



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 13 January 2025 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:31 P.M., 13 January 2025). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

CONTENTS

ANSWERS	10	CABINET OFFICE	17
ATTORNEY GENERAL	10	■ Cabinet Office: Christmas	17
■ Agriculture: Crime	10	■ Cabinet Office: Departmental Responsibilities	17
■ Armed Forces: Ukraine	10	■ Cabinet Office: Staff	19
BUSINESS AND TRADE	11	■ Civil Service: Equality	19
■ Car Washes: Codes of Practice	11	■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Ministers' Private Offices	20
■ Digital Markets Unit	11	■ Departmental Coordination	21
■ Employment: Social Class	11	■ Departmental Responsibilities	22
■ Fireworks: Animal Welfare	12	■ Diego Garcia	22
■ Glass: Import Duties	12	■ Foreign Investment In UK: National Security	22
■ Industrial Strategy Council: Public Appointments	12	■ Political Parties: Finance	23
■ Living Wage	13	■ Public Sector: Procurement	23
■ Local Government: Conditions of Employment	13	■ Public Sector: Unemployment	23
■ Overseas Trade: Indonesia	13	■ Trade Unions: Facilities	24
■ Overseas Trade: Japan	14	CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	24
■ Overseas Trade: Namibia	14	■ BBC: Scotland	24
■ Overseas Trade: Norway	15	■ Business: Disability	25
■ Paternity Leave	15	■ Charities Act 2011	25
■ Trade Agreements: Australasia	16	■ Cricket: Afghanistan	25
■ Trade Agreements: Northern Ireland	16	■ Culture and Sports: Loans	26
		■ Listed Buildings: Carbon Emissions	26

■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme	26	■ DM Gosport	40
■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme: Essex	27	■ Future Combat Air System	41
■ Loneliness: Health Services	27	■ HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark	41
■ Loneliness: Research	28	■ Military Aircraft: Procurement	42
■ Loneliness: Social Services	29	■ Nuclear Submarines: Decommissioning	42
■ Newspaper Press: Foreign Investment in UK	29	■ RFA Argus: Amphibious Vehicles	42
■ Prize Money: Research	30	■ Russia: Shipping	43
■ Radio: Rural Areas	30	■ Strategic Defence Review: Department of Health and Social Care	43
■ Religious Buildings: Epping Forest	30	■ Ukraine: Humanitarian Aid	44
■ Rugby: Clubs	31	■ War Widow(er)s Recognition Payment	44
■ Rugby: Finance	31	EDUCATION	45
■ Rugby: Loans	32	■ Apprentices: Boys	45
■ Youth Services	32	■ Children's Social Care Independent Review	45
DEFENCE	33	■ Educational Psychology: Surrey Heath	46
■ Ammunition: Procurement	33	■ Institutes of Technology	47
■ Arctic: Defence	33	■ Internet: Education	48
■ Armed Forces Covenant: Northern Ireland	34	■ Qualifications	49
■ Armed Forces: Blood Cancer	35	■ Relationships and Sex Education	49
■ Armed Forces: Joint Exercises	35	■ Schools: Asylum	50
■ Armed Forces: Labour Turnover	35	■ Schools: Weather	51
■ Armed Forces: Private Education	36	■ Special Educational Needs	52
■ Armed Forces: Rehabilitation	37	■ Special Educational Needs: Stoke-on-Trent South	52
■ Armed Forces: Sick Leave	38	■ Special Educational Needs: Surrey	54
■ Armed Forces: Training	38	■ STEM Subjects: Education	54
■ Defence: Expenditure	39	■ Students: Ukraine	56
■ Defence: Procurement	39	■ Teachers: Academies	56
■ Defence: Reviews	39		
■ Defence: Vocational Guidance	40		

■ Teachers: Labour Turnover and Recruitment	57	■ Solar Power: Housing	67
■ Teachers: Pay	58	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	68
■ Universities: Boys	59	■ Agricultural Machinery: Small Businesses	68
■ Young People: Arts	60	■ Agriculture: Grants	68
ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	60	■ Agriculture: Subsidies	69
■ Advanced Nuclear Fund	60	■ Avian Influenza : Disease Control	69
■ Aquind: Electricity Interconnectors	60	■ Avian Influenza and Notifiable Diseases	70
■ Batteries: Lithium	61	■ Cephalopods and Shellfish: Animal Welfare	71
■ Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency and Energy Company Obligation	61	■ Dogs: Animal Breeding	71
■ Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency and Energy Company Obligation: Wales	61	■ Electric Vehicles: Batteries	72
■ Community Energy: Employment	62	■ Electrical Goods: Waste Disposal	72
■ Drax Power Station: Subsidies	62	■ Environment Agency: Motor Vehicles	73
■ Energy Supply	63	■ Farmers: Income	74
■ Great British Energy	63	■ Farming Investment Fund	74
■ Hydebank Wood Prison: Solar Power	63	■ Food: Packaging	75
■ Liquefied Natural Gas: USA	64	■ Food: Public Sector	75
■ Macquarie Infrastructure Group	64	■ Game: Birds	75
■ National Grid: Runcorn and Helsby	65	■ Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023	76
■ Offshore Industry: Environment Protection	65	■ National Landscapes: Finance	76
■ Oil: Pollution	65	■ Nature Conservation	76
■ Renewable Energy	66	■ Wetlands: Conservation	77
■ Rented Housing: Energy Performance Certificates	67	■ Zoos: Safety	77
■ Smart Data Communications Company: Energy	67	FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE	78
		■ Afghanistan: Women	78
		■ African Union	78
		■ Alaa Abd El-Fattah	78
		■ Alaa Abd el-Fattah	79

■ AUKUS	79	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	90
■ Azerbaijan: Airlines	80	■ Addictions: Stoke-on-Trent South	90
■ BBC World Service: Foreign Relations	80	■ Alcoholic Drinks and Drugs: Stoke on Trent	91
■ Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement	81	■ Alcoholic Drinks: Misuse	92
■ Brazil: G20	81	■ Alcoholism: Rehabilitation	92
■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty	81	■ Ambulance Services: Stoke-on-Trent South	93
■ China: Falun Gong	82	■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Health Services	94
■ China: Overseas Companies	82	■ Blood Cancer: Databases	95
■ Climate Change: Compensation	82	■ Brain Cancer: Health Services	95
■ Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting	83	■ Brain: Injuries	96
■ Development Aid: Nutrition	83	■ Brain: Tumours	97
■ Development Aid: Reviews	84	■ Breast Cancer: Genetics	98
■ Ethiopia: Human Rights	84	■ Cancer: Drugs	98
■ Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance: Finance	85	■ Cancer: Health Services	99
■ Gaza: Armed Conflict	85	■ Cannabis: Medical Treatments	100
■ Gaza: Conflict Resolution	85	■ Clinical Trials: Young People	101
■ Gaza: Hostage Taking	86	■ Coeliac Disease: Medical Treatments	102
■ Hong Kong: Demonstrations	86	■ Community Diagnostic Centres: Essex and Suffolk	102
■ Hussam Abu Safiya	87	■ Community Diagnostic Centres: Maidenhead	103
■ Israel: Visits Abroad	87	■ Coronavirus: Vaccination	104
■ Mozambique: Politics and Government	87	■ Dental Services: Contracts	104
■ Religious Freedom	88	■ Electronic Cigarettes: Smuggling	104
■ Sri Lanka: Land Mines	88	■ Fertility	105
■ Sudan: Humanitarian Aid	88	■ Food: Labelling	105
■ Sustainable Development	89	■ Gender Dysphoria: Hormone Treatments	106
■ Syria: Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham	89	■ Givinostat: Greater Manchester	106
■ Syria: Women	89		
■ United Nations: Older People	90		

■ Gonorrhoea: Health Services	107	■ Respiratory Diseases: Screening	120
■ Health Services: Runcorn and Helsby	107	■ Sepsis	121
■ Health Services: Rural Areas	108	■ Social Services: Reform	121
■ Health Services: Standards	109	■ Surgery: Reform	122
■ Health: Disadvantaged	109	■ Viral Diseases: Disease Control	123
■ Health: Knowsley	110	HOME OFFICE	123
■ Health: Men	110	■ Agriculture: Crime	123
■ Integrated Care Boards	111	■ Antisocial Behaviour: Roads	124
■ Junior Doctors: Physician Associates	111	■ Aviation: Immigration Controls	124
■ Lung Cancer: Diagnosis	112	■ Defending Democracy Taskforce	125
■ Maternity Services: Nurses	112	■ Deportation	125
■ Medical Equipment: Energy	112	■ Domestic Abuse and Sexual Offences: Victim Support Schemes	126
■ Medical Equipment: Shortages	113	■ Domestic Abuse: Young People	127
■ Mental Health: Children and Young People	113	■ Driving under Influence: Arrests	127
■ Multiple Sclerosis: Health Services	113	■ Fire and Rescue Services: Health Hazards	127
■ NHS Shared Business Services	114	■ Fire and Rescue Services: Health Services	127
■ NHS Trusts: Standards	115	■ Health Professions: Engineering	128
■ NHS: Digital Technology	115	■ Human Trafficking	128
■ NHS: Drugs	115	■ Immigration: EU Nationals	128
■ NHS: Public Consultation	116	■ Migrant Workers: Civil Servants	129
■ Oxygen: Medical Treatments	116	■ Motor Vehicles: Crime	129
■ Pain: Health Services	117	■ Offences against Children	130
■ Pancreatic Cancer: Stoke on Trent	118	■ Offences against Children: Artificial Intelligence	130
■ Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy: Somerset	118	■ Police	130
■ Pharmacy: Finance	119		
■ Prostate Cancer: Screening	119		
■ Respiratory Diseases: Disease Control	120		

■ Police National Computer	131	■ Housing: Police	143
■ Police: Greater London	131	■ Local Government	143
■ Police: Lancashire	131	■ Local Government: Devolution	144
■ Police: Pensions	132	■ Local Government: Elections	144
■ Polygamy: Databases	132	■ Local Government: Staff	144
■ Retail Trade: Crime	132	■ Mayors: Elections	145
■ Serious Crime Prevention Orders	133	■ Members: Correspondence	145
■ Slavery: Care Workers	134	■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Correspondence	146
■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel	134	■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Freedom of Information	146
■ Visas: Israel	135	■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Staff	146
HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION	135	■ Planning Authorities	147
■ Parliamentary Estate: Cosmetics and Soaps	135	■ Planning Permission	148
HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	136	■ Planning: Health Services	148
■ Affordable Housing: Construction	136	■ Private Rented Housing	148
■ Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission	137	■ Public Sector: Lincolnshire	149
■ Community Development	137	■ Regeneration: Stoke-on-Trent South	150
■ Development Plans	137	■ Regional Planning and Development: Thames Estuary	150
■ Devolution: Surrey	138	■ Renters' Rights Bill	151
■ Disabled Facilities Grants: Staffordshire	138	■ Social Rented Housing: Waiting Lists	151
■ Domestic Abuse: Victim Support Schemes	140	■ Temporary Accommodation: Stoke-on-Trent South	151
■ Empty Property	140	■ Unitary Councils	152
■ Freehold: Fees and Charges	141	■ Vagrancy Act 1824	153
■ Garden Communities	141	■ Voting Rights: Foreign Nationals	153
■ Homelessness: Stoke-on-Trent South	141		
■ Housing: Aldershot	142		
■ Housing: Construction	142		

JUSTICE	153	■ Artificial Intelligence: Intellectual Property	168
■ Courts and Legal Aid Scheme	153	■ Broadband: Surrey Heath	169
■ Criminal Proceedings	154	■ Computers and Electronic Equipment: Vacancies	169
■ Crown Prosecution Service	155	■ Digital Technology: Internet	169
■ Domestic Abuse: Reoffenders	155	■ Digital Technology: Older People and Rural Areas	170
■ Domestic Abuse: Victim Support Schemes	156	■ Digital Technology: Small Businesses	170
■ Juries: Finance	157	■ Hate Crime: Social Media	171
■ McClure Solicitors: Insolvency	157	■ Internet: Regulation	171
■ Offences against Children: Civil Proceedings	158	■ Mobile Phones: Westmorland and Lonsdale	171
■ Parole: Homicide	158	■ Ophthalmology: Research	172
■ Peers: Convictions	158	■ Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Act 2022	174
■ Prisoners' Release	159	■ Project Gigabit: Berkshire	175
■ Prisons: Crimes of Violence	159	■ Public Sector: Databases	175
■ Prisons: Literacy	160	■ Research: Migrant Workers	175
■ Probate	162	■ Social Media: Abuse and Harassment	176
■ Rape: Crown Court	162	■ Telecommunications: Rural Areas	176
■ Reoffenders	163	■ Voice Over Internet Protocol: Rural Areas	177
■ Reoffenders: Prisons	163	■ Voice over Internet Protocol: Westmorland and Lonsdale	177
■ Shoplifting: Reoffenders	163	SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION	178
NORTHERN IRELAND	164	■ Candidates: Expenditure	178
■ Chemicals: Northern Ireland	164	■ Electoral Register	178
■ Chemicals: Regulation	165	■ Labour Together: Expenditure	179
■ Higher Education: Londonderry	165	TRANSPORT	179
■ Intertrade UK: Northern Ireland	165	■ Airports: Carbon Emissions	179
■ Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007	166		
■ Spirit Aerosystems: Northern Ireland	166		
SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY	168		
■ Artificial Intelligence and Automation: Employment	168		

■ Automatic Number Plate Recognition: Pedestrian Areas	180	■ River Tyne: Bridges	192
■ Avanti West Coast	180	■ Shipping: Registration	192
■ Avanti West Coast: Newcastle-under-Lyme	180	■ South West Main Line: Dawlish	192
■ Boats: Environment Protection	181	■ South Western Railway: Nationalisation	192
■ Boats: Waste Disposal	181	■ Taxis: Working Conditions	193
■ Bus Service Operators Grant: Reform	181	TREASURY	193
■ Bus Services: Concessions	182	■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax	193
■ Bus Services: Rural Areas	182	■ Business Rates: Tax Allowances	194
■ Buses: Electric Vehicles	183	■ Business: Government Assistance	194
■ Buses: Fares	183	■ Cash Dispensing: Liverpool Walton	195
■ Buses: Registration	183	■ Charities: Employers' Contributions	196
■ Cars: Accidents	185	■ Choirs: Tax Allowances	196
■ Cycling and Walking: Finance	185	■ Construction: Inheritance Tax	196
■ Dangerous Driving: Romford	185	■ Crown Estates: Wales	197
■ Electric Bicycles and Electric Scooters: Regulation	186	■ Cryptocurrencies: Capital Gains Tax	198
■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points	186	■ Defibrillators: VAT	198
■ Great Western Railway	187	■ Development Aid	198
■ Large Goods Vehicles: Concrete	187	■ Disposable Income: Taxation	199
■ M1: Speed Limits	187	■ Economic Situation	199
■ Motor Insurance	187	■ EU Budget: Contributions	199
■ Motorcycles: Licensing	188	■ Food Banks	200
■ Motorways: Repairs and Maintenance	189	■ Fuels: Excise Duties	200
■ MV Ruby: Ammonium Nitrate	189	■ Hospices: Northern Ireland	201
■ MV Ruby: Great Yarmouth	190	■ Import Duties: USA	202
■ Railways and Roads: Chester South and Eddisbury	190	■ Interest Rates: Low Incomes	202
■ Railways: Rural Areas	191	■ Metals: Carbon Emissions	202
■ Railways: Standards	191	■ Military Bases: Diego Garcia	203
		■ Ministers: Official Cars	203

■ Motor Vehicles: Excise Duties	203	■ Social Security Benefits:	
■ Off-payroll Working: Tax Yields	204	Disability	214
■ Private Education: VAT	204	■ State Retirement Pensions:	
■ Public Expenditure	205	British Nationals Abroad	214
■ Public Sector Debt	205	■ State Retirement Pensions:	
■ Small Businesses: Business Rates	206	Women	214
■ Tax Avoidance	207	■ Winter Fuel Payment: Poverty	215
WOMEN AND EQUALITIES	207	■ Young People: Education and Employment	215
■ Disability and Ethnic Groups: Equality	207	WRITTEN STATEMENTS	217
■ Ethnic Groups: Equality	208	BUSINESS AND TRADE	217
■ Gender	208	■ Putting fans first: consultation on the resale of live events tickets and call for evidence on pricing practices	217
■ Hearing Impairment: Women	208	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	218
■ Political Parties: Discrimination	209	■ Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant Relocation DCO Extension	218
■ Unpaid Work: Discrimination	209	SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY	219
WORK AND PENSIONS	210	■ Publication of the AI Opportunities Action Plan and the Government Response	219
■ Child Poverty Taskforce: Conferences	210	TREASURY	220
■ Children: Maintenance	210	■ 2025 UK-China economic and financial dialogue	220
■ Employment: Disability	211		
■ Housing Benefit	212		
■ Pension Credit	212		
■ Pensions	213		
■ Pensions: Advisory Services	213		

Notes:

Questions marked thus **[R]** indicate that a relevant interest has been declared.

Questions with identification numbers of **900000 or greater** indicate that the question was originally tabled as an oral question and has since been unstarred.

ANSWERS

ATTORNEY GENERAL

■ Agriculture: Crime

Josh Fenton-Glynn:

[\[21535\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, how many agricultural crime offences in Calderdale District resulted in suspects being (a) charged, (b) convicted and (c) not convicted in each year since 2010.

Lucy Rigby:

The Government recognises the impact that crimes of theft have on all our communities, whether rural or urban, and we are committed to tackling the problem.

There is no specific legal definition of agricultural crime and therefore data on it cannot be collated. However, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) holds data on the number of prosecutions where the principal offence category was theft and handling stolen goods.

It is important to note that CPS principal offence category data is only extracted from the Case Management Information System once the prosecution case has been finalised, this means that the following offence data only relates to completed prosecutions and not any ongoing prosecutions.

From 2010 to date, the CPS has prosecuted 57,641 cases with a theft and handling stolen goods principal offence category originating from the West Yorkshire police force area. Of these, 52,286 resulted in a conviction and only 5,355 resulted in an acquittal.

■ Armed Forces: Ukraine

Sir Julian Lewis:

[\[22244\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, what the Government's policy is on the potential prosecution of UK nationals returning to the UK after serving as volunteer fighters in the Ukrainian armed forces if they hold (a) both Ukrainian and UK citizenship, (b) sole UK citizenship but born to Ukrainian parents and (c) sole UK citizenship without Ukrainian antecedents; and whether official guidance for volunteers returning to the UK is publicly available.

Lucy Rigby:

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) travel advice to Ukraine states: 'If you travel to Ukraine to fight, or to assist others engaged in the war, your activities may amount to offences under UK legislation. You could be prosecuted on your return to the UK'. Their full advice is available here: [Ukraine travel advice - GOV.UK](#).

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), which acts independently of police and government, will consider any information that is referred by the police and any

decision to prosecute will be considered on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors.

To date, the CPS has not prosecuted any cases involving UK-linked foreign fighters in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Car Washes: Codes of Practice

Stuart Anderson:

[\[22352\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make the Responsible Car Wash Scheme's Code of Practice mandatory.

Justin Madders:

The Department of Business and Trade does not currently have any plans to make the Responsible Car Wash Scheme's Code of Practice mandatory.

I also refer the member for South Shropshire to the answer I provided to UIN 21371 on 9 January for further information.

■ Digital Markets Unit

Jo Platt:

[\[22068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the Digital Markets Unit can make effective market interventions.

Justin Madders:

On 1 January the pro-competition regime for digital markets entered into force. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) will operate the regime, as the UK's principal independent competition regulator.

The Government has designed and implemented the regime, which provides the CMA with powers to make effective interventions. These include powers to investigate and to impose remedies that are specifically designed for the markets and firms involved, as well as requirements to carry out in-depth investigations and consult relevant stakeholders before intervening. This tailored, participative and evidence-based approach will ensure that interventions are proportionate and effective.

■ Employment: Social Class

Kirsty Blackman:

[\[22269\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of mandating socioeconomic background reporting for all employers with over 250 employees.

Justin Madders:

The Department has not undertaken any such assessment. Companies are already required to disclose employee matters and can choose to include socioeconomic aspects where relevant to their business. For example, all large companies in the UK must include information on employees as part of their Annual Report's Section 172(1) Statement. This should detail how employees are consulted, and their views considered, in decision making, ensuring employees of all backgrounds feel involved in how the company is run. It is a matter of good practice to collect data on employee background that the company can choose to communicate its workforce inclusivity.

■ Fireworks: Animal Welfare

Dr Allison Gardner: [\[22848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of further restricting the (a) use and (b) sale of fireworks on animal welfare and wildlife.

Justin Madders:

Most people use fireworks in a responsible, safe, and appropriate manner and there are laws in place to address situations where fireworks are misused. The current regulatory framework is designed to support people to enjoy fireworks whilst lowering the risk of dangers and disruption to people, pets, and property.

No assessment has been made of the potential impact of further restricting a) use and b) sale of fireworks on animal welfare and wildlife. To inform any future decisions the Government intends to engage with businesses, consumer groups and charities to gather evidence on the issues and impacts of fireworks.

■ Glass: Import Duties

Sarah Champion: [\[21312\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of reduced glass import tariffs on UK glass manufacturers.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The Department for Business and Trade recently conducted an assessment to determine whether the current tariff rate for various glass products was appropriate. Having considered the predominance of imports from the EU or from countries with whom we have an FTA, and further analysis of specific imports from non-FTA partners, the evidence does not suggest that tariff liberalisation is materially affecting the interests of the sector, or the competitiveness of businesses.

■ Industrial Strategy Council: Public Appointments

Andrew Griffith: [\[22723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 8 January 2025 to Question 21472 on Industrial Strategy Council: Public Appointments, if

he will provide details of the number of people that were considered for appointment to the Industrial Strategy Council.

Sarah Jones:

Members of the Industrial Strategy Advisory Council were selected following the Cabinet Office Guidance on Direct Ministerial Appointments. As per this guidance, Ministers and departmental officials identified a wide range of potential candidates that fit the agreed criteria for the role, from a variety of backgrounds, representing business leaders, policy experts and trade union leaders.

■ **Living Wage**

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[22253\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 11832 on the Living Wage, if the Impact Assessment will provide an estimate of the number of national living wage earners who will become income tax payers from April 2025.

Justin Madders:

The Department produces National Minimum Wage Impact Assessments in line with the requirements of the Better Regulation Framework. Previous Impact Assessments are available via [Legislation.gov.uk](https://legislation.gov.uk).

The Impact Assessment that will be published alongside the legislation for the 2025 rates will not provide an estimate of the number of National Living Wage earners who will become income tax payers from April 2025.

■ **Local Government: Conditions of Employment**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[22041\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment has been made of the cost of the Employment Rights reforms on local authorities, including the indirect cost through outsourced social care services.

Justin Madders:

On Monday 21 October, the Government published 24 Impact Assessments, providing a comprehensive analysis on the potential impact of the Employment Rights Bill.

This analysis includes consideration of impacts on the public sector, particularly where proposed legislative reforms are expected to affect local authorities. We will engage closely with local authorities as policy develops.

■ **Overseas Trade: Indonesia**

Adam Jogee:

[\[21789\]](#)

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 Indonesia.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Indonesia is an emerging economic powerhouse where UK companies see significant opportunities, particularly in renewable energy, infrastructure, education and health. In November 2024 the Prime Minister and President Prabowo of Indonesia agreed to work towards a new Indonesia-UK Economic Growth Partnership to drive increased trade and investment.

The UK will also support Indonesia to deliver the reforms needed to join the OECD, which should address business environment issues to further increase trade and investment opportunities.

■ Overseas Trade: Japan

Adam Jodge: [\[21788\]](#)

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 Japan.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

We continue to discuss with Japan how to improve our bilateral trade, including through implementation and utilisation of the UK-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). For example, last year we secured Geographical Indication status protection for 76 additional British food and drink products in Japan.

At the G20 Summit last November, the UK and Japan Prime Ministers also announced a new ministerial level Economic 2+2 dialogue to advance bilateral trade and discuss geopolitical issues which are vital to economic growth in both countries.

■ Overseas Trade: Namibia

Adam Jodge: [\[21782\]](#)

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 Namibia.

Adam Jodge: [\[21783\]](#)

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 Botswana.

Adam Jodge: [\[21784\]](#)

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 Zimbabwe.

Adam Jodge: [\[21790\]](#)

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 Tanzania.

Adam Jodge: [\[21791\]](#)

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 Malawi.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The Department for Business and Trade, and UK Export Finance, has officials throughout our Embassy network in Africa to support businesses where there are commercial opportunities. Additionally, the Developing Countries Trading Scheme, which entered into force in June 2023, makes it simpler and more beneficial for African countries (including Tanzania and Malawi) to export goods to the UK. The UK-Southern African Customs Union and Mozambique (SACUM) and UK-Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) are development-focused free trade agreements that underpin UK goods trade with Botswana, Namibia (SACUM) and Zimbabwe (ESA).

Overseas Trade: Norway**Adam Jogee:**[\[21787\]](#)

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 Norway.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The United Kingdom is committed to our strong trading relationship with Norway. The Prime Minister signed a Joint Declaration with Norway on our strategic partnership in December 2024. This declaration reaffirms our commitment to working together and using existing structures under the UK-EEA/EFTA Free Trade Agreement to identify further opportunities to increase the volume and value of our trade.

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade recently met with his Norwegian counterpart, and officials held the third UK-EEA/EFTA Joint Committee trade meeting in December 2024 where they discussed how we can remove barriers and grow our trading relationship.

Paternity Leave**Jim Shannon:**[\[21986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on introducing more flexible paternity leave.

Justin Madders:

The Government is committed to ensuring that employed parents receive the best possible support to balance their work and family responsibilities.

The Employment Rights Bill will increase the flexibility of Paternity Leave. This Bill will make Paternity Leave available from 'day one' in a new job and enable it to be taken after Shared Parental Leave.

We will also review the parental leave system to ensure that it supports working families. Planning work is already underway across Government, including with the Department of Work and Pensions.

Mims Davies: [\[22948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what the role of the Fair Work Agency will be in helping to ensure businesses observe best practice in granting paternity leave.

Mims Davies: [\[22949\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what role the Fair Work Agency will play in ensuring businesses observe best practice when granting their employees maternity leave.

Justin Madders:

We are creating the Fair Work Agency to deliver a much-needed upgrade to enforcement of workers' rights.

The Fair Work Agency will work closely with the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), which already provides guidance for both employers and workers in these specific areas, to deliver appropriate support to the majority of businesses who want to comply with the law.

■ Trade Agreements: Australasia

Clive Jones: [\[21827\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, which parts of the (a) UK-Australia and (b) UK-New Zealand trade agreements will be monitored as part of the biennial monitoring reports on those treaties.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The Department is currently considering our approach to FTA monitoring, and we will provide an update on this in due course to align with the Trade Strategy.

Clive Jones: [\[21828\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, which groups his Department will consult for its biennial monitoring reports on the (a) UK-Australia and (b) UK-New Zealand free trade agreements.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The Department for Business and Trade engages with and recognises the need to understand a range of stakeholder perspectives in its aims to monitor Free Trade Agreements, including Australia and New Zealand.

■ Trade Agreements: Northern Ireland

Jim Allister: [\[22858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 19 November 2024 to Question 14407 on Trade Agreements, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the (a) Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and (b) Windsor Framework on the ability of Northern

Ireland companies to access inputs through that Agreement which allow cumulation in Northern Ireland within relevant Rules of Origin for onward sale.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

On Rules of Origin, CPTPP gives Northern Ireland companies the ability to cumulate materials from other CPTPP countries, in their exports to CPTPP countries, in the same way as any other part of the UK. Goods moving into Northern Ireland, including under CPTPP, are able to access UK tariffs preferences, subject to the 'at risk' criteria. The Windsor Framework does not affect exports from Northern Ireland, or Rules of Origin for exports.

CABINET OFFICE

■ Cabinet Office: Christmas

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21391\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Whether his Department has issued guidance to staff in the (a) Cabinet Office, (b) Office for Equalities and Opportunities and (b) Civil Service People Group on holding in-house Christmas parties.

Georgia Gould:

The position on parties and personal conduct has not changed since the previous administration.

The "Away days, staff days, and celebrations" policy covers any proprietary issues and the approvals required. Additionally, the standards of behaviour which all staff are expected to adhere to and their responsibilities both in and outside of the workplace are outlined in the Civil Service Code, and Cabinet Office "Personal conduct" and "Alcohol, drug misuse and smoking" policies. All internal policies are published on the Cabinet Office intranet and available to all staff.

■ Cabinet Office: Departmental Responsibilities

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21066\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to Qs8 and 17 of the oral evidence given by the Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet Office to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee on 4 December 2024, HC 463, if he will list each of the 40 distinct groups within the Cabinet Office.

Georgia Gould:

As of December 2024, there were 37 established business units within the Cabinet Office. This number will change following recent Machinery of Government changes.

CABINET OFFICE BUSINESS UNITS (AS AT 19 DEC 2024)

NO 10 AND DELIVERY GROUP

CABINET OFFICE BUSINESS UNITS (AS AT 19 DEC 2024)

Prime Minister's Office

Mission Delivery Unit

SECRETARIATS, SECURITY AND PARLIAMENT

National Security Secretariat

Economic and Domestic Secretariat

Borders

Propriety and Constitution Group

Government in Parliament

Joint Intelligence Organisation

Government Security Function

UK Security Vetting

European Relations Secretariat

GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS

Government Digital Service

Central Digital and Data Office

Government Communication Service

Government Commercial and Grants Function

Public Sector Fraud Authority

Infrastructure and Projects Authority

Office of Government Property

Government People Group

Government People Group - Government Recruitment Service

Public Sector Reform and Efficiency

CORPORATE SERVICES

CO Operating Officer Office

Office for Veterans' Affairs

CABINET OFFICE BUSINESS UNITS (AS AT 19 DEC 2024)

CO People and Places

CO Strategy, Finance, and Performance

CO HMT Commercial

CO Digital

CO Strategy Directorate

INQUIRY RESPONSE

Public Inquiry Response Unit

Infected Blood Inquiry - Response Team

OFFICE FOR EQUALITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Office for Equality and Opportunities

INDEPENDENT

Intelligence and Security Committee

Grenfell Inquiry

Infected Blood Inquiry

Covid Inquiry

Civil Service Commission

Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists

■ Cabinet Office: Staff

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21691\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many staff in his Department have undertaken two consecutive jobs without external competition since 3 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

The requested information is not centrally held, and complying with this request would incur a disproportionate cost to the department.

■ Civil Service: Equality

Alex Burghart:

[\[21351\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he plans to publish the civil service EDI dataset.

Georgia Gould:

We are considering the Civil Service Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Expenditure Review commissioned by the previous Government.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Ministers' Private Offices**Emily Thornberry:**[\[20173\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2024 to Question 12890 on Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Ministers' Private Offices, how much the Government Property Agency spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and its predecessor Departments between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024; and on what items.

Georgia Gould:

The Government Property Agency confirmed £230,462.01* excluding VAT was spent during the period 4th July 2022 to 4th July 2024 on new furniture and fittings plus other refurbishment (including moves) This is broken down as follows:

- New Furniture and Fittings - £215,030.73*
- Other Refurbishment of Ministerial Offices including moves - £15,431.28*

The full itemised list can be found below:

(a) new furniture and fittings

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

- Date Reference: 31/10/2023
- What: New office furniture (desks, chairs, tables) as a result of the move from 1 Victoria Street to 55 Whitehall and the creation of DESNZ.
- How Much: £141,781.00 ex VAT
- Date Reference: 31/10/2023
- What: Installation of Audio Visual (AV) Equipment
- How Much: £73,249.73 ex VAT

Please note: the costs above were incurred as part of existing refurbishment and move taking place for DESNZ, and were not costs incurred from additional requests from Ministers.

*Additionally: Additional Changes in 55WH after the handover of the building included the request to swap the Ministerial Office with the Private Office. This was requested on 20/11/2023 and required the use of pre-existing furniture which required portage, however, unfortunately the GPA has been unable to source the cost or exact details of what was ordered at this time by the deadline.

(b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices

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

- Date Reference: 26/10/23 to 03/11/23
- What: Relocation of Ministerial Team 1VS to 55WH
- How Much: £10,362.28 ex VAT
- Date Reference: 06/12/2023
- What: Floorbox changes to ministerial and private office rooms. Please note that we are unable to proportionately split this cost between the minister's room and the private offices.
- How much: £5,069 ex VAT

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

■ Departmental Coordination

Mike Wood:

[\[22308\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the policy paper entitled Plan for Change, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, what steps the Government is taking to prevent duplication of efforts across departments involved in delivering the Plan; and if the Government will publish departmental roles and responsibilities for each mission area.

Ellie Reeves:

Mission-led government is about breaking down silos between departments in the delivery of the Plan for Change. Each mission has a Secretary of State who takes responsibility for coordinating the activity of other relevant departments, including by chairing the mission board.

Mike Wood:

[\[22314\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the policy paper entitled Plan for Change, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, what guidance his Department has issued to ensure cross-departmental alignment.

Ellie Reeves:

Missions are a new way of doing government. The core aim of the missions is to break down silos between departments to achieve specific, long-term outcomes. The Prime Minister has established 5 designated mission boards which bring together Ministers from across government that drive tangible change for the public.

■ Departmental Responsibilities

Alex Burghart: [\[21348\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether his Department plans to issue Outcome Delivery Plans.

Georgia Gould:

The Government has published its Plan for Change, which sets out clear and ambitious milestones to reach over this Parliament from each of the Government's national missions. Detail on wider government commitments will continue to be provided by relevant departments.

Rupert Lowe: [\[21444\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a work experience scheme for Ministers relating to their Department's areas of responsibility.

Georgia Gould:

All ministers receive tailored inductions upon appointment to support them in their ministerial duties.

The Government does not have plans to introduce a work experience scheme for ministers in addition to the inductions already provided.

■ Diego Garcia

Mr Mark Francois: [\[22256\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 7 January 2025 to Question 20932 on Diego Garcia, what his planned timetable is to publish details of the Prime Minister's meetings between July and December 2024.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly on GOV.UK.

■ Foreign Investment In UK: National Security

Mike Wood: [\[22310\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many transactions were referred to his Department under the National Security and Investment Act 2021 have involved organisations with links to the Chinese (a) state and (b) Community Party since 5 July 2024; and how many and what proportion of these transactions were approved.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Government publishes an annual report on the National Security and Investment (NSI) Act, with information about the transactions that it has been notified about and those it subsequently called in for a full national security assessment.

The reports include the percentage of accepted notifications, call-in notices issued, final notifications issued and the number of withdrawals from a called in acquisition and final orders issued by origin of investment.

The NSI Annual Report 2023-24 was published on 10 September 2024. The period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 will be covered in the next annual report, which will be published later this year.

■ Political Parties: Finance

Alex Burghart:

[\[21342\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make it his policy that the Civil Service Commission should be informed of recent political donations from people appointed to the Civil Service by exception.

Georgia Gould:

The Civil Service Commission's prior approval is required for appointments by exception at SCS PB2 or above. Individual Civil Service departments and organisations have delegated authority to appoint by exception at grades below SCS PB2.

For appointments by exception delegated to departments, the department is responsible for both carrying out background checks on individuals who may be appointed, and addressing any potential propriety matters.

■ Public Sector: Procurement

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21384\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 16510 on Public Sector: Procurement, if he will exempt SMEs from the new National Procurement Policy Statement's requirements on (a) social value and (b) trade union recognition and access.

Georgia Gould:

The government will publish a new National Procurement Policy Statement shortly. The Procurement Act, due to come into force in February 2025, requires contracting authorities to have regard to the particular barriers facing SMEs, and to consider what can be done to overcome them.

■ Public Sector: Unemployment

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhési:

[\[21661\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what estimate he has made of the number of public sector workers of working age who have become economically inactive in each of the last 10 years.

Georgia Gould:

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

A response to the Hon. Gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 3 January is attached.

Attachments:

1. UKSA Letter [PQ21661 (1).pdf]

■ **Trade Unions: Facilities**

Nick Timothy: [\[21072\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what estimate he has made of the average cost, as a percentage of the total paybill, of trade union facility time in the (a) public sector and (b) private sector in the latest period for which data is available.

Georgia Gould:

Under the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017, relevant public sector authorities are required to publish certain information annually on facility time usage in their organisation.

The most recently available data, for 2022/23, is published on gov.uk. It provides data on the total cost of facility time for public sector organisations, including as a percentage of total pay.

The Cabinet Office does not hold information on the cost of facility time within the private sector. The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) has made impact assessments relating to the Employment Rights Bill, which have been [published on .gov.uk](#)

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ **BBC: Scotland**

Blair McDougall: [\[21731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will have discussions with the BBC on maintaining a sustainable production department in Scotland.

Stephanie Peacock:

The public service remit for television requires that public service broadcasters like the BBC make an appropriate range and amount of their programmes across the UK. This includes specific obligations to production in Scotland, where the BBC is required to make 8% of its network spend and network programme hours. The independent regulator Ofcom holds the BBC to account in meeting these obligations.

The Government is committed to working with the sector to ensure the right framework, conditions and support are in place for all broadcasters - including the BBC - to be more ambitious in growing our world-leading TV sector outside of London and the South East, and to commission content in every part of the country. Ministers and officials in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have regular discussions with the BBC, and during the upcoming Charter Review will consider the work of the BBC across the whole UK, including in Scotland.

■ Business: Disability

James Naish:

[\[21506\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will have discussions with representatives of (a) deaf and (b) disabled people's organisations on long-term funding for such organisations.

Stephanie Peacock:

On 17 October, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport publicly announced our ambition to reset the relationship between Government and civil society. We want to reset this relationship so that civil society can play a role as an equal partner alongside the Government in delivering a shared vision of national renewal.

As a first step, we have committed to developing a Civil Society Covenant in collaboration with civil society that will set out the terms of a new relationship between government and civil society. Over the autumn, DCMS ran an extensive engagement exercise to gather views on what the new relationship should look like as well as the enabling factors and barriers to achieving it.

We heard from hundreds of people representing the rich diversity of the civil society sector from across the country including disability and hearing loss organisations. We are now considering the responses to inform development of the final Covenant which we aim to publish in 2025.

■ Charities Act 2011

Ruth Jones:

[\[22351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to review the adequacy of the Charities Act 2011.

Stephanie Peacock:

The government has no plans to conduct a review of the adequacy of the Charities Act 2011.

DCMS regularly considers the charity regulatory landscape to ensure that charities are sufficiently transparent and accountable, and to ensure that the Charity Commission for England and Wales has appropriate oversight of the sector.

■ Cricket: Afghanistan

Tonia Antoniazzi:

[\[22344\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had discussions with the England and Wales Cricket Board on the England Cricket team's participation in the championship trophy match with Afghanistan.

Stephanie Peacock:

The UK Government condemns the appalling erosion of women and girls' rights in Afghanistan. Sport operates independently of government, and participation in the

ICC Champion's Trophy match is a matter for the England and Wales Cricket Board and the International Cricket Council.

My officials are in contact with the England and Wales Cricket Board on the wider issue of the Afghanistan women's cricket team. We welcome the fact that the ECB are making strong representations to the ICC on this issue and what support can be given.

■ Culture and Sports: Loans

Saqib Bhatti: [21407]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will take steps to ensure that Covid-19 loans to the (a) culture and (b) sports sectors are repaid in full.

Stephanie Peacock:

Yes.

■ Listed Buildings: Carbon Emissions

Stuart Andrew: [21291]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions she department has had with the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on the decarbonisation of listed buildings.

Chris Bryant:

I have not held any such discussions, but my officials discuss this and other related issues as part of ongoing engagement with their DESNZ and MHCLG counterparts. In addition, in July, Historic England, the UK government's statutory advisor on England's historic environment, published guidance to support the decarbonisation of historic buildings.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/new-advice-on-adapting-historic-buildings-for-energy-and-carbon-efficiency/>

■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

Chi Onwurah: [21601]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme on religious minority groups.

Chi Onwurah: [21602]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of building repair costs on inner-city congregations of listed places of worship.

Chi Onwurah:

[\[21603\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme on religious minority groups in the North East.

Chris Bryant:

The Department monitors the implementation and impact of the grant scheme through the regular reporting of the grant administrator. Since 2010, the grant scheme has returned over £350 million to listed places of worship across the UK. The scheme has supported both rural and city based places of worship, and places of worship of a range of denominations. As well as making awards to Christian places of worship, since August 2022, the Listed Places of Grant Scheme has awarded more than £3 million to 416 Non-Christian listed places of worship. This includes Buddhist, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and other denominations.

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[22369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has plans to extend the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme beyond the current deadline of 31 March 2025.

Chris Bryant:

We will announce the outcomes of the Business Planning process, including the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme soon.

■ **Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme: Essex**

Priti Patel:

[\[21600\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, who the recipients were of grants from the Listed Places of Worship Scheme in Essex since 2001; and how much each recipient received.

Chris Bryant:

Due to a change in the grant administrator, the Department only has such data from August 2022, since then, the Department has paid 351 grants to 135 individual listed places of worship in Essex to a total value of £1,129,393.

■ **Loneliness: Health Services**

Paul Davies:

[\[21900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department is taking steps to integrate loneliness prevention programmes into the healthcare system.

Paul Davies:

[\[21901\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will take steps to encourage employers to create workplace environments that reduce employee loneliness.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) leads on the cross-government tackling loneliness programme, with multiple departments contributing towards the delivery of this work. DCMS is working closely with DHSC and DWP to consider loneliness in future health and workplace policies. This includes adding new loneliness data to the [Public Health Outcomes Framework](#) in February 2025, which will enable health organisations and Local Authorities to compare local loneliness data with other health outcomes to inform their work. We know that chronic loneliness negatively impacts [physical health, mental health, employee productivity and wellbeing](#), with [those who are unemployed at increased risk of loneliness](#). Therefore, DWP Jobcentres carry out an important role in identifying people at risk of loneliness, directing people to tailored support such as social prescribing, volunteering opportunities, befriending schemes and other local community opportunities and helping them return, or prepare to return, to the labour market.

■ Loneliness: Research**Paul Davies:**[\[21904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department plans to provide funding for research on effective interventions to tackle loneliness across different demographics.

Paul Davies:[\[21905\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking assess the effectiveness of loneliness reduction initiatives; and whether she plans to take steps to amend her policies in the context of the findings of these assessments.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government is working to build the evidence base on loneliness including the demographic groups most affected and the effectiveness of interventions. It uses available evidence to keep policies under review.

For example, DCMS has recently published two new qualitative research reports, including [one](#) exploring how and why young disabled people experience loneliness and what could be done to reduce it. The research programme for the year 2024/25 includes engaging with existing research on the most effective ways to measure loneliness levels.

DCMS is working with external researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of the Know Your Neighbourhood Fund. The Fund aims to widen participation in volunteering and tackle loneliness. The evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the Fund in achieving these aims.

DCMS also seeks to support stakeholders and grassroots organisations to evaluate their work robustly by facilitating information sharing and learning via the Tackling Loneliness Hub, an online platform for professionals working to reduce loneliness.

■ Loneliness: Social Services

Paul Davies: [21899]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to help (a) reduce the stigma associated with and (b) encourage more people to seek help for loneliness.

Stephanie Peacock:

To reduce the stigma associated with loneliness and to encourage people to seek help, the government provides advice through the [Better Health: Every Mind Matters campaign's advice pages](#).

■ Newspaper Press: Foreign Investment in UK

Jack Rankin: [21928]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 20 December to Question 19589 on Newspaper Press: Foreign Investment in UK, what level of indirect investment by foreign states will trigger the issuing of a Foreign State Intervention Notice.

Jack Rankin: [21930]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 19590 on Newspaper Press: Foreign Investment in UK, whether the response to the consultation is contingent on free trade negotiations.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Consultation on The Enterprise Act 2002 (Mergers Involving Newspaper Enterprises and Foreign Powers) Regulations 2024 closed on 9 July 2024. Ministers recognise the high importance of this issue and are considering the responses carefully. Ministers take into account a wide range of issues and evidence when making a decision, and will publish the response in due course.

Jack Rankin: [21929]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 20 December to Question 19589 on Newspaper Press: Foreign Investment in UK, whether her Department has (a) considered and (b) taken legal advice on issuing Foreign State Intervention Notices in the last six months.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Secretary of State has a quasi-judicial role when considering foreign state ownership, influence and control in newspapers and news magazines, and as such we cannot comment further.

■ Prize Money: Research**Dr Scott Arthur:****[R] [21854]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, when she plans to publish the research her Department commissioned from London Economics on large scale commercial prize draws.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Department is still considering the findings of the independent research, which looked at the size and nature of the prize draw market, as well as possible gambling harm associated with these products. This research is informing our policy considerations, as whilst not regulated as a gambling product under the Gambling Act, we want people who participate in large scale commercial prize draws to be confident that proportionate protections are in place. We will update Parliament further in due course.

■ Radio: Rural Areas**Alicia Kearns:****[21682]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to support new FM licences for radio stations in (a) Rutland, (b) Mid-Wales and (c) other rural areas.

Stephanie Peacock:

The growth and development of digital radio and changes in listener behaviour have resulted in a clear shift away from analogue listening – digital listening now accounts for 74% of all radio listening (RAJAR Q3 2024). Although AM/FM platforms remain important for smaller commercial and community stations, significant numbers of listeners are migrating to digital platforms.

The licensing of AM/FM radio services is a matter for Ofcom, and in October Ofcom set out its current approach to licensing in a progress report on the rollout of small-scale DAB (SSDAB) technology. This report set out Ofcom's current view that SSDAB offers audiences a wider range of services and makes a more efficient use of spectrum than FM, and committed to at least two further rounds of SSDAB licensing before considering the possibility of any further analogue licensing in the future.

■ Religious Buildings: Epping Forest**Dr Neil Hudson:****[22368]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to protect Listed Places of Worship in Epping Forest.

Chris Bryant:

There is a range of funding available via DCMS and the Department's Arm's-Length Bodies that supports places of worship. These include Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme; the National Lottery Heritage Fund, who have committed to investing around £100m between 2023 and 2026 to support places of worship; the Churches Conservation Trust, which funds repairs and maintenance of over 350 churches in

the CCT portfolio; and Historic England's Heritage At Risk grants, funding £9 million worth of repairs to buildings on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register between April 2024 and March 2025.

Since 2022, 5 Listed Places of Worship Grants have been awarded in the constituency of Epping Forrester, with 4 grants totalling £3,041 to the Church of the Holy Cross and St Lawrence, and 1 grant of £1,847 awarded to the Church of Holy Innocents High Beach. Granular data is not available before 2022 due to a change in grant administrator.

DCMS Arms-Length Body the National Lottery Heritage Fund has also supported two listed places of worship in Epping Forest; awarding £29,000 to Grade II* St Mary's, Chigwell in 2003, and £17,000 to Grade II listed St Mary the Virgin, Theydon Bois in 1997.

■ Rugby: Clubs

James Naish:

[\[22105\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has received representations about the funding of small rugby union clubs.

Stephanie Peacock:

Rugby Union has a vital role to play in our national identity. My department continues to work with the RFU, representatives of Premiership clubs and Championship clubs, and the wider sport sector to support the ongoing sustainability of elite and community level rugby union.

We provide the majority of support for grassroots sport through our arm's length body, Sport England – which annually invests over £250 million of National Lottery and government money. Sport England has awarded the RFU £13,859,000 for the period 2022-27 as one of Sport England's long-term system partners to support grassroots rugby union.

■ Rugby: Finance

Ian Roome:

[\[22415\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what financial support her Department has given the Rugby Football Union to support the Women's Rugby World Cup in 2025.

Stephanie Peacock:

To date, DCMS has invested £20.65 million in the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup. This includes £12.13 million of funding towards the tournament's legacy and impact programme, 'Impact 25'. This is supporting women's and girls' clubs across the country as part of the Rugby Football Union's ambition to widen female participation in England. This is part of our strategic approach to ensuring we maximise the socio-economic benefits of major sporting events.

In addition, the Government's arm's length body for grassroots sport, Sport England, has awarded the Rugby Football Union £13.8 million for the period 2022-27, as one of their long-term system partners who have responsibility to support grassroots rugby union.

■ Rugby: Loans

James Naish:

[\[21503\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will take steps to ensure that second tier professional rugby union clubs are able to continue to operate when Covid-19 loans become repayable.

Stephanie Peacock:

Rugby Union has a vital role to play in our national identity. I recently met with the Rugby Football Union to discuss the future of the sport. My department continues to work with the RFU, representatives of Premiership clubs and Championship clubs, and the wider sport sector to support the ongoing sustainability of elite and community level rugby union.

The RFU is independent of the Government and is responsible for the regulation of rugby union, and for protecting and promoting the financial sustainability of the sport at all levels.

Loan financing of around £5 million was provided to Championship clubs as part of the Sport Survival Package (SSP). The loans were provided on favourable terms, tailored to meet the unique legal and financial circumstances of clubs. DCMS remains in close contact with our loan agents, Sport England, to ensure loans are repaid and borrowers comply with the terms of their loans.

■ Youth Services

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[21714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what her planned timetable is for the implementation of the National Youth strategy; what steps she is taking to involve youth sector organisations in the development of that strategy; and how her Department plans to consult young people on that strategy.

Stephanie Peacock:

We are developing our plans for the new National Youth Strategy, in partnership with young people and with organisations within the youth sector, to bring power back to young people and rebuild a thriving and sustainable sector. We know there is excellent existing work across the sector to understand issues faced by young people, propose solutions, and promote youth voice in decision-making, and we are working with the youth sector to build on this to co-produce the strategy.

We will be holding a series of youth-led roundtables, conducting a youth survey and setting up a youth advisory board to work alongside us. The Youth Advisory Group comprises young people with diverse lived experiences from across the country, with the first meeting scheduled for January 2025. The Secretary of State, Minister

Peacock and officials have already met with a number of young people and youth sector organisations to hear their thoughts on the Strategy and we will continue to build on this work over the coming weeks and months.

We plan to publish the Strategy in summer with an interim report planned for the spring.

DEFENCE

■ Ammunition: Procurement

Rebecca Paul:

[\[21429\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to replenish stockpiles of precision-guided munitions; and what steps he plans to take to help increase domestic production capacity.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence is carefully investing to improve the health of our munitions stockpiles, including precision-guided munitions, within the available financial envelope. Through investing in munitions we seek to grow domestic production, strengthen our resilience and self-reliance, boost our sovereign defence industrial capacity, increase our exports and create good jobs in the UK. The Department will continue to develop our approach as the outcomes of the Strategic Defence Review become clear.

■ Arctic: Defence

Graeme Downie:

[\[21882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he last had discussions with his NATO counterparts on protecting the High North.

Luke Pollard:

Engagement with NATO Allies is central to our approach to defend and deter in the Arctic and High North. Secretary of State for Defence and Defence Ministers regularly engage with their NATO counterparts, including High North countries to discuss how to strengthen deterrence and defence in the region, through NATO, the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and bilaterally.

Graeme Downie:

[\[21883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what forces are committed to defending the High North.

Luke Pollard:

The UK is committed to maintaining a coherent Defence posture, presence, and profile in the High North region. The Royal Marines have conducted annual exercises with Norway for over 50 years to hone their extreme cold weather warfighting skills, supported by assets from Joint Aviation Command. In the last 18 months, P8A Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft, and the Queen Elizabeth Class Aircraft Carriers,

have all operated in the region. During Exercise STEADFAST DEFENDER, the Royal Navy was at the heart of this maritime exercise with HMS Prince of Wales, demonstrating the importance of interoperability. The UK also conducted Icelandic Air Policing with F-35 jets.

In 2025, the UK will continue to develop our already close relationships with our Allies and partners in the High North, as part of NATO, Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and bilaterally. Furthermore, we will continue our profile in the region with Air, Maritime and Land assets operating under NATO and Sovereign command.

■ Armed Forces Covenant: Northern Ireland

Jim Allister:

[22543]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the (a) effectiveness of the application of the Armed Forces Covenant in Northern Ireland and (b) adequacy of Armed Forces Covenant arrangements in Northern Ireland.

AI Carns:

Our election manifesto commitment to put the Armed Forces Covenant fully into law highlighted the need to strengthen the rights of the Armed Forces community and thus improve current and former service life on a broader scope. Work is currently underway to develop policy in a range of areas relevant to the Armed Forces community.

The Armed Forces Covenant applies across the whole of the UK including the Devolved Nations; its delivery is shaped by local and regional factors and jurisdictions. In Northern Ireland, government bodies and the charitable sector work together to provide practical support to the Armed Forces community, helping deliver the Covenant. Since 2015, Covenant delivery has been supported by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, an Arm's Length Body of the Ministry of Defence and a charity. In 2023-24, the Trust awarded a total of £31.7 million to projects across the UK, including Northern Ireland, in support of the Armed Forces community. From 2022-23 to date, £3.26 million across 51 grants in total have been awarded to projects in Northern Ireland.

A Covenant Legal Duty impact survey aimed at organisations subject to the Duty was completed in 2024. This included engagement with the Devolved Administrations. The survey was aimed at the whole of UK. Greater detail on the survey can be found in the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2024, published in December 2024: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/676049f6cfbf84c3b2bcfac/Armed_Forces_Covenant_annual_report_summary_2024.pdf

We are making good progress in delivering the Covenant in Northern Ireland, where unique circumstances require a different approach to be taken from the rest of the UK. We will continue to work closely with our stakeholders in Northern Ireland to ensure that the Covenant remains effective.

■ Armed Forces: Blood Cancer

Jayne Kirkham:

[\[22835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many (a) veterans and (b) serving personnel who have served as crew on (A) Sea Kings, (B) Pumas and (C) Chinooks have been diagnosed with (i) multiple myeloma, (ii) sarcoma and (iii) blood cancer in the last ten years.

AI Carns:

The Ministry of Defence is undertaking work to determine the number of Serving personnel who have served as air crew and been diagnosed with cancer. I will write to the hon. Member when information is available, and a copy of this letter will be placed in the Library of The House.

■ Armed Forces: Joint Exercises

Rebecca Paul:

[\[21427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent steps his Department has taken to enhance interoperability between the Armed Forces and allied nations' forces on joint operations.

Luke Pollard:

Enhancing interoperability continues to be at the core of our work, both between the branches of our Armed Forces and with our Allies. UK Strategic Command is defence's Integrated Design Authority ensuring integration across capabilities. Internationally, the UK continues to play a leading role in exercises and training, such as through hosting the upcoming Exercise Formidable Shield - the world's largest maritime Integrated Air and Missile Defence exercise. We continue to develop our key international partnerships - such as the Joint Expeditionary Force - to ensure our capabilities are interoperable across both NATO and wider allies.

■ Armed Forces: Labour Turnover

Dame Caroline Dinenge:

[\[21582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to increase retention of service personnel.

AI Carns:

The new Government's work in improving retention and recruitment is part of a package of measures aimed to renew the contract between the nation and those who serve. We are modernising and refining our policies and processes to attract, and then retain the best possible talent, highlighting that Defence is a modern, forward-facing employer which offers a valuable and rewarding career. Our aim is to attract and recruit more, as well as maximise the number of applicants that successfully enter and remain in Armed Forces employment.

We have already awarded the largest Armed Forces pay increase in 22 years, and gone further in announcing a £30,000 financial incentive to a cohort of tri-Service Air

Engineers as well as an £8,000 retention payment for a cohort of Army personnel. These measures support the retention of key skills and personnel in Defence through appropriate financial recognition.

The Ministry of Defence and Ministers recognise the significant sacrifices that our military families make in serving our nation, and more retention-positive measures have been introduced. As part of this we have protected the integrity of the Continuity of Education Allowance; the Secretary of State for Defence directed that the cap on current rates be lifted to support the means of mitigating the disruption to Service children's education, caused by Service commitments involving frequent moves of the family home. The recent repurchase of the SFA estate from Annington Homes will enable the Ministry of Defence the freedom to embark on a substantive programme of redevelopment and improvement of our housing estate to provide quality homes for Service families. Furthermore, we have extended Wraparound Childcare to families serving overseas which will potentially save up to £3,400 annually for Service families. We are developing a suite of future initiatives, to be announced in the spring, that will improve Service life and boost retention with the Armed Forces.

■ **Armed Forces: Private Education**

Dame Caroline Dinenge: [\[21581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the uplift in Continuity of Education allowance for costs associated with VAT on independent school fees.

Dame Caroline Dinenge: [\[21583\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will review the uplift in Continuity of Education Allowance for costs associated with VAT on independent school fees after six months.

Dame Caroline Dinenge: [\[21584\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to extend Continuity of Education Allowance to all service personnel.

AI Carns:

Following the budget statement by the Chancellor on 30 October 2024, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) confirmed it would carry out an in-year re-rating of the continuity of education allowance (CEA), which is a contribution towards boarding education. The methodology used to calculate the new rates remained the same as previous yearly calculations, a weighted average of the fees charged by the top 75% of schools used by CEA claimants.

The MOD will monitor the impact on retention in service for those claiming CEA following the introduction of VAT on independent school fees. This will inform a review of the CEA calculation methodology ahead of revised rates being produced for the new academic year starting September 2025.

The MOD provides the option for all eligible Service personnel to claim CEA as a contribution to boarding education to minimise the disruption to their children's education caused by service commitments involving frequent moves of the family home. To be eligible, the Service person's circumstances must fit within specific regulations, especially around accompanied service and family mobility.

■ Armed Forces: Rehabilitation

Derek Twigg:

[\[22577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many injured service personal required rehabilitation services in each armed service in each year since 2015; and how much his Department on rehabilitation of injured service personnel in each service in the same period.

Al Carns:

The table below presents the number of UK Armed Forces personnel who have had at least one appointment at Primary Care Rehabilitation Facilities (PCRF), Regional Rehabilitation Units (RRU) and/or Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) in each year since 2015, broken down by service.

YEAR	TOTAL	NAVY	ARMY	RAF
2015	58,144	9,450	36,807	11,824
2016	57,332	9,348	36,053	11,847
2017	55,605	9,523	34,653	11,346
2018	53,318	9,371	32,641	11,229
2019	52,981	9,678	31,775	11,446
2020	42,138	7,905	25,200	8,959
2021	45,526	8,640	27,524	9,281
2022	46,673	8,959	27,920	9,739
2023	45,137	8,696	26,828	9,572
2024	45,217	8,547	27,203	9,410

The table below presents the total spent on rehabilitation at Regional Rehabilitation Units (RRUs), Defence Primary Health Care Rehab Headquarters and the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) from the start of 2015 to 8 January 2025. The figures below do not include costs for Primary Care Rehab Facilities (PCRFs). PCRFs provide primary rehabilitation for Service Personnel who do not require referral into an RRU. PCRFs costs are embedded within Medical Centres and the costs cannot be extracted.

As rehabilitation is delivered in a tri-service environment, it is not possible to break this data down by Service.

FINANCIAL YEAR	TOTAL £
2015-16	28,391,515
2016-17	22,895,461
2017-18	27,841,573
2018-19	31,852,392
2019-20	40,041,538
2020-21	32,473,582
2021-22	35,275,941
2022-23	39,037,736
2023-24	41,468,534
2024-25	30,885,020
Total	332,536,267

■ Armed Forces: Sick Leave

Derek Twigg: [\[22578\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the sickness rate was for service personnel by rank in each year since 2015.

Al Carns:

This information is not held in the format requested.

■ Armed Forces: Training

Derek Twigg: [\[22579\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the average number of training days undertaken by serving army personnel was in each year since 2015 by rank.

Luke Pollard:

The Army invests significantly in skills, education and training for its people to build the problem-solving attributes, teamwork, resilience, intellect and creativity needed to be successful now and in the future.

A comprehensive professional pipeline trains soldiers and officers from the basics of being a soldier, through progressive levels of trade training, as well as the leadership skills required at all ranks. More broadly, Defence continues to invest in collective

training capabilities for its Armed Forces and, under the Future Soldier programme, the Army is modernising collective training to better prepare for the challenges personnel will face in modern warfare.

We do not centrally hold the information in the format that has been requested due to the broad range and scope of training that can be undertaken by all Army personnel, including both individual and collective training.

■ Defence: Expenditure

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[22341\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much and what proportion of defence spending is allocated to Wales.

Maria Eagle:

Ministry of Defence expenditure in financial year 2023-24 totalled £53.9 billion. We do not allocate this spending by nation nor region.

■ Defence: Procurement

David Reed: [\[R\] \[21201\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to simplify procurement processes to enable (a) micro, (b) small and (c) medium-sized companies to compete more effectively for defence contracts.

Maria Eagle:

The Procurement Act 2023 introduces reforms intended to make it easier for small businesses to access public sector procurements, including a requirement for contracting authorities to consider barriers to participation and whether they can be removed or reduced.

UK industry partners of all sizes, including SMEs, are at the heart of our One Defence approach and we recognise the vital contribution they make in driving economic growth and strengthening our national security.

The Defence Industrial Strategy will set the conditions to unlock the full potential of SMEs to innovate at pace and seize future opportunities.

■ Defence: Reviews

Mr Calvin Bailey: [\[21517\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he plans to take to learn lessons from the implementation of (a) Strategic (i) Defence and (ii) Security Reviews, (b) Defence Industrial Strategies and (c) Defence Equipment Plans over the last 25 years.

Mr Calvin Bailey: [\[21518\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department has taken to compare the (a) recommendations and (b) objectives of (i) Strategic (A) Defence and (B)

Security Reviews, (ii) Defence Industrial Strategies and (ii) Defence Equipment Plans with the Defence outcomes achieved during the last 25 years.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence is committed to learning lessons from previous reviews and their implementation. The Strategic Defence Review (SDR), launched by the Prime Minister on 16 July, is taking a diverse range of views and evidence, including previous reviews, strategies and plans, into account to determine the roles, capabilities and reforms required by UK Defence to meet the challenges, threats and opportunities of the twenty-first century, deliverable and affordable both within the resources available to Defence and within the trajectory to 2.5%. The SDR will ensure that Defence is central both to the security, and to the economic growth and prosperity, of the UK. The Reviewers will report to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Defence in the spring of 2025, and the Secretary of State will subsequently publish a version of that report to Parliament. More widely, Defence is undertaking the biggest reform programme in over 50 years, creating a stronger UK Defence centre to secure better value for money, better outcomes for our Armed Forces, and be better able to implement the SDR.

■ **Defence: Vocational Guidance**

James Cartlidge:

[22655]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to allow UK defence companies to participate in (a) careers fairs and (b) related events on university campuses.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence works closely with UK defence companies to highlight the significant benefits of a career in the defence sector. We recognise that attracting and retaining the right mix of skills is critical to sustaining a vibrant, innovative and competitive UK defence sector, and this is an important area of focus in the development of the Defence Industrial Strategy.

Decisions relating to UK defence companies participating in careers fairs and related events on university campuses are for the companies themselves. Such events provide students valuable opportunities to learn about different career possibilities in the defence sector.

■ **DM Gosport**

Dame Caroline Dinenge:

[21580]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to maintain (a) Service Family Accommodation and (b) training base accommodation in Gosport.

Al Carns:

Service Family Accommodation (SFA).

In the last year, 25 SFA at Gosport were fully refurbished to enable them to be occupied by Service families. Additionally, 241 SFA have had, or are receiving, improvement works to include new boilers, kitchens and bathrooms and redecoration.

In addition, new External Wall Insulation to 68 SFA is due to complete in financial year 2024-25.

The recent repurchase of the SFA estate from Annington Homes will enable the Ministry of Defence the freedom to embark on a substantive programme of redevelopment and improvement of our housing estate to provide quality homes for Service Families.

Training Base Accommodation (Single Living Accommodation (SLA)/ Transit Accommodation).

Single Living Accommodation (SLA) and Training Base Accommodation is maintained under the Future Defence Infrastructure Service (FDIS) suite of contracts, which provide for statutory and mandatory preventative maintenance and inspections. The findings of the inspections identify issues in advance of failure and by their nature are preventative.

In addition to preventative maintenance, Service Personnel are encouraged to report any faults or complaints via their contract provider.

■ **Future Combat Air System**

Rebecca Paul: [\[21430\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent progress has been made on the Future Combat Air System.

Maria Eagle:

Progress continues to be made on the Future Combat Air System (FCAS). The core platform, that will sit at its heart, is being delivered through the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP). The Prime Minister and his Italian and Japanese counterparts have reiterated their commitment to GCAP. The GCAP International Government Organisation to oversee delivery on behalf of all the partner governments has been created. On 13 December 2024, BAE Systems (UK), Leonardo (Italy), and Japan Aircraft Industrial Enhancement Co Ltd (JAIEC), reached an agreement to form a new company under a business joint venture for GCAP, subject to regulatory approvals. The new joint venture will be accountable for the design, development and delivery of the next generation combat aircraft.

■ **HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark**

James Cartlidge: [\[22653\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department has received enquiries from international partners on the potential sale of (a) HMS Bulwark and (b) HMS Albion.

Maria Eagle:

The Royal Navy is exploring options to sell both HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark in a government-to-government sale. These vessels had, in effect, been retired by the previous Government. Their sale will save £9 million a year in maintenance costs in addition to the receipt from the sale, unlocking as much funding as possible to invest in modernisation, as well as reinforcing relationships with international partners.

■ Military Aircraft: Procurement

James Cartlidge: [\[22654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has had discussions with the Chief of the Air Staff on procuring a replacement for the Hawk T2.

James Cartlidge: [\[22955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans his Department has for procuring a replacement for the Hawk T2.

Maria Eagle:

Ministers regularly discuss the future capability requirements of the Royal Air Force with the Chief of the Air Staff. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Huntingdon on 3 December 2024 to Question 15292.

Attachments:

1. Global Combat Air Programme [15292 - Global Combat Air Programme.docx]

■ Nuclear Submarines: Decommissioning

Graeme Downie: [\[21447\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much funding he has allocated to the submarine dismantling programme for each of the next five years.

Maria Eagle:

The Department does not release spending profiles for individual programmes. However, I can confirm the latest Whole Life Cost for the Submarine Dismantling Project, as published in the Department's 2023 Government Major Projects Portfolio data, is £298 million. This figure includes costs associated with dismantling work in Rosyth and maintenance costs for decommissioned submarines in Devonport.

■ RFA Argus: Amphibious Vehicles

David Reed: [\[21932\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 17477 on RFA Argus: Amphibious Vehicles, whether his Department has identified reductions in amphibious capability from the use of RFA Argus in place of HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark.

Luke Pollard:

The previous administration had no plans for either HMS Albion or HMS Bulwark to return to sea ahead of their leaving service in the 2030s, therefore there has been no reduction in capability.

RFA Argus, alongside Bay Class, is a highly capable ship and will continue to support Royal Marine operations until the introduction of Multi-Role Support Ships in the early 2030s.

Russia: Shipping**Graeme Downie:**[\[21875\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he last had discussions with his Finnish counterpart on Russian shadow fleet aggression in the Baltic Sea.

Luke Pollard:

The Secretary of State for Defence contacted his Finnish counterpart immediately following the incident damaging the Estlink 2 undersea cable between Finland and Estonia on Christmas Day. They also discussed the incident when they met at the Ukraine Defence Contact Group meeting at Ramstein Air Base on 9 January.

Acting as framework nation for the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), we have activated a JEF Response Option, known as NORDIC WARDEN, which will harness AI to track potential threats to undersea infrastructure and monitor the Russian shadow fleet, sending out real-time warnings of suspicious activity to JEF nations as well as NATO.

This JEF activity reinforces existing and planned NATO responses.

Graeme Downie:[\[21885\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how often Royal Navy vessels have been tasked to shadow Russian navy ships near the UK in each of the last five years.

Luke Pollard:

The Royal Navy continuously monitor UK waters and are ready to respond to the presence of Russian vessels. Specific detail cannot be confirmed for reasons of safeguarding national security.

Strategic Defence Review: Department of Health and Social Care**Mr Calvin Bailey:**[\[21519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions his Department has had with health and care stakeholders on the potential impact of the Strategic Defence Review on areas for which his Department is responsible; and whether his Department have made a submission to that Review.

Luke Pollard:

Defence Medical Services is an important theme being considered by the Reviewers as part of One Defence and renewing the nation's contract with those who serve.

During the Review and Challenge, there was a Panel dedicated to Defence Medical Services to provide robust challenge to submissions received from the Department into the Review. Now this phase has concluded, the Reviewers continue to iterate their final recommendations for the Prime Minister. The Review will be socialised across Whitehall, including with Department for Health and Social Care colleagues.

■ **Ukraine: Humanitarian Aid**

Mr Calvin Bailey:

[\[21725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he has had with (a) his Ukrainian counterpart, (b) MOAS, (c) other humanitarian charities and (d) other stakeholders on the value of frontline medical evacuation services provided by humanitarian charities in Ukraine.

Luke Pollard:

The Secretary of State for Defence has regular discussions with his Ukrainian counterpart on a number of issues. Through the FCDO, the UK Government continues to maintain close contact with humanitarian partners to support Ukraine, including with medical evacuation services.

The Ministry of Defence has a well-established route through which requests for support from the Government of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence are received and we carefully weigh how we commit UK taxpayer money, aligned with that demand signal.

Our humanitarian support to Ukraine now amounts to £477 million to Ukraine.

■ **War Widow(er)s Recognition Payment**

Robin Swann:

[\[22221\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent progress he has made on the War Widow(er)s Recognition Payment scheme; how many applicants have received payments; and what the (a) branch of service and (b) regiment of such recipients is.

Al Carns:

This Government recognises the unique commitment that Service families make to our country. We remain sympathetic to those widows and widowers who forfeited pensions under historic rules because they remarried or cohabited.

The War Widow(er)s Recognition Payment Scheme has received 357 applications and accepted and paid 240 claims since it was launched on 16 October 2023. Of those, 99% of all claims have been processed and the Recognition Payment Scheme is delivering effectively to those it was established to recognise.

Information relating to the branch of service and regiment of individuals whose widows have received payments under the scheme is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

EDUCATION**■ Apprentices: Boys****Mims Davies:****[R] [21652]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to increase the number of white working-class boys taking up apprenticeships.

Janet Daby:

Meeting the skills needs of the next decade is central to delivering all of the government's five missions – economic growth, opportunity for all, a stronger NHS, safer streets, and clean energy. Through delivering the Opportunity and Growth Missions, we will ensure that we have the skilled workforce needed to deliver the national, regional and local skills needs, aligned with the Industrial Strategy and break down the barriers to opportunity for learners.

The department is developing new foundation apprenticeships to give more young people a foot in the door at the start of their working lives, whilst supporting the pipeline of new talent that employers will need to drive economic growth.

Foundation apprenticeships will be a work-based training offer that will provide young people with clear progression pathways into further work-based training and employment.

The department is engaging with relevant stakeholders to inform our thinking to maximise the positive impact of foundation apprenticeships on young people, including those in disadvantaged areas. More detail on foundation apprenticeships will be set out in due course.

The department continues to pay additional funding to employers and training providers to support them to take on young apprentices, apprentices with learning difficulties and disabilities, and care leavers.

The department also continues to promote apprenticeships through the Skills for Life campaign and in schools and colleges through the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge (ASK) Programme. Through the ASK Programme, the department increases awareness of apprenticeships amongst students in years 10 to 13, as well as parents, carers, teachers and careers advisers. During the 2023/24 academic year, ASK engaged with 2,366 schools and colleges and reached over 575,000 students.

There were 82,080 apprenticeship starts by white male apprentices that were aged under 25 in the 2023/24 academic year.

■ Children's Social Care Independent Review**Freddie van Mierlo:****[21892]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for his policies of the recommendations of the Independent Review

of Children's social care final report (MacAlister,2022), published on the 23rd of May 2022.

Janet Daby:

Reforming children's social care is critical to giving hundreds of thousands of children and young people the best start in life. This government has already moved quickly to set out its plans for a whole-system and child-centred approach to reform and our actions are informed by the findings of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

In November, the department published its ambitious, wide ranging plans in 'Keeping children safe, helping families thrive', setting the wheels in motion to break the cycle of crisis intervention and rebalance the system back towards earlier help for families. In addition, in December the department introduced the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. This is a landmark piece of legislation, introducing a series of measures with a focus on delivering a joined up system to stop vulnerable children falling through cracks in services.

■ **Educational Psychology: Surrey Heath**

Dr Al Pinkerton:

[\[21889\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that local councils can (a) recruit and (b) retain educational psychologists in Surrey Heath constituency.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

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

As the employers of educational psychology services, it is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that their services are adequately staffed. The department is however taking measures to support local authorities by investing in building the pipeline.

The department is investing over £21 million to train 400 more educational psychologists from 2024. This builds on the £10 million currently being invested in the training of over 200 educational psychologists who began their training in September 2023.

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

■ Institutes of Technology

Dame Caroline Dinéage: [\[21586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to support Institutes of Technology.

Dame Caroline Dinéage: [\[21587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many students took higher technical education courses at Institutes of Technology in each academic year between 2018-19 and 2023-24.

Janet Daby:

The collaborative approach between further education, higher education and employers developed by Institutes of Technology (IoTs) is valued. The department will be working with the sector as we develop our strategy for post-16 education and skills.

Information on the number of students that took higher technical education courses (those at, or above, level 4) at IoTs are set out in the table below.

ACADEMIC YEAR*	LEVEL 4+ LEARNERS	BACKGROUND
2018/19	0	The first IoT opened in September 2019 therefore no learners were recorded in annual year 2018/19
2019/20	916	Based on 6 IoTs open to learners
2020/21	1901	Based on 8 IoTs open to learners
2021/22	3089	Based on 11 IoTs open to learners
2022/23	4512	Based on 15 IoTs open to learners
2023/24	6381	Based on 19 IoTs open to learners (This data is incomplete as the Higher Education Statistic Agency data will not be available until April 2025.)

*The department changed the way the data was collected and presented from 2021/22 academic year. The figures for 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years are for

learner starts at levels 4 and 5. The figures for 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years are for learner cohorts for level 4+ (including level 6 and above).

■ **Internet: Education**

Ben Obese-Jecty: [22770]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to educate children about (a) online safety and (b) the risk of online sexual predators as part of the National Curriculum.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [22773]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to incorporate educational resources from the National Crime Agency into the National Curriculum in order to inform children about the dangers of online child sexual exploitation.

Catherine McKinnell:

As part of statutory relationships and health education in primary schools and relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) in secondary schools, pupils are taught about online safety and harms. This includes being taught about what positive, healthy and respectful online relationships look like, the effects of their online actions on others, how to recognise and display respectful behaviour online and where to get help and support for issues that occur online. The guidance emphasises that schools should keep aware of issues such as grooming and sexual exploitation, including coercive and controlling behaviour, and that these should be addressed sensitively and clearly.

Teaching about online safety also complements the computing curriculum, which covers the principles of online safety at all key stages, with progression in the content to reflect the different and escalating risks that pupils face.

The RSHE statutory guidance is currently under review. The department is looking carefully at responses to the public consultation conducted last year, considering the relevant evidence and discussing with stakeholders, before setting out next steps to make sure the guidance draws from the best available evidence. As part of this process, the department will explore whether additional content is required, including on online harms, and how this can complement the government's wider actions to tackle harmful behaviour, sexual violence and exploitation.

As with other curriculum subjects, the department does not advise schools on which resources, external speakers or organisations to use, not least because schools operate in a variety of different contexts and have both the expertise and knowledge that makes them best placed to make these decisions. However, in 2023, the department published guidance on teaching online safety in schools, which sets out how to teach about all aspects of internet safety in a coordinated and coherent way across the curriculum, and also includes links to further sources of information, including the National Crime Agency's resources. This guidance can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-online-safety-in-schools>.

■ Qualifications

Abtisam Mohamed:

[21749]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference page 36 of the publication entitled Plan for Change: Milestones for mission-led government, published on 5 December 2024, what level of qualification will be considered higher-level.

Janet Daby:

The Plan for Change sets out the government's long-term plan to improve the lives of working people and deliver a decade renewal across our country through ambitious, but achievable, milestones by the end of this Parliament.

As part of the Plan for Change, the government will build skills for opportunity and growth so that every young person can follow the pathway that is right for them. Whether through high-quality apprenticeships, colleges or universities, skills give people the power to seize opportunity. The department will measure progress through the proportion of young people in education or employment with training, and through the number achieving higher-level qualifications. Higher-level qualifications covers qualifications which are at level 4 and above.

■ Relationships and Sex Education

Vikki Slade:

[21917]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of including grief education in the relationships and sex education curriculum.

Catherine McKinnell:

The statutory relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) guidance, which sets out the specific topics pupils should be taught, makes clear that teachers should be aware of common adverse childhood experiences and understand when and how these may be affecting their pupils. This will help teachers to tailor their lessons accordingly, taking decisions on appropriate resources and support to enable them to teach the curriculum effectively. Teachers are free to draw on the support and expertise of subject associations and other providers of curriculum support. The RSHE statutory guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>.

The RSHE statutory guidance is currently under review. The department is looking carefully at responses to the public consultation conducted last year, considering the relevant evidence and discussing with stakeholders before setting out next steps to make sure the guidance draws from the best available evidence. As part of this process, the department will explore whether additional content is required, including on grief education and bereavement.

■ Schools: Asylum**Helen Hayes:** [21647]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum who were not in school in each of the last five years, broken down by gender.

Helen Hayes: [21648]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to improve the central data collection on access to education for unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

Helen Hayes: [21649]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure young girls who are unaccompanied children seeking asylum are (a) able to access education and (b) supported to stay in school.

Janet Daby:

Information on the number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum who were not in school is not collected or held by the department. Data collected by the department on children not in school does not indicate whether children are asylum seekers.

The department published a response to the public call for evidence, 'Improving support for children missing education', in December 2024. This response outlines current best practice approaches and next steps for how local authorities, schools and others can be empowered to go further to identify and support children missing education (CME) and to tackle the pattern of children falling through the cracks. The response can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6749c6faebabe47136b3a25b/Children_missing_education_-_call_for_evidence_response.pdf.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, introduced on 17 December, includes proposals for compulsory Children Not in School registers in every local authority in England, to enable authorities to better identify all children not in school in their areas and, where these children are not receiving a safe, suitable education, to take action to support them. The department is also committed to introducing a single child identifier, so all children can get the right support from education, health and care services.

The department's annual published children looked after data shows that only 4% of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are girls and that 89% of all UASC are aged 16 and over.

All UASC will be looked after by their local authority. All state-funded schools are required to give relevant looked after and previously looked after children top priority for admission once their corporate parent, the local authority, applies for a place.

As looked after children, local authorities have the same duties to UASC as all other looked after children, which includes support received in school.

The government is committed to ensuring that all children, especially the most vulnerable in our society, are safe and have access to an excellent education. Where children are not on a school roll or receiving suitable education elsewhere, the department has issued statutory guidance for local authorities outlining their duty to make arrangements to identify and support into education all CME. The guidance specifically references that children of new migrant families may be at particular risk of missing education. This guidance can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf57a4dcb0757928e5bd39/Children_missing_education_guidance_-_August_2024.pdf.

■ Schools: Weather

Derek Twigg:

[22580]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many school days were lost due to weather conditions in each year since 2010.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department does not specifically collect data on school days lost due to weather conditions.

From the start of the 2024/25 academic year, it became mandatory for schools to share attendance data with the department. Attendance data can be found at:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools>.

Other attendance statistics and past releases are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-pupil-absence>. This shows pupil absence statistics from May 2010 onwards and pupil attendance statistics from September 2022.

It is for individual settings and responsible bodies to determine their approach to closure based on their own risk assessment. Closures should be considered a last resort, and the imperative is for settings to remain open where it is safe to do so. Where a school was planning to be open for a session but then has to close unexpectedly, for example due to adverse weather, the attendance register is not taken as usual because there is no session. For statistical purposes this is counted as a 'not possible' attendance.

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

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

parents on remote education is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/providing-remote-education-information-to-parents-template>.

■ Special Educational Needs

Damian Hinds:

[21579]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to monitor trends in Education Health and Care Plan applications by local authority area.

Catherine McKinnell:

Information on applications for education, health and care (EHC) plans is collected from local authorities via the annual SEN2 data collection each January. SEN2 is a statutory return. It includes information on requests for assessment for an EHC plan made to each local authority and the outcome of that request, the assessments for an EHC plan made by each local authority and the outcome of that assessment, as well as information on the EHC plans maintained by the authority.

The information collected also contains characteristics of the individual, such as sex, ethnicity and age.

This information is subsequently published for each local authority in the 'Education, health and care plans' statistical release, which can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-health-and-care-plans>.

This publication includes the number of requests for assessment for an EHC plan and the number of assessments for an EHC plan as returned by each local authority.

In addition to the SEN2 data, the department also monitors trends using more timely operational data directly from local authorities.

■ Special Educational Needs: Stoke-on-Trent South

Dr Allison Gardner:

[22847]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to improve support for children with (a) autism and (b) SEND in mainstream settings in Stoke-on-Trent South.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or in alternative provision receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life. The department is committed to taking a community-wide approach in collaboration with Local Area Partnerships, improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs.

To support this, the department has brought together a group of leading neurodiversity experts in a new Neurodiversity Task and Finish Group, led independently by Professor Karen Guldberg from the University of Birmingham, to work closely with the department to help improve inclusivity and expertise in

mainstream settings in a way that works for neurodivergent children and young people.

Additionally, the department's Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) programme brings together Integrated Care Boards (ICB), local authorities, and schools, working in partnership with parents and carers to support schools to better meet the needs of neurodiverse children and their families and enable an inclusive school environment. PINS deploys specialists from both health and education workforces into 10% of mainstream primary school settings, which is approximately 1680 schools. PINS is building teacher and staff capacity to identify and meet the needs of neurodiverse children, including those with speech and language needs, through whole-school interventions. The programme is being evaluated, and the learning will inform future policy development around how schools support neurodiverse children.

The department's Universal SEND Services contract brings together SEND-specific continuing professional development and support for the school and further education workforce. The programme aims to improve outcomes for children and young people, including those with autism. As part of the contract, the Autism Education Trust (AET) provides a range of training and support for staff on autism. Since the contract began in May 2022, over 200,000 professionals have received training from AET training partners.

Following the last Ofsted SEND inspection in January 2024, officials have been working with Stoke-on-Trent City Council to closely monitor progress against the areas for improvement identified by inspectors.

The areas were:

1. Improve the timeliness of the identification, assessment, and implementation of support to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.
2. Improve the visibility and engagement of children and young people with SEND within their communities while in education and their broader life experiences.
3. Develop the timeliness and quality of education, health and care plans so they always accurately identify needs and clearly articulate the provision needed for the child and young person.
4. Develop systems and processes to ensure that the voice of children and young people with SEND is heard and acted upon at an individual and strategic level.
5. Improve the oversight of children and young people attending and quality assurance of alternative provisions and out-of-county placements, including residential settings.

■ Special Educational Needs: Surrey

Dr Al Pinkerton:

[\[21891\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to provide (a) training and (b) other support to special educational needs coordinators in schools in Surrey.

Catherine McKinnell:

All mainstream schools (including academies and free schools) must have a special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). The SENCO must be a qualified teacher, or the headteacher, working at the school. SENCOs play a vital role in setting the direction for their school and leading on the day-to-day special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision.

Schools should ensure that the SENCO has sufficient time and resources to carry out these functions. This should include providing SENCOs with sufficient administrative support and time away from teaching to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities in a similar way to other important strategic roles within a school.

On 1 September 2024, the government introduced a new mandatory leadership level National Professional Qualification (NPQ) for SENCOs. The NPQ must be completed within three years of taking up a SENCO post. The new NPQ will play a key role improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND by ensuring SENCOs consistently receive high-quality, evidence-based training.

The £12 million Universal Services programme also helps the school and further education workforce to identify and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND earlier and more effectively.

The programme offers online training, professional development groups, bespoke school and college improvement projects, sector-led research, autism awareness training and an embedded focus on preparation for adulthood, including employer-led webinars for college staff.

■ STEM Subjects: Education

Sammy Wilson:

[\[21572\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to promote STEM courses across the education system.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

High and rising school standards are at the heart of the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best start in life.

The government is committed to ensuring that anyone, can pursue an education and career in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

An important focus is on primary mathematics where the government has a commitment to improve the quality of mathematics teaching across nurseries and primary schools, learning from the success of phonics. The government continues to support continuing professional development for mathematics teachers in schools and post-16 institutions. Mathematics is the most popular A level.

To support the teaching of computing and increase participation in computer science qualifications, the government funds the National Centre for Computing Education. This support includes programmes designed to encourage greater participation from girls and industry-led events that raise pupils' awareness of careers in computing.

In science, to ensure that every pupil has access to high-quality teaching, the department funds the 'Subject Knowledge for Physics Teachers' programme. This intensive retraining programme comprises six modules to upskill non-specialist teachers of physics and enhance their subject knowledge, confidence and pedagogical knowledge.

Oak National Academy also offers free, optional and adaptable materials for use at key stages 1 to 4 in mathematics, computing and all three sciences.

The department also funds the STEM Ambassadors programme, a nationwide network of over 30,000 registered volunteers representing thousands of employers, who engage with young people to increase their interest in STEM subjects and to raise awareness of the range of careers that STEM qualifications offer.

The government will continue to support learners who wish to have a career in STEM through its technical education offer, with a range of high-quality qualifications and apprenticeship opportunities at all levels. Examples of this include:

- 12 T Levels in STEM subjects, including engineering, science, digital and media. T Levels are promoted to young people via the Skills for Life national communications campaign.
- Over 370 employer-designed apprenticeship standards in STEM. Apprenticeships are a great way for anyone, regardless of their background, to receive high-quality training and skills to begin, or progress in, a successful career in STEM.

We have also established a comprehensive network of 21 Institutes of Technology across England to significantly increase the number of learners with higher technical skills in key STEM sectors, such as manufacturing and engineering, construction and digital.

The department has announced an Initial Teacher Training financial incentives package for the 2025/26 academic year recruitment cycle worth £233 million, which is a £37 million increase on the last cycle. This includes a range of measures, including bursaries worth £29,000 tax-free and scholarships worth £31,000 tax-free, to encourage talented trainees to key subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing. For the 2024/25 and 2025/26 academic years, the government is offering a targeted retention incentive worth up to £6,000 after tax for mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing teachers in the first five years of their careers who

choose to work in disadvantaged schools. This will support recruitment and retention of specialist teachers in these subjects and in the schools and areas that need them most.

■ Students: Ukraine

Samantha Niblett:

[\[21750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to support applications for apprenticeships for students on Homes for Ukraine visas that expire before the course concludes.

Janet Daby:

Students on Homes for Ukraine visas are eligible to undertake an apprenticeship where they are able to complete the apprenticeship within the time they have available. All apprenticeships must be at least 12 months in duration.

We want learners to be able to complete their apprenticeships within the time they have available. Where the learner's residency permit does not extend to the entire length of the apprenticeship, they are not eligible for funding. The department will keep this under review, as it does with all of its rules.

In determining student eligibility for 16 to 19 funding, including for Ukrainians aged 16 to 19 living in the UK under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine), institutions must satisfy themselves that there is a reasonable likelihood that the student will be able to complete their study programme before seeking funding for the student. However, when a student applies for a study programme where their current legal permission to remain in the UK expires six months or more after they start, then institutions may allow them to enrol. The department considers it sufficient for institutions to rely on confirmation from the student, and/or family, that they intend to apply for the necessary extension to their permission to remain for the duration of their study programme.

The situation is similar for adult learners who wish to undertake courses funded via the Adult Skills Fund. Where the learner's visa will expire before the end of the course, the provider can use their discretion to fund the learner if, and only if, they have a high degree of certainty that the learner intends to, and will be eligible to, apply to extend their permission to remain for the duration of their study programme. The department would expect that individuals who are not yet eligible to apply for the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme, but intend to apply for it, would be eligible for funding under this rule.

■ Teachers: Academies

Neil O'Brien:

[\[21663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of schools that will be impacted by the extension of statutory pay and conditions arrangements to Academy teachers in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Catherine McKinnell:

There are currently 11,245 academies in England that would be in scope of the measure in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Teachers: Labour Turnover and Recruitment**Andrew Cooper:**[\[22472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment her Department has made of the number of unfilled teacher posts in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire, (c) the North West and (d) England in each of the last five years; and what steps she is taking to (i) fill those vacancies and (ii) improve teacher recruitment and retention in those areas.

Catherine McKinnell:

Recruiting and retaining more 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. This government has inherited a system with critical shortages of teachers, with numbers not keeping pace with demographic changes.

Information on the school workforce is published in the 'School Workforce in England' statistical publication, and can be accessed at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>.

This includes the number and rate of unfilled teacher posts in each school, local authority, region and nationally. Figures for the North West and England are published at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/f3eb0c32-ece8-4c6e-778a-08dd2da39723>.

The attached table provides the number and rate of unfilled teacher posts in the Mid Cheshire and Cheshire constituencies, aggregated from local authority level data, in each of the last five academic years, as at November each year.

The growing number of teacher shortages is why the government has set out the ambition to recruit 6,500 new expert teachers across schools, both mainstream and specialist, and colleges over the course of this Parliament.

The department has made good early progress towards this key pledge by ensuring teaching is once again an attractive and respected profession, key to which is ensuring teachers receive the pay they deserve. The department has accepted in full the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendation of a 5.5% pay award for teachers and leaders in maintained schools for 2024/25. Alongside teacher pay, the department has made £233 million available from the 2025/26 recruitment cycle to support teacher trainees, with tax-free bursaries of up to £29,000 and scholarships of up to £31,000 in shortage subjects. The department has also expanded its school teacher recruitment campaign, 'Every Lesson Shapes a Life', and the further education teacher recruitment campaign 'Share your Skills'.

In addition to recruiting expert teachers, the department wants existing teachers to stay and thrive in the profession. New teachers of mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing in the first five years of their careers will now receive a Targeted Retention Incentive of up to £6,000 after-tax if working in disadvantaged schools. There are six schools in Mid Cheshire that are eligible for Targeted Retention Incentives.

To further support retention, the department has made available workload and wellbeing resources, developed with school leaders, through our new Improving Workload and Wellbeing online service, and continues to promote the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter, which currently has nearly 4,000 school and college signatories.

The department is also funding mental health and wellbeing support for school and college leaders, providing professional supervision and counselling for those who need it. More than 2,000 leaders have benefitted so far, with support continuing to be available through Education Support's website.

The department is also committed to supporting schools in implementing flexible working practices, including taking planning, preparation and assessment time remotely.

The department has established Teaching School Hubs across the country, which provide approved high-quality professional development to teachers at all stages of their careers. They play a significant role in delivering Initial Teacher Training, the Early Career Framework, National Professional Qualifications and Appropriate Body services. Cheshire Teaching School Hub is a centre of excellence supporting teacher training and development across Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester.

Attachments:

1. Teacher_Vacancies_Cheshire
[22472_Teacher_Vacancies_in_Cheshire_and_Mid_Cheshire.xlsx]

■ **Teachers: Pay**

Nadia Whittome:

[\[21707\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the (a) impact of the proposed pay rise for teachers on school budgets and (b) potential merits of providing additional funding to cover such a pay rise.

Catherine McKinnell:

On 10 December 2024, the department published its written evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body, to inform their recommendations for school teachers' pay in the next academic year. This included a proposed pay award of 2.8% for teachers for the 2025/26 academic year. In the context of the challenging national economic picture, a 2.8% award would be appropriate, ensuring teachers' pay remains competitive and continues to reflect the vital contribution they make to children's life chances.

The whole public sector, including schools, is being expected to drive better value from existing budgets to help rebuild public services. Schools will be expected to fund

the 2025 pay award from the additional investment provided at the Budget, alongside their existing funds. The department will support schools to use their funding as efficiently as possible with a suite of new productivity initiatives. The department will soon publish a national affordability estimate for schools in the School Cost Technical Note. This estimate will be equivalent to the position of an average school.

Final decisions on the teacher's pay award for 2025/26 will be made following recommendations from the independent pay review body process, which is on-going. The government will consider its response to the Pay Review Body's recommendations with regard to the overall financial position. The written evidence sets out the department's expectations about what schools will want to consider in their budget plans.

Laurence Turner:

[22484]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to section 7.2.12 of her Department's publication entitled School workforce census guide 2024: Guide for schools including academies within a Multi Academy Trust, published on 11 October 2024, how many and what proportion of teacher posts in publicly-funded schools in England were paid on each pay range record for which data was returned in the most recent workforce census period broken down by (a) academy schools, (b) free schools, (c) local authority maintained schools and (d) all publicly-funded schools.

Catherine McKinnell:

Information on the school workforce is published in the 'School Workforce in England' statistical publication, which is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>.

The attached table provides the pay ranges reported for teacher contracts broken down by school type in the November 2023 school workforce census, which is the latest data available.

Attachments:

1. Teacher_Pay_By_School_Type [22484_Teacher_pay_ranges.xlsx]

■ Universities: Boys

Mims Davies:

[R] [21651]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to increase the number of white working-class boys attending university.

Janet Daby:

This government will act to address the persistent gaps for different groups and break down the barriers to opportunity. Opportunity should be available to all but too many people across our country do not get the chance to succeed.

Whilst many higher education (HE) providers have demonstrated positive examples of supporting all working-class students, including targeted outreach, on course bursaries and mentoring, we are keen to see the sector to go further. By summer, we

will set out our plan for HE reform and we expect providers to play an even stronger role in improving access and outcomes for all disadvantaged students.

■ Young People: Arts

Adam Jogee:

[\[21761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she plans to take to increase the opportunities for young people at (a) school, (b) college and (c) university in (i) Newcastle-under-Lyme and (ii) Staffordshire to visit museums, theatres and art galleries.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department wants all children and young people to have access to a variety of enriching experiences as an important part of our mission to break down barriers to opportunity. Educational visits are part of this ambition. The decision to undertake any educational visit is a matter for individual schools, colleges and higher education institutions to determine. As part of studying GCSE drama and A level drama and theatre studies, students are entitled to experience live theatre.

More broadly, the government supports children and young people's access to theatres, museums and galleries, for example through the Museums and Schools programme. The programme builds partnerships between schools and museums, including The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent. 79% of Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations, which include theatres, museums and galleries, work with children and young people.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Advanced Nuclear Fund

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[22255\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he plans to replace the Advanced Nuclear Fund after March 2025.

Michael Shanks:

The Advanced Nuclear Fund (ANF) concludes at the end of the current Spending Review Period in March 2025.

All future plans for nuclear innovation will be considered as part of multi-year Spending Review.

The Government remains committed to nuclear power as a key part of our clean power plans and research and development are a critical part of this commitment.

■ Aquind: Electricity Interconnectors

Suella Braverman:

[\[22050\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Defence on the potential national security risks of the AQUIND interconnector project.

Michael Shanks:

My Rt hon Friend the Secretary of State has regular discussions with Ministerial Colleagues on a number of issues.

■ **Batteries: Lithium****Charlotte Cane:****[R] [21475]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on industrial lithium-ion battery storage safety.

Michael Shanks:

My Rt hon Friend the Secretary of State has regular discussions with Ministerial Colleagues on a number of issues.

■ **Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency and Energy Company Obligation****Ann Davies:****[22466]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the (a) oversight and (b) remedial mechanisms of the (i) ECO4 scheme and (ii) Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Since 2019, installations under Government backed energy efficiency schemes, including ECO4, have been required to be carried out by TrustMark registered publicly available specification (PAS2030) certified installers alongside an insurance backed guarantee. Consumers have a route to redress, with remedial work arranged through the original installer and oversight from the relevant scheme provider for quality and auditing, or through the guarantee if installers have ceased to trade. Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency (CIGA) is a non-profit organisation that provides guarantee certificates for cavity wall insulation measures. The Department has no oversight of CIGA's business activities, including the number of certificates issued and/or recalled for remediation.

■ **Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency and Energy Company Obligation: Wales****Ann Davies:****[22467]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate he has made of the number of properties in Wales waiting for remedial work as a result of work undertaken through the (a) ECO4 scheme and (b) Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

All insulation under ECO4 must be installed by a TrustMark-registered installer, and covered by a TrustMark approved 25 year guarantee. The Government has previously published guidance for consumers who suspect that they may have faulty cavity wall insulation installed in their home outlining the routes to redress under these circumstances.

Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency (CIGA) is a non-profit organisation that provides guarantee certificates for cavity wall insulation measures. The Department has no oversight of CIGA's business activities, or the number of certificates issued by it, or where these have been called upon for remediation.

Ann Davies:

[\[22468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate he has made of the cost of remedial work due to be carried out in properties in Wales as a result of work undertaken through the (a) ECO4 scheme and (b) Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Remediation costs can differ significantly from one property to another. All insulation under ECO4 must be installed by a TrustMark-registered installer, and covered by a TrustMark approved 25 year guarantee. The government has previously published guidance for consumers who suspect that they may have faulty cavity wall insulation installed in their home outlining the routes to redress under these circumstances. CIGA is a non-profit organisation that issues guarantee certificates for cavity wall insulation installations. DESNZ does not have oversight of CIGA's business activities, or the number of certificates issued by it, or where these have been called upon for remediation.

■ Community Energy: Employment

Jim Shannon:

[\[21983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of community energy projects on local employment.

Michael Shanks:

The Government recognises the important role community energy projects play in many different areas, including tackling climate change and providing local employment opportunities.

Great British Energy's Local Power Plan will provide funding and support to community energy groups to roll out renewable energy projects and develop up to 8 GW of cleaner power. It will increase capacity and capability to build a pipeline of successful projects in local areas and aims to expand community energy projects by helping to crowd-in investment, creating skilled jobs and changing communities for the better.

Great British Energy will benefit all four nations of our United Kingdom whilst respecting the devolution settlements.

■ Drax Power Station: Subsidies

Tim Farron:

[\[21275\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make it his policy to retrieve the subsidy payments made to the Drax power station.

Michael Shanks:

Ofgem's recent investigation did not find any evidence to suggest that Drax had been issued with subsidies incorrectly. Whilst Drax complied with sustainability standards, it had failed to report data accurately. This is a serious matter and Government expects full compliance with all regulatory obligations. Drax's subsequent £25 million redress payment underscores the robustness of the regulatory system.

Energy Supply**Nick Timothy:**[\[22121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will publish the latest modelling conducted by his Department or its agencies of (a) energy supply and demand and (b) network capacity constraints.

Michael Shanks:

The Department's Energy and Emission Projections are updated and published annually; these show projected energy demand and electricity generation under policies that have been implemented and those that are planned where the level of funding has been agreed, and the design of the policy is near final.

The National Energy System Operator (NESO) is responsible for managing network constraints and publishing constraint forecasts: [*ETYS 2023](#). As set out in our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, Government is working to accelerate the build of electricity network infrastructure to increase capacity and enable a cheaper and secure energy system for Britain.

Great British Energy**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[21394\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he plans to lay an Official Statistics Order to include Great British Energy.

Michael Shanks:

The Department does not expect to amend the Official Statistics Order 2023 to include Great British Energy (GBE), because GBE will be an operationally independent energy company and we do not anticipate it will produce the sorts of statistics expected of bodies included in the order.

Hydebank Wood Prison: Solar Power**Jim Shannon:**[\[21984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions he has had with his Northern Irish counterpart on the new solar farm installed at Hydebank Prison.

Michael Shanks:

DESNZ officials meet regularly with their counterparts in Northern Ireland to discuss matters relating to renewables, including solar. Solar energy is at the heart of our

Clean Energy mission and solar farms, alongside rooftop installations, will play an important part in helping to decarbonise the electricity grid by 2030. Government is keen to lead by example in decarbonising its estate and as set out in the Clean Power Action plan, published in December 2024, Great British Energy will also promote renewables on public estates, unlocking additional scope for generation capacity on government-owned land. Great British Energy will seek to work with government landowners who will host generation assets and provide power directly to public buildings, in addition to connecting into the grid.

■ Liquefied Natural Gas: USA

Ian Roome:

[\[21542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the ability of the carbon intensity calculations used by his Department to take into account the recent increase in the volume of liquified natural gas imported from the USA.

Michael Shanks:

The UK follows the agreed international approach for setting targets, and reporting greenhouse gas emissions, which is for countries to report the emissions produced within their territories.

However, consumption-based emissions, which factor in overseas emissions associated with imports, are reported by Defra (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uks-carbon-footprint>) and considered in policy making where relevant and material.

DESNZ also publish conversion factors for company reporting which include well-to-tank emissions factors for LNG (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/government-conversion-factors-for-company-reporting>). The latest published factors are based on 2022 data but the values are updated annually, allowing for changes in the sources of imported gas, particularly LNG, to be reflected.

■ Macquarie Infrastructure Group

Dr Roz Savage:

[\[21956\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the potential risk of investment by Macquarie in (a) Lime Down Solar Park and (b) other Nationally Significant Infrastructure Developments.

Michael Shanks:

Ofgem and DESNZ have robust market monitoring schemes to assess electricity generation licence applications. Ofgem's principal objective is to protect the interests of existing and future consumers through maintaining security of supply and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Ofgem considers the experience, capability, and financial stability of each applicant.

The National Security and Investment (NSI) Act gives the government powers to scrutinise and intervene in acquisitions that may pose threats to national security. The Government does not routinely comment on specific deals or the applicability of the Act.

■ National Grid: Runcorn and Helsby

Mike Amesbury:

[22065]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the availability of national grid connections in Runcorn and Helsby constituency.

Michael Shanks:

Provision of network capacity in Runcorn and Helsby is the responsibility of the network companies, regulated by Ofgem. Information on network capacity for new distribution network connections in Runcorn and Helsby is available at https://www.spenergynetworks.co.uk/pages/connection_opportunities.aspx and by contacting Scottish Power Energy Networks. For transmission connections, information is available at <https://www.neso.energy/industry-information/connections/connections-360> and by contacting National Energy System Operator.

■ Offshore Industry: Environment Protection

Mr Toby Perkins:

[21285]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department's upcoming consultation on updated environmental guidance for offshore oil and gas projects will include measures to enact the ban in primary legislation; and when he plans to launch that consultation.

Michael Shanks:

On 30 October the Government launched a public consultation on draft guidance that will help offshore operators understand how to assess end-use (scope 3) greenhouse gas emissions associated with oil and gas extraction projects in areas that have already been licensed. This is a necessary step following the Supreme Court *Finch* judgment.

The consultation closed on 8 January 2025 and the finalised guidance will be published in the Spring.

Separately, the Government will also shortly consult on the implementation of its manifesto position not to issue new oil and gas licences to explore new fields.

■ Oil: Pollution

Mr Toby Perkins:

[21284]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to improve accountability for oil companies responsible for oil pollution.

Michael Shanks:

Oil spills from oil and gas installations are of significant concern to the Department which is why there is no minimum quantity for reporting. The number of oil spills reported to OPRED (Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning) has almost halved since 2018 and the amount of oil spilled in 2023 was at an historic low.

Operators are required to report all discharges, spills and non-compliances and every case is investigated by OPRED proportionately. OPRED takes enforcement action against operators if needed, including the use of notices to improve compliance with the law, fines or referral for criminal prosecution.

Mr Toby Perkins:[\[21286\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how much revenue was raised from fines of oil companies for all oil spills occurring during offshore operations in each of the last five years.

Michael Shanks:

OPRED issues fines for oil spills as an alternative to criminal prosecution for the more serious offences. A maximum fine of £50,000 can be issued for the most serious of spills. Revenue raised from fines of oil companies for all oil spills occurring during offshore operations in each of the last five years was £25,000 in 2020 and a £25,000 fine due to be issued for an oil spill in 2024. No fines for oil spills were issued in the other years.

OPRED has a range of other enforcement options that can be taken to ensure compliance with the law.

Renewable Energy**Ben Maguire:**[\[21937\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions his Department has had with oil and gas companies on renewables policy.

Michael Shanks:

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

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

Ben Maguire:[\[21938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will commission an independent review of alternative renewable energy technologies.

Michael Shanks:

The Secretary of State does not intend to commission a separate independent review of alternative renewable energy technologies. DESNZ monitors new developments through the Net Zero Innovation Programme.

Additionally, since 2012 the Energy Entrepreneurs Fund has received proposals for alternative technologies, which are reviewed independently.

The link to more of the Energy Entrepreneurs Fund can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/energy-entrepreneurs-fund>

■ Rented Housing: Energy Performance Certificates

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[22768]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to ensure landlords are compliant with the need to ensure that new tenancies have an Energy Performance Rating of at least C from 1 April 2025.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government will consult shortly on increasing minimum energy efficiency standards in the domestic private rented sector. The consultation will include proposals for rented homes to achieve Energy Performance Certificate C or equivalent by 2030.

■ Smart Data Communications Company: Energy

Mr Angus MacDonald:

[21960]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to support the Data Communications Company in the (a) development and (b) testing of the Virtual Wide Area Network; and whether he plans to make funding available to ensure that consumers in rural areas can access smart meters.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Data Communications Company (DCC) is required to assess opportunities to increase the overall level of communications network coverage for Great Britain beyond its currently provisioned minimum level of 99.25%. To enable the DCC to increase network coverage, the Department has recently consulted upon and indicated its intention to proceed with changes to the regulatory framework that will support implementation of the DCC's Virtual Wide Area Network solution. The necessary funding for this, including in rural areas, is provided for by the energy industry, as is the case with other smart metering costs.

■ Solar Power: Housing

Gill Furniss:

[22659]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to help increase the uptake of home solar panel installations.

Michael Shanks:

Future standards this year will set new homes and buildings on a path that moves away from relying on volatile fossil fuel markets and ensures they are fit for a net zero future.

As part of the Warm Homes Plan, the Government is considering the role that finance may play in supporting homeowners with the upfront costs of energy efficiency improvements, solar panels, and installing low carbon heating.

Further details about how the Government will increase the deployment of domestic solar panels will be set out in the forthcoming Solar Roadmap.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Agricultural Machinery: Small Businesses

Sir John Hayes:

[\[22570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to support SME manufacturers of farm equipment in cases where demand has fallen, in the context of funding provided by the Farming Investment Fund.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra recognises that farmers and the agricultural supply sector need clarity and certainty. Defra continues to roll out schemes and will optimise them in an orderly way over time so that farmers can plan. The budget for future years will be set in Phase 2 of the Spending Review, and details of future grant rounds will be confirmed in due course.

Defra is supporting farmers with £5 billion to the farming budget over two years – more money than ever for sustainable food production and to boost rural economic growth. In the long term, Defra will support farmers and farming businesses to become sustainable and self-reliant.

■ Agriculture: Grants

Sir John Hayes:

[\[22569\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to align future application windows of the Farm Equipment and Technology Fund with the agricultural calendar.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra is working to simplify and rationalise its grant funding offers including the Farming Investment Fund, ensuring that grants are targeted towards those who need them most and where they can deliver the most benefit for food security and nature. The timings of any future grant offers will be confirmed in due course and is subject to the outcome of Phase 2 of the Spending Review.

Defra continues to support farmers with £5 billion to the farming budget over two years – more money than ever for sustainable food production and to boost rural economic growth. In the long term, Defra will support farmers and farming businesses to become sustainable and self-reliant.

■ Agriculture: Subsidies

Tim Farron:

[\[21281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the value of government subsidies to farmers in 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government has committed to support farmers through a budget of £5 billion over the next two years, including £2.6 billion in 2024/25.

■ Avian Influenza : Disease Control

Claire Young:

[\[22171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has had recent discussions with its international counterparts on (a) coordination and (b) information sharing in the context of the circulation of highly pathogenic avian influenza across international boundaries; and whether his Department plans to develop a platform for stakeholders to (i) share resources and (ii) coordinate efforts to help tackle the disease.

Daniel Zeichner:

Wild waterbirds of the orders Anseriformes (for example, ducks, geese, and swans) and Charadriiformes (for example, gulls, terns, and waders) are considered the natural reservoir of avian influenza viruses. Their migratory patterns and interactions with kept birds form the backbone of most established avian influenza transmission networks worldwide enabling the virus to spread across international boundaries. This includes the UK despite robust controls preventing the movement of potentially infected poultry and poultry products from infected areas.

International collaboration and knowledge exchange on global dynamics of avian influenza are facilitated through discussions between the UK Chief Veterinary Officer and representatives from Defra and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) avian influenza national and international reference laboratories, and their global counterparts through the World Organisation for Animal Health, the Quadripartite Organisations and allied projects. This includes working through the joint WOA-FOA Scientific Network on animal influenza [OFFLU](#). In addition, international collaboration is ongoing through specific research projects, such as [KAPPA-FLU](#) project which is focusing on understanding the connectivity and dynamics of avian influenza.

Information and guidance for bird keepers and members of the public are published and available via gov.uk/birdflu and the international research network [FluGlobalNet](#) platform founded by APHA which facilitates information and science exchange on animal influenzas.

■ Avian Influenza and Notifiable Diseases

Claire Young: [\[22167\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many (a) mallard and (b) other gamebird rearing and release facilities have been found to be infected with (i) highly pathogenic avian influenza and (ii) which other notifiable diseases in each of the last five years.

Claire Young: [\[22168\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what information his Department holds on how many (a) mallards and (b) other gamebirds of which species have been destroyed at rearing and release facilities due to (i) highly pathogenic avian influenza and (ii) which other notifiable diseases in each of the last five years.

Daniel Zeichner:

Over the last five years highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has been confirmed at seven premises (five in England, one in Scotland and one in Wales) where commercial gamebirds have been kept, out of a total of 411 premises where HPAI has been confirmed in poultry or other captive birds. Under avian influenza rules gamebird covers any pheasant, partridge, ptarmigan, grouse or moor game, black (or heath) game and ducks bred for shooting.

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) holds records of how many poultry or other captive birds including kept gamebirds are culled for disease control purposes by Government. In addition, the outcome of veterinary investigations conducted by APHA at all sites where HPAI has been confirmed in kept birds including any cases in kept gamebirds are published on gov.uk in APHA's [outbreak epidemiology reports](#).

These reports include information on the number and type of birds present at infected premises.

Claire Young: [\[22169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what information his Department holds on how many (a) mallard and (b) other gamebird rear and release facilities where cases of (i) highly pathogenic avian influenza and (ii) other notifiable diseases had been detected (A) had already released gamebirds into the natural environment that season and (B) were open to wild birds (1) by being unroofed and (2) through pop holes being open in each of the last five years.

Daniel Zeichner:

My Department holds information on the release of Pheasants and Red-legged partridges on and within a 500m buffer of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in England for the last four years for SACs and two years for SPAs.

In addition, the outcome of veterinary investigations conducted by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) at all sites where highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has been confirmed in poultry or other captive birds including any cases in kept gamebirds are published on gov.uk in APHA's [outbreak epidemiology reports](#).

These reports include information on potential pathways to infection at the infected premises.

Once gamebirds have been released, they are classed as wild birds for avian influenza rules. Reports of mortality in release gamebirds are investigated through APHA's wild bird surveillance programme. Details of [findings of HPAI in wild birds](#) are published on gov.uk and are available to view and interrogate via [APHA's interactive wild bird surveillance map](#) and [dashboard](#).

■ Cephalopods and Shellfish: Animal Welfare

Sarah Champion: [\[21608\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending the definition of animals in the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to include (a) decapod crustaceans and (b) cephalopod molluscs.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government is committed to an evidence-based approach to improve welfare standards for decapod crustaceans and cephalopod molluscs. Defra seeks to commission research and expert opinion to inform any future policy decisions and welcomes the continued dialogue with stakeholders.

■ Dogs: Animal Breeding

Steve Darling: [\[22396\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the Animal Welfare Committee's December 2024 opinion on specialised dog reproductive practices.

Daniel Zeichner:

The department is carefully considering the Animal Welfare Committee's findings and will outline any next steps in due course. Any policy changes would be made with appropriate engagement with stakeholders.

Steve Darling: [\[22397\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department plans to take to regulate the use of stud dogs in dog breeding.

Daniel Zeichner:

Under The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 (the 2018 Regulations) anyone in the business of breeding and selling dogs and/or who breeds three or more litters in a 12-month period needs to have a valid licence from their local authority. Licensed breeders who own and use stud dogs as part of their breeding activity must provide for their welfare in line with the 2018 Regulations' licensing conditions.

The Government is considering the findings of its post-implementation review of the 2018 Regulations and the Animal Welfare Committee's opinion on the welfare

implications of specialised canine reproductive practices and will outline any next steps in due course.

■ **Electric Vehicles: Batteries**

Munira Wilson: [\[22680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to reduce the timeframe for the authorisation of new electric vehicle battery recycling facilities.

Mary Creagh:

Environmental permits enable Government missions on economic growth, green innovation and net zero. To protect the environment and the public, all environmental permits require appropriate assessment to prevent harm.

All environmental permitting is subject to statutory timeframes. Defra and the Environment Agency are constantly reviewing and improving Environmental Permitting services to make them efficient and reactive to customer needs. The Environment Agency will consider prioritising applications, if they meet specific criteria that include supporting economic growth or are for nationally significant infrastructure projects.

The Environment Agency encourages applicants to contact them as early as possible in any project plans and take up pre application advice ([Get advice before you apply for an environmental permit](#)), particularly for complex permits for new and novel technologies such as vehicle battery recycling facilities.

■ **Electrical Goods: Waste Disposal**

Sojan Joseph: [\[22820\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to encourage local authorities to include the recycling of small electrical items as part of household waste collections.

Mary Creagh:

The Waste Electronics and Electrical Equipment (WEEE) regulations make producers responsible for the electrical products they place on the market when they become waste. As part of this producers can pay into the WEEE Compliance Fee fund that provides project funding for local authorities seeking to provide more recycling opportunities for local residents. It also funds consumer awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of properly disposing of their electrical waste. According to Material Focus, 100 local authorities in the United Kingdom operate Kerbside collection for small electricals.

■ Environment Agency: Motor Vehicles

Joe Robertson: [\[21865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 23 December 2024 to Question 20097, on road Environment Agency: Motor Vehicles, how much the Environment Agency has spent on vehicle livery broken down by (a) vehicle type, (b) fuel type, and (c) the proportion allocated to branding and decorative elements in each of the last three financial years.

Joe Robertson: [\[21866\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 23 December 2024 to Question 20098 on Environment Agency: Motor Vehicles, whether wheel lug nuts on Environment Agency vehicles are (a) painted and (b) otherwise cosmetically enhanced.

Joe Robertson: [\[21867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 23 December 2024 to Question 20097 on Environment Agency: Motor Vehicles, whether livery expenditures are classified as (a) essential and (b) non-essential modifications; and how these classifications are determined.

Joe Robertson: [\[21868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 23 December 2024 to Question 20098 on Environment Agency: Motor Vehicles, what colour wheel lug nuts are standard for vehicles purchased by the Environment Agency.

Emma Hardy:

The Environment Agency does not specify a colour for wheel lug nuts on its vehicles and does not cosmetically alter them. All wheel nuts on the Environment Agency's commercial vehicles have plastic wheel nut indicators attached, which act as a safety feature to indicate if any wheel nuts have come loose. These plastic caps are yellow as standard but can be found in green or orange. Very occasionally, the Environment Agency uses red wheel nut indicators to indicate when a wheel has been changed but has not yet been torqued.

All vehicles owned by the Environment Agency have Chapter 8 markings to comply with Department for Transport codes of practice. The Environment Agency logo is also added to owned vehicles; this is regarded as essential for any public serving organisation, particularly for vehicles being used to respond to incidents where the Environment Agency needs a physical presence. The Environment Agency cannot provide a breakdown of the costs of applying chapter 8 markings and logos. The Environment Agency does not have a specific budget allocated solely for vehicle branding.

■ Farmers: Income

Jim Shannon:

[21988]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of income for farmers in 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government has committed to support farmers through a farming budget of £5 billion over two years, including £2.4 billion in 2025/26. We publish regular accredited official statistics on farm income in England and other data related to farm businesses. For example, on 14 November 2024, we published our Farm Business Income statistics ([Farm business income - GOV.UK](#)), which looked at how Farm Business Income has changed in 2023/24, including the contribution of Direct Payments and agri-environment payments to farm incomes and analysis by farm type.

Farm Business Income has seen substantial year-on-year fluctuations over the past 15 years driven by a multitude of factors which include weather and market fluctuations. For most farm types, Farm Business Income in 2023/24 saw very large falls relative to exceptional highs in 2022/23. At the all-farm level and a longer-term view, the average Farm Business Income of approximately £82,000 for the agricultural transition (2021/22-2023/24) remains above the pre-transition average of approximately £58,000 (2018/19-2020/21).

Further, farming evidence packs have been recently updated including key statistics and farm performance ([Farming statistics evidence packs - GOV.UK](#)). These set out an extensive range of data to provide an overview of agriculture in the UK, and the contribution of farm payments to farm incomes, including analysis by sector, location in England and type of land tenure.

The Secretary of State discussed the department's approach to the problem of low farming income across Britain at the Oxford Farming Conference on 9 January, and his full remarks can be found [here](#).

We will continue to carry out appropriate and timely assessments of our interventions to inform policy development.

■ Farming Investment Fund

Sir John Hayes:

[22568]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to announce his decision on the future of the Farming Investment Fund.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra is working to simplify and rationalise its grant funding offer, including the Farming Investment Fund, ensuring that grants are targeted towards those who need them most and where they can deliver the most benefit for food security and nature. The timings of any future grant offers will be confirmed in due course and is subject to the outcome of the Phase 2 of the Spending Review.

Defra continues to support farmers with £5 billion to the farming budget over two years – more money than ever for sustainable food production and to boost rural economic growth. In the long term, Defra will support farmers and farming businesses to become sustainable and self-reliant.

■ Food: Packaging

Lee Anderson:

[\[18182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of material switching by food producers currently using metal food cans on (a) UK food security and (b) the (i) recyclability of and (ii) cost of recycling other types of packaging.

Mary Creagh:

The Scheme Administrator will study what measures may be needed to mitigate against material switching, where switching may produce perverse environmental outcomes. As pEPR places the cost of disposing of packaging back on those who place packaging on the market, the system contains intrinsic incentives against producers switching to materials which are more expensive to reprocess in the waste stream.

■ Food: Public Sector

James McMurdock:

[\[22546\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what percentage of British produce is being brought in (a) hospitals, (b) army bases and (c) prisons.

Daniel Zeichner:

This data was not collected at any point by the last Government. However, the new Government wants to fix the unequal playing field for British farmers attempting to bid into the £5 billion spent each year on public sector catering contracts. As a first step, we are committed to working with industry to create a baseline, then monitor the food currently bought in the public sector and where it is bought from, as announced at the Oxford Farming Conference this week so we can ensure future support to enter this important supply chain, which would need to be consistent with our domestic and international legal obligations, is effective.

■ Game: Birds

Claire Young:

[\[22170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the current research his Department is conducting on the impacts of gamebird releases includes looking at the impacts of mallard releases.

Daniel Zeichner:

The current research my Department is conducting on the impacts of gamebird release does not include looking at impacts of mallard releases.

■ Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023**Peter Prinsley:** [\[22179\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress he has made on the implementation of the Genetic Technologies (Precision Breeding) Act 2023.

Daniel Zeichner:

This is a devolved matter, and the information provided therefore relates to England only.

The Secretary of State has recently announced that the secondary legislation necessary to implement the Precision Breeding Act for plants in England will be laid by the end of March.

Defra is also considering the animal welfare framework outlined in the Precision Breeding Act.

■ National Landscapes: Finance**Gideon Amos:** [\[22490\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much funding his Department plans to provide to (a) Quantock Hills, (b) Blackdown Hills and (c) other national landscapes in the 2025-26 financial year.

Mary Creagh:

Business planning is ongoing, so we are currently unable to confirm Defra grant allocations to National Landscapes, including the Quantock Hills and Blackdown Hills, for the 2025-26 financial year. We understand the uncertainty around resourcing remains a challenge and recognise that the Defra core grant is vital to support our Protected Landscapes.

■ Nature Conservation**Gill Furniss:** [\[22660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to (a) protect natural habitats and (b) promote biodiversity net gain.

Mary Creagh:

In England we are committed to nature protection and recovery. This includes delivering our legally binding biodiversity target to restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat by 2042.

We will create, restore and connect wildlife-rich habitat, reduce pressures on species including from pollution and climate change, and take targeted action to recover specific species.

The Environmental Improvement Plan is being reviewed and we have confirmed the commitment to restoring 75% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) to favourable condition by 2042. SSSIs continue to be one of the most effective tools for

protecting and enhancing biodiversity and deliver a wide range of health and socio-economic benefits.

A priority for this Government is to support building the homes and infrastructure we desperately need while protecting the environment.

Mandatory biodiversity net gain, which became a requirement for most developments in February 2024, is an important means of enabling this.

Officials are working closely with the construction, environmental, and local authority sectors to monitor the delivery of biodiversity net gain to ensure its success.

■ **Wetlands: Conservation**

Adam Jogee:

[\[22445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many Ramsar sites have had their ecological character threatened in each of the last 14 years.

Mary Creagh:

In line with Article 3.2 of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar Convention), Contracting Parties are committed to monitor their Ramsar Sites and inform the Secretariat whenever the ecological character of a site has changed, is changing, or is likely to change as a result of human interference.

Over the last 14 years, 9 cases have been opened for UK Ramsar Sites under Article 3.2. Following actions to manage these changes or risks of change, the majority have been closed. Three cases remain open with regards to the following sites:

- Ouse Washes,
- Dee Estuary and
- Ballynahone Bog.

Work is ongoing to address and close these cases.

■ **Zoos: Safety**

Jim Shannon:

[\[22268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the safety of zoos.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice (the Zoo Standards) set out, amongst other things, requirements which licensed zoos in England are expected to meet with regard to public and animal safety. Defra is currently working to update the Zoo Standards, including considering updates to public safety requirements. Updated Zoo Standards will be published shortly.

Zoos must also comply with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 which ensures the safety of staff. The British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums

(BIAZA) also publish Health & Safety Guidelines for Zoos & Aquariums which focus on the health and safety of employers, employees and the public within zoos.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Afghanistan: Women

Tracy Gilbert: [\[21816\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the banning of windows overlooking places used by women in Afghanistan.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We condemn the appalling erosion of human rights in Afghanistan, particularly for women and girls, including the most recent ridiculous ban on windows overlooking spaces used by women. As the Foreign Secretary has said, the exclusion of women from all aspects of public life is another tragic setback for Afghanistan. FCDO officials regularly press the Taliban to reverse their inhuman restrictions, including during a visit to Kabul in December. We also condemned the Taliban's actions against women and girls in a joint statement with the G7+ in December. We are discussing with international partners ways to hold the Taliban accountable for their actions.

■ African Union

Adam Jogee: [\[21797\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many times Ministers in his Department have met with the leadership of the African Union since 5 July 2024.

Anneliese Dodds:

FCDO Ministers regularly engage with the leadership of the African Union (AU). Lord Collins spoke with the AU Commissioners for Political Affairs and Trade and Industry immediately following his appointment in July. Lord Collins and I both met AU Commissioners in Addis Ababa during visits in August, and Lord Collins subsequently met with AU Commission Chairperson Faki at the UN General Assembly in September. I met with the Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment during COP29 in November.

■ Alaa Abd El-Fattah

Marsha De Cordova: [\[21363\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what further steps he plans to take to encourage the Egyptian authorities to release Alaa Abd El-Fattah.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK Government remains committed to securing the release of Alaa Abd El-Fattah. We continue to raise Mr El-Fattah's case at the highest levels with the Egyptian Government. The Prime Minister wrote to President Sisi on the case on 26 December. The Foreign Secretary raised Mr El-Fattah's case with Egyptian Foreign Minister Abdelatty most recently on 20 December 2024. The National Security Advisor, Jonathan Powell raised this with the Foreign Minister on 2 January 2025. I raised Mr El-Fattah's case with Foreign Minister Abdelatty on 15 October 2024.

■ **Alaa Abd el-Fattah****Nadia Whittome:**[\[22372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with international allies on efforts to help secure the release of Alaa Abd el-Fattah in Egypt.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK Government remains committed to securing the release of Alaa Abd El-Fattah. We continue to raise Mr El-Fattah's case at the highest levels of the Egyptian Government.

FCDO officials speak regularly with likeminded partners on how to enhance international cooperation and end the practice of arbitrary arrest, detention or sentencing.

The Prime Minister wrote to President Sisi to raise Mr El-Fattah's case on 26 December. The Foreign Secretary also raised the case with Egyptian Foreign Minister Abdelatty most recently on 20 December 2024. The National Security Adviser, Jonathan Powell raised this with the Foreign Minister on 2 January 2025.

Nadia Whittome:[\[22373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the Government plans to raise case of Alaa Abd el-Fattah at the upcoming Universal Periodic Review session for Egypt at the United Nations.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK Government remains committed to securing the release of Alaa Abd El-Fattah. We continue to raise Mr El-Fattah's case at the highest levels with the Egyptian Government.

The FCDO will use the upcoming Universal Periodic Review session on Egypt in January to raise issues relating to human rights.

■ **AUKUS****Wendy Morton:**[\[22281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with (a) the Secretary of State for Defence, (b) his Australian counterpart and (c) his US counterpart on the AUKUS agreement.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign Secretary engages regularly on AUKUS with the Defence Secretary, and his Australian and US counterparts. Most recently, the Foreign and Defence Secretaries hosted the Australian Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister for the Australia-UK Ministerial Consultations (AUKMIN) in December 2024, where they reaffirmed their enduring commitment to the partnership and welcomed strong progress made across both Pillars.

Wendy Morton:[\[22282\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he has taken with the Secretary of State for Defence to progress the AUKUS agreement since July 2024.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign Secretary works closely with the Defence Secretary to progress AUKUS. Since July 2024, this government has signed a trilateral agreement to enable the sharing of critical submarine technology and information, secured a landmark exemption to the US International Traffic in Arms Regulations, and appointed Sir Stephen Lovegrove as the UK's AUKUS Adviser, whose report will help maximise the benefits and opportunities of the partnership.

■ Azerbaijan: Airlines**Wendy Morton:**[\[22630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment has he made of the potential merits of an international investigation into the recent Azerbaijan Airlines crash.

Stephen Doughty:

Our thoughts are with all those affected by this incident, including the family and friends of those who have died. We support Brazil, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan in their work to ensure a comprehensive and independent investigation into the tragedy. My officials remain in close contact with officials in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

■ BBC World Service: Foreign Relations**Wendy Morton:**[\[22619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2024 to Question 19313 on BBC World Service: Foreign Relations, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on the Soft Power Council.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport have agreed to co-chair the Soft Power Council, and will host its first meeting on 15 January. A Written Ministerial Statement will be issued, setting out the Council's remit and membership.

■ Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement

Victoria Collins:

[\[21529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what progress his Department has made on the ratification of the Global Oceans Treaty.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Government is completely committed to ratification of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement, also known as the "High Seas Treaty" or "Global Oceans Treaty"), which is in line with our determination to reinvigorate the UK's wider international leadership on climate and nature. Work is in hand on the measures needed to implement the detailed and complex provisions of the Agreement before the UK can ratify.

■ Brazil: G20

Priti Patel:

[\[21593\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the proposals from Brazil during their Presidency of the G20 for an 18th Sustainable Development Goal.

Catherine West:

The UK is a long-standing supporter of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as agreed in 2015, including Goal 10: Reducing Inequality, which covers racial inequalities.

The UK and Brazil share an ambition to break down barriers to opportunity and tackle inequality. As set out in the King's Speech in July 2024, the Government will introduce a draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill, which will enshrine in law the full right to equal pay on the basis of race or disability, amongst other measures to tackle racial discrimination. There are no plans for the UK to adopt any additional SDGs.

■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty

Priti Patel:

[\[21590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answers of 6 December 2024 to Question 16721 and of 9 December 2024 to Question 16720 on British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty, for what reason he was unable to provide the information requested; and when he plans to make a decision on publishing such details associated with that appointment.

Stephen Doughty:

Discussions between the UK and Mauritius on the future exercise of sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory remain ongoing. It is not appropriate to provide a running commentary on engagement between UK and Mauritian officials. As set out in the joint statements on 20 December and 13 January, we will continue to work

closely with Mauritius to conclude a deal that is in both sides' shared interests. It remains our intention to decide on publication of costs associated with Jonathan Powell's role as the PM's BIOT Envoy at a later date.

■ China: Falun Gong

Jim Shannon: [\[21991\]](#)

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 of China's treatment of Falun Gong practitioners.

Catherine West:

The environment for freedom of religion or belief across China is restrictive, which includes the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners.

This Government champions freedom of religion or belief for all abroad. We work to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora, and through bilateral engagement. For example, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary both raised human rights recently with their counterparts (President Xi and Foreign Minister Wang).

■ China: Overseas Companies

Lee Anderson: [\[21372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to enhance the vetting and monitoring processes of Chinese businesses operating in the UK.

Catherine West:

As an open economy, the Government welcomes foreign trade and investment where it supports growth and jobs in the UK, meets our stringent legal and regulatory requirements, and does not compromise our national security. Legislation including the country-agnostic National Security and Investment (NSI) Act gives the Government powers to scrutinise and potentially intervene in acquisitions of control over entities and assets in or linked to the UK that may pose national security risks.

■ Climate Change: Compensation

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[21020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to review the adequacy of revenue raising mechanisms for climate reparations ahead of COP30 in Belem.

Anneliese Dodds:

Countries in the Global South are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, and we are committed to partnering with these countries to address the climate and nature crisis and accelerate the clean energy transition.

We are committed to helping deliver global climate finance, including the New Collective Quantified Goal agreed at COP29 of at least \$300 billion per year to developing countries by 2035, and responding to the wider call on all actors to increase climate finance to developing countries to £1.3 trillion per year. As part of that effort, we consider specific revenue raising mechanisms on a case-by-case basis, and we are pressing for faster and more ambitious reforms to the global financial system to deliver much more and higher quality climate and development finance. This is not about reparations. The UK government's position on reparations has not changed.

■ Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

Priti Patel:

[\[21597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to implement the measures agreed in the Leaders' Statement and Samoa Communique at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting on 26 October 2024.

Stephen Doughty:

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Leaders' Statement and Communique focused on the need to build societal, democratic, environmental and economic resilience across the Commonwealth. The UK is taking these commitments forward, including by working with partners to bolster human rights and democratic governance. We have pledged further support to the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub, which helps vulnerable member states access funding to tackle the impacts of climate change. We are taking forward the establishment of the UK Trade Centre for Expertise, as well as the Commonwealth Investment Plan of Action to mobilise increased trade and investment across the Commonwealth.

■ Development Aid: Nutrition

Wendy Morton:

[\[22284\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of providing funding for the Nutrition for Growth replenishment campaign before the pledging event in Paris in 2025.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is looking forward to the upcoming 2025 Nutrition for Growth summit and FCDO officials have been working closely with French counterparts to build momentum ahead of the summit. The FCDO has published an assessment of progress with the commitments that the previous government made at the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit in 2021. We will review this as we finalise our approach to N4G 2025. Despite the challenges posed by the current fiscal situation, which the spending review will address, the UK is committed to protecting the world's most vulnerable, including through the use of lifesaving nutrition interventions.

■ Development Aid: Reviews

Wendy Morton: [\[22277\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the (a) terms of reference and (b) timeline is for Baroness Shafik's review of international development.

Anneliese Dodds:

As the Foreign Secretary said in his keynote speech on 9 January, he set in train three reviews upon his appointment, is grateful to Martin Donnelly, to Ngaire Woods and to Minouche Shafik for all their work into the FCDO's role and capabilities, looking particularly at our economic capability in this department, and at our global impact in this department, and our fusion of development and diplomacy as well as our development capability and capacity. The next step will be to consider how best to present the recommendations of all three reviews. In each case we are asking how we can ensure that the tools at our disposal provide maximum benefits to our goals not least UK prosperity and security.

Wendy Morton: [\[22620\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2024 to Question 19316 on Development Aid: Reviews, when he received the Development Review.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Development Review was submitted to the Foreign Secretary alongside the Global Impact and Economic Diplomacy reviews at the end of 2024. Once the Foreign Secretary has considered their recommendations, he will consider how best to communicate the independent reviews' findings.

■ Ethiopia: Human Rights

Kate Osamor: [\[21328\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of allegations of serious human rights abuses and atrocities committed by the Ethiopian Government in Amhara.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is aware of reports of human rights violations in Amhara, and we are engaging all sides to call for peace and accountability. The Minister for Africa raised the issue when he met Prime Minister Abiy in October 2024. To help alleviate suffering, we co-hosted a humanitarian pledging conference in April that raised \$610 million, including a £100 million UK contribution, with funds raised providing lifesaving support to civilians across Ethiopia, including in Amhara. We are working to assist delivery of this support to those most in need, and we are also supporting the implementation of the Government of Ethiopia's Transitional Justice policy, including by improving the investigative capacity of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.

■ Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance: Finance

Wendy Morton:

[\[22283\]](#)

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, whether he plans to announce a commitment in relation to the Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance's replenishment campaign for the 2026-2030 strategic period ahead of the High Level Pledging Summit in Brussels in 2025.

Anneliese Dodds:

The United Kingdom is one of the largest contributors to Gavi and aims to see a successful replenishment in 2025. Funding decisions will be made as part of the ongoing Spending Review and announced upon its conclusion.

■ Gaza: Armed Conflict

Adam Jogee:

[\[21768\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government has taken to help stop the loss of life in Gaza since 19 December 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We have raised protection of civilians and the destruction of health infrastructure repeatedly with the Israeli government, most recently on 3 January. The UK has announced £112 million for the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) so far this financial year, including £41million for UNWRA, providing vital services to civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, and to Palestinians across the region. In July, we announced £5.5m in funding to UK-Med for operating their field hospitals. UK-Med have now provided vital care to over 300,000 Gazans since the start of the conflict.

Securing an immediate ceasefire, the safe release of all hostages and urgent action to address the humanitarian crisis remains the UK's top priority.

■ Gaza: Conflict Resolution

Wendy Morton:

[\[21992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister for Development of 28 November 2024 on UK Leadership on Sudan, Official Report, column 945, what discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the Jeddah process; and if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of those discussions for making progress to a sustainable end to the conflict in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Foreign Secretary has discussed the situation in Sudan with both his US and Saudi counterparts this past week. The UK has consistently called upon the warring parties to fully implement the commitments made in the Jeddah Declaration and commit in good faith to mediation talks, including through the UN Security Council

resolution we co-penned with Sierra Leone, which was cynically vetoed by Russia in November. We will continue to pursue all diplomatic avenues, including as UN Security Council penholder on Sudan, to maintain collective pressure on both sides to protect civilians, allow unrestricted humanitarian access, and commit to a sustained and meaningful peace process.

On the conflict in Gaza, this government has been clear; we are committed to pursuing a lasting solution to the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict, including through achieving a two-state solution. We continue to support efforts to this end through our aid programmes, which assist civil society in Israel and Palestine on a range of issues, including peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

■ **Gaza: Hostage Taking**

Adam Jogee:

[\[21769\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government has taken to help secure the release of the remaining hostages in Gaza since 19 December 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Securing an immediate ceasefire and the safe release of all hostages, including Emily Damari and three other hostages with strong links to the UK, remains the UK's top priority. We have continuously supported hostage talks, and we continue to work alongside our allies and partners in the region, exercising every possible diplomatic lever to see them immediately released. Since 19 December 2024, the Foreign Secretary has talked to several of his counterparts from across the region. On 6 January, the Foreign Secretary spoke to the Prime Minister of Qatar, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, offered UK support for negotiations, and stressed the importance of securing a ceasefire to enable the safe return of Emily Damari and the three other UK-linked hostages and see an end to the war in Gaza.

■ **Hong Kong: Demonstrations**

Priti Patel:

[\[21598\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to the (a) Chinese Government and (b) authorities in Hong Kong on reports of the Hong Kong Police offering rewards for the arrests of pro-democracy activists residing in the UK and Canada; what discussions he has had with his Canadian counterpart on such reports; and what steps he is taking to protect people affected living in the UK.

Catherine West:

The Foreign Secretary issued a statement on 24 December condemning the Hong Kong police's latest arrest warrants and calling on Beijing to repeal the National Security Law. Senior British diplomats have raised these concerns directly with the Hong Kong and Beijing authorities. FCDO officials have discussed the matter with the Canadian government at working level.

The UK Government will not tolerate any attempts by foreign governments to coerce, intimidate, harass, or harm their critics overseas, especially in the UK. The Government will continue to stand with and support members of the Hong Kong community who have relocated to the UK.

■ **Hussam Abu Safiya**

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[21720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart about Dr Hussam Abu Safiya.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are concerned by the reports of the IDF operation at Kamal Adwan hospital, and the reported detention of Dr Hussam Abu Safiya and others. In recent weeks, I have raised this case with both Israel's Ambassador to the UK, and Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Haskel. Israel must allow medical staff to carry out their work unimpeded, and to travel around Gaza as needed. On 27 December I underlined to Israel's government that the situation in Northern Gaza cannot continue and raised our serious concern about repeated strikes on Kamal Adwan hospital, and the safety of civilians and medical workers there.

■ **Israel: Visits Abroad**

Chris Law:

[\[20977\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the Minister for Development met representatives of the Israeli Government during her visit to Israel in December 2024.

Anneliese Dodds:

I met Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Sharren Haskel and Yuli Edelstein, Chair of Israel's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, during my official visit to Israel in December 2024.

■ **Mozambique: Politics and Government**

Adam Jogee:

[\[21767\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with the (a) Southern African Development Community and (b) African Union on the political situation in Mozambique.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK has discussed the political situation in Mozambique with key partners, including the Southern African Development Community and the African Union. The UK and partners continue to support the peaceful resolution of current unrest in Mozambique. Promoting political dialogue is central to our approach, as well as urging all parties to show restraint while respecting the rule of law and human rights. Lord Collins also recently emphasised the importance of de-escalation and an inclusive transition with representatives of the Mozambican government, and will

discuss the situation with the Executive Secretary of SADC when visiting Botswana from 14-16 January.

■ Religious Freedom

Ian Byrne: [\[21415\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to promote freedom of religion and belief internationally.

Anneliese Dodds:

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 and promoting tolerance and mutual respect through our engagement in multilateral fora, our bilateral work, and our programme funding, including the FCDO John Bunyan Fund, a designated programme for FoRB-focused overseas projects. 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.

■ Sri Lanka: Land Mines

Fabian Hamilton: [\[21566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to support mine clearance programmes in Sri Lanka.

Catherine West:

The UK has funded landmine clearance programmes that make land safe since 2002. This supports livelihoods and encourages a return to normalcy for citizens in conflict-affected areas of Sri Lanka. Since 2016, our delivery partners at the HALO Trust and Mines Advisory Group have collectively cleared 3,361,647 square metres of land which is now used for agriculture, collection of natural resources, infrastructure, public services and residential purposes. The UK is one of the founding signatories of the Mine Ban Treaty, and these projects demonstrate the UK's continued leadership with others to make Sri Lanka landmine-free.

■ Sudan: Humanitarian Aid

Wendy Morton: [\[22009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to identify potential additional routes for humanitarian aid delivery into Sudan since July 2024.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK has continued to push for additional aid routes into Sudan, including through Aweil (from South Sudan to Sudan), to facilitate aid deliveries, particularly into areas held by the Rapid Support Forces; and for existing routes in to be free of bureaucratic and administrative impediments. In addition, the UK continues to press for improved cross-line routes, including into Khartoum. We raised the critical importance of

increased humanitarian cross-border and cross-line access at open briefings at the UN Security Council on 19 December 2024 and 6 January 2025 and have engaged directly with the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, Tom Fletcher, on the UN response. On 25 November 2024, the Foreign Secretary chaired a Sudan meeting with G7 and Arab Quint Foreign Ministers to discuss joint steps to improve humanitarian access, protect civilians, and increase aid.

■ Sustainable Development

Priti Patel:

[\[21594\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the progress on delivery of each of the Sustainable Development Goals by (a) the UK and (b) other governments.

Anneliese Dodds:

Despite significant international development gains over the last 40 years, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2024 Report found that globally only 17 per cent of the SDG targets with assessable data were on track to be achieved by 2030.

As the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary set out at the UN General Assembly in September, the UK is committed to working with partners at home and internationally to accelerate progress towards the SDGs by 2030. Relevant UK government departments report their contribution to the domestic delivery of the SDGs in their Annual Reports and Accounts published on gov.uk.

■ Syria: Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham

Priti Patel:

[\[21596\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what contacts his Department has had with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Foreign Secretary met the interim Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Shaibani in Riyadh on 12 January, where he discussed the importance of an inclusive political transition and regional security. Senior Foreign Office officials have recently travelled to Damascus in December to meet with the leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and the interim Minister for Foreign Affairs, to underline the UK's support for the Syrian people and discuss the pathway towards a more hopeful, representative and peaceful future for Syria. The UK stands with the Syrian people in building a more stable, free and prosperous future.

■ Syria: Women

Wendy Morton:

[\[22293\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 24 December 2024 to Question 19309 on Syria: Women, what plans he has to support education for women and girls in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Education in Syria, especially for girls, has been a continuing priority for the UK. The UK is a leading donor to the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait, providing critical support to children across Syria. Since 2017, our Syria Education Programme has supported over 625,000 children, 50 percent of which are girls. The programme prioritises inclusion and enhanced access to education for girls, including through building girls' confidence and reducing dropout risks. We remain committed to supporting education and are considering how changes in Syria present opportunities and risks.

United Nations: Older People**Anna Sabine:**[\[22497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of UK support for a UN convention on the rights of older persons.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK Government is committed to equality and opportunity for all, with a particular focus on those most likely to be marginalised and discriminated against, including on the grounds of their age. We are open in principle to the idea of a multilateral instrument dedicated to the human rights of older people and will continue to play a constructive role in discussions on this issue at the UN and other relevant fora.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**Addictions: Stoke-on-Trent South****Dr Allison Gardner:**[\[22521\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to fund improved provisions for addiction support services in Stoke-on-Trent South.

Andrew Gwynne:

In addition to the Public Health Grant, the Department provides additional funding to support drug and alcohol services. In 2024/25 a total of £4,670,913 was allocated to Stoke-on-Trent. This included £2,906,020 for the Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery grant, £939,906 for the Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant, £589,429 for the Housing Support Grant, £165,719 for the Individual Placement and Support Grant (employment support), and £69,839 for the Inpatient Detoxification Grant. This funding is provided at a local authority level and information on funding at a constituency level is not available. Future targeted funding for drug and alcohol treatment services beyond 2025 will be announced very shortly.

The Government is providing £70 million of additional funding for local authority-led Stop Smoking Services in England in 2024/25, building on existing funding made available via the Public Health Grant. The Government will also provide a further £70 million funding for Stop Smoking Services in 2025/26. As part of this additional

funding Stoke-on-Trent has been allocated £381,688 for Stop Smoking Services in 2025/26.

The Department remains focused on ensuring those experiencing gambling-related harm can access the right care at the right time. The introduction of a new statutory levy on gambling operators will provide increased, independent funding to support the improvement and expansion of treatment and support services, with NHS England acting as the main treatment commissioner.

■ Alcoholic Drinks and Drugs: Stoke on Trent

Dr Allison Gardner:

[22846]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) provide support for and (b) increase capacity of drug and alcohol recovery services in Stoke-on-Trent.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is committed to ensuring that anyone with a drug or alcohol problem can access the help and support they need, and we recognise the need for evidenced-based, high-quality treatment. In addition to the Public Health Grant, the Department provides additional funding to support drug and alcohol services. In 2024/25, a total of £4,670,913 was allocated to Stoke-on-Trent. This included £2,906,020 for the Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant, £939,906 for the Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant, £589,429 for the Housing Support Grant, £165,719 for the Individual Placement and Support Grant (employment support), and £69,839 for the Inpatient Detoxification Grant. Future targeted funding for drug and alcohol treatment services beyond 2025 will be announced very shortly.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) provides monitoring, data, guidance, and targeted support to help local authorities, such as Stoke-on-Trent, to support improvement of drug and alcohol treatment. For Stoke-on-Trent, this support includes regular meetings with the Director of Public Health, commissioners, and providers to discuss treatment and recovery delivery, site visits by OHID, and engagement in improvement support programmes, for example introducing innovation into treatment services to improve access and retention for people who use opiates.

Additionally, OHID has published guidance for local authorities to support them in commissioning effective alcohol and drug treatment and recovery services in their areas, with more information available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/commissioning-quality-standard-alcohol-and-drug-services>

The Department continues to work with all local areas to address unmet need and drug misuse deaths and to drive improvements in continuity of care. This includes the Unmet Need Toolkit which can be used by local areas to assess gaps in referral

pathways. The toolkit also contains guidance on good practice to reduce the level of unmet need and target priority or underserved groups.

■ **Alcoholic Drinks: Misuse**

Dr Allison Gardner: [\[22517\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking through the implementation of an alcohol strategy to tackle problem drinking.

Andrew Gwynne:

Under our Health Mission, the Government is committed to prioritising preventative public health measures to support people to live longer, healthier lives. The Department will continue to work across Government to better understand how we can best reduce alcohol-related harms.

■ **Alcoholism: Rehabilitation**

Jim Shannon: [\[21989\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of people referred for alcohol addiction support.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities publishes adult substance misuse treatment statistics annually which includes the numbers of adults aged 18 and over in contact with drug and alcohol treatment services in England. The latest publication is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/substance-misuse-treatment-for-adults-statistics-2023-to-2024/adult-substance-misuse-treatment-statistics-2023-to-2024-report>

This publication provides an analysis of trends over time. The data over the last ten years for adults newly presenting to treatment for alcohol only and treatment for alcohol and non-opiate drugs shows that from a previous high in 2013/14 of 84,533, the number of new presentations to treatment fell year-on-year between 2014/15 and 2017/18. The number of new presentations remained relatively stable between 2017/18 and 2020/21, before rising continuously since then to a new high of 94,782 in 2023/24. This is the highest number since records began in 2008.

The most recent estimates of alcohol dependence in England from 2019/20 suggest that, of the people with alcohol dependence that could benefit from specialist alcohol treatment, in 2023/24, 80% were not in treatment.

The following table shows the above information in more detail:

YEAR	NUMBERS OF ADULTS		
	NUMBERS OF ADULTS NEWLY PRESENTING TO TREATMENT FOR ALCOHOL ONLY	NUMBERS OF ADULTS NEWLY PRESENTING TO TREATMENT FOR ALCOHOL AND NON- OPIATES	TOTAL
2013-14	65,110	19,423	84,533
2014-15	61,404	18,548	79,952
2015-16	57,723	18,822	76,545
2016-17	52,583	18,716	71,299
2017-18	50,656	18,757	69,413
2018-19	52,393	20,215	72,608
2019-20	50,957	21,167	72,124
2020-21	52,220	20,849	73,069
2021-22	56,995	23,234	80,229
2022-23	57,802	24,229	82,031
2023-24	65,108	29,674	94,782

Source: National Drug Treatment Monitoring System

Information on the number of young people under 18 years old being treated for substance misuse, including alcohol, is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/alcohol-and-drug-misuse-and-treatment-statistics>

■ Ambulance Services: Stoke-on-Trent South

Dr Allison Gardner:

[22845]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce ambulance waiting times in Stoke-on-Trent South constituency.

Karin Smyth:

The Government recognises the pressures on the National Health Service during the winter period and the impact this is having on ambulance response times, including in Stoke-on-Trent.

We are committed to supporting the National Health Service to improve performance and achieve the standards set out in the NHS Constitution but must be clear that there are no quick fixes.

However, we are determined to turn things around through investment and reform. The Chancellor announced £25.6 billion of additional healthcare funding over the next two years, and we will set out a 10-Year Health Plan to radically reform the NHS and build a health service that is fit for the future.

■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Health Services

Jo Platt:

[21006]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of local medical committees advising GPs to withdraw from ADHD shared care agreements; and what steps his Department plans to take to ensure there is uninterrupted access to essential medications and care for patients with ADHD.

Karin Smyth:

Shared care arrangements between a specialist service and the patient's general practice (GP) cover a number of clinical areas. Guidance is in place to help GPs decide whether to accept shared care responsibilities, with further information available at the following link:

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

National Health Service clinicians need to be content that any prescriptions, or referrals for treatment, are clinically appropriate. If a shared care arrangement cannot be put in place after the treatment has been initiated, the responsibility for continued prescribing remains with the specialist clinician, and this applies to both NHS and private medical care. However, a GP who had previously agreed to, and had been deploying, a shared care agreement would need to demonstrate clear reasoning as to why they can no longer support this, and they have a responsibility, along with the specialist clinician, to secure continuity of care for their patient.

Where possible, we encourage patients to raise any concerns directly with their GP in the first instance, as this is usually the fastest method of resolution, and can help to build a practice patient relationship.

The Department has been working hard with industry and NHS England to help resolve the supply issues with some attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) medicines, which are affecting the United Kingdom and other countries around the world. As a result of intensive work, some issues have been resolved and all strengths of lisdexamfetamine, atomoxetine capsules, and guanfacine prolonged-release tablets are now available.

We are continuing to work to resolve the supply issues, where they remain, for methylphenidate prolonged-release tablets. We are engaging with all suppliers of methylphenidate prolonged-release tablets to assess the challenges faced and their actions to address them. We are also directing suppliers to secure additional stocks, expedite deliveries where possible, and review plans to further build capacity to support continued growth in demand for the short and long-term. To improve supply

and resiliency, we are also working with prospective new suppliers of methylphenidate prolonged-release tablets to expand the UK supplier base.

In collaboration with NHS England's national ADHD data improvement plan, we plan to combine modelling for future growth forecasts, which will be shared with industry to improve demand forecasting for ADHD medicines.

■ **Blood Cancer: Databases**

Sorcha Eastwood:

[22160]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of blood cancer data.

Karin Smyth:

The National Disease Registration Service, through the National Cancer Registration and Analysis Services (NCRAS), collects information on how many people in England are diagnosed with or treated for cancer. Blood cancer is included as a distinct category, labelled haematological neoplasms. This creates a clinically rich data resource that is used to measure diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes for patients diagnosed with cancer. The data held by the NCRAS supports service provision and commissioning in the National Health Service, clinical audits, and public health and epidemiological research, all of which contribute to improved outcomes for those diagnosed with cancer, including those with blood cancer. The information is available at the following link:

<https://www.cancerdata.nhs.uk/>

National Disease Registration Service analysts attend quarterly meetings with United Kingdom and Ireland Association of Cancer Registries analysts to discuss any differences in the reporting of cancer data and how these can be made analogous. Annual performance indicators, including key performance indicators for haematology, are available at the following link:

<https://ukiacr.org/kpis>

■ **Brain Cancer: Health Services**

Mr Angus MacDonald:

[23113]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps with his counterparts in the devolved Administrations to implement a national brain cancer strategy.

Andrew Gwynne:

Health Services across the United Kingdom are devolved. In England, we are developing a 10-year plan to radically reform the National Health Service, and my Rt Hon. friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, has been clear that there needs to be a national cancer plan, which will include brain cancer. We are currently in discussions about this plan and its relationship to the 10-Year Health Plan and the Government's wider health mission.

UK Government Ministers regularly engage with their counterparts in the Devolved Governments. No discussions have been had about a UK-wide national brain cancer strategy.

■ Brain: Injuries

Chris Bloore:

[22780]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve health outcomes for survivors of acquired brain injuries.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government wants a society where every person, including those with a long-term condition such as an acquired brain injury (ABI), receives high-quality, compassionate continuity of care, with their families and carers supported.

We will change the National Health Service so that it becomes not just a sickness service, but able to prevent ill health in the first place. This will help us be better prepared for the change in nature of disease and allow our services to focus more on the management of chronic, long-term conditions, like ABI, including rehabilitation where appropriate.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence is currently developing guidance 'Rehabilitation for chronic neurological disorders including acquired brain injury', which is expected to be published on 16 July 2025. More information is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/indevelopment/gid-ng10181>

I met the original proponent of the ABI strategy, my Hon. Friend, Sir Chris Bryant MP, on 27 November 2024 to discuss ABI and we had a very fruitful discussion about what might be achievable in the both the short term and the longer term. Sir Chris remains a huge advocate for those that have suffered an ABI and I fully agree with him that the Government should, and importantly will, do more, including showcasing those areas that have effectively integrated post-hospital care and support, including rehabilitation, to other areas where patients are not getting the care and support they deserve.

A decision on next steps on ABI at the national level will be taken in due course.

Meanwhile, we have committed to develop a 10-year plan to deliver an NHS fit for the future. We will be carefully considering input from the public, patients, health staff, and our stakeholders as we develop the plan over the coming months. The engagement process has been launched and I would encourage stakeholders to engage with that process to allow us to fully understand what is not working as well as it should and what the potential solutions are, including on ABI. More information is available at the following link:

<https://change.nhs.uk/en-GB/>

■ Brain: Tumours

Matt Bishop:

[\[22508\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to fund research into potential treatments for brain tumours to help (a) extend life expectancy and (b) alleviate suffering.

Andrew Gwynne:

Research is crucial in tackling cancer, which is why the Department of Health and care invests over £1.5 billion per year in health research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). NIHR research expenditure for all cancers was £121.8 million in 2022/23.

In the five years between 2018/19 and 2022/23, the NIHR directly invested £11.3 million in research projects and programmes focused on brain tumours. In addition, our wider investments in NIHR research infrastructure, including facilities, services and the research workforce, are estimated to be £31.5 million, between 2018/19 and 2022/23, and have enabled 227 brain cancer research studies to take place in the same period. In total, NIHR investments have enabled 8,500 people to participate in potentially life-changing research in the National Health Service over this time.

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.

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

Mike Amesbury:

[\[22668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to prioritise screening for brain tumours.

Andrew Gwynne:

In the United Kingdom, national screening programmes are introduced based on the recommendations of the UK National Screening Committee, an independent scientific advisory committee which advises Ministers and the National Health Service in all four countries on all aspects of population and targeted screening and supports implementation.

The UK National Screening Committee has not been asked to look at screening for brain tumours. The Committee welcomes any new published peer reviewed evidence which suggests the case for a new or modified screening programme via its annual call, which is available at the following link:

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

■ Breast Cancer: Genetics

Clive Jones:

[R] [22475]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 18282 on Breast Cancer: Genetics, whether workforce planning for genetic counsellors will prioritise areas that have regional inequities in access to genetic counselling.

Andrew Gwynne:

Each of the seven NHS Genomic Medicine Service regions is reviewing its local workforce strategies and people plans to understand the support needed for patients requiring genomic testing, including genetic counsellors. In addition, each of the 17 NHS Clinical Genomic Services is reviewing and planning profession capacity requirements, including genetic counsellors, to support delivery of care within timescales required for patients and clinicians.

Within NHS England, the NHS Genomics Unit is working with the Workforce, Training and Education Directorate to feed genomics demand into the national workforce model. This work is aligned with the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.

In addition, NHS England and the NHS Race and Health Observatory have partnered to commission an 18-month research project to investigate disparities in access to and delivery of the NHS Genomic Medicine Service faced by ethnic minority patient groups and identify actions to address any inequities.

■ Cancer: Drugs

Clive Jones:

[R] [21831]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment she has made of the number of cancer medicines used in the NHS compared to other European countries.

Karin Smyth:

Whilst the Department has made no such assessment, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommends most new licensed cancer medicines for use in the treatment of National Health Service patients in England, with a current positive approval rate of 92% for cancer topics, excluding terminated appraisals, for 2024/25. This equates to 24 out of 26 appraisals.

Analysis from the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations' W.A.I.T Indicators compares availability of new medicines across European countries. The 2024 report showed that the availability in England of cancer medicines that received an European Union marketing authorisation between 2019 and 2022 was slightly higher than the European average.

■ Cancer: Health Services

Paul Davies: [\[22840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to improve patient outcomes for (a) rarer cancers, (b) sub-types of cancer and (c) triple negative breast cancer in the cancer plan.

Paul Davies: [\[22841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department's cancer plan will include measures to improve the collection of data on triple-negative breast cancer.

Paul Davies: [\[22842\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the cancer plan will contain measures to improve (a) pathology and (b) testing within the (a) overall cancer and (b) triple negative breast cancer pathway.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government recognises that a cancer-specific approach is needed to meet the challenges in cancer care, and to improve outcomes for people living with different types of cancer including rare cancers, sub-types of cancer and triple-negative breast cancer.

The Government has set out plans to publish a ten-year health plan to reform the National Health Service. Following publication of the 10-Year Health Plan, we will publish a new national cancer plan. 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.

Data on triple negative breast cancer for England is collected through the National Disease Registration Service (NDRS). An NDRS Quality Assurance Team is in place to identify, investigate, and monitor data quality issues, with over 130 Quality Assurance reports being run each month as well as quarterly reports to assess the completeness of key data.

To drive up the completeness of the data for triple negative breast cancer, progesterone receptor status, human epidermal growth factor receptor in situ hybridization status, and oestrogen receptor status are part of the Cancer Outcomes and Services Data set, which supports national registration.

In January 2025, the Government published the Elective Reform Plan as part of the government's Plan for Change. The plan sets out the reform and productivity efforts needed to ensure that patients, including those waiting for pathology tests are seen on time and have the best possible experience during their care.

To improve the NHS Constitution standard for diagnostics, the cancer waiting time standards and the referral to treatment standard, we expect all community diagnostic centres (CDCs) and hospital-based diagnostic services to be open 12 hours a day,

seven days a week so that patients have improved access and availability to diagnostic tests, including pathology.

Productivity and reform in CDCs will also be underpinned by investment in digital interventions. This will include all pathology networks reaching maturity in 2025. Networks are essential for facilitating diagnostic digitisation and ensuring the standardisation of systems needed for sharing results and optimising slot booking capacity. Networks can reduce variation and provide patients with equity of services' quality and efficiency, as well as maximise workforce efficiencies that can help to offset workforce shortages.

■ Cannabis: Medical Treatments

Jim Shannon:

[\[22612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of restrictions on the use of electronic prescriptions for the issuing of medicinal cannabis products.

Jim Shannon:

[\[22614\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency guidance on the use of medicinal cannabis.

Karin Smyth:

Rules around the electronic prescribing of cannabis-based medicines are no different to other drugs regulated in Schedule 2 to 5 of the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001.

In England, the NHS Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) enables the electronic transmission of prescriptions for Schedule 2 to 5 controlled drugs. As part of the robust system of governance and restrictions around the most addictive and harmful drugs, all private healthcare provider prescriptions for Schedule 2 and 3 controlled drugs cannot be transmitted by electronic means and must be issued on a paper FP10PCD prescription form. All paper copies of private prescriptions of Schedule 2 and 3 controlled drugs must be submitted to the NHS Business Services Authority. NHS England Controlled Drug Accountable Officers have a statutory duty to monitor the management and use of controlled drugs in the National Health Service and private healthcare.

Similar legislative and governance arrangements are in place in Northern Ireland concerning the management and use of controlled drugs. All private prescribing of Schedule 2 and 3 controlled drugs must be issued on a paper PCD1 prescription form, which, once dispensed, are submitted to the Business Services Organisation, in line with requirements in the Misuse of Drugs (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2002. There is currently no electronic transmission of prescriptions in primary care in Northern Ireland.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) does not provide guidance on the use of medicinal cannabis. The MHRA provides guidance on

manufacturing, importing, distributing, and supplying unlicensed medicines, which includes cannabis-based products for medicinal use in humans.

Current guidelines on the prescribing and use of cannabis-based medicinal products, specifically guideline NG144, are published on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence website, which is available at the following link:

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

The guidelines have been endorsed by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland as applicable within Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence develops its guidance independently and keeps its published guidelines under active surveillance, so that it is able to update its recommendations in light of any significant new evidence.

■ Clinical Trials: Young People

Paulette Hamilton:

[22727]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle barriers to (a) teenagers and (b) young adults accessing clinical trials; and if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of this on UK life sciences.

Andrew Gwynne:

To maximise our potential to be a world leader and develop a more competitive, efficient and accessible clinical research system, the Department is committed to implementing recommendations from the Lord O'Shaughnessy independent review of commercial clinical trials in full.

The Department is committed to ensuring clinical trials are people-centred and more accessible, including for teenagers and young adults. For example, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), funded by the Department, provides an online service called 'Be Part of Research' which promotes participation in health and care research by allowing users to search for relevant studies and register their interest. Young adults aged 18 or over, can consent to be matched to and contacted about relevant studies.

The Department through the NIHR also funds research infrastructure provides research expertise, specialist facilities, a research delivery workforce and support services, necessary for the delivery of research nationally, including studies involving teenagers and young adults.

There is currently no assessment planned on the impact of barriers to teenagers and young adults accessing clinical trials on life sciences in the United Kingdom.

■ Coeliac Disease: Medical Treatments

Sarah Owen:

[22682]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure those diagnosed with coeliac disease receive timely and appropriate treatment.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is committed to putting patients first. This means making sure that patients are seen on time and ensuring that people have the best possible experience during their care.

We have made a commitment that 92% of patients should wait no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment within our first term. This includes those waiting for treatment for coeliac disease. As a first step to achieving this, following the Budget, we will deliver an additional two million operations, scans, and appointments across all specialities during our first year in Government, which is equivalent to 40,000 per week.

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

The NHS website is also a key awareness tool and contains useful information for the public about coeliac disease, its symptoms and how it is diagnosed and treated. This information is available at the following link:

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

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

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

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

■ Community Diagnostic Centres: Essex and Suffolk

Sir Bernard Jenkin:

[22243]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his Oral Statement of 6 January 2026 on Health and Adult Social Care Reform, Official Report, Column 597, where new diagnostic centres in (a) Essex and (b) Suffolk will be based.

Karin Smyth:

The Elective Reform Plan, published on 6 January 2025, sets out that we will deliver additional community diagnostic centre (CDC) capacity in 2025/26 by expanding a number of existing CDCs and building up to five new ones.

Capital investment agreed at the 2025 Spending Review and announced in the Autumn Statement will be allocated to local National Health Service systems by NHS England, and details on this will be released as part of upcoming capital planning guidance. The investment will support a range of initiatives, including supporting systems to deliver against the government's ambition to return to the 18-week constitutional standard.

NHS England will work with local systems to identify the most appropriate locations for investments, including new CDCs, and expansions of existing CDCs. A key factor they will consider is that new CDCs are positioned in a location which addresses local need and will address health inequalities.

■ Community Diagnostic Centres: Maidenhead**Mr Joshua Reynolds:**[\[22857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to open one of the new seven day Community Diagnostic Centres at St Mark's Hospital in Maidenhead.

Karin Smyth:

St Marks Hospital is currently hosting temporary activity for Slough Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC) in Maidenhead whilst the permanent site at Upton Community Hospital in Slough is being completed. All diagnostic activity will move to Upton Hospital later in 2025 once the new CDC is constructed, where it is expected that Slough CDC will be open 12 hours per day, 7 days a week.

The Elective Reform Plan, published on 6 January 2025, sets out that we will extend the minimum standards for all community diagnostic centres, to open 12 hours per day, 7 days a week as well as delivering additional CDC capacity in 2025/26 by expanding a number of existing CDCs and building up to five new ones.

CDCs intend to provide a broad range of elective diagnostics in the community and closer to home, reducing pressure on hospitals and giving patients quicker and more convenient access to tests. Therefore, where feasible, the National Health Service has and will endeavour to locate CDCs in the community rather than in acute settings. This supports one of the Government's key strategic shifts, namely moving care from the hospital to the community.

Capital investment agreed at Spending Review 2025 and announced in the Autumn Statement will be allocated to local systems by NHS England, and details on this will be released as part of upcoming capital planning guidance. The investment will support a range of initiatives, including supporting systems to deliver against the Government's ambition to return to the 18-week constitutional standard.

NHS England will work with local systems to identify the most appropriate locations for investments, including new CDCs, and expansions of existing CDCs. A key factor they will consider is that new CDCs are positioned in a location which addresses local need and will address health inequalities.

■ **Coronavirus: Vaccination**

Esther McVey: [\[22602\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to paragraph 3.6 of the minutes of the Covid-19 Vaccine Benefit Risk Expert Working Group held on 18 November 2020, if he will publish (a) the 36 questions posed by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to Pfizer/BioNTech and (b) any response received from that company.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency does not intend to publish these questions, or any subsequent responses received from the manufacturers.

■ **Dental Services: Contracts**

Chris Bloore: [\[22778\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his Department's timetable is for the commencement of dentist contract renegotiations.

Stephen Kinnock:

To rebuild dentistry in the long term and increase access to National Health Service dental care, we will reform the dental contract, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

There are no perfect payment systems and careful consideration needs to be given to any potential changes to the complex dental system so that we deliver a system better for patients and the profession. We continue to meet the British Dental Association and other representatives of the dental sector to discuss how we can best deliver our shared ambition to improve access for NHS dental patients.

■ **Electronic Cigarettes: Smuggling**

Dr Neil Hudson: [\[22366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to tackle the sale of illegal vapes.

Dr Neil Hudson: [\[22367\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to tackle the import of illegal vapes.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is taking concerted effort to tackle the import and sale of illicit vapes. This includes investing up to £3 million over 2023/24 and 2024/25 to support

National Trading Standards to deliver a range of enforcement interventions, including the removal of illicit products from the market and intervention at ports. The Government will expand on this by investing a further £30 million in 2025/26 to support tobacco and vapes enforcement action, £10 million of which will go towards bolstering Trading Standards' ability to tackle illicit tobacco and vapes.

Alongside additional investment we are also taking legislative steps to tackle the illicit market. The Tobacco and Vapes Bill provides powers to introduce a new retail licensing scheme in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland for tobacco, vapes and nicotine products and to establish a new registration system for tobacco, vaping and nicotine products entering the United Kingdom market. We are also introducing a ban on the sale and supply of single use vapes under environmental legislation.

■ Fertility

Andrew Griffith: [\[22721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) males and (b) females have an infertility diagnosis.

Andrew Griffith: [\[22722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) male and (b) female patients who have received a diagnosis of infertility are waiting for fertility treatment.

Karin Smyth:

This information is not collected centrally.

■ Food: Labelling

Lisa Smart: [\[22127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to include Annatto (E160b) on the list of allergens that must be labelled under UK food labelling regulations.

Andrew Gwynne:

There are many potential food ingredients that may cause an allergic reaction to sensitised people. The current 14 regulated allergens are recognised as being the most common and potent allergens of public health concern across Europe. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses>

The prevalence of allergy to the additive Annatto (E160b) is currently unknown in the United Kingdom. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is currently working with the British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology and other stakeholders on gathering information on hidden and emerging food allergens which will help in assessing the need for further research and work in this area. If further information is received on the prevalence of Annatto as an allergy we will review this evidence. The

FSA continues to monitor the situation closely but has no current recommendations to Ministers on amending the list of 14 regulated allergens.

The FSA continues to work to make it easier for people with food hypersensitivities, namely allergies, intolerances, and coeliac disease, to have access to clear and accurate information which is a fundamental part of their work. Their research is available at the following link:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-hypersensitivity>

■ Gender Dysphoria: Hormone Treatments

Sir Julian Lewis:

[20913]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his Oral Statement of 11 December 2024 on Puberty-suppressing Hormones, Official Report, Column 923, what guidance his Department issues to parents considering taking their children to other countries for (a) top surgery and (b) other gender reassignment surgery.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 7 January 2025]: There is no published guidance regarding young people under 18 years old travelling abroad for gender reassignment surgery. NHS Children and Young People's Gender Services, which are commissioned in line with NHS England's interim service specification and the Cass Review, do not make referrals for surgical interventions.

The Government strongly discourages parents from taking their child abroad for gender reassignment surgery. Parents should seek advice from appropriate medical professionals if they believe their child has gender incongruence.

■ Givinostat: Greater Manchester

Lisa Smart:

[22123]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) encourage NHS trusts in Greater Manchester to participate in the Early Access Programme for Givinostat and (b) to help tackle barriers to participation.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England does not have any initiatives to encourage participation in compassionate use schemes, which are the responsibility of individual pharmaceutical companies.

Participation in the Early Access Programme (EAP) for givinostat, which must be through one of the 23 NorthStar Centres in the United Kingdom, is decided at an individual National Health Service trust level although there is general advice that trusts should engage with the relevant commissioner if they choose to participate. A NorthStar Centre will not be able to provide givinostat if its local trust has not approved participation. Under the EAP, givinostat is free to both patients taking part in it and to the NHS, but the trusts must still cover the cost of administering it to patients. Only Duchenne muscular dystrophy clinicians can make requests for

givinostat for their patients. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis for individual named patients aligned to eligibility criteria.

NHS England hopes that all NHS trusts, including in Greater Manchester, who receive a request from a NorthStar Centre to provide givinostat to an eligible patient approve this request. NHS England will work with partners to ensure that Trusts understand the urgent need to make access possible for eligible patient.

■ **Gonorrhoea: Health Services**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[22705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 8 January 2025 to Question 21699 on Gonorrhoea: Health Services, what data his Department holds on the cost of treating gonorrhoea to the NHS; and if he will publish that data.

Andrew Gwynne:

The data on the cost of treating gonorrhoea to the National Health Service is not held centrally. This is because most gonorrhoea infections are treated with antibiotics in sexual health services using funding from the Local Authority Public Health Grant. In 2023, there were 85,223 diagnoses of gonorrhoea in sexual health services in England.

For infections and complications requiring treatment in secondary care, the UK Health Security Agency estimates that the cost to the NHS of treating gonorrhoea in secondary care in 2022/23 was approximately £2,000 per in-patient admission. Data on the number of admissions is not held centrally.

■ **Health Services: Runcorn and Helsby**

Mike Amesbury:

[\[22064\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help reduce NHS waiting lists in Runcorn and Helsby constituency.

Karin Smyth:

Tackling waiting lists is a key part of our Health Mission and a top priority for this government. On 6 January 2025, NHS England published the new Elective Reform Plan, part of the Government's Plan for Change, which sets out a whole system approach to hitting the 18-week referral to treatment target by the end of this Parliament. The plan sets out the reform and productivity efforts needed to ensure that patients are seen on time and have the best possible experience during their care, including those using the National Health Service in Runcorn and Helsby. The plan is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/reforming-elective-care-for-patients.pdf>

We have set an ambition to make progress on the 18-week standard in 2025/26, to 65% nationally and for all trusts to deliver a minimum five percentage point

improvement by March 2026. At the end of November 2024, the rate in Warrington and Halton Hospital NHS Trust was 59.5%, and the rate at the Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust was 49.6%.

At the 2024 Autumn Budget, the Chancellor announced £1.5 billion of capital funding for new surgical hubs and diagnostic scanners. This will build capacity for over 30,000 additional procedures and over 1.25 million diagnostic tests, as well as new beds which will create more treatment space in emergency departments, reduce waiting times, and help shift more care into the community.

Dedicated and protected surgical hubs are transforming the way the NHS provides elective care by focusing on high volume low complexity surgeries. There is one operational surgical hub serving patients in the Runcorn and Helsby constituency at Halton General Hospital - Mid Mersey Elective Hub (Captain Sir Tom Moore).

■ Health Services: Rural Areas

Helen Morgan:

[\[22387\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his statement of 6 January 2025 on Health and Social Care Reform, Official Report, columns 595 to 598, what steps he is taking to ensure equal access to healthcare in rural and urban areas.

Karin Smyth:

The Government recognises the health inequalities faced by rural communities in England, particularly around access to healthcare services. In response, we are working closely across the department, with NHS England and regional Directors of Public Health to develop approaches that address these inequalities so that no person or community is left behind.

The Government is committed to putting patients first, including in both rural and urban areas. This means making sure that all patients are seen on time and ensuring that people have the best possible experience during their care.

On 6 January 2025, NHS England published the new Elective Reform Plan, part of the Government's Plan for Change, which sets out a whole system approach to hitting the 18-week Referral to Treatment target by the end of this Parliament. The plan sets out the reform and productivity efforts needed to ensure that patients are seen on time and have the best possible experience during their care. A copy of the plan is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/reforming-elective-care-for-patients.pdf>

We have set an ambition to make progress on the 18-week standard in 2025/26, to 65% nationally and for all trusts to deliver a minimum five percentage point improvement by March 2026. At the end of November 2024, the rate at The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust was 48.5%.

■ Health Services: Standards

Mike Wood:

[\[22021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to page 28 of the policy paper entitled Plan for Change: Milestones for mission-led government, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, what key performance indicators he plans to use to track the implementation of the 10 year health plan; and if he will publish definitions of success for each indicator.

Karin Smyth:

The 10-Year Health Plan is being developed in line with best practice for policy making set out in the HM Treasury Green Book. This includes consideration of monitoring and evaluation before, during and after implementation.

Identifying appropriate performance indicators will be done in conjunction with developing the detail of the plan. Further detail will be set out at an appropriate time, including any plans to publish specific success metrics and their definitions.

■ Health: Disadvantaged

James Asser:

[\[22481\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to tackle health inequalities in (a) England, (b) London, and (c) West Ham and Beckton constituency.

Andrew Gwynne:

The United Kingdom faces significant health inequalities, with life expectancy varying widely across and within communities. The Government is committed to building a fairer Britain by tackling the structural inequalities that contribute to poor health, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

Existing initiatives to reduce inequalities in relation to health services in England include NHS England's 'Core 20 Plus 5', which focuses on improving the five clinical areas at most need of accelerated improvement in the poorest 20 percent of the population, along with other underserved population groups identified at a local level, including groups that share protected characteristics, and socially excluded groups such as people experiencing homelessness.

The Office of Health Improvement and Disparities' London Regional Team provides system leadership for population health and reducing health inequalities across London. Partners are working together to deliver the Health and Care Vision for London, which sets out a shared ambition to make London the healthiest global city, and the best global city in which to receive health and care services. The Vision aims to tackle issues that cause poor health and health inequalities.

The Mayor of London has set out his aims and objectives for addressing health inequalities in London. This sets the direction of travel for collaborative working by the Mayor of London, partners and communities to tackle health inequalities.

Newham Local Authority received £34.2 million in Public Health Grant funding in 2024/25. This provides services such as stop smoking, drug and alcohol treatment, health visiting/school nursing, sexual health, and NHS Health Checks among others, all of which contribute to addressing health inequalities. Newham Local Authority, the National Health Service and other partners are working together to improve health equity and address the social determinants of health, including through the '50 Steps to a Healthier Newham' Strategy and the Newham Centre for Health Equity.

■ Health: Knowsley

Anneliese Midgley: [\[22738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the level of health inequalities in Knowsley constituency.

Anneliese Midgley: [\[22739\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce health inequalities in Knowsley constituency.

Andrew Gwynne:

The United Kingdom faces significant health inequalities, with life expectancy varying widely across and within communities. The Government is committed to building a fairer Britain by tackling the structural inequalities that contribute to poor health, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

Existing initiatives to reduce inequalities in relation to health services in England include NHS England's 'Core 20 Plus 5', which focuses on improving the five clinical areas at most need of accelerated improvement in the poorest 20 percent of the population, along with other underserved population groups identified at a local level, including groups that share protected characteristics, and socially excluded groups such as people experiencing homelessness.

The Office of Health Improvement and Disparities' North West Regional Team provides system leadership for population health and reducing health inequalities across the North West. Across Cheshire and Merseyside, partners are working together as part of the All Together Fairer collaborative to improve health equity and the social determinants of health through measurable actions for each place to create a fairer, more equitable society.

Knowsley is one of 75 local authorities with high levels of deprivation receiving funding to improve outcomes for families with babies as part of the approximately £300 million Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme.

■ Health: Men

Mims Davies: [\[R\] \[22651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to appoint a men's health champion.

Andrew Gwynne:

On 28 November 2024, my Rt. Hon. friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, announced plans for England's first Men's Health Strategy at the Men's Health Summit, held in partnership with Movember and hosted by Arsenal and the Premier League.

We will shortly be launching a call for evidence to seek views on what is currently working and what more needs to be done to support the health of all men. Through the strategy, we will explore all avenues to improve men's health, including on leadership.

■ Integrated Care Boards**Adam Dance:****[21818]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the criteria are for Ministers to (a) intervene in an Integrated Care Board's reconfiguration proposal and (b) revisit decisions made in those proposals.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 8 January 2025]: The call-in power introduced on 31 January 2024 allows my Rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, to intervene in service reconfigurations within the National Health Service at any stage where a proposal exists and following that intervention, to take or re-take any decision that previously could have been taken by the NHS commissioning body.

The Department published statutory guidance in January 2024 which sets out how call-in requests may be considered. This guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reconfiguring-nhs-services-ministerial-intervention-powers>

■ Junior Doctors: Physician Associates**Helen Morgan:****[21712]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of allowing a Physician Associate to Junior Doctor conversion course.

Karin Smyth:

There is no training pathway specifically designed for a physician associate to become a doctor in the United Kingdom. To become a doctor in the UK, an individual is required to complete either an undergraduate degree or a graduate-entry programme in medicine from a UK medical school which meets the standards set by the General Medical Council.

■ Lung Cancer: Diagnosis

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[22588\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken help improve rates of early diagnosis of lung cancer.

Andrew Gwynne:

The National Health Service is taking crucial steps to improve cancer outcomes across England, including for lung cancer. The Targeted Lung Health Check is a national NHS screening programme which is designed to identify cancers at an earlier stage with the goal of saving more lives. It will be available to 100% of the eligible population by 2030.

Within the programme so far, detection at stage 1 and 2 stands at 75%, while outside the programme its 29%. When fully rolled out the Lung Cancer Screening Programme will detect approximately 9,000 cancers earlier each year and support the NHS Long Term Plan to detect more cancers earlier.

■ Maternity Services: Nurses

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21700\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 23 December 2024 to Question 19416 on Maternity Services: Nurses, if his Department will make an estimate of the number of close relative marriage neonatal nurses there are in the NHS; and if he will publish this data.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 8 January 2025]: The Department has no plans to make such an estimate.

■ Medical Equipment: Energy

Jim Shannon:

[\[21982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the cost of electricity on people with health conditions requiring medical devices which use electricity.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department began an assessment process on patient support for at home medical equipment energy costs in August 2024 with a review of existing policy provision. This work includes consideration of the impact of the cost of running electrical medical equipment at home on vulnerable groups.

At Ministerial direction, the Department is working with the National Health Service, gathering technical data from within the health sector on use, cost and power demand of at home medical devices, to support development of costed policy options.

■ **Medical Equipment: Shortages**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[22056\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the unavailability of (a) digital thermometers and blood pressure monitors and (b) other low cost equipment for clinical staff on NHS (i) staff time usage and (ii) efficiency.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department and NHS England do not currently plan to make an assessment. The Department closely monitors the supply and availability of a broad range of medical devices and equipment continually across the National Health Service in England and the United Kingdom. We continue to work to mitigate any issues and potential impact on patients, clinical staff, and service efficiency.

We have a range of well-established processes and tools in place to help manage disruption to the supply of medical products in the UK as and when they arise. This includes the National Supply Disruption Response, which acts a single point of contact for the health and care system and medical supply industry, in the event of supply disruption which cannot be mitigated via routine contingency measures.

■ **Mental Health: Children and Young People**

Damian Hinds:

[\[21573\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to NHS England's statistics entitled Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023 - wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey, published on 21 November 2023, whether he plans to publish further updates to those statistics.

Stephen Kinnock:

Although no decisions have yet been made to commission further waves, the Government recognises the importance of the Mental Health of Children and Young People in England Report. We will publish plans in due course.

■ **Multiple Sclerosis: Health Services**

Nick Timothy:

[\[22394\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) improve access to neurology services for people with multiple sclerosis and (b) increase funding for research into neurological conditions.

Andrew Gwynne:

There are several initiatives supporting service improvement and better care for patients with multiple sclerosis (MS) in England, including the Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) Programme for Neurology, the RightCare Progressive Neurological Conditions Toolkit, and the Neurology Transformation Programme (NTP).

The GIRFT National Specialty Report made recommendations designed to improve services nationally and to support the National Health Service to deliver care more

equitably across the country. The report highlighted differences in how services are delivered and provided the opportunity to share successful initiatives between trusts to improve patient services nationally. In addition, the NTP has developed a model of integrated care for neurology services to support integrated care boards to deliver the right service, at the right time for all neurology patients, including providing care closer to home.

Once diagnosed, and with a management strategy in place, most people with MS can be cared for through routine access to primary and secondary care. NHS England commissions the specialised elements of MS care that patients may receive from 27 neurology centres across England. Within specialised centres, neurological multidisciplinary teams ensure patients can access a range of health professionals, including specialist nurses, psychologists, and allied health professionals such as dieticians and speech and language therapists, and that they can receive specialised treatment and support, according to their needs.

The Department delivers research into neurological conditions via the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). In 2023/24, the most recent year we have data for, the NIHR spent £72.9 million on research into neurological conditions across research projects, programmes, and infrastructure.

The NIHR welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including neurological conditions, including MS. These applications are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards being made based on the importance of the topic to patients and health and care services, value for money and scientific quality.

■ NHS Shared Business Services

James Naish:

[22390]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to review the use of NHS Shared Business Services for finance services such as (a) payroll, (b) pensions, (c) procurement and (d) taxation.

Karin Smyth:

NHS Shared Business Services provides these services through contract framework agreements which it hosts. In late 2023, NHS England launched an Accredited Framework Host programme and successfully accredited 20 Procurement Framework Host organisations, of which NHS Shared Business Services is one, all of whom have subscribed to enhanced standards. These standards cover a range of areas, from minimum contractual terms & conditions, robust supplier appointment and value for money assessment processes, through to sharing of commercial and commission data with NHS England.

Further details and the list of accredited host organisations such as NHS Shared Business Services are available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/system-guidance-for-the-implementation-of-framework-host-management/>

■ NHS Trusts: Standards**Edward Argar:** [\[22295\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which NHS Trusts have declared a critical incident since 1 December 2024.

Karin Smyth:

There is no official National Health Service data collected and validated for publication on the number of 'critical incidents' as these are declared locally by NHS organisations and can be stood-up and stood-down quickly.

NHS management information as of 8 January 2025 reports that that there are 18 active critical incidents. Critical incidents can be declared in response to operational pressures and for other reasons including power outages, or IT or estates issues.

■ NHS: Digital Technology**Mike Wood:** [\[22022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the policy paper entitled Plan for Change: Milestones for mission-led government, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, how he plans to measure the impact of digital transformation in the NHS; and what performance targets he has set for patient access to single health records.

Karin Smyth:

Digital transformation offers substantial opportunities for the National Health Service to improve care outcomes and to lower cost, while improving the experience of patients. The impact of digital tools and programmes are measured individually, and organisations are required to identify, manage, actively track and report impacts, outcomes and benefits against agreed plans.

The Government has announced its intention to develop a Single Patient Record, and specific investment decisions and targets will be subject to the forthcoming 10-Year Health Plan, Spending Review Phase 2, and further detailed work. The Government has continued to take action in the short term on joining up patient records, including investing £19.5 million in Shared Care Records.

■ NHS: Drugs**Clive Jones:** [\[R\] \[21832\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the ability of the NHS to adopt precision medicines with companion diagnostics at pace.

Karin Smyth:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) makes evidence-based recommendations for the National Health Service on whether new medicines represent a clinically and cost-effective use of resources. To enable rapid access for NHS patients to effective new treatments, NICE aims wherever possible to issue

recommendations on new medicines close to the point of licensing. The NHS in England is legally required to fund medicines recommended by NICE, normally within three months of the publication of final guidance.

Where a companion diagnostic test is required, the costs will be built in to the NICE appraisal process. To enable the rapid implementation of these, planning for delivery of testing, including identifying appropriate testing technologies and where new testing populations need to be supported, must begin before NICE draft recommendations are published to ensure that appropriate genetic testing is available at the capacity required.

Ben Lake: [\[22055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the retained margin element of the NHS drug tariff.

Karin Smyth:

The adequacy of medicine margin that pharmacies are allowed to retain, with medicine margin being the difference between how much pharmacies are reimbursed and how much pharmacies were charged by suppliers, is currently being considered as part of the wider funding for the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework.

■ **NHS: Public Consultation**

Daisy Cooper: [\[22084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding his Department has allocated for the public consultation on a new NHS 10-year-plan.

Karin Smyth:

The public and staff must be at the centre of developing the Plan to make the National Health Service fit for the future, so it makes a positive impact on their day-to-day lives. That is why we are running a series of in-depth deliberative events and have launched an open platform to hear from members of the public and those who work in health and care.

The events are being delivered within the Department's budget as part of its responsibility to promote the health and wellbeing of everyone in England. We are determined to do this in a way that gives everyone the chance to get involved while also ensuring value for money. At this point in time, we are not able to provide accurate costs for the whole engagement exercise, because it is still ongoing.

■ **Oxygen: Medical Treatments**

Peter Prinsley: [\[22180\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure (a) expertise and (b) public confidence are retained in Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy services available on the NHS.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England is currently reviewing the service provision and national service specification for Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Services, used to clearly define the standards of care expected from organisations funded by NHS England to provide specialised care, due to the current service contracts expiring during 2025. Revisions to service specification follow the published process, which supports appropriate stakeholder engagement and governance. More information on the process is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/methods-national-service-specifications/>

NHS England has considered the feedback received from the recent public consultation on the Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Services revised service specification, alongside other sources of evidence, to inform its plans for the service re-procurement. The outcome of this will be made available in due course.

Further, NHS England is required to commission services, including Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Services, in line with the National Health Service's triple aim of improving health outcomes, improving quality of care and ensuring value for the system.

■ Pain: Health Services**Dr Allison Gardner:****[22529]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) reduce waiting lists and (b) expand provision for pain management services in Stoke-on-Trent.

Karin Smyth:

Tackling waiting lists and expanding provision is a key part of our Health Mission and a top priority for the Government. We have committed to getting back to the NHS constitutional standard that 92% of patients should be seen within 18 weeks of referral to treatment by the end of this Parliament.

On 6 January 2025, NHS England published the new Elective Reform Plan, part of the Government's Plan for Change, which sets out a whole system approach to reducing waiting lists and hitting the 18-week target by the end of this Parliament. The plan sets out the efforts needed to ensure that patients are seen on time and have the best possible experience during their care, including those using the National Health Service in Stoke-on-Trent.

We have set an ambition to make progress on the 18-week standard in 2025/26 so that 65% of patients nationally wait no longer than 18 weeks and set a target for all Trusts to improve on their current performance on this standard by a minimum of five percentage points by March 2026.

Currently, the University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust, on average, runs 11 clinics each week in the main outpatient department at Royal Stoke University Hospital for pain management. The trust also host the Stoke-on-Trent Community

Diagnostic Centre (CDC). The CDC is open and delivering more timely, accessible, and additional diagnostic tests for patients in Stoke-on-Trent. Under our plan, we expect all CDCs to open 12 hours per day, seven days a week, to deliver additional diagnostic capacity for local populations.

■ **Pancreatic Cancer: Stoke on Trent**

Dr Allison Gardner:

[\[22851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve outcomes for patients with a pancreatic cancer diagnosis in Stoke-on-Trent.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department is working with NHS England to deliver interventions to improve outcomes for those with pancreatic cancer across England, including Stoke-on-Trent.

As the first step to ensure faster diagnosis and treatment, we will deliver an extra 40,000 operations, scans, and appointments each week.

Early diagnosis is imperative to improving outcomes for all types of cancer, especially pancreatic cancer due to the non-specific nature of its symptoms. NHS England is providing a route into pancreatic cancer surveillance for those at inherited high-risk to identify lesions before they develop into cancer. NHS England is additionally creating pathways to support faster referral routes for people with non-specific symptoms and is increasing direct access for general practitioners to diagnostic tests.

NHS England is also funding a new audit into pancreatic cancer, aiming to provide regular and timely evidence to cancer service providers of where patterns of care in England may vary, to increase the consistency of access to treatments and to stimulate improvements in cancer treatment and outcomes for patients.

■ **Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy: Somerset**

Adam Dance:

[\[22814\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of difficulties faced by NHS patients in Somerset in receiving prescriptions of Creon.

Karin Smyth:

The Department monitors and manages medicine supply at a national level so that stocks remain available to meet regional and local demand. We have not made an assessment of stock levels within Somerset specifically.

The Department has been working with suppliers, NHS England and national clinical specialists to address current supply issues with Creon, which is a brand of pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT). The supply issues with Creon are impacting countries throughout Europe and have been caused by limited availability of raw ingredients and manufacturing capacity constraints to produce volumes

needed to meet demand. These issues have resulted in knock-on supply disruptions of alternative PERT medications.

The Department is continuing to work with all suppliers of PERT to help resolve the supply issues in the short and longer term by asking that they expedite deliveries, source stock from other markets and increase production. The Department has also been working with specialist importers of unlicensed medicine to ensure National Health Service patients can obtain unlicensed imports of PERT where appropriate to help mitigate this supply issue. Comprehensive guidance has been issued to the NHS and is being regularly reviewed and updated as the situation changes.

■ Pharmacy: Finance

Neil Coyle:

[\[22011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will undertake a review of the (a) funding model and (b) role of community pharmacies.

Stephen Kinnock:

Pharmacies play a vital role in our healthcare system. The Government is committed to expanding the role of pharmacies and to better utilising the skills of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. That includes making prescribing part of the services delivered by community pharmacists.

By 2026 all newly qualified pharmacists will have a prescribing qualification, with additional investment in upskilling the existing workforce to also become independent prescribers. NHS England is currently piloting how prescribing can work in community pharmacy in all integrated care boards, supporting a range of conditions. These pathfinders will then inform any future decisions about the service.

We will shortly be resuming our consultation with Community Pharmacy England regarding the funding arrangements for community pharmacy.

■ Prostate Cancer: Screening

Mike Amesbury:

[\[22669\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of a national screening programme for prostate cancer.

Andrew Gwynne:

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

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

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

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

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

■ Respiratory Diseases: Disease Control

Adrian Ramsay:

[22507]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) hospitals and (b) other publicly owned healthcare settings are compliant with the UK Health Security Agency guidance entitled Reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, in the workplace, updated on 10 June 2022.

Andrew Gwynne:

Under the Health and Social Care Act 2008: Code of Practice on the Prevention and Control of Infections, NHS England health and social care providers are required to implement measures that protect patients, residents, and staff while providing assurance to trust boards regarding infection risks and outcomes. This obligation extends to the application of national pathogen-specific guidance, including the UK Health Security Agency's Reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, in the workplace, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reducing-the-spread-of-respiratory-infections-including-covid-19-in-the-workplace>

The Code of practice outlines 10 criteria used to assess how registered providers meet regulatory requirements for infection prevention and control, including cleanliness.

■ Respiratory Diseases: Screening

Jim Shannon:

[22262]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the number of spirometry tests carried out in Community Diagnostic Centres.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS England continues to support the restoration of local spirometry services and is enhancing capacity through community diagnostic centres (CDCs).

Spirometry tests are a minimum core test required of all standard or large CDCs. The Department does not currently hold validated data on the number of spirometry tests carried out in CDCs but, as part of guidance issued by NHS England in September 2024, CDCs are expected to perform a minimum of 80 spirometry tests a week if open five days a week, and 112 tests if open for seven days a week. The Elective

Reform Plan, published on 6 January 2025, also sets out that we will extend the minimum standards for all CDCs to open 12 hours per day, seven days a week. As CDCs move to seven days, in line with expectations set out in the plan, they will increase overall activity in line with guidance.

■ Sepsis

Jim Shannon:

[\[22615\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people in the UK have been diagnosed with sepsis in the last 12 months.

Andrew Gwynne:

There is a lack of reliable estimates of the incidence and prevalence of sepsis, due to the inconsistency in the definitions used to describe sepsis, and the differences in coding between professionals and organisations in the United Kingdom.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes data on the number of death registrations where sepsis was the underlying cause of death, and where sepsis was mentioned anywhere on the death certificate, for England and Wales between 2001 and 2023. According to the ONS, in 2023, the number of deaths registered where sepsis was mentioned anywhere on the death certificate in England and Wales was 26,203. The ONS has not yet published the number of death registrations for sepsis for 2024. The published ONS data for deaths involving sepsis is available at the following link:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/adhocs/2111deathsinvolvingsepsisenglandandwales2001to2023>

The Department continues to work with NHS England and the UK Health Security Agency to improve our understanding of sepsis data and to monitor trends in infection incidence and deaths from sepsis, which are complex and multifactorial.

■ Social Services: Reform

Dr Allison Gardner:

[\[22523\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his Department's press release entitled New reforms and independent commission to transform social care, published on 3 January 2025, how these reforms will improve service provision in Stoke-on-Trent South constituency.

Stephen Kinnock:

In January 2025, we announced that we will be taking forward a range of initiatives, including funding more home adaptations, promoting better use of care technologies, and further professionalising the adult social care workforce.

On top of the Budget making £3.7 billion of additional funding available to social care authorities in 2025/26, which includes an £880 million increase in the Social Care Grant, this announcement included an immediate £86 million uplift to the Disabled Facilities Grant. Local authority funding allocations will be announced shortly.

We also announced that in April 2025 we will be launching an independent commission into adult social care as part of our critical first steps towards delivering a National Care Service. This will start a national conversation about what care and support working age adults, older people, and their families expect. The commission will identify the biggest challenges in adult social care and recommend practical changes to best meet the current and future needs of the population across England.

■ Surgery: Reform

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[22732\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to page 12 of the document entitled Reforming elective care for patients, published on 6 January 2025, what steps he plans to take to implement shared decision-making.

Karin Smyth:

The Elective Reform Plan, published on 6 January 2025, sets out the reform and productivity efforts needed to ensure that patients are seen on time and have the best possible experience during their care. Shared decision making is an important part of good patient experience, ensuring that patients have greater empowerment, autonomy, and control over their care. Shared decision making is not a new concept but is a key component of universal personalised care that we are committed to delivering and expanding.

Improving digital tools will be essential, and changes to the NHS App will help to improve communication and shared decision making between patients and clinicians. We have committed to ensuring that at least 85% of acute trusts will be able to provide information about their elective appointments to patients on the NHS App by the end of March 2025. We will also make more types of content about patients' treatment available on the NHS App, such as discharge letters, by December 2025. We will also support all trusts to adopt digital patient engagement portals (PEPs) which enable patients and their healthcare team to send messages and share documents. We understand, though, that digital options do not work for everyone and we will continue to provide high quality, non-digital options for those who want and need them. Providing customer-care training to patient facing non-clinical staff will form another key part of supporting patients to make informed decisions about their care.

The plan outlines that we will be expanding opportunities for self-management and remote monitoring which will empower patients to manage long-term conditions in ways which are more convenient for their lives. The National Health Service will use digital questionnaires through PEPs and the NHS App to make remote monitoring a standard offer to patients with long-term conditions, following agreement with their healthcare team.

Shared decision making between patients and clinicians is a cornerstone of supporting more patient initiated follow-ups (PIFU), helping patients to be seen quickly when required, whilst avoiding the inconvenience of appointments they do not

need. We have set out the aim of increasing PIFU uptake to at least 5% of all outpatient appointments by March 2029.

■ **Viral Diseases: Disease Control**

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[22557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to stop the spread of the hMPV virus from China.

Andrew Gwynne:

Human metapneumovirus (hMPV) is one of many viruses within the United Kingdom that cause illness each winter. It has been in circulation for many decades. Most people have been infected by the age of five and reinfection occurs throughout life.

The UK Health and Security Agency (UKHSA) monitors activity and publishes data every week through the winter period. 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.

UKHSA has issued general public advice on prevention of transmission of respiratory viruses, this includes the importance of good hand hygiene, catching coughs with tissues, and avoiding vulnerable people while symptomatic. These measures would be expected to reduce transmission of hMPV.

HOME OFFICE

■ **Agriculture: Crime**

Josh Fenton-Glynn:

[\[21531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many offences involving agricultural crime were investigated in each year since 2010 in (a) England and Wales, (b) West Yorkshire and (c) Calderdale District.

Josh Fenton-Glynn:

[\[21532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many offences involving agricultural crime resulted in (a) charges or summons, (b) evidential difficulties outcomes and (c) investigations completed but no suspects identified. in each year since 2010.

Josh Fenton-Glynn:

[\[21533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate her Department has made of the costs associated with the theft of agricultural vehicles in each year since 2010 in (a) cash terms and (b) 2024-25 real terms prices.

Josh Fenton-Glynn:

[\[21534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had on updating the National Police Chiefs' Council's Rural Crime Strategy to better prevent farm machinery, plant and vehicle theft when the current strategy expires in 2025.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Rural crime can have devastating consequences for countryside communities. That is why this Government is committed to reducing crime in rural areas.

The National Police Chiefs' Council is expected to publish its next four-year Rural and Wildlife Crime Strategy in April. We fully support the aims of the Strategy and are working closely with the NPCC, including to ensure wider Government priorities are reflected.

We are committed to implementing the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 and support its intentions to tackle the theft and re-sale of high-value equipment, particularly for use in an agricultural setting.

The Home Office collects and publishes information on the number of offences and their investigative outcomes recorded by the police in England and Wales on a quarterly basis. However, offences involving agricultural crime cannot be separately identified from the data held centrally.

NFU Mutual estimated that the total cost of agricultural vehicle theft claims in 2023 was £10.7 million. This estimate only includes costs of agricultural vehicle thefts where a subsequent claim was made through NFU Mutual.

■ Antisocial Behaviour: Roads**Mr Clive Betts:**[\[22575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention in response to the question from the hon. Member for Sheffield South East of 29 July 2024, Official Report, Column 1028, what progress her Department has made on tackling antisocial road users.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Tackling anti-social behaviour is a top priority for this Government, and a key part of our Safer Streets Mission.

On 27 November 2024, the Government announced proposals to give the police greater powers to clamp down on e-bikes, e-scooters and other vehicles involved in anti-social behaviour, with officers no longer required to issue a warning before seizing vehicles.

This will allow the police to quickly remove anti-social vehicles which are creating a nuisance or disturbance in city centres and pedestrian areas. These powers will be included in the forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill.

■ Aviation: Immigration Controls**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[22252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many general aviation reports were submitted by region in (a) 2023 and (b) 2024.

Dan Jarvis:

Home Office records show that approximately 159,768 General Aviation Reports have been submitted nationally in 2023 and 2024.

2024

North Region -11,413

Central Region - 25,691

Heathrow Region - 21,298

South Region - 16,897

South-East Region - 855

Total - 76,154

2023

North Region -12,237

Central Region - 25,689

Heathrow Region - 22,403

South Region - 17,186

South-East Region - 962

Total - 78,477

■ Defending Democracy Taskforce

Johanna Baxter:

[\[902125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, to ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, What recent work has been undertaken by the Defending Democracy Taskforce.

Dan Jarvis:

The Taskforce has reflected on last year's elections and is now taking forward a programme of work to ensure lessons are learned.

This includes work to tackle the unacceptable instances of harassment and intimidation of our elected representatives that we saw during the General Election.

This vital work is ongoing, and I will update the House in due course.

■ Deportation

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[22140\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many voluntary deportations took place between 4 July and 31 December 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[22144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proportion of deportations between 4 July and 31 December were (a) enforced and (b) voluntary.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office routinely publishes data on returns in the "[Immigration Systems Statistics](#)" quarterly release. Data on quarterly returns of individuals since July 2024 can be found in table Ret_D01 of the "[returns detailed datasets](#)".

The next full quarterly release, which will include data up to December 2024 is due to be published on the 27th February 2025. We have also published interim figures on the 9th of January to provide an overview of the number of people who have been returned from the UK since early July.

Returns are reported in 3 main groups:

- enforced returns (people subject to administrative removal or deportation action which is carried out by the Home Office)
- voluntary returns (people who were liable to removal action or subject to immigration control but have left of their own accord, sometimes with support from the Home Office)
- port returns (people who are refused entry to the UK and have subsequently departed)

■ Domestic Abuse and Sexual Offences: Victim Support Schemes**Caroline Voaden:** [\[21169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on steps to ensure sustainable funding is provided to local authorities for domestic abuse and sexual violence services.

Jess Phillips:

This Government has set out an ambition to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) within a decade and will treat it as the national emergency that it is. We will deliver a cross-government, transformative approach, underpinned by a new VAWG Strategy published later this year.

We are already driving forward activity which supports local government to tackle VAWG. The government has increased funding to local authorities to £160 million for 2025-26, an uplift of £30 million from the previous year, to provide further support in safe accommodation for domestic abuse survivors. The Home Office has confirmed a number of grants held for the next financial year (2025-26) with charities supporting victims of VAWG. We have sought to protect frontline services and give them certainty, so they can plan ahead effectively.

Furthermore, the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 will, once in force, require local policing bodies, local authorities, and integrated care boards to collaborate in relation to the commissioning of certain victim support services, and to prepare and publish a

joint commissioning strategy for victims of domestic abuse in their area. This strategy will be informed by a joint needs assessment.

■ **Domestic Abuse: Young People**

Nadia Whittome: [\[21711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to protect teenagers from violence and abuse in relationships.

Jess Phillips:

This Government is considering a wide range of actions to address teenage relationship violence and abuse, including assessing whether any changes to the law are needed and supporting our education system to teach children about respectful and healthy relationships and consent.

■ **Driving under Influence: Arrests**

Mr Andrew Snowden: [\[22763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people were (a) arrested and (b) charged for (i) drink and (ii) drug driving in December 2024.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The information requested is not held centrally by the Home Office because drunk and drug driving offences are not among the list of offences for which police forces are currently required to notify the Home Office of data on arrests, charges and outcomes.

■ **Fire and Rescue Services: Health Hazards**

Mike Amesbury: [\[22062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of the University of Central Lancashire's report entitled Minimising firefighters' exposure to toxic fire effluents, published in November 2020.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office takes very seriously the health and safety of those firefighters who risk their lives for our communities every day.

The Home Office is reviewing recent academic research to evaluate risks posed by contaminants and the effectiveness of decontamination procedures, and we will share our findings with the Fire and Rescue Authorities, who hold the legal responsibility to protect firefighters against those risks.

■ **Fire and Rescue Services: Health Services**

Mike Amesbury: [\[22061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the potential merits of regular health checks for fire fighters.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Fire and rescue authorities, as employer, are responsible for the health and wellbeing of the firefighters they employ, and so it is for those authorities to take the appropriate action to conduct health checks on their workforce.

Health Professions: Engineering

Derek Twigg: [\[21977\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of classifying clinical engineers as healthcare professionals under the Health and Care Worker Visa.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office keeps all its immigration visa routes under regular review, which includes consulting the Department of Health and Social Care on which occupations should be eligible for the Health and Care Visa.

Human Trafficking

Dave Robertson: [\[902122\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent progress her Department has made on increasing international cooperation to tackle organised immigration crime.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Mr Speaker, the criminal smuggling gangs are international operations and it will require international cooperation from governments and law enforcement agencies to dismantle their networks, and disrupt their supply chains.

Our new Border Security Command is already building and strengthening partnerships across the world to tackle this evil trade in human lives, signing new agreements from Germany to Iraq, and using every opportunity we have on the global stage to put this issue on the agenda, and drive collective action.

Immigration: EU Nationals

Tim Farron: [\[21274\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department conducted a lessons learned review of the EU settlement scheme digital status service.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office conducted an end-programme lessons learnt review on the roll out of the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), of which the digital status service is part. We published two private beta reports setting out key findings of the test phases of the EUSS, including the functionality of the end-to-end online application process. These reports are available at:

[EU Settlement Scheme: private beta testing phase 1 report \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK](#)

[EU Settlement Scheme private beta testing phase 2 report - GOV.UK](#)

■ **Migrant Workers: Civil Servants**

Rebecca Long Bailey:

[\[21609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Skilled Worker Visa sponsorship salary threshold requirements introduced in April 2024 on retention of civil service staff initially employed on graduate visas.

Seema Malhotra:

The graduate route is designed to allow UK graduates time to work, or look for work, for a 2 or 3 year period after completing their studies. After this time, they must be able to meet the requirements of another immigration route to stay in the UK. These rules apply equally to the Civil Service as to all other UK workplaces.

■ **Motor Vehicles: Crime**

Patrick Hurley:

[\[21724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps the Government is taking to increase (a) the number of specialist teams to deal with vehicle crime and (b) the funding available to track stolen cars across borders.

Dame Diana Johnson:

This Government is determined to drive down vehicle crime and we are working with the automotive industry and law enforcement to ensure our response is as strong as it can be – including recruiting thousands of additional neighbourhood police officers, PCSOs and Special Constables to provide a visible and effective response to car crime in local communities.

We continue to work closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead for vehicle crime, through the National Vehicle Crime Working Group, to take forward a programme of work, focusing on prevention and deterrence of theft of and from vehicles. Through the Working Group, a network of vehicle crime specialists has been established, involving every police force in England and Wales, to ensure forces can share information about emerging trends in vehicle crime and better tackle regional issues.

There are also a number of specialist teams that support work to tackle vehicle crime, including Opal, the police's national intelligence unit for serious acquisitive crime, and the National Vehicle Intelligence Service (NaVCIS), a national policing unit funded by industry, including finance and leasing companies, insurers and hauliers, to provide dedicated specialist intelligence and enforcement.

Last autumn, driven by the NPCC lead for vehicle crime and supported by the Home Office, the National Vehicle Crime Reduction Partnership was established, bringing together the police, Home Office and manufacturers.

We are also providing £250,000 this financial year to help support enforcement at the ports to prevent stolen vehicles and vehicle parts being shipped abroad, including additional staff and specialist equipment.

■ Offences against Children

Nadia Whittome: [\[21710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of the findings of the 2024 report by the Youth Endowment Fund entitled Children, violence and vulnerability.

Jess Phillips:

The Home Office works closely with the Youth Endowment Fund to ensure that their findings on what works to reduce violence amongst young people are carefully considered to positively influence the development of youth services.

We will carefully consider the findings from this report as part of the Government's Plan for Change and the Safer Streets Mission which includes an ambition to halve knife crime and violence against women and girls; and actions to build confidence in policing and the criminal justice system.

The Young Futures Programme is a key part of this and will establish a network of Young Futures Hubs and Young Futures Prevention Partnerships, to intervene earlier to offer support for Young People in a more systematic way, as well as creating more opportunities for them in their communities.

■ Offences against Children: Artificial Intelligence

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[22403\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what resources her Department has allocated to law enforcement agencies to help tackle the level of Child Sexual Exploitation cases due to AI.

Jess Phillips:

UK law is clear that AI generated child sexual abuse images are illegal material. We invest in capabilities across law enforcement to identify and disrupt child sexual abuse, which includes offences involving AI generated child sexual abuse material.

This financial year, the Home Office provided over £17 million to build the workforce capacity and technical capability of the National Crime Agency, and over £11 million to resource undercover online officers.

This funding targets the highest harm and most technologically sophisticated child sexual abuse offenders.

■ Police

Mike Wood: [\[22300\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to page 6 of the policy paper entitled Plan for Change: Milestones for mission-led government, published

on 5 December 2024, CP1210, how many and what proportion of the additional police officers will be (a) full-time police constables, (b) full-time detective constables, (c) PCSOs and (d) special constables.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee will be supported by the commitment to deliver an additional 13,000 additional police officers, PCSOs and special constables in neighbourhood policing roles. There will be funding of £100 million to kickstart delivery, as announced by the Prime Minister in December 2024.

We will work with police forces on the mix of roles which will make up those 13,000 additional personnel, will vary from force to force, depending on their needs and existing staffing.

■ **Police National Computer**

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[\[21703\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 20 December 2024 to Question 19427 on the Police National Computer, what proportion of PNC records relate to dead people.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The data could only be obtained for the purposes of answering this question at disproportionate cost.

■ **Police: Greater London**

Rachel Blake:

[\[21548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the National and International Cities grant to the Metropolitan Police for policing the capital city.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Metropolitan Police face increased demands on resources from policing the capital city and, as part of the 2025-26 police funding settlement, the Metropolitan Police will receive £248.7 million through the National and International Capital City grant, an increase of £63.3 million when compared to the 2024-25 settlement.

Overall, the Metropolitan Police will receive up to £3.8 billion in funding in 2025-26, an increase of up to £226.9 million when compared to the 2024-25 police settlement.

■ **Police: Lancashire**

Mr Andrew Snowden:

[\[22762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Autumn Budget 2024 on the number of police officers in Lancashire.

Dame Diana Johnson:

If it maintains officer numbers at the required level of 3,586 officers.

Total funding to police forces in 2025-26 will be up to £17.4 billion, an increase of up to £987 million compared to the 2024-25 police funding settlement.

This includes a £657.1 million additional Government grant funding to police forces, which includes:

- £230.3 million to support forces with the increase to the changes to employer National Insurance Contributions as set out by the Chancellor in the Autumn Budget; and
- £100.0 million to deliver the first steps of this Government's Neighbourhood Policing Commitment in 2025-26.

In addition to the force's government grant of up to £284 million, Lancashire Police will receive £12,596,034 to directly support the maintenance of officer numbers in FY2025/26

■ **Police: Pensions**

Sir Alec Shelbrooke:

[\[21287\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to publish a Remediable Service Statement for the Police Pension Scheme.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Remediable Service Statements are produced for each scheme member by the relevant scheme administrator.

While the Home Office has responsibility for overarching policy and legislative changes to the police pension regulations, the police pension scheme is locally administered by individual police forces.

It is for each chief constable, in their role as scheme manager for their force, to determine their administrative timetable. This includes the timetabling of when scheme members' Remediable Service Statements will be distributed.

■ **Polygamy: Databases**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[21262\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 23 October 2024 to Question 8756 on Polygamy, if she will make it her policy to record data on polygamous marriages in the UK.

Dame Diana Johnson:

I refer the Hon. Member to the Answer of 27 November 2024 to Question UIN 15076.

■ **Retail Trade: Crime**

Satvir Kaur:

[\[21549\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help tackle retail crime in (a) Southampton and (b) nationally; and if she will make an

assessment of the potential merits of providing additional powers to the police for this purpose.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Shop theft is at a record high, police recorded crime for shoplifting in Southampton Community Partnership area saw an increase of (43%) in the latest year and a higher increase than in England and Wales as a whole (29%).

This Government is taking strong action to tackle this problem by ending the effective immunity, introduced by the previous Government, granted to shop theft of goods under £200. We will also introduce a new offence of assaulting a retail worker to protect the hardworking and dedicated staff that work in stores.

As announced in the Autumn Budget, and building on current Home Office funding, we will provide:

£5 million over three years to continue to fund a specialist analysis team within Opal, the National Policing Intelligence Unit for serious organised acquisitive crime, to crack down on organised gangs targeting retailers;

£2 million over three years to the National Business Crime Centre, a resource for police and businesses to learn, share and support each other to prevent and combat crime; and

£100k in 2025-26 for the National Police Chiefs' Council for further training on prevention tactics.

■ **Serious Crime Prevention Orders**

Adam Jogee:

[\[21774\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of Serious Crime Prevention Orders.

Dan Jarvis:

Serious Crime Prevention Orders are a powerful tool for preventing and disrupting the activities of the highest-harm criminals involved in serious crime. However, the orders are not currently being used to maximum effect. Between 2011 and 2021, only two applications were made to the High Court for an SCPO in the absence of a conviction, of which only one was successful, compared to a total of 1,057 SCPOs being made in the Crown Court on conviction in the same period. This is significantly lower than Parliament anticipated when it introduced SCPOs in the Serious Crime Act 2007.

As announced on 2nd January, the Government is seeking to improve the SCPO regime by introducing new interim SCPOs. Currently, securing an SCPO on suspects, including people smugglers, can be a complex and lengthy process. Interim orders will speed up the process for placing restrictions on people under investigation so as to prevent, deter and disrupt serious and organised crime, including people smuggling. These new interim orders will allow the National Crime Agency, the police and other law enforcement agencies to apply directly to the High Court to impose

immediate restrictions whilst a full order is considered. The Government will bring forward further measures to improve the functioning of SCPOs in due course.

These figures are experimental, based on HMCTS management information and are not equivalent to official statistics published by the Ministry of Justice.

The Explanatory Notes to the 2007 Act state that “the main route for making an order will be an application to the High Court”. In addition, at Lords Committee Stage of the Serious Crime Bill, Baroness Scotland of Asthal stated that operational partners had indicated that there may be 25 or 30 such orders – see Hansard, Volume 690, 7 March 2007: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2007-03-07/debates/07030790000002/SeriousCrimeBill\(HL\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2007-03-07/debates/07030790000002/SeriousCrimeBill(HL))

■ Slavery: Care Workers

Mr Luke Charters:

[21436]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to prevent modern slavery in the care sector.

Jess Phillips:

The Government believes that everyone deserves to be treated fairly at work and rewarded for their contribution to the economy. We are aware of issues being raised in the adult care sector, including concerns about unethical employment practices by some sponsors of the 'Health and Care Worker' visa.

The Home Office has zero tolerance of sponsors who seek to exploit workers they sponsor and will take action against any found to be doing so. However, while the UKVI actively monitors the compliance of sponsors with their duties, they are not a labour market regulator, and their powers to redress concerns are limited to revoking a sponsor's licence. Furthermore, UKVI have no legal powers to police the recruitment chains used by sponsors and such recruitment often takes place outside of UK legal jurisdiction. The Home Office does, however, expect sponsors to recruit staff lawfully.

The Home Office also funds the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), which has specially trained officers with police-style powers to prevent, detect and investigate serious labour exploitation across the entire economy in England and Wales. The GLAA have a number of live investigations within the care sector currently.

The Home Office will continue to work closely with DHSC and other relevant departments to address these issues, including exploring further regulation through the Fair Work Agency, the forthcoming single enforcement body.

■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel

Zöe Franklin:

[902123]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help reduce the number of people who die when crossing the Channel in small boats.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Criminal gangs only care about the profits they make, not about the lives they put at risk. The Border Security Command is leading the UK's efforts to disrupt and bring to justice those facilitating illegal migration, including small boats crossings.

Border Force-crewed vessels, directed and coordinated by HM Coastguard, provide a 24/7 response to these dangerous and unnecessary crossings.

■ Visas: Israel**Laurence Turner:**[\[902121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of how her Department processes visa applications submitted by Arab citizens of Israel.

Seema Malhotra:

Mr Speaker, applications submitted by citizens of Israel, Arab or otherwise, are assessed against the requirements of the Immigration Rules on their individual merits.

As part of any visa application assessment, consideration is given in cases involving compelling, compassionate, and exceptional circumstances.

Those who wish to travel to the UK can do so via the existing range of visa routes available to visit, work, study or join family in the UK.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION**■ Parliamentary Estate: Cosmetics and Soaps****Alex Mayer:**[\[21446\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many and what proportion of soaps and other skincare products used on the parliamentary estate are cruelty free certified.

Nick Smith:

Our supplier contract stipulates all products used should be, so far as is reasonably possible, cruelty free, and compliant with the recommendations of Cruelty Free International.

All soaps supplied comply with the relevant cosmetic regulations (Cosmetic Products Enforcement Regulations 2013 and Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 on cosmetic products) which means they are not allowed to be tested on animals.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ Affordable Housing: Construction**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21615\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the average grant subsidy per unit is to build an average affordable dwelling under the (a) social rent, (b) affordable rent and (c) affordable home ownership tenures for the current Affordable Housing Programme.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[22328\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the average capital grant subsidy is per unit for a social rent dwelling.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Department delegates delivery of the Affordable Homes Programme to Homes England outside London and to the Greater London Authority (GLA) in London. The government agrees budgets and targets with both agencies to deliver the programme's overall targets for additional homes and specific types of tenure, as well as types of home, including those built using of Modern Methods of Construction and Supported Housing.

In awarding contracts under the programme Homes England and the GLA assess the need for grant on a site-by-site basis. In agreeing how much grant a project requires they will take into account the costs for building out the site with how much grant is needed to make that project viable, and the overall value for money for the programme. The most recent publication, with data reflecting grant allocations to the end of March 2023, can be found [here](#).

Ben Maguire: [\[21951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of legislating to increase the minimum percentage of affordable housing requirement when new housing developments are (a) planned and (b) built.

Matthew Pennycook:

The golden rules introduced through the revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December 2024 require that development on the Green Belt delivers 15 percentage points more affordable housing than the existing local plan affordable housing requirements, up to a maximum of 50% (except where the local plan requirement is already higher). We estimate that the median affordable housing target in the Green Belt will be 50%.

Outside of the Green Belt, it is for local authorities to assess the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community, including those who require affordable housing, and to reflect this in planning policies. We will consider what further steps we can take to support social and affordable housing as part of our intent to produce a set of national policies for decision making later this year.

■ Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[20984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2024 to Question 17009 on Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission, whether she had discussions with (a) the Prime Minister or (b) 10 Downing Street on the proposed Chinese Embassy prior to her decision to call-in the planning application.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer to Question UIN [17009](#) on 6 December 2024.

■ Community Development

Paul Davies: [\[21898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to promote community-based initiatives that foster social connections among vulnerable populations.

Alex Norris:

The government funds programmes to increase social connections including those run by Near Neighbours and Schools Linking, which deliver initiatives in communities to bring people together.

Community groups also play a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and providing services which improve health and wellbeing, reduce anti-social behaviour, protect nature and offer support to groups in need. On 23 December 2024 we announced the outcome of round 4 of the Community Ownership Fund, with 85 projects from across the UK receiving £36.2 million in funding.

■ Development Plans

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21623\]](#)

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, what financial resources will be made available by her Department to support mayoral combined authorities in bringing forward spatial development plans.

Matthew Pennycook:

We recognise that strategic authorities will require effective capacity so that they can deliver on the ambitions set out in the English Devolution White Paper, including in relation to proposed Spatial Development Strategies. Any decisions on funding will be a matter for the upcoming Spending Review.

■ Devolution: Surrey**Dr Al Pinkerton:**[\[21890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the English Devolution White Paper on the delivery of public services in Surrey.

Jim McMahon:

The White Paper we published before Christmas sets an ambitious new framework for English devolution, moving power out of Westminster and back to those who know their areas best. To deliver change, we need strong local leadership and empowered institutions. This is what devolution is all about.

A unitary council for Surrey residents will bring lower and upper tier services together, creating opportunities for service transformation which will support improvements in delivery. Ultimately, our goal is mayoral devolution that will prioritise the delivery of high quality, sustainable public services to citizens and communities, above all other issues.

Mayors will be equipped with a range of new powers across planning, infrastructure, transport, skills, business and energy, alongside strong and effective relationships with councils and other partners, to deliver the missions we have set out to transform the country.

■ Disabled Facilities Grants: Staffordshire**Adam Jogie:**[\[21776\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many people have received funding from the Disabled Facilities Grant in (a) Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency and (b) Staffordshire in each of the last 14 years.

Adam Jogie:[\[21780\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the Disabled Facilities Grant.

Rushanara Ali:

Government recognises how important home adaptations are in enabling older and disabled people to live as independently as possible in a safe and suitable environment. This is why on 3 January 2025 government announced an immediate £86 million in-year uplift to the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), taking the funding total to £711 million for 2024-25. This will allow 7,800 more eligible people to make vital improvements to their home allowing them to live more independent lives and reducing hospitalisations.

Furthermore, government announced an £86 million additional investment in the DFG for the 2025-26 financial year at the Autumn Budget (bringing total funding for 2025-26 to £711 million).

Government continues to keep all aspects of the DFG under consideration. As part of this process, we are reviewing the suitability of the current upper limit.

Government does not hold data on how many people have received DFG funding. The table below sets out the number of completed grants for the (a) Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency and (b) Staffordshire in each of the last 14 years, taken from voluntary, unaudited and incomplete data provided annually by local authorities in England. Due to changes in reporting mechanisms, completions data for financial year 2017-18 is not available.

	YEAR	NUMBER OF DFGs COMPLETED
(a) Newcastle-under-Lyme	(b) Staffordshire	
2010-2011	130	932
2011-2012	116	1018
2012-2013	Incomplete data	Incomplete data
2013-2014	95	Incomplete data
2014-2015	119	683
2015-2016	Incomplete data	Incomplete data
2016-2017	118	Incomplete data
2017-2018	N/A	N/A
2018-2019	120	754
2019-2020	75	659
2020-2021	60	573
2021-2022	135	703
2022-2023	87	864
2023-2024	92	984

■ Domestic Abuse: Victim Support Schemes

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[21748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to improve national oversight of local commissioning of (a) specialist led-by and (b) domestic abuse services.

Rushanara Ali:

Local authorities have a duty to commission services under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The statutory guidance is clear that local authorities must assess the needs of all victims, including those requiring specialist support, and ensure sufficient support is available to meet identified need. Support should be delivered by knowledgeable and experienced specialist domestic abuse providers. The guidance is also clear that commissioning processes should not exclude smaller voluntary organisations, such as those run 'by and for' groups with particular protected characteristics.

To further support local authorities in meeting these responsibilities, £160 million has been committed for support in safe accommodation in 2025/26, which includes a £30 million uplift to strengthen domestic abuse support services.

My department works closely with local authorities, supporting delivery of these duties, including monitoring through quarterly and annual data collections. My officials regularly liaise with organisations such as Women's Aid, and I am establishing a new Domestic Abuse Housing Group, to be co-chaired by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, to oversee delivery. This will help ensure that services remain responsive, effective, and aligned with the needs of domestic abuse victims.

■ Empty Property

Gregory Stafford: [\[21953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of repurposing vacant (a) shops, (b) offices and (c) houses; and whether this would reduce local new-build housing targets.

Matthew Pennycook:

The National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that substantial weight should be given to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements, including bringing back into residential use empty homes and the development of under-utilised land and buildings, to meet the need for homes and other uses.

Changes we made to the National Planning Policy Framework in December 2024 broadened the definition of brownfield land, set a strengthened expectation that applications on brownfield land will be approved, and made clear that plans should promote an uplift in density in urban areas.

On 22 September 2024, we published a 'brownfield passport' policy paper inviting views on how we might further prioritise and fast-track building on previously used urban land.

■ Freehold: Fees and Charges**Samantha Niblett:** [\[21752\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans she has to ensure that charges for freehold homeowners for the upkeep of shared (a) areas and (b) facilities are equitable.

Matthew Pennycook:

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

■ Garden Communities**Cameron Thomas:** [\[21223\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her Department's policy is on the future of the garden communities programme.

Matthew Pennycook:

Garden Communities are locally-led new settlements or urban extensions. The Garden Communities programme provides support to progress long-term housing projects from their earliest stages. It enables local authorities to recruit specialist staff, undertake the required planning and receive advice and support from the housing delivery body, Homes England. The government will keep the programme under review.

■ Homelessness: Stoke-on-Trent South**Dr Allison Gardner:** [\[22525\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to provide support for veterans who are homeless and rough sleeping in Stoke-on-Trent South constituency.

Rushanara Ali:

This is a government of service committed to ensuring our veterans have access to the housing support they need.

As announced at the Budget, £633.2 million will be provided to councils in England in the financial year 2025 to 2026 through the Homelessness Prevention Grant, to support them to deliver services to tackle and prevent homelessness, including veteran homelessness. This includes an uplift of £192.9 million compared to 2024 to 2025. Stoke-on-Trent City Council is receiving a total of £1,747,686 over 2025-26. All Homelessness Prevention Grant allocations for 2025-26 can be found [here](#).

On 8 November the Government committed a further £3.5 million to the Reducing Veteran Homelessness Programme from March 2025, including Op FORTITUDE, the homelessness pathway for homeless veterans, including those rough sleeping. This is in addition to £8.55 million of funding made available to support veterans into housing over 2023-25.

■ Housing: Aldershot**Alex Baker:** [\[20788\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the potential implications for her policies of trends in the number of people living in overcrowded housing in Aldershot constituency.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Department does not collect data on overcrowding at a constituency level. The government's Plan for Change milestone of building 1.5 million new homes in this Parliament will help tackle overcrowding across the country.

■ Housing: Construction**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[20979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the target of 1.5 million new homes in the context of net migration.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon Member to the answer to Question UIN [2451](#) on 5 September 2024.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of biodiversity net gain on the cost of housebuilding.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21631\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of biodiversity net gain on the sale of land previously used for agriculture.

Matthew Pennycook:

Mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain was introduced by the previous government through the Environment Act 2021. To support this, an impact assessment was undertaken in 2019 estimating the overall assessed cost of biodiversity net gain to developers and the effect on developable land prices. No subsequent assessment has been made under the current government.

Mike Wood: [\[22018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the policy paper entitled Plan for Change, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, if she will make it her policy to publish an annual report on progress towards the target to build 1.5 million homes.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer given to Question UIN [19066](#) on 20 December 2024.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[22033\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's press release entitled Ministers set to unleash biggest building boom in half a century, published on 5 December 2024, what metrics will be used to measure the number of new homes delivered in the third year of the Parliament.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon Member to the answer to Question UIN [19066](#) on 20 December 2024.

■ Housing: Police

Tom Tugendhat:

[\[21324\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the Renters' Rights Bill on the ability of Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner to provide accommodation for police officers.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government will continue to engage with stakeholders, including representatives of police forces and Police and Crime Commissioners, to ensure that the provisions of Renters' Rights Bill operate effectively.

■ Local Government

Martin Wrigley:

[\[21426\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department plans to seek the approval of local councils before establishing new (a) foundation strategic authorities, (b) mayoral strategic authorities and (c) established mayoral strategic authorities; and whether she plans to introduce secondary legislation to implement these proposals.

Jim McMahon:

The Government has announced its intention to introduce new Mayoral Combined Authorities and Mayoral Combined County Authorities with elections in May 2026. This will require the consent of all constituent local authorities involved, using the processes set out in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. These areas, and other new and existing devolved institutions in England, will be designated as Strategic Authorities when the English Devolution Bill comes into force. The government is fully committed to working in partnership with councils to bring about devolution by establishing new strategic authorities, and to creating a clear pathway to accessing higher levels of devolution, including Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities. We will set out in the English Devolution Bill more detail on how we will seek the consent of constituent councils under this new legislation, which will be laid in this Parliamentary session.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the English Devolution White Paper, published on the 16 December 2024, what discussions she had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer before setting the population threshold to 500,000 or more for newly formed councils.

Jim McMahon:

Ministers regularly have meetings with colleagues across government.

■ Local Government: Devolution

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21624\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her planned timetable is for the implementation of the proposals in the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024.

Jim McMahon:

The deadline for application to the Devolution Priority Programme was 10 January and we will confirm participants shortly after. The English Devolution Bill will be introduced in the first session, subject to parliamentary time. Integrated funding settlements will be provided to Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities at the start of the next financial year (25/26) and four more Mayoral Combined Authorities will follow in the 26/27 financial year. Further changes to funding and programmes will be delivered through the Spending Review process.

We intend to formally invite reorganisation proposals in January 2025 from all relevant councils. We expect to deliver new unitary authorities in April 2027 and 2028.

■ Local Government: Elections

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21620\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's publication entitled English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, if she will make it her policy to ensure elections to principal and strategic authorities take place concurrently.

Jim McMahon:

The Government has no plans to change the timing of elections for principal and strategic authorities to ensure that they take place concurrently.

■ Local Government: Staff

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21629\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 15441 on Local Government: Staff, how the Local Government Workforce Development Group members will be selected; and whether the membership will be politically balanced.

Jim McMahon:

Membership of the Workforce Development Group is composed of officers from both national and local government organisations. The group is focussed on the common interest of tackling local government workforce issues and is not party political. The inaugural meeting was chaired by the Minister for Local Government, and future meetings will be chaired by a senior official from MHCLG.

■ Mayors: Elections**Martin Wrigley:**[\[21465\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the English Devolution White Paper, in what circumstances Mayors will vote with other elected officials.

Jim McMahon:

Mayors and Combined and Combined County Authority board members will vote on the areas set out in their governance arrangements. The new statutory framework will make these consistent across the country.

In Mayoral Combined and Combined County Authorities, a majority vote which includes the Mayor will be required to approve decisions on the use of most functions. Specific functions set out in the Devolution Framework will be exercisable only by the Mayor. We will confirm the final arrangements when we lay the English Devolution Bill.

Dr Simon Opher:[\[21721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to change the voting system to Supplementary Vote for mayoral elections.

Rushanara Ali:

I refer my hon Friend to the answer given to Question UIN [20691](#) on 19 December 2024.

■ Members: Correspondence**Apsana Begum:**[\[21382\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when she plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse dated 29 August 2024, reference number MC2024/19996, on support for a public inquiry into the New Providence Wharf fire.

Alex Norris:

The Department provided a response on 6 January 2025.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Correspondence**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 16200 on Local Government: Productivity, for what reason her Department does not routinely publish letters issued to local authorities. .

Jim McMahon:

In line with the practice of successive previous governments, MHCLG does not regularly publish non-public correspondence between Ministers and local authorities. Local authorities are free to publish these letters if they believe it is beneficial to do so.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Freedom of Information**

Neil Coyle: [\[22299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her Department's target response time to Freedom of Information requests is; and when she plans to respond to Case NC39961.

Alex Norris:

The statutory timescale for responding to FOI requests is 20 working days. A response to the Honourable Gentleman was issued by MHCLG's correspondence team on 10 January 2025. I hope that he will accept my apologies for any inconvenience caused by the delay to this response.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Staff**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the (a) full time equivalent and (b) headcount number of staff assigned to work in each of her Department's offices is.

Alex Norris:

The location of every departmental office and the number of staff assigned to work in each of those offices as at 31 December 2024, in both (a) full time equivalent and (b) headcount, is set out below.

OFFICE LOCATION	FTE	HEADCOUNT
Belfast	21	21
Birmingham	144	147
Birkenhead	87	91
Bristol	163	167

OFFICE LOCATION	FTE	HEADCOUNT
Cambridge	50	53
Cardiff	44	45
Darlington	125	127
Edinburgh	51	52
Exeter	24	26
Hastings	23	26
Hemel Hempstead	56	58
Leeds	163	168
London	2,163	2,220
Manchester	196	201
Newcastle	66	67
Norwich	12	12
Nottingham	70	72
Plymouth	24	24
Sheffield	48	51
Truro	14	15
Warrington	56	59
Wolverhampton	269	277
Grand Total	3,867	3,979

■ Planning Authorities

Kevin Hollinrake:

[21613]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to paragraph 3.35 of Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, how much and what proportion of the £46 million in funding allocated to her Department will be spent on (a) recruitment and training for graduates and apprentices, (b) accelerating large sites waiting for planning approval and (c) upskilling local planning authority capacity.

Matthew Pennycook:

Details of precisely how the £46 million committed to support capacity and capability in local planning authorities will be allocated is subject to departmental planning, and negotiations are ongoing with delivery partners. Further detail will be provided in due course and the House will be updated in the usual way.

■ Planning Permission**Mr Lee Dillon:**[\[21439\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of preventing planning inspectors from overturning decisions made in line with neighbourhood plans.

Matthew Pennycook:

Appeal decisions by planning inspectors must be taken in accordance with policies in the development plan for the area, including any neighbourhood plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The revised National Planning Policy Framework, which is a material consideration, continues to make clear that where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans), permission should not usually be granted. Protections from speculative development for areas with a qualifying neighbourhood plan have also been retained in the revised Framework.

■ Planning: Health Services**Josh Newbury:****[R]** [\[22103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of making (a) Integrated Care Boards and (b) NHS trusts statutory consultees in the planning process.

Matthew Pennycook:

NHS and Integrated Care Boards are consultees on local plans. This helps ensure that local strategies to improve health and the provision of the required health infrastructure are considered upfront in plans and in planning decisions. There are no current plans to make NHS and Integrated Care Boards statutory consultees in the planning application process.

■ Private Rented Housing**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[21611\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of (a) increases to (i) capital gains tax and (ii) stamp duty, (b) fixed term tenancies and evictions in the Renters' Rights Bill and (c) requiring landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their properties to a EPC C rating by 2030 on the private rented sector by the end of this Parliament.

Matthew Pennycook:

There were no changes made to Capital Gains tax residential property rates at Autumn Budget and Spending Round 2024.

The increase of the higher rates of Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) by two percentage points does not affect existing landlords, only those looking to enter the market or expand their portfolio. Landlords can still benefit from the lower non-residential rates of SDLT when purchasing six or more properties in a single transaction, or mixed (commercial and residential) property.

The Department published the Renters' Rights Bill Impact Assessment on 22 November 2024. It received a 'Green' rating from the Regulatory Policy Committee (RPC), indicating that it is 'fit for purpose'. For landlords that already provide decent homes and a prompt repair service to their tenants, the costs of our reforms, including abolishing fixed terms and introducing reformed possession grounds, are estimated to be just £22 per rented property annually – only 0.2% of mean annual rents.

The government will consult shortly on increasing minimum energy efficiency standards in the domestic private rented sector to achieve Energy Performance Certificate C or equivalent by 2030. The consultation will be accompanied by an assessment of the potential impacts of the proposals.

Public Sector: Lincolnshire**Sir John Hayes:**[\[21972\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the English Devolution White Paper on the delivery of public services in Lincolnshire.

Jim McMahon:

Subject to the relevant Statutory Instrument being made, Greater Lincolnshire will elect a Mayor in May 2025. The Mayor and Combined County Authority will receive the additional funding and powers associated with the Mayoral Strategic Authority level of devolution as set out in the White Paper, including on adult education and employment support, transport, and planning. As previously agreed, they will also receive a mayoral investment fund of £24 million a year for 30 years. Transferring funding and powers from Westminster will give an elected local leader the tools they need to kick start the local economy and improve vital public services across Lincolnshire.

The White Paper also announced a programme of local government reorganisation for two-tier areas. Unitarisation can lead to better outcomes for residents, and save significant money which can be reinvested in public services.

■ Regeneration: Stoke-on-Trent South**Dr Allison Gardner:**[\[22526\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she has taken to help support the regeneration of town centres in Stoke-on-Trent South constituency.

Alex Norris:

This Government is fully committed to rejuvenating our high streets and supporting the businesses and communities that make our town centres successful. This means addressing anti-social behaviour and crime, working with the banking industry to roll out 350 banking hubs, stamping out late payments, empowering communities to make the most of the vacant properties, strengthening the Post Office network, reforming the apprenticeship levy, and business rates.

Furthermore, the Government is investing in local growth with local allocations for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2025-26 now announced, which places may choose to invest in regenerating town centres. Stoke-on-Trent has been allocated £4,476,723. Stoke-on-Trent has additionally received funding from the Levelling Up Fund and Levelling Up Partnerships, which will also support local growth.

■ Regional Planning and Development: Thames Estuary**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[21616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2024 to Question 16892 on Regional Planning and Development: Finance, what her Department's policy is on the (a) continuation of the Thames Estuary Growth Board and (b) coordination of planning across the Thames Estuary area.

Jim McMahon:

At the Autumn Budget, the Government confirmed that it would consult on its minded to decision to cease funding for pan-regional partnerships at the end of this financial year. The consultation sought to gather views from all interested parties on the impacts of this decision, should it be taken forward, and closed on 16 December. The Department is currently considering the responses received and will confirm a final decision shortly.

The English Devolution White Paper, Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth, published in December 2024, confirmed our commitment to strategic planning through the production of Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs) covering all of England. Legislation to enable this will be introduced in 2025 through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

■ Renters' Rights Bill

Kevin Hollinrake:

[R] [21626]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 15451 on Renters' Rights Bill, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that Impact Assessments (a) receive clearance from the Regulatory Policy Committee and (b) are published no later than the First Reading of a Bill.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Department aims to publish Impact Assessments in a timely manner, in line with the 'Better Regulation Framework' guidance, which states that an Impact Assessment 'should be published alongside relevant legislation when it is laid before Parliament.'

In exceptional circumstances this may not be possible, for example, where the legislation is urgent, further work is needed following concerns expressed by the Regulatory Policy Committee (RPC) or where the assessment is with RPC for review. In those circumstances, the Department works with the RPC to ensure the Bill Impact Assessment and RPC opinion is published as soon as possible.

■ Social Rented Housing: Waiting Lists

Kevin Hollinrake:

[21625]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many households were on social housing waiting lists in (a) England and (b) London in each year since 2009-10.

Matthew Pennycook:

The number of households on social housing registers (waiting lists) in (a) England and (b) London each year since 2009-10 is available in live table 600 [here](#). The number of households on the housing register (waiting list) is not the same as the number of households waiting. Local authorities periodically review their registers to remove households who no longer require housing, so the total number of households on housing registers may overstate the number of households who still require social housing at any one time. The frequency of reviews varies between local authorities. Housing register size may also be affected by other factors. For example, there is the potential for some households to be on the housing register of more than one local authority.

■ Temporary Accommodation: Stoke-on-Trent South

Dr Allison Gardner:

[22524]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to help reduce the number of (a) adults and (b) children living in temporary accommodation in Stoke-on-Trent South constituency.

Rushanara Ali:

Homelessness levels are far too high. This can have a devastating impact on those affected.

We must address this and deliver long term solutions. The Government is looking at these issues carefully and will develop a new cross government strategy, working with mayors and councils across the country to get us back on track to ending homelessness once and for all.

We are already taking the first steps to get back on track to ending homelessness. In December, MHCLG announced that £633.2 million will be provided to councils in England in the 25/26 financial year through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG), of which £1,747,686 has been allocated to Stoke-on-Trent. These figures represent an additional £635,096 in funding for over 24/25 allocations, a 57.1% uplift, and will help to prevent rises in the number of families in temporary accommodation and help to prevent rough sleeping.

This brings total spend on homelessness services to nearly £1 billion in 25/26, a record level of funding.

More widely, we are taking action to tackle the root causes of homelessness, including: delivering the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation and building 1.5 million new homes over the next parliament; and abolishing Section 21 'no fault' evictions, preventing private renters being exploited and discriminated against, and empowering people to challenge unreasonable rent increases.

In addition, MHCLG's dedicated team of homelessness advisers work regularly with local authorities, including Stoke-on-Trent, to support them in delivering their statutory duties.

■ Unitary Councils**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[21621\]](#)

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, what the evidential basis is for the decision to set new unitary council sizes at 500,000 or more.

Jim McMahon:

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

■ Vagrancy Act 1824

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[21612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to introduce replacement legislation for the Vagrancy Act 1824.

Rushanara Ali:

The Government views the Vagrancy Act as antiquated and no longer fit for purpose. No one should be criminalised for simply sleeping rough on the streets.

We will carefully consider the Vagrancy Act and other relevant legislation in developing our new cross-government homelessness strategy.

■ Voting Rights: Foreign Nationals

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21697\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many people with citizenship of other countries can vote in UK elections; of which countries such people hold citizenship; which elections they are eligible to vote in; and whether these arrangements are reciprocal.

Rushanara Ali:

Electoral statistics are not available broken down by citizenship.

The franchise for UK Parliamentary elections, Northern Ireland Assembly elections, local government elections in England and Northern Ireland and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales are reserved. This answer relates to reserved elections only.

Irish citizens resident in the UK can vote in all elections. These rights are reciprocal. Commonwealth citizens lawfully resident in the UK can vote in all elections. These rights are not generally reciprocal.

EU citizens resident in the UK before EU exit can in the main continue to vote in local elections. Post-Brexit migrants from some EU Member States (Poland, Luxembourg, Spain, Portugal and Denmark), with whom the Government has agreed reciprocal arrangements, can vote in local elections.

The franchise for devolved elections in Scotland and Wales is a matter for the Scottish and Welsh parliaments.

JUSTICE

■ Courts and Legal Aid Scheme

Danny Beales:

[\[21925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of funding for (a) legal aid and (b) criminal courts.

Sarah Sackman:

This Government inherited a justice system under enormous strain and a legal aid system facing significant challenges, but we have already started to rebuild the system. On criminal legal aid, in November 2024 we announced our response to the Crime Lower consultation, confirming an uplift to the lowest police station fees, introducing a new Youth Court fee scheme, and paying for travel time in certain circumstances. Together, these changes amount to a £24 million investment for criminal legal aid providers.

In addition, in December 2024, we announced that criminal legal aid solicitors will receive up to £92 million more a year to help address the ongoing challenges in the criminal justice system, subject to consultation. This is a significant investment to reflect the valuable and tough work that is undertaken by those who work in the criminal justice system, helping them to make sure justice is served and that victims get the resolution they need. Alongside consulting on specific solicitor fee uplifts, we are committed to continuing to work with the criminal legal aid profession, including the Bar, on further opportunities for reform this Parliament and to support the overall sustainability, diversity, and efficiency of the system.

On civil legal aid, the Ministry of Justice has recently undertaken a comprehensive review of civil legal aid and, having considered the evidence collected, we acknowledge that the sector is facing a number of challenges. We are committed to improving the experience of users and providers and, as an important first step towards this, we intend to consult on uplifts to housing and debt and immigration legal aid fees this month which would inject an additional £20 million into the sector each year once fully implemented. We will continue to consider the fees paid in other categories of civil legal aid, and the wider themes from the Review, in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the civil legal aid sector.

■ Criminal Proceedings**Mike Wood:**[\[22024\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to page 33 of the policy paper entitled Plan for Change: Milestones for mission-led government, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, how she plans to measure success in building confidence in the criminal justice system; and whether she plans to regularly (a) collect and (b) publish victim satisfaction data.

Sarah Sackman:

We are still developing this pillar of the mission and will say more in due course.

We regularly publish victim engagement data for the criminal justice system in the Criminal Justice System Delivery Data Dashboard. These metrics cover the percentage of investigations closed because the victim does not support police action, cases stopped after a defendant has been charged because a victim no longer supports the prosecution, and cases in which the victim or witness no longer supports prosecution on the day of trial.

■ Crown Prosecution Service

Dame Caroline Dinenage:

[\[21585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 16135 on Crown Prosecution Service and with reference to the The Better Case Management Revival Handbook, published in January 2023, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the Crown Court consistently manages cases.

Sarah Sackman:

The management of case progression and listing across the criminal courts is a judicial function. As part of their systemic oversight, the senior judiciary produced (and have subsequently kept under review) a framework of guidance to drive improved performance.

The Better Case Management Revival Handbook, published in January 2023, is intended to remind all criminal justice partners of the principles of Better Case Management (BCM) and to ensure the courts consistently apply them. Chief among the aims is better collaboration between prosecution and defence to drive earlier guilty pleas wherever appropriate, increase trial effectiveness, and reduce the number of hearings per Crown Court case. The Government is working closely with the judiciary and other justice partners to improve adherence to Better Case Management Principles through supporting the Criminal Court Improvement Group (CCIG), which is chaired by the Senior Presiding Judge.

Among other things, we have piloted a new role in certain Crown Court offices – Case Coordinators – who are deployed exclusively to support the local judiciary in driving adherence to the BCM principles. HMCTS also provides the CCIG (and local judicial managers) with data and analytical support to help oversee and manage performance. Most recently, HMCTS has supported a judicially-led review into Crown Court listing practices, which aims to achieve broad alignment of listing approaches and increase the consistency and predictability of case management processes.

Ultimately, the management of cases through the Crown Court is the responsibility of the independent judiciary.

■ Domestic Abuse: Reoffenders

Josh Babarinde:

[\[21733\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many domestic abusers are serving prison sentences in England and Wales.

Josh Babarinde:

[\[21734\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of domestic abusers reoffend within (a) one year, (b) three years, (c) five years and (d) ten years of conviction.

Josh Babarinde:

[\[21735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of domestic abusers perpetrate domestic abuse against their original victims within (a) one year, (b) three years, (c) five years and (d) ten years of conviction.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

It is not possible to robustly calculate the number of domestic abusers in prison or their reoffending rate. This is because these crimes are recorded under the specific offences for which they are prosecuted, such as intentional strangulation or suffocation.

This Government is prioritising public protection from, and rehabilitation for, this cohort through measures such as better training for probation officers and improved use of monitoring technology. We have also recently introduced Domestic Abuse Protection Orders, which brings together the strongest elements of existing orders to protect victims.

This Government also ensured that a range of offences linked to domestic abuse have been excluded from the early release programme, unlike the scheme run by the previous Conservative Government. We have set out an unprecedented mission to halve violence against women and girls within a decade, using every tool available to us to deliver transformative change.

Josh Babarinde:

[\[21739\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of domestic abusers perpetrated further crimes in prison in (a) 2022, (b) 2023, and (c) 2024.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

It is not possible to robustly calculate the number of domestic abusers in prison or their reoffending rate. This is because these crimes are recorded under the specific offences for which they are prosecuted, such as intentional strangulation or suffocation. Data relating to crimes in prison is held across police referral and adjudication records. To be able to identify these cases we would have to access and review all potentially relevant records which would be of disproportionate cost.

The Public Protection Policy Framework and the Unwanted Prisoner Contact Service work to protect victims and prevent offenders, such as domestic abusers, from continuing to carry out crimes such as stalking or coercive controlling behaviour from prison.

■ Domestic Abuse: Victim Support Schemes

Joe Morris:

[\[22401\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department plans to take through the Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill to support victims of domestic abuse.

Alex Davies-Jones:

This Government was elected with a landmark mission to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the next decade. We will use every tool within our power to target perpetrators and address the root causes of abuse and violence, including domestic abuse. In November, we launched Domestic Abuse Protection Orders in selected areas to provide more protection for victims, and early this year we will introduce domestic abuse experts in 999 control rooms. These are just some of the first steps we are taking to tackle VAWG and improve the justice system response to domestic abuse across England and Wales.

Through the upcoming Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill, we have committed to strengthening the powers of the Victims' Commissioner to further empower them to hold the system to account when the needs of victims, including victims of domestic abuse, are not being met.

Juries: Finance**Dr Allison Gardner:**[\[22533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that people carrying out jury duty do not experience financial hardship.

Sarah Sackman:

Juries are a vital part of our criminal justice system and undertake an important civic duty. The support provided to jurors includes measures to assist those who may suffer financial hardship. People who are not paid by their employer whilst they are on jury service can claim a loss of earnings allowance from the court, and jurors can apply for a deferral or excusal based upon financial hardship.

McClure Solicitors: Insolvency**Kate Osborne:**[\[21670\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will take steps to identify all people impacted by the collapse of McClure solicitors.

Sarah Sackman:

The legal profession in England and Wales operates independently of government. The responsibility for regulating the sector sits with the approved regulators, overseen by the Legal Services Board. It would therefore not be appropriate for the Ministry of Justice to hold or seek to hold the information on people impacted by the collapse of McClure solicitors.

Given the seriousness of the issue raised, my officials have spoken to the Solicitors Regulation Authority, who has confirmed that it is carrying out an investigation into the former partners of WW& J McClure. There are several routes in place to ensure consumers have access to support in the event of the collapse of their solicitor's law firm.

The Legal Ombudsman deals with service complaints against regulated legal services providers – including those who are no longer operational. Their website

provides information with regards to the different routes available for consumers depending on their personal circumstances: [Complaining about closed service providers | Legal Ombudsman](#).

■ Offences against Children: Civil Proceedings

Helen Hayes: [\[21650\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, when her Department plans to respond to the consultation entitled Limitation law in child sexual abuse cases, which closed on 10 July 2024.

Sarah Sackman:

The consultation on limitation law in child sexual abuse cases was held between 15 May 2024 and 10 July 2024. Ministers are currently considering responses to the consultation and a Government response will be issued shortly.

■ Parole: Homicide

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[21745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people convicted of causing a death have been granted parole before the halfway point in their original sentences in the last year.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

No prisoners are eligible to be considered for release by the Parole Board before the half-way point in their sentence.

■ Peers: Convictions

James McMurdock: [\[22544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will take steps to ensure that cases involving members of the House of Lords convicted of serious crimes do not adversely impact public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Sarah Sackman:

All individuals, including members of the House of Lords, are held to be equal before the law. Decisions on bringing forward charges and prosecutions are for the police and Crown Prosecution Service, and the management of cases through the courts and sentencing is a matter for the independent judiciary. Prosecutors have an overriding responsibility to act without fear, favour or prejudice. Therefore, any member of the House of Lords who commits a crime will face the appropriate consequences for their actions in our open and fair criminal justice system, just like any other member of the public.

■ Prisoners' Release

Dr Allison Gardner: [\[22853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to improve support for people being released from prison.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

We are committed to ensuring pre-release plans are created for those leaving custody, to ensure their needs are identified early and individual robust plans are in place to address these.

We are working closely with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and other Departments on the development of a new cross-government strategy to put us back on track to ending homelessness, as well as delivering our temporary accommodation service (CAS3), so all offenders leaving prison at risk of homelessness who are supervised by probation are offered up to 12 weeks of accommodation to provide a stable base on release.

We are also working with prisons to improve offenders' access to purposeful activity, including learning, to improve prisoners' reading, numeracy and vocational training so that more prisoners are prepared for work on release. In addition, we have launched regional Employment Councils, which for the first time will bring businesses together with probation and the Department of Work and Pensions to support offenders in the community.

To support prison leavers with a drug or alcohol need, over 50 Health and Justice Partnership Coordinators nationwide are improving links between prison, probation and treatment providers, and we have secure laptops to enable prisoners to meet with community treatment providers virtually, prior to release.

■ Prisons: Crimes of Violence

Josh Babarinde: [\[21741\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many prison officers reported abuse by offenders in (a) 2022, (b) 2023, and (c) 2024.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Abuse of prison officers by prisoners is taken very seriously, and will never be tolerated. It is comprehensively recorded through various mechanisms, including internal reports, disciplinary records, and external investigations. The goal of these systems is to ensure the safety and security of staff, while also managing the behaviour of prisoners within the system. As the information is collected in a variety of formats, collating it would be a labour-intensive process, which could not be undertaken without incurring disproportionate cost.

Attacks on prison officers are taken very seriously, and they are treated equally with assaults on the police and other emergency service workers under the Assaults on Emergency Workers Act (Offences) 2018. Since June 2022, the maximum penalty for

those who assault emergency workers, which covers prison officers, has now doubled.

■ Prisons: Literacy

Paul Davies: [\[21906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she plans to take to ensure that all prisoners have access to high-quality literacy programs.

Paul Davies: [\[21908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she plans to take steps to integrate prisoner literacy programs with other (a) educational and (b) vocational training opportunities.

Paul Davies: [\[21909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she plans to take to support the use of (a) technology and (b) digital resources to enhance literacy education in prisons.

Paul Davies: [\[21910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether her Department is taking steps to tailor literacy programmes for prisoners (a) with learning disabilities and (b) for whom English is a second language.

Paul Davies: [\[21912\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether her Department is taking steps to form partnerships with (a) external organisations and (b) volunteers to support literacy initiatives in prisons.

Paul Davies: [\[21913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will take steps to help tackle the (a) stigma and (b) barriers preventing prisoners from participating in literacy programs.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Reading is a priority for HMPPS, and improving prisoner literacy is a key aim of prison education and plays an important role in supporting rehabilitation and reducing reoffending. Formal literacy teaching follows national accredited qualifications, which must follow quality standards laid down by awarding organisations.

Education providers are also encouraged to embed learning in vocational training. Engagement is also supported through the delivery of Education for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) and all learners are screened for neurodiversity needs and provided with support so that education is tailored, and adjustments (such as providing assistive technology or additional support) are made for those with additional learning needs and/or ESOL.

All prisons have reading strategies, and we have established a national reading panel with external experts to provide advice and challenge as we develop new work in this area. These include representatives from Department for Education, Ofsted, British

Dyslexia Association and the National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults. Libraries support prisoners in their reading. We also have a long-standing National Reading Working Group that has members from Further Education and the Third Sector.

In terms of improving digital delivery, our in-cell technology programme, Launchpad, has now been provided in 17 prisons which gives prisoners access to resources that support reading and literacy in their cells. Launchpad will be delivered to a further 2 prisons by March 2025, increasing the total number of prisoners with access to around 12,900. Since the 1st of July 2024, the Shannon Trust, 'Learn to Read' content series has been accessed by Launchpad users over 5000 times.

Paul Davies: [\[21907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she plans to take to tackle the shortage of qualified (a) teachers and (b) staff to provide literacy education in prisons.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The recruitment of qualified teachers is primarily a matter for the prison education providers. HMPPS is working with education providers to reduce teacher vacancies. The vacancy rate for all providers has reduced over the last few months. As of 15 December 2024 it was 4%, reducing from 5% in November 2024 and 7% in October 2024.

HMPPS has contractual levers in place to ensure that literacy courses are delivered, with financial penalties for non-delivery. Providers must deliver 95% of commissioned courses due to vacancies, or take a 2% financial penalty. We also do not pay for any commissioned education which is not delivered.

Paul Davies: [\[21911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to (a) assess (i) feedback from and (ii) outcomes of and (b) improve literacy programmes for prisoners.

Paul Davies: [\[21914\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will allocate funding to support research on effective literacy interventions for prisoners.

Paul Davies: [\[21915\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how she measures the success of literacy programs; and if she will set benchmarks to track progress of those programs.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

We are evaluating some of the programmes to support literacy delivered by partners and will look to publish an evaluation report later in 2025. We are also improving our understanding of the outcomes of different prison education types, including English courses, through the Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD) programme.

As part of BOLD, there is existing funding to conduct research to explore the relationship between prison education and post-release employment outcomes with

findings expected to be published in 2025. All this learning will continue to support our evolving understanding of what more we can do to improve literacy in prisons.

The success of formal literacy education is primarily measured by prisoners 'achieving' and getting an accredited qualification; we regularly use this data to ensure good performance. Latest published data (for 2023/24) shows a 5% increase in participation in English functional skills and a 21% increase in prisoner learners who achieved a full in English functional skills, compared to 2022/23.

■ Probate

Victoria Collins:

[\[21822\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she plans to take with probate services to find a solution for cases where there is a chain of representation but the name of the applicant will not match that on the Grant of Probate.

Sarah Sackman:

A chain of representation arises where all the executors of an estate have died before completing the administration of that estate. Under section 7(1) of the Administration of Estates Act 1925 the executor for deceased's executor becomes the executor for the original incomplete estate as well as the estate they were appointed as executor.

The chain of representation is broken if an executor in the chain has died intestate. In those circumstances a grant of administration de bonis non must be obtained to administer the estate.

HM Courts and Tribunal Service's probate service will always provide assistance and support in all cases where the chain of representation applies, and where the name of an applicant does not match that on a Grant of Probate.

■ Rape: Crown Court

Mary Glendon:

[\[21981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to introduce specialist rape courts at every Crown Court.

Alex Davies-Jones:

We know that, due to the complexity of the cases, victims of rape can wait longer than victims of other offence types for their case to complete in court. We remain committed to delivering our manifesto commitment, where we set out that we will fast-track rape cases, with specialist courts.

The fast-tracking of rape cases has dependencies with, and impacts on, the rest of the criminal justice system, including the wider Crown Court caseload and the capacity of the rape and serious sexual offences specialist legal workforce. We are carefully considering how best to deliver this. We plan to work closely with the judiciary and will be able to say more in due course.

We are committed to supporting victims of rape throughout their journeys through the criminal justice system, including at court. Section 28 has helped victims and

witnesses avoid the stress of giving evidence live at trial and improve their evidence, by enabling cross-examination to take place at a separate hearing in advance of the trial. Trauma informed training has now been rolled out at three Crown Courts, to over 400 staff who come into contact with victims at court. We have also been running a one-year pilot through which victims of rape and other sexual offences can request transcripts of the Crown Court sentencing remarks in their case, for free, which will end in May 2025.

We will go further, and as part of our landmark mission to halve violence against women and girls within a decade, we are also introducing specialist rape and sexual offence teams in every police force and rolling out free, independent legal advocates for victims of adult rape, to advise them at any point from the moment they report.

■ Reoffenders

Josh Babarinde:

[\[21738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of violent offenders reoffend within (a) one year, (b) three years, (c) five years and (d) ten years of conviction.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Offences are recorded on the Police National Computer using the Home Office Classification, which does not allow us to identify whether an offence is 'violent' or 'non-violent'. As a result, it is subsequently not possible to identify violent offenders through digital records. Providing this information would therefore require a manual search of court records and would therefore be of disproportionate cost.

■ Reoffenders: Prisons

Josh Babarinde:

[\[21740\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of offenders perpetrated further crimes in prison in (a) 2022, (b) 2023, and (c) 2024.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Data relating to crimes committed in prison are held in HMPPS's police referral and adjudications records. To be able to identify all such cases, it would be necessary to review all potentially relevant records, and this could not be done without incurring disproportionate cost.

■ Shoplifting: Reoffenders

Sir John Hayes:

[\[21971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of people convicted for shoplifting offences reoffended within (a) 12 months and (b) two years in each of the last five years.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The proven reoffending rate for the adult cohort convicted of shoplifting offences between 2017/18 and 2021/22 (the latest year for which reoffending data is available)

can be found in the table below, along with the number of offenders and reoffenders included in this cohort. The proven reoffending rate is calculated using a 12-month follow up period.

TABLE 1: RATE OF REOFFENDING FOR ADULTS CONVICTED OF SHOPLIFTING OFFENCES IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 12-MONTH FOLLOW UP PERIOD, ACROSS THE PAST FIVE YEARS

	Apr 17 – Mar 18	Apr 18 - Mar 19	Apr 19 -Mar 20	Apr 20 -Mar 21	Apr 21 - Mar 22
Proportion of offenders who reoffend (%)	59.0	58.2	54.8	54.0	60.3
Number of offenders in cohort	41,222	35,159	28,790	16,036	15,358
Number of reoffenders	24,305	20,463	15,774	8,661	9,265

The proven reoffending methodology is complex and based on a one-year reoffending rate. Providing this information for a new 2-year reoffending measure would be of disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Chemicals: Northern Ireland

Adam Jogee: [\[21762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of chemical regulation in Northern Ireland.

Hilary Benn:

The Department for Work and Pensions is the policy lead with regard to chemical regulation across the UK, as sponsor of the Health and Safety Executive.

In that role, the Department for Work and Pensions continuously assesses the adequacy of chemical regulation across the whole of the UK.

Adam Jogee: [\[21763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what discussions he has had with the Chemical Industries Association about the (a) access to and (b) regulation of safe and approved chemicals in Northern Ireland.

Hilary Benn:

The Department for Work and Pensions is the policy lead with regard to chemical regulation across the UK, as sponsor of the Health and Safety Executive.

In that role, the Department for Work and Pensions continuously assesses the adequacy of chemical regulation across the whole of the UK.

■ **Chemicals: Regulation**

Jim Allister:

[\[22541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether the conditions for notification to the EU that the Stormont Brake has been triggered have been met on Regulation (EU) 2024/2865 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2024 amending Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures.

Hilary Benn:

The Government is under statutory obligations to assess any Stormont Brake notification against the tests set out by law. I will make a decision in due course.

■ **Higher Education: Londonderry**

Tonia Antoniazzi:

[\[22662\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what recent steps he has taken to support the expansion of university provision in Derry/Londonderry under the terms of the New Decade, New Approach agreement.

Hilary Benn:

As part of our mission-led approach, this Government is committed to working with the Northern Ireland Executive to address regional economic imbalances, including through good university provision in the North West.

The Derry & Strabane City and Region Deal was signed on 18 September 2024. This deal will help support university expansion in Derry/Londonderry through a £39 million investment into Ulster University's Cognitive Analytics & Digital Robotics Innovation Centre. This is in addition to investment towards Phase 2 of the School of Medicine project, including a Medical Education Facility on the Altnagelvin Hospital site.

This Government will continue to work with the Executive to deliver high-quality university education in Derry/Londonderry, and deliver the City Deal programme to provide capital investment that supports expanded provision at Ulster University's Magee Campus as set out in NDNA.

■ **Intertrade UK: Northern Ireland**

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[22582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that the work of Intertrade UK is not affected by trade barriers faced by some GB-based businesses supplying to Northern Ireland-based consumers.

Hilary Benn:

A key focus for Intertrade UK will be to promote the full extent of the UK's market to businesses and traders and to help to counter any misconceptions businesses and traders in Great Britain may have about providing goods and services in Northern Ireland.

I expect to be in a position to announce the full membership of Intertrade UK and the date of the first meeting shortly.

■ Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007**Peter Fortune:**[\[21834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation on Non-Jury Trials Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007, published on 9 December 2024.

Hilary Benn:

The consultation on the non-jury trial provisions under the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 was drafted to ensure that as many people as possible are given the opportunity to share their views on the non-jury trial provisions. As well as publishing on GOV.UK, links to the consultation were sent directly to a selection of relevant stakeholders, including those from the legal profession, law enforcement and academia in order to encourage responses. A link to the consultation was also shared on the Northern Ireland Office's X account.

The consultation provides two methods of response; a direct email address and a postal address.

The Northern Ireland Office will provide the consultation document in alternative accessible formats on request. The GOV.UK page provides an email address that members of the public can use to request an alternative format and encourages respondents to specify what format they require and, if relevant, what assistive technology they use.

■ Spirit Aerosystems: Northern Ireland**Jon Trickett:**[\[21563\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps he is taking to support Spirit AeroSystems (a) production and (b) jobs.

Hilary Benn:

The Government is working with the Northern Ireland Executive to help ensure the best outcome for Spirit Aerosystems and all its skilled and hardworking staff.

The Northern Ireland Office and the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) are fully aware of the commercial discussions taking place about the potential acquisition of the Spirit business. DBT continues to be in contact with Spirit, Airbus, Boeing and other potential buyers, and we want to see an outcome that includes a commitment to

develop Spirit and its supply chain as part of any acquisition and provides the best possible opportunity for growth in Northern Ireland.

DBT continues to provide support for Spirit's Research and Development activity through the Aerospace Technology Institute programme.

Jon Trickett:

[\[21564\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the break up of Spirit on the Northern Ireland economy.

Hilary Benn:

The Government is working with the Northern Ireland Executive to help ensure the best outcome for Spirit Aerospace and all its skilled and hardworking staff.

The Northern Ireland Office and the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) are fully aware of the commercial discussions taking place about the potential acquisition of the Spirit business. DBT continues to be in contact with Spirit, Airbus, Boeing and other potential buyers and we want to see an outcome that includes a commitment to develop and grow the aerospace industry in Northern Ireland both directly and through the supply chain.

Jon Trickett:

[\[21565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of Airbus not completing the takeover of the Spirit AeroSystems site in Belfast on jobs (a) at Airbus and (b) throughout the supply chain in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) Britain.

Hilary Benn:

My Department and the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) is fully aware of the commercial discussions taking place about the potential acquisition of Spirit AeroSystems business. The Government is working with the Northern Ireland Executive to help ensure the best outcome for Spirit and all its skilled and hard working staff.

DBT continues to be in contact with Spirit, Airbus, Boeing and other potential buyers. We want to see an outcome for Spirit that includes a commitment to develop Spirit and its supply chain as part of any acquisition and provides the best possible opportunity for growth and jobs in Northern Ireland.

The UK Government is aware Spirit employs nearly five thousand staff at its sites in Northern Ireland and Scotland supplying world-class aerospace products across the globe. It is for this reason, and its contribution to the UK's economy, that UKG has a keen interest in seeing that any acquisition provides the best opportunity for growth and investment.

Jim Allister:

[\[22540\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what discussions he has had with relevant stakeholders on ensuring the continuity of full employment at the Spirit AeroSystems site in Northern Ireland.

Hilary Benn:

The Government is working with the Northern Ireland Executive to help ensure the best outcome for Spirit Aerospace and all its skilled and hardworking staff.

The Northern Ireland Office and the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) are fully aware of the commercial discussions taking place about the potential acquisition of the Spirit business. DBT continues to be in contact with Spirit, Airbus, Boeing and other potential buyers, and we want to see an outcome that includes a commitment to develop Spirit and its supply chain as part of any acquisition and provides the best possible opportunity for growth in Northern Ireland.

DBT continues to provide over £13 million of support for Spirit' Research and Development activity through the Aerospace Technology Institute programme.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ Artificial Intelligence and Automation: Employment****Colum Eastwood:**[\[21536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential net impact of (a) Artificial Intelligence and (b) automation on employment numbers.

Feryal Clark:

AI has the potential to increase productivity and create high value jobs in the UK economy. This government is committed to making sure AI opportunities are available across the UK and today we have launched the AI Opportunities Action Plan to reach this goal.

The government is committed to preparing workers with the skills needed for future jobs by working with industry to responsibly adopt AI across all sectors. Skills England, DSIT and the Industrial Strategy Council will unite businesses, training partners, unions, and government to assess and address the country's AI and digital skills needs.

■ Artificial Intelligence: Intellectual Property**Charlotte Cane:**[\[21808\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what recent assessment he has made of the impact of artificial intelligence on intellectual property rights.

Feryal Clark:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is central to the Government's plan to kickstart an era of economic growth. The AI Opportunities Action Plan sets out how we will lay the foundations for AI growth, driving adoption and building UK capability.

The Intellectual Property Office identified copyright, digital replicas, and computer-generated works as potential high-impact areas. The Government is consulting to gather evidence of the impact of AI to inform future policy development.

We are looking at the broader IP system to ensure it supports the AI sector, while continuing to protect the UK's strengths in traditional innovation and creativity.

■ **Broadband: Surrey Heath**

Dr Al Pinkerton:

[\[21494\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to ensure that vulnerable communities have access to broadband services in Surrey Heath constituency.

Chris Bryant:

The government recognises that access to the internet is increasingly essential for full participation in society and has taken steps to ensure households across the UK are able to access fast, reliable mobile and broadband services.

More than 25 providers now offer low-cost mobile and broadband packages for households in receipt of Universal Credit and some other means tested benefits (up from 10 providers in September 2022), with the average price of a broadband social tariff being £17.41 per month. Social tariffs could provide consumers with savings of over £220 per year on their fixed broadband bills.

■ **Computers and Electronic Equipment: Vacancies**

Colum Eastwood:

[\[21538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has made an assessment of the reasons for a decrease in the number of jobs filled in (a) electronic manufacturing and (b) the computer digital sector in 2022-2023.

Feryal Clark:

The digital sector is of vital importance to the UK economy, and overall employment in the sector has increased between [2022-2023](#). DSIT continues to analyse trends in employment in the sector. The government is committed to growing the pipeline of skilled talent, both to support UK companies and provide opportunities for all to access good jobs in the sector.

■ **Digital Technology: Internet**

David Chadwick:

[\[21886\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the Government Digital Service's report entitled Accessibility monitoring of public sector websites and mobile apps from 2022 to 2024, published on 17 December 2024, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) the digital accessibility of websites is reviewed regularly, (b) websites are checked for accessibility for the visually impaired using a keyboard and (c) automated tools are not singularly used to check digital accessibility.

Feryal Clark:

The Government Digital Service (GDS) monitors the accessibility of public sector websites and mobile applications under The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. Between January 2022 and September 2024, GDS monitored 1,203 websites and 21 mobile applications.

Accessibility monitoring of public sector websites and mobile applications is ongoing.

The monitoring process for each website consists of both automated and manual accessibility checks, including keyboard testing.

More information on the monitoring methodology can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-monitoring-how-we-test> .

■ Digital Technology: Older People and Rural Areas**Paul Davies:****[21902]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will take steps to ensure that digital inclusion initiatives are accessible to (a) all, (b) the elderly and (c) people in remote areas.

Chris Bryant:

Yes, by definition, that is the intention behind all digital inclusion, which is a priority for this Government, because we want everyone to have the access, skills, support and confidence to participate in a modern digital society, whatever their circumstances. We also understand that digital exclusion disproportionately impacts certain demographics, including older people.

That is why, as we develop our approach to tackling this issue, we are working closely with key partners in the third sector, industry and local authorities to base interventions on and target them to individual needs. I hope to say more on this in the near future.

■ Digital Technology: Small Businesses**Charlotte Cane:****[21807]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help SMEs adopt digital technology.

Feryal Clark:

The SME Digital Adoption Taskforce led by Phil Smith and reporting to DBT is looking specifically at SMEs adopting technology. They are working towards their interim report. The National Technology Adviser and Government Chief Scientific Adviser are running an official Government review reporting to the Chancellor, DBT SoS and DSIT SoS that identifies barriers that businesses within the Industrial Strategy's 8 growth sectors face when adopting established and novel technologies. This is then related to productivity and growth of the economy. It is building on existing analysis, industry insights and other government reviews and workstreams. Recommendations will feed directly into Industrial Strategy work.

■ Hate Crime: Social Media

Mims Davies:

[\[21653\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for her policies of the 40 safety measures that Ofcom has set out for social media platforms to tackle misogyny.

Feryal Clark:

The Online Safety Act puts new duties on social media companies and search services, making them responsible for their users' safety. These include new duties tackling illegal content and activity which affects women and girls, including intimate image abuse, exploitation and other forms of abuse.

Ofcom will publish draft guidance in February, detailing measures services can take to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) online.

The government has set an unprecedented mission to halve VAWG in a decade by improving the police and criminal justice system response, relentlessly pursuing perpetrators, and providing victim support. The steps Ofcom is taking helps supports this mission by tackling harmful content online.

■ Internet: Regulation

Sarah Smith:

[\[21487\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps the Government is taking to regulate online content.

Feryal Clark:

The government is working with Ofcom to implement the Online Safety Act as quickly and effectively as possible. The Act, once implemented, will require services to tackle illegal content online and protect children from harmful content. On 16 December 2024, Ofcom reached a significant milestone by publishing the first draft illegal harms code which sets out measures that services can take to comply with their new duties.

Ofcom will reach several more milestones over the coming months including publication of its: child access guidance; age assurance guidance for pornography publishers; draft guidance on protecting women and girls online; and the draft child safety code.

■ Mobile Phones: Westmorland and Lonsdale

Tim Farron:

[\[21277\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will make an assessment of the number of properties in Westmorland and Lonsdale constituency without good mobile connectivity.

Tim Farron: [\[21280\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will make it his policy to ensure the adequacy of mobile connectivity in Westmorland and Lonsdale constituency before the switch-off of the public switched telephone network.

Chris Bryant:

Opinions vary as to what constitutes 'good' mobile connectivity and I have raised my concerns about the reporting of connectivity with Ofcom, but according to Ofcom's Connected Nations report (published on 5 December 2024), 4G indoor premises coverage is available from all four mobile operators in 68% of premises in your constituency, with 97% from at least one. This leaves 3% of premises (around 1,500 premises) with no 4G indoor coverage from any operator. Premises includes all buildings not just homes.

Through the Shared Rural Network, we are continuing to deliver 4G mobile connectivity to places where there is either limited or no coverage at all.

Whilst the transition from the analogue landline network to voice over internet protocol is an industry-led process, Ofcom and Government are working together with communications providers to ensure consumers and sectors are protected and prepared for the upgrade process.

■ **Ophthalmology: Research**

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[21671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding into uveitis research there was in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[21672\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding into cataract research there was in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[21673\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding into keratoconus research there was in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[21674\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding into blepharitis research there was in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Dr Ben Spencer:

[\[21675\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding into central retinal vein occlusion research there was in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Dr Ben Spencer:

[\[21676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what the total amount of Government investment into retinal detachment occlusion research was in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that investment.

Feryal Clark:

The Department of Health and Social Care funds medical research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The NIHR Biomedical Research Centre at Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and UCL Institute of Ophthalmology was awarded £20 million funding for a five-year period starting from December 2022.

UKRI's Medical Research Council (MRC) also plays a key role in funding underpinning research which may not be attributable to a specific condition but will benefit medical research more generally. UKRI delivers a substantial portfolio of researcher-led projects. This includes a wide variety of areas including physiological, biological, and mechanistic aspects that are applicable to many eye diseases and disorders of vision.

Details of UKRI and NIHR funding on specific areas is provided in the table below:

	NIHR FUNDING IN FY 2023/24	UKRI FUNDING IN 2023/24
Uveitis	NIHR did not commit any specific funding for uveitis research in financial year 2023-24.	The total commitment across UKRI in 2023-24 for uveitis research was £248,809 for 1 award (1 award from MRC).
Cataract	NIHR allocated £2,584,219 for research concerning cataracts research in financial year 2023-24.	The total commitment across UKRI in 2023-24 for cataract research was £516,566 for 1 award (1 award from Innovate UK).
Keratoconus	NIHR allocated £49,458 for research concerning keratoconus research in financial year 2023-24.	The total commitment across UKRI in 2023-24 for keratoconus research was £516,566 for 1 award (1 award from Innovate UK).
Blepharitis	NIHR did not commit any specific funding for blepharitis research in financial year	UKRI did not commit any specific funding for blepharitis research in 2023-24.

	NIHR FUNDING IN FY 2023/24	UKRI FUNDING IN 2023/24
	2023-24.	
Central Retinal Vein Occlusion	NIHR allocated £70,000 for research concerning central retinal vein occlusion in the financial year 2023-24.	UKRI did not commit any specific funding for central retinal vein occlusion research in 2023-24.
Retinal Detachment Occlusion Research	NIHR did not commit any specific funding for retinal detachment occlusion research in financial year of 2023-24.	The total commitment across UKRI in 2023-24 for retinal detachment occlusion research was £1,223,830 for 1 award (1 award from MRC).

■ Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Act 2022

Clive Jones:

[\[21824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, when he plans to implement sections (a) 61 to 65, (b) 67 and (c) 70 to 74 of the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Act 2022.

Clive Jones:

[\[21825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, for what reason the remaining provisions of the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Act 2022 have not been implemented; and what steps he is taking to implement these provisions.

Clive Jones:

[\[21826\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will make an assessment of the impact of the delay in implementing the final provisions of the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Act 2022 on (a) mobile connectivity, (b) data poverty and (c) regional digital inclusion.

Chris Bryant:

The Government is committed to implementing all remaining provisions of the Product Security and Telecommunications Act 2022 as soon as possible. These measures will help deliver the benefits of advanced digital connectivity.

Most provisions have already been implemented. Those remaining are complex and technical. The Department will bring forward a consultation on the implementation of sections 61 to 64, including transitional provisions, as soon as possible.

■ Project Gigabit: Berkshire

Mr Lee Dillon: [\[21441\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what plans his Department has to expand the roll out of Project Gigabit in (a) Kintbury, (b) Boxford, (c) Lambourn, (d) Great Shefford and (e) Newbury constituency.

Chris Bryant:

According to the independent website Thinkbroadband.com, 99% of premises in the Newbury constituency can already access superfast broadband speeds (≥ 30 Mbps), and almost 87% can access a gigabit-capable broadband connection.

To extend gigabit-capable coverage further, approximately 1,600 premises in the constituency are currently included in a Project Gigabit contract being delivered by Openreach. This includes eligible premises in Kintbury, Boxford, Lambourn and Great Shefford.

Additionally, a significant number of premises in the constituency are expected to be connected through the commercial market.

■ Public Sector: Databases

James Naish: [\[21495\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to review the use in the public sector of web tags to record data.

Feryal Clark:

Public sector organisations are responsible for their own websites and DSIT has no plans to review or issue guidance on the use of web tags. All public sector organisations must comply with data protection laws.

■ Research: Migrant Workers

Charlotte Cane: [\[21805\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the potential impact of visa restrictions on the research sector.

Feryal Clark:

The UK's immigration offer enables talented scientists, researchers and innovators to come to the UK through a number of visa routes such as the Global Talent visa, the High Potential Individual visa and the Skilled Worker visa, and we continually keep our policies under review.

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology has regular discussions with the Home Office, and with other Government Departments, to ensure that the UK's world-class science, research, technology and innovation sectors are supported.

UKRI allows researchers coming to the UK who are working at least 50% of their time on a UKRI grant to claim the cost of their visa from the grant. Many other research

funders operate a similar policy. Researchers in receipt of Horizon Europe grants are also allowed to claim the cost of their visa from their grant.

■ **Social Media: Abuse and Harassment**

Sarah Smith: [\[21485\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to help tackle online harassment and abuse on social media.

Sarah Smith: [\[21486\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking with social media companies to protect online users from anonymous accounts publishing abusive and offensive material.

Feryal Clark:

The Online Safety Act will require social media platforms to take more responsibility for the safety of their users. Platforms will need to remove all illegal abusive content and protect children from harmful content, including hateful and abusive content.

Where anonymous abuse does not meet the criminal threshold, adult users of the largest services (Category 1) will have the choice to filter out content from non-verified users. Those services must also offer user empowerment tools to adult users, which when applied will reduce the likelihood that they are exposed to certain legal content, including abusive content.

■ **Telecommunications: Rural Areas**

Ben Maguire: [\[21936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of attaching emergency batteries for mobile phones to telephone masts in rural areas.

Chris Bryant:

Communications providers have a statutory responsibility to take measures to identify, prepare for and reduce anything that compromises the availability, performance or functionality of their networks and services. Some mobile phone masts have battery back-up so that they can continue operating despite a power outage, although the amount of back up currently varies across the access network.

Ofcom have recently undertaken a public Call for Input on this issue, and in September 2024 they announced they will undertake further analysis to consider whether additional measures are needed. Government will continue working closely with Ofcom, mobile operators and the power sector to ensure there is appropriate and proportionate resilience across the network.

■ Voice Over Internet Protocol: Rural Areas**Ben Maguire:** [\[21935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that rural communities remain connected following the digital switchover.

Chris Bryant:

The digital switchover is an industry led programme. Customers in rural communities will not have their landlines migrated to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) without an available stable internet connection (VoIP only requires a minimum speed of 0.5mbps).

The Government has taken several initiatives to boost rural connectivity and mobile coverage throughout the UK, including Project Gigabit, the Shared Rural Network deal with the industry, and publishing the Wireless Infrastructure Strategy 2023.

■ Voice over Internet Protocol: Westmorland and Lonsdale**Tim Farron:** [\[21278\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the public switched telephone network switch-off on rural communities in Westmorland and Lonsdale constituency.

Tim Farron: [\[21279\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will take steps to ensure that there is no enforced switch off of the public switched telephone network before he has made an assessment of the impact of this change on rural communities in Westmorland and Lonsdale constituency.

Chris Bryant:

The Government is determined to ensure that any and all risks incurred during the industry-led migration from the analogue landline network to voice over internet protocol are mitigated. On 18 November 2024, the Department published guidance for communication providers on how to identify and support customers when their landline migrates. This includes customers who are landline dependent, many of which live in rural communities.

The Department also published a checklist of activities that communication providers should take before migrating customers to voice over internet protocol without their active consent. We expect providers to meet the safeguards set out in this checklist to keep customers – including those in rural communities - safe throughout the migration.

Ofcom reports that 2024 saw 45% more service incidents on the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) compared to 2023, resulting in a 55% increase in the number of service hours lost. Retaining the PSTN would increase the risks of outages which would have a negative impact on consumers.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION**■ Candidates: Expenditure**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[22920\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, pursuant to the Answer of 8 January 2025 to Question 22037 on Candidates: expenditure, whether the 20 pence per page prescribed fee can be charged for electronic information provided by email.

Sir Jeremy Wright:

The charge to be supplied of copies of the election expenses is 20p per copy page, as set out in regulation 10 (3) of the Representation of the People Regulations 2001. The legislation does not specify whether this is in paper or electronic form.

As the legislation does not specify format, and as the fee is intended to cover the administrative costs of providing these documents, it may be applied to electronic documentation provided by email.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[22921\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, pursuant to the Answer of 8 January 2025 to Question 22035 on Candidates: Expenditure, what steps the Electoral Commission is taking to increase the transparency of (a) candidate spending and (b) donation returns in relation to the General Election 2024.

Sir Jeremy Wright:

The Electoral Commission does not have regulatory or enforcement powers with regard to candidate spending and donations. It does, however, publish candidate returns together in one place in order to provide voters with greater transparency and a fuller picture of the money spent and received by the candidates at the election. It will publish headline figures from candidate spending returns at the 2024 general election in due course.

■ Electoral Register

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[22922\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what estimate the Electoral Commission has made of the number of people on the electoral roll in (a) Northern Ireland and (b) Great Britain for each general election since 2010.

Sir Jeremy Wright:

The Electoral Commission publishes data and research on elections taking place in the UK, including electorate figures.

Figures on the number registered voters at each general election since 2010 are in the table below.

	NORTHERN IRELAND	GREAT BRITAIN
2010	1,169,184	44,428,277
2015	1,236,765	45,117,432
2017	1,242,698	45,592,735
2019	1,293,971	46,273,781
2024	1,363,961	46,859,848

■ Labour Together: Expenditure

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[22923\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what the Electoral Commission's timetable is for publishing details of spending by Labour Together for the 2024 general election.

Sir Jeremy Wright:

The Commission will publish returns received from registered non-party campaigners in two stages, with returns under £250,000 published shortly and those over £250,000 published in the coming months.

Non-party campaigners are required to register with the Electoral Commission if they intend to spend more than £10,000 on regulated campaigning ahead of a general election. However, they are only required to report their spending and donations to the Commission if they spend more than £20,000 in England, or £10,000 in any other part of the UK.

Labour Together registered with the Commission in March 2024. Following the election, they confirmed they did not exceed the reporting threshold. As a result, they are not required to submit a return.

TRANSPORT

■ Airports: Carbon Emissions

Victoria Collins:

[\[21516\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 10 October 2024 to Question 900487 on Airports: Carbon Emissions, what strict environmental standards she will use to assess airport expansions.

Mike Kane:

The assessment of applications for airport expansion will take account of all relevant law, policy and other material considerations. This includes environmental assessments undertaken as part of the planning application process.

The UK's obligations on greenhouse gas emissions are set under the 2008 Climate Change Act. The UK also has legally binding targets to reduce emissions and concentrations of harmful pollutants, including a targeted 35% reduction in population exposure to fine particulate matter in England (PM_{2.5}) by 2040 (compared to 2018 levels).

■ Automatic Number Plate Recognition: Pedestrian Areas

Jayne Kirkham: [\[22834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of enabling local authorities to apply to use ANPR to enforce designated pedestrian zones.

Lilian Greenwood:

Moving traffic contraventions, including entry into a designated pedestrian zone, may be civilly enforced by designated local authorities using CCTV prescribed by regulations made under the Traffic Management Act 2004.

By using these cameras local authorities are able to capture not just the number plate and location, but the wider context, to establish whether a contravention has occurred.

In the Department's view, ANPR technology could not in isolation provide the functionality needed for fair and effective civil enforcement.

■ Avanti West Coast

Adam Jogee: [\[21764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with the management of Avanti West Coast since her appointment.

Simon Lightwood:

Department for Transport officials routinely meet with AWC and Network Rail as part of a relentless focus on improving rail performance, bringing together track and train and holding both sides accountable. The current Secretary of State has not yet met with the Managing Director of Avanti West Coast (AWC) since her appointment.

Further meetings with the Rail Minister or the Secretary of State will be held in due course.

■ Avanti West Coast: Newcastle-under-Lyme

Adam Jogee: [\[21765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the (a) performance and (b) adequacy of the services provided by Avanti West Coast to residents in Newcastle-under-Lyme since her appointment.

Simon Lightwood:

The Secretary of State is clear that the performance of Avanti West Coast has not been good enough. The Department routinely engages with all rail operators on

service frequency and quality of service across the network, to hold Train Operator Companies (TOCs) to account on the services they provide to passengers, including for residents of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

■ **Boats: Environment Protection**

Ben Maguire: [\[21939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent steps her Department has taken to (a) reduce the number of abandoned leisure boats and (b) mitigate environmental damage from those boats.

Mike Kane:

The department has taken no recent steps to address either of the two issues raised in the question. The department has issued advice in the port marine safety code around the issue of abandoned vessels, but that advice is aimed at vessels which pose a threat to safety. The department would expect that each port would use its powers in a reasonable manner to the limit of its authority to address any issue caused by abandoned leisure vessels, and would do so in would environmentally responsible way.

■ **Boats: Waste Disposal**

Ben Maguire: [\[21941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional (a) funding and (b) support for (i) local authorities and (ii) harbourmasters to (A) safely dispose of and (B) reclaim abandoned vessels.

Mike Kane:

Many ports already have powers to remove, dispose of, and recoup costs pertaining to abandoned vessels. Environmental impact is a factor that may be considered as a part of a decision to intervene. If ports do not have powers to remove vessels, they can seek additional powers if needed by means of a Harbour Revision Order. As these legal avenues already exist, the Department has taken no recent action, nor plans to undertake an assessment but we continue to welcome input from stakeholders on these issues.

■ **Bus Service Operators Grant: Reform**

Alex Mayer: [\[21419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions her Department has had with the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on reforms to the Bus Service Operators Grant.

Simon Lightwood:

We are committed to simplifying and consolidating bus funding from the Government, and we are considering next steps for reform of the Bus Service Operators Grant as part of this work. This will include engagement with other government departments.

■ Bus Services: Concessions

Mr Will Forster:

[\[21508\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the English national concessionary scheme to peak travel times.

Simon Lightwood:

The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) provides free off-peak bus travel to those with eligible disabilities and those of state pension age, currently sixty-six. Local authorities in England have the power to go beyond their statutory obligations under the ENCTS and offer additional discretionary concessions, such as extending the times at which concessionary passes can be used.

Pippa Heylings:

[\[22130\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has had discussions with Whizz Kidz on their report entitled Beyond fare Equality through Concessionary Bus Travel; and if she will mandate free travel for disabled bus pass holders.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department regularly meets with stakeholders to discuss a range of issues but have had no such discussions with Whizz Kidz.

The terms of the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme already mandate free off-peak bus travel for disabled bus pass holders.

■ Bus Services: Rural Areas

Dr Allison Gardner:

[\[22534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to expand bus service provision in rural (a) villages and (b) other areas.

Simon Lightwood:

Good local bus services are an essential part of prosperous and sustainable communities. The government introduced the Bus Services (No.2) Bill on 17 December as part of its ambitious plan for bus reform. The Bill puts the power over local bus services back in the hands of local leaders and is intended to ensure bus services reflect the needs of the communities that rely on them right across England, including in rural areas. The government has committed to increasing accountability by including a measure on socially necessary services so that local authorities and bus operators have to have regard for alternatives to changing or cancelling services.

In addition, the government has confirmed £955 million for the 2025 to 2026 financial year to support and improve bus services in England outside London. This includes £243 million for bus operators and £712 million allocated to local authorities across the country. Local authorities can use this funding to introduce new bus routes, make services more frequent and protect crucial bus routes for local communities.

■ Buses: Electric Vehicles

Gregory Stafford:

[\[22225\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to (a) support British companies bidding for electric bus contracts and (b) ensure that (i) BYD, (ii) Yutong and (iii) other foreign companies do not have a disproportionate share of Government electric bus (A) contracts and (B) grants.

Simon Lightwood:

The transition to zero emission buses represents a great opportunity for UK bus manufacturers, both to supply the zero emission buses needed here in the UK and to win export orders abroad as other countries upgrade their bus fleets.

On 8 October, the Department announced plans to create a new UK Bus Manufacturing Expert Panel. This panel will bring together industry experts and local leaders to explore ways to ensure the UK remains a leader in bus manufacturing. More details on this will be set out in due course.

■ Buses: Fares

Ian Roome:

[\[22165\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has issued guidance to (a) local authorities and (b) bus companies on the pricing of children's fares.

Simon Lightwood:

At present, bus services in England outside London are predominantly run on a commercial basis by private operators, and the level at which bus operators set their fares is a commercial decision.

The government is committed to delivering better bus services for passengers, including making them more reliable and affordable, because we know how important this is for communities. The Department for Transport has issued to guidance to local transport authorities and bus operators to support the development of local Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs). This makes clear that fares policy should be an integral part of BSIPs, and that they should set out ambitions and proposals for extending youth fares for younger people.

■ Buses: Registration

Alex Mayer:

[\[22174\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many coaches were registered by the Traffic Commissioners for Great Britain in (a) 2024 to date and (b) each of the last five years.

Simon Lightwood:

The Office of the Traffic Commissioner (OTC) collects annual data on the number of active and newly issued public service vehicle (PSV) operator licences and the vehicles authorised to operate under these licences. Coach operators are required to

hold a valid PSV licence to operate in the UK. The PSV licence data covers both bus and coach operators and does not distinguish between the two.

The number of PSV operator licences and vehicles authorised to operate under these licences from 2024 to date:

REPORTING YEAR (TO DATE)	NUMBER OF VALID PSV OPERATOR LICENCES	NUMBER OF VEHICLES AUTHORISED
April 2024 - January 2025	5465	88992

REPORTING YEAR (TO DATE)	NUMBER OF NEW PSV OPERATOR LICENCES GRANTED	NUMBER OF VEHICLES AUTHORISED AS A RESULT OF A NEW APPLICATION
April 2024 - January 2025	266	1386

The figures for the number of PSV operator licences and the vehicles authorised to operate under these licences for the last five years:

REPORTING YEAR (APRIL TO MARCH)	NUMBER OF VALID PSV OPERATOR LICENCES	NUMBER OF VEHICLES AUTHORISED
2019-20	6852	90865
2020-21	6602	89980
2021-22	6158	88582
2022-23	5809	86371
2023-24	5451	88664
2024-January 2025	5465	88992

REPORTING YEAR (APRIL – MARCH)	NUMBER OF NEW PSV OPERATOR LICENCES GRANTED	NUMBER OF VEHICLES AUTHORISED AS A RESULT OF A NEW APPLICATION
2019-20	474	2810
2020-21	317	1323
2021-22	264	2292

REPORTING YEAR (APRIL – MARCH)	NUMBER OF NEW PSV OPERATOR LICENCES GRANTED	NUMBER OF VEHICLES AUTHORISED AS A RESULT OF A NEW APPLICATION
2022-23	310	1463
2023-24	368	1451
2024-January 2025	266	1386

■ Cars: Accidents

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[22585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking with relevant authorities to help reduce the number of fatal car crashes in outer London boroughs.

Lilian Greenwood:

Since the general election, the Department has begun work on a new Road Safety Strategy, the first in over a decade. The Department will share more details in due course.

Local government is the main delivery agent of road safety. The responsibility to implement, fund, deliver, promote and enforce local road safety initiatives remains with local authorities under the 1988 Road Traffic Act.

■ Cycling and Walking: Finance

Anna Sabine:

[\[22220\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to paragraph 4.69 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC 295, how she plans to use the additional funding for cycling and walking infrastructure in the 2025-26 financial year.

Simon Lightwood:

At the Budget we announced an additional £100 million investment in cycling and walking infrastructure to support local authorities. Final allocations for active travel investment in 2025/26 will be decided as part of the Department for Transport business planning process, which is expected to conclude shortly.

■ Dangerous Driving: Romford

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[22586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking with relevant authorities to help tackle dangerous driving in Romford constituency.

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[22587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking with relevant authorities to help tackle drink driving in Romford constituency.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government takes road safety seriously, and we are committed to reducing the numbers of those killed and injured on our roads. The Department has begun work on a new Road Safety Strategy, the first in over a decade. The Department will share more details in due course.

The Government's THINK! road safety campaign aims to reduce deaths and serious injuries on our roads. THINK! launched a major new drink driving campaign in November, which highlights the risks of drinking even a little before driving.

The enforcement of road traffic law and how available resources are deployed within Romford, and London boroughs, is the responsibility of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and the Mayor of London, taking into account the specific local problems and demands with which they are faced.

■ Electric Bicycles and Electric Scooters: Regulation**Mr Clive Betts:**[\[22571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to introduce new regulations to clarify the legal use of (a) ebikes and (b) escooters.

Simon Lightwood:

The law on the use of e-cycles and e-scooters is clear. E-cycles can legally be used in the same way as a regular pedal cycle providing the user is aged 14 or over, and providing the cycle meets in full the requirements set out in the Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycle Regulations 1983 (as amended). There is ample guidance on gov.uk on this matter. In short, the requirements state that the cycle must be fitted with pedals that can propel it; must have a maximum continuous rated power output of no greater than 250 Watts; and that the motor must stop providing assistance at 15.5 miles per hour. Any electric cycle that does not meet the EAPC regulations is classed as a motorcycle or moped and needs to be approved, registered, insured, and taxed as a motor vehicle; and riders will also need an appropriate driving licence to ride one and must wear an approved motorcycle safety helmet.

It is currently illegal to use private e-scooters on public roads, cycle lanes and pavements, and rental e-scooters can only be used as part of the Government's rental e-scooter trials. The Government recognises the need to address public concern about the regulation of e-scooters and is considering next steps. It will consult on any new proposed regulations before they come into force.

Enforcement of the rules for e-cycles and e-scooters is a matter for the police.

■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points**Sir John Hayes:**[\[22248\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans she has to provide funding for the expansion of electric vehicle chargepoints in (a) South Holland and The Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government's £381 million Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund supports local authorities to transform the availability of EV charging for drivers without off-street parking across England.

Lincolnshire County Council, which South Holland and The Deepings sit within, has been allocated £6,380,592 capital and resource funding through the LEVI Fund to expand local public chargepoints.

■ Great Western Railway**Dan Norris:**[\[21562\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many Great Western Railway trains were cancelled due to lack of drivers in December 2024.

Simon Lightwood:

Great Western Railway cancelled just under two per cent of total services in December due to driver related issues, particularly on Sundays. We acknowledge that performance is not where it needs to be on Great Western Railway and the Department is working closely with the Operator to improve performance and ensure greater resilience going forward.

■ Large Goods Vehicles: Concrete**Michelle Welsh:**[\[22818\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 19765 on Large Goods Vehicles: Concrete, when her Department plans to publish the findings from the call to evidence on weight limits for Volumetric Concrete Mixers.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department will publish its findings shortly.

■ M1: Speed Limits**Mr Clive Betts:**[\[22572\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many miles of the M1 motorway between Junction 34 and Junction 1 had speed restrictions as a result of roadworks as of 1 January in each year between 2015 and 2025.

Lilian Greenwood:

Unfortunately, the information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost as the department does not hold this information.

■ Motor Insurance**Steve Darling:**[\[22395\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the terms of reference are for the Motor Insurance Taskforce.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Motor Insurance Taskforce has a strategic remit to set the direction for UK Government policy, identifying short and long-term actions for departments that may contribute to stabilising or reducing premiums, while maintaining appropriate levels of cover. It will evaluate the impact of increased insurance costs on consumers and the insurance industry, including how this impacts different demographics, geographies, and communities.

■ **Motorcycles: Licensing**

Alex Ballinger: [\[22486\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the total number of passes for the AM moped licence was in 2024; and what assessment she has made of the potential merits of conducting a review of user licensing for powered light vehicles.

Alex Ballinger: [\[22487\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to consult on introducing licence upgrade courses for powered light vehicles.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government is considering plans to review existing requirements for motorcycle training, testing and licensing, taking account of long-standing Department for Transport and Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency plans and recent sector proposals.

Those wishing to ride a moped will first need to pass a theory test. After which they will need to pass an off-road riding test (known as the 'module 1 test') and an on-road riding test (known as the 'module 2 test').

The table below show the number of Module 1 and Module 2 AM category practical riding tests conducted by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and the number of tests passed between 1 January and 31 December 2024.

TEST TYPE	TESTS CONDUCTED	TESTS PASSED
AM Module 1	18	13
AM Module 2	17	8

Alex Ballinger: [\[22488\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions she has had with the Motorcycle Industry Association on user licensing for powered light vehicles.

Alex Ballinger:

[\[22489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of the Motorcycle Industry Association's publication entitled A Licence to Net Zero, published in October 2023.

Lilian Greenwood:

My Department will be meeting the Motorcycle Industry Association at the Motorcycle Strategic Focus Group later this month to discuss the A Licence to Net Zero plan, alongside other ideas put forward by the motorcycle industry.

■ **Motorways: Repairs and Maintenance**

Mr Clive Betts:

[\[22573\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the impact of time delays on road users is taken into account when determining the length of motorway (a) maintenance and (b) improvement contracts.

Mr Clive Betts:

[\[22574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the average length of motorway (a) maintenance and (b) improvement contracts in terms of (i) duration and (ii) distance covered has changed in the last 10 years.

Lilian Greenwood:

For maintenance activities, National Highways operates long-term Maintenance & Response (M&R) contracts, typically spanning 8–15 years. These contracts handle tens of thousands of interventions across the Strategic Road Network annually. Currently, there are 10 M&R contracts, each covering approximately the same road network length as 10 years ago. However, on average, the contract durations have slightly increased compared to their previous iterations. To minimise the impact on customers, National Highways ensures that individual maintenance activities are carefully planned, with most works conducted overnight and designed to have minimal disruption.

■ **MV Ruby: Ammonium Nitrate**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[21544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the MV Ruby's cargo of ammonia nitrate was tested for contamination.

Mike Kane:

The port provided the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) with the information required to verify the potential contamination and therefore no certification was required.

Rupert Lowe: [\[21546\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will clarify the decision making process behind the decision to transfer MV Ruby's cargo of ammonia nitrate into the North Sea; and who was responsible for that decision.

Mike Kane:

The East of England Environment Group comprising a range of scientific experts and regulators, considered the options, including socio-economic impacts, and a recommended site was agreed for disposal. This site is a live aggregate dredging area, over 20 metres deep with no anticipated impacts on sensitive habitats or ecosystem features.

The ship's master made the ultimate decision to discharge the ammonium nitrate due to *force majeure* and the risks posed to the crew and ship by an incoming weather front.

■ **MV Ruby: Great Yarmouth**

Rupert Lowe: [\[21543\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she had with relevant local authorities on decisions relating to the MV Ruby in Great Yarmouth port.

Mike Kane:

Ministers and senior officials worked with their counterparts from the relevant local authorities throughout the time MV Ruby was docked at Great Yarmouth.

Rupert Lowe: [\[21547\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will publish all documents relating to plans to evacuate Great Yarmouth constituency due to the docking of the MV Ruby.

Mike Kane:

Decisions regarding evacuation of local populations are taken based on the local assessment of risk and impacts by local authorities and local emergency services cooperating as a Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) to ensure an effective local response.

■ **Railways and Roads: Chester South and Eddisbury**

Aphra Brandreth: [\[21467\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans she has for capital investment in (a) rail and (b) road infrastructure in Chester South and Eddisbury constituency to secure economic growth for the cross-border manufacturing cluster.

Simon Lightwood:

Transport is an essential part of our mission to rebuild Britain, and we are absolutely committed to improving rail connectivity across the North and working with local leaders. Our Budget in October 2024 confirmed we are progressing planning and design work to support future delivery of our plans for northern rail connectivity and,

following the cancellation of HS2 Phase 2, we are considering how to address capacity and connectivity issues north of Birmingham.

We are also going beyond the government's promise to fix an additional 1 million potholes per year and providing a £500 million cash increase on 2024-25 local roads maintenance baseline funding, for 2025-26. Chester South and Eddisbury Parliamentary constituency is across two local authority areas, Cheshire West and Chester, and Cheshire East. For 2025-26, Cheshire West and Chester will receive an uplift in highways maintenance funding of £4,084,000 for a total of £15,515,000, and Cheshire East will receive an uplift of £5,546,000 for a total of £21,030,000.

Future funding for capital investment in transport will be determined as part of DfT's spending review, scheduled for spring 2025. This process will involve assessing national priorities and allocating resources accordingly to address critical infrastructure needs.

■ Railways: Rural Areas

Charlotte Cane:

[\[21813\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to increase access to rail links in rural communities.

Simon Lightwood:

Rail has an important role in connecting rural communities as part of the wider transport system. The department requires its train operators to plan services and rail timetables that are designed to meet expected passenger demand. These should be resilient and provide value for money for the taxpayer. These timetables are kept under review and, where appropriate, adjusted to reflect fluctuations in demand.

■ Railways: Standards

Charlotte Cane:

[\[21812\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of passenger rail performance.

Simon Lightwood:

Ministers have been clear that rail services have been failing passengers. Cancellations are at a ten-year high and punctuality is inconsistent across the network. We need to improve services for passengers and deliver better value for money for the taxpayer.

Publicly-owned Great British Railways will end years of fragmentation – bringing together track and train to deliver for passengers with more reliable, better-quality services and simpler ticketing and fares. Shadow Great British Railways (SGBR) will start to provide the opportunity to take joined up, whole system decisions that improve performance for the benefit of passengers and taxpayers .

■ River Tyne: Bridges**Chi Onwurah:** [\[21309\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential (a) economic and (b) cultural impact of the (i) state and (ii) inability to swing of the Newcastle upon Tyne Swing Bridge.

Mike Kane:

Responsibility for the mechanism and structure of the Swing Bridge lies with the Port of Tyne. Any such assessments are matters for the Port and relevant local authorities for the surrounding area.

Whilst the Department engages actively with many UK ports, no recent discussions have been held with the Port of Tyne on this matter. If any specific issue is raised with the Department, then it will discuss with the Port as appropriate.

■ Shipping: Registration**Ben Maguire:** [\[21940\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a detailed national registration system for leisure vessels.

Mike Kane:

The Secretary of State for Transport has not assessed this the potential merits of introducing a detailed national registration system for leisure vessels. Whilst registering on the Small Ships Register is not mandatory, small ship owners are encouraged to register their vessel. The small ships register (part 3) currently has 34,527 vessels registered.

■ South West Main Line: Dawlish**Martin Wrigley:** [\[21418\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the letter from her Department to the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth, published on 10 December 2024, whether she plans to fully fund phase 5 of the South West Rail Resilience Programme at Dawlish.

Simon Lightwood:

The Chancellor has been clear about the nation's finances and has launched a multi-year Spending Review. Decisions and timescales about individual projects, including the fifth phase of the South-West Rail Resilience Programme, will be informed by the review process and confirmed in due course.

■ South Western Railway: Nationalisation**Jerome Mayhew:** [\[21369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many full-time equivalent staff are working on the transfer of South Western Railways into a directly operated railway.

Simon Lightwood:

A new Public Ownership Programme Directorate has been established in the Department to deliver the programme to transition passenger services into public ownership over the next three years. The Directorate currently has 34 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees who work across the entire public ownership programme, not just South Western Railway. Other capabilities from across the Department, as well as external expertise, will be drawn upon as required to support the transfer of all ten operators transferring to public ownership, starting with South Western Railway in May 2025.

■ Taxes: Working Conditions**Abtisam Mohamed:**[\[21448\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has received representations on the working conditions of drivers in the private hire industry.

Abtisam Mohamed:[\[21449\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will have discussions with representatives of private hire companies on the working conditions of drivers.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department for Transport discusses a range of issues with representatives from the taxi and private hire vehicle sector. Employment law and working practice policy, including working conditions, is outside of my Department's remit and is owned by the Department for Business and Trade.

TREASURY**■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax****Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[22139\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether farm equipment was included when assessing the number of farms impacted by changes to inheritance tax.

James Murray:

Yes. Any farm equipment eligible for Business Property Relief was included in the analysis used to assess this impacts of this policy.

Information on APR and BPR reforms can be found in the policy briefing paper published at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms/summary-of-reforms-to-agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief#statistical-annex-distribution-of-claims-at-death-for-agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-in-2021-to-2022>.

Additionally, more information behind the approach adopted is available in the Chancellor's recent letter to the Chair of the Treasury Select Committee at <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/45691/documents/226235/default/>.

■ Business Rates: Tax Allowances

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[22331\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what her policy is on business rate relief in (a) freeports, (b) investment zones and (b) legacy enterprise zones; and how that relief will apply to the new business rate multiplier on hereditaments over £500,000 rateable value.

James Murray:

Freeports, Investment Zones and Enterprise Zones have access to a range of tax reliefs, including 100 per cent business rates relief. The eligibility criteria for business rates relief in Freeports and Enterprise Zones is available online:

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-business-rate-relief>, as well as guidance for local authorities on granting Investment Zone business rate relief:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/investment-zones-business-rates-relief-scheme-guidance-for-local-authorities/investment-zone-business-rates-relief-local-authority-guidance>.

The Government has announced its intention to introduce permanently lower tax rates for high street retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties, with rateable values below £500,000, from 2026-27. This tax cut must be sustainably funded, and so we intend to apply a higher rate from 2026-27 on the most valuable properties - those with a Rateable Value of £500,000 and above. When calculating business rates liabilities, the multiplier is applied first and then reliefs are applied after. This means that eligible businesses in these areas will receive 100 per cent business rates relief on their liability under the new multipliers.

■ Business: Government Assistance

Dr Scott Arthur:

[\[21855\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to support (a) small and (b) large family owned businesses.

James Murray:

At Autumn Budget, we published our Corporate Tax Roadmap, in which we are capping corporation tax at 25% as well as maintaining Small Profit Rate + marginal relief at their current rate + threshold, and maintaining the Annual Investment Allowance at £1m. As a result of commitments in the Corporate Tax Roadmap, 9 in 10 actively trading companies will have a Corporation Tax rate lower than 25%.

The Government protected the smallest businesses from the impact of the increase to Employer National Insurance by more than doubling the Employment Allowance to £10,500. The Government is also making sure family businesses will receive a very significant level of relief once changes to business property relief have been made, with the first £1 million of business assets continuing to receive 100% relief and then 50% thereafter.

Despite the difficult fiscal inheritance, we have also been able to protect key business support programmes that can be accessed by all small and large family businesses,

like the England-wide network of Growth Hubs. We are also allocating £250 million in 2025/26 for small business loans programmes, including Start Up Loans and the Growth Guarantee Scheme.

■ Cash Dispensing: Liverpool Walton

Dan Carden:

[22972]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of (a) access to (i) deposit and (ii) withdraw cash and (b) the availability of trained people to help with cash access services in Liverpool Walton constituency.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government recognises that cash continues to be used by millions of people across the UK, including those in vulnerable groups, and is committed to protecting access to cash for individuals and businesses. Furthermore, the Government recognises that businesses need access to cash deposit services in order to continue accepting cash.

The Financial Conduct Authority is responsible for protecting access to cash. In September 2024, it introduced new rules which require the UK's largest banks and building societies to assess the impact of a closure of a relevant cash withdrawal or deposit facility and put in place a new service if necessary.

Furthermore, where a community, or interested party, feels that access to cash in their area is not sufficient, they are able to submit a cash access assessment request to LINK, the operator of the UK's largest ATM network, who undertake these assessments. Further information about submitting a cash access assessment request can be found at the following link: <https://www.link.co.uk/helping-you-access-cash/request-access-to-cash>

LINK publishes data on the number of ATMs across each parliamentary constituency. In the constituency of Liverpool Walton, LINK data identifies 46 free-to-use ATMs out of 75 cash access facilities across the constituency. There are also 40 Post Office branches in the wider Liverpool area where you can deposit and withdraw money.

The Government recognises that some individuals may need assistance, including in-person assistance, to support their access to cash, and is committed to ensuring appropriate services are in place to support this.

This is why the Government is working closely with industry to roll out 350 banking hubs across the UK. The UK banking sector has committed to deliver these hubs by the end of this parliament. These hubs will provide small businesses and individuals who need face-to-face support with critical cash and in-person banking services. Over 100 Banking Hubs are already open across the UK.

■ Charities: Employers' Contributions

Sir John Hayes:

[\[21970\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will introduce an exemption from changes to employer National Insurance contributions for (a) small and (b) local charities.

James Murray:

The Government has protected the smallest businesses and charities from the impact of the increase to Employer National Insurance by increasing the Employment Allowance from £5,000 to £10,500, which means that 865,000 employers will pay no 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. All charities are eligible for the Employment Allowance, even if they are wholly or mainly carrying out functions of a public nature.

The UK tax regime for charities, including an exemption from paying business rates, is among the most generous of anywhere in the world with tax reliefs for charities and their donors, worth just over £6 billion for the tax year to April 2024.

■ Choirs: Tax Allowances

Victoria Collins:

[\[21821\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing a similar Orchestra Tax Relief to vocal concerts.

James Murray:

The creative industries play a key role in driving economic growth. The Government is committed to supporting them as part of its plan to fix the foundations of the economy.

To qualify for Orchestra Tax Relief (OTR), a concert must be performed by a group of at least 12 instrumentalists. The voice is not considered to be an instrument, but orchestra concerts with a vocal element are not excluded from the relief. Concerts with a vocal element may be eligible provided that the instrumentalists are the primary focus.

The Government keeps all tax policy under review and regularly receives proposals for sector-specific tax reliefs. When considering a new tax relief, the Government must ensure it supports businesses in a fair way and that taxpayer money is effectively targeted.

■ Construction: Inheritance Tax

Mr Angus MacDonald:

[\[21961\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of changes to business property relief on (a) plant hire companies and (b) the ability of those companies to help meet housebuilding targets.

James Murray:

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

www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms.

It is expected that up to around 2,000 estates will be affected by the changes to APR and BPR in 2026-27.

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

The Budget set out a series of new investments to kickstart the biggest increase to social and affordable housebuilding in a generation. This is an important step to providing the conditions needed for the market to deliver 1.5 million homes - homes that are desperately needed.

To deliver on the commitment to get Britain building the government added £500 million to the Affordable Homes Programme in 2025-26, increasing it to £3.1 billion, the biggest annual budget for affordable housing in over a decade. This is part of over £5 billion total housing investment in 2025-26 to boost supply.

This package helps provide certainty for investors ahead of the government's long-term housing strategy which will be published alongside Phase 2 of the Spending Review.

■ Crown Estates: Wales**Llinos Medi:****[22766]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions she has had with the Welsh Government on devolving management of the Crown Estate to Wales.

Darren Jones:

The UK Government has had no discussions with the Welsh Government on devolving the Crown Estate.

The Crown Estate has played a significant role in attracting international investment into Wales to support the UK's net zero target and will continue to do so through future leasing rounds for offshore wind developments, including floating wind projects in the Celtic Sea. They work closely with the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales in support of shared priorities, ensuring that these resources are sustainably managed for the long term.

Introducing a new entity would fragment the market, complicate existing processes, and likely delay further development offshore, undermining investment in Welsh waters.

■ Cryptocurrencies: Capital Gains Tax

Torsten Bell:

[\[22761\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an estimate of the revenue accrued from capital gains tax on the sale of crypto-assets in the last financial year.

James Murray:

No estimate of the revenue accrued from capital gains tax on the sale of cryptoassets has been made for the last financial year, 2023-24. From the tax year ending 2025, changes will be introduced to the Capital Gains pages of the Self-Assessment forms requiring amounts in respect of cryptoassets to be identified separately.

■ Defibrillators: VAT

Tim Roca:

[\[22498\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of making defibrillators exempt from VAT.

James Murray:

The Government currently provides VAT reliefs to aid the purchase of defibrillators. For example, when an Automated External Defibrillator is purchased with funds provided by a charity and then donated to an eligible body, no VAT is charged. Furthermore, all state schools in England have been fitted with AEDs.

A key consideration for any potential new VAT relief is whether savings would be passed on to the consumer. Evidence suggests that businesses only partially pass on any savings from lower VAT rates.

■ Development Aid

Nadia Whittome:

[\[22370\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the overseas development assistance budget to 0.7% of gross national income without applying a fiscal test.

Darren Jones:

The Government remains committed to international development. This is why we allocated £13.3 billion to ODA in 2024/25 and £13.7 billion in 2025/26 at Autumn Budget 2024. We will restore Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending to the level of 0.7 percent of GNI as soon as the fiscal circumstances allow, but this isn't currently affordable. The government will continue to monitor future forecasts closely, and each year will review and confirm, in accordance with the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015, whether a return to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA is possible against the latest fiscal forecast.

■ Disposable Income: Taxation

David Simmonds:

[\[22378\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the policy paper entitled Plan for Change, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, whether (a) council tax and (b) other local taxes will be included in the target of higher Real Household Disposable Income per person.

James Murray:

Real Household Disposable Income (RHDI) is reported by the ONS as part of the UK Economic Accounts.

RHDI represents the total income of households in a given period after direct taxes have been accounted for, with an adjustment for inflation. RHDI per person is calculated as aggregate RHDI divided by the estimated population.

As council tax is a direct tax faced by households, it is accounted for in the measurement of RHDI per person. Where other local taxes directly affect household income, they will also be accounted for in the measurement of RHDI per person.

■ Economic Situation

Mike Wood:

[\[22013\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the policy paper entitled Plan for Change, published on 5 December 2024, CP1210, what metrics she plans to use to measure economic stability beyond gross domestic product.

Tulip Siddiq:

The government's Plan for Change can only be delivered on the foundation of a stable economy.

Achieving economic stability requires macroeconomic stability, which gives firms and households the certainty to plan spending and investment; financial stability, which supports the real economy and ensures we can withstand shocks; fiscal credibility, which keeps inflation expectations anchored; and long-term policy certainty, which encourages investors. The Autumn Budget took significant steps to restore stability to public finances and improve our public services. Only by achieving stability can we grow the economy and keep both taxes and inflation low.

The breadth of economic stability will require the use of many metrics to track it. These may include measures of price stability and inflation; measures of policy uncertainty; and a range of financial market indicators.

■ EU Budget: Contributions

Jim Allister:

[\[22542\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much from the public purse the UK provided to the EU for any purpose in financial years (a) 2019-20, (b) 2020-21, (c) 2021-22, (d) 2022-23 and (e) 2023-24.

Darren Jones:

As part of the Withdrawal Agreement, the UK agreed the Financial Settlement with the EU. This provides a methodology for settling pre-existing UK financial obligations and is not a fixed amount.

The European Union Finances Statement 2023 sets out HM Treasury's estimates of the size of these obligations in more detail. As at 31st December 2023, the UK is estimated to have paid £23.8bn in net liabilities under the agreement since February 2020. HM Treasury will provide updated figures for 2024 in the next annual statement, expected in Spring 2025.

Other payments to the EU, such as those under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, are reported in departments' annual accounts and normal budgetary disclosures.

Food Banks**Ben Maguire:**[\[21945\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department is taking to help reduce the number of families dependent on food banks.

James Murray:

The Government has committed to producing a Food Systems Strategy which will provide an opportunity to set out how the food system can deliver for growth, health and the environment. A particular focus will be ensuring that families in poverty can afford healthy food which will improve child welfare, reduce the burden on the NHS, and benefit UK productivity in the long term.

Moreover, the Child Poverty Taskforce is working to publish a comprehensive strategy to tackle child poverty. This includes consideration of how the Government can tackle the key drivers of essential costs for low-income families, such as food.

The Government has put in place several measures to support the households who face the greatest hardship, including the Fair Repayment Rate for debt deductions in Universal Credit, which means approximately 1.2 million families will keep more of their award each month. The Household Support Fund in England has also been extended until 31 March 2026, which will mean those most in need can continue to access support towards the cost of essentials, such as food, energy and water. We are investing over £30 million in the rollout of free breakfast clubs in every primary school, so that every child is well prepared for the school day and can achieve their full potential.

Fuels: Excise Duties**Ben Maguire:**[\[21942\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential impact of (a) maintaining and (b) reducing levels of fuel duty on (i) households, (ii) small businesses and (iii) the haulage sector.

Ben Maguire:[\[21943\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of rises in fuel duty on rural communities.

James Murray:

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government announced continued support for people and businesses by extending the temporary 5p fuel duty cut and cancelling the planned inflationary increase for 2025/26, meaning rates will remain frozen at the levels set in March 2022.

This support represents a total saving for drivers in 2025/26 of around £3 billion, or £59 for the average car driver. Vans will see an average saving of £126 and heavy goods vehicles will see an average saving of nearly £1,100. Those driving more than average, which includes drivers in rural communities, will generally experience larger savings.

The Rural Fuel Duty Relief Scheme provides a 5p reduction to motorists buying fuel in certain areas. The areas included in the scheme demonstrate certain characteristics such as: pump prices much higher than the UK average; remoteness leading to high fuel transport costs from refinery to filling station; and relatively low sales meaning that retailers cannot benefit from bulk discounts.

■ Hospices: Northern Ireland**Sorcha Eastwood:**[\[21479\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the Department of Health and Social Care's press release entitled Biggest investment into hospices in a generation, published on 19 December 2024, whether any Barnett consequentials will be made available for Northern Ireland.

Darren Jones:

The Barnett formula applies to all increases or decreases to UK Government Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL).

As this funding for adult and children's hospices is being re-allocated from within existing Department of Health and Social Care budgets there will be no additional Barnett consequentials for the devolved governments. The Barnett formula has already been applied to funding previously allocated at Autumn Budget 2024.

The Northern Ireland Executive's block grant funding is growing in real terms in 2025-26 and the Executive's spending review settlement for 2025-26 is the largest in real terms of any settlement since devolution. The Northern Ireland Executive will receive over 24% more per person than equivalent UK Government spending in the rest of the UK in 2025-26, including the 2024 Northern Ireland Executive restoration financial package. That translates into over £2.5 billion more in 2025-26.

■ Import Duties: USA**Martin Wrigley:** [\[22785\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of new US tariffs on the UK economy.

James Murray:

HMT continuously monitors external developments and potential impacts on the UK economy, but it will not comment on hypotheticals.

The US is one of the UK's closest partners with a trading relationship worth £304 billion and representing 18% of total UK trade. We look forward to working with the new US administration in office, including on their policy priorities and to improve UK-US trading relations to support businesses on both sides of the Atlantic.

■ Interest Rates: Low Incomes**Jim Shannon:** [\[22610\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of trends in the level of interest rates on people with low incomes.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government understands the importance of protecting family finances. That is why we are committed to delivering economic stability to grow the economy, maintain low and stable inflation, and keep taxes and mortgages as low as possible. Low and stable inflation is an essential pre-requisite for economic growth and improving living standards, so we are continuing to support the independent Monetary Policy Committee as it acts to return inflation to target sustainably.

We are taking a comprehensive approach—supporting those in immediate need while addressing the structural changes necessary to fix the country's foundations. These combined efforts will help families by boosting wages and putting more money in people's pockets. Specific actions already taken by the Government to support people on low incomes include: increasing to the National Living Wage from April 2025; extension of the Household Support Fund in England and Discretionary Housing Payments in England and Wales in 2025-26; and introduction of a new Fair Repayment Rate from April 2025 to cap debt repayment made through Universal Credit.

■ Metals: Carbon Emissions**Steve Witherden:** [\[20885\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism on foundry businesses (a) in Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr constituency and (b) nationally.

James Murray:

The government will introduce the UK Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) on 1 January 2027.

The UK CBAM will ensure highly traded, carbon intensive products from overseas face a comparable carbon price to those produced here so that UK decarbonisation efforts lead to a true reduction in global emissions rather than simply displacing carbon emissions overseas.

The CBAM will apply to all imports of relevant goods into the UK, and will have indirect differential regional impacts due to the location of impacted sectors. Both nationally and in Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr, the CBAM will give industry confidence to invest in decarbonising knowing their efforts will not be undermined by carbon leakage. An assessment of CBAM impacts on the economy and businesses will be provided when the policy is final or near final, in the form of a tax information and impact note.

■ **Military Bases: Diego Garcia**

Priti Patel:

[\[21589\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 22 November 2024 to Question 14333 on Diego Garcia: Military Bases, which Departments will incur the costs of the (a) lease of the military base, (b) economic partnership and (c) Chagosian trust fund; with which Departments her Department has reached agreement; whether the financial elements are included in the (i) 2025-26 budget allocations and (ii) spending envelope to 2029-30; and whether she has received representations to increase the cost envelope since 3 October 2024.

Darren Jones:

The UK-Mauritius treaty enabling the continued operation of the base on Diego Garcia is still subject to finalisation and signature. Financial obligations arising from this agreement, including departmental budgetary responsibilities, will be managed responsibly within the government's fiscal framework, including through the upcoming spending review.

■ **Ministers: Official Cars**

Charlie Dewhurst:

[\[22463\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 11 December 2024, to Question 17676, on Ministers: Official Cars, if the Chancellor's car travel arrangements are at public expense.

James Murray:

We do not comment on the specific arrangements in place for the Chancellor for security reasons.

■ **Motor Vehicles: Excise Duties**

Chris Bloore:

[\[22779\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to review the list price at which motorists are required to pay additional car tax.

James Murray:

The Expensive Car Supplement is an additional VED charge for new cars with a list price of £40,000 or more, which is payable in year 2 – 6 of a car's lifecycle.

As set out at Autumn Budget 2024, the government recognises the disproportionate impact of the current VED Expensive Car Supplement threshold for those purchasing zero emission cars and will consider raising the threshold for zero emission cars only at a future fiscal event, to make it easier to buy electric cars.

■ Off-payroll Working: Tax Yields**Katrina Murray:**[\[21894\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the impact of the introduction of IR35 on tax receipts.

James Murray:

The off-payroll working rules, also known as IR35, have been in place for over twenty years and are designed to ensure that individuals working like employees but through their own company, usually a personal service company (PSC), pay broadly the same income tax and National Insurance contributions (NICs) as those who are directly employed.

The reform to the off-payroll working rules in the private and voluntary sectors, introduced in April 2021, is estimated to have generated an additional £1.8 billion in tax revenue up to March 2022. Further details are set out in HMRC's research report published on gov.uk in December 2022:

[Impacts of the off-payroll working rules reform in the private and voluntary sectors - GOV.UK](#)

HMRC has [previously evaluated the public sector reform](#) and estimated it generated around £525m between April 2017 and March 2019.

■ Private Education: VAT**Tracy Gilbert:**[\[21815\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what funding from ending the VAT exemption on private schools she plans to provide to the Scottish Government.

Darren Jones:

Ending tax breaks for private schools will raise revenue that can help fund priorities in the state education sector in England. The Barnett formula will be applied in the usual way to any resulting additional funding for UK Government departments provided in devolved areas.

The Scottish Government's block grant funding is growing in real terms in 2025-26 and its spending review settlement for 2025-26 is the largest in real terms of any settlement since devolution. The Scottish Government will receive over 20% more per person than equivalent UK Government spending in the rest of the UK in 2025-26 which translates into over £8.5 billion more.

■ Public Expenditure

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[21692\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what proportion of efficiency savings she plans to require of Government departments in each year of the Spending Review Phase 2 in order to meet her planned 5% savings over this Parliament; and what assessment she has made of the potential impact of levels of efficiency savings announced in (a) her Department's policy paper entitled Fixing the foundations: public spending audit 2024-25, published on 29 July 2024 and (b) the Autumn Budget 2024 on her planned 5% efficiency savings over this Parliament.

Darren Jones:

In developing their plans for the Spending Review departments will need to find 5% savings and efficiencies against their current budgets, to help drive out waste and ensure all funding is focused on the Government's priorities.

The Government will set out its spending plans in the multi-year Spending Review in June 2025.

The Government uses the Government Efficiency Framework to distinguish between efficiencies and savings.

■ Public Sector Debt

Saqib Bhatti:

[\[22707\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of increased borrowing costs on the UK's debt repayments.

Saqib Bhatti:

[\[22709\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of increased borrowing costs on the UK's debt repayments.

Mr Andrew Snowden:

[\[22764\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of increased long term gilt rates on Government borrowing costs.

Darren Jones:

The government does not comment on specific financial market movements. Gilt yields are determined by a wide range of international and domestic factors, and it is normal for the price and yields of gilts to vary when there are wider movements in global financial markets.

The Chancellor has commissioned the Office for Budget Responsibility for an updated economic and fiscal forecast for the 26th of March, which will incorporate the latest data.

■ Small Businesses: Business Rates**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[21633\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether properties with a rateable value of £15,000 or less will be able to continue to claim Small Business Rate Relief for the 2026-27 year.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21635\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the financial impact of potential changes to Small Business Rate Relief after the introduction of new non-domestic rate multipliers on small businesses; and whether she plans to take steps to mitigate this impact.

James Murray:

Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) is available to businesses with a single property below a set rateable value. Eligible properties under £12,000 receive 100 per cent relief, which means over a third of businesses in England (more than 700,000) pay no business rates at all. There is also tapered support available to properties valued between £12,000 and £15,000.

The government is committed to retaining SBRR, which is a permanent relief set down in legislation. As highlighted in the *Transforming Business Rates* Discussion Paper, the Government is interested in hearing stakeholders' views on whether the current eligibility criteria impact businesses' incentives to invest and expand into a second property.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[21634\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department is taking to support small high street businesses reliant on Small Business Rate Relief.

James Murray:

Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) is available to businesses with a single property below a set rateable value. Eligible properties under £12,000 receive 100 per cent relief, which means over a third of businesses in England (more than 700,000) pay no business rates at all. There is also tapered support available to properties valued between £12,000 and £15,000.

The Government has no plans to withdraw SBRR, which is a permanent relief set down in legislation. As highlighted in the *Transforming Business Rates* Discussion Paper, the Government is interested in hearing stakeholders' views on the extent to which the current system acts as a barrier to investment and specifically, whether the current eligibility criteria for SBRR impacts businesses' incentives to invest and expand into a second property.

■ Tax Avoidance

Samantha Niblett: [\[22178\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the independent review of the loan charge will cover the (a) current and (b) historic roles of (i) promoters, (ii) umbrella companies and (iii) HMRC; what steps she is taking to ensure the independence of the staff of the review; whether people who (A) work and (B) have worked for (1) HMRC and (2) her Department will be permitted to work for the review; and what steps she is taking to ensure the confidentiality of the conclusions and recommendations of the review until it is published.

James Murray:

At Budget, the Government committed to an independent review of the Loan Charge to help bring the matter to a close for those affected whilst ensuring fairness for all taxpayers.

Further details will be set out in due course.

Danny Beales: [\[22855\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what her planned timetable is for the delivery of the Loan Charge Review.

James Murray:

At Budget, the Government committed to an independent review of the Loan Charge to help bring the matter to a close for those affected whilst ensuring fairness for all taxpayers.

Further details will be set out in due course.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

■ Disability and Ethnic Groups: Equality

Sojan Joseph: [\[22821\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether she plans to have discussions with EU counterparts on the introduction of the EU Pay Transparency Directive as part of the Government's plans to consult on the draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill.

Anneliese Dodds:

This Government is committed to building on the historic achievements of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and Equality Act 2010 and tackle pay discrimination. The Equality (Race and Disability) Bill will introduce mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting for large employers and extend the right to make equal pay claims to ethnic minority and disabled people. Additionally, as set out in the Plan to Make Work Pay, we will put in place measures to ensure that outsourcing of services can no longer be used by employers to avoid paying equal pay and improve enforcement by establishing an Equal Pay Regulatory and Enforcement Unit. These changes will strengthen and expand the existing legislative framework.

We are also committed to protecting the ability to draw on equal pay comparators where workers' terms and conditions can be attributed to a single source, ensuring those provisions that were previously derived from EU law remain enshrined in UK law.

■ Ethnic Groups: Equality

Charlie Dewhirst: [22192]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, pursuant to the answer of 20 November 2024 to Question 14502 on Gender: Equality, what guidance the (a) Civil Service People Group and (b) Office for Equality and Opportunities has produced on whether positive discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity is permitted under the Equality Act 2010.

Anneliese Dodds:

In April 2023, the previous government issued guidance on positive action in the workplace (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/positive-action-in-the-workplace-guidance-for-employers/positive-action-in-the-workplace>). This sets out the differences between positive action and positive discrimination and what is permitted under the Equality Act 2010.

■ Gender

Sir John Hayes: [21966]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what her Department's definition of gender identity is.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Office for Equality and Opportunity does not have its own definition of gender identity.

Claire Coutinho: [22701]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will publish all submissions to the call for input on single-sex spaces that were determined to have misinterpreted the Equality Act 2010.

Anneliese Dodds:

The submissions to the previous Government's call for input on single-sex spaces guidance which seem to have misinterpreted the Equality Act 2010 have been sent to the EHRC, as the relevant independent regulator, for further review.

■ Hearing Impairment: Women

James Naish: [21507]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of updating the Equalities Act 2010 in order to more actively support (a) deaf, (b) deafblind and (c) hard of hearing women.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Government is committed to championing the rights of disabled people. Deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing women are afforded protections under the Equality Act 2010 (the Act), in relation to the sex and disability protected characteristics.

The Act makes it clear that businesses and public bodies that provide goods and services to the public must not unlawfully discriminate against disabled people, including those who are deaf or have hearing impairments. The Act places an anticipatory duty on service providers to make reasonable adjustments to improve access to premises, buildings and services. The Act is clear that the failure by a service provider to make reasonable adjustments for a disabled person could amount to disability discrimination.

Similar strong protections apply in employment, where a reasonable adjustment applies where an employer is recruiting or already employing disabled women. Failure to make adjustments or generally treating disabled applicants or employees less favourably than others would amount to unlawful disability discrimination. Where the law is breached, disabled people may enforce their rights in court or, as the case may be, at an employment tribunal.

The government also recognises that people hold multiple protected characteristics and that some experience discrimination due to a combination of these, for example sex and disability. We are committed to strengthening protections in this area, and will bring the combined discrimination (dual characteristics) provision at section 14 of the Act into force. This will help ensure adequate protection for people who experience combined discrimination.

■ Political Parties: Discrimination**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[21688\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question 16341 on Political Parties: Discrimination, if she will issue guidance on the distinction between philosophical and political belief.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has issued guidance and codes of practice covering philosophical belief. What is and is not a political belief as opposed to a philosophical belief is a question that is for individuals to consider and, if necessary, the courts to determine, if raised in the context of Equality Act 2010 protections.

■ Unpaid Work: Discrimination**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[21693\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, with reference to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question HL2771 on Civil Servants: Recruitment and pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2024 to Question 14502 on Gender: Equality, if she will issue

guidance to public bodies to stop the practice of internship programmes which restrict applications on the basis of race or ethnicity.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Equality Act 2010 (The Act) provides protections for people from discrimination in the workplace and in society. It makes it unlawful to treat someone unfairly or discriminate against anyone based on certain personal characteristics. This includes race and ethnicity.

The Act also makes it unlawful for recruiters to hire by race, where the person is to be paid under a contract for services. Under certain conditions, a recruiter choosing between candidates of equal merit can hire the candidate from the more disadvantaged or lower-participating race or ethnicity. This is one type of 'positive action'. Positive action can deliver better outcomes for particular groups in order to overcome or minimise a disadvantage arising from a protected characteristic.

In April 2023, the previous government published guidance to help employers understand the difference between positive action and positive discrimination. The guidance is available on gov.uk at www.gov.uk/government/publications/positive-action-in-the-workplace-guidance-for-employers. Section 9 of this guidance explains the general positive action provision. Section 10.2 explains tie-breaking in more detail. With this considered, there are currently no plans to issue further guidance to public bodies on positive action.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Child Poverty Taskforce: Conferences

Danny Kruger:

[20769]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to her Department's press release entitled Child Poverty Taskforce holds first Scottish summit, published on 22 November 2024, if she will publish a list of (a) attendees and (b) speakers at that summit.

Alison McGovern:

The Child Poverty Taskforce will publish the child poverty strategy in Spring 2025 and further details on the engagement which helped develop the strategy will be outlined as part of the publication. Working closely with partners across all UK nations and regions is a central part of our approach to develop the strategy, as set out in [Tackling Child Poverty: Developing Our Strategy](#).

■ Children: Maintenance

Catherine Fookes:

[21222]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the income change threshold on child maintenance allowance on both the (a) paying and (b) receiving parents.

Catherine Fookes:

[\[21224\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of altering the income change threshold on child maintenance allowance reviews.

Andrew Western:

Where a paying parent's income is at least 25 per cent different than the figure obtained from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) for the last available full tax year, or no figure is available, the Child Maintenance Service will consider whether the liability should be based on the parent's current income. A change will not be considered unless it breaches the 25 per cent tolerance.

The 25 per cent threshold ensures that both parents can continue to budget with certainty and therefore provide ongoing stability for the child. Most people's income does not change to this degree over the course of one year. This approach ensures that minor changes to income do not interfere with the efficiency of the system, increasing costs for the taxpayer.

The Department has been conducting a review of the child maintenance calculation to make sure it is fit for purpose and reflects today's social trends. The review will also consider income change thresholds including their potential impact on both the paying and receiving parents.

■ Employment: Disability

James Naish:

[\[21505\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department plans to take to help (a) deaf and (b) other disabled people to find work.

Alison McGovern:

Backed by £240m investment, the Get Britain Working White Paper launched on 26 November will drive forward approaches to tackling economic inactivity and work toward the long-term ambition of an 80% employment rate.

Employers play a key role in increasing employment opportunities and supporting disabled people and people with health conditions, to thrive as part of the workforce. Our support to employers includes increasing access to Occupational Health, Support with Employee Health and Disability service [a digital information service for employers](#) and the Disability Confident scheme.

Appropriate work is generally good for health and wellbeing, so we want everyone to get work and get on in work, wherever they are and wherever they live.

Disabled people and people with health conditions are a diverse group so access to the right work and health support, in the right place, at the right time, is key. We therefore have a range of specialist initiatives to support individuals, including those who are deaf, to stay in work and get back into work, including those initiatives that join up employment and health systems.

Measures include support from Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentres and Access to Work grants, as well as joining up health and employment support around the individual through Employment Advisors in NHS Talking Therapies and Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care.

■ Housing Benefit

Ruth Jones: [\[22674\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many households in England and Wales received discretionary housing payment after qualifying for local housing allowance in 2023-24.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We do not hold this information.

Local authorities administer the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme as they are best placed to make informed judgements about relative priorities and needs in their area to ensure that the most vulnerable are supported and the funds are targeted effectively. As such, DWP do not hold administrative data on households in receipt of a DHP and thus cannot state how many awards were made for households who received housing support via the Local Housing Allowance in 2023/24.

The Department publishes Official Statistics on the use of DHPs twice a year, based on information supplied by local authorities: [Discretionary Housing Payments statistics - GOV.UK](#)

■ Pension Credit

Steve Darling: [\[21729\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people are waiting for their pension credit application to be processed in each region.

Emma Reynolds:

We do not currently hold this information at regional level. Outstanding Pension Credit claims totalled 88,500 at the end of week commencing 30th December 2024. This includes 8,500 advanced claims. Advanced claims are where the application can be started up to 4 months before reaching State Pension age.

Please note, the data shown is unpublished management information, collected and intended for internal departmental use and has not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standards.

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[22254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many new applications for Pension Credit were (a) made and (b) approved between 10 September 2024 and 21 December 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

Statistics on Pension Credit application volumes were published on 28 November 2024. This includes numbers of applications that were received, awarded and not awarded, up to 17 November 2024. [Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - GOV.UK](#).

Please note, the next publication of Pension Credit application statistics is due around the end of February 2025 and will cover the data up to week commencing 10 February 2025.

■ Pensions**John Milne:****[21921]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to her Department's guidance entitled Pension freedoms and DWP benefits, published on 27 March 2015, what assessment she has made of the impact of that policy on defined contribution pension savers.

Emma Reynolds:

The Government is committed to enabling savers to achieve security in retirement. We've announced as part of the King's Speech that the Pensions Bill will include measures to give savers the benefit of guided retirement products, with a retirement income; this will change the experience of Defined Contribution savers as our approach would provide a secure income over retirement as a default, unless the member chooses something different.

We have also committed to assess adequacy for future savers as part of the second phase of the pensions review. We closely monitor the decumulation decisions of Defined Contribution savers. This has included research on retirement planning and decumulation decisions, such as Planning and Preparing for Later Life and analysis of Pensions Freedoms.

[Planning and Preparing for Later Life - GOV.UK](#)

[Pension Freedoms: a qualitative research study of individuals' decumulation journeys - GOV.UK](#)

■ Pensions: Advisory Services**John Milne:****[21919]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what proportion of defined contribution pensions were accessed after a Pension Wise guidance appointment in each of the last five years.

Emma Reynolds:

The information is not available. There are two sources which provide relevant data in relation to the request. The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) publish the number accessing a pension pot in the contract-based market (from 2015/16 to 2023/24) and whether this was accessed following financial advice, a Pension Wise appointment

(and no financial advice), or no financial advice or guidance: [Retirement income market data 2023/24 | FCA](#).

The Money and Pension Service (MaPS) have previously published survey data on outcomes of Pension Wise appointments. A copy has been attached (see figure 12).

Attachments:

1. Attachment [Money and Pensions Service.pdf]

■ **Social Security Benefits: Disability**

Danny Kruger:

[\[20771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 6515 on Social Security Benefits: Disability, if she will publish the consultation responses from organisations.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We will not be publishing organisational responses to the previous Government's consultation, as it is for each organisation to choose whether or not to publish its response. Many organisations have already published their own responses.

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

Jim Shannon:

[\[21606\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that people who emigrate to (a) Canada and (b) Australia are aware that their state pensions will be frozen.

Emma Reynolds:

For a number of years, advice has been provided to the public that the UK State Pension is not uprated overseas except where there is a legal requirement to do so - for example where there is a reciprocal agreement that allows for uprating.

Information on moving or retiring abroad is available on GOV.UK and this includes advice on how State pension is affected.

Advice can also be obtained by calling the International Pension Centre on 0191 218 777 or from the Pension Service on 0800 731 7898

■ **State Retirement Pensions: Women**

Colum Eastwood:

[\[21541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to her statement of 17 December 2024 on Women's State Pension Age Communication: PHSO Report, Official Report columns 167 to 169, whether her Department has made an estimate of the annual cost of implementing a compensation scheme for affected women in Northern Ireland.

Emma Reynolds:

The State Pension is a transferred matter in Northern Ireland. These matters are the responsibility of the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland.

■ Winter Fuel Payment: Poverty**Danny Kruger:****[20770]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of pensioner poverty levels in each region following changes to the eligibility for the Winter Fuel Payment.

Emma Reynolds:

The latest available data on pensioner poverty levels by region is published by the Department here [Households below average income: Households below average income: for financial years ending 1995 to 2023 - GOV.UK](#)

On 19 November, Secretary of State wrote to the Work and Pensions Select Committee to share internal government modelling produced by the Department outlining estimates of the number of pensioners in the UK estimated to move into poverty as a result of the Winter Fuel Payment policy change. This letter is available here [Winter Fuel Payments eligibility change - Letter from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions](#) It is not possible to provide regional breakdowns of the poverty impacts of this change.

■ Young People: Education and Employment**Adam Dance:****[21820]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what sanction regime will be used for young people under the Youth Guarantee; how that regime will differ from the conditionality regime; and what assessment she has made of the potential impact of that new regime on vulnerable young people with (a) mental ill-health and (b) SEND.

Alison McGovern:

The Youth Guarantee will be available to all young people in England aged 18-21, not just those on benefits, and therefore sanctions are not relevant for many in scope of the Guarantee.

Young people on benefits can access DWP's Youth Offer and Jobcentre Plus support offer. If young people on benefit do not engage with activity mandated by a work coach, without good reason, they may be subject to a sanction. However, emphasis is placed on protecting vulnerable claimants and decision-makers always take all the individual circumstances of the case into account before making a decision. Our work coaches regularly explain benefit conditions and the consequences of failing to meet agreed requirements to our claimants to ensure understanding.

As set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper, we will explore a new approach to the benefit rules for young people to ensure they support the intent and design of the Youth Guarantee. For example, supporting young people to focus on improving their skills. We will engage widely on this issue to ensure all young people, including those

with mental health or Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, have access to opportunities in employment, education or training.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Putting fans first: consultation on the resale of live events tickets and call for evidence on pricing practices

Minister for Employment Rights, Competition and Markets (Justin Madders):
[\[HCWS359\]](#)

The UK has a world leading music and live events sector which plays an important role in our national life, and it supports economic growth across the country. However, the Government is concerned that tickets for many live events have become inaccessible to fans due to highly inflated ticket prices on the resale market. In addition, new practices within the live events sector, such as dynamic pricing, are presenting challenges for fans when buying tickets, particularly around transparency.

We want to put fans first, ensure they are treated fairly and in so doing support an economically successful live events sector.

To support these objectives, the Department for Business and Trade and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have published a consultation on the resale of live events tickets and a call for evidence on pricing practices in the live events sector, which are available on GOV.UK.

Consultation on the resale of live events tickets

The Government recognises that a well-functioning ticket resale market can play an important role: helping to redistribute tickets between genuine fans, allowing those who cannot attend an event to give an opportunity to others to get a ticket, while recouping some or all of their costs. However, it appears that professional ticket touts are systematically buying up tickets on the primary market then reselling them to fans at often hugely inflated prices, with none of the profits going back to the performer, venue or the live events sector more generally. To address these issues, the Government is seeking views on a range of possible options, including:

- Limits on ticket resale such as via a price cap, making it illegal for tickets to be resold at more than a certain percentage above the original price; and fixed limits on the number of tickets that a seller can resell;
- Increasing the accountability of secondary ticketing platforms by placing a duty on them to ensure that information provided by sellers is accurate;
- Supporting the enforcement of existing consumer protection laws by updating provisions in the Consumer Rights Act 2015 to make enforcement more efficient and effective, including a licensing regime focused on resale platforms; and
- Encouraging industry-led actions to improve the transparency and accessibility of ticket sales, for example by phasing ticket distribution.

Call for evidence on pricing practices in the live events sector

The live events sector has adopted new approaches to selling tickets, including pricing strategies using new technologies. These practices are changing both how the system works and also the experiences of fans when they purchase tickets. It is important that fans are treated fairly and openly with timely, transparent and accurate information being presented ahead of sales, particularly when demand is high.

The call for evidence is seeking views to determine if there is a case for future intervention, specifically examining:

- How the ticketing market works in the UK, when and how tickets are sold using dynamic pricing; and other technologies used to sell tickets;
- If and how consumers have been impaired by a lack of transparency, for example the transparency and timeliness of information provided to inform purchasing decisions, and the extent of hidden fees, tiered pricing or pressure selling; and
- Whether the current legal framework provides sufficient protection, including whether gaps exist or if there is potential for new harms arising from emerging trends.

Next steps

The consultation and call for evidence will be open for 12 weeks. We encourage all interested stakeholders, including fans, ticketing platforms and the wider live events sector to respond.

I am placing a copy of the consultation and call for evidence in the Libraries of both Houses.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant Relocation DCO Extension

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Steve Reed):

[\[HCWS362\]](#)

This Government has committed to rebuilding Britain, delivering 1.5 million new homes along with the critical infrastructure that underpins economic growth. As set out in the Plan for Change, we will deliver housing in the right places, supporting our towns and cities to grow, and providing the homes people want near to businesses and employment opportunities. This Government is therefore committed to growth and has promised to take tough decisions to get Britain building.

One of our first actions was therefore to revise the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which was formalised on the 12 December 2024. This marks the next step in radically reforming the planning system to meet the needs of the country and made major changes to the rules around the green belt. It is therefore right that the application is now properly analysed with consideration given to the Government's updated policies.

This statement confirms that it is necessary to extend the deadline for the Secretary of State's decision on the application by Anglian Water under the Planning Act 2008, for the

Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant Relocation Project Development Consent Order (DCO).

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make his decision within three months of receipt of the Examining Authority's report, unless the power under section 107(3) is exercised to extend the deadline and a Ministerial Statement is made to Parliament announcing the new deadline.

The DCO application for the Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant Relocation Project was received by the Planning Inspectorate under the previous Government's planning system.

The deadline for this decision is therefore to be further extended to 14 April 2025 to enable the application to be analysed in light of this key policy update.

The decision to set the new deadline for this application is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant or refuse development consent.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ Publication of the AI Opportunities Action Plan and the Government Response

Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Peter Kyle):

[\[HCWS360\]](#)

In July, I commissioned Matt Clifford CBE, tech entrepreneur and Chair of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency, to develop an AI Opportunities Action Plan. Today, that plan, and the government's response to it, have been published.

This Government promised to deliver change and improve lives in every part of the country. To grow a faster, fairer economy with good jobs that put more money in working people's pockets. To rebuild our crumbling public services and provide our citizens with the world-class healthcare and education they deserve.

That clear sense of purpose has fundamentally shaped our approach to AI. This is no longer a technology that belongs in a distant future; the AI revolution is already happening, and it will define the decade to come. We must decide whether we sit back and wait for this technology to shape our lives or get ahead and ensure that British people are the first to benefit.

This Government is hugely optimistic about AI's potential to change our country for the better and deliver a decade of national renewal. AI is at the heart of our plan for change. From building an NHS fit for the future and making Britain a clean energy superpower, to taking back our streets and bringing down the barriers to opportunity for all, none of our national missions are possible without embracing the power of technology. Most importantly, an AI-powered economy will improve living standards for working people across the country.

We have led the world on AI safety. Now, we have a responsibility to capitalise on our unique position to provide global leadership in seizing the opportunities of AI. The AI

Opportunities Action Plan proposes 50 recommendations reflecting the scale and pace required to strengthen the foundations of the UK's AI ecosystem, deliver real change for citizens through using AI in the public and private sectors, and securing our future by ensuring the UK is a first mover on AI.

In our response, we set out how we intend to shape the application of AI within a modern social market economy, based on the principles of shared economic prosperity, improved public services and increased personal opportunities. To deliver the plan's recommendations, we are taking decisive action to deliver enduring change:

- Creating AI Growth Zones (AIGZs), areas with enhanced access to power and streamlined planning approvals, to establish new public-private partnerships and accelerate the development of AI infrastructure on UK soil.
- Expanding our sovereign AI compute capacity by at least 20 times by 2030, ensuring that the UK can keep pace as our compute needs grow.
- Creating a new AI Energy Council, bringing together industry leaders from the energy and AI sectors, co-chaired by me and the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. The Energy Council will provide expert insight on the energy needs of AI, alongside opportunities to accelerate investment in the development of renewable and innovative energy solutions to meet those needs.
- Launching a new dedicated team with a mandate to strengthen the UK's sovereign AI capabilities by supporting our national champions at the frontier of AI. Operating with the agility of the Vaccines Task Force, the team will partner with AI companies and use every tool at Government's disposal to ensure they have access to the compute, data and talent they need to succeed.

The Action Plan shows us that we have a narrow window to secure our stake in the future of AI, and deliver a better future for British people. We must take decisive action before it is too late. Today, we have set out our plan to secure our global leadership in the AI revolution and fulfil our fundamental promise to the British people. This is a top priority for the Prime Minister. Working right across government, we will use AI to grow our economy, rebuild our broken public services and improve living standards for working people. Together, we will ensure that British citizens are the first to benefit from the extraordinary opportunities this technology can offer.

TREASURY

■ 2025 UK-China economic and financial dialogue

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):

[\[HCWS361\]](#)

I visited China 10 – 13 January to deliver the 2025 UK-China Economic and Financial Dialogue.

Growing the economy is the number one mission of this government. But that growth must be secure and resilient, built on the stable foundations that we have prioritised as we deliver on our Plan for Change and embark on a decade of national renewal.

National security and growth are not opposed. They are mutually reinforcing. We must and will continue to engage with international partners on trade and investment to grow our economy, while ensuring that our security and values are not compromised.

This means finding the right way to build a stable and balanced relationship with China. One that recognises the importance of cooperation in addressing the global issues we face, competing where our interests differ, and challenging robustly where we must.

It is for this reason that I visited Beijing and Shanghai for an economic and financial dialogue with China. I was accompanied by the Governor of the Bank of England, the Chief Executive of the Financial Conduct Authority, and representatives from Britain's financial services firms. This dialogue unlocked market access for UK exporters in financial services and agri-products, providing greater certainty for business and an expected boost to the UK economy of £600 million over five years.

However, this is not a return to the 'golden era' of UK-China relations. Throughout the visit, I was clear that whilst we must cooperate on areas of mutual interest, we will also confidently express our economic and trade concerns to the Chinese, including on market access and wider market distorting practices. A key outcome of this dialogue is that we have secured China's commitment to improve existing channels so that we can openly discuss sensitive issues and the ways in which they impact our economy. Our engagement also advanced wider UK interests. I raised a range of UK concerns in meetings with Chinese government counterparts, including Russia's illegal war in Ukraine, developments in constraints on rights and freedoms in Hong Kong, and human rights. Our approach ensures we can confidently challenge China on areas where we disagree and uphold the UK's national security, the first duty of our government.

This visit builds a platform for a long-term relationship with China that works squarely in our national interest – ensuring our economy has the broad base and resilient foundations for the growth that makes working people in every corner of Britain better off.