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**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**  
**(HANSARD)**

# **HOUSE OF LORDS**

## **WRITTEN STATEMENTS AND WRITTEN ANSWERS**

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<b>Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on Trent</b>	Spokesperson for NI Office, Scotland Office and Wales Office, Whip
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<b>Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill</b>	Minister of State, Department for Transport
<b>Lord Hermer</b>	Attorney-General
<b>Lord Hunt of Kings Heath</b>	Minister of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
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<b>Lord Livermore</b>	Financial Secretary, HM Treasury
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<b>Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede</b>	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice, Whip
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<b>Baroness Smith of Cluny</b>	Advocate-General for Scotland
<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
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# Written Statements

Thursday, 28 November 2024

## Counter-terrorism Disruptive Powers Report 2023

[HLWS256]

**Lord Hanson of Flint:** My hon Friend the Minister of State for Security (Dan Jarvis) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

I have today published the Counter-Terrorism Disruptive Powers Report 2023 (CP 1212). The report has been laid before Parliament and it will be available in the Vote Office and online on GOV.UK.

It is important that there is transparency in the use of our counter-terrorism tools. Publishing this report ensures that the public can access data and information on the range of powers used to combat terrorist threats to the United Kingdom, the extent of their use and the safeguards and oversight in place to ensure they are used properly.

### COVID-19 Inquiry Response Costs: Quarter 2 24/25

[HLWS255]

**Baroness Twycross:** The Covid-19 pandemic impacted each and every person in the UK. The work of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry is crucial in examining the UK's response to and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. There are evidently lessons to be learnt from the pandemic and the government is committed to closely considering the Covid-19 Inquiry's findings and recommendations, which will play a key role in informing the government's planning and preparations for the future.

The Government recognises the unprecedented and wholly exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, and the importance of examining as rigorously as possible the actions the state took in response, in order to learn lessons for the future. The Inquiry is therefore unprecedented in its scope, complexity and profile, looking at recent events that have profoundly impacted everyone's lives.

The independent UK COVID-19 Inquiry publishes its own running costs quarterly. Following the publication of the Inquiry's Financial Report for Quarter 2 2024-25 on 24 October 2024, I would like to update colleagues on the costs to the UK Government associated with responding to the UK COVID-19 Inquiry.

Figures provided are based upon a selection of the most relevant departments and are not based on a complete set of departmental figures and are not precise for accounting purposes. Ensuring a comprehensive and timely response to the Inquiry requires significant input from a number of key government departments, including, but not limited to, the Cabinet Office, the Department for Health and Social Care, the UK Health Security Agency, the Home Office and HM Treasury, many of which are supported by

the Government Legal Department. While every effort has been made to ensure a robust methodology, complexities remain in trying to quantify the time and costs dedicated to the Inquiry alone.

It should be noted that alongside full time resource within departments, Inquiry response teams draw on expertise from across their organisations. The staff costs associated with appearing as witnesses, preparing witnesses and associated policy development work on the UK Covid Inquiry are not included in the costs below.

#### Breakdown of Staff & Costs

The government's response to the UK COVID-19 Inquiry is led by Inquiry Response Units across departments.

- Number of UK COVID-19 Inquiry Response Unit staff: 284 Full Time Equivalents.
- Cost of UK COVID-19 Inquiry Response Unit staff: £5,303,000 (including contingent labour costs).
- Financial year 2024/25 (Q1 + Q2), total cost of UK COVID-19 Inquiry Response Unit staff: £10,352,000 (including contingent labour costs).

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Cumulative Total
Cost of UK COVID-19 Inquiry Response Unit staff (including contingent labour costs)	£5,049,000	£5,303,000	£10,352,000
Number of UK COVID-19 Inquiry Response Unit staff (Full Time Equivalents)	280	284	N/A

#### Total Inquiry Response Unit Legal Costs

Inquiry Response Units across government departments are supported by the Government Legal Department, co-partnering firms of solicitors, and legal counsel. These associated legal costs (excluding internal departmental advisory legal costs) for Q2 are below.

- Q2 legal costs: £5,818,000.
- Financial year 2024/25 (Q1 + Q2), total legal costs: £10,054,000.

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Cumulative Total
Total legal costs	£4,236,000	£5,818,000	£10,054,000

## Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation: 2022 Report and Government Response

[HLWS258]

**Lord Hanson of Flint:** My rt hon Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

In accordance with section 36 of the Terrorism Act 2006, Jonathan Hall KC, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, has prepared a report on the operation of the Terrorism Acts in 2022, which is being laid before the House today.

I am grateful to Mr Hall KC for his thorough report and have carefully considered the recommendations and observations included within. I am today also laying before the House the Government's response to the report (CP 1211). Copies of the report and the Government's response will be available in the Vote Office and will also be published on GOV.UK.

## Integrated National Transport Strategy

[HLWS263]

**Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill:** My Right Honourable friend, the Secretary of State for Transport (Louise Haigh), has made the following Ministerial Statement:

The Government has today set out its vision for the first integrated national transport strategy in over two decades, delivering on the commitment made in our manifesto.

For too long there has been no national plan for how transport should be designed and delivered in England, which has led to a fragmented and inefficient system that lacks join-up and cohesion. As a result, many of the people in our cities, towns and rural areas are poorly connected, with transport systems that don't work for them.

The Strategy will drive a cultural change where people are put at the heart of how we design, build and operate transport. At its core will be a single national vision for how transport systems should work together, empowering local leaders to deliver integrated local transport that meets the needs of their local community.

The transport system should be safe, reliable and accessible for everyone – improving passenger experience and unlocking equal access to opportunities across England. Walking and cycling should be the best choice for shorter journeys and, where driving is the right choice, these journeys should be smoother and more predictable. I want public transport to be a more attractive option and for people to experience a seamlessly integrated transport network that works for them.

Today, I have announced my vision for this Strategy and launched a public Call for Ideas, which gives everyone the chance to share views about their own transport experiences and what could be done to improve them.

In the new year, my Department will host a series of regional roadshows around the country, giving local leaders, transport operators and passengers the opportunity to help shape the way we deliver a truly integrated transport network.

This Government is committed to ensuring that transport works for everyone, and this Strategy will set the framework for how we meet people's needs today and in the future.

## Local Government Finance

[HLWS262]

**Baroness Taylor of Stevenage:** My Honourable Friend the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon OBE MP) has today made the following statement:

Today, the government has published details on the Local Government Finance Settlement for the next year for councils across England, and our wider ambitions for the sector over the course of this Parliament.

Councillors, officers and frontline staff are due our respect and appreciation for the work they have done to keep services going through very difficult times.

This government is under no illusion about the scale of the issues facing local government. We know that the demand for, and cost of, services has increased significantly – and that this has made the job for councils in recent years much harder. After a decade of cuts and fiscal mismanagement inflicted by the last government, compounded by spiralling inflation and a failure to grow our economy, councils of all political stripes are in crisis. Our fiscal inheritance means that there will be tough choices on all sides to get us back on the path to recovery, and it will take time.

We are taking immediate action to address these challenges. The Autumn Budget announced over £4 billion in additional funding for local government services, £1.3 billion of which will go through the Local Government Finance Settlement ('the Settlement'). Outside of the Settlement, the government has also announced additional funding to support local government across a range of priorities, including special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and homelessness services, a guarantee for income from the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (pEPR) scheme, as well as funding for local roads maintenance.

However, fixing the foundations of local government requires a programme of reform over the course of this Parliament. After years of delays, we will update the local government finance system. The current funding system is fundamentally broken, wasting taxpayers' money and starving authorities of the funding needed to provide the services we all rely on. The previous government agreed with us on the need to reform the system – proposing a similar approach in its 'Fair Funding Review' – but where they were unable to, we will finish the job by consulting on and implementing an up-to-date assessment of needs and resources, starting in 2026-27. This will be the first multi-year funding Settlement in ten years.

Reform of local public services, so that they focus on prevention, is also critical if we are to end the cycle of system failure and cost escalation. We will reform the services that have for too long been overlooked by the previous government, to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable residents who rely on them - particularly children's social care, homelessness and rough sleeping, special educational needs and disabilities, and adult social care services.

We will reset the relationship with local government, working as equal partners to ensure that the sector delivers continuous improvement for its communities, operates at the highest standards of probity, and provides value for money; all while giving the sector greater autonomy, certainty and flexibility. We will rebuild the system of accountability and oversight in local government, including an overhaul of local audit, scrutiny and standards, and will consult on strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England.

Our upcoming English Devolution White Paper will set out plans for a new governing settlement for England. This includes our landmark programme of devolution and reorganisation: giving powers to local leaders with skin in the game to generate new jobs, skills, and ultimately the growth that our public services rely on; and creating more efficient and accountable local authority structures, moving towards suitably sized unitary councils.

There is no magic wand. It will be a long, hard slog to work with councils to rebuild from the ground up, to deliver the services taxpayers need and deserve. Together, this year's Settlement and our programme of reform mark the first steps towards stabilising and rebuilding local government.

#### *Local Government Finance Settlement 2025-26*

This year's Settlement will begin to put us on the right course, spending taxpayers' money efficiently, and ensuring that funding goes to the places that need it most. The Autumn Budget announced over £4 billion in additional funding for local government services, £1.3 billion of which will go through the Settlement. Overall, the provisional Settlement will ensure that local government receives a real-terms increase in Core Spending Power of around 3.2%.

In addition, the government announced at the Autumn Budget that it will guarantee that local authorities in England will receive at least £1.1 billion in total from the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging scheme in 2025-26.

In 2025-26, the Settlement will target additional funding to the places that need it most. We will deliver additional funding for a number of priorities, including an additional £680 million via the Social Care Grant; a new Children's Social Care Prevention Grant, worth £250 million; and a new 'Recovery Grant', worth £600 million, for places with greater need and demand for services (we have used deprivation as a proxy for this) and less ability to raise income locally. This tackles head on the combination of rocketing demand; low tax bases which restrict the ability of local areas to raise income locally; and weakened resilience in many of these councils after substantial central government funding cuts during the 2010s. Alongside this, our commitment can be judged against a guarantee that no local authority will see a reduction in their Core Spending Power in 2025-26, after taking account of any increase in council tax levels. This will provide the protections required for all authorities, including district councils, to sustain their services.

Taking into account both money allocated to councils through the Settlement and the pEPR guarantee, every planning and social care council will have more to spend on services in 2025-26 than in 2024-25; and for almost all authorities we expect this to be an increase in real terms.

The government is clear in its commitment to tackle the issues that matter most to rural communities. We are focusing on the services that people rely on, such as social care, where pressures have grown across the country in recent years. This will deliver for rural areas just as it will for the whole country. In this context, funding from the Rural Services Delivery Grant will be repurposed through improved methods to target funding toward areas with greater need and demand for services, whilst investing in the priority services people care about such as adult and children's social care. The government believes that the Rural Services Delivery Grant is outdated and does not properly assess rural need. A large share of predominantly rural councils receive nothing from the Rural Services Delivery Grant. Put simply, it does not do as it claims. This is clearly not right, and the government is keen to hear from councils about how best to consider the impact of rurality on the costs of service delivery, and demand, as part of our longer-term consultations on local authority funding reform.

#### *Further support for local government*

The government is under no illusions about the scale of the issues facing local government, and this Settlement will begin to address the pressures that councils are under. We recognise, however, that we may see some continued instability as we adjust to the new system. Any council concerned about its financial position or its ability to set or maintain a balanced budget should contact MHCLG. The government has a framework in place to support councils in the most difficult positions. We will not seek to replicate conditions that made borrowing more expensive. Where a council in need of exceptional financial support views additional council tax increases as critical to maintaining their financial sustainability, the government will continue to consider requests for bespoke referendum principles. In considering requests, the government will take account of councils' specific circumstances, including the potential impact on local taxpayers.

The government has committed to provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional employer NICs costs. This applies to those directly employed by local government. More information will be provided at the provisional Settlement.

#### *Supporting households*

Many households are still feeling the impact of the prolonged cost of living crisis and the government is committed to protecting local taxpayers from excessive council tax increases. The previous government, and the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) in March 2024, both assumed core council tax and adult social care precept referendum principles of 3% and 2% respectively. The government is now formally confirming that it will maintain the proposed core (3%) and adult social care

precept (2%) referendum principles for next year. These strike the balance between protecting taxpayers and providing funding for local authorities.

We are ensuring that households receive the support they need from programmes outside the Settlement. The Autumn Budget confirmed the extension of the Household Support Fund (HSF) for a further year, from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2026. This will ensure low-income households can continue to access support towards the cost of essentials, such as food, energy and water. Funding of £742 million will be provided to enable the HSF extension in England, plus additional funding for the Devolved Governments through the Barnett formula to be spent at their discretion, as usual.

Proposals in the policy statement for the 2025-26 Settlement will be subject to the usual consultation process at the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in December 2024.

This Written Ministerial Statement covers England only. The policy statement will be deposited in the House libraries, and has been published on GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-finance-policy-statement-2025-to-2026>

## Republic of Korea Upgraded Free Trade Agreement: Round Three Negotiations

[HLWS259]

**Baroness Jones of Whitchurch:** My Rt Hon Friend the Minister for Trade Policy and Economic Security (Douglas Alexander MP) has today made the following statement:

The third round of negotiations on an upgraded Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the Republic of Korea (RoK) took place in Seoul between 5 and 14 November 2024.

The talks were the UK's first with the RoK since the Secretary of State for Business and Trade announced the government's intention to deliver the UK's FTA negotiations programme in July.

Economic growth is our first mission in Government and FTAs have an important role to play in achieving this. An upgraded FTA with the RoK will contribute to growth, jobs and prosperity in the UK, and provide long-term certainty to UK businesses. Improvements to the existing agreement will include a comprehensive chapter on digital trade, simplified rules of origin and a range of additional commitments that capture advancements in trade policy beyond our existing terms. Total trade between the UK and RoK was worth £17 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q2 2024. An upgraded FTA is intended to support further growth in this trade.

Negotiators made good progress on a number of areas, including but not limited to:

### *Digital trade*

Constructive discussions were held to build on the existing agreement's limited digital provisions. Discussions during the round covered a range of areas,

including data, trade digitalisation, and cooperation on emerging technologies.

### *Rules of Origin*

Good progress was achieved towards securing a new Rules of Origin chapter that supports current and future supply chains. Discussions covered the chapter's general provisions and origin procedures text, as well as Product Specific Rules.

### *Services and Business Mobility*

Productive discussions were held across a range of areas including domestic regulation, financial services, business mobility and professional and business services. The UK is seeking commitments to open up new opportunities for services trade.

### *Customs and Trade Facilitation*

Good progress was made, with sides agreeing a large part of the chapter. These commitments will make customs processes more predictable and facilitative.

### *Good Regulatory Practice*

Negotiators made significant progress towards agreeing the RoK's first Good Regulatory Practice chapter, which will support companies to operate in a more transparent and predictable regulatory environment.

### *Other Areas*

Positive discussions were held across a range of areas of the FTA including Supply Chains, Trade and Gender Equality, and Anti-Corruption.

The Government will only ever sign a trade agreement which aligns with the UK's national interests, upholding our high standards across a range of sectors, including protections for the National Health Service.

The fourth round of negotiations is expected to take place in London in the Spring of 2025. The Government will continue to work towards delivering outcomes in the FTA that secure economic growth for the UK and will update Parliament on the progress of discussions with the RoK as they continue to develop.

## School Funding: Provisional 2025-26 Allocations

[HLWS261]

**Baroness Smith of Malvern:** My Honourable Friend, Minister of State, Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell), has made the following statement:

Today we are confirming provisional funding allocations for 2025-26 through the schools, high needs and central school services national funding formulae (NFFs). Overall, core schools funding (including funding for both mainstream schools and high needs) is increasing by £2.3bn in 2025-26 compared to the previous year.

Within this £2.3bn, high needs funding is increasing by a further £1 billion in 2025-26 to help local authorities and schools with the increasing costs of supporting children and young people with SEND. The majority of this increase will be allocated through the high needs

NFF. Through this formula, local authorities will receive at least a 7% increase per head of their population aged 2-18, compared to their 2024-25 allocations, with some authorities seeing gains of up to 10%.

The overall high needs funding increase of £1.0 billion includes over £90 million to increase the high needs element of the 2024-25 core schools budget grant (CSBG) to a full-year equivalent of over £230 million. This will be incorporated with the other teachers' pay and pensions grants into a single CSBG (totalling £480 million) for special schools and alternative provision in 2025-26.

Funding for mainstream schools through the schools NFF is increasing by 2.23% per pupil compared to 2024-25. This includes a 1.28% increase to ensure that the 2024 teachers and support staff pay awards continue to be fully funded at national level in 2025-26. The 2025-26 schools NFF includes funding for pay and pensions costs that was previously allocated outside of the NFF, but is now being rolled into the formula – the 2024 to 2025 Teachers' Pay Additional grant (TPAG), Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution grant (TPECG) and Core Schools Budget grant (CSBG). This ensures that this additional funding forms an ongoing part of schools' core budgets.

On top of this rolled-in funding, the core factor values in the schools NFF are rising, to increase the funding available to schools. Through the minimum per pupil funding levels, every primary school will attract at least £4,955 per pupil, and every secondary school at least £6,465 per pupil.

Central school services funding funds local authorities for the ongoing responsibilities they continue to have for all schools, and some historic commitments that local authorities face. The total provisional funding for ongoing responsibilities is £342 million in 2025-26, which includes £4 million for additional costs of copyright licences for schools.

Across the schools, high needs, and central services NFFs, we have kept the structure of the formulae largely unchanged from 2024-25. This is to minimise disruption for schools and local authorities due to the shorter than usual timescales for the 2025-26 funding cycle, given the timing of the general election. For 2026-27 and beyond, we will consider changes to various funding formulae, recognising the importance of a fair funding system that directs funding where it is needed.

Updated allocations of schools, high needs and central schools services funding for 2025-26 will be published to the usual timescale in December through the Dedicated Schools Grant allocations, taking account of the latest pupil data at that point.

### **Serious Crime Prevention Orders in Terrorism Cases: Review of Police Powers**

[HLWS257]

**Lord Hanson of Flint:** My hon Friend the Minister of State for Security (Dan Jarvis) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

I have today published the Review of Police Powers to Apply for Serious Crime Prevention Orders in Terrorism Cases. The report has been laid before Parliament and it will be available in the Vote Office and online on GOV.UK.

This report is published and laid before Parliament to discharge the statutory duty under section 44 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2021.

### **Visa Sponsorship**

[HLWS260]

**Lord Hanson of Flint:** My hon Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Migration and Citizenship (Seema Malhotra) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

The Home Office is committed to minimising abuse of the visa and immigration system by unscrupulous employers. We are now setting out our first steps to deliver on our manifesto commitment to ban rogue employers from sponsoring overseas workers. We are setting out stronger controls to prevent employers who flout UK employment laws from sponsoring overseas workers, alongside going after those who show signs of non-compliance. No organisation is above the law or too big to fail.

For the first time, visa and employment laws will be brought into close alignment which will ensure those who come to work in the UK will have strong protections, especially in important areas of our economy such as Adult Social Care.

The government will deliver legislation for the flagship Fair Work Agency, ensuring fair and strong employment rights for all. Through this legislation, we will ensure that any business found guilty of serious employment law breaches, such as failing to comply with National Minimum Wage, will have robust action taken against them – up to and including having their visa sponsorship licences refused or revoked. Alongside this, we are strengthening powers to ensure the compliance of those on the register of licenced sponsors.

Over the last 2 years, there have been a growing number of allegations about sponsors seeking to charge workers for sponsoring them, particularly in the care sector. Where these charges are inappropriate, individuals can fall into work-related debt and experience a significant amount of harm. To combat this, we are now taking action to ensure that if a business wishes to recruit internationally, they will be required to pay for certificates of sponsorship, sponsor licences and the associated administration themselves. This will end the intolerable practice of recovering these costs from workers, which has led to the exploitation and unfair treatment of staff, particularly care workers who have been left in debt to their employers. These rules will apply to the Skilled Worker route first and will be in force by the end of the year. We intend to build on this in due course, widening it to other sponsored employment routes.

This government is also taking robust action against businesses that show signs of non-compliance such as committing minor visa rule breaches. Current rules impose Action Plans on businesses for only 3 months, but today we are committing to extending this to up to 12 months. While these longer Action Plans are in place, employers will be restricted in how they can use their licence, including limiting or removing the ability to sponsor overseas workers. If they do not comply with the Action Plan, fail to pay for the plan or make the necessary improvements by the end of their Action Plan, their sponsorship licence will be revoked.

We will take strong action against employers who do not comply with the rules, where necessary revoking their sponsor licence. We will strengthen this by making it harder for those with a long-term record of non-compliance to return to the sponsor register. The current penalties for breaking visa rules are too weak,

with all revoked businesses only facing 12 months of sanctions - regardless of their track record. That is why we will be introducing longer cooling off periods for businesses that repeatedly flout these rules or commit serious immigration breaches, barring them from applying for a sponsorship licence over this period and therefore hiring overseas workers.

This set of new measures shows how seriously the government takes maintaining the integrity of the visa and immigration system, and ensuring those who would seek to abuse the system face strong consequences. These measures are part of wider efforts to tackle the root causes behind the UK's long-term reliance on international workers and wider action to link migration policy with skills and wider labour market policy. All those who work in the UK deserve decent employment with decent employers - this Government is working to ensure that happens.



# Written Answers

Thursday, 28 November 2024

## Air Routes: Northern Ireland

Asked by *Lord Rogan*

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to encourage more competition between airlines on routes connecting Great Britain and Northern Ireland. [HL2561]

**Lord Henty of Richmond Hill:** We recognise the importance of maintaining a thriving and competitive aviation sector in the UK that supports Union connectivity. The UK aviation market operates predominantly in the private sector, and it is for airports to invest in their infrastructure and airlines to determine the routes they operate.

Northern Ireland is well served by airlines operating routes to Great Britain.

Airlines including Aer Lingus, British Airways, easyJet, Loganair and Ryanair operate routes from Northern Ireland to several cities across Great Britain.

## Air Traffic Control: Compensation

Asked by *Lord Young of Cookham*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether NATS Holdings will be required to compensate airlines for the consequences of its IT failure last year. [HL2590]

**Lord Henty of Richmond Hill:** The Government regrets the NATS operational failure and the impact this had on airlines and their customers. The Independent Review into this incident has now concluded and lessons will be learned. NATS is regulated against service targets set by the Civil Aviation Authority. There are annual incentives for NATS linked to its performance so if this falls below target levels it may incur penalties. However, NATS is not penalised for individual incidents such as the technical failure of August 2023.

## Bangladesh: Rohingya

Asked by *The Lord Bishop of St Albans*

To ask His Majesty's Government how much of their recently announced £10.3 million of additional funding to Bangladesh is dedicated to supporting Rohingya refugees. [HL2768]

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** The UK is a leading donor to the humanitarian response in Bangladesh and has provided £401 million to support the Rohingya refugees and host communities since 2017. During Minister West's recent visit to Bangladesh, she announced a further £10.3 million of UK funding. This will provide additional support to Rohingya refugees with clean water, hygiene and sanitation services, primary healthcare,

protection services and shelter materials. UK funding will also provide assistance to those impacted by natural disasters in Bangladesh earlier this year. The UK remains at the forefront of international efforts to support Rohingya refugees.

## British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty

Asked by *Lord Kempsell*

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Chapman of Darlington on 7 November (HL1811), which Chagossian groups or representatives they engaged with to ensure that the agreement to transfer sovereignty of the British Indian Ocean Territory to Mauritius reflects the interests of Chagossians. [HL2469]

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** There are a large number of Chagossian groups with a spectrum of views. Ministers and officials have sought to engage a range of Chagossian groups or representatives with an interest on a range of issues, including implementation of the agreement. We will continue to do so. We recognise the importance of the islands to Chagossians and have worked to ensure this agreement reflects their interests.

## Children: Gender Recognition

Asked by *Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town*

To ask His Majesty's Government for how long they have required the notice of deaths of children between 10 and 18 to include details of their "sex registered at birth" and "by which gender did the child identify at time of death"; why this categorization was introduced; for how long they have required the gender of the mother to be specified; and what were the reasons for that inclusion. [HL1675]

**Baroness Merron:** The Notification of Child Death Form, part of the National Child Mortality Database, continues to capture the sex of the child for anyone under the age of 18 years old, in line with sex being a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

Although questions relating to gender identity already existed within one part of the National Child Mortality Database collection, specifically for suicide and self-harm, the change in October expanded these questions to all deaths. This was to capture the language used by young people and their families to improve system learning and to support the prevention of future deaths.

The Child Death Notification Form does not require the gender of the mother to be specified.

## China: Maritime Law

Asked by *Lord Alton of Liverpool*

To ask His Majesty's Government how they plan to oppose China's efforts to reinterpret international maritime laws, particularly with regard to 'innocent passage' and exclusive economic zones. [HL2657]

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** We are committed to international law, the primacy of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and to freedom of navigation and overflight. We oppose any action that raises tensions or the risk of miscalculation. We do not take sides in the South China Sea sovereignty disputes. We encourage all parties to settle their disputes peacefully through the existing legal mechanisms, particularly UNCLOS.

### China: Taiwan

*Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the recommendations set out in the report Mapping out the UK's response to grey zone escalations against Taiwan, published by the China Strategic Risks Institute in May. [HL2536]

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** The UK has a clear interest in peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and has restated its importance alongside G7 partners. We consider the Taiwan issue to be settled peacefully by the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait through constructive dialogue, without the threat or use of force or coercion. We do not support any unilateral attempts to change the status quo. This includes increased Chinese assertiveness towards Taiwan.

### China: Uyghurs

*Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool*

To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of China about reports by human rights groups that repatriated or abducted Uyghur refugees are likely to be tortured or executed by that government. [HL2598]

*Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the statement by the Assistant United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that deportations of Uyghurs to China are "a flagrant violation of international law", as reported by The New York Times on 10 November; whether they have raised this issue at the UN Human Rights Council or the UN General Assembly; and if not, why not. [HL2599]

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** This Government stands firm on human rights, including over Xinjiang, where China continues to persecute and arbitrarily detain Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities. We raise our concerns at the highest levels: the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary both raised human rights recently with their Chinese counterparts President Xi and Foreign Minister Wang. We continue to co-ordinate efforts with our international partners to hold China to account: we joined a statement led by Australia at the UN General Assembly last month, and joined a statement led by the USA at the Human Rights Council in September. Both statements noted evidence of torture in Xinjiang,

among other human rights violations. The UK is committed to upholding the principle of non-refoulement and has repeatedly called on other countries to respect their obligations under international human rights law, including under the Convention Against Torture.

### Church of England: Offences against Children

*Asked by Lord Birt*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they plan to establish a public inquiry into how the Church of England has responded to allegations of paedophilia. [HL2494]

**Baroness Twycross:** The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse was established to consider whether important institutions — including the Anglican Church — had taken seriously their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse. The Inquiry published a report, entitled "The Anglican Church - Safeguarding in the Church of England and the Church of Wales". The report, published in October 2020, is available on the Inquiry's website, alongside the response to its recommendations from the Church of England and the Church of Wales. The response by the Church of England was considered by the House of Bishops on 19 October 2020 and a unanimous vote supported and accepted all of the Inquiry's recommendations, particularly the two most significant themes arising from the report; firstly, proper redress for victims and survivors, and secondly, greater independence in safeguarding decision making.

The Chair of the Inquiry, Professor Alexis Jay, subsequently conducted an independent review, on behalf of the Church of England, into the future of Church Safeguarding, which was published in February 2024. The Government does not plan to establish a further inquiry.

### Customs: Digital Technology

*Asked by Baroness Neville-Rolfe*

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Statement by the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury on 5 November (HCWS188), what are the specific reasons for the pause in delivery of the UK Single Trade Window programme. [HL2552]

**Lord Livermore:** The Government has paused delivery of the Single Trade Window (STW) as part of the allocation of overall SR25 funding, due to the challenging wider fiscal context. We will provide a further update on the STW as part of the next phase of the Spending Review.

*Asked by Baroness Neville-Rolfe*

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Statement by the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury on 5 November (HCWS188), what assessment

they have made of whether (1) Deloitte, and (2) IBM, have met the requirements of their Single Trade Window contract with HMRC; and what is the status of the formal dispute resolution process between HMRC and Deloitte. [HL2553]

**Lord Livermore:** Following the decision to pause work on the Single Trade Window, HMRC is working with its delivery partner to assess the impact of this decision on existing contracts, including an assessment of delivery to date. There is no formal dispute resolution process running.

*Asked by Baroness Neville-Rolfe*

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Statement by the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury on 5 November (HCWS188), what assessment they have made of legislative barriers preventing Home Office and HMRC disclosing information collected via safety and security declarations to law enforcement partners; and what steps they are taking to remove such barriers. [HL2555]

**Lord Livermore:** HMRC regularly discloses information to the Home Office for customs and immigration purposes, which the Home Office may disclose onwards (with consent as required by legislation) to law enforcement partners. This allows for the effective delivery of those functions.

HMRC is also permitted to share safety and security information with law enforcement partners when that information is directly requested.

HMRC and the Home Office are working together to ensure safety and security information is available to those who need it.

## Department for Education: Data Protection

*Asked by Lord Storey*

To ask His Majesty's Government when they plan to publish the full report of the 2020 compulsory audit of the Department for Education, carried out by the Information Commissioner. [HL2566]

**Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The department will publish an updated audit closure report in Quarter 1 of 2025/26 on completion of the remedial actions.

## Educational Visits: France

*Asked by Lord Foster of Bath*

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Hanson of Flint on 12 November (HL2099), what discussions they have had with other countries to introduce a similar scheme for school visits to the UK. [HL2550]

**Lord Hanson of Flint:** To date, we have had no such discussions.

## Employers' Contributions

*Asked by Baroness Neville-Rolfe*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of (1) the cost of the increase in National Insurance contributions for employers, and (2) the savings from the increase in employment allowance for the smallest businesses, on the hospitality sector. [HL2580]

*Asked by Baroness Neville-Rolfe*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of (1) the cost of the increase in National Insurance contributions for employers, and (2) the savings from the increase in employment allowance for the smallest businesses, on the retail sector. [HL2581]

*Asked by Baroness Neville-Rolfe*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of (1) the cost of the increase in National Insurance contributions for employers, and (2) the savings from the increase in employment allowance for the smallest businesses, on small and medium-sized enterprises. [HL2582]

*Asked by Baroness Neville-Rolfe*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of (1) the cost of the increase in National Insurance contributions for employers, and (2) the savings from the increase in employment allowance for the smallest businesses, on pharmacies. [HL2583]

**Lord Livermore:** A Tax Information and Impact Note was published on 13 November alongside the legislation when it was introduced to Parliament.

The latest forecasts for tax revenues were published alongside the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) October Economic and Fiscal Outlook. These forecasts are based on economic determinants, including wage growth and employment levels.

The government has protected the smallest businesses 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 employer NICs at all next year.

More than half of employers see no change or gain overall from this package and eligible employers will be able to employ up to four full-time workers on the National Living Wage and pay no employer NICs.

## Euston Partnership

*Asked by Lord Berkeley*

To ask His Majesty's Government what is the current status of the Euston Partnership; which government department it reports to; and what are its terms of reference. [HL2610]

**Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill:** The status of the Euston Partnership Board remains unchanged and reports to the Department for Transport. A new chair will be announced in due course. The Board's purpose and meeting minutes are published on GOV.UK.

*Asked by Lord Berkeley*

To ask His Majesty's Government who is the Chair of the Euston Partnership; who are the members of the Board; when it last met; and whether it publishes its minutes of meetings. [HL2611]

**Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill:** The interim chair of the Euston Partnership Board is John Reed, Managing Director of the Euston Partnership. A new chair will be announced in due course.

Details of the Board membership are published in the minutes from each meeting. The Euston Partnership Board last met on 14th November 2024.

### Female Genital Mutilation

*Asked by The Lord Bishop of St Albans*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they will take to ensure better co-ordination of guidance given to medical practitioners, teachers, and faith leaders on reporting and protecting girls from female genital mutilation. [HL2564]

**Lord Hanson of Flint:** Tackling Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is an important part of this Government's mission to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. We are focused on preventing these crimes from happening in the first place, supporting and protecting survivors and those at risk, and bringing perpetrators to justice.

Frontline professionals and agencies with safeguarding responsibilities are crucial to protecting survivors and those at risk of FGM. Statutory guidance is therefore in place for agencies with safeguarding responsibilities to equip them with information on the law on FGM and to provide detailed advice on identifying FGM cases and how to coordinate appropriate responses.

The guidance also makes clear the importance of reporting for safeguarding professionals. It includes explicit reference to the mandatory reporting duty of some professionals (teachers, health and social care workers), making clear that under the law, they must rapidly inform the police of 'known' FGM cases among under-18s.

In addition to statutory guidance, there is an official FGM Resource Pack available for professionals which highlights what works in protecting survivors and those at risk of FGM. The Resource Pack includes training and assessment resources, as well as information about available specialist support services to enable coordinated responses.

Finally, the Government has developed free e-learning on FGM for frontline staff in healthcare, police, Border Force and children's social care.

### Forced Marriage Unit

*Asked by The Lord Bishop of St Albans*

To ask His Majesty's Government how many cases the Forced Marriage Unit provided advice and support to in (1) 2019, (2) 2020, (3) 2021, (4) 2022, and (5) 2023. [HL2565]

**Lord Hanson of Flint:** The joint Home Office and Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) lead efforts to combat forced marriage both at home and abroad, providing support and advice for victims, those at risk, and professionals, through its public helpline and inbox. The support offered ranges from providing information on forced marriage general enquiries and guidance to assistance in repatriation to the UK (for victims overseas).

The FMU publishes annual statistics that represent only the cases that have been reported to the FMU. Forced marriage is a hidden crime, so these figures will not reflect the full scale of the abuse. For this reason, the FMU is also involved in activities to raise awareness of forced marriage among key professions.

Data for the years 2019 – 2023, regarding FMU cases, is as follows:

- 2023: the FMU received 802 contacts relating to possible forced marriage or FGM (FMU can assist in relation to Forced Marriage and FGM where they impact British Nationals). This figure includes general enquiries and comprises 280 cases of forced marriage where advice and support were provided.
- 2022: the FMU received 847 contacts (including general enquiries) and provided advice and support in 302 cases.
- 2021: the FMU received 1,205 contacts (including general enquiries) and gave advice and support in 337 cases.
- 2020: the FMU received 1,159 contacts (including general enquiries) and provided advice and support in 759 cases.
- 2019: Reporting in this year did not distinguish between general enquiries and cases where advice and support were provided. A total of 1,355 cases were recorded.

A more detailed breakdown of these statistics is available for the years 2019 – 2023 and is accessible to the public via GOV.uk.

### Hong Kong: Human Rights

*Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool*

To ask His Majesty's Government what impact they expect the meeting between the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Indo-Pacific) and Hong Kong's Convenor of the Executive Council to have; and what discussions they have had, if any, with Hong Kong's Convenor of the Executive

Council regarding human rights violations in Hong Kong. [[HL2534](#)]

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** Minister West met with Regina Ip on 31 October in an official capacity. Human rights were raised as part of the discussion.

The UK will continue to speak often and candidly with Hong Kong authorities across both areas of contention as well as areas for cooperation. Engagement with representatives of Hong Kong and China is pragmatic and necessary to support UK interests.

*Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Indo-Pacific) intends to raise issues relating to human rights in Hong Kong, including the forthcoming sentencing of 45 Hong Kong pro-democracy activists, convicted under National Security Law, the case of political prisoners including Joshua Wong, Gwyneth Ho, Jimmy Lai and Owen Chow, and transnational repression, during her visit to Hong Kong. [[HL2535](#)]

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** The Minister for the Indo-Pacific Catherine West MP visited Hong Kong for a two-day programme of engagements. Minister West met with stakeholders across the Hong Kong Government, the business community and the public to discuss areas of co-operation and challenge on areas of contention.

In her engagements with Hong Kong Government officials, the Minister flagged concerns over the erosion of Hong Kong's rights and freedoms, including under the National Security Law.

### Hong Kong: Trials

*Asked by Lord Shinkwin*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Indo-Pacific) discussed the forthcoming sentencing of the 45 pro-democracy activists under the National Security Law with Hong Kong's Convenor of the Executive Council during their recent meeting. [[HL2522](#)]

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** Minister West met with Regina Ip on 31 October in an official capacity. Human rights were raised as part of the discussion.

The UK will continue to speak often and candidly with Hong Kong authorities across both areas of contention as well as areas for cooperation. Engagement with representatives of Hong Kong and China is pragmatic and necessary to support UK interests.

### Hospitality Industry: Employers' Contributions

*Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick*

To ask His Majesty's Government what support they are providing to the hospitality industry following the

rise in national insurance announced in the Autumn Budget. [[HL2367](#)]

**Baroness Jones of Whitchurch:** The Government is creating a fairer business rate system by introducing permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses from 2026-27 and extending the current relief for 1 year at 40%. From 2026-27 the Government intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality and leisure properties with rateable values less than £500,000, which will be funded by the introduction of a Large Business Multiplier from 2026-27 on properties with a rateable value of £500,000 and above (less than 1% of all properties.)

The Government recognises the need to protect the smallest employers which is why we have more than doubled the Employment Allowance to £10,500, meaning more than half of businesses with NICs liabilities either gain or see no change next year. Businesses will still be able to claim employer NICs reliefs including those for under 21s and under 25 apprentices, where eligible. We will transform the apprenticeship levy into a more flexible growth and skills levy to support business and boost opportunity.

We are working further with the Hospitality Sector Council to address other strategic issues such as high street regeneration, skills, sustainability, and productivity.

### Immigration Controls

*Asked by Baroness Neville-Rolfe*

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the 2025 UK Border Strategy, published on 17 December 2020, whether they intend to publish a report in 2024 setting out progress against that strategy; and whether they will list the metrics that are being used to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the border. [[HL2554](#)]

**Baroness Twycross:** The 2025 Border Strategy was produced by the previous government. This Government is working to secure the UK's borders, while reducing trade friction as part of the reset of our relationship with the European Union. The government will continue to provide updates in due course.

### Immigration Controls: Airports

*Asked by Baroness Hoey*

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to create designated-British-passports-only entry points at UK airports. [[HL2551](#)]

**Lord Hanson of Flint:** Whilst there are currently no plans to change queuing arrangements at the UK border, those arrangements remain under constant review in order to prioritise security, maintain fluidity and ensure that we continue to run our border in the UK's best interests.

As the quickest and most efficient method of crossing the border, we encourage all eligible passengers to make use of the e-Gates at our ports of entry where possible.

## Import Controls

Asked by *Baroness Neville-Rolfe*

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Statement by the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury on 5 November (HCWS188), what is the status of the Home Office's Cerberus Project in relation to using safety and security declarations to target Border Force activity. [HL2556]

**Lord Hanson of Flint:** Safety & Security declarations are a key dataset that will enhance Home Office capability to protect the border. We have already undertaken a discovery exercise on the operationalisation of this data for the purposes of detecting high risk movements of goods. On the basis of that discovery our approach in 2025 will be to:

- Use the existing HMRC Safety & Security Great Britain (S&S GB) system to risk assess EU traffic using the new EU S&S data. This will commence as soon as data is available on 31 January 2025.
- Build new risking capability to exploit the data within our Cerberus Border Risking Data Analytics system. This work will commence in Q4 24-25 and continue throughout the SR period. It will ensure that we make the best use of S&S data by fusing it with wider border data and intelligence. Our 2025 priority is the roll off (RoRo) ferry mode where we see the greatest threat and largest operational dividend.

The Home Office already uses Rest of the World S&S data to risk RoW traffic.

## Integrated Care Boards: Debts

Asked by *Lord Scriven*

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Merron on 8 November (HL2000), from which budget lines and areas NHS England provided the additional funding outlined; how much, if any, of the additional funding came from allocated capital budgets and what the slippage this has caused; and how much, if any, funding came from non-capital budget lines and what are the opportunity costs this has incurred. [HL2640]

**Baroness Merron:** There have been no cuts to operational services to make the £2.3 billion of funding available. The majority came from central NHS England funding, held as part of the start year financial plans for this purpose. The remainder came from savings identified during the subsequent planning round, including taking a higher risk appetite on the extent to which underspends or savings would be identified during the course of the year. No funding came from savings on allocated capital budgets.

## Materials Handling Equipment: Licensing

Asked by *Earl Attlee*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment, if any, they have made of requiring operators of mobile cranes to be licensed in a similar way to those licensed under the Goods Vehicles Licensing of Operators Act 1995. [HL2603]

**Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill:** Mobile cranes mounted on an HGV chassis are not exempt from the requirements contained in the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995. However, cranes which are specially built, or adapted for some lifting operations are exempt from operator licensing, and other regulations, covering Construction and Use, Authorised Weight, and Goods Vehicle Type Approval Regulations. These specially built vehicles are instead authorised to be used on the public highway by Road Vehicles (Authorisation of Special Types) (General) Order 2003 (STGO). The rationale for the difference is that these vehicles are typically used for the purposes of construction and demolition and are normally only used on the public highway on a limited basis to move between sites.

The Department for Transport has previously considered bringing mobile cranes which are not based on an HGV chassis into the scope of operator licensing, most recently when undertaking a review of plating and testing requirements of heavy vehicles which are exempt from roadworthiness testing. At that time, it was not deemed proportionate to include them in the scope of operator licensing. This position is kept under review.

## Mental Health Services

Asked by *Lord McCrea of Magherafelt and Cookstown*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to improve mental health support services across England; and what consultations they have held on this issue with the devolved administrations. [HL2710]

**Baroness Merron:** As part of our mission to build a National Health Service that is fit for the future and that is there when people need it, we will recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers across child and adult mental health services in England to reduce delays and provide faster treatment, which will also help ease pressure on busy mental health services. We will also introduce access to a specialist mental health professional in every school in England, and roll out Young Futures hubs in every community.

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has made clear his commitment to ongoing engagement and collaboration with the devolved governments. The next Health and Social Care Interministerial Group is scheduled for 11 December 2024.

In addition, officials have established a regular Four Nations Meeting on mental health reform, in which the Mental Health Bill's measures and potential implications for the devolved administrations are discussed.

### **NHS England: Remote Working**

*Asked by Lord Patten*

To ask His Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by Baroness Merron on 4 November (HL1572), what assessment they have received, if any, from NHS England regarding the impact of working from home on efficiency and outcomes in that organisation. [HL2419]

**Baroness Merron:** The Department does not set NHS England's working from home policies, and it has not received any assessment from NHS England regarding the impact of working from home on efficiency and outcomes.

### **NHS: Muslims**

*Asked by Lord Godson*

To ask His Majesty's Government what is the legal relationship between NHS England and the NHS Muslim Network; and how much the NHS spent or committed to spend in supporting the work of the NHS Muslim Network in (1) 2023–24, and (2) 2024–25. [HL2574]

**Baroness Merron:** The NHS Muslim Network supports Muslim colleagues, allies, and friends, by providing a forum for Muslim staff to share their experiences and to raise issues faced by this staff group. There is no legal relationship between NHS England and the NHS Muslim Network, and this is the same for NHS England and all staff networks in the National Health Service.

Staff networks are not allocated budgets but can apply for funding to support activities which improve staff experience or patient outcomes. In 2023/24, NHS England spent £2,655 supporting the NHS Muslim Network activities. So far in 2024/25, NHS England has not spent or committed any funding to support the NHS Muslim Network activities.

### **Northern Ireland Protocol and Windsor Framework**

*Asked by Lord McCrea of Magherafelt and Cookstown*

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have, if any, to remove the Northern Ireland Protocol and Windsor Framework. [HL2755]

**Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent:** The Government is committed to the Windsor Framework and to protecting the UK internal market. In accordance with the law, the Government last month initiated the consent vote process in the Northern Ireland Assembly so that it

may make its democratic decision on the continued application of Articles 5-10 of the Windsor Framework. The outcome of that vote is a matter for MLAs to decide.

### **Offenders: Electronic Tagging**

*Asked by Lord Patten*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of breaches of conditions in past 12 months associated with (1) curfew tags, (2) location tags, and (3) alcohol tags, respectively. [HL2559]

**Lord Timpson:** To establish the number of those with an electronic monitoring requirement that have breached their electronic monitoring condition, or other licence conditions in the past 12 months would require a review of thousands of individual case records held on prison and probation systems. This information could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

### **Pontypool and New Inn Station: Repairs and Maintenance**

*Asked by Lord Murphy of Torfaen*

To ask His Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with Network Rail on the estimated completion date for works to Pontypool and New Inn station, and on the causes for the delay. [HL2673]

**Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill:** The Welsh Government has provided funding to Torfaen County Borough Council for the upgrade of Pontypool and New Inn railway station. Questions relating to the progress of these works should be addressed to Transport for Wales who are responsible for the operation of the station.

### **Prime Minister's Chief of Staff: Pay**

*Asked by Baroness Vere of Norbiton*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether the Chief Secretary to the Treasury approved the salary of the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff as per the senior pay controls process. [HL1343]

**Baroness Twycross:** Following his appointment as the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, senior pay control processes were followed and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury provided salary approval.

### **Property Management Companies: Qualifications**

*Asked by Baroness Neville-Rolfe*

To ask His Majesty's Government what is the difference in qualification requirements between property managers in the (1) private, and (2) social, housing sectors since the passing of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. [HL2579]

**Baroness Taylor of Stevenage:** The Social Housing (Regulation) Act introduced a power for the Regulator of Social Housing to set a Competence and Conduct Standard for the social rented sector. The previous Government consulted in February 2024 on a set of proposals which would require senior housing managers and executives to gain a suitable qualification in housing management. This Government committed in September to introducing a Competence and Conduct Standard. We are currently considering responses received to the consultation, and will set out our next steps in the coming months.

For homes outside the social housing sectors, the Government announced in a Written Ministerial Statement on 21 November 2024 that it will strengthen regulation of managing agents to drive up the standard of their service. As a minimum, this should include mandatory professional qualifications which set a new basic standard that managing agents will be required to meet. We will consult on this next year.

As this work progresses, we will continue to consider how to ensure appropriate competency requirements are applied across the housing management sector.

### **Property Management Companies: Standards**

*Asked by Baroness Thornhill*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of whether regulation of property managers in the private sector would improve standards. [HL2589]

**Baroness Taylor of Stevenage:** There is a strong case for greater regulation of managing agents. Too many leaseholders suffer from poor quality services and abuse at the hands of unscrupulous agents, and management of some buildings has become a more complex operation. As set out in the Written Ministerial Statement of 21 November 2024, the Government will therefore strengthen regulation of managing agents to drive up the standard of their service. As a minimum, this should include mandatory professional qualifications which set a new basic standard that managing agents will be required to meet. We will consult on this matter next year.

### **Rented Housing**

*Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to increase the number of rental properties available. [HL2569]

**Baroness Taylor of Stevenage:** We will build 1.5 million high-quality homes over this Parliament and deliver the biggest increase in affordable housing for a generation.

In addition, at the Budget the Chancellor set out details of an immediate one-year cash injection of £500 million

to top up the existing Affordable Homes Programme to deliver up to 5,000 new social and affordable homes.

The Renters' Rights Bill will also improve the experience of private renting in England, providing greater security and stability for tenants while ensuring that landlords can reclaim their properties when the need to.

### **Taiwan: Cybersecurity**

*Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool*

To ask His Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to establishing a cybersecurity dialogue with Taiwan similar to the UK–Singapore Cyber Dialogue; and whether they intend to support Taiwanese participation in the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, to address shared cybersecurity challenges. [HL2654]

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** The UK–Singapore Cyber Dialogue held on 13 June 2023 in London was followed by a second iteration in Singapore from 12–13 June 2024. The Dialogues strengthen our close ties on cyber collaboration and align our approaches in cyber governance and tackling cyber threats.

The UK's longstanding position on Taiwan has not changed. We do not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan but a strong, unofficial relationship with deep and growing ties in a range of areas, underpinned by shared democratic values. We support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organisations as a member where statehood is not a prerequisite, and as an observer or guest where it is.

### **Taiwan: International Civil Aviation Organization and International Maritime Organization**

*Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool*

To ask His Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Maritime Organization to promote participation by Taiwanese companies and other stakeholders, in response to China's increased military activities in the Taiwan Strait. [HL2602]

**Baroness Chapman of Darlington:** We have a clear interest in peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. We consider the Taiwan issue one to be settled peacefully by the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait through constructive dialogue, without the threat or use of force or coercion. We do not support any unilateral attempts to change the status quo. This includes increased Chinese assertiveness towards Taiwan.

The UK believes the people of Taiwan have a valuable contribution to make on issues of global concern, and the UK supports Taiwanese participation at international



organisations as a member where statehood is not a prerequisite, or as an observer or guest where it is.

### **Terrorism: Northern Ireland**

*Asked by Lord Empey*

To ask His Majesty's Government how much compensation they have paid in the past five years in response to claims made by relatives of those shot and killed by soldiers in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. [HL2549]

**Lord Coaker:** In the last five years the Ministry of Defence has paid £4,682,122 in compensation to relatives of individuals fatally shot by members of the British Army in Northern Ireland between 1969 to 2007.

### **Wheelchairs**

*Asked by Baroness Thomas of Winchester*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they will take to ensure that integrated care boards are providing sufficient suitable wheelchairs in all parts of the country to enable wheelchair users, particularly children, to access one without delay. [HL2645]

**Baroness Merron:** Integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for the provision and commissioning of local wheelchair services, including children's wheelchair services, and the development of their local wheelchair service eligibility criteria, based on the needs of their local population. NHS England supports ICBs to

commission effective, efficient, and personalised wheelchair services.

NHS England is taking a number of steps to reduce regional variation in the quality and provision of National Health Service wheelchairs, and to support ICBs to reduce delays in people receiving timely intervention and wheelchair equipment. These include:

- establishing a national wheelchair dataset, as data has been collected quarterly from Clinical Commissioning Groups, now ICBs, since July 2015, which looks at waiting times at the various stages across the pathway to enable targeted action if improvement is required, to support the drive for improvements in wheelchair services;
- developing wheelchair currencies, with wheelchair currencies having been developed by NHS England to offer a structured way for providers, commissioners, and systems to understand the complexity of a patient population and to support commissioning conversations;
- introducing personal wheelchair budgets and legal rights for people, which offers a clear framework to commission personalised wheelchair services which are outcomes focused and integrated; and
- co-producing a wheelchair quality framework, which is being co-produced with key stakeholders and people with lived experience, is due to be published by the end of the financial year 2024/25, and will set out quality standards and statutory requirements for ICBs, such as offering personal wheelchair budgets.

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