives welcomed the commitment of the Foreign Secretary that climate and nature crisis will be central to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office’s work, which builds on the Prime Minister’s commitment that climate and nature will be at the centre of the cross-UK Government missions. We discussed economic growth. We resolved to promote and encourage trade and investment as key engines of prosperity.

Tackling illicit finance across the UK, OTs and Crown Dependencies is a Government priority. We agreed to work in partnership on this important agenda. I emphasised the importance of implementing Publicly Accessible Registers for Beneficial Ownership (PARBOs). The UK also set out the ambition for this becoming the global norm and the expectation that the OTs would implement registers that are fully accessible to the public. Montserrat has joined Gibraltar in implementing a public register and commitments were made by St Helena – who passed legislation earlier this month - and the Falklands Islands to implement these by April 2025. Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands will have legislation on legitimate interest access registers of beneficial ownership approved through their respective legislatures by April 2025, with implementation by June 2025 or earlier. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary attended the closing session of the Council underscoring their determination to reset the relationship with the Overseas Territories.

We agreed a joint communiqué, which was issued following the conclusion of the Council and published on the gov.uk website.