

**Session 2024-25  
No. 19**



**Friday  
13 September 2024**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

# **HOUSE OF LORDS**

## **WRITTEN STATEMENTS AND WRITTEN ANSWERS**

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<b>Lord Khan of Burnley</b>	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
<b>Lord Leong</b>	Whip
<b>Lord Livermore</b>	Financial Secretary, HM Treasury
<b>Baroness Merron</b>	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care
<b>Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede</b>	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice
<b>Baroness Sherlock</b>	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions
<b>Baroness Smith of Malvern</b>	Minister of State, Department for Education
<b>Baroness Taylor of Stevenage</b>	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
<b>Lord Timpson</b>	Minister of State, Ministry of Justice
<b>Baroness Twycross</b>	Whip
<b>Lord Vallance of Balham</b>	Minister of State, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
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# Written Statements

Friday, 13 September 2024

## Fiscal Risks and Sustainability Report 2024

[HLWS96]

**Lord Livermore:** My right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves) made the following Written Ministerial Statement yesterday.

This government's number one mission is to grow the economy. Sustainable public finances support the stability necessary for a successful economy. The stability that allows a family to buy their own home, for a business to thrive and for a government to invest in public services. The Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) *Fiscal Risks and Sustainability* (FRS) report [CP 1142], laid today and based on the previous government's Spring Budget policies, shows the substantial longer-term challenges to the sustainability of the public finances.

As set out in the public spending audit [CP 1133] laid in July, the previous government left a challenging fiscal inheritance, with a projected overspend of £22 billion. This government has already taken action to begin fixing the foundations, including £5.5 billion in public spending savings for 2024-25. Further difficult decisions will be needed at the Autumn Budget across spending, welfare and tax in order to meet the fiscal rules and to support sustainable economic growth. This is the responsible thing to do to fix the foundations of our economy and bring back economic stability.

Sustained economic growth is the only route to the improved prosperity that the UK needs. Had the UK grown at the average rate of other OECD economies over the last 13 years, the economy would have been over £140 billion larger and this could have brought in an additional £58 billion in tax revenues in the last year alone. Growth is therefore this government's defining mission and one pillar underpinning this mission is stability. Economic stability will allow us to grow the economy, maintain sustainable public finances, and keep taxes, inflation and mortgages as low as possible.

Economic stability requires respecting the institutions that are guarantors of our stability and we have already demonstrated our commitment to strengthening independent institutions, including the OBR. In July, I announced the most significant set of changes to our fiscal framework since the inception of the OBR. This included introducing the Budget Responsibility Act, ensuring any major future fiscal announcements will be subject to an independent assessment by the OBR, as well as confirming that Spending Reviews will take place every two years with a minimum duration of three years in order to improve value for money, the planning of public expenditure and provide greater budgetary certainty. The government is also committed to robust fiscal rules which will ensure the public finances are always managed responsibly.

The FRS builds on previous years' analysis, examining the risks posed to the public finances by climate change damage, health spending and debt sustainability. The OBR's analysis shows that the UK will face significant costs from climate-related damage, even in a scenario where the UK and the rest of the world continue with current mitigation commitments. The costs would be more severe if these commitments are not met, which is why one of the government's missions is to make the UK a clean energy superpower. The government has already acted to remove the de-facto ban on onshore wind, approve three major solar projects, and significantly increase the budget for the sixth Contracts for Difference round. The government will work with the private sector through the newly founded Great British Energy, capitalised with £8.3 billion. Preparing for the future also means adapting to the effects of climate change. Without action, flooding, coastal erosion and other climate hazards will pose greater risks to lives, livelihoods and people's wellbeing. The government will explore how to further strengthen our approach to developing the country's resilience to climate change, working to improve resilience and preparation across central government, local authorities, local communities, and emergency services.

The FRS sets out that rising health spending is forecast to be the single most important driver of public debt increasing over the next 50 years. It also shows that a healthier population brings economic and fiscal benefits. The health mission will ensure that we build an NHS fit for the future that is there when people need it, with fewer lives lost to the biggest health-related killers, in a fairer Britain where everyone lives well for longer.

The final chapter of the report assesses the UK's debt sustainability. Public debt is projected to reach 274% of GDP in 2073-74, based on a number of long-term spending pressures and the previous government's policies remaining unchanged. However, boosting the productive potential of the economy can help to reduce this rise in debt, with the OBR's analysis showing that every 0.1% increase in annual productivity growth would reduce the increase in the debt-to-GDP ratio by 25 percentage points. A full one percentage point increase in annual productivity growth to 2.5%, equivalent to a return to pre-financial crisis rates of productivity growth, could keep debt below 100% of GDP throughout the next 50 years. This underlines the importance of tackling the UK's weak productivity performance through the government's growth mission. Since the launch of the growth mission in July, the government has wasted no time in making progress and has already announced several growth-enhancing policies, guided by the principles of stability, investment and reform.

Economic shocks have been the most significant driver of rising debt in recent years. Through the Spending Review process, the government will take forward work on a number of priority themes, including a greater focus on long-termism and prevention, to improve the resilience of the economy to future shocks.

The FRS highlights the challenging fiscal outlook faced by this and future governments, and underlines the importance of growth and stability. I am grateful to the staff of the OBR for the work and expertise that has gone

into this report, which fulfils the body's obligations in the Charter for Budget Responsibility to examine and report on the sustainability of, and risks to, the public finances. The government will respond to the FRS in the spring.

## Written Answers

Friday, 13 September 2024

### **Alder Hey Children's Hospital and Great Ormond Street Hospital: Gender Dysphoria**

Asked by *Baroness Hunt of Bethnal Green*

To ask His Majesty's Government how many young people are on the waiting list to access support at the specialist gender services at Great Ormond Street Hospital and Alder Hey Children's Hospital; and what is the current average length of time spent by young people on the waiting list before attending their first appointment. [HL628]

**Baroness Merron:** As of July 2024, there were 6,033 individuals on the national waiting list for NHS Children and Young Peoples Gender Services, which includes the services in London and the North West, with a median waiting time of 95 weeks.

NHS England has published an ambitious two-year action plan, which sets out how it will continue to transform and improve services. Investment in children and young people's gender services in 2024/25 has more than doubled compared to 2023/24, and will increase further as new services are established.

In April 2024, NHS England opened two new services in the North West and London that offer a fundamentally different clinical model, embedding multi-disciplinary teams in specialist children's hospitals. A third new service will open in the South West in the autumn, and a fourth in the East of England in spring of next year. NHS England is advancing towards meeting its commitment for there to be a specialist children's gender service in every region by 2026. These new services will increase service capacity and reduce waiting lists.

We understand that it must be challenging for all those on the waiting list for services, but it is important that we get these services right, which involves developing teams with specialist clinical skill sets and ensuring that research is embedded within services. NHS England has also written to all children and young people on the waiting list for services, to offer them a mental health assessment, and has rolled out an improved referral pathway into services, which ensures that children are assessed more holistically through referral via pediatrics or children's mental health services.

In his House of Commons written statement HCWS70 on 4 September 2024, my Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care outlined the significant progress that has been made in the transformation of children and young people's gender services.

### **Coastal Erosion: Government Assistance**

Asked by *Lord Kempsey*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support communities in England threatened by coastal erosion, and whether they will publish a national strategy for countering the impacts of coastal erosion. [HL642]

**Baroness Hayman of Ullock:** The Water Minister and I know the devastating impact flooding and coastal erosion can have on communities. That is why we are committed to supporting coastal communities and ensuring flood risk management is fit for the challenges we face now and in the future. We will work to improve resilience and preparation across central government and local authorities to better protect communities across the UK.

The Government's investment plan includes defences for the coast where it is sustainable and affordable to defend the coastline. In areas where it is not, other approaches such as managed realignment or transition may be needed.

### **Court of Protection**

Asked by *Lord Jackson of Peterborough*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to protect the rights of families in Court of Protection proceedings and to encourage transparency, natural justice and openness in those legal proceedings. [HL798]

**Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede:** Attended hearings in the Court of Protection have ordinarily been held in public since 2016 with a 'Transparency Order' being made by the court to prohibit the publication of information that identifies, or is likely to identify, the vulnerable person concerned, their family, or any other person specified in the order.

### **Fisheries: Government Assistance**

Asked by *Lord Berkeley*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they plan to support the UK coastal fishing industry with seafood grants to improve fuel efficiency, crew health and safety, and the economic viability of the sector. [HL570]

**Baroness Hayman of Ullock:** Food security is national security, and a sustainable fishing industry is an important part of that. Decisions on future funding for the fishing industry will be taken through the Spending Review processes. Discussions on the opportunities and challenges facing the industry over the last two months have been helpful in gaining an understanding of what other types of support or Government action may be appropriate. These discussions will continue.

## Marriage

Asked by **Baroness Cox**

To ask His Majesty's Government further to the Written Answers by Lord Bellamy on 16 June and 2 August 2023 (HL8197 and HL9550), whether they will publish a response to the Law Commission Report Celebrating Marriage: A New Weddings Law, published in July 2022, particularly Recommendation 42. [HL793]

Asked by **Baroness Cox**

To ask His Majesty's Government what is their assessment of the recommendation for reform of the Marriage Act 1949 in paragraph 8.50, page 135, of The Casey Review into Opportunity and Integration, published in December 2016. [HL794]

Asked by **Baroness Cox**

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to protect the spousal rights of women who have been married outside of the legal framework for weddings in England and Wales. [HL795]

Asked by **Baroness Cox**

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the compliance of the Marriage Act 1949 and other marriage law with the right to freedom of religion or belief, as Church of England and Church in Wales marriage ceremonies fulfil legal requirements and are legally recognised, while other religious ceremonies may not be. [HL796]

**Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede:** We are aware that the Law Commission made recommendations for wholesale change to weddings law in July 2022. These recommendations include recommendation 42, in relation to the creation of offences relating to an officiant dishonestly misleading a couple about the legal effect of a wedding ceremony or failing to disclose that the ceremony they are officiating will not create a valid marriage. We will take the time as a new Government properly to consider the Law Commission's recommendations and will outline our position in due course.

The Marriage Act 1949 enables religious bodies, alongside the Church of England and the Church in Wales, to conduct legally binding weddings. However, the difficulties which those who have undergone ceremonies which do not qualify as legally binding face when their relationships come to an end is a matter of concern. That is why the Government committed in its 2024 manifesto to 'strengthen the rights and protections available to women in cohabiting couples'. We will set out the next steps on this manifesto commitment in the near future.

## Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner

Asked by **Lord Empey**

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have any plans to amend (1) the terms of reference, and (2) the remit, of the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner. [HL843]

**Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent:** We are committed to continuing to support veterans in Northern Ireland and we will set out next steps for the appointment of a new Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner in due course.

## Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner: Resignations

Asked by **Lord Empey**

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of (1) the reasons behind, and (2) the consequences of, the resignation of the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner: and whether they intend to seek a successor. [HL842]

**Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent:** Over the last four years, Northern Ireland's first Veterans Commissioner, Danny Kinahan, worked on a range of important issues that affect veterans in everyday life, including health, housing, and welfare. The Government would like to thank Danny for his dedicated work on behalf of veterans and families living in Northern Ireland. On 5 September, he resigned from the role. A statement setting out his position has been published on the Veterans Commissioner's website.

The Government is committed to continuing to support veterans in Northern Ireland, and will set out next steps for the appointment of a new Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner in due course.

## Ofwat

Asked by **Lord Birt**

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have any plans to review the (1) performance, (2) remit, and (3) powers, of Ofwat. [HL578]

**Baroness Hayman of Ullock:** Companies are being held to strict requirements by the regulators, demanding significantly higher spend on environmental enhancement than in the previous price review.

On 11 July, the Secretary of State met with water company bosses to set out our expectations for the sector, just six days after my Cabinet appointment. Alongside this, this Government announced a series of **initial steps** towards ending the crisis in the water sector.

The Water (Special Measures) Bill will give Ofwat further powers to hold water companies to account where they do not deliver for customers and the environment.

This Bill is just the start of the fundamental and much broader transformation that this Government will lead for the water industry.

The Government will launch a review to shape further legislation that will fundamentally transform how our water system works and clean up our rivers, lakes and seas for good.

### Remand in Custody: Women

*Asked by Lord Bradley*

To ask His Majesty's Government what proportion of women remanded in custody in each of the last three years were subsequently (1) sentenced, and (2) not sentenced. [HL869]

**Lord Timpson:** The Ministry of Justice publishes data on the remand status of defendants and subsequent outcomes in the [Remands data tool](#).

The attached tables provide the proportion of outcomes for female defendants after being remanded in custody, split by magistrates' court and Crown Court.

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates' courts and subsequently committed to the Crown Court will have separate remand decisions made in both courts and will be included in both totals.

The Answer includes the following attached material:

HL869 Tables [2024-09-23 PQ HL869 tables.xlsx]

The material can be viewed online at:  
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2024-09-09/HL869>

### Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation

*Asked by Lord Browne of Ladyton*

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the remarks by Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede on 24 July (HL Deb col 501), what further discussions, if any,

have taken place about the formulation and timetabling of anti-SLAPP legislation. [HL743]

**Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede:** The Government recognises that SLAPPs pose a risk to the integrity of our legal system. We are considering all options for reform in relation to this issue.

### Veterans: Radiation Exposure

*Asked by Lord Watson of Wyre Forest*

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to meet representatives of UK nuclear test veterans. [HL279]

**Lord Coaker:** This is a Government of service that will always stand up for those who serve our country. As part of the Minister for Veterans and People's role, he will regularly meet and engage with veterans including UK nuclear test veterans, to learn about their experiences and understand how the Government can provide the right support to them.

The Minister for Veterans and People has engagements planned in the coming weeks to discuss specific concerns raised by nuclear test veterans.

### Zimbabwe: Elections

*Asked by Baroness Hoey*

To ask His Majesty's Government what representations have been made to the Commonwealth Observer Group to the 2023 Zimbabwe Harmonised Elections of its final report on its findings on those elections. [HL626]

**Lord Collins of Highbury:** The Commonwealth Secretariat deploys independent Commonwealth Observer Groups to monitor elections. It is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Secretary-General to approve the publication of Commonwealth Election Observation Reports. Whilst we hope to see the report on the 2023 Zimbabwe Harmonised Elections soon, we do not wish to influence the independent Commonwealth process.

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