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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

#### ■ **British Business Bank**

**James Wild:**

[\[21044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many businesses have been supported by the British Business Bank since 2014.

**Gareth Thomas:**

The British Business Bank's recently published Impact Report shows that in 2023 alone the Bank funded 23,100 businesses. Data on the number of businesses supported by the Bank since its inception in 2014 is intended to be published in 2025.

#### ■ **Car Washes: Licensing**

**Stuart Anderson:**

[\[21371\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to establish a licensing regime for hand carwashes.

**Justin Madders:**

The Hand Car Wash sector is one of Office of the Director of Labour Market Enforcement (ODLME) priority areas. The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) have taken a proactive stance working closely with the Responsible Hand Car Wash scheme and Nottingham Trent University to understand the issues and maximise opportunities to address them within current legislation.

As the scheme has concluded, the Government is assessing these evaluations to understand how both to bolster compliance, and support sector-led initiatives. The Home Office and enforcement bodies, such as the GLAA, continue to support industry initiatives aimed at improving standards.

#### ■ **Department for Business and Trade: Prizes**

**Dame Harriett Baldwin:**

[\[21299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many in-year awards were made to officials in his Department since 5 July 2024.

**Justin Madders:**

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) operates a fully in year reward system for delegated grades and, like in other departments, has a non-consolidated performance budget that is derived from a percentage of the pay bill. In DBT, this is 1.3% and may be spent on cash or vouchers (up to a maximum of £2,500 per employee in any financial year).

Between 5th July 2024 and 19th December 2024, DBT made 3,468 cash in-year awards (with a total value of £1,551,060) and 2,466 non-cash awards (with a total value of £190,648).

#### ■ Department for Business and Trade: Written Questions

**Andrew Griffith:** [\[21249\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, when he plans to respond to Questions 18414, 18415 and 18416 tabled by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs on 6 December 2024.

**Gareth Thomas:**

Questions 18414, 18415 and 18416 were answered on 19 December 2024.

#### ■ Foreign Investment in UK: India

**Dame Harriett Baldwin:** [\[21297\]](#)

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

**Dame Harriett Baldwin:** [\[21300\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, when the timing of the meeting of 18 December 2024 with the Indian Business Leaders delegation was agreed.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

On 18 December 2024, a business delegation of 13 Indian companies met with the UK's Prime Minister and senior Cabinet Ministers in a curated visit to enhance the UK-India partnership.

The delegation provided perspectives on opportunities for investment and economic growth between the UK and India and discussed opportunities under a UK-India trade deal. The timing of the meeting was agreed in the second half of 2024 and there is no intention to publish minutes of the meeting.

#### ■ High Streets Task Force

**Dame Harriett Baldwin:** [\[19680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has met with the UK High Streets Taskforce.

**Gareth Thomas:**

Across Government, Ministers and officials meet with a range of high street experts. I have recently met with the Hospitality Sector Council and Retail Sector Council and visited Gateshead and Consett town centres.

To mark Small Business Saturday, the Secretary of State visited Walthamstow High Street and Sunflour Café in Islington, meeting with the businesses which that make our town centres successful. We continue to engage with those involved in the

delivery of the High Streets Task Force, which has now concluded, to learn the lessons from the programme.

#### ■ **Horizon IT System: Compensation**

**Chris Hinchliff:** [\[21864\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he plans to take steps to recover the costs of compensation from Fujitsu relating to failures of the Horizon Post Office IT system.

**Gareth Thomas:**

The Government welcomes Fujitsu's acknowledgement of their moral obligation to make a contribution to the cost of the Horizon scandal. Fujitsu's contribution will be decided once the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry has reviewed all the evidence and the Chair has delivered his report.

#### ■ **Overseas Companies: Sri Lanka**

**Gregory Stafford:** [\[21952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions he has had with Sri Lankan authorities on strengthening business relations for British citizens who have set up companies in Sri Lanka.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

DBT has a team dedicated to supporting the UK-Sri Lanka trade and investment relationship. Officials have regular contact with Sri Lankan authorities through the annual UK-Sri Lanka Strategic Dialogue to promote areas of mutual interest, including bilateral discussions on trade and investment.

My officials use programmes and levers to strengthen business relations for UK companies, including working closely with the *Council for Business with Britain* to support the removal of barriers to trade, and the Developing Countries Trading Scheme, which cuts tariffs and simplifies trading rules for Sri Lankan exports to the UK.

#### ■ **Overseas Trade: Jamaica**

**Adam Jogee:** [\[21785\]](#)

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 Jamaica.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The Department for Business and Trade is supporting UK firms to access opportunities in Jamaica across a variety of sectors, including critical infrastructure. In November 2024, the UK hosted Senator Aubyn Hill, the Jamaican Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce, to discuss opportunities for deeper commercial collaboration following the first UK-Jamaica trade mission in September 2024. Later this month, the UK will meet Jamaica for the Trade and Development Council under

the CARIFORUM-UK Economic Partnership Agreement to discuss further opportunities to grow trade.

#### ■ Overseas Trade: Malta

**Adam Jogee:** [\[21786\]](#)

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 Malta.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

We are resetting the relationship with our European friends – including Malta – to strengthen ties, secure a broad-based security pact and tackle barriers to trade. We are working with the EU and bilaterally with Member States to identify areas to strengthen cooperation for mutual benefit, such as the economy, energy, security and resilience. We will also hold regular UK-EU Summits at leader level to review progress, starting in the first half of this year.

#### ■ Overseas Trade: Trinidad and Tobago

**Adam Jogee:** [\[21792\]](#)

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 Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The Department for Business and Trade is supporting UK businesses to access opportunities to grow trade with Trinidad and Tobago, including in areas such as critical infrastructure. In October 2024, UK Export Finance signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Finance in Trinidad and Tobago. This provides an avenue of financial support for projects in healthcare infrastructure and airport development, among other areas. And, later this month, the UK will meet Trinidad and Tobago for the Trade and Development Council under the CARIFORUM-UK Economic Partnership Agreement to discuss further opportunities to grow our trading relationship.

#### ■ Supply Chains: Refrigeration

**Alex Mayer:** [\[21234\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to support the cold chain sector with (a) resilience and (b) preparedness for potential disruption as a result of (i) heat waves, (ii) power loss and (iii) cyberattack.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) works with other departments and industry to proactively mitigate the risks and impacts of unplanned power outages, cyber-attacks, and severe weather events like heatwaves, through ongoing horizon-scanning, data sharing, and business engagement.



As part of the next UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA), Government departments are inputting into an assessment of the resilience of the cold chain sector to rising temperatures and heatwaves. The assessment will identify cold chain vulnerabilities to heatwaves, explore adaptation responses, and develop an effective adaptation plan through to 2050. The outputs will be included in the next CCRA, to be published in 2027.

## ■ Trade Agreements: India

**Dame Harriett Baldwin:** [\[21298\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the sectors in the scope of an India-UK Free Trade Agreement.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The Prime Minister is committed to delivering growth and opportunities throughout the UK, which a trade deal with India will support.

Negotiating a deal with India will align with the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, enabling our world-leading sectors to adapt and grow, as well as seizing opportunities to lead in new sectors.

## ■ Trade Agreements: USA

**Andrew Griffith:** [\[21247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what meetings (a) he, (b) ministers in his Department and (c) officials in his Department have had with President-Elect Trump's transition team on a potential UK-US trade deal.

**Dame Harriett Baldwin:** [\[21302\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether (a) he, (b) ministers in his Department and (c) officials in his Department have had meetings with President-Elect Trump.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The incoming US administration is still in the process of appointing senior staff.

The Prime Minister had a warm introductory call with President-Elect Trump on 6 November. During this call, the Prime Minister offered his congratulations and said he looked forward to working closely with President-elect Trump across all areas of the special relationship. The Prime Minister spoke to the President-elect again on 18 December. Neither the Secretary of State, Ministers, nor officials in the Department have had meetings with President-Elect Trump's transition team.

## ■ Trade Promotion

**Adam Jogee:** [\[21773\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what criteria he plans to use to appoint country-specific trade envoys.

**Gareth Thomas:**

Trade Envoys are appointed on their ability, relevant skills and experience. This can be based on market and or UK sector knowledge including previous government-to-government experience plus their commitment to support the Government's trade and investment objectives and priorities when overseas.

**CABINET OFFICE**■ **Arms Length Bodies**

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[21402\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to Question 28 of the oral evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee on 4 December 2024 on The work of the Cabinet Office, HC 463, what his planned timetable is for publishing the modernised public directory of Arm's Length Bodies.

**Georgia Gould:**

The [Cabinet Office's Arm's Length Bodies Landscape Analysis 2023](#) was published on 17 December 2024.

■ **Cabinet Office: Pay**

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[21403\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Pursuant to the answer of 10 December 2024 to Question 16595 on Cabinet Office: Pay, what the mean salary is of a civil servant in the (a) Women's Equality Unit, (b) Race Disparity Unit and (c) Disability Unit.

**Georgia Gould:**

Salaries ranges for each civil servant grade are set by the Cabinet Office and are not at the discretion of the individual business units such as the Office for Equality and Opportunity. Details of Cabinet Office structure and salaries are due to be published on the 30th of January 2025 as part of transparency reporting.

■ **Cabinet Office: Senior Civil Servants**

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[21405\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 16596 on Cabinet Office: Senior Civil Servants, how he plans to publish details of the panel members.

**Georgia Gould:**

Details of panel members will be published on Gov.uk.

■ **Government Departments: Internet**

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[21396\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Pursuant to the Answer of 14 November 2024 to Question 14352 on Government Departments: X Corp, and with reference to the SAFE

Framework: the 4 principles for HMG Brand Safety, how many platforms have been removed from the HMG Inclusion List in the last 12 months; what the reasons for their removal were; and what appeals process is available for platforms seeking reinstatement.

**Georgia Gould:**

HMG operates an inclusion list of websites for programmatic advertising that meet the existing HMG acceptable standards. This inclusion list does not cover platforms, which are assessed separately. No platforms have been removed in the last 12 months.

■ **Members: Correspondence**

**Alex Burghart:**

[\[22052\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when the Prime Minister plans to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar dated 29 November 2024.

**Georgia Gould:**

A response will be sent in due course.

■ **Public Bodies: Finance**

**Mr Richard Holden:**

[\[21401\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to Question 28 of the oral evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee on 4 December 2024 on The work of the Cabinet Office, HC 463, if he will publish a breakdown of the £105 million of potential savings; and which of those savings have been implemented.

**Georgia Gould:**

The details of the savings identified by each public body review under the Public Bodies Review Programme are already published individually on gov.uk. Each department is responsible for ensuring the implementation of the relevant savings by its public bodies.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ **Culture and Sports: Loans**

**Saqib Bhatti:**

[\[21408\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions she has had with the (a) sports and (b) cultural sector on the repayment of Covid-19 loans by September 2025.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

Loan financing was provided to organisations on favourable terms, tailored to meet the unique legal and financial circumstances of sporting and cultural organisations. The Government is clear that these loans must be repaid and, where necessary, steps will be taken to ensure the protection of taxpayer's money.

DCMS remains in close contact with our loan agents, Sport England and Arts Council England, to ensure loans are repaid and borrowers comply with the terms of their loans. DCMS ministers regularly meet with stakeholders, and where appropriate we discuss loan repayments.

## ■ Football

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[\[21032\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of A22's new Unify League proposals on English football.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Prime Minister has made it very clear that there will be no Super League-style breakaway from English football.

As part of the strengthened Football Governance Bill, the Regulator will be able to prevent English clubs from joining future breakaway competitions by taking into account factors such as sustainability, heritage and fairness. The Regulator will be obliged to gather the views of fans and consult the FA before it prohibits a competition.

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

The Football Governance Bill was introduced on 24 October.

## ■ Performing Arts: Government Assistance

**Dr Simon Opher:**

[\[21719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to support the comedy industry.

**Chris Bryant:**

Comedy is a serious business. It is a vital performing art and contributes to the mental health and wellbeing of people, not just in the UK, but around the world. It forms part of our cultural landscape, enriching lives, shaping our collective identity and often providing a necessary corrective to political pomposity.

Arts Council England funds numerous organisations and venues that support comedy. For the purposes of ACE funding, comedy is considered under the broad term of 'theatre.' This means that as long as a performer, club or promoter meets the eligibility criteria for specific programmes, then ACE welcomes funding applications. Between the financial years covering 2010/11 to 2024/25 ACE has awarded £12,296,254 in funding where an applicant name, project title or subclassifier contains the word "comedy".

Venues such as theatres also benefit from tax relief. The government believes tax relief is essential to help incentivise investment in productions, and to contribute to

innovation and economic growth, enabling arts organisations to continue to produce new content which is vital in keeping them competitive on an international stage.

## DEFENCE

### ■ Armed Forces: Equality

**Mr Richard Holden:**

[\[21063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024, to Question HL1878, on Armed Forces: Equality, if he will list each of the actions from the previous EDI review that were endorsed by his Department's People Committee.

**Al Carns:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my noble Friend, the Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence (Lord Coaker), on 19 December 2024 to Question HL3228 in the House of Lords.

**Attachments:**

1. Armed Forces: Equality [HL3228 - Armed Forces Equality.docx]

### ■ Armed Forces: Health Professions

**Derek Twigg:**

[\[20921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the (a) number of each rank in post of and (b) requirement for each rank of medical service personnel was on 1 April 2024.

**Al Carns:**

I am withholding the information as its disclosure would, or would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the Armed Forces.

### ■ Defence: Procurement

**David Reed:**

[R] [\[21200\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to help ensure defence primes' commitments to (a) apprenticeships and (b) graduate recruitment (i) are geographically balanced and (ii) extend opportunities to (A) micro, (B) small, (C) medium-sized and (D) other businesses in regions with significant defence industry presence.

**David Reed:**

[R] [\[21204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what measures his Department is taking to help ensure the retention of UK STEM graduates within the highly skilled defence workforce.

**David Reed:**

[\[21205\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking with the Secretary of State for Education to encourage young people to pursue careers in STEM fields within the defence sector.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is taking steps itself to secure important skills in areas such as digital, cyber, STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), nuclear and space. As we tackle these challenges we will continue to work closely with industry partners of all sizes. Our strategic suppliers have identified SME Champions and there is now regular engagement between them and the department, focusing upon how industry and MOD should improve their practice to better support SMEs.

We also work with other Government Departments and academia to ensure that we are growing and retaining these skills nationally.

Through the Defence STEM Steering Group, Defence and their national strategic partners are actively promoting engineering as an inclusive career field, supporting teacher training, and coordinating outreach activities to maximise efficiency.

**■ Defence: Small Businesses****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[22101\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of changes to (a) Business Property Relief and (b) employer National Insurance contributions on SMEs in the defence sector.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Ministry of Defence recognises the vital contribution that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) make within the defence industry, and we have a long-standing commitment to improve our engagement with such suppliers in order to broaden and strengthen our supply-base. As individual suppliers and contractors will manage the changes to Employer National Insurance Contributions and Business Property Relief differently, it would be extremely difficult for the Department to estimate the impact this will have on SMEs in the defence sector.

**■ Defence: Technology****David Reed:**[\[R\] \[21196\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to improve engagement with micro-sized technology companies through traditional prime contractors.

**David Reed:**[\[R\] \[21198\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to remove bureaucracy from defence primes to enable them to build out their ecosystems of (a) micro, (b) small and (c) medium-sized businesses.

**Maria Eagle:**

Micro, small and medium sized businesses make a vital contribution to economic growth and are a valuable source of technical innovation in defence. This is recognised in the recently published Defence Industrial Strategy Statement of Intent.

We work with our largest suppliers through a network of their SME Champions, trade associations and SME representatives to ensure that SMEs have fair access to opportunities in our supply chain and that our prime contractors are adopting policies, such as fair payment practices, that support small businesses working in defence. We are also engaging with our industrial partners of all sizes to develop a new SME Action Plan which will simplify and make more accessible opportunities to Defence contracts for smaller suppliers.

**David Reed:**

[R] [21199]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to support (a) micro, (b) small and (c) medium-sized technology companies in the early stages of development within the defence sector.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Ministry of Defence is committed to supporting micro, small and medium-sized technology companies. Through the Defence Industrial Strategy the department will foster a more diverse community of suppliers, including non-traditional suppliers, through reducing barriers to entry and setting the conditions that unlock the full potential of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

One of the ways we are already doing this is through the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) with its remit to find and fund suppliers to deliver innovative projects to meet UK defence and security challenges. DASA also supports funded SMEs with additional business services to help scale up and commercialise their innovative ideas.

## ■ Fleet Solid Support Ships

**James Cartlidge:**

[21000]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether it remains Government policy that at least 60% of sub-contracting companies working on fleet solid support ships should be from the UK.

**Maria Eagle:**

The overall build strategy for the Fleet Solid Support (FSS) ships remains unchanged. All three ships will be assembled in the UK, with blocks manufactured in Navantia's shipyards in Spain and in Harland and Wolff's shipyards in the UK, retaining the overall UK workshare as originally planned.

The value of the individual contracts is commercially sensitive information. It is expected that approximately 60 per cent of the contract value will be with UK companies. The FSS ship contract will create more than 1,200 UK shipyard jobs and around 800 jobs will be sustained in the UK supply chain. There is also substantial investment being made in the UK including around £100 million into UK shipyards.

As prime contractor for the FSS Programme, Navantia UK is responsible for delivery of the contract and is in the process of letting a number of contracts to UK companies, in addition to those already let with BMT and Harland & Wolff.

## ■ Military Aircraft: Helicopters

**Mr Richard Holden:**

[\[21064\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 4 October 2024 to Question 6066 on Helicopters: Official Visits, whether the replacement to the Rotary Wing Command Support Air Transport Helicopter Service will be outsourced to the private sector.

**Maria Eagle:**

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

## ■ Ministry of Defence

**David Reed:**

[\[R\] \[21206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the RUSI Lecture given by the Chief of the Defence Staff on 4 December 2024, what steps his Department is taking to (a) streamline decision-making and (b) reduce business case approval timelines.

**Luke Pollard:**

Through the Defence Reform programme, we will improve procurement efficiency and secure better value for taxpayers, creating a simpler Defence focused on warfighting and deterrence.

A key facet of this programme is to create a stronger Defence centre with clearer accountabilities through the Permanent Secretary, Chief of Defence Staff, National Armaments Director and Chief of Defence Nuclear. This, coupled with our work on our future governance structures, will ensure Defence is optimised to enable faster, streamlined decision making, approvals, and delivery of our outcomes so that we remain ahead of current and future threats.

## ■ Ministry of Defence: Innovation

**David Reed:**

[\[R\] \[21209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the RUSI Lecture given by the Chief of the Defence Staff on 4 December 2024, what steps his Department is taking to (a) support high-risk, high-reward technology experimentation and (b) track the outcomes of such initiatives.

**Maria Eagle:**

Defence invests in high-risk, high-reward technology experimentation from across the Defence enterprise. Defence's core Science, Innovation and Technology budgets (e.g. Defence Science & Technology Programme and Defence Innovation Fund) are led from Head Office and are the main contributors to this. There are further investments from the Capability Portfolios of each Top Level Budget (e.g. Strategic



Programmes, Single Service Commands) and utilise constructs such as the RAF's Rapid Capabilities Office.

Recent examples of such work include the Dragonfire Laser Directed Energy Weapon Demonstrator and the BriteCloud Expendable Active Decoy.

Defence's Research and Innovation programmes are run according to best practice Portfolio, Programme and Project management Processes which aim to deliver defined outcomes and benefits that are then tracked and monitored.

The Ministry of Defence is currently undertaking the Defence Reform programme, which will determine the delivery and exploitation mechanisms for any 'high-risk, high-reward' technologies. This builds on both the current S&T portfolio processes and the 'Spearhead' and 'Gamechanger' initiatives which are currently experimenting ways to improve delivery."

## ■ Multi-role Ocean Surveillance Ships

**David Reed:**

[\[21181\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 17481 on Multi-role Ocean Surveillance Ships, at what stage in its concept phase the Multi-Role Support Ships programme is; and what stages of the concept phase have been completed.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Multi-Role Support Ship programme is progressing well through the Concept Phase. The Royal Navy (RN) and Defence Equipment and Support are conducting detailed work on key user requirements, conceptual designs, affordability, and exportability assessments, while working closely with leading UK shipbuilding entities and the National Shipbuilding Office (NSO) on the best commercial approach for UK to deliver for the RN and the Nation.

The Outline Business Case is due for submission in mid-2025 this will detail the schedule for shifting to the Assessment Phase in 2026.

**David Reed:**

**[R]** [\[21183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his Department's planned timetable is for awarding contracts for the construction of multi-role support ships.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Multi-Role Support Ship (MRSS) programme is in its Concept Phase. The Royal Navy and Defence Equipment and Support are conducting detailed work on key user requirements, conceptual designs, affordability, and exportability assessments. Alongside other shipbuilding programmes, they are maintaining engagement with all leading UK shipbuilding entities and the National Shipbuilding Office (NSO) on the best commercial approach for UK to deliver for the Navy and the Nation. The Outline Business Case is due for submission mid-2025 which will detail the schedule for future contract award milestones.

## ■ Type 32 Frigates

**David Reed:**

[\[21180\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2024 to Question 17483 on Type 32 Frigates, at what stage in its concept phase the Type 32 frigate programme is; and what stages of the concept phase have been completed.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Type 32 frigate programme is in the concept phase and has not yet reached the level of maturity to allow publication of a specific timetable for design and procurement. This is consistent with a programme of this size and complexity at this early stage in its development.

All future designs of the Royal Navy will be part of the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) so would be inappropriate to provide further detail until SDR decisions have been made.

## ■ Veterans

**Maureen Burke:**

[\[21126\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to support veterans.

**Al Carns:**

This is a Government of service that will always stand up for those who serve our country. I am working across government and with civil society to ensure veterans get access to the support they need.

This Government has already taken swift action to demonstrate our commitment to renew this nation's contract with those who have served. In November the Prime Minister announced an additional £3.5 million of funding for the continuation of the cross-UK Reducing Veterans Homelessness Programme, including Op FORTITUDE. This is in addition to the reforms he announced earlier in the year which mean that veterans are now exempt from local connection and residency tests when applying for social housing in England.

Housing support is available across the United Kingdom through Op FORTITUDE, a single referral pathway for veterans. This system provides housing guidance and assistance to veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness. As of 5 January 2025, 2,993 referrals have been made and 854 veterans have been supported into housing.

A range of support is in place for veterans. In England Op RESTORE provides specialist care to veterans who have physical health problems, and Op COURAGE, a specialist mental health service that helps service leavers, veterans and reservists. Healthcare is devolved across the UK, and as such systems that can be accessed by veterans differ in the Devolved Governments. As of 3 January 2025, over 35,000 referrals have been made to Op COURAGE and Op RESTORE has over 1,000 service users.

Veterans can also access a range of tailored employment support, including the Career Transition Partnership, which is the initial point of provision for those leaving military service in search of new job opportunities.

The Government's manifesto commitment to include the Veteran Card in the list of voter identification has already been delivered with the legislation coming into effect in December 2024..

In December 2024 the MoD launched an LGBT financial recognition scheme, with a total budget of £75 million, which was 50% higher than the level recommended in the Etherton review and the cap set by the last Government. This will mean that almost all of the 49 recommendations made by Lord Etherton will have been delivered.

We will continue to stand up for those who served and have served and are currently reviewing how we can make veterans' support more institutionally resilient.

## EDUCATION

### ■ Free School Meals

**Munira Wilson:** [\[22087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many pupils who are eligible for free school meals are not claiming it.

**Munira Wilson:** [\[22088\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an estimate of the number and proportion of children who would be eligible for free school meals had the income threshold for people on Universal Credit risen with inflation since 2018.

**Stephen Morgan:**

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

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

The department has not made a recent formal assessment of the proportion of children who are eligible for FSM but not registered to receive the entitlement. The last review conducted in 2013 suggested that 89% of eligible pupils were registered for FSM. We recognise the vital role played by FSM and encourage all eligible families to take their entitlement up and join the 2.1 million pupils currently registered

to receive FSM. To support FSM take up, we provide the Eligibility Checking System which allows local authorities to quickly verify eligibility for FSM and ensure that it is easily received.

The department has not formally assessed the number and proportion of children who would be eligible for FSM, had the eligibility threshold for households on Universal Credit increased in line with inflation since its introduction in 2018. As with all policies, the government keeps the approach to FSM under review.

## ■ Multi-academy Trusts: Pay

**Cat Smith:**

[21323]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department collects on the pay of multi-academy trust chief executives.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The Academy Trust Handbook sets out the requirements for academy trusts on executive pay, including reporting and publication. Academy trusts must:

- Publish their annual audited accounts, including the number of employees whose benefits exceeded £60,000 in £10,000 bandings and the total employee benefits paid to key management personnel.
- Publish on their website the number of employees whose benefits exceeded £100,000, including salary, employers' pension contributions, other taxable benefits and termination payments.

The department collates and publishes academy trust pay data in the Academy Sector Annual Report and Accounts, which also includes an annex (annex E in the most recently published set) listing all the academy trusts which paid at least one member of staff in excess of £150,000 and which is accessible here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academies-sector-annual-reports-and-accounts>.

## ■ National Curriculum Tests: Science

**Laurence Turner:**

[22207]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Standards and Testing Agency's publication of 20 July 2022, entitled Information: primary assessments in the 2022/23 academic year, for what reason it was decided not to undertake further science sampling tests at Key Stage 2.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Statutory teacher assessment of science is undertaken annually at the end of key stage 2 for all pupils in the relevant cohort. Between 2014 and 2020, biennial national science sampling tests were used to supplement this teacher assessment data, with a nationally representative sample of key stage 2 pupils participating in these tests to monitor the performance and attainment in science at national level.

The science sampling test scheduled to take place in 2020 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, due to resource pressures on the department, the previous government decided not to recommence science sampling thereafter. The ongoing Curriculum and Assessment Review is considering the current assessment system and will make its recommendations later in the year.

## ■ Schools: Standards

**Mike Wood:**

[\[22026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the policy paper entitled Plan for Change, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, how she plans to measure progress towards her target for children to be thriving at school; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of using data on attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers as a core metric for this target.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The Opportunity Mission will break the link between a child's background and their future success. Driving high and rising standards is at the heart of the department's vision for all schools, and these standards are crucial in supporting all children and young people to both achieve and thrive. As my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education set out in her speech to the Confederation of School Trusts in November 2024, achieving and thriving go hand-in-hand, with children who are healthy and have a sense of belonging at school most likely to achieve well. We are looking at a range of indicators for this and will set out more details. At every stage, improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people, and those with special educational needs and disabilities, will be a priority.

## ■ Teachers: Health

**Kate Osamor:**

[\[21329\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of the report entitled Teacher Wellbeing Index 2024, published by Education Support on 20 November 2024.

**Kate Osamor:**

[\[21330\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of publishing an education staff retention strategy.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Supporting our teachers is critical to the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and boost the life chances for every child, as the within-school factor that makes the biggest difference to a young person's educational outcome is high quality teaching.

The department wants to improve the experience of being a teacher and re-establish teaching as an attractive profession, one that existing teachers want to remain in, former teachers want to return to, and new graduates wish to join. Fair pay is key to this, which is why we accepted in full the School Teachers' Review Body's

recommendation of a 5.5% pay award for teachers and leaders in maintained schools for 2024/25.

In addition, new teachers of mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing in the first five years of their careers will now receive a targeted retention incentive of up to £6,000 after-tax if working in disadvantaged schools. These targeted incentives are helping schools to retain those specialist teachers in the shortage subjects and schools that most need them.

Our 'Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders' study also shows the importance of reducing teacher workload, improving wellbeing and increasing opportunities to work flexibly in retaining more of our excellent school staff. Already we have taken action to remove the requirement for schools to use Performance Related Pay from September 2024 and clarified that teachers can undertake their Planning Preparation and Assessment time at home.

The department is also making available workload and wellbeing resources that were developed with school leaders, through our new improving workload and wellbeing online service, and continuing to promote the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter, which currently has nearly 4,000 school and college signatories. The department is funding mental health and wellbeing support for school and college leaders, which includes professional supervision and counselling for those who need it. More than 2,000 leaders have benefitted from the support so far. Support continues to be available and can be accessed by visiting Education Support's website.

High quality continuous professional development is also key to ensuring we have and retain an effective teaching workforce. That is why we have committed to introducing a new teacher training entitlement, to ensure teachers stay up to date on best practice with continuing professional development. This builds on the work the department already does to ensure teachers can access high quality development at key points in their careers, underpinned by our Initial Teacher Training and Early Career frameworks, and onwards through our suite of national professional qualifications.

We are committed to resetting the relationship with the profession and will continue to work with partners to tackle retention issues.

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### ■ Solar Power: Supply Chains

**Alicia Kearns:**

**[22099]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will publish a plan to help tackle the use of Uyghur slave labour in solar supply chains.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Government opposes all forms of slave labour. The Government is clear UK businesses should monitor their supply chains and do everything in their power to remove any instances of forced labour they may find.

Through the reconvened Solar Taskforce, the Government is working across Whitehall and closely with industry stakeholders to take forward the actions needed to develop supply chains that are resilient, sustainable, innovative, and free from forced labour. Further information will be set out in the Solar Roadmap, to be published in Spring 2025.

**ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS****■ Domestic Waste: Recycling****Joe Robertson:**[\[19909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether any (a) grant scheme, (b) core departmental and (c) other funding for local authorities is linked to their recycling rates of household waste.

**Mary Creagh:**

From 1 January 2025, the Producer Responsibility (Packaging and Packaging Waste) Regulations 2024, alongside simpler recycling and the deposit return scheme, will deliver transformational change, creating thousands of new jobs, helping communities to clean up their local areas, and stimulating billions of pounds' worth of investment.

This will require obligated producers to pay the full end of life costs including managing the efficient and effective collection and disposal costs of waste associated with the packaging that they place on the market. That will bring more than £1 billion of investment into local Government waste collections.

The majority of the funding provided from central Government to councils through the Local Government Finance Settlement is un-ringfenced, including funding for waste management. For 2025-26, funding that local authorities receive from the Extended producer responsibility scheme will be additional income that is separate to income received through the local government finance settlement.

The Government will assess the impact of additional pEPR income on the relative needs and resources of individual local authorities, and how we factor it into our measurement of local authority spending power, ahead of the 2026-27 Settlement. We will consult local councils on any expected changes.

**■ Domestic Waste: Waste Disposal****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[18949\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to his Department's guidance entitled Ensuring good waste collection services for

households, published on 29 November 2024, and the consultation outcome on exemptions and statutory guidance for simpler recycling in England entitled Government response, published on 9 May 2024, for what reason that guidance does not specify minimum levels of service frequency for residual waste collections.

**Mary Creagh:**

This Government is simplifying the rules to make recycling easier for people in England, while stimulating growth and maximising environmental benefits.

Local authorities are already legally required to deliver waste collection services to all households in their area. Simpler Recycling in England will go further by mandating weekly food waste collections ensuring that the most unpleasant waste is dealt with quickly and reliably.

Local authorities are best placed to determine the effective delivery of local services. As is currently the case, authorities will continue to decide collection frequency of waste collections in a way that suits the needs of their local community. There has never been a statutory requirement regarding the frequency of bin collections for local authorities, under any Government.

We recognise that as recycling services are expanded and improved under Simpler Recycling in England, local authorities may choose to review residual waste services to ensure they are providing best value for money in line with local need. The government's priority is ensuring that households' needs are met, and we expect local authorities to continue to provide services to a reasonable standard, as they do now.

Defra recently published guidance to ensure that local authorities consider certain factors when they review services, to ensure that reasonable standards are maintained. These include ensuring that there are no disamenity impacts, such as the build-up of odorous waste at the kerbside or an increase in fly-tipping of residual waste. We expect local authorities to monitor any changes to collection frequencies to ensure there are no unintended adverse consequences.

■ **Flood Control: Finance**

**Alicia Kearns:**

[\[22093\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much funding has been allocated to support areas at risk of flooding; and when he plans to announce these.

**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 list of projects to receive Government funding in 2025/26 will be agreed by the Environment Agency over the coming months in the usual way through Regional Flood and Coastal Committees, with local representation.



## ■ Incinerators

**James Naish:**

[\[21493\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department is planning to review the role of waste incineration in the management of residual waste in England; and what his plans are for proposed incineration facilities that have not yet begun construction.

**Mary Creagh:**

Over the last 14 years, recycling rates stalled, meaning too much waste is dealt with unnecessarily through incineration or thrown in landfill.

On 30 December, Defra published the [Residual waste infrastructure capacity note](#) and an [accompanying statement](#), in which we have set out that government will only back new waste incineration projects that meet strict new conditions. Proposals for new facilities will have to maximise efficiency and support the delivery of economic growth, net zero and the move to a circular economy.

By publishing this analysis we are supporting decisions makers and local communities to engage directly with developers on new proposals and ow these will benefit local communities.

The analysis published shows that there remain certain areas in England where significant volumes of household waste are sent to landfill. There is also a need to divert non-household wastes away from landfill. Waste incineration should not compete with greater waste prevention, preparation for re-use, or recycling; and we are committed to ensuring only necessary facilities are consented in the future.

Incineration plays an important role in diverting waste from landfill and is usually the best management option for most residual waste and existing approvals for facilities that have not yet begun construction are unaffected by this announcement. However, this Government has publicly urged developers and investors to review the data published and the Government's ambitions and what this means for proposals at all stages in the process, including those that have already secured the necessary permissions.

## ■ National Parks: Audit

**Steff Aquarone:**

[\[22182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of trends in levels of costs for statutory external audit fees levied on National Park authorities on those authorities; and if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the (a) levels of those fees and (b) breadth of those statutory requirements.

**Mary Creagh:**

Defra acknowledges that rising costs, including to fees required to fulfil statutory obligations, increase the funding pressures on National Park authorities.

Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA) independently sets fees for eligible bodies defined in the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, including National Park authorities. PSAA is responsible for setting the scales of fees for the audit of accounts of authorities who have opted into its services. PSAA consults on and publishes its fee scales - 99% of eligible local bodies opted into its national scheme for the appointing period 2023/24 to 2027/28, including all National Park authorities in England.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government launched a strategy in December to overhaul the local audit system in England. The strategy commits to a series of measures to fix the broken system and consults on several specific proposals.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-audit-reform-a-strategy-for-overhauling-the-local-audit-system-in-england>

## ■ Wetlands

**Adam Jogee:** [\[22444\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department plans to mark World Wetlands Day in 2025.

**Mary Creagh:**

The theme for World Wetlands Day 2025 is 'Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future' and Defra plans to mark World Wetlands Day. In 2021 the UK co-sponsored the United Nations Resolution to designate 2 February as World Wetlands Day and we have since undertaken activities or supported other organisations in their activities to celebrate wetlands where appropriate. World Wetlands Day is an important opportunity to reflect on the value of wetlands in supporting biodiversity and delivering other public benefits.

This Government is committed to delivering our legally binding biodiversity targets, including to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030 and to restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat by 2042. Wetlands will be vital in achieving these.

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### ■ Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

**Wendy Morton:** [\[22003\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2024 to Question 16959 on Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance: Finance, what discussions he has had with international partners on supporting (a) Gavi and (b) upcoming global health replenishments; and when those discussions took place.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

As Minister for Development, I met with both the CEO of Gavi and the Executive Director of the Global Fund last Autumn to discuss upcoming replenishments. The UK is one of the largest donors to both Gavi and the Global Fund and we want to see successful replenishments for both in 2025. UK funding decisions will be taken as part of the ongoing Spending Review and announced following its completion.

■ **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid****Wendy Morton:**[\[21993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterparts on their commitments to ensure aid delivery into Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK has made repeatedly clear to the Israeli authorities the need to improve aid delivery and increase the variety and volume of goods reaching Gaza. The Foreign Secretary made this clear in a call with Israeli Foreign Minister Sa'ar on 8 December. I have raised the dire situation in northern Gaza with both the Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister and the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on several occasions, most recently on 3 January. As I made clear to Parliament on 7 January, the scale of human suffering is unimaginable. We have been clear that this is a man-made crisis and Israel must act immediately to address it.

■ **Gaza: Israel****Stephen Gethins:**[\[21610\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of reports of attacks by Israel on medical facilities in Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK Government remains deeply concerned about the impact of military activity on healthcare facilities in Gaza. Medical staff and facilities must be protected, and civilians should be able to safely access medical treatment. It is unacceptable that northern Gaza now has no functioning major health facilities, following strikes on the Kamal Adwan hospital. In our statement to the UN Security Council on 3 January, we dismayed at the deterioration of the healthcare situation in Gaza, and called on Israel to clarify the whereabouts of medical staff detained from hospitals in the north. I have repeatedly underlined our grave concern about these issues with Israeli counterparts, most recently on 3 January and again today 8 January.

**■ Myanmar: Religious Freedom****Ruth Jones:** [\[22073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent progress he has made on supporting (a) Rakhine Muslim and (b) Christian communities in Myanmar.

**Catherine West:**

We are committed to defending freedom of religion or belief for all. Since 2017, the UK has provided over £48 million in aid including cash assistance and water, sanitation and hygiene services to the Rohingya and other Muslim minorities in Rakhine state. We continue to stress the need for de-escalation in Rakhine and for civilians to be protected. This was recently reiterated in a joint statement with international partners in January 2025. We continue to condemn the abuses taking place against Myanmar's religious minorities, including its Christian population. In response to the Myanmar military's worsening aerial attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including churches, we announced seven sanctions in October 2024, targeting suppliers of aviation fuel and equipment to the Myanmar military.

**■ Russia: Liquefied Natural Gas****Carla Denyer:** [\[21157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will have discussions with the Scottish Government's (a) Energy and Climate change directorate and (b) External Affairs directorate on whether any Scotland based companies are undertaking (i) recruitment, (ii) training, (iii) technical management services for Seapeak LLC in relation to the shipping of Russian Liquefied Natural Gas to (A) EU and (B) other third countries.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The UK has taken extensive action to limit energy revenues that fund Russia's war. The UK prohibited the import of Russian LNG in January 2023 and banned the export of energy related goods, including those that support LNG production. We continue to consider all lawful and practical options to limit Russian energy revenues.

**■ Russia: Shipping****Graeme Downie:** [\[21877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help tackle the threat from the Russian shadow fleet in the (a) Baltic and (b) North Sea.

**Stephen Doughty:**

Our oil-related sanctions are having a significant impact, with Russia forced to shoulder a 25 percent reduction in oil and gas revenues from January to October 2024, compared to the same period in 2022. Where Russia has sought to circumvent those sanctions, we have taken robust action. We have now sanctioned 93 shadow fleet oil tankers; and we are exposing malign maritime practices by requesting proof

of insurance from suspected shadow vessels passing through the English Channel - an approach partners along the Baltic route will now replicate. We continue to step up our efforts, working closely with Nordic-Baltic partners and others, to ensure our sanctions' effectiveness and impact. We continue to keep further measures on oil and gas under active review.

## ■ Southeast Asia: Religious Freedom

**Ruth Jones:**

[\[22072\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent progress his Department has made on helping to improve freedom of religion or belief of minority Buddhist communities in Southeast Asia.

**Catherine West:**

The UK remains strongly committed to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad. It is our firm opinion that no one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. We are championing the right to FoRB multilaterally, bilaterally and through programme funding. In Southeast Asia, for example, as a member of the International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief in Vietnam, the UK has often worked to raise cases of concern with Vietnamese authorities in this area. The appointment of David Smith MP as the Special Envoy for FoRB is a clear signal of the UK's ongoing commitment to these efforts in Southeast Asia and across the globe.

## ■ Southern Africa: Storms

**Stephen Gethins:**

[\[22029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment has been made of the potential impact of Cyclone Chido on people in southern Africa.

**Stephen Gethins:**

[\[22030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the impact of Cyclone Chido on communities in northern Zambia.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

Heavy wind and rain from Tropical Cyclone Chido have caused widespread damage in Mozambique and Malawi, and have resulted in extensive crop and infrastructure damage in parts of the region. Flooding has increased the risk of disease outbreak in a region where cholera is endemic, and cases are on the rise. Northern Mozambique was most affected by Tropical Cyclone Chido; resulting in 120 deaths, and impacting 687,000 people, many of whom are already internally displaced and affected by conflict.

To support, the UK has provided £5 million to Mozambique, focusing on providing emergency shelter, clean water, sanitation needs and preparedness building. Barring

heavy rain and greater flood risk, Tropical Cyclone Chido has not had a substantial impact on Northern Zambia.

#### ■ **Sudan: Armed Conflict**

**Mr Calvin Bailey:**

[\[21255\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with (a) Troika and (b) other partners on (i) monitoring and (ii) rapid diplomatic responses to escalations in the levels of atrocity risks in (A) Zamzam refugee camp, (B) Darfur and (C) Sudan.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The Foreign Secretary has raised the issue of increased atrocity risks in Sudan with a number of key regional and international actors. In December, the Foreign Secretary discussed protection of civilians in Sudan with Troika counterparts Secretary Blinken (US) and Foreign Minister Barth Eide (Norway). The Foreign Secretary also engaged with the African Union and African Security Council members during his visit to New York in November, including at a roundtable he hosted where he urged states to use their influence with the warring parties to push for improved humanitarian access in Sudan and protection of civilians. We will continue to use our engagements with international partners to pressure warring parties to comply with international humanitarian and human rights law.

#### ■ **Switzerland: Religious Freedom**

**Ruth Jones:**

[\[22074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies on freedom of religion or belief of the imposition of legal restrictions on the Burqa in public spaces in Switzerland; and whether he plans to take steps to help promote freedom of religion or belief in Switzerland in the context of that legislation.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The UK continues to champion freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all. We are working to uphold the right to FoRB through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora and in our important bilateral work. These are ultimately matters for the democratic Swiss authorities but we engage with Switzerland on a range of issues both bilaterally and multilaterally- including human rights and FoRB issues, this includes during the Swiss Chairing of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, as well as through our shared membership of the Council of Europe and OSCE.

#### ■ **Syria: British Nationals Abroad**

**Wendy Morton:**

[\[21998\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December 2024 to Question 19312 on Syria: British

Nationals Abroad, what steps is he taking to provide consular support to British nationals in Syria.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Consular support is not available from the UK Government from within Syria as all British Embassy services in Damascus are suspended. This makes it difficult to provide direct assistance to British nationals located there. Nevertheless, each request for consular assistance from Syria is considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account all relevant circumstances.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ Blood Cancer: Health Services

**Sorcha Eastwood:**

[\[22161\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help reduce inequalities of care for blood cancer patients.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 8 October 2024 to Question [5808](#).

### ■ Brain: Tumours

**Derek Twigg:**

[\[20923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what funding his Department has provided for child brain tumour research in each year since 2015.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Department invests £1.5 billion per year in health research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), and NIHR research expenditure for all cancers was £121.8 million in 2022/23. Cancer is a major area of NIHR spend, reflecting its high priority.

For research specifically on child brain tumours, the NIHR has made three direct awards since 2015 with a total value of approximately £650,000. The following table shows the NIHR's committed spend on research into child brain tumours in each year since 2015/16, and the total award budget:

| FINANCIAL YEAR | TOTAL   |
|----------------|---------|
| 2015/16        | £0      |
| 2016/17        | £0      |
| 2017/18        | £54,305 |
| 2018/19        | £59,110 |
| 2019/20        | £64,058 |

| FINANCIAL YEAR     | TOTAL    |
|--------------------|----------|
| 2020/21            | £57,691  |
| 2021/22            | £0       |
| 2022/23            | £48,801  |
| 2023/24            | £179,149 |
| Total award budget | £649,614 |

Between 2018/19 and 2022/23, the NIHR directly invested £11.3 million in research projects and programmes focused on brain tumors across 15 awards. Additionally, wider NIHR investment in research infrastructure, supporting the facilities, services, and the research workforce, supported the delivery of 227 brain cancer research studies over this period, enabling an estimated 8,500 people to participate in research at estimated cost of £31.5 million. This NIHR infrastructure-supported research included a significant number of studies involving children and young people, including those delivered by NIHR Great Ormond Street Biomedical Research Centre.

In September 2024, the NIHR announced new research funding opportunities for brain cancer research, 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. Further information on these opportunities is available at the following link:

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/new-funding-opportunities-novel-brain-tumour-research-launched>

The NIHR continues to encourage and welcome applications for research into any aspect of human health, including childhood cancer. Applications are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and health and care services, value for money, and scientific quality.

## ■ Cancer: Medical Treatments

**Charlotte Cane:**

**[21800]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken to reduce waiting times for cancer treatment.

**Karin Smyth:**

We know that patients are waiting too long for cancer treatment, and we will get the National Health Service diagnosing cancer on time or earlier, treating it faster, and we will improve patients' experience across the system.



As we set out in our new plan for reforming elective care, we are committed to improving performance on cancer waiting times. Further details will be set out in a dedicated national cancer plan and the NHS's annual operational planning guidance.

**Clive Jones:**

[R] [\[21829\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the 2024/25 priorities and operational guidance, updated on 24 April 2024, what steps she is taking to hold NHS England accountable for implementing regular demand and capacity assessments of Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy (SACT) services.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department continues to support the National Health Service in England to increase cancer treatment capacity. NHS England had previously established a task-and-finish group to gather, collate, and compile available information to establish Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy (SACT) delivery capacity, and to generate recommendations for the short, medium, and longer term to alleviate identified pressures on service delivery.

Recommendations have been shared with local systems and, working with Cancer Alliances, they are considering how to progress those that will best support the needs of their local populations. In support of this work, each Cancer Alliance should have a nominated lead for overseeing and supporting demand and capacity of SACT across its footprint, including the completion of a bi-annual evaluation of demand and capacity of SACT services, and should escalate any issues to the relevant integrated care board for resolution.

Additionally, with support from Cancer Alliances, cancer pathway improvement work will focus on maximising the productivity of cancer diagnostic and treatment pathways by regularly assessing supply and demand for systemic anti-cancer therapy services.

## ■ Childbirth and Infant Mortality

**Abtisam Mohamed:**

[\[21451\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 2 December 2024 to Question 15960 on Neonatal Inequalities, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) monitoring and (b) reporting on (i) pre-term births and (ii) neonatal brain injuries by (A) ethnicity and (B) deprivation.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government is committed to ensuring that all women and babies received safe, personalised, equitable, and compassionate care. I am urgently considering the immediate action needed across maternity and neonatal services to improve outcomes and address the stark inequalities that persist for women and babies across ethnicity and deprivation.

The Department's officials work closely with NHS England and maternity and neonatal sector partners to monitor inequalities in perinatal outcomes by ethnicity and deprivation, including through the published Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk

through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK reports. The Office of National Statistics' report on preterm birth by ethnicity and the recent Imperial College London Brain Injury Surveillance Reports include breakdowns by ethnicity and deprivation. There are no current plans to make a further specific assessment of the merits of monitoring and reporting on pre-term births and neonatal brain injuries by ethnicity and deprivation.

## ■ **Coronavirus: Vaccination**

**James MacCleary:**

**[21871]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of not allowing carers to be vaccinated for Covid-19 on people requiring care.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Government is committed to protecting those most vulnerable to COVID-19 through vaccination, as guided by the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The primary aim of the national COVID-19 vaccination programme remains the prevention of severe illness, namely hospitalisations and deaths, arising from COVID-19.

In its advice for the autumn 2024 vaccination campaign, the JCVI advised that COVID-19 vaccine should be offered to: adults aged 65 years old and over; residents in a care home for older adults; and persons aged six months to 64 years old in a clinical risk group, as defined in tables 3 and 4 of the COVID-19 chapter of the UK Health Security Agency Green Book, for which more information is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/medicines-repurposing-programme-annual-highlights/>

The JCVI noted that in the current era of high population immunity to COVID-19 and with all cases due to highly transmissible Omicron sub-variants, any protection offered by the vaccine against transmission of infection from one person to another is expected to be extremely limited. On this basis the JCVI did not advise offering vaccination to unpaid carers. The Government accepted JCVI advice for autumn 2024, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-autumn-2024-vaccination-programme-jcvi-advice-8-april-2024/jcvi-statement-on-the-covid-19-vaccination-programme-for-autumn-2024-8-april-2024>

On 13 November 2024, the JCVI published advice on the COVID-19 vaccination programme covering vaccination in 2025 and spring 2026, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-in-2025-and-spring-2026-jcvi-advice/jcvi-statement-on-covid-19-vaccination-in-2025-and-spring-2026>

The Government has accepted JCVI advice on eligibility for the spring 2025 COVID-19 vaccination programme. The Government is considering the advice for autumn 2025 and spring 2026 carefully and will respond in due course.

## ■ Department of Health and Social Care: Correspondence

**Adam Dance:**

[\[22204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2024 to Question 20545 on Department of Health and Social Care: Correspondence, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that 80% of hon. Members receive a response to correspondence in 20 days.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Department is committed to meeting the target of responding to at least 80% of correspondence from Hon. Members within 20 working days. Parliament has a right to hold Ministers to account. We recognise there is room for improvement and we are committed to doing things differently. The Leader of the House of Commons wrote to all Cabinet members in November 2024 to remind Ministers of their responsibilities to provide helpful and timely responses to Members' written parliamentary questions and correspondence.

The Government has already taken steps to strengthen its approach to correspondence, with a Ministerial champion for correspondence identified in each department. As the lead Minister appointed for this Department, I am receiving information from my officials on performance and highlighting the importance of this work in communicating with Hon. Members across both Houses of Parliament.

## ■ Gender Dysphoria: Children and Young People

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**

[\[21185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase (a) the level of funding for and (b) access to Children's and Young People's Gender Services.

**Karin Smyth:**

As my rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, set out during his oral statement to Parliament on 11 December 2024, the Government and NHS England are committed to implementing the recommendations of the Cass Review.

NHS England has opened three new services in the North West, London, and Bristol that offer a fundamentally different clinical model, embedding multi-disciplinary teams in specialist children's hospitals. A fourth service in the East of England will open in spring of next year. NHS England is making progress towards its commitment for there to be a specialist children's gender service in every region by 2026, which will increase capacity and reduce the waiting list.

Investment in children and young people's gender services in 2024/25 has more than doubled compared to 2023/24 and this will increase further as new services are established.

### ■ Genetics: Diseases

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[22100\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 3 January 2025 to Question 19417 on Genetics: Diseases, how much funding was provided by NHS England to the Genetic Risk Equity project; and what that funding was used for.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The project began in 2022/23, with total spend being £2.7 million. The following table showing the breakdown by year and to the nearest £100,000:

| YEAR    | SPEND (£) |
|---------|-----------|
| 2024/25 | 1,000,000 |
| 2023/24 | 1,000,000 |
| 2022/23 | 700,000   |

Source: NHS England

Note: The funding was spent on additional midwifery capacity, genomics associates, neonatal nurses (2024/25 only) and genetic literacy/public health outreach. 5% was spent on project management and evaluation.

### ■ Influenza: Vaccination

**Kim Leadbeater:** [\[21525\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to expand the eligibility criteria for winter flu vaccinations.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Eligibility for the seasonal influenza vaccination programme is based on the advice and recommendations of an independent expert committee, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The latest JCVI advice on seasonal influenza vaccines is available on the GOV.UK website, at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation#influenza-vaccines-jcvi-advice>

Details on the annual influenza vaccination programme, based on the JCVI's advice, are set out in the annual flu letter, a copy of which is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-flu-immunisation-programme-plan-2024-to-2025/national-flu-immunisation-programme-2024-to-2025-letter>

The groups in the 2024/25 programme are:

- pregnant women;
- all children aged two or three years old on 31 August 2024;
- primary school aged children, from Reception to Year 6;
- secondary school aged children, from Year 7 to Year 11;
- all children in clinical risk groups aged from 6 months to less than 18 years old;
- those aged 65 years old and over;
- those aged 18 to under 65 years old in clinical risk groups;
- those in long-stay residential care homes;
- carers;
- close contacts of immunocompromised individuals; and
- frontline health and social care workers.

The JCVI keeps its advice on seasonal influenza vaccines under regular review.

#### ■ **Lung Cancer: Widnes and Halewood**

**Derek Twigg:** [\[20922\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people in Widnes and Halewood constituency were being treated for lung cancer as of 1 October 2024.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

We do not collect data on the number of people treated for lung cancer by constituency. However, we do have the total number of people being treated for lung cancer across trusts throughout the country. The number of people who received either a first or subsequent treatment for lung cancer in September 2024 was 4,676.

#### ■ **National Institute for Health and Care Research: Finance**

**Clive Jones:** [\[R\] \[21833\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how the additional funding announced in the Autumn Budget 2024 for the National Institute for Health and Care Research will be allocated.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The 2025/26 settlement for the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) will fund research into a range of health and care challenges facing the population. A key element of this investment is research to support the goals of the Government health and growth missions, including investment to maximise our potential to be a world leader and develop a more competitive, efficient, and accessible clinical research system.

To allocate research funding, the NIHR employs a competitive and peer-reviewed process for applications to its research funding programmes, evaluating submissions based on scientific rigour, potential patient benefits, and alignment with population health and care priorities.

Details of NIHR funding allocated to individual research awards are openly published and updated on an ongoing basis on the 'Open Data' site of the NIHR at the following link:

<https://nihr.opendatasoft.com/pages/homepage/>

## ■ NHS: Drugs

**Sir Ashley Fox:** [\[21742\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many repurposed medicines have successfully been granted MHRA licences in the last two years.

**Sir Ashley Fox:** [\[21743\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average length of time has been for a repurposed medicine to be granted an MHRA licence from the point of application in the last two years.

**Karin Smyth:**

In the last two years, there has been one medicine to date, namely Anastrozole, coming through the Repurposed Medicines Programme, with more information available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/medicines-2/medicines-repurposing-programme/>

As only one medicine has been through the Repurposed Medicines programme so far, there is no meaningful 'average time' at this point, but the review times are being monitored.

**Sir Ashley Fox:** [\[21744\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department is taking steps to decrease the amount of time it takes for a repurposed medicine to be granted an MHRA licence.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Medicines and products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) reviews the efficacy, safety and quality of a repurposed medicine in a similar way to other medicinal applications.

This review is part of the activities which MHRA contributes to under the Medicines Repurposing Programme. Once sufficient evidence is available, MHRA will consider the applications within the statutory timelines which can be expedited if company dossiers contain all required information. Timelines for assessment vary and depend on the nature of the application.

MHRA continuously reviews processes for the assessment of applications to determine whether any efficiencies and improved timelines are feasible.

## ■ NHS: Workplace Pensions

**Peter Fortune:**

[\[21838\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled NHS Pension Scheme: proposed amendments for April 2025, published on 10 December 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department launched the consultation 'NHS Pension Scheme: proposed amendments for April 2025' on GOV.UK on 10 December 2024, with more information available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/nhs-pension-scheme-proposed-amendments-for-april-2025>

As per the Government's Publishing Accessible Documents guidance, the consultation document is published in HTML format to make it easier to read and to find. The digital survey for users to respond to the consultation is also hosted on an accessible platform. The draft regulations which accompany the consultation are lengthy and technical in nature, and so these are published as a PDF to preserve formatting and technical content. Users of assistive technology (such as screen readers) can request a copy of the draft regulations in an accessible format by emailing [publications@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:publications@dhsc.gov.uk).

Users who have queries on the consultation or require an alternative format can also contact [nhspconsultations@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:nhspconsultations@dhsc.gov.uk).

## ■ Nurses: Training

**James Naish:**

[\[22109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing non-academic routes for people to train as nurses.

**Karin Smyth:**

We have a complete apprentice pathway for nursing, from entry level to postgraduate advanced clinical practice. NHS England is expanding routes into healthcare professions through apprenticeships.

Our 10-Year Health Plan to reform the National Health Service will establish how to train and provide the staff the NHS needs, including nurses, through all training routes, to care for patients across our communities. A refreshed NHS Long Term Workforce Plan due for publication in summer 2025 will deliver the transformed health service we will build over the next decade, ensuring the NHS has the right people, in the right places, with the right skills to give the care patients need when they need it.

**■ Patients: Death****Jeremy Hunt:****[R] [18920]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of NHS Secondary Care Trusts are reporting all of the legally required elements of the Learning from Deaths national guidance.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

This information is not collected centrally. All National Health Service trusts, apart from NHS ambulance trusts, are required to meet the reporting requirements in The National Health Service (Quality Accounts) (Amendment) Regulations 2017 relating to national learning from deaths policy. These reporting requirements are set out in the National Guidance on Learning from Deaths, published in March 2017. The guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/nqb-national-guidance-learning-from-deaths.pdf>

The reporting requirements on learning from deaths for NHS ambulance trusts are set out in National Guidance for Ambulance Trusts on Learning from Deaths, published in July 2019, and are available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/learning-from-deaths-guidance-for-ambulance-trusts.pdf>

Under the NHS Standard Contract, trusts are required to comply with national guidance on learning from deaths where applicable.

**■ Prescriptions: Fees and Charges****James Naish:****[22114]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will simplify the process for obtaining Maternity Exception Certificates.

**James Naish:****[22115]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people have been fined for accessing prescriptions without a valid Maternity Exception Certificate.

**Karin Smyth:**

There are no plans to revise the application process for maternity exemption certificates that provide entitlement to free National Health Service prescriptions. The NHS Business Services Authority has advised that in 2024, 48,063 Penalty Charge Notices were issued to those who indicated they held a valid maternity exemption certificate that could not be validated.



## ■ Prostate Cancer: Lincolnshire

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[22246\]](#)

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) South Holland and The Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Department is committed to improving the adequacy of all cancer services including for prostate cancer, this includes cancer services in South Holland and The Deepings and Lincolnshire.

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 is 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.

## ■ Radiotherapy: Medical Equipment

**Derek Twigg:**

[\[21976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which organisation is responsible for procuring radiotherapy machines.

**Karin Smyth:**

Responsibility for purchasing radiotherapy treatment machines sits with local systems. The Government committed £70 million for new machines in last year's Budget, to ensure that the most advanced treatment is available to patients who need it.

## ■ Urinary Tract Infections

**Luke Taylor:**

[\[22155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps the NHS is taking to improve training for doctors on (a) understanding and (b) treating chronic urinary tract infections.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The standard of training for doctors is the responsibility of the General Medical Council (GMC). The GMC sets the outcome standards expected at undergraduate level. The curricula for postgraduate training is set by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges for foundation training, and by individual Royal Colleges and faculties for specialty training. The GMC approves curricula and assessment systems for each training programme.

Curricula across the specialties where doctors in training might regularly treat patients with urinary tract infections will contain competencies relating to understanding, identifying and treating urinary tract infections and the associated symptoms. The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges Evidenced-based interventions (EBI) programme includes guidance on chronic UTIs, with more information available at the following link:

<https://ebi.aomrc.org.uk/interventions/investigation-and-onward-referral-of-women-with-recurrent-uti/>

In September 2024, the EBI programme was adopted as standard operating procedure by the National Health Service.

The Royal College of General Practitioners also provide e-learning on UTIs, with more information available at the following link:

<https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/mod/book/tool/print/index.php?id=12652>

**■ Viral Diseases****Alicia Kearns:****[22090]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many cases of human metapneumovirus have been identified in the UK.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The UK Health Security Agency's long-term surveillance of human metapneumovirus (hMPV) in England, through systems covering general practice surgeries and hospital laboratories, indicates that hMPV levels in winter 2024-25 are in line with what we would expect to see at this time of year.

Healthcare data for hMPV and other respiratory viruses comes from the sentinel surveillance system, a data collection method used to monitor trends. This means it is not a count of every person being treated for the respiratory virus in hospital. Total case numbers are therefore not held centrally.

Further information on data collection is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sources-of-surveillance-data-for-influenza-covid-19-and-other-respiratory-viruses>

**Alicia Kearns:**

[22091]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with (a) his international counterparts and (b) the World Health Organisation on human metapneumovirus.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has had no recent communications from the World Health Organisation or other countries in relation to human metapneumovirus (hMPV).

UKHSA's long-term surveillance of hMPV in England, through systems covering general practice surgeries and hospital laboratories, indicates that hMPV levels in winter 2024-25 are in line with what we would expect to see at this time of year.

Healthcare data for hMPV and other respiratory viruses is routinely published on the UKHSA dashboard, which is available at the following link:

<https://ukhsa-dashboard.data.gov.uk/respiratory-viruses/other-respiratory-viruses>

## ■ Vitiligo

**Jim Shannon:**

[21987]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people in the UK have been diagnosed with vitiligo.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Department does not hold data on the number of people in England who have been diagnosed with vitiligo. Data relating to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is a matter for the devolved governments.

## HOME OFFICE

### ■ Community Policing

**Mike Wood:**

[22023]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to page 34 of the policy paper entitled Plan for Change: Milestones for mission-led government, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, how she plans to measure the success of the neighbourhood policing guarantee; and if she will publish data on (a) police visibility and (b) public satisfaction at the community level.

**Mike Wood:**

[22025]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the policy paper entitled Plan for Change, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, how she plans to measure progress towards her target for safer town centres; and what her target is for reducing levels of (a) anti-social behaviour, (b) shoplifting and (c) other specific crimes.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

We are currently in the process of devising a new performance framework for neighbourhood policing to improve standards and performance across the country. We are engaging with police forces, the College of Policing and National Police Chiefs' Council to agree the content of the performance framework, including assessing which measures are available nationally and at the local level.

The Guarantee and associated performance framework will ensure everyone, regardless of where they live, receives strengthened and more consistent neighbourhood policing.

**Crimes of Violence****Alex Mayer:**[\[21236\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of trends in the level of violent crime during heatwaves in 2024.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

There is a wide body of academic research pointing to associations between short-term increased temperatures and violent crime, but the Home Office has no plans to conduct any future specific research in this area in relation to heatwaves in 2024.

**Gender Based Violence****Alicia Kearns:**[\[21684\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what criteria she will use to measure the success of the ambition to halve violence against women and girls.

**Jess Phillips:**

We are undertaking a programme of work to bring together suitable data and metrics to measure progress against the ambition to halve VAWG in a decade. We are working closely with The Office for National Statistics and other stakeholders in producing the metrics underpinning how the government will measure success. Further details will be confirmed in due course.

**Home Office: Equality****Rupert Lowe:**[\[21138\]](#)

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

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

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.

## ■ Migrants: Detainees

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**

[\[21024\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress she has made on implementing the recommendations of the Brook House Inquiry, published on 19 September 2023; and whether any of those recommendations have been completed.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

30 out of the 33 recommendations made in the Brook House Inquiry report have been accepted or partially accepted, with 12 recommendations met and closed as of October 2024. The remaining recommendations remain on track for closure by summer 2025.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

### ■ House of Commons Commission: Correspondence

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[21352\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the Director of Parliamentary Digital Services plans to provide a substantive reply to the correspondence of 27 November 2024 from the hon. Member for Slough.

**Nick Smith:**

The Managing Director of the Parliamentary Digital Service replied on 6 January 2025.

## HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### ■ Absent Voting: Registration

**Andy MacNae:**

[\[21147\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of removing the requirement for a national insurance number on postal vote registration forms.

**Rushanara Ali:**

The requirement to provide a National Insurance Number when applying for a postal vote acts to ensure that the person making the application is the same individual entitled to apply for the postal vote and mirrors the longstanding practice when registering to vote. There are no plans to change the requirements for an absent vote application.

## ■ Building Regulations

**Jayne Kirkham:**

[\[22215\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will introduce the Future Homes and Building Standards as soon as possible.

**Alex Norris:**

The Future Homes and Buildings Standards consultation was published in December 2023 and closed in March 2024; a government response, including implementation plans, has not yet been issued.

Government fully supports the need for low carbon homes and buildings, fit for a net zero future. We are reviewing proposals and feedback from the Future Homes and Buildings Standards consultation and will publish the government response in due course.

## ■ Civil Society: Islam

**Mr Richard Holden:**

[\[21404\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the answer of 9 December 2024 to Question 17300 on Muslim Council of Britain, what her policy is on engagement with (a) Cage, (b) MEND and (c) the Muslim Association of Britain.

**Alex Norris:**

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

## ■ Councillors: Disciplinary Proceedings

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[20985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, whether the decision to suspend councillors will be taken by (a) the full council or (b) the local authority's standards committee; and what right of appeal will there be.

**Jim McMahon:**

On 18 December the Government launched a consultation to seek views from local authorities, sector bodies, and the public on a range of proposals to strengthen the local government standards regime and ensure there is a stronger, more consistent, and more accountable framework for addressing member misconduct.

The results of this consultation will help to inform any policy and legislative change, including in relation to the possible introduction of the sanction of suspension and related safeguards, and the appropriate arrangements for an appeals process.

**Local Government Finance: Essex****James McMurdock:**[\[21102\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to clear Thurrock council's debt following the proposed merger of councils in Essex.

**Jim McMahon:**

The Government has a framework to support councils in financial difficulty. In addition, the previous Secretary of State used statutory powers to intervene in a small number of councils failing their Best Value Duty partly associated with high levels of unsustainable debt. In the case of Thurrock, the Government will continue to work with the Best Value Commissioners and the Council to support Thurrock in its financial recovery.

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

**Local Government: Correspondence****David Simmonds:**[\[21478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will publish any correspondence sent to councils on local government restructuring since 16 December 2024.

**Jim McMahon:**

I wrote immediately after the publication of the English Devolution White Paper on 16 December to leaders of all councils in areas where there is a two-tier structure of local government, and to leaders of neighbouring unitary councils. My letter set out further details on the Government's ambitions for local government reorganisation and next steps in the process of moving to simpler structures in all those areas. I will make arrangements for that letter to be published on gov.uk shortly. I will write to this group again by the end of January to invite unitary proposals for their area.

**Local Government: Reform****Martin Wrigley:**[\[21097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the population sizes in the English Devolution White Paper refer to (a) electorate and (b) total population.

**Jim McMahon:**

The population sizes outlined in the English Devolution White Paper for creating new unitary councils and new devolution geographies refer to total population.

**Alicia Kearns:**

[\[22092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, whether unitary local authorities will be required to merge with neighbouring councils to meet the 500,000 target.

**Jim McMahon:**

On 16 December, I wrote to all councils in two-tier areas and to neighbouring small unitaries alongside the White Paper, to set out our plans. I intend to formally invite unitary proposals in January 2025 from all these councils. I will ask for interim plans in March and I am open to hearing from other councils who consider reorganisation will put them on a more sustainable footing. I will take a phased approach to delivery, taking into account where reorganisation can unlock devolution, where areas are keen to move quickly or where it can help address wider failings.

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

## ■ Voting Methods: Finance

**Euan Stainbank:**

[\[21195\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional funding to Returning Officers to cover the costs of accessible voting devices that exceed the new burdens funding.

**Rushanara Ali:**

The Elections Act 2022 requires Returning Officers to consider and provide support for electors with all forms of disability, including varying degrees of sight loss. The Tactile Voting Device, introduced in 2001, has proven effective for some voters with sight loss but we are aware that other options, such as magnifiers, digital reading applications and lighting aids, are also used to support individual elector's preferences.

For local elections, costs incurred by Returning Officers to support voters with sight loss are typically met by local authorities, with new burdens funding made available where new burdens are imposed by legislation.

For UK Parliamentary and Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections, costs are met by the Consolidated Fund and Returning Officers can claim reimbursement for necessary and reasonable expenses incurred in delivering these polls, including expenditure incurred in the provision of accessible voting equipment. For equipment that will be used at both local and UK Parliamentary/PCC elections, costs can be shared between the funding sources.



**JUSTICE****■ Criminal Injuries Compensation: Birmingham****Laurence Turner:**[\[22209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the average processing time was for applications to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme by people resident in Birmingham in each of the last five years.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The table below shows the average time for decisions to be made on applications\* for criminal injuries compensation by people resident in Birmingham\*\*.

| CALENDAR YEAR OF CICA DECISION | AVERAGE TIME (DAYS) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| 2020                           | 335                 |
| 2021                           | 440                 |
| 2022                           | 490                 |
| 2023                           | 381                 |
| 2024                           | 372                 |

\* 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.

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

**■ Intimate Image Abuse: Prosecutions****Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[22143\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many (a) children and (b) adults were prosecuted for the creation of indecent images of (i) children and (ii) adults using denudifying apps in 2024.

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[22145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people were prosecuted for the (a) creation, (b) distribution and (c) ownership of entirely AI-generated indecent images of children in 2024.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The Ministry of Justice publishes data on prosecutions for a wide range of offences, including offences involving the possession, creation and distribution of indecent images of children. Data up to and including June 2024 is available in the Outcomes by Offences data tool that can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice Statistics

landing page here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/criminal-justice-statistics-quarterly>.

However, data held centrally does not include whether the offence involved AI-generated images or use of nudifying apps. This information may be held in the court records but to examine individual court records would be of disproportionate cost.

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

### ■ Social Security Benefits: Appeals

**Andrew Cooper:** [\[22205\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the average length of time was for a First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Child Support) appeal for (a) personal independence payment and (b) universal credit in (i) Mid Cheshire constituency, (ii) Cheshire and (iii) England in each of the last five years.

**Andrew Cooper:** [\[22206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many appellants are waiting for First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Child Support) appeals to be listed for personal independence payment in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England.

**Sarah Sackman:**

Information about appeals to the First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Child Support) (SSCS) is published at: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics). The average waiting times data requested can be found under "Tribunal Statistics CSV files".

The information requested about the number of appellants waiting for appeals to be listed is not held centrally.

HMCTS cannot isolate the number of appellants waiting for their appeal to be listed, as opposed to the number of appeals waiting to be listed. An appellant may have more than one appeal waiting to be listed: appeals can be made against (amongst other things) initial decisions on entitlement to Personal Independence Payment (PIP), overpayments, or period of time for which PIP has been awarded, for which separate appeals can be lodged.

**NORTHERN IRELAND****■ Health Services: Northern Ireland**

**Adam Jogee:** [\[21779\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he has had recent discussions with the Northern Ireland Executive on the health service in Northern Ireland.

**Fleur Anderson:**

Improving health outcomes across the UK is a priority mission for this Government. Although health is devolved in Northern Ireland, the Government wants to work with the Northern Ireland Executive to transform its public services and improve outcomes for people in Northern Ireland.

Government Ministers regularly engage with Executive Ministers, including the Northern Ireland Health Minister, to discuss plans to improve public services in Northern Ireland.

**■ Hospitals: Northern Ireland**

**Adam Jogee:** [\[21771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he has had recent discussions with the Northern Ireland Executive on the number of people on hospital waiting lists in Northern Ireland.

**Fleur Anderson:**

Improving health outcomes across the UK is a priority mission for this Government. Although health is devolved in Northern Ireland, the Government wants to work with the Northern Ireland Executive to transform its public services and improve outcomes for people in Northern Ireland.

The Government regularly engages with Executive Ministers, including the Northern Ireland Health Minister, to discuss plans to improve public services. I have engaged extensively with stakeholders across the Northern Ireland health service to discuss how the Government can work with the Executive to tackle its shared health challenges, including waiting lists.

**■ Members: Correspondence**

**Alex Burghart:** [\[22053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, when he plans to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar dated 5 December 2024.

**Hilary Benn:**

I replied to the Honourable Members letter on the 23rd December by email.

**■ Northern Ireland Office: Equality****Rupert Lowe:**[\[21144\]](#)

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

**Hilary Benn:**

The Northern Ireland Office works within the Civil Service Recruitment Principles, as regulated by the Civil Service Commission, to recruit using a fair and open process and appoint on merit.

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

The Northern Ireland Office has not used any positive action schemes, as defined by the Equality Act, to support the hiring of those with protected characteristics in the last financial year.

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

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

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

**SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY****■ Internet: Abuse****Sarah Smith:**[\[21488\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to support families of (a) missing and (b) deceased individuals that are experiencing online abuse.

**Feryal Clark:**

The government is committed to supporting families who have endured unimaginable losses. The Online Safety Act will help address challenges faced by bereaved parents when engaging with online services following a child's death. The Act gives

Ofcom the power to require information from regulated services about a deceased child's online activity following a coroner's request.

In terms of horrific abusive content, under the Act social media platforms must take responsibility for users' safety by removing illegal abusive content. These duties on platforms to tackle illegal content are expected to come into effect in Spring 2025.

## ■ Internet: Disinformation

**Sarah Smith:**

[\[21490\]](#)

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

**Feryal Clark:**

Our immediate focus is getting the Online Safety Act (OSA) implemented quickly and effectively. The OSA sets out a clear regulatory framework to tackle both mis- and disinformation where it constitutes illegal content or harmful content to children.

In addition, through our work on media literacy, we are taking steps to empower users with the skills they need to engage critically with online content. Since 2022, we have provided almost £3million in funding to projects helping citizens make safer, more informed decisions online.

Officials also regularly meet with major social media platforms to discuss disinformation activity, emerging risks and platforms' responses.

## TRANSPORT

### ■ Bus Services: Rural Areas

**Gregory Stafford:**

[\[902021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to improve bus services in rural areas.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The government is committed to delivering better, more frequent and more reliable bus services for passengers. We have already made significant progress, introducing the Bus Services Bill to help give local leaders the powers they need to take control of their local services if they choose to do so, and announcing investment of over £1 billion to support and improve bus services.

### ■ Bus Services: Standards

**John Whitby:**

[\[902023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help improve local bus services.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The government is committed to delivering better, more frequent and more reliable bus services for passengers. We have already made significant progress, introducing the Bus Services Bill to help give local leaders the powers they need to take control of their local services if they choose to do so, and announcing investment of over £1 billion to support and improve bus services.

■ **Bus Services: West Dorset****Edward Morello:**[\[902016\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the regularity of bus services on vulnerable users in West Dorset constituency.

**Simon Lightwood:**

We know that bus services can be a lifeline for many, and are committed to delivering better, more frequent services across the country. That is why we are allocating bus funding based on need not the quality of bids. Dorset Council will receive £3.8m next year, a £2.5m annual increase on the previous year.

■ **Buses: Fares****Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:**[\[902026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of increasing bus fares on customers.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The previous bus fare cap was unfunded beyond 2024. The Government is stepping in and investing over £150 million to ensure single bus fares in England outside London remain capped at £3 throughout 2025. The cap ensures that millions can continue to travel for less and access better opportunities with potential savings of up to 80% on some routes.

■ **Delivery Services: Roads and Pedestrian Areas****James Naish:**[\[22108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to (a) monitor and (b) regulate delivery drivers working for food delivery companies to ensure they are using roads and pavements safely.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Everyone who drives, rides or cycles, including delivery drivers and riders, has a duty to behave in a safe and responsible manner, and to follow the rules set out in The Highway Code. They must also hold the necessary registration, tax, licence and appropriate insurance for driving or riding the vehicle they are using: if they do not, they may be liable for prosecution. Enforcement of these rules is a matter for the police.

Employers have a duty to manage the safety of their employees, and their employees in turn have a responsibility to drive, ride or cycle appropriately and to comply with relevant laws.

Last month, the Minister for Local Transport wrote to the main food delivery companies to remind them of their obligations, and of the importance the Government places on the safety of all road users. The Department will consider next steps in the light of the responses received to the letter.

## ■ Freight: Infrastructure

**Mike Reader:**

[\[21178\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of identifying a National Freight Network.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The UK has a complex national freight system handling millions of transactions every day. The merits of increasing our understanding of this system to inform policy making, regulation and investment interventions are well understood, and this Government is improving its data and analytical capabilities to do so. This will enable stronger interventions, including those that may be delivered through spatial corridor and network approaches.

## ■ Parking Offences: Debt Collection

**James Naish:**

[\[22113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that parking enforcement debt collection practices are equitable.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Local authorities may only charge reasonable costs in relation to fees for enforcement agents, these are clearly set out in the Taking Control of Goods (Fees) Regulations 2014. Enforcement agents responsible for executing warrants of control on behalf of local authorities are obliged to follow the code set out in part 3 of, and schedule 12 to, the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 and the Taking Control of Goods Regulations 2013. In addition, the Department issues statutory guidance to local authorities on the use of enforcement agents. Debt collection in respect of private parking operators is a matter for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

## ■ Public Transport: North East

**Matt Vickers:**

[\[902019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what funding her Department is providing for public transport projects in the North East.

**Simon Lightwood:**

We announced a £200m uplift for City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements in 2025/26, in addition to the £310m and £563m already allocated to Tees Valley and North East Combined Authority respectively. We announced a further £31m for buses in the region; reopened the Northumberland Line and funded new Metro trains.

■ **Railways: Passengers****Lillian Jones:**[\[902025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to improve passenger rail performance.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Improving the performance of our railways, including by delivering the biggest overhaul of the railway sector in a generation, is a top priority for this Government.

I have been clear with operators and with Network Rail that I will not tolerate poor performance while we rewire the system to work in the interest of passengers.

Ministers continue to meet with Managing Directors of Train Operating Companies and their Network Rail counterparts to assess their performance, and we will not hesitate to demand immediate action to raise standards.

■ **Special Escort Group****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[21686\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 19468 on Special Escort Group, on what statutory basis the police are able to (a) stop and direct traffic and (b) exceed speed limits in non-emergency situations.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Powers for police to stop and direct traffic are set out in sections 35, 37 and 163 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.

The exemption for speed is set out in section 87(1) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The exemption to speed does not require there to be an emergency to apply; the relevant requirements are that:

- The vehicle is being used for police purposes, and
- Compliance with the speed limit would be likely to hinder the purpose to which the vehicle is being put at the relevant time.



**TREASURY****■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax****John Glen:****[21588]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will publish the internal equality impact assessment under the Equality Act 2010 for changes to (a) agricultural and (b) business property relief.

**James Murray:**

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

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

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

**■ Business Rates and Inheritance Tax****Kevin Hollinrake:****[21636]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of (a) family-owned businesses and (b) changes to Business Property Relief on the economy of local communities.

**James Murray:**

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government took a number of difficult but necessary decisions on tax, welfare, and spending to restore economic stability, fix the public finances, and support public services. These were tough decisions given the situation we inherited from the previous administration, but the Government has done so in a way that makes the tax system fairer and more sustainable.

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

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

**■ Civil Service: Redundancy****Mike Wood:** [\[22015\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of whether public spending plans in the (a) Autumn Budget 2024 and (b) Spending Review phase (i) one and (ii) two will require (A) compulsory and (B) voluntary redundancies in the civil service.

**Darren Jones:**

At Autumn Budget, this government committed to developing a long-term strategic workforce plan for a more efficient and effective Civil Service.

During Spending Review phase two, departments will set out their long-term spending plans, including for their Civil Service workforces.

**■ Employers' Contributions: Women****Mims Davies:** [\[20995\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of proposed increases to employer National Insurance contributions on women in part-time work.

**Mims Davies:** [\[20996\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of proposed increases to employer National Insurance contributions on women in full-time work.

**Mims Davies:** [\[20997\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, What assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of changes in the level of National Insurance contributions on young people in part time work.

**James Murray:**

The Office for Budget Responsibility's October 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook expects that the Employer National Insurance Contributions package will lead to a reduction in the participation rate of 0.1 per cent from 2025-26 onwards. Overall, once the impact of all budget measures are taken into consideration, the OBR expect the employment level to increase from 33.1 million in 2024 to 34.3 million in 2029.

Employers have a choice about how they respond to the NICs increase. The Government recognises that employers may respond by increasing employees' wages more slowly than they would have otherwise, alongside absorbing pressures through prices, efficiencies or lower profits.

Employers will also continue to benefit from employer NICs reliefs including for hiring under 21s and under 25 apprentices, where eligible.

## ■ Individual Savings Accounts: Help to Buy Scheme

**Calum Miller:** [\[21091\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the property price limit on Help to Buy ISAs.

**Tulip Siddiq:**

This Government is committed to helping first time buyers own their own home, and will do this by building 1.5 million more homes.

The Government keeps savings policy under review, any changes of this kind would be made at a relevant fiscal event.

## ■ Inheritance Tax

**Patricia Ferguson:** [\[21817\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what guidance her Department will issue to non-agricultural businesses on the changes to Inheritance Tax announced in the Autumn Budget 2024.

**James Murray:**

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms).

As with other tax changes, HM Revenue and Customs will update its guidance in due course in the usual way.

## ■ National Insurance Contributions

**Graeme Downie:** [\[21482\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many people paid Class (a) 2 and (b) 4 National Insurance contributions in 2023.

**Graeme Downie:** [\[21484\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much was paid in Class (a) 2 and (b) 4 National Insurance contributions in 2023.

**James Murray:**

The number of people with Class 2 and Class 4 National Insurance Contributions (NICs) liabilities are estimated based on the 2021-22 Survey of Personal Incomes, projected using economic assumptions consistent with the Office for Budget Responsibility's March 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

This represents an estimate of the number of people with Class 2 and Class 4 NICs liabilities, and does not represent the number of people from whom HMRC received payments in 2023-24.

| ESTIMATED NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS LIABLE<br>(THOUSANDS) | 2023-24 |
|---|---------|
| Class 2 NICs  | 2,310   |
| Class 4 NICs  | 2,280   |

Information on NICs can be found in the “HMRC tax receipts and National Insurance contributions for the UK” statistical bulletin, available here:

[HMRC tax receipts and National Insurance contributions for the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmrc-tax-receipts-and-national-insurance-contributions-for-the-uk)

The breakdown of National Insurance contributions (NICs) by class for Great Britain and Northern Ireland is provided by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in “National Insurance Fund (NIF) Accounts”, available here (in the Notes to the Account):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-insurance-fund-accounts>

The NIF publication compares figures for year ended 31 March 2024 with year ended 31 March 2023. Note that the breakdown in the NIF accounts does not include the NHS allocation, paid over by HMRC to the NHS, though information on this allocation is included in the NIF Accounts.

## ■ Russia: Assets

**Wendy Morton:** [\[22007\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the value of Russian state assets in the UK.

**Tulip Siddiq:**

The Government coordinates these figures closely with our G7 partners. There are sensitivities around publishing these figures, and other G7 partners have restrictions on their ability to publish.

It is important, therefore, that a decision to release any figures is taken on a collective G7 basis.

## ■ Small Businesses: Employers' Contributions

**Alex Brewer:** [\[21870\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of an increase in the rate of employers' National Insurance contributions on (a) hairdressers and (b) other small to medium-sized high street businesses that do not qualify for business rates relief.

**James Murray:**

In order to repair the public finances and help raise the revenue required to support public services, the Government has taken the difficult decision to increase employer National Insurance contributions (NICs).

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

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

## WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

### ■ Disadvantaged

**Laurence Turner:**

[\[22208\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what recent progress she has made on enactment of the socio-economic duty under Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The Government is committed to commencing the socio-economic duty in the Equality Act 2010. The duty will require public bodies, when making strategic decisions, to consider actively how their decisions might help to reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage.

We will work closely with public authorities and civil society in order to ensure effective implementation of the duty and will provide an update on our work in due course.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### ■ Children: Maintenance

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[21456\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to help tackle unpaid child maintenance.

**Andrew Western:**

The Child Maintenance Service (CMS) is committed to ensuring separated parents support their children financially, taking robust enforcement action against those who do not.

The CMS has a relatively low percentage of unpaid maintenance. Only 8% of the total maintenance due to be paid since the start of the CMS remains to be collected through the Collect & Pay service.

The CMS has been improving its service to allow Direct Pay arrangements to quickly move to Collect and Pay when the Paying Parent is not paying or when Direct Pay is no longer appropriate.

The CMS has a range of strong enforcement powers that can be used against those who consistently refuse to meet their obligations to provide financial support to their children including deducting directly from earnings, bank accounts and forcing the sale of a property.

The Department plans to streamline the enforcement process further by removing the requirement to obtain a court issued liability order and instead allow the Secretary of State to issue an administrative liability order. Introducing this simpler administrative process will enable the CMS to take faster action against those paying parents who actively avoid their responsibilities.

### ■ Department for Work and Pensions: Political Impartiality

**Mr Richard Holden:**

[\[21056\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Pursuant to the answer of 25 November 2024 to Question 15237 on Civil Servants: Political impartiality, whether there has been a disciplinary investigation into party political campaigning by officials in her Department during the Rochdale by-election in February and March 2024.

**Andrew Western:**

The information you have requested is not on a central system. Gathering this information would require input from team leaders and will incur disproportionate costs.

### ■ Homelessness: Children

**Danny Beales:**

[\[21927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether the child poverty strategy will include measures to tackle child homelessness.

**Alison McGovern:**

Delivering our manifesto commitment to tackle child poverty is an urgent priority for this Government, and the Ministerial Taskforce is working to publish the Child Poverty Strategy in Spring 2025.

The Taskforce's publication of 23 October 'Tackling Child Poverty: Developing our Strategy' sets out how we are developing the Strategy, exploring all available levers across Government to deliver an enduring reduction in child poverty this parliament. This is part of a 10-year strategy for lasting change which will be published in the Spring.

The Strategy will look at levers across four key themes of increasing incomes, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience; and better local support especially in the early years. This will build on the reform plans underway across government and work underway in Devolved Governments.

The Taskforce will hear directly from experts on each of the Strategy's themes including children and families living in poverty and work with leading organisations, charities, and campaigners. In December, the Taskforce met with external experts

from the housing sector to discuss the critical role of housing in tackling child poverty. The Ministerial session was the first in a series of deep dives into specific policy areas; the focus of this session was on parental employment, childcare and housing.

## ■ Local Housing Allowance: Rents

**Ben Maguire:** [\[21947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will take steps to ensure that Local Housing Allowance rates reflect rents in (a) rural and (b) urban areas.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

In April 2024, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) increased to the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of local market rents for one year at a cost of £7bn over 5 years.

LHA rates are set within Broad Rental Market Areas (BRMAs), which are determined by rent officers at the Valuation Office Agency for England, Rent Officers Wales and Rent Services Scotland. There are 192 BRMAs across Great Britain.

A BRMA is an area within which a person could reasonably be expected to live with regard to facilities and services for the purposes of health, education, recreation, banking and shopping. The BRMA criteria takes account of travel to and from those services by both public and private transport in both rural and urban areas.

Rent Officers gather a representative sample of private rental data across the BRMA of all property types and property sizes from a range of sources. They also survey across the full year to capture current market conditions. This includes collecting a representative sample from all the local authority areas within a BRMA, including larger urban centres and more sparsely populated rural areas where relevant.

## ■ Pension Credit: Winter Fuel Payment

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[21083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an estimate of the number of additional Pension Credit claims received since the announcement on changing the eligibility of the Winter Fuel Payment; and what proportion of these claims have been successful.

**Emma Reynolds:**

We are unable to advise how many claims for Pension Credit have been made and then awarded since 29 July 2024. This is because the Department currently reports clearance times by the week the claim was cleared, rather than the week the claim was made. As such this information is not currently available.

However, statistics published on 28 November, show that 42,500 Pension Credit Claims were awarded between 29 July and 11 November [Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - GOV.UK](#).

**■ Pensions: Disclosure of Information****Mr Angus MacDonald:**[\[21962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to increase transparency in the (a) management and (b) adjustment of pension schemes.

**Emma Reynolds:**

Trustees have a fiduciary duty to act in the best interests of the scheme membership, and are required by law to provide members with information about how the scheme has been managed. This includes legal duties about transparency and disclosure of information. There are also clear legal requirements around a trustee or sponsoring employer's ability to make changes to a pension scheme, including requirements that members must be properly consulted before a change is made if it will affect their benefit rights.

The Pensions Regulator has powers to investigate and take the necessary action if there is evidence these obligations are not being met.

The Pensions Regulator's 2024 revised General Code of Practice sets out detailed requirements which all occupational pension schemes are expected to follow in order to maintain an effective system of governance.

**■ Social Security Benefits: Cost of Living****John Milne:**[\[21922\]](#)

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

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

No assessment has been made. The Social Security Administration Act 1992 requires the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to review benefit and State Pension rates each year to see if they have retained their value in relation to the general level of prices or earnings. Where the relevant benefit or State Pension rates have not retained their value, legislation provides that the Secretary of State is required to, or in some instances may, up-rate their value.

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

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



**■ State Retirement Pensions: Australia and Canada**

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[21551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people with a frozen overseas state pension live in (a) Canada and (b) Australia.

**Emma Reynolds:**

Data on State Pension caseloads that are not uprated overseas are published and this can be found on [Stat-Xplore](#). Users can log in or access Stat-Xplore as a guest user and, if needed, can access [guidance](#) on how to extract the information required.

As of the quarter ending May 2024, the number of individuals with an overseas state pension that live in a) Canada are 110,860 and b) Australia are 203,699.

**■ State Retirement Pensions: British Nationals Abroad**

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[21569\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many pensioners have returned to the UK from countries where their state pension has been frozen in each of the last five years.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Department does not hold the information to be able to answer this question.

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[21570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has taken steps to notify British pensioners retiring abroad that their pension may be frozen.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The UK's policy on the up-rating of the UK State Pension for recipients living overseas is a longstanding one. The UK state pension is payable worldwide without regard to nationality and is uprated abroad where we have a legal requirement to do so.

Up-rating is based on levels of earnings growth and price inflation in the UK which has no direct relevance where the pensioner is resident overseas.

Over many years, priority is given to those living in the United Kingdom when drawing up expenditure plans for additional pensioner benefits.

Information on what will happen when people emigrate to certain countries is available on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) and this includes advice on the impact on State pension for people who do. Further advice can be obtained by calling the International Pension Centre on 0191 218 777 or the Pension Service on 0800 731 7898.

**Jim Shannon:** [\[21607\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when the most recent review of the frozen pensions policy was.

**Emma Reynolds:**

There has been no recent review of the policy.

The policy on the uprating of UK State Pensions paid overseas is a longstanding one of successive Governments, which has been in place for over 70 years.

UK State Pensions are payable worldwide, without regard to nationality, and are only uprated abroad where there is a legal requirement to do so, for example in countries with which we have a reciprocal agreement that provides for up-rating.

Up-rating is based on levels of earnings growth and price inflation in the UK which has no direct relevance where the pensioner is resident overseas.

Over many years, priority is given to those living in the United Kingdom when drawing up expenditure plans for additional pensioner benefits.

**■ State Retirement Pensions: Payments****Rachel Gilmour:**[\[22214\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of paying the State Pension in monthly instalments.

**Emma Reynolds:**

State Pension payments are usually paid four weekly in arrears. People have the option to be paid weekly or in some circumstances bi-weekly. There are no plans to introduce alternative payment arrangements.

**■ State Retirement Pensions: Women****Mr Angus MacDonald:**[\[21963\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has had discussions with the Leader of the House on scheduling a parliamentary debate on compensation for women affected by changes to the state pension age.

**Emma Reynolds:**

Sir John Hayes MP (Conservative, South Holland and The Deepings) has secured a Westminster Hall general debate on the topic of 'Compensation for women affected by changes to the State Pension age' on Wednesday 15 January 2024.

## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

#### ■ **Use of sanctions to tackle irregular migration and organised immigration crime**

**Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy):** [\[HCWS357\]](#)

Today I am updating the House on my plans to use sanctions to tackle irregular migration and organised immigration crime.

People smuggling is a challenge to global security. Criminal networks are making huge profits exploiting vulnerable people by facilitating irregular migratory movements, including dangerous sea crossings across Europe.

As Foreign Secretary, I will ensure the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office uses every tool at its disposal to tackle the challenges posed by irregular migration as part of the Government's wider effort to secure our borders.

I am therefore pleased to inform the House that the FCDO will develop legislation for a new sanctions regime targeting irregular migration and organised immigration crime. This shows further UK innovation in mobilising sanctions to tackle evolving threats that matter at home and abroad. The sanctions regime will allow the Government to take further robust action against the people smuggling gangs and their enablers.

The FCDO is also working to deliver more returns arrangements, and more projects and programmes to tackle irregular migration at source.

In this way, the FCDO will use the widest possible toolkit to smash the people smuggling gangs and tackle the challenges posed by irregular migration to deliver the Government's Plan for Change.

### NORTHERN IRELAND

#### ■ **Commissioning of the Independent Review of the Windsor Framework**

**Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Hilary Benn):** [\[HCWS358\]](#)

On 10 December, the Northern Ireland Assembly held a vote on the continued application of Articles 5 -10 of the Windsor Framework. On 12 December, the Speaker of the Assembly formally wrote to me confirming that the motion passed with a majority of the elected members voting in favour, but not with cross-community support.

As set out in Schedule 6A of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, this obliges me to commission an Independent Review into the functioning of the Framework, in accordance with paragraphs 7 - 9 of the Unilateral Declaration of October 2019. I have today commissioned the Right Honourable Lord Murphy of Torfaen to conduct this Review.

Lord Murphy previously served in Government as Minister of State for Northern Ireland, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Secretary of State for Wales. In his many years of public service, he has shown a deep understanding of the bonds between the nations of the United Kingdom, and an appreciation of the operation of all three strands of the Good Friday Agreement to which the Government is committed. This experience and knowledge, and the high regard in which he is held across communities in Northern Ireland, will be valuable as he undertakes the Review.

Lord Murphy will work to provide me with a report of the Review's conclusions, no later than six months from today, on the functioning of the Windsor Framework and its implications for social, economic and political life in Northern Ireland, and on the UK Internal Market, including any recommendations. I have today placed a copy of the Review's Terms of Reference in the Library of the House.

Following receipt of the Review's report, I shall lay a copy of it before Parliament and respond to its recommendations in accordance with my duties under the law.