



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 10 February 2025 and the information is correct at the time of publication (07:29 P.M., 10 February 2025). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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

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

ANSWERS

ATTORNEY GENERAL

■ Courts

Charlotte Cane: [\[27733\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Justice on backlogs of court cases.

Lucy Rigby:

I welcome the strong action already taken by the Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor to bring down the outstanding caseload that this Government inherited, and measures introduced to help ensure victims have swift access to justice.

These actions include extending magistrates' court sentencing powers to 12 months and funding additional Crown Court sitting days, taking them to the highest levels since financial year 2015/16 .

In the longer term, the Lord Chancellor has commissioned an independent review of the criminal courts, led by Sir Brian Leveson, to consider the merits of wider reforms, as well as assessing the efficiency and timeliness of court processes.

These important issues have been discussed as part of our cross-government approach through the Safer Streets Mission Board.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Companies

Andrew Griffith: [\[28624\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, on what date the Incorporated Companies in the UK statistical release for October to December 2024 will be published.

Justin Madders:

Companies House aims to release the specific statistics for October to December 2024 by the end of February 2025. Further information about the reason for the delay will accompany the statistics when they are published. Updates on this matter are available on the gov.uk website:

[Incorporated companies in the UK October to December 2024 - Official statistics announcement - GOV.UK](#)

■ Companies House: Artificial Intelligence

Sir John Hayes:

[\[27832\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, for what purposes Companies House has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

Justin Madders:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is at the heart of the Government's plan to kickstart an era of economic growth, transform how we deliver public services, and boost living standards for working people across the country. Companies House trialled Microsoft Copilot to support administrative tasks. It has deployed specific AI tools to generate tailored communications content and develop new IT services more quickly.

Companies House is also developing and testing advanced analytics, machine learning and AI that detect suspicious activity and identify trends.

■ Post Boxes

Martin Wrigley:

[\[28323\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, which Department is responsible for ensuring the mandatory installation of post boxes.

Justin Madders:

The government is not responsible for ensuring the mandatory installation of post boxes.

Section 29(6) of the Postal Services Act 2011 requires Ofcom, as the independent regulator, to "secure the provision of sufficient access points to meet the reasonable needs of users of the universal postal service".

Royal Mail is currently required by Ofcom's Designated Universal Service Provider (DUSP) condition 1.8.1 to provide a post box within half a mile, by straight line distance, of the premises of at least 98% of users of postal services.

■ Rules of Origin

Andrew Griffith:

[\[28625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the answer of 4 February 2025 to Question 26598 on Rules of Origin, whether he has had discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the economic impact on the UK of joining the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean Convention on Rules of Origin.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Business and Trade meet regularly to discuss a wide range of pertinent issues, including through relevant Cabinet Committee meetings. At this time we do not currently have plans to join the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean Convention on Rules of Origin, and we will not be giving a running commentary on specific discussions taking place. Any decisions will follow a robust and pragmatic consideration of benefits, risks and the national interest.

■ UK International Consumer Centre**Laurence Turner:** [\[29383\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 27 January 2025 to Question 25524 on UK International Consumer Centre, if he will place a copy of the agreement referenced in the Commons Library.

Justin Madders:

I regret that the grant funding agreement cannot be submitted to the Commons Library. Grant letters and details are commercially sensitive for both the parties.

Releasing these details would, or would be likely to, prejudice the interests of those concerned by damaging the confidence which customers, suppliers or investors have, threatening their ability to obtain supplies or secure finance, and potentially weakening their position in a competitive environment by revealing market-sensitive information or information of potential usefulness to others such as its competitors.

■ World Health Organisation: Finance**James McMurdock:** [\[28441\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department has plans to increase funding to the World Trade Organisation.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The UK's funding to the World Trade Organization (WTO) is, as for all members, determined by the WTO itself, as agreed to by the UK under the conditions of membership in Article VII of the Marrakesh Agreement establishing the WTO, which entered into force on 1 January 1995. The membership fees are calculated by use of an established formula based on each Member's share of international trade (based on trade in goods, services and intellectual property rights for the last five years for which data is available).

CABINET OFFICE**■ Cabinet Office: Disciplinary Proceedings****Mr Richard Holden:** [\[29018\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many civil servants in his Department have been disciplined for (a) plagiarism and (b) making false statements on a CV when applying for a job in the latest 12 month period for which figures are available.

Georgia Gould:

The Cabinet Office has no record of any civil servants in the Department being disciplined in the latest 12 month period for plagiarism or making false statements on a CV when applying for a job.

■ Cabinet Office: Environment Protection

Ellie Chowns:

[\[27963\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' policy paper entitled Environmental principles policy statement, published on 31 January 2023, whether his Department provides training further to section 19 of the Environment Act 2021 in the (a) statutory instrument capability programme, (b) parliamentary capability team training programme and (c) Policy Profession programme.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

A range of guidance is available to civil servants when preparing legislation, including on section 19 of the Environment Act 2021.

Ahead of the duty coming into force on 1 November 2023, guidance was issued to civil servants working on legislation. In January 2024, the Guide to Preparing Explanatory Memoranda (EMs) to Statutory Instruments was published and included information on this duty. The next update to The Guide to Making Legislation, which will be published shortly, will include guidance on the policy statement.

■ Cabinet Office: Sanitation

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[26613\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the policy is of (a) his Department, (b) the Office for Equality and Opportunity and (c) the Civil Service People Group on transgender people's use of single sex facilities.

Georgia Gould:

The Government People Group's policy and guidance in this area are currently being revised.

As a department, the Cabinet Office aligns with the Government People Group's model Civil Service policy. As such, the Cabinet Office policy will be revised in due course.

The Office for Equality and Opportunity is part of the Cabinet Office for operations and staffing purposes. As such, its policy is aligned with wider Cabinet Office policy.

■ Cabinet Office: Staff

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[27920\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many all-staff calls have been held in his Department since 4 July 2024; and how many staff attended each of those calls.

Georgia Gould:

There have been a total of 10 all-staff calls during this period.

The number of staff attending these calls were:

- 2552

- 2332
- 1926
- 2078
- 1885
- 1916
- 1702
- 3903
- 2725
- 3003

■ Civil Servants: Recruitment

Mr Richard Holden: [28581]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will list (a) each (i) scheme and (ii) programme for the Civil Service Fast Stream and (b) how many people were recruited to the civil service through each in 2024.

Georgia Gould:

There were 15 separate Fast Stream schemes in 2024. The information requested is publicly available within the Fast Stream Annual Report 2024 linked below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-fast-stream-recruitment-data-2024>

Mr Richard Holden: [29020]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 19 November to Question 6094 on Cabinet Office: Civil Servants, for what reason does the Government not publish details of appointments below SCS2 grade.

Georgia Gould:

Approval is required from the Civil Service Commission for any appointment by exception at SCS2 or above. A list of such appointments by exception (SCS2 and above) are published and updated regularly on the Commission's website.

Aggregated data is published on details of appointments by exception below SCS2 grade. There has been no change to these arrangements since the Rt Hon member was a minister in the department.

■ Government Departments: Communication and Marketing

Mr Richard Holden: [27919]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the estimated spending on Government (a) communications and (b) marketing is in 2024-25 (a) before and (b) after the Autumn Budget 2024.

Georgia Gould:

Historical data on communication and marketing spend is listed by department on the Government efficiency, transparency and accountability [page](#) on GOV.uk.

The Government Communications Service is expecting to save £85 million in 2024-25 from reducing unnecessary communications spend.

■ Government Departments: Directors**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[28582\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 21 January 2025 to Question 23481 on Government Departments: Directors, what steps his Department is taking to avoid conflicts of interest in relation to consultant lobbyists serving as a non-executive director of a Department.

Georgia Gould:

The interests of non-executive board members and public appointments will continue to be updated and published bi-annually as part of an established process as set out in the [Non-Executive Board Member declaration of interests process - GOV.UK](#).

All financial interests and all remunerated outside employment, work, memberships and appointments should be declared. Disclosure requirements and clear conflict of interest policies are detailed in the guidance to support the department in managing any conflicts of interest. These include recusal from relevant matters, limitations on any gifts, transparent lobbying practices and robust mechanisms for ethics enforcement within government.

■ Gulf Cooperation Council: Investment**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[27998\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what information his Department holds on the value of investments in the UK that are held by the sovereign wealth funds of each state in the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Georgia Gould:

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

A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 3rd February is attached.

Attachments:

1. Letter from the National Statistician [PQ27998 (1).pdf]

■ Independent Adviser on Ministerial Standards: Email**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[27918\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the email address is for correspondence from hon. Members to the Independent Adviser on Ministerial Standards.

Georgia Gould:

As was the case when the Rt Hon member was a Minister in the department, correspondence from Members of Parliament addressed to the Independent Adviser on Ministerial Standards can be submitted to the Cabinet Office using the contact details available in the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-ministers-and-responsibilities/list-of-ministerial-responsibilities-html>

■ Legislation: Impact Assessments**Mr Richard Holden:****[27923]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question HL2719 on Legislation: Impact Assessments, if he will publish that letter.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

It is a long-established precedent that internal government correspondence is not normally shared publicly, therefore we will not publish the letter. However, we continue to press Departments on their responsibility on these matters.

■ Lobbying**Phil Brickell:****[28748]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he plans to respond to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee of Session 2023–24, Lobbying and Influence: post-legislative scrutiny of the Lobbying Act 2014 and related matters, published on 2 May 2024, HC 203.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

I refer the Honorable Member to PQ UIN 20199.

■ Ministers: Codes of Practice**Mr Richard Holden:****[29004]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2024, to Question 13759 on Business: Meetings, if he will take steps to publish supplementary guidance to the Ministerial Code on how Ministers should record meetings with business representatives who have paid money to the political party to which they belong to facilitate a meeting.

Georgia Gould:

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK. Published declarations include the purpose of the meeting and the names of external individuals and organisations in attendance.

Updated guidance on ministers' meetings was published to GOV.UK on 30 January 2025 at the following address: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ministers->

[overseas-travel-and-meetings-publication-guidance/ministers-overseas-travel-and-meetings-publication-guidance](#).

■ **Ministers: Members' Interests**

Mr Richard Holden:

[28575]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December 2024 to Question 18670 on DCMS: Official Visits and with reference to the guidance entitled Ministers' gifts (given and received), travel, hospitality received and meetings with external organisations and individuals, published on 2 April 2024, for what reason data from 1 July to 30 September 2024 was not published by the end of December 2024.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Transparency data for Ministers, Special Advisers and Senior Officials, including for the period of 1 July to 30 September 2024, was published on GOV.UK on 30 January 2025.

This data was published alongside the new monthly Register of Ministers' gifts and hospitality, which can be found at the following address - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/register-of-ministers-gifts-and-hospitality>.

■ **Official Cars: Procurement**

Bradley Thomas:

[28834]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he plans to procure British manufactured vehicles for use by the Government Car Service.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Government Car Service (GCS) is committed to supporting British businesses wherever possible, and approximately half of the vehicles in the GCS fleet are manufactured in the United Kingdom. However, public sector procurement is governed by clear principles, including value for money, transparency, and fair competition, which guide GCS purchasing decisions.

This approach ensures that all vehicles are assessed based on objective criteria such as quality, cost-effectiveness, and suitability for purpose. Where British manufactured vehicles meet GCS requirements and offer the best overall value, they are prioritised in line with procurement regulations.

■ **Prime Minister: Aviation**

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[29217]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the cost of helicopter travel by the Prime Minister is since 4 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

None.

■ Public Appointments: Political Activities**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[27922\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether his Department has issued guidance on the publication of declarations of political activity for public appointees.

Georgia Gould:

I refer the Rt Honorable Gentleman to the answer to PQ 25696, answered on 30th January 2025.

■ Special Advisers: Pay**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[28583\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 27 January 2025 to Question 24650 on Special Advisers: Pay, what changes were made to special adviser pay policy since October 2024.

Georgia Gould:

The updated pay ranges for Special Advisers will be published in the next Annual Report on Special Advisers, which will include the changes referenced in answer to Question 24650.

■ UK Integrated Security Fund**Stephen Gethins:** [\[28520\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much and what proportion of its budget the UK Integrated Security Fund has allocated for (a) conflict (i) prevention and (ii) resolution and (b) peacebuilding in the (A) 2024-25 and (B) 2025-26 financial years.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Integrated Security Fund (ISF) came into operation on 1 April 2024 and has a budget of almost £1bn for Financial Year 2024-25. The Fund prioritises spending on those geographies and thematic issues that pose the greatest direct threat to the UK. Activity focussed on conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding are embedded into programmes across the ISF. However, these are not tracked as individual or separate components. The annual ISF budget for 2025-26 will be published shortly.

Stephen Gethins: [\[28521\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the annual budget is for the UK Integrated Security Fund in the (a) 2024-25 and (b) 2025-26 financial years.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Integrated Security Fund (ISF) came into operation on 1 April 2024 and has a budget of almost £1bn for Financial Year 2024/25. Exact spend for the Fund will be published in the 2024/25 ISF Annual Report later in the year. The annual ISF budget for 2025-26 will be published shortly.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**■ BBC: Finance****James McMurdock:**[\[27784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will have discussions with the BBC on (a) the introduction of advertising, (b) the creation of a specific tax for streaming services, (c) making BBC Radio listeners pay for the service and (d) other options for future funding.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government remains committed to the licence fee for the remainder of the current Charter period.

Ministers and officials in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have regular discussions with the BBC on a range of important issues including BBC Charter Review and funding. There are a range of ways the BBC could be funded and we are thinking creatively about options for the future, to ensure we future-proof our national broadcaster for many years to come. Funding the BBC through general taxation is not being considered.

■ Board of Women's Sport**Mr Louie French:**[\[27426\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, when the Board of Women's Sport (a) last met and (b) next plans to meet; and whether she plans to update the terms of reference of that board.

Stephanie Peacock:

This Government fully endorses the recommendations of Karen Carney OBE's Independent Review of Women's Football, including the recommendation to form a Board of Women's Sport.

The Minister for Sport held a meeting with all stakeholders responsible for implementing the Carney Review in November, and will shortly reconvene groups to focus on specific elements of the review in order to drive tangible progress.

The Board of Women's Sport will be reconvened in spring 2025 to ensure adoption of best practice in key areas and to make sure the learnings of the review, alongside emerging issues, can be explored across the sector.

■ Broadcasting: Children**Munira Wilson:**[\[27623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 17 January 2025 to Question 22681 on Broadcasting, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact on the protection of children online of including podcasts in the broadcasting code.

Stephanie Peacock:

Ofcom, the independent regulator, is responsible for drafting and maintaining the Broadcasting Code, which outlines standards for television and radio broadcasting in the United Kingdom. The Government has no plans to make an assessment of the potential impact on the protection of children by including online podcasts in the Broadcasting Code.

■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Employers' Contributions**Rupert Lowe:**[\[27795\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what estimate she has made of the cost to her Department of the proposed increase in employer National Insurance contributions for financial year 2025-26.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government will provide support for departments and other Exchequer-funded public sector employers for additional Employer National Insurance Contributions costs only. This funding will be allocated to departments in the usual way, in line with the approach taken under the previous Government's Health and Social Care Levy.

■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Public Relations**John Cooper:**[\[27766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how much (a) her Department and (b) each of its Arm's Length Bodies has spent on external public relations since 5 July 2024; and which firms that funding went to.

Stephanie Peacock:

Public relations activity is a subset of communication spend. As such, this data is not held. The Government Communication Service encourages the prioritisation of low and no cost public relations activities wherever possible. It is recommended that all external communications support should be procured through approved government frameworks, with strict controls in place to ensure cost-effectiveness.

■ Gambling: Advertising**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:**[\[27091\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she has taken with the Advertising Standards Authority to tackle online gambling advertisements (a) targeting children and (b) failing to disclose the presence of (i) loot boxes and (ii) other gambling-like features in mobile games.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith:[\[27092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of a ban on gambling advertisements in video games PEGI rated 18 and under.

Stephanie Peacock:

Gambling operators must ensure that their advertising is not targeted at children and must not appear in media created for children or for which children make up 25% or more of the audience. Operators must also ensure that they take all reasonable steps to use data available to exclude individuals on the basis of their age or other relevant criteria. These rules are required as part of the Gambling Commission's Licence Conditions and Codes of Practice (LCCP). The ASA continues to closely monitor and enforce compliance but, if needed, can refer gambling operators' advertising to the Gambling Commission which can and do take action. The ASA's rulings on breaches of loot box advertising code requirements are available at:

<https://www.asa.org.uk/codes-and-rulings/rulings.html>

DCMS officials regularly meet the Advertising Standards Authority to discuss a range of issues, including its view on whether ads for apps, video games and other online products that feature random-item purchasing mechanisms sufficiently disclose this fact in the content of the advertisement. Through ' [Guidance on Advertising In-game Purchases](#) ' and ASA rulings, the ASA system sets and applies standards to mitigate the potential for ads to mislead consumers about the cost of in-game purchases, whether games contain them, and how they might affect gameplay. The ASA's sister body, the Committee of Advertising Practice, is currently deliberating whether and, if so, on what basis, to take further action in this aspect of its regulation.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith:**[27508]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had recent discussions with gambling (a) companies and (b) operators on (i) advertising to (A) children and (B) other vulnerable people and (ii) their compliance with advertising codes of conduct.

Stephanie Peacock:

As the Gambling Minister set out in her speech at the GambleAware conference in December 2024, the industry has now been set a clear task to further raise standards to ensure that gambling advertising is appropriate, responsible, and does not exacerbate harm, and this work will be monitored closely.

There are a range of robust rules in place to ensure that gambling adverts, wherever they appear, are socially responsible and do not target children. The ASA continues to closely monitor and enforce compliance but, if needed, can refer gambling operators' advertising to the Gambling Commission which can and does take action.

■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme**Shivani Raja:****[27588]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will provide additional funding beyond the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme to support the maintenance of historic places of worship in (a) Leicester East constituency and (b) England.

Chris Bryant:

I note that the honourable member is asking us to spend more money and would be grateful if they could advise me on which other budget should be cut or tax should be commensurately increased. There is a range of funding available via DCMS and the Department's Arm's-Length Bodies that supports historic places of worship. These include the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme; the National Lottery Heritage Fund, who have committed to investing around £100m between 2023 and 2026 to support places of worship; the Churches Conservation Trust, which funds repairs and maintenance of over 350 churches in the CCT portfolio; and Historic England's Heritage At Risk grants, funding £9 million worth of repairs to buildings on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register between April 2024 and March 2025.

Media: Freedom of Expression**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[26983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will take steps to (a) ensure that organisations campaigning against free media are not publicly funded and (b) protect freedom of speech for media outlets.

Stephanie Peacock:

All funding decisions are carefully considered, and subject to DCMS spend controls and governance.

The Government is committed to protecting media freedom, which is essential to a strong and functioning democracy. The UK has an independent, self-regulatory system for the press, while broadcast news is regulated by the independent regulator Ofcom through the Broadcasting Code. The Government cannot interfere with Ofcom's regulatory or operational decisions, including how Ofcom chooses to regulate content.

To help ensure journalists operating within the UK can do so free from physical, legal and online threats, abuse and violence, I chair the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists, together with the Minister for Safeguarding and Violence against Women and Girls. The Committee facilitates collaboration between government, journalism, policing, prosecution services and civil society in support of this aim. I will continue to work with members on this important issue, including by delivering the National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists.

Public Libraries: Berkshire**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[27881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the availability of public libraries in (a) Slough and (b) Berkshire.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[27882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the funding available for public libraries in (a) Slough and (b) Berkshire.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[27883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to support public libraries in Slough.

Chris Bryant:

Libraries are a vital public resource, helping to inspire, educate, support and entertain people of all ages and backgrounds. The range of outcomes they help to achieve is substantial and varied, and the government is therefore committed to ensuring that libraries continue to thrive.

Local authorities in England have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. They are responsible for assessing the needs of their local communities and designing a library service to meet those needs within available resources.

The department, as part of its regular monitoring and review of changes to local authority library service provision, has engaged with Slough Council and the other Councils in Berkshire on a number of occasions to discuss issues related to their respective library service.

I understand that as at 31 December 2023 the statutory library provision delivered by Slough Council was four local authority-run static libraries and of the other five Councils in Berkshire (Bracknell Forest, Reading, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead and Wokingham) there were 46 local authority-run static libraries.

The government is committed to getting local government back on its feet. The final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025-26 makes available over £69 billion for local government, which is a 6.8% cash terms increase on 2024-25.

■ **Tourism: Local Government**

Blake Stephenson:

[\[R\] \[27307\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the adequacy of funding provided to local authorities to promote tourism.

Chris Bryant:

I note that the honourable member is asking us to spend more money and would be grateful if they could advise me on which other budget should be cut or tax should be commensurately increased. Government recognises the vital role that local authorities play in supporting the Visitor Economy and showcasing the unique assets of their areas. Through DCMS' Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) programme - that is being rolled out across England to transform the landscape of destination management organisations, and the two Destination Development pilots - Local Authorities are being provided with strong local and regional leadership and governance, enabling them to develop their visitor economies in their respective destinations. VisitBritain has also launched a new international marketing campaign

this year - Starring Great Britain - to ensure that tourism remains a key driver of economic growth across the country.

■ Youth Services: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes: [\[27106\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how the National Youth Strategy will help tackle barriers to opportunity for children and young people in (a) South Holland and The Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire.

Stephanie Peacock:

The National Youth Strategy will be co-produced with young people and the youth sector to ensure it meets the needs of young people right across the country. This Government is also committed to tackling barriers to opportunity for all young people through the Opportunity Mission.

DEFENCE

■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

Laura Kyrke-Smith: [\[902658\]](#)

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

Luke Pollard:

As we approach the third anniversary of this unprovoked attack, our commitment to stand with the Ukrainian people is absolute.

This year the UK will give more military support to Ukraine than ever before, with a £4.5 billion boost. This will see the UK procure hundreds more air defence systems, drones and essential equipment support to sustain Ukrainian forces on the front line.

This week the Secretary of State will host the Ukraine Defence Contact Group in Brussels, galvanising international support to Ukraine.

Luke Myer: [\[902659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to support jobs in the defence sector.

Maria Eagle:

Defence is not just a cornerstone of national security but also a powerful engine for growth. Defence spending already supports 239,000 UK jobs in industry, including around 8,000 apprenticeships, building the capabilities of the future. The Strategic Defence Review and the Defence Industrial Strategy will secure skilled, rewarding, exciting careers in Defence, that support families and communities across our nation.

Christine Jardine: [\[902663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to help protect female members of the armed forces from sexual harassment.

Al Carns:

Sexual Harassment has no place in our Armed Forces.

Every individual must be treated with dignity and respect.

We have a Zero Tolerance policy in Defence – unacceptable behaviour of any kind is not tolerated people will be held accountable.

All criminal behaviour is investigated by the Service police and those found to be below the standard will be met with sanctions, including Termination of Service.

Kevin Bonavia:[\[902664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent discussions he has had with NATO allies on strengthening European security.

Luke Pollard:

We regularly engage with NATO and our Allies on strengthening Euro-Atlantic security. The Prime Minister met the NATO Secretary General on 3 February, underlining our unshakeable commitment to the Alliance. European Allies must take greater responsibility for our own security, spending more and producing more. That is the message the Prime Minister and Defence Secretary continue to deliver to our Allies.

■ Armed Forces: Engineers**Derek Twigg:**[\[25173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many engineers there were in post in the (a) Royal Navy, (b) Army and (c) RAF in each year since 2010.

Luke Pollard:

This information is being withheld as it would prejudice the capability, security and effectiveness of UK Armed Forces, and could provide tactical advantage to hostile forces.

■ Boeing E-7**Mr Mark Francois:**[\[28473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the expected Minimal Deployability Capability is for the E-7 Wedgetail.

Maria Eagle:

The Wedgetail aircraft will be able to conduct operational tasking after entering service at Initial Operating Capability.

Further details regarding the capability of Wedgetail are withheld as release would prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the Armed Forces.

■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty**Bradley Thomas:** [\[28381\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions (a) Ministers and (b) officials in his Department have had with US counterparts on the British Indian Ocean Territory since President Trump took office.

Luke Pollard:

The Secretary of State for Defence held an introductory call with US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on 31 January 2025, during which they discussed a wide range of security issues. Ministers and officials will continue to hold regular meetings with their US counterparts, including on the long-term protection of the base on Diego Garcia as a shared UK and US priority.

■ Clyde Naval Base and RNAD Coulport: Planning**Siân Berry:** [\[27939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17711 on Clyde Naval Base and RNAD Coulport, if he will publish the (a) name, (b) purpose, (c) expected in-service date and (d) forecast cost of planned infrastructure projects at HMNB Clyde that do not fall within the Clyde Infrastructure programme.

Maria Eagle:

There are a number of infrastructure projects at different levels of maturity that do not fall within the Clyde Infrastructure Programme at HMNB Clyde, however as they consist of nuclear and non-nuclear supporting infrastructure to support submarine operations it would not be appropriate to share further details for security reasons.

■ Eastern Europe: Armed Forces**Jeremy Corbyn:** [\[28882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the presence of UK troops as part of the NATO's Exercise Steadfast Dart 25 in Eastern Europe on the risk of escalating tensions in that region.

Luke Pollard:

In an unpredictable security environment, exacerbated by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, we must remain ready to deter all threats and to defend all Allies. Exercises like Steadfast Dart enhance our collective defence and deterrence, and are planned and publicised well in advance. NATO's actions are defensive, transparent and proportionate. NATO and Allies fully respect our international obligations, and abide by both the letter and the spirit of the OSCE's Vienna Document on military transparency.

■ Gurkhas: Pensions

Samantha Niblett:

[28865]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what progress his Department has made on granting retrospective pension arrangements to Gurkha veterans who served in the armed forces.

Al Carns:

The Government greatly values the contribution that Gurkhas make in support of the UK's security and defence and takes its responsibilities to our Gurkha veterans very seriously.

The legal basis for Gurkha pensions has been upheld by three Judicial Reviews since 2003, including a case that went to the European Court of Human Rights in 2018. The Government maintains that the 1948 Gurkha Pension Scheme continues to provide a good income for our Gurkha veterans living in Nepal, in accordance with the original scheme design.

The Government remains committed to supporting Gurkhas and their families during and after their service with the British Army, as demonstrated by the increase in funding via the Gurkha Welfare Trust, including a £24 million uplift to the medical and healthcare Grant-in-Aid already in place and an extension in principle to that Grant in Aid beyond 2029.

We remain open to conversations about what more could be done to meet the welfare needs of Gurkhas, in both the UK and in Nepal. As the Minister for Veterans and People, I am looking forward to meeting the Nepali Ambassador in the coming weeks.

■ Hawk Aircraft

David Reed:

[R] [28861]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 16 January 2025 to Question 23535 on Hawk Aircraft, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the high fatigue index in the remaining Hawk T1 fleet on the total number of available UK-based training hours for personnel.

Maria Eagle:

Hawk T1 is not employed in a flying training role. The Hawk T1 airframes are solely allocated to sustaining the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, The Red Arrows.

As given in the answer to Question 23535, across all airframes we have retained more than sufficient overall remaining available fatigue life to ensure all Red Arrows tasking until 2030 as planned.

David Reed:

[R] [28862]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 16 January 2025 to Question 23535 on Hawk Aircraft, what plans his Department has for the replacement of

the Hawk T1 by 2030; and whether it is his policy to maintain a sovereign jet training capability in this process.

Maria Eagle:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 5 December 2024 for Question 16460 to the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mark Francois).

Attachments:

1. Hawk Aircraft [UIN 16460.docx]

■ **Hawk Aircraft: Repairs and Maintenance**

David Reed:

[R] [\[28860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the annual cost is to maintain the Hawk T1 fleet under the existing fleet maintenance contract.

Maria Eagle:

There are two support contracts in place to support the Hawk TMk1 to its out of service date in March 2030 and the Hawk TMk2 to 2033. Specific terms and conditions are subject to commercial confidentiality. In the financial year from 2023-24 the value for solely the TMk1 aircraft maintenance was £27.7 million.

■ **Military Aircraft: Training**

David Reed:

[R] [\[28857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many UK personnel have been trained on jet aircraft in (a) the UK and (b) overseas in each of the last five years; and in which countries overseas training has taken place.

Luke Pollard:

In the last five years there have been 82 UK personnel trained on fast jet (FJ) aircraft in the UK and 22 UK personnel trained on fast jet aircraft overseas. Overseas training has taken place in the USA and Italy.

FINANCIAL YEAR	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	TOTAL
FJ Pilots trained in the UK	24	28	5	7	18	82
FJ Pilots trained overseas	0	0	7	8	7	22

David Reed:

[R] [\[28858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what was the total cost to the public purse of training personnel on jet aircraft in (a) the UK and (b) overseas in each of the last five years; and what proportion of the total training budget each represents.

Luke Pollard:

The UK Military Flying Training System (UKMFTS) cost for the Fast Jet training element over the last 5 years was circa £500.4 million. That includes fixed and multiple variable costs such as fuel, instructor and trainee salary, infrastructure/accommodation upkeep, aerodrome operations and runway refurbishment.

The cost detail for Fast Jet Outsourced Training over the last five years is being withheld to protect commercial confidentiality. Outsourcing services are negotiated Government to Government via Memorandums of Understanding and Technical Arrangements and therefore it is not appropriate to disclose specific cost detail.

It is not possible to state what proportion of the total training budget this represents as the information is not held in this format and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

■ Military Attachés

James Cartlidge:

[\[28550\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to expand the Defence Attaché network.

Luke Pollard:

The Ministry of Defence remains committed to strengthening our global defence partnerships and ensuring our national security interests are well represented abroad. Whilst we carefully prioritise locations where a greater presence will have the most impact, the outcomes of the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) and subsequent Spending Review will have a direct impact on Defence's desire to expand the Diplomatic Network.

2024 saw the assignment of a residentially accredited Defence Attaché to a newly established Defence Section in Montevideo (Uruguay). Whilst in 2025, Defence Sections in Baku (Azerbaijan) and Yerevan (Armenia) are scheduled to open. Expansion of the Defence Attaché network aligns with our broader foreign and security objectives, ensuring we are well-positioned with allies and partners to respond to emerging threats and evolving geopolitical challenges.

James Cartlidge:

[\[28551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Defence Attaché network for engaging with overseas partners.

Luke Pollard:

The effectiveness of the Defence Attaché (DA) network is subject to continuous assessment through diplomatic feedback, and operational impact reviews and the intelligence reporting received from the host nation.

The outcomes of the Strategic Defence Review have the potential to see the expansion and growth of the DA network, thereby having an intrinsic link to its level of effectiveness.

Recent assessments indicate that the DA network continues to play a critical role in strengthening strategic alliances, enhancing interoperability with key allies and partners, facilitating defence exports, and advancing bilateral agreements.

■ Ministry of Defence: Correspondence

Dr Caroline Johnson:[\[28960\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many and what proportion of items of correspondence from Parliamentarians received by (a) his Department, (b) him and (c) his Ministers in each month since August 2024 have not yet received a substantive response.

Luke Pollard:

We are committed to ensuring Government responses to correspondence are timely, accurate, and high quality.

All correspondence from Parliamentarians to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is processed centrally. Whether an individual item of correspondence was originally received by an individual Minister is not recorded.

The number of items of correspondence received each month and the number and proportion awaiting a response as at 6 February 2025 are as follows.

DATE RECEIVED	NUMBER RECEIVED	NUMBER AWAITING RESPONSE	PROPORTION AWAITING RESPONSE
August 2024	204	2	1%
September 2024	229	3	1%
October 2024	311	6	2%
November 2024	300	11	4%
December 2024	258	16	6%
January 2025	301	202	67%
February 2025	29	28	97%

For the small proportion of correspondence which are late, these often pertain to complex cases, and MOD has the processes in place to ensure these will be answered as soon as possible.

■ **Navy: Guided Weapons**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[28466\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Royal Navy's land-attack missile capability.

Luke Pollard:

The Royal Navy has a potent land attack capability, equipped to strike from above, on, and beneath the water. This includes Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles launched from the Astute Class Submarines, Paveway IV precision guided bombs carried by the F-35B aircraft and the Naval Strike Missile, which is being fitted to surface ships.

The Strategic Defence Review, announced in July 2024, will comprehensively evaluate all aspects of defence, including the Royal Navy's land attack capability.

James Cartlidge:

[\[28537\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent progress he has made on replenishing stocks of all types of Aster missile in use by the Royal Navy.

Maria Eagle:

Negotiations to purchase Aster 30 have concluded and a Contract placement, via the multi-national procurement agency OCCAR, is expected imminently. The shorter-range Aster 15 munition is being phased out under the replacement programme Sea Viper CAMM.

James Cartlidge:

[\[28538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has had recent discussions with his French counterpart on the acquisition of additional Aster missiles for use by the Royal Navy.

Maria Eagle:

Whilst the Secretary of State for Defence has not met recently with the French Defence Minister, negotiations to purchase Aster 30 have concluded and a Contract placement is expected imminently.

■ **Ukraine: Humanitarian Aid**

Graeme Downie:

[\[28255\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 13 January 2025 to Question 21725 on Ukraine: Humanitarian Aid, when he plans to make a decision on future funding for MOAS frontline medical evacuation services in Ukraine.

Luke Pollard:

We have engaged with Defence staff in Kyiv and the Ukrainian Embassy in London and it does not appear that this is a prioritised and supported request from the

Ukrainian Government. While we recognise the important work the charity undertakes in-country we are unable to meet MOAS' request.

I regret the disappointment this will cause for the charity and the staff in Ukraine and recognise the impact this will have on MOAS' ability to continue to provide this capability. However, we must be led by the needs of the Ukrainian Government and ensure that UK taxpayers' money is appropriately allocated where Ukraine deems the need is greatest.

■ Veterans: Nuclear Weapons

Sir Julian Lewis: [\[28877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent steps he has taken to facilitate the (a) recovery and (b) disclosure of medical records held in (i) the Merlin database and (ii) other Departmental archives of service personnel present at UK atomic bomb tests.

Al Carns:

The Government is deeply grateful to all those who participated in the UK nuclear testing programme. We recognise their Service and the huge contribution they have made to the UK's security.

I have asked officials to look seriously into unresolved questions regarding medical records as a priority, and this is now underway.

This work will enable us to better understand what information the Department holds in relation to the medical testing of Service personnel who took part in the UK nuclear weapons tests.

EDUCATION

■ Home Education: Neurodiversity

Adam Dance: [\[28872\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential (a) administrative and (b) psychological impact of children not being on school registers on home schooling families of neurodivergent children.

Stephen Morgan:

There is currently no duty on parents to notify local authorities when they have elected to home educate their child. The 'Children Not in School' measures in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will help remedy this by placing a duty on local authorities to maintain compulsory registers of all children not in school in their areas, and accompanying duties on parents and out-of-school education providers to provide information for these registers.

Information recorded on registers could include whether an eligible child has special educational needs. This would enable local authorities to provide tailored support to these children and their families, and for a more accurate assessment to be made of the impact on these children of not being on school registers. Statutory guidance will

be produced to go alongside the measures, which will set out requirements for local authorities and parents.

The department has conducted an Equalities Impact Assessment on the 'Children Not in School' measures. As part of this assessment, we have considered the potential impact on children with special educational needs and disabilities, including those who are neurodivergent.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Derbyshire**

Natalie Fleet: [\[28096\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many special school places exist in Derbyshire; and if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of this number.

Natalie Fleet: [\[28097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure all children who require a special school place are provided with one in Derbyshire.

Stephen Morgan:

In 2023, the department collected data from local authorities on available capacity in special schools, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) units and resourced provision for the first time. The capacity data tells us approximately how many places local authorities think were available on 1 May 2023. In Derbyshire, there were approximately 1150 special school places.

The statutory duty to provide sufficient school places, including for pupils with SEND, sits with local authorities. The department supports local authorities to provide suitable school places for children and young people with SEND through annual high needs capital funding.

We have now announced £740 million of capital for high needs funding in the 2025/26 financial year. This can be used to deliver new places in mainstream and special schools, as well as other specialist settings. It can also be used to improve the suitability and accessibility of existing buildings.

The department understands that local authorities will want certainty about the allocation of the high needs provision capital funding for the 2025/26 financial year as soon as possible, in order to develop their approach to supporting children and young people with SEND or who require alternative provision in their area. We will confirm allocations for the £740 million funding later in the spring.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Training**

Munira Wilson: [\[27890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an estimate of the number and proportion of practitioners in the (a) early years and (b) childcare sectors that have received training on SEND identification.

Stephen Morgan:

The department knows that children's early years are crucial to their development, health and life chances. We recognise the importance of the early identification of needs to ensure the right support is put in place as early as possible to ensure children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and developmental differences and delays can get the best start in life.

The department wants all early years educators to feel confident in identifying and supporting developmental differences and delays, including knowing how to access further support and advice when needed. To support this we have funded training for up to 7000 special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), have published new resources, including a free online training module and SEND assessment guidance to help early educators to identify, assess and support children in their settings, and announced funding support for the Nuffield Early Language Intervention programme for this academic year for children needing extra support with their speech and language development.

When a child is between two and three-years-old, educators must review their progress and provide parents or carers with a brief written summary of their development in key areas. This summary highlights strengths, areas needing additional support, and strategies to address any concerns. Guidance is available to help educators accurately assess a child's development and work closely with parents and professionals to provide necessary support.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO**■ Biofuels: Carbon Capture and Storage****Barry Gardiner:**[\[28878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change draft rules on the attribution of emissions reductions from bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) to the country of origin on UK subsidies for BECCS.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

All UK greenhouse gas emissions are compiled and reported consistent with international guidance from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC 2006 Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories provide a methodology for the reporting of emissions from bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) that the UK will follow when the technology is operating at sufficient scale. In line with all IPCC reports, the 2006 Guidelines were written by world-leading experts, underwent multiple rounds of review from other experts and Governments and were formally accepted by Governments including the UK.

■ British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme

Ann Davies:

[\[28867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make it his policy to replicate the changes announced for the Mineworkers Pension Scheme to the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

I refer the honourable member to the response from my honourable friend the Minister for Industry on 29 January 2025 (UIN 25410).

■ British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme: Stafford

Leigh Ingham:

[\[29352\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many former British Coal employees were recipients of the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme in Stafford constituency.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

As of 30 October 2024, there were 141 members of the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme in Stafford constituency.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Correspondence

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[28953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many and what proportion of items of correspondence from Parliamentarians received by (a) his Department, (b) him and (c) his Ministers in each month since August 2024 have not yet received a substantive response.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government attaches significant importance to the effective and timely handling of correspondence from MPs, either directly or on behalf of their constituents. The Department's correspondence team has already implemented an improvement plan that will deliver a more effective and streamlined process.

The correspondence performance of all Whitehall Departments is published quarterly. The full data for 2024 is due to be published soon by the Cabinet Office. Data for Quarter 1 of 2025 will be published in due course.

■ Drax Power Station

Nadia Whittome:

[\[28656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, on how many occasions the Drax power station has claimed that 100% of the wood it burnt is from sustainable sources since 2012.

Michael Shanks:

DESNZ does not hold detailed data on the sourcing of biomass.

Drax's compliance with sustainability criteria is overseen by Ofgem, the independent energy regulator, and the Low Carbon Contracts Company as the counterparty for the Contract for Difference Scheme.

Government works closely with LCCC and Ofgem to ensure that generators only receive subsidies for biomass that meets our sustainability criteria.

■ Industrial Energy Transformation Fund

Jim Allister: [\[28279\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether the Industrial Energy Transformation Fund will be reopening for applications.

Sarah Jones:

In the 2024 Autumn Budget, the Government committed £163 million to continue delivery for all current projects in Phases 1 and 2 and the first Phase 3 competition window of the IETF (Spring 2024) through to completion.

Ministers are considering opportunities to support UK industry to decarbonize and reach Net Zero as part of the Spending Review. Further announcements will be made in due course.

■ Members: Correspondence

Andrew Griffith: [\[28694\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when he plans to respond to the letter dated 19 December 2024 from the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs.

Michael Shanks:

My noble Friend Lord Hunt of Kings Heath wrote to the hon Member on 6 February about Rampion 2.

■ North Sea Oil: Carbon Emissions

Ayoub Khan: [\[28367\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the Answer of 30 January 2025 to Question 25957 on North Sea Oil: Carbon Emissions, whether he plans to appeal the Edinburgh Court of Session's ruling of 30 January 2025.

Michael Shanks:

The Government is carefully considering the Court of Session's judgment to inform its decisions on next steps.

■ Offshore Industry: North Sea

Andrew Bowie: [\[27871\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions he has had with the companies involved with the Jackdaw and Rosebank fields proposals on the potential financial risks relating to the time taken for those proposals to be considered;

and if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the time taken for those to be considered on levels of future investment in the North Sea.

Michael Shanks:

Details of Ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly on gov.uk.

The Government is still considering the Court's decision, and the responses to the recent consultation on updated Environmental Impact Assessment guidance, and will engage further with all relevant stakeholders as soon as possible.

■ **Pylons: Housing**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[27833\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of the proposed Grimsby to Walpole National Grid pylon project on house prices in affected areas in Lincolnshire.

Michael Shanks:

The Government does not assess the impact of new transmission network infrastructure on house prices.

However, landowners, businesses, and homeowners that have electrical equipment, such as pylons or towers, sited on their land have the right to compensation for the value of their land, as well as for any losses or expenses incurred. Acquiring authorities can also put in place discretionary schemes offering additional compensation.

■ **Wylfa Power Station**

Llinos Medi:

[\[28629\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of designating Wylfa as a preferred site for a new nuclear energy generation project.

Michael Shanks:

On 6 February 2025, we published the draft of a new nuclear National Policy Statement (EN-7) for consultation. EN-7 proposes to employ a criteria-based approach, rather than listing potentially suitable sites, to empower nuclear developers to identify suitable sites for their projects.

The Government wants previously listed sites, such as Wylfa, which was acquired by Great British Nuclear in 2024, to meet their potential and EN-7 acknowledges the advantages they can offer for nuclear infrastructure deployment.

Llinos Medi:

[\[28630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the suitability of Wylfa to be designated as a preferred site for a new nuclear energy generation project.

Michael Shanks:

On 6 February 2025, we published the draft of a new nuclear National Policy Statement (EN-7) for consultation. EN-7 proposes to employ a criteria-based approach, rather than listing potentially suitable sites, to empower nuclear developers to identify suitable sites for their projects.

The Government wants previously listed sites, such as Wylfa, which was acquired by Great British Nuclear in 2024, to meet their potential and EN-7 acknowledges the advantages they can offer for nuclear infrastructure deployment.

Llinos Medi:[\[28631\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent discussions he has with the Welsh Government on developing a new nuclear site at Wylfa.

Michael Shanks:

Ministers, and officials within the Department, regularly meet Welsh Government counterparts. As a site which has previously hosted a nuclear power station and is now owned by Great British Nuclear (GBN), we will work with GBN to assess options for new nuclear at the Wylfa site.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ Air Pollution: Pollution Control****Dr Neil Hudson:**[\[24707\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the funding allocated to local authorities to improve air quality.

Emma Hardy:

The department works closely with local authorities to develop approaches to reducing air pollution.

Under the NO2 Programme, the Government's DfT-Defra Joint Air Quality Unit has provided significant funding to support local authorities to improve air quality in areas of NO2 exceedances, for example recently agreeing Greater Manchester's £86m Clean Air Plan. We continue to work closely with local areas as they implement their plans.

Local authorities have funding allocated to them as part of the local government settlements. Any future, additional funding for local authorities will be subject to the Government's spending review process.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Military Aid

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[17314\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many taskings for Military Aid to the Civil Authorities from his Department required the use of RAF CH-47 Chinook helicopters since 2019.

Emma Hardy:

Since 2019, Defra has made two Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA) requests that have resulted in the deployment of RAF CH-47 Chinooks. These were both in 2019.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Written Questions

Helen Morgan:

[\[29014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to Question 24518 on Farming Recovery Fund, tabled on 16 January 2025 by the hon. Member for North Shropshire.

Daniel Zeichner:

A response to Question 24518 is being prepared and will be provided as soon as possible. I apologise for the delay in responding to the hon. Member.

■ Domestic Waste: Recycling and Waste Disposal

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[27559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department issues guidance on the frequency of household rubbish and recycling collections.

Mary Creagh:

Through Simpler Recycling, all householders will receive a comprehensive and consistent set of waste and recycling services. This will enable householders to recycle as much waste as possible and to frequently dispose of bad-smelling food waste, which will be collected from all households at least weekly.

Defra recognises that as recycling services are expanded and improved, local authorities may want to review residual waste services to ensure they are providing best value for money in line with local need. The Government's priority is ensuring that households' needs are met, and we expect local authorities to continue to provide services to a reasonable standard, as they do now.

Building on existing and new legal duties, Defra has published [guidance](#) to ensure that local authorities consider certain factors when they review services, to ensure that reasonable standards are maintained.

■ Farms

Helen Morgan: [\[29013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to support community farms.

Daniel Zeichner:

We welcome community farms in England as they give local communities a chance to get involved in the countryside. Community farms, like any other farm, may be eligible for a variety of grants.

Depending on the setup of the community farm, projects may be eligible for the Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes such as the Sustainable Farming Incentive. Our ELM schemes provide fairer support to smaller farms, and farmers and land managers can choose the scheme or schemes that work best for their business.

To work out what's available, you can visit the 'funding for farmers, growers and land managers' landing page on GOV.UK.

■ Flood Control

Charlotte Cane: [\[27738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to support flood preparedness projects.

Emma Hardy:

We are investing a record £2.65 billion over two years in building, maintaining and repairing our flood and coastal defences, protecting 66,500 properties and funding around 1,000 projects. This includes £108 million we are shifting towards maintenance to shore up creaking defences.

Farmers and rural communities across the country will see their resilience to flooding improved thanks to the £50 million funding for Internal Drainage Boards. In addition, £57 million has been paid out to support 12,700 farm businesses through the Farming Recovery Fund.

■ Food: Waste

Mrs Sharon Hodgson: [\[23725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make it her policy to introduce mandatory food waste reporting urgently.

Matt Vickers: [\[23898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what his planned timetable is for introducing mandatory food waste reporting.

Mary Creagh:

In our manifesto, the Government committed to reducing waste by moving to a circular economy.

The Secretary of State has convened a Small Ministerial Group on Circular Economy and a Circular Economy Taskforce of experts across government, industry, academia, and civil society has been established to help develop a Circular Economy Strategy for England and a series of roadmaps detailing the interventions that the Government will make on a sector-by-sector basis. Preventing food waste will be a key part of this work and we will consider the evidence for action right across the economy to evaluate what interventions may be needed as we develop the strategy.

■ **Inland Waterways: Flood Control**

Michael Wheeler:

[\[26731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department are taking to help protect properties bordering (a) the Bridgewater Canal, (b) the Manchester Ship Canal and (c) other (i) natural and (ii) artificial waterways in Worsley and Eccles constituency from flooding.

Emma Hardy:

The Environment Agency (EA) does not have any regulatory powers for flood risk management for the Bridgewater Canal or Manchester Ship Canal which are both privately owned assets. The owners are responsible for operating and maintaining their assets.

The EA responded during the recent incident in Little Bollington, Cheshire, and continues to support this area during the recovery period.

The EA has permissive powers to undertake maintenance on Main Rivers including vegetation clearance and removal of blockages. Within this constituency there are 8 debris screens on Main Rivers that the EA own, maintain, and clear. Debris screens stop debris entering culverts which if blocked can cause flooding. Before and during heavy rainfall the EA clears debris from these screens. The EA also work closely with partners, including Salford CC and United Utilities to have a strategic overview of all sources of flooding.

Within the Worsley Brook area the EA has 4 flood warning areas where they offer a flood warning service to over 330 properties. There are also a further 4 flood warnings areas within the wider constituency, where a further 315 properties are able to receive a flood warning enabling them to take action when flooding is expected.

■ **Litter: Fines**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[23782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 25 November 2024 to Question 14343 on Litter, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the compliance of (a) local authorities and (b) outsourced companies with the provisions of the non-statutory Code of Practice on issuing fines to receive greater (i) revenue and (ii) profits.

Mary Creagh:

Local authorities remain responsible for the whole enforcement process. Authorities that outsource any area of enforcement to private companies should ensure that the contractor fulfils all the requirements set down for the authority itself.

This position is set down in existing advisory guidance on enforcement of environmental offences available [here](#).

Members: Correspondence**John McDonnell:** [\[27094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to reply to the correspondence dated 7 December 2024 from the Public and Commercial Services Union.

John McDonnell: [\[27095\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to consult with civil service trade unions prior to the publication of the Governing Greening Commitments 2025-30.

Mary Creagh:

A response to the Public and Commercial Services Union was sent on 3 February 2025. I apologise for the delay in responding. Defra officials will discuss the implementation of the new framework with the relevant unions.

Neonicotinoids**Tim Roca:** [\[25545\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to ban the use of neonicotinoid pesticides.

Emma Hardy:

This Government is clear that we will change existing policies to end the use of neonicotinoid pesticides that threaten bees and other vital pollinators.

Planning: Animal Welfare and Environment Protection**Calum Miller:** [\[28799\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that (a) environmental and (b) animal welfare standards are maintained in planning reforms.

Mary Creagh:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 28 January 2025 to the hon Member for West Dorset, PQ [25127](#).

■ Recycling

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[26852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to support closed loop recycling schemes; and if he will bring forward legislative proposals to protect those schemes through regulations.

Mary Creagh:

The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging and Packaging Waste) Regulations 2024, which reform the UK's producer responsibility system for packaging came into force on 1 January 2025. Extended Producer Responsibility is a major reform that will be iterated over several years to incentivise packaging producers to reduce their material footprint and use more recyclable packaging. We continue to consider further improvements to the scheme with input from a range of stakeholders, including how to treat businesses which run closed loop recycling systems for packaging that is commonly collected by Local Authorities, and my officials are reviewing options to bring forward an offset for closed loop recycling systems at the earliest opportunity.

■ River Lim: Sewage

Edward Morello:

[\[26679\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of untreated sewage discharges into the River Lim on the environment.

Edward Morello:

[\[26680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has had discussions with South West Water on steps to upgrade the sewage processing facilities on the River Lim.

Emma Hardy:

For too long, water companies have discharged unacceptable levels of sewage into our rivers, lakes and seas.

That is why we are placing water companies under special measures through the Water (Special Measures) Bill. The Bill will drive meaningful improvements in the performance and culture of the water industry as a first important step in enabling wider, transformative change across the water sector.

In October 2024, the Secretary of State and the Welsh Government launched an Independent Commission, led by Sir Jon Cunliffe, into the water sector and its regulation, in what is expected to form the largest review of the industry since privatisation. These wide-ranging recommendations will form the basis of further legislation to attract long-term investment and clean up our waters for good.

As part of Price Review 2024 (PR24), which runs from 2025–2030, water companies will be delivering record levels of investment: £104 billion over the next five years. This includes South West Water delivering £749 million of investment over the next

five years in storm overflows, continuous water quality monitoring and event duration monitoring.

■ River Roding: Sewage

Mr Calvin Bailey: [\[26705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Environment Agency in tackling pollution of the River Roding by Thames Water outfalls without permits.

Mr Calvin Bailey: [\[26706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent estimate he has made of E. coli levels in the River Roding during dry weather; and what discussions he has had with the Environment Agency on those levels.

Emma Hardy:

The River Roding faces challenges from urban pressures, storm overflow discharges, surface water runoff, misconnections, and pollution incidents. These factors can contribute to elevated bacterial levels, including E. Coli, particularly during wet weather when foul and surface water systems may interact. These urban influences are factored into the Environment Agency's overall assessment of water quality.

The Environment Agency's routine monitoring is carried out under the requirements of the **Water Framework Directive (WFD)**. This includes sampling for a range of chemical, ecological, and biological indicators to assess the overall health of the watercourse

During Thames Water's improvements in PR19, there was an investigation into the Snakes Lane Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) to look at options available to reduce spill frequency. In its final determinations for PR24 (2020-2025), Ofwat allowed Thames Water £784 million to reduce the use of storm overflows across its network. Improvement actions will include increasing treatment capacity at sewage works, providing storage for high flows, reducing flows entering the system and provision of treatment for storm overflows which are separate from the main treatment route.

■ Royal Botanic Gardens Kew: Public Appointments

Charlie Dewhirst: [\[25858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the public appointment advertisement for Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, published on 19 December 2024, for what reasons equality, diversity and inclusion are listed as a desirable criteria for this position.

Mary Creagh:

Equality, diversity and inclusion are a priority for this Government, as they were under the last. Defra wants Kew's Board to continue to have skills in those areas, in order for Kew to effectively implement their ten-year Manifesto for Change, which was launched in 2021. For example, one aim of the ten-year plan is to increase the

number of visitors to Kew from under-represented communities whilst another is to train the next generation of plant experts, attracting a wide range of people to a career working in and with nature.

■ Sewage: Water Treatment

Chris Coghlan:

[25484]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how his Department plans to ensure that sewage treatment facilities (a) in Horley and (b) nationally are upgraded according to agreed timescales.

Emma Hardy:

For Price Review 2024 (PR24), which runs from 2025 – 2030, water companies will be delivering record levels of investment: £104 billion over the next five years.

Ofwat, Environment Agency (EA) and Natural Resources Wales have developed a new Delivery Monitoring Framework for the delivery period from 2025-30. It will establish a system for tracking and reporting on water company delivery of their WINEP obligations, to report to their customers and regulators on progress. Thames Water will be expected to comply with the 6 monthly reporting requirements.

As part of the Environment Act 2021, water companies in England are required to produce Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMPs). DWMPs set out how a water company intends to improve their drainage and wastewater systems over the next 25 years. These plans will help sewerage companies to fully assess the capacity of the drainage and wastewater network and develop collaborative solutions to current problems and future issues.

Chris Coghlan:

[27286]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to provide (a) financial, (b) planning and (c) infrastructure support for the (i) development and (ii) improvement of sewage treatment facilities.

Emma Hardy:

Ofwat published their final determinations for [Price Review 2024](#) (the price, investment and service package for water companies in England and Wales) on 19 December, which sets company expenditure and customer bills for 2025-2030.

This will deliver substantial, lasting, improvements for customers and the environment through £104 billion of investment in the water sector, including improving over 1700 wastewater treatment works.

Government recognises the importance of having a robust drainage and wastewater system both now and for future demand. As part of the Environment Act 2021, water companies in England are required to produce Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMPs). DWMPs set out how a water company intends to improve their drainage and wastewater systems over the next 25 years. These plans will help sewerage companies to fully assess the capacity of the drainage and

wastewater network and develop collaborative solutions to current problems and future issues.

It is ultimately water companies' responsibility to maintain and improve their sewage treatment facilities, as needed.

■ Trapping

Daisy Cooper: [\[27887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 28 October 2024 to Question 10820 on Trapping, what his timetable is for banning the use of snares.

Mary Creagh:

As stated in the reply to Question 10820, Defra is considering the most effective way to deliver this commitment and will be setting out next steps in due course. As outlined in our manifesto, we will bring an end to the use of snare traps in England.

■ Water: Standards

Chris Coghlan: [\[27288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to support water regulators in (a) monitoring (i) river and (ii) sea water quality and (b) rectifying low water quality.

Emma Hardy:

For too long, water companies have discharged unacceptable levels of sewage into our rivers, lakes and seas.

Since 01 January 2025, water companies are required to publish data related to discharges from all storm overflows within one hour of the discharge beginning. In addition to this, the Water (Special Measures) Bill will introduce a duty for water companies to publish data related to discharges from all emergency overflows within one hour of the discharge beginning. This will ensure that every sewage discharge outlet is monitored.

Price Review 24 set record levels of investment into the water industry of £104 billion over the next five years and sets out work water companies have to conduct. This includes investing £12 billion to upgrade nearly 3,000 storm overflows in England and Wales, reducing the number of spills from storm overflows and installing water quality monitors to provide further information on the impact of sewage discharges on water quality.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE■ **Álvaro Uribe****Brendan O'Hara:**[\[28534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the legal case in Argentina implicating former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Vélez for human rights violations; and whether he plans to make representations to his Argentinian counterpart on the (a) protection of (i) lawyers and (ii) victims involved in and (b) eventual outcome of the case.

Catherine West:

It is not appropriate to comment on an ongoing legal case. The UK remains committed to upholding human rights and international law, including through its international engagement.

■ **Asylum: Hotels****Wendy Morton:**[\[27263\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 17 January 2025 to Question 22629 on Development Aid: Asylum Hotels, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department to agree a timeline for the (a) reduction and (b) cessation of the use of asylum hotels.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Government is committed to ensuring asylum costs fall. This includes taking measures to reduce the asylum backlog and end the use of expensive hotels over time, as part of a reduction in overall asylum accommodation costs. We expect these plans to create more space in the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget to spend on our international development priorities overseas. The Home Office will be represented at the first meeting of the re-established Ministerial ODA Board which will discuss in-donor refugee costs.

■ **BBC Monitoring and BBC World Service: Finance****Sir Julian Lewis:**[\[28444\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what information his Department holds on how much and what proportion of the annual budgets of the BBC (a) World Service and (b) Monitoring Service are funded by FCDO; and what discussions he has had with the BBC on preventing cuts in those services.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Government provides approximately one-third of the funding for the BBC World Service, with the remainder funded from the BBC Licence Fee. The BBC are operationally and editorially independent and set the budget for the World Service. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) provided £104.4

million of grant funding to the World Service in 2023/24, the most recent year for which there are published audited accounts.

FCDO Ministers engage routinely with the BBC on the World Service. The BBC discussed their plans for the World Service in 2025/26 with the FCDO, as part of the Spending Review process.

HMG does not provide any funding for BBC Monitoring.

■ **British Council: Closures**

Wendy Morton: [\[28081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to Q66 of the oral evidence given by the Chief Executive of the British Council to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 13 January 2025, HC 609, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the closure of British Council offices in up to 40 countries on the UK's (a) soft power and b) security in Europe.

Wendy Morton: [\[28082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure the continued operation of the British Council in countries where other hostile state actors are present.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The British Council is operationally independent from the UK Government. Decisions relating to the size and model of its overseas network are operational matters for the British Council.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) works with the British Council to ensure strategic alignment between FCDO objectives and British Council activity.

■ **British Overseas Territories and Netherlands: Travel**

Andrew Rosindell: [\[27844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of travel arrangements between British Overseas Territories and the Caribbean constituent countries of the Netherlands.

Stephen Doughty:

There are a number of direct and indirect connections between the British Overseas Territories and the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Both Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands have direct flights to Sint Maarten. Anguilla and Sint Maarten are also connected via ferry. Regular flight connections between Montserrat and Sint Maarten will operate in February and March this year.

■ Chevening Scholarships Programme

Rupert Lowe:

[\[27481\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will publish a breakdown of the (a) cost to the public purse and (b) recipients by nationality of the Chevening Scholarship in each of the last five years.

Anneliese Dodds:

Chevening Scholarships provide fully-funded postgraduate masters awards at UK universities for future global leaders from approximately 140 eligible countries and territories.

Chevening Programme Expenditure

FINANCIAL YEAR	TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE
2019 - 2020	£57,744,779.51
2020 - 2021	£50,397,000.00
2021 - 2022	£59,233,000.00
2022 - 2023	£58,994,000.00
2023 - 2024	£59,330,000.00

Annual costs for Chevening Scholarships can be found in the FCDO Annual Reports and Accounts on GOV.UK. The cost for each Chevening scholar varies between individuals, depending on factors including the cost of tuition fees, accommodation and flights.

Breakdown of recipients by nationality of the Chevening Scholarship for the last 5 years:

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	AWARDS MADE IN 2019 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2020 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2021 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2022 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2023 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2024 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)
Afghanistan	15	23	29	18	21	13
Albania	16	6	14	11	11	10
Algeria	8	9	9	8	7	7
Angola	9	4	7	8	8	7

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	AWARDS MADE IN 2019 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2020 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2021 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2022 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2023 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2024 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)
Anguilla	2	2	3	5	6	5
Antigua and Barbuda	2	3	3	0	1	2
Argentina	25	19	24	21	15	30
Armenia	9	3	9	7	4	4
Australia	3	3	0	2	3	4
Azerbaijan	9	8	11	9	6	5
Bahamas	2	1	1	1	4	5
Bangladesh	13	14	20	15	21	22
Barbados	3	2	2	1	2	1
Belize	5	3	4	5	5	5
Benin	1	1	1	1	0	0
Bermuda	0	1	0	0	0	0
Bhutan	3	4	5	5	5	6
Bolivia	7	5	9	8	4	6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	13	5	9	8	4	5
Botswana	9	5	7	4	4	6
Brazil	57	46	53	47	46	36
Brunei Darussalam	1	1	0	1	1	3
Burkina Faso						2
Burundi	5	5	5	4	4	5
Cambodia	17	9	13	11	12	9

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	AWARDS MADE IN 2019 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2020 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2021 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2022 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2023 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2024 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)
Cameroon	15	12	10	5	8	8
Canada	2	1	4	1	2	3
Cape Verde	0	4	0	1	0	1
Cayman Islands	1	0	0	0	0	0
Chad	0	2	1	1	0	1
Chile	7	2	5	4	4	4
China	60	37	41	33	30	17
Colombia	25	14	16	14	14	14
Congo, Republic of	0	0	1	1	0	0
Congo, The Democratic Republic Of The	7	8	9	2	4	8
Costa Rica	5	3	9	4	5	6
Côte d'Ivoire	6	7	6	8	4	8
Cuba	12	11	11	6	8	8
Djibouti	3	2	2	4	0	1
Dominica	0	1	1	2	1	3
Dominican Republic	11	10	14	11	10	8
Ecuador	9	4	5	6	4	6
Egypt	45	33	39	32	31	29
El Salvador	6	2	3	2	2	3
Equatorial Guinea	0	0	1	1	0	0
Eritrea	1	1	0	0	0	2

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	AWARDS MADE IN 2019 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2020 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2021 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2022 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2023 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2024 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)
Ethiopia	16	24	21	13	18	17
Falkland Islands	0	0	1	0	0	0
Fiji	2	4	5	6	6	7
Gabon	0	0	0	0	0	0
Georgia	13	9	15	15	13	10
Ghana	22	21	19	16	17	14
Greece	2	1	1	0	0	0
Grenada	0	1	1	2	4	3
Guatemala	4	3	5	3	4	1
Guinea	1	6	6	1	4	4
Guyana	10	6	5	5	4	4
Haiti	4	2	1	2	1	4
Honduras	3	3	3	3	2	2
Hong Kong	2	2	2	1	2	2
Iceland	2	1	1	0	1	0
India	47	38	41	46	38	36
Indonesia	60	50	58	45	42	39
Iraq	22	21	26	22	19	18
Israel	2	1	2	1	1	0
Jamaica	18	14	17	16	14	13
Japan	1	1	0	1	2	3
Jordan	15	12	16	11	7	10
Kazakhstan	8	8	8	6	9	12

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	AWARDS MADE IN 2019 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2020 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2021 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2022 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2023 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2024 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)
Kenya	33	39	38	37	36	30
Kingdom of Eswatini	9	6	4	3	3	4
Kiribati	1	0	0	0	0	1
Kosovo	5	11	10	9	5	6
Kyrgyzstan	6	4	5	2	4	6
Lao People's Democratic Republic	8	7	9	8	8	8
Lebanon	9	6	11	9	10	10
Lesotho	5	3	5	3	6	6
Liberia	6	3	3	1	4	6
Libya	18	15	17	18	12	11
Madagascar	11	8	3	9	5	6
Malawi	13	8	9	8	6	7
Malaysia	38	37	40	38	34	31
Maldives	4	5	6	6	7	8
Mali	0	2	0	1	2	4
Mauritania	1	3	4	4	4	5
Mauritius	9	8	7	6	6	5
Mexico	53	39	40	39	37	33
Moldova, Republic Of	7	6	5	7	6	5
Mongolia	7	12	8	11	13	16
Montenegro	9	6	8	7	4	5

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	AWARDS MADE IN 2019 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2020 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2021 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2022 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2023 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2024 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)
Montserrat	4	1	2	1	1	3
Morocco	11	11	13	9	10	10
Mozambique	8	8	11	11	9	9
Myanmar	12	9	16	8	10	10
Namibia	9	14	15	11	13	11
Nauru	0	0	0	1	0	1
Nepal	11	12	17	10	12	13
New Zealand	3	1	1	1	2	3
Nicaragua	4	3	5	4	2	1
Niger	0	2	0	0	2	4
Nigeria	56	46	46	44	44	30
North Macedonia	7	7	7	7	6	6
Oman	1	1	1	0	0	0
Pakistan	49	34	51	47	46	43
Palestinian Territory, Occupied	26	20	23	14	13	10
Panama	7	4	11	5	5	5
Papua New Guinea	3	2	3	5	8	3
Paraguay	15	13	13	14	16	16
Peru	18	7	15	12	9	10
Philippines	28	16	34	23	22	21
Republic of Korea	24	21	13	12	18	12
Rwanda	19	10	9	8	5	5

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	AWARDS MADE IN 2019 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2020 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2021 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2022 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2023 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2024 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)
Saint Helena	0	1	0	0	0	1
Saint Kitts and Nevis	0	0	1	1	0	0
Saint Lucia	3	1	5	4	4	3
Saint Vincent and The Grenadines	2	1	2	4	3	3
Samoa	2	2	1	3	3	4
Sao Tome And Principe	0	0	0	0	2	0
Senegal	8	5	6	5	4	6
Serbia	15	10	10	6	7	10
Seychelles	3	2	3	2	2	3
Sierra Leone	6	5	4	6	5	6
Singapore	4	2	4	3	5	3
Solomon Islands	4	0	3	6	3	7
Somalia	11	10	11	11	14	16
South Africa	44	33	46	35	42	28
South Caucasus	3	2	4	3	0	2
South Sudan	6	5	5	6	5	6
Sri Lanka	6	7	13	8	9	10
Sudan	16	17	18	17	17	16
Suriname	2	1	0	0	0	2
Syrian Arab Republic	22	21	24	22	20	19

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	AWARDS MADE IN 2019 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2020 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2021 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2022 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2023 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2024 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)
Taiwan (Republic of China)	4	6	3	4	5	5
Tajikistan	4	3	3	4	3	5
Tanzania	18	15	15	16	17	9
Thailand	24	15	22	17	22	21
The Gambia	10	9	8	5	5	6
Timor-Leste	4	2	0	2	2	2
Tonga	2	0	1	2	3	4
Trinidad and Tobago	3	1	2	2	2	2
Tunisia	14	11	11	8	6	7
Turkey	24	21	23	18	22	23
Turkmenistan	4	1	0	6	2	1
Turks and Caicos Islands	1	0	3	1	2	4
Tuvalu	1	0	1	0	1	0
Uganda	16	16	24	18	24	17
Ukraine	21	20	19	42	26	23
Uruguay	9	7	9	8	10	9
Uzbekistan	9	8	8	5	6	15
Vanuatu	0	0	0	3	1	2
Venezuela	10	7	9	7	7	6
Vietnam	24	19	25	19	23	22
Virgin Islands (British)	0	1	0	2	2	0

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	AWARDS MADE IN 2019 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2020 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2021 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2022 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2023 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)	AWARDS MADE IN 2024 (INCL. FULL/PART PARTNER FUNDED AWARDS)
Yemen	9	6	14	8	5	9
Zambia	23	14	14	12	13	12
Zimbabwe	30	10	12	7	6	8

We are withholding some country specific information under Section 38 (Health and Safety) exemption (1) (a) and (b) of the Freedom of Information Act, which provides that information is exempt if disclosure would or would be likely to endanger the physical or mental health of any individual or endanger the safety of any individual.

■ Chile: Foreign Relations

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[27843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what was discussed between his Department and his Chilean counterparts during the delegation to Santiago and Punta Arenas in January 2025.

Catherine West:

Baroness Chapman, Minister for Latin America and the Caribbean, visited Chile 7-9 January to meet with Chilean political and business leaders, and to strengthen bilateral and trade ties following the UK's recent accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. In Santiago, Baroness Chapman met her ministerial counterpart, Gloria de la Fuente, and visited the Chilean headquarters of Anglo American to discuss the growing use of carbon-neutral technologies within the mining sector. Baroness Chapman also visited Punta Arenas to celebrate the longstanding and enduring UK-Chile relationship on Antarctica, and our strong naval partnership.

■ China: Nuclear Weapons

Luke Akehurst:

[\[28790\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the nuclear weapon capabilities of the People's Republic of China in (a) 2015 and (b) 2025.

Catherine West:

This Government takes a consistent, long-term, and strategic approach to managing the UK's relations with China, rooted in UK and global interests. Upholding national

security and keeping the public safe is the first duty of this government. This underpins not just our relationship with China, but all our international relationships. In recent years we have seen China rapidly expand and diversify its nuclear arsenal with more warheads and a larger number of sophisticated delivery systems. We regularly engage China on these issues, including as part of discussions among recognised Nuclear Weapons States (the 'P5 'process'), and continue to urge China to engage in strategic risk reduction discussions and promote stability through transparency.

■ Climate Change: Women's Rights

Wendy Morton: [\[27526\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of his policies on climate change on the International Women and Girls Strategy 2023 to 2030.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is committed to ensuring gender equality is a key part of our programming on climate and addressing gendered inequalities as part of our fight against climate change. We are committed to increasing the proportion of our international climate finance that will have gender equality objectives. At COP29, I launched a groundbreaking new report concerning climate change and gender-based violence and announced up to £5.5 million to support grassroots organisations and to increase women's voices and active participation in the design of water and nature-based solutions across the Middle East and North Africa.

■ Colombia: Armed Conflict

Andrew Rosindell: [\[27838\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had any discussions with his counterparts in Colombia regarding the ongoing conflict in the Catatumbo region.

Catherine West:

The UK continues to monitor the concerning escalation of conflict in the Catatumbo region of Colombia. At the UN Security Council meeting on the Colombian Peace Process in January, we condemned the violence between the National Liberation Army (ELN in Spanish) and General Staff of Blocks and Front (EMBF in Spanish), which has left many dead and thousands displaced. Senior Embassy officials have been in contact with government negotiators and the relevant government ministries to express our concern at the situation. The START fund is providing £150k of aid, and the UK is one of its largest donors.

■ Commonwealth Scholarships Programme

Rupert Lowe:

[\[27480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the (a) cost to the public purse and (b) nationality of each recipient of a Commonwealth Scholarship was in the last five years.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK (CSC), provides post-graduate awards (Fellowships, Masters and PhDs) at UK universities to students from approximately 64 eligible Commonwealth countries and British Overseas Territories.

Commonwealth Programme Expenditure:

FINANCIAL YEAR	CSC GRANT-IN-AID (FROM HMG, INCLUDING DFE) (£M)
2020-21	25.313
2021-22	28.224
2022-23	28.224
2023-24	28.224
2024-25	28.224

Breakdown of recipients by nationality of the Commonwealth Scholarship for the last 5 years:

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Antigua and Barbuda		2	1		
Australia	2			1	
Bangladesh	44	40	47	29	27
Belize		1	1	2	2
Botswana			1	2	1
Cameroon	17	18	22	17	20
Canada	2			2	
Dominica	1				

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Fiji		1	1	3	2
Ghana	56	70	50	55	54
Grenada			2		
Guyana	5	3			1
India	72	91	81	76	89
Jamaica	4	2		5	4
Kenya	79	55	74	61	78
Kingdom of Eswatini	2	6	1	1	4
Kiribati				1	
Lesotho	2	1	3	3	2
Malawi	17	31	20	25	31
Malaysia		2	2		2
Maldives		1	1	1	2
Mauritius		2	1	2	2
Montserrat		1			
Mozambique	5	3	5	2	6
Namibia	2	8		2	2
New Zealand	1				1
Nigeria	161	174	149	126	89
Pakistan	46	54	44	61	65
Papua New Guinea	2		1	1	
Rwanda	16	9	5	14	11
Saint Lucia	1	2		1	1
Saint Vincent and The Grenadines		1		2	1
Samoa					1
Sierra Leone	14	6	13	13	15

COUNTRY/TERRITORY	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Singapore					1
Solomon Islands			3		
South Africa	6	12	10	8	9
Sri Lanka	2	15	7	13	7
Tanzania	23	14	20	33	23
The Gambia	7	5	10	8	5
Togo					1
Tonga			1		
Tuvalu	1				
Uganda	64	53	72	63	59
Vanuatu					2
Zambia	26	27	23	22	15

■ Developing Countries: Women's Rights

Wendy Morton:

[\[27280\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what plans his Department has to update the International Women and Girls Strategy 2023–2030.

Wendy Morton:

[\[27282\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to implement the International Women and Girls Strategy 2023–2030.

Anneliese Dodds:

This Government has been clear that we will work to advance gender equality and empower women and girls through our international action. The previous government launched the International Women and Girls Strategy (2023-2030) in March 2023 to guide the UK's international action. Our focus is now firmly on delivery. In November, we announced a new £27 million programme to tackle online violence against women and girls. In December, the Prime Minister announced £37 million to expand access to sexual and reproductive health and rights through supporting grassroots civil society organisations and movements.

Wendy Morton:[\[27281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that women's (a) economic participation and (b) access to education are effectively integrated in the International Women and Girls Strategy 2023–2030.

Anneliese Dodds:

Ensuring all girls have access to quality education is a core part of the UK's work on gender equality. We deliver bilateral education programmes in 18 countries and are the top bilateral donor to the Global Partnership for Education, which provides grant funding to 74 lower income countries. The UK is committed to women's economic empowerment, including through our flagship Work and Opportunities for Women programme, which aims to improve economic opportunities for women working in global value chains. In October 2024, we announced £7.5 million to the World Bank to support high quality evidence on women's economic empowerment.

Development Aid**Preet Kaur Gill:**[\[26946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what (a) countries and (b) regions he is prioritising for the allocation of official development assistance.

Anneliese Dodds:

Our mission is to build partnerships to help create a world free from poverty on a liveable planet. The FCDO's development spending will be used to achieve better development outcomes as part of a coherent international approach, with a strong focus on poverty reduction and accelerating progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The FCDO's Official Development Assistance (ODA) programme allocations for 2024/25 were published on 6 February. We are prioritising predictability and stability after years of turbulence. Ministers will consider ODA allocations for 2025/26 over the coming months and we will publish them in the Annual Report & Accounts in summer 2025. The second phase of the Spending Review, concluding in late spring 2025, will set departmental ODA budgets for future years.

Electric Cables: Seas and Oceans**Edward Morello:**[\[26655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the threat posed to underwater cables by foreign states; and what steps are being taken across Government to protect this infrastructure.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office works closely on this issue across government, in particular with the Ministry of Defence, the Department for

Energy Security and Net Zero, which is the lead department for developing policies for the security and resilience of underwater energy infrastructure and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, which is the lead government department for telecommunications and is responsible for developing policies to help ensure the security and resilience of underwater telecommunications cables.

■ **Faroe Islands and Greenland: Politics and Government**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[27841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant of the Answer of 20 January 2025 to Question 23271 on Faroe Islands and Greenland: Politics and Government, what the Minister of State for Europe and North America discussed with his counterparts from Greenland in those meetings.

Stephen Doughty:

I have met with Greenlandic Foreign Minister, Vivian Motzfeldt, twice since taking office. The first time, at the Arctic Circle Assembly in October 2024, we discussed the UK's Arctic policy, security, trade and bilateral relations. The second time in London, in January 2025, we discussed the Kingdom of Denmark's chairship of the Arctic Council in 2025, Arctic policy, security, trade as well as bilateral relations.

■ **Gender Based Violence: Women's Rights**

Wendy Morton:

[\[27527\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to tackle gender-based violence through the International Women and Girls Strategy 2023 to 2030.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is committed to putting women and girls at the heart of everything we do. We are scaling up evidence-based approaches to prevent gender-based violence (GBV) through homes, schools and workplaces through the What Works to Prevent Violence programme, investing £67.5 million.

In November, we announced £27 million to tackle technology-facilitated GBV, and £5 million additional funding to help grassroots organisations to tackle child marriage.

We are continuing to mobilise action on GBV at national and international levels. For example, at COP29, we launched a report on GBV and climate, co-produced by the UK and Australia, and learnt from women on the front line of the climate crisis.

■ **NATO: Military Alliances**

Wendy Morton:

[\[27531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to his Locarno speech, delivered on 9 January 2025, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen defence collaboration with NATO allies.

Stephen Doughty:

The Government is committed to a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) First Defence Policy, through which we are making NATO stronger, ensuring one billion North Americans and Europeans are all safer and more prosperous. With our reset of relations, we are working with our European Allies to harden Europe's defences. European NATO Allies must continue to take greater responsibility for our own security - spending more, producing more, and delivering larger and more capable forces. With threats increasing, the UK is committed to strengthening defence collaboration with NATO Allies even further with a cast iron commitment to increasing defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP. That is the message the Foreign Secretary and I took to the December 2024 Foreign Ministers meeting.

■ Palestinians: Internally Displaced People**Abtisam Mohamed:**[\[27497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether it is his policy to oppose efforts to move Palestinians in Gaza to neighbouring Arab states.

Abtisam Mohamed:[\[27498\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will condemn President Trump's statement on moving Palestinians in Gaza to neighbouring Arab states.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

As the Foreign Secretary has said, for the people of Gaza, so many of whom have lost lives, homes or loved ones, the last 14 months of conflict have been a living nightmare. The UK is clear that Palestinian civilians must be permitted to return to their communities and rebuild. There must be no forcible transfer of Gazans from or within Gaza, nor any reduction in the territory of the Gaza Strip. We would oppose any effort to move Palestinians in Gaza to neighbouring Arab states against their will.

We have always been clear that an immediate ceasefire is just the first step towards a lasting solution to this crisis. The US played an integral role in negotiating the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, alongside Qatar and Egypt, and the Prime Minister reiterated this in his call with President Trump on 26 January. The UK has begun convening partners, and is prepared to help lead efforts, to ensure coordinated international support for Palestinian-led security, governance, recovery, and reconstruction in Gaza.

■ Rwanda: Peacekeeping Operations**Sir Gavin Williamson:**[\[28156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with the UN Secretary General on the UN's use of Rwandan troops as peacekeepers.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Foreign Secretary spoke with the UN Secretary General on 30 January to express his sympathies for the six United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) peacekeepers killed in Goma and discuss the deteriorating situation in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). They agreed to work together on de-escalating this conflict and urging Rwanda and the DRC to return to the negotiating table. The UK condemns M23 and the Rwandan Defence Force's occupation of Goma and other territories in eastern DRC as an unacceptable breach of DRC's sovereignty. We have been clear with Rwanda that this would provoke a strong response from the international community. We are considering all options with partners.

■ South Georgia: Nature Conservation**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[27845\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help protect native wildlife on South Georgia in the context of the potential risk of a collision of the iceberg A23a with the island.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is in close contact with the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) and the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) about the movement of iceberg A23a. BAS and GSGSSI are both actively monitoring the movement of the iceberg and are working to identify a range of likely future scenarios and potential implications, including for the region's wildlife. It is currently anticipated that A23a will run aground on the continental shelf before it reaches the landmass of South Georgia, and that any impacts on wildlife are likely to be localised and transient, but we will keep this assessment under review.

■ Sub-Saharan Africa: Development Aid**David Mundell:**[\[26800\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his sub-Saharan Africa aid policies of the US State Department's decision to halt nearly all foreign assistance funding; and whether the Government plans to take steps to replace any shortfall in HIV/AIDS funding.

David Mundell:[\[26801\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department plans to take to ensure the continuity of treatment and prevention services for global HIV/AIDS programs, in the context of the recent US State Department decision to halt nearly all existing foreign assistance funding.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK notes the US decision to pause foreign aid funding for 3 months, pending a review. This is a matter for the US. Progress toward the Sustainable Development

Goals requires collective action, and the UK will continue to work with all international partnerships toward that vision. The UK's commitment to supporting both humanitarian aid and development across the world and promoting universal comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) remains steadfast.

■ Sudan: Armed Conflict

Uma Kumaran: [\[27014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his international counterparts on alleged reports of (a) gender-based and (b) conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK remains committed to tackling gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in Sudan. From 23-25 January, the Foreign Secretary visited Chad and travelled to the Sudan-Chad border. He spoke directly to Sudanese refugees, including survivors, who shared harrowing stories of sexual violence and torture. The UK has galvanised international efforts on this issue, including through the UN Human Rights Council, Security Council and International Alliance on PSVI. In September, the UK convened an event at the UN General Assembly with Dutch and Swiss partners to draw attention to the situation, spotlight the plight of women and girls and stress the importance of survivor-centred, local and women-led responses. The UK co-led a Resolution at the UNSC with Sierra Leone on the protection of civilians which called on parties to take urgent steps to prevent CRSV and to improve protection and access to services. Despite unanimous support from the Council, the Resolution failed to pass due to a Russian veto. I visited South Sudan from 19-21 August 2024, where I heard first-hand the horrifying experiences of women who fled the war in Sudan.

■ Sudan: Humanitarian Aid

Wendy Morton: [\[27262\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 17 January 2025 to Question 22010 on Sudan: Humanitarian Aid, what estimate he has made of the amount of humanitarian aid being provided by international partners to help those who fled Sudan and are being assisted in the wider region.

Anneliese Dodds:

The 2024 Sudan Regional Response Plan (RRP), which outlined the financial requirements to provide life-saving aid to refugees and host communities in Sudan's neighbouring countries, sought a total of \$1.5 billion but was only 31% funded. The US, EU, and UAE were amongst the Government donors to the RRP in 2024. The 2025 Sudan RRP seeks \$1.8 billion with the aim of supporting 5 million people. In November 2024, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office doubled UK aid

to £226.5 million. This uplift is funding the UN and NGOs to provide support to over one million people affected by war in Sudan and displaced by the conflict.

■ UK Soft Power Council

Wendy Morton: [\[28974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will provide an official readout of the recent meeting of the UK Soft Power Council.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

A summary of each meeting will be published on gov.uk. Officials and ministers from the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office and the Department for Culture Media and Sport have in addition provided proactive briefings to parliamentarians and will consider further such briefings if there is sufficient demand.

Wendy Morton: [\[28975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the criteria were for appointing members of the Soft Power Council; and whether those members will provide declarations of interests for publication.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Members were identified based on their expertise and real-world experience in soft power and foreign policy domains. As is standard in appointment processes, due diligence and conflicts of interest declarations checks were carried out. These will not be published.

■ USA: Development Aid

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[26951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the pause in USAID spending on (a) jointly-funded UK-US programmes and (b) multilateral (i) organisations and (ii) initiatives.

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[26952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the pause in USAID spending.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK notes the US decision to pause new obligations of foreign aid funding for 3 months, pending a review and this is a matter for the US. Progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals requires collective action, and the UK will continue to work with all international partners, including the US, toward that vision. The UK's commitment to supporting both humanitarian aid and development across the world remains steadfast.

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[26953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his US counterparts on cooperation on (a) overseas development assistance and (b) humanitarian aid.

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[26954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his US counterpart on the pause in spending on (a) overseas development assistance and (b) humanitarian aid.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Foreign Secretary had a call with his recently appointed US counterpart, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, on 27 January. The readout is available here: [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/readout-foreign-secretary-meeting-with-us-secretary-of-state>].

■ USA: Foreign Aid

Dr Simon Opher: [\[28041\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the reported decision by the US government to pause foreign aid.

Anneliese Dodds:

This is a matter for the US. Progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals requires collective action, and the UK will continue to work with all international partners toward that vision. The UK's commitment to supporting both humanitarian aid and development across the world remains steadfast.

■ Venezuela: Foreign Relations

Andrew Rosindell: [\[27840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with opposition figures in Venezuela since the Presidential election in that country in July 2024.

Catherine West:

Since the elections in July, the Foreign Secretary has discussed the concerning situation in Venezuela on multiple occasions, including with international partners and members of the opposition. On 10 January, he announced that Maduro's claim to power was fraudulent and announced new sanctions designations against members of the Maduro regime. The UK will continue to engage internationally in order to achieve a peaceful solution that respects the will of the Venezuelan people.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Accident and Emergency Departments: Standards

Joe Robertson: [\[28796\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to end the use of corridor care in the NHS.

Joe Robertson: [\[28859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of publishing year-round data on the number of patients being treated in temporary care environments.

Karin Smyth:

The Government is clear that patients should expect and receive the highest standard of service, and is determined to tackle the issue of corridor care.

On 30 January, we published Road to recovery: the government's 2025 mandate to NHS England, which set out the priorities and actions to be taken to reform and improve urgent and emergency care services.

We continue to keep the data available and published to support improvements to urgent and emergency care services under review. Subject to data quality, NHS England would intend to publish data collected on the use of temporary escalation spaces in the spring.

■ Ambulance Services: Gloucester

Alex McIntyre: [\[28698\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken to help improve ambulance waiting times in Gloucester.

Karin Smyth:

We are committed to improving urgent and emergency care performance and getting ambulance response times, including in Gloucester, back to the NHS Constitution's standards. We are clear, however, that there are no quick fixes and to turn things around will take investment and reform.

Recent action includes the Autumn Budget, which announced £25.6 billion of additional healthcare funding over the next two years; and the publication of the 'Road to recovery: the government's 2025 mandate to NHS England' on the 30th January, which set prioritised delivery instructions for the NHS including for urgent and emergency care. This is available at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-to-recovery-the-governments-2025-mandate-to-nhs-england/road-to-recovery-the-governments-2025-mandate-to-nhs-england> In Spring, we will publish a 10-Year Health Plan which will set out the reforms needed to build a health service that is fit for the future.

■ Anaesthetics: Training

Helena Dollimore: [\[27906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many doctors applied for core anaesthetic training in each of the last five years; and how many training places were available in the same period.

Karin Smyth:

The following table shows the number of doctors who applied for training in the Core Anaesthetics programme, as well as how many training places were available across the United Kingdom in each of the last five years:

YEAR	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Applications	1,479	2,046	2,337	2,604	3,522
Training places (posts)	569	566	558	545	542

Source: Workforce, Training and Education, Competition Ratios, published by NHS England and available at the following link: <https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/competition-ratios>

■ Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder: Health Services

Joe Morris: [\[28661\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with (a) NHS specialists, (b) support groups and (c) all other stakeholders on increasing available support for children with avoidant restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID).

Joe Morris: [\[28662\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with NHS England on the provision of clear care pathways for children with avoidant restrictive food intake disorder.

Joe Morris: [\[28663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with NHS England on (a) neurodivergence and (b) avoidant restrictive food intake disorder.

Stephen Kinnock:

Ministers and departmental officials hold discussions regularly with NHS England and stakeholders on a range of issues.

We recognise the devastating impact an eating disorder, such as avoidant restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID), can have on someone's life, and the earlier treatment is provided, the greater the chance of recovery. We continue to work closely with NHS

England to ensure that people with an eating disorder get the care and treatment they need.

In 2019/20, NHS England funded seven community eating disorder teams for children and young people in a pilot programme to improve access, assessment, and treatment for children presenting with ARFID. The training from these pilots is now available for providers in local areas for their children and young people's community eating disorder services. And in 2021, NHS England commissioned ARFID training for staff delivering treatment in inpatient children and young people's mental health services.

NHS England also commissioned the research charity Autistica to produce an ARFID and Autistic People briefing paper. This informed two awareness raising webinars, one for staff from the eating disorders charity BEAT, and the other for commissioners, clinicians, and providers, to consider how autistic children and young people with ARFID could benefit from eating disorder support and services.

Building on the work of the Children and Young People's ARFID pilot, NHS England is developing a framework for community eating disorder services to support them in delivering an ARFID pathway for adults.

■ **Cambridge Cancer Research Hospital and Milton Keynes University Hospital: Finance**

Blake Stephenson:

[28333]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding will be allocated for (a) Cambridge Cancer Research Hospital and (b) Milton Keynes Hospital through the New Hospital Programme.

Karin Smyth:

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care set out a credible and deliverable plan for the new hospital schemes in the New Hospital Programme (NHP) on 20 January 2025, following the conclusion of the review of the NHP. The Plan for Implementation was laid in the House Library and published on the GOV.UK website, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-hospital-programme-review-outcome>

As confirmed by the publication, the estimated cost for the Cambridge Cancer Research Hospital scheme and the Milton Keynes Hospital scheme is £500 million or less for each scheme. However, these are estimates and the exact funding for the schemes is determined through the review and through the agreement of the individual hospital scheme business cases, as is usual for large infrastructure projects.

■ Care Workers: Conditions of Employment

Joe Robertson: [\[28797\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to end exploitative employment practices by social care employers.

Joe Robertson: [\[28798\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential implications for its policies of exploitative employment practices by social care employers.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have seen unacceptable increases in unethical practices and exploitation in the adult social care sector. The Department works closely with regulators, local authorities, other departments, and enforcement bodies to share concerns and intelligence about unethical practices in adult social care. The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority investigates reports of worker exploitation and illegal activity, such as human trafficking, modern slavery, forced labour, and other labour market offences. The Government is also delivering the legislation for a new flagship Fair Work Agency, ensuring fair and strong employment rights for all.

In relation to the exploitation of international recruits, £16 million has been provided to regional partnerships this financial year to support them to prevent and respond to unethical practices. The Home Office has also recently announced measures to ban rogue employers from sponsoring overseas workers.

■ Cerliponase Alfa

Adam Dance: [\[29367\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress has been made on the negotiations with Biomarine on the provision of Brineura as a treatment for Batten disease.

Karin Smyth:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is currently developing guidance for the National Health Service on whether Brineura (cerliponase alfa) can be recommended for routine NHS funding, taking into account real-world evidence collected during a period of managed access. The NICE and NHS England are actively engaging with BioMarin, as well as other stakeholders in the development of the guidance. These discussions are complex, and given the exceptional nature of this evaluation and the impact on patients and their families, it is essential that they take the necessary time and care to reach the best possible outcome. All parties are also committed to providing updates to stakeholders, notwithstanding the necessity that discussions are undertaken in a confidential setting.

■ Dementia: Diagnosis

Joe Robertson:

[\[28291\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that patients with dementia living in (a) rural and (b) socio economically-deprived areas are diagnosed as quickly as those in other areas.

Stephen Kinnock:

Given the level of inequalities known within dementia diagnosis, NHS England commissioned the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) to develop a resource to support investigation of the underlying variation in dementia diagnosis rates.

The OHID's Dementia Intelligence Network developed a tool for local systems, which includes an assessment of population characteristics such as rurality and socio-economic deprivation. This enables systems to investigate local variation in diagnosis and take informed action to enhance their diagnosis rates.

The tool has been released and is available via the NHS Futures Collaboration platform.

Martin Wrigley:

[\[28719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of early diagnosis rates on the quality of life of dementia patients.

Martin Wrigley:

[\[28720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of early diagnosis rates on the quality of care for dementia patients.

Martin Wrigley:

[\[28721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of early diagnosis rates on the quality of life choices for dementia patients.

Stephen Kinnock:

Lord Darzi's independent review showed that a timely diagnosis is vital to ensure that a person with dementia can access the advice, information, care, and support that can help them to live well and remain independent for as long as possible. The Government and NHS England are committed to recovering the dementia diagnosis rate to the national ambition of 66.7%.

Improving dementia care is one of four workstreams delivering NHS England's Ageing Well Strategy. The dementia workstream is looking at improving early diagnosis and early access to care and support for patients, families, and carers, as well as taking preventative action through public health messaging, promoting healthy lifestyle choices, and expanding NHS Health Checks. The workstream is also looking at improving local services and delivering an integrated approach to care across

statutory, voluntary, community, and social enterprises, as well as other services, and providing dementia training for the workforce.

The Department delivers dementia research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The NIHR funds a range of research into dementia, for example an £11 million programme to develop new digital approaches for the early detection and diagnosis of dementia.

■ Dementia: Health Services

Martin Wrigley: [\[28729\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ensure that dementia care receives long term investment.

Stephen Kinnock:

With our Plan for Change, the Government is committed to getting the National Health Service back on its feet and creating a society where every person with dementia receives high-quality, compassionate care, from diagnosis through to the end of life. The 10-Year Health Plan will address the challenges diagnosed by Lord Darzi and set the vision for what good joined-up care looks like for people with complex health and care needs, including those with dementia. It will set out how we support and enable health and social care services to work together better to provide that joined-up care

The Department delivers dementia research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The NIHR has established significant investments into research for dementia care. This includes a £13.5 million investment in the NIHR's Three Schools Dementia Programme, which links public health, primary care, and social care. The programme addresses key evidence gaps around how we can effectively support and care people living with dementia

■ Dementia: Learning Disability

Joe Robertson: [\[28294\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking with NHS England to tackle diagnostic overshadowing of dementia symptoms for patients with learning disabilities.

Stephen Kinnock:

The annual health check for people with learning disabilities should include a review of mental health, including signs of dementia, especially in adults with Down's syndrome. People requiring an assessment for dementia should be referred to a clinician with specialist expertise in the mental health of people with learning disabilities. Assessment for dementia should be supplemented with tools devised for use with people with learning disabilities. Under the Health and Care Act 2022, from 1 July 2022 Care Quality Commission registered providers are required to ensure that their staff receives specific training on learning disability and autism, appropriate to

their role. This will help to ensure that staff have the right knowledge and skills to provide safe and informed care.

To support providers to meet the statutory training requirement, we have been rolling out the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism to the health and adult social care workforce. This training includes content on avoiding diagnostic overshadowing and frequently co-occurring conditions. Over two million people have completed the e-learning package, which is the first part of this training, and over 1,700 trainers are delivering the interactive second part of this training across the country.

The Department funds dementia research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), which includes research with people with learning disabilities. For example, the NIHR is funding a study testing the neuroimaging method of functional near infrared spectroscopy to detect cognitive decline in people with Down's syndrome.

■ **Dental Services: East Midlands**

Juliet Campbell:

[\[28427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of dentists are taking on new NHS patients in (a) Broxtowe constituency, (b) Nottingham and (c) East Midlands.

Stephen Kinnock:

As of 4 February 2025, there were seven National Health Service dentist practices in the Broxtowe constituency, with three showing as 'accepting new child patients when availability allows' and three showing as 'accepting new adult patients when availability allows'. In the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board, there were 110 NHS dentist practices, with 46 showing as 'accepting new child patients when availability allows' and 34 showing as 'accepting new adult patients when availability allows'. In the East Midlands, there were 466 NHS dentist practices, 185 of these are showing as 'accepting new child patients when availability allows' and 124 showing as 'accepting new adult patients when availability allows'. This data is sourced from the Find a Dentist website and is matched to constituencies based on the postcode data shown on the website, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist/>

■ **Department of Health and Social Care: Public Relations**

John Cooper:

[\[27757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much (a) his Department and (b) each of its Arm's Length Bodies has spent on external public relations since 5 July 2024; and which firms that funding went to.

Karin Smyth:

Figures are available only for the total cost of external public relations support to paid campaigns incurred by the Department for the period 5 July 2024 to 3 February 2025.

This cost is £474,763.33. All spend has been through a single contract with Mullen Lowe.

■ Doctors: Training

Helena Dollimore: [27907]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many doctors applied for medical specialty training in each of the last five years; and how many training places were available in the same period.

Karin Smyth:

Doctors undertake two years of foundation training after graduation, which is followed by a choice of core training programmes. Most of those in core training then apply for higher specialty training programmes.

For 2024, there were 4,177 applications across the 25 specialty training programmes that comprise medical specialty training, which came from 2,897 unique applicants due to doctors being able to apply to a number of different specialities when seeking specialty training posts. The number of unique applicants for prior years is not held by the Department.

The attached table shows the number of doctors who applied for training in the 25 individual specialty training programmes that comprise medical specialty training, along with how many training posts were available across the United Kingdom in each speciality, in each of the last five years.

This information is drawn from information published by NHS England on the Competition Ratios for all doctor training specialties each year, which is available at the following link:

<https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/competition-ratios>

Attachments:

1. Table of Medical Specialty Training [PQ27907 - Table of Medical Specialty Training Applications and Posts 2020 to 2024.xlsx]

■ Epilepsy: Drugs

Dr Rupa Huq: [27869]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the availability of anti-epileptic medication.

Karin Smyth:

The Department is working hard with industry to help resolve the intermittent supply issues with some epilepsy medications. As a result of ongoing activity and intensive work, including directing suppliers to expedite deliveries, most issues, including with carbamazepine, lamotrigine, and oxcarbazepine presentations, have been resolved.

We are currently aware of an ongoing supply issue with all strengths of topiramate tablets from one manufacturer. This supply issue is expected to resolve by the end of

May 2025. We are also aware of a shortage of phenobarbital 15 milligram tablets from one manufacturer, with the resupply date to be confirmed. In both cases, alternative suppliers are in stock with sufficient supply to support patients, and these issues have been communicated to the National Health Service.

■ **General Practitioners: Finance**

Samantha Niblett:

[\[28714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his Department's press release GP reforms to cut red tape and bring back family doctor, published on 20 December 2024, whether GPs will be able to determine how to spend the additional funding to best meet local needs.

Stephen Kinnock:

On 20 December 2024, we announced a proposed £889 million uplift for general practice (GP) in 2025/26 and set out the proposed areas of reform which will help us to deliver on our commitments. This is the largest uplift to GP funding in years and means we are reversing the recent trend with a rising share of total National Health Service resources going to GPs.

Details on how funding will be allocated is subject to the ongoing GP Contract consultation with the General Practitioners Committee England, and will be announced ahead of April.

■ **General Practitioners: Recruitment**

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[23859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many newly qualified GPs have been employed under the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme since August 2024.

Stephen Kinnock:

Information on the number of recently qualified general practitioners (GPs) for which primary care networks are claiming reimbursement via the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS) is currently being collated. We are working to verify the data and establish its reliability, which is necessary before any dataset can be published.

The Government has delivered an £82 million boost to the ARRS over 2024/25 to enable the recruitment of over 1,000 newly qualified GPs. My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has confirmed that recently qualified GPs who are employed via the ARRS will continue to be supported through the scheme in 2025/26.

■ General Practitioners: Standards

Charlotte Cane: [\[21801\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken to increase access to GP appointments.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 13 January 2025]: We recognise that patients are finding it difficult to see a general practitioner (GP), and we are committed to fixing the front door to the National Health Service to ensure that patients receive the care they deserve. That is why, in October 2024, we provided an £82 million boost to the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme enabling the recruitment of 1,000 newly qualified GPs across England. This will increase the number of appointments delivered in general practice, which will benefit thousands of patients that are struggling to care the care they desperately need. This will also secure the future supply of GPs and take pressure off those currently working in the system.

Additionally, we have announced a proposed £889 million uplift to the GP contract in 2025/26, with a rising share of total NHS resources going to general practice. We are also currently consulting on key proposals to improve access, continuity of care and GP recruitment. This uplift reflects this government's commitment to bring back the family doctor, slash red tape and put general practice at the heart of the neighbourhood health service.

■ Givinostat

Jo Platt: [\[28088\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department is taking steps to ensure that all eligible NHS Trusts participate in the early access programme for givinostat.

Jo Platt: [\[28089\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions he has had with (a) NHS England and (b) ITF Pharma UK on the provision of (i) resources and (ii) guidance to NHS trusts to enable them to take part in the Early Access Programme for givinostat.

Martin Wrigley: [\[28286\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure access to Givinostat for families of children with Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

Martin Wrigley: [\[28287\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that NHS Trusts are (a) aware of and (b) encouraged to participate in the Givinostat Early Access Programme.

Martin Wrigley:

[28288]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what guidance his Department has issued to NHS Trusts on tackling administrative barriers to access to Givinostat treatment.

Martin Wrigley:

[28289]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking with NHS England to ensure that eligible patients have access to Givinostat employee assistance programmes.

Karin Smyth:

ITF Pharma UK, the United Kingdom marketing authorisation holder for givinostat, is providing access to givinostat through a type of compassionate use scheme called an Early Access Programme (EAP). Under the EAP, givinostat is free to both patients taking part in it and to the National Health Service, but the trusts must still cover the cost of administering it to patients. Only Duchenne muscular dystrophy clinicians can make requests for givinostat for their patients. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis for individual named patients, aligned to eligibility criteria.

NHS England does not have any initiatives to encourage participation in compassionate use schemes, which are the responsibility of individual pharmaceutical companies. Participation in the EAP for givinostat, which must be through one of the 23 NorthStar Centres in the UK, is decided at an individual NHS trust level, although there is general advice that trusts should engage with the relevant commissioner if they choose to participate, so that any impacts on the wider service can be taken into account. A NorthStar Centre will not be able to provide givinostat if its local trust has not approved participation.

NHS England has published guidance for integrated care systems (ICS) on free of charge medicines schemes such as EAPs, including providing advice on potential financial, administrative, and clinical risks. The guidance aims to support the NHS to drive value from the medicines and ensure consistent and equitable access to medicines across England. ICSs should follow the recommendations to determine whether to implement any free of charge scheme, including assessing suitability and any risks in the short, medium, and long term. The guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/free-of-charge-foc-medicines-schemes-national-policy-recommendations-for-local-systems/>

■ Health Mission Board

Dr Simon Opher:

[28667]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when the Health Mission Delivery Board last met.

Dr Simon Opher: [\[28668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when the Health Mission Delivery Board will next meet.

Karin Smyth:

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care chairs a cross-Government Health Mission Board to oversee and drive delivery of the Health Mission. The current membership of the Health Mission Board includes the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster as the Deputy Chair. Other ministers will be invited to meetings according to the agenda.

Mission Boards are Cabinet Committees. It is a long-established precedent that information about the proceedings of the Cabinet, or of any committee of the Cabinet, is not normally shared publicly, and this includes mission boards.

■ Health Services and Social Services: Visits

Josh Fenton-Glynn: [\[26606\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to review the Care Quality Commission Fundamental Standard on Visiting and Accompanying to include (a) data on and (b) experiences of family and friends visiting vulnerable people in health and social care settings.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: [\[26607\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of Regulation 9A of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 in protecting the physical health of vulnerable people in health and social care settings during pandemic disease outbreaks.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: [\[26608\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of Regulation 9A of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 in protecting the mental health and wellbeing of vulnerable people in health and social care settings during pandemic disease outbreaks.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: [\[26609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential risk of introducing a legal right for vulnerable people in health and social care settings to be visited by close family members during (a) pandemic disease outbreaks and (b) other healthcare crises.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: [\[26610\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had on Regulation 9A of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 with (a) Non-Departmental Public Bodies of his

Department, (b) Government Executive Agencies, (c) Care Rights UK and (d) other external stakeholders.

Josh Fenton-Glynn:

[\[26611\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to strengthen the visitation rights of family and friends of vulnerable people in health and social care settings to provide (a) emotional support and (b) advocacy.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Care Quality Commission Fundamental Standard on Visiting and Accompanying (Regulation 9A) came into force on 6 April 2024 to strengthen the requirements for health and care providers to facilitate visiting, including during pandemics, as long as it is safe to do so. Visiting is essential to supporting the health and wellbeing of patients and residents, and enabling loved ones to provide support and advocacy.

We continue to monitor the situation regarding visiting through Capacity Tracker data and intelligence from external partners. We will conduct a review of Regulation 9A from April 2025, 12 months on from the legislation coming into force, to assess whether the legislation has been effective in addressing concerns about visiting in health and care settings. In conducting the review, we will draw on a wide range of evidence, including data, intelligence, and the perspectives of people and organisations with an interest.

Depending on the outcome of the review we will consider whether further action is needed.

■ Hospitals: Sexual Offences

Alicia Kearns:

[\[27706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on the number of reports of (a) rape and (b) sexual assault that have taken place in hospitals since 1 January 2024.

Alicia Kearns:

[\[27707\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many alleged (a) rapes or (b) sexual assaults have taken place in hospitals since 1 January 2024.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 7 February 2025]: The Government is committed to tackling the appalling crimes of rape and sexual assault. NHS England has introduced a comprehensive package of measures to improve sexual safety across the NHS.

NHS providers have a mandatory duty to notify the Care Quality Commission of all incidents that affect the health, safety, and welfare of people who use services, including allegations of sexual abuse.

NHS England is investing in improving the collection and analysis of sexual violence data to support organisations to implement policies that reduce incidents of sexual misconduct in the NHS.

Data relating to rape and sexual assault would be held at NHS Trust level. There is no single national dataset in the NHS which captures information on rape and sexual assault for all combinations of staff, patients or visitors to NHS hospitals. Local police forces hold data where there has been a report to the police of rape or sexual assault.

For assaults on staff, the most recent NHS Staff Survey includes questions about staff experiences of sexual misconduct. Results from the 2024 staff survey are expected to be available after March 2025. Results are made available for each NHS Trust, and they are not broken down into hospital and non-hospital settings and do not include patient, carer, or visitor reports.

■ IVF

Mr Luke Charters: [\[24016\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will issue guidance on commissioning policies for NHS-funded IVF.

Karin Smyth:

Integrated care boards are responsible for commissioning local health services, including fertility services, taking account of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) guidelines. The NICE is currently reviewing the fertility services guidelines.

The Government recognises that access to National Health Service funded fertility services is variable, and is working jointly with NHS England on options to improve access for all eligible groups.

■ Mental Health Services: Children

Sarah Champion: [\[27268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what definition of child practitioner his Department uses for children's (a) health and (b) mental health services.

Sarah Champion: [\[27270\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what distinguishes child practitioners from other professionals working in children's mental health services.

Sarah Champion: [\[27272\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what (a) functions and (b) responsibilities are assigned to child practitioners.

Stephen Kinnock:

Children and young people's wellbeing practitioners assess and support children and young people with mental health problems, improving their access to therapies. Further information on children and young people's wellbeing practitioners is available at the following link:

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles-psychological-therapies/childrens-wellbeing-practitioner>

■ **Mental Health Services: Lincolnshire**

Sir John Hayes:

[27826]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help armed forces veterans access mental health support in (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire.

Stephen Kinnock:

Across England, NHS England commissions Op COURAGE, the integrated mental health and wellbeing service for veterans. The Op COURAGE Midlands service, run by the Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, covers the South Holland area.

In the South Holland and The Deepings constituency and in Lincolnshire, veterans can self-refer to Op COURAGE, or a referral can be made on their behalf by a clinician or a family member. The service has been designed to support veterans from all areas, and is delivered from a range of locations, including National Health Service trusts, general practices, Poppy Shops, veteran hubs, and drop-in centres. Elements of the service may also be provided online if this is clinically appropriate.

Whilst Op COURAGE provides a bespoke model of care for veterans, we recognise that there are some veterans who prefer to access mainstream NHS services such as Talking Therapies.

■ **Mental Health Services: Prisoners**

David Smith:

[28312]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what support is provided to people with mental health issues who are serving IPP sentences.

Stephen Kinnock:

NHS England Health and Justice commissioned healthcare providers deliver both primary and secondary care mental health services to all individuals within the custodial estate, irrespective of their detained status. Each individual will be assessed, their care formulation will be agreed, and appropriate clinical treatment, interventions, and support will be provided. If the individual requires transfer to hospital, the transfer to hospital process will be initiated.

■ **Mental Health Services: South Derbyshire**

Samantha Niblett:

[28253]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of waiting times for mental health services in South Derbyshire constituency; and what steps he is taking to reduce those times.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 7 February 2025]: Waiting times for those referred to mental health services are too high all across England, including in the South Derbyshire constituency.

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

Nationally, we plan to recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers across child and adult mental health services in England to reduce delays and provide faster treatment. We will also introduce access to a specialist mental health professional in every school and roll out Young Futures hubs in every community.

In addition, people of all ages who are in crisis or who are concerned about a family or loved one can now call NHS 111, select the mental health option, and speak to a trained mental health professional. National Health Service staff can guide callers with next steps such as organising face-to-face community support or facilitating access to alternative services, like crisis cafés or safe havens, which provide a place for people to stay as an alternative to accident and emergency or a hospital admission.

It is the responsibility of the integrated care boards to commission care to meet the needs of their local population.

■ NHS: Digital Technology**Joe Robertson:**[\[28299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to integrate digital tools into NHS services to help (a) tailor those services to the diverse needs of patients and (b) improve those services.

Karin Smyth:

Patients are able to access National Health Services, such as requesting general practice appointments and managing secondary care appointments, through local online tools and the NHS App, which can also be accessed through a web browser. The NHS App is designed to meet international accessibility standards, and the services are routinely tested with a range of people with accessibility issues. However, digital health tools are part of a wider offering that includes face-to-face support, with appropriate help for people who struggle to access digital services.

NHS England has also published a framework for NHS action on digital inclusion, and is developing further resources to support practical actions. All digital programmes are actively considering how they can contribute to improvements in healthcare inequalities and digital inclusion.

Joe Robertson:

[\[28301\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve digital (a) literacy and (b) confidence in NHS clinical staff.

Karin Smyth:

We are striving for digital services to improve access, experiences, and outcomes for the widest range of people, based on their preferences, as any digital healthcare benefits will be limited if people remain digitally excluded.

Mitigating against the risk of digital exclusion is one of five key priorities that NHS England has asked the integrated care systems to address in their drive to reduce healthcare inequalities. NHS England successfully ran a number of programmes to support patients, carers, and health service staff with their digital literacy. These include:

- the NHS App Spoken Word Pilot project, designed to test the efficacy of promoting National Health Service digital health products and services in languages other than English;
- the Digital Health Champions programme, a proof of concept to support citizens who have no or low digital skills with understanding how to access health services online; and
- the Widening Digital Participation programme, aimed to ensure more people have the digital skills, motivation, and means to access health information and services online.

NHS England has also published a framework for NHS action on digital inclusion and is developing further resources to support practical actions and to build clinical confidence in using digital tools. All digital programmes are actively considering how they can contribute to improvements in healthcare inequalities and digital inclusion.

■ NHS: Drugs

Steff Aquarone:

[\[28230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce cost inefficiencies in purchasing medical supplies.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 7 February 2025]: NHS England's new Operating Model, published on 30 January, sets out in Section 4 how it will support National Health Service bodies to deliver efficiencies by improving commercial arrangements. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/our-new-operating-model-supporting-you-to-deliver-high-quality-care-for-patients/>

These include supporting them to make full use of the products, goods, and services available through the NHS Supply Chain, when best value exists, to procure from frameworks operated by an accredited framework host, to use the NHS Spend

Comparison Service to identify savings, the Health Commercial System, also known as Atamis, to undertake commercial activity, and the NHS procurement value and savings methodology to track and report on procurement savings and benefits.

■ Pharmacy

Rebecca Paul: [\[28167\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his Department's response to the consultation on hub and spoke dispensing, last updated on 13 May 2024, what his planned timetable is for introducing the legislative amendments outlined in his Department's response.

Stephen Kinnock:

The policy proposals, consultation, and response were published under the previous administration. Following the General Election, the Government has reviewed the proposals. The Department is working towards introducing legislation to enable hub and spoke dispensing between different legal entities this year. This change will be enabled via amendments to both primary and secondary legislation, and is subject to the usual Parliamentary processes.

Joe Robertson: [\[28298\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of community pharmacies in maintaining public health.

Stephen Kinnock:

Pharmacies are commissioned to deliver a range of evidence-based services that contribute to public health, including providing advice on maintaining health, treatment for common conditions, identifying people with high blood pressure, initiating and managing oral contraception, and providing vaccination services.

National Health Service pharmaceutical services delivered in community pharmacy are also subject to evaluations to assess outcomes such as clinical appropriateness, and impacts on patients and other parts of the NHS. This includes the National Institute for Health and Care Research's evaluation of Pharmacy First to assess how the service has been implemented across England, including impacts on prescribing in the general practice setting, use of hospitals, and how the service has impacted access to care and costs for different patient groups.

■ Social Services: Employers' Contributions

Julia Buckley: [\[28329\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions on non-profit social care providers for under 65s.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government considered the cost pressures facing adult social care as part of the wider consideration of local government spending within the Spending Review

process. To enable local authorities to deliver key services such as adult social care, the Government is making available up to £3.7 billion of additional funding for social care authorities in 2025/26. Overall, core local government spending power is increasing by 6.8% in cash terms.

HOME OFFICE

■ Asylum: Applications

Rupert Lowe:

[\[27935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the Immigration system statistics data table entitled Asylum applications, initial decisions and resettlement detailed datasets, year ending September 2024, what information her Department holds on the location of the people who made implicit withdrawals between Q1 2020 and Q3 2024; and what estimate she has made of the number of these people who are still in the UK.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The information you have requested is not published. It has not been verified for publication and therefore cannot be released.

Official statistics published by the Home Office are kept under review in line with the code of practice for statistics, taking into account a number of factors including user needs, the resources required to compile the statistics, as well as quality and availability of data.

■ Asylum: Havering

Julia Lopez:

[\[29105\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has commissioned the use of hotel accommodation in the London Borough of Havering for the purpose of housing asylum seekers since 10 October 2024.

Julia Lopez:

[\[29106\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made any revision to the process of notifying hon. Members before asylum hotels are established within their constituency.

Dame Angela Eagle:

No new hotels have been commissioned to accommodate asylum seekers in the London Borough of Havering since 10 October 2024.

When a hotel has been identified for use as contingency accommodation, Home Office officials will write to the local authority Chief Executive and the constituency MP to inform them of plans to accommodate asylum seekers there.

■ Asylum: Local Government**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[28146\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made changes to the level of funding to local authorities for asylum seekers since July 2024.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office has a statutory obligation to support asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute.

In recent years, the Home Office has had various grants through which we provide funds to support local authorities, with responsibilities for housing asylum seekers.

Grant 7 was launched in April 2024 to facilitate local authority support of increased dispersal accommodation (DA) accommodation. A £3500 payment was allocated for the net growth of occupancy in each quarter for Home Office Supported Asylum Seeker accommodation within the geographical bounds of the local authority under the following categories; DA, overflow dispersal accommodation (ODA) and initial accommodation (IA).

Grant 6 was launched in April 2024 to acknowledge the contribution of Local Authorities to supporting asylum seekers. A payment of £750 was made for each occupied bedspace as of 01 April 2024 and a subsequent payment was allocated for the net growth of occupancy in each quarter for Home Office Supported Asylum Seeker accommodation within the geographical bounds of the local authority under the following categories; DA, ODA and IA and contingency accommodation (CA).

All local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales who support asylum seekers are eligible for payment. Similar arrangements are in place for Northern Ireland.

■ Asylum: Scotland**John Lamont:** [\[29057\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many hotels in Scotland are being used to accommodate asylum seekers.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Hon Member to the Answer I gave on 3 February to Question UIN 26316.

■ British Nationality: Children**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[28681\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many fee waiver requests for child citizenship applications have been (a) submitted, (b) accepted and (c) rejected in the last 12 months.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[28682\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what revenue has the Exchequer received from child citizenship applications since the fee waiver was introduced.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [28683]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has plans to increase the fees associated with applications for child citizenship.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [28684]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has commissioned an impact assessment on proposals to increase fees associated with adult citizenship applications.

Seema Malhotra:

An Impact Assessment has been published alongside the Immigration and Nationality (Fees) (Amendment) Order 2025

(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2025/9/pdfs/ukia_20250009_en.pdf) which sets out an estimate of the proposed fee changes, were they to increase to the level of the new fee maxima. A full impact assessment will be published alongside any increase to fee levels in the Immigration and Nationality (Fees) Regulations 2018.

Fees for immigration and nationality applications are kept under review. Any changes to fee levels can only be made through an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality (Fees) Regulations with the approval of Parliament.

The Home Office publishes data on the number of fee waiver requests for child registration applications that have been submitted, accepted and rejected. The latest data can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-and-protection-data-q3-2024>.

The Home Office does not hold specific data on the amount of revenue received from child citizenship applications.

■ Child Sexual Abuse Independent Panel Inquiry

Sarah Champion: [28486]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse final report, published in October 2022, which Department has lead responsibility for implementing the recommendations of that report.

Jess Phillips:

The Home Office has the lead responsibility across Government for tackling child sexual abuse. However, the final 20 recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse are wide-ranging and cut across multiple Government departments lead responsibilities. That is why a cross-Government ministerial group is continuing to consider and work through the remaining recommendations.

The Home Secretary has committed, in her statement to Parliament on the 16 January 2025, that the Government will lay out a clear timetable for taking forward the 20 recommendations of the final report before Easter.

■ Children: Protection

Mr Will Forster:

[\[27049\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to tackle safeguarding issues relating to (a) children at risk of being removed from the UK in contravention of a court ruling and (b) other children with a foreign national parent.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The statutory guidance 'Working together to safeguard children' 2023 is clear that, if at any time it is considered that a child may be in need or has suffered significant harm or is likely to do so, a referral should be made immediately to a local authority's children's social care service. Child protection agencies and the police treat allegations of abuse very seriously; they will investigate and take appropriate action, including prosecution, where there is sufficient evidence of an offence having been committed.

A prohibited steps order (PSO) prevents a parent from carrying out actions in the exercise of their parental responsibility for a child without the court's agreement. A PSO may prohibit a named person from removing a child from the United Kingdom.

The court can also make other orders to support such an order to prevent the removal of the child from the United Kingdom, such as an order to surrender a passport.

Breach of a PSO is a contempt of court, with penalties including a fine or imprisonment.

A Port Alert Order is designed to prevent a child, or a Vulnerable adult being removed from England and Wales on the instruction of a Judge of the Family Court on Behalf of the High Court, or directly from a High Court Judge. Police then watchlist the named individual to ensure any intention to travel is identified. If travel is identified, then an alert is sent to the relevant Port and Police Force. The Order instructs police at port to seize the travel documents of the person subject to the Order (for example their Passport, Identity Card or other Travel Document) to prevent the child or Vulnerable adult from leaving the country.

■ Deportation

Chris Philp:

[\[28532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will use sanctions including visa penalties on countries that do not cooperate with the removal of their nationals.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Where cooperation with countries on returns falls below the levels expected, and where appropriate, we stand ready to use all levers available to us to encourage cooperation, including the power to impose visa penalties.

■ **Drugs: Organised Crime**

Chris Philp:

[\[28530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has plans to proscribe drug cartels as terrorist organisations.

Dan Jarvis:

The criteria for proscribing an organisation under the Terrorism Act 2000, and the Government's approach to commenting on those decisions remain exactly the same as they were when the Rt Hon Member was a Home Office Minister.

■ **Firearms: Licensing**

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:

[\[28449\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has used powers under section 44 of the Police Act 1996 to require Chief Constables to provide information on the time taken by firearms licensing departments to process (a) grants and (b) renewals for (i) shotguns and (ii) section 1 firearms.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The issuing of firearms certificates and the efficiency of police forces is a matter for individual Chief Constables, who are held to account by Police and Crime Commissioners.

However, the performance of forces in this space is being actively monitored by the National Police Chiefs' Council's lead for firearms licensing, Deputy Chief Constable David Gardner, and both he and his predecessor have been working actively with forces on performance related issues.

■ **Fraud: Crime Prevention**

Blake Stephenson:

[\[28336\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department plans to take to help tackle financial fraud.

Dan Jarvis:

This Government is committed to working with law enforcement, industry and international partners to tackle financial fraud. This includes blocking fraud at its source, disrupting it before it reaches the public, and providing preventative advice and support such as our "Stop! Think Fraud" campaign.

Further industry action includes potential legislative action to ban "SIM farms", technical devices that allow criminals to send scam texts to thousands of people at the same time, and the Online Safety Act codes of practice which will come into effect in March.

We are working closely with partners to develop a new expanded Strategy as set out in our manifesto. Further details on our approach will be set out in due course.

■ Gender Based Violence

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[27910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology on the potential merits of expanding the provisions of the Online Safety Act 2023 to help tackle violence against women and girls.

Jess Phillips:

Tackling VAWG in all of its forms, including when it takes place online, is a top priority for this Government, and that's why we have set out an unprecedented mission to halve VAWG within a decade.

The misuse of technology to abuse or harm others (including online) has a disproportionate impact on women and children and we know this is a significant and growing issue in the UK and worldwide.

We will go further than before to deliver a cross-government transformative approach to halve all forms of violence against women and girls, underpinned by a new VAWG strategy to be published next year. In January 2025, the Government introduced new legislation which will make creating sexually explicit 'deepfake' images a criminal offence.

The Online Safety Act designates material relating to child sexual exploitation and abuse as a priority offence. Platforms must put in place systems and processes to minimise and remove this content. The Illegal Harms Codes, laid before Parliament in December and coming into force from 17 March this year, sets out the steps companies must take to meet their duties under the Act to tackle this content."

I regularly meet with Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) to discuss these matters.

My officials also engage regularly with DSIT and the Ministry of Justice to identify the most appropriate legislative vehicles to tackle technology-facilitated VAWG.

Joe Morris:

[\[28303\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology on tackling violence against women and girls using the Online Safety Act 2023.

Jess Phillips:

Tackling VAWG in all of its forms, including when it takes place online, is a top priority for this Government, and that's why we have set out an unprecedented mission to halve VAWG within a decade.

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My officials also engage regularly with DSIT and the Ministry of Justice to identify the most appropriate legislative vehicles to tackle technology-facilitated VAWG.

■ **Gender Based Violence: Youth Services**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[27909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential contribution of youth services to the prevention of violence against women and girls.

Jess Phillips:

The Government has set an ambitious target to halve VAWG in a decade. To achieve this, we must reduce the current levels of offending and reoffending but also prevent abuse from happening all together.

The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy will set out our strategic direction and concrete actions to deliver this ambition. We are considering a range of policy options across Government to prevent these crimes including education for young people around healthy relationships and consent, community interventions and tackling online VAWG.

That includes looking at how we can work most effectively with youth services and through the Young Futures programme to deliver this ambition.

■ **Hate Crime: Disability**

Edward Morello:

[\[27898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what her Department's planned timetable is for bringing forward legislative proposals to make disability hate crime an aggravated offence.

Edward Morello:[\[27940\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to ensure police training is updated so that victims of disability hate crime are appropriately supported.

Dame Diana Johnson:

We have committed to ensuring parity of protection for disabled and LGBT+ people under the aggravated offences and will implement this change in an appropriate legislative vehicle in due course.

The College of Policing is responsible for police training in England and Wales and publishes operational guidance for police, known as 'Authorised Professional Practice' (APP), on how to deal with different types of crimes and incidents, including hate crimes. The College of Policing keeps its APP is under review.

The Government funds the National Online Hate Crime Hub which supports individual local police forces in dealing specifically with online hate crime. The Hub provides expert advice to police forces to support them in investigating these offences.

■ Home Office: Artificial Intelligence**Alicia Kearns:**[\[28092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of banning the use by officials in her Department of the DeepSeek artificial intelligence model.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government has a robust set of security policies in place to oversee how information is handled, within our buildings, on our IT and by our staff.

We keep these policies under constant review to ensure they are applicable to new technologies.

The Government's Generative AI framework outlines that only corporately assured Generative AI tools should be used to process HMG information. Everyone who works with government has a duty of confidentiality and a responsibility to safeguard any government information or data that they process, access or share, and all government departments are required to meet a range of mandatory security standards.

■ Home Office: Correspondence**Dr Caroline Johnson:**[\[28590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of items of correspondence from Parliamentarians received by (a) her Department, (b) herself and (c) her ministerial team have not received a substantive response in each month since August 2024.

Dame Diana Johnson:

On policy correspondence cases that have not yet received a substantive response for each month since August 2024 are in the following table.

MONTH	TOTAL RECEIVED	TOTAL OUTSTANDING	HOME SECRETARY RESPONSE	OTHER MINISTERIAL RESPONSE	% OUTSTANDING
August 2024	538	0	0	0	0
September 2024	472	1	0	1	0.2%
October 2024	606	5	1	4	0.8%
November 2024	625	8	0	8	1.3%
December 2024	541	69	3	66	12.8%
Total	2782	83	4	79	3%

Data about intake and performance in answering MP Correspondence on case specific matters (including UK Visa and Immigration, Immigration Enforcement, Border Force and HM Passport Office) is published quarterly with the latest data available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/customer-service-operations-data-q3-2024>

■ Home Office: Employers' Contributions

Rupert Lowe:

[\[27804\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the cost to her Department of the proposed increase in employer National Insurance contributions for financial year 2025-26.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government will provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional Employer National Insurance Contributions costs only.

This funding will be allocated to departments in the usual way, in line with the approach taken under the previous Government's Health and Social Care Levy.

■ Home Office: Muslims

Rupert Lowe:

[\[27492\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the potential cost to the public purse was of her Department's Islamic network in each of the last five years.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The costs of individual faith and belief networks over the last five financial years are not held centrally in an accessible form, and could only be identified and verified for the purposes of answering this question at disproportionate cost. However, the Department has previously provided cost figures for all Staff Networks. The answer to this can be found here: [PQ 26338](#)

In addition, the Cabinet Office last year has audited the cost-effectiveness of all equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) activities and in response to that audit, new guidance was published on Civil Service EDI Expenditure, including an end to all external spending on EDI activity, unless cleared and authorised by Ministers.

■ Home Office: Public Relations

John Cooper: [\[27753\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much (a) her Department and (b) each of its Arm's Length Bodies has spent on external public relations since 5 July 2024; and which firms that funding went to.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Public relations activity is a subset of communication spend. As such, this data is not held. The Government Communication Service encourages the prioritisation of low and no cost public relations activities wherever possible.

It is recommended that all external communications support should be procured through approved government frameworks, with strict controls in place to ensure cost-effectiveness.

■ Immigration

Rupert Lowe: [\[27715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for what reason there was an increase in the number of settlement grants for workers from 2022-2023.

Seema Malhotra:

The increase in individuals reaching the five-year qualifying threshold in 2023 will tend to reflect the increase in work visas issued five years previously, in 2018 under the previous administration. My Hon friend, the Home Secretary, addressed reasons for the latter increase in her statement to the House of Commons on 2 December 2024.

■ People Smuggling: Convictions

Mrs Elsie Blundell: [\[27592\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the impact of her Department's policies on the number of convictions for (a) people smuggling and (b) related crimes since July 2024.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Backed by £150 million funding, the Border Security Command (BSC) has a strategic cross-government remit and convening authority over the border security system, with its early focus on delivering operational capacity and new powers to support agencies across the Border Security system to dismantle criminal gangs quickly and effectively.

The National Crime Agency (NCA) leads the law enforcement response to the organised criminality involved in the trafficking and smuggling of people to the UK; it investigates and brings organised immigration crime offenders to justice. The NCA assesses their activity is having an impact here and overseas – Their operational results are demonstrated in the form of arrests, prosecutions and seizures, and they have continued to disrupt a large number of networks involved in this type of criminality since July 2024.

From 4th July 2024 through 12th December 2024, 17 people were convicted and sentenced across 7 OIC operations thanks to NCA's actions. 15 of those sentenced received a total of over 107 years in custody, with a further 2 people receiving suspended sentences for their OIC crimes.

The NCA has over 70 ongoing investigations into networks or individuals in the top tier of organised immigration crime - several of these sit right at the top of the NCA's priority list.

■ Police: Workplace Pensions**Liz Jarvis:**[\[27962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has plans to allow police survivors who (a) remarry and (b) cohabit after losing a spouse to retain their full pension entitlement.

Dame Diana Johnson:

With the introduction of the 2006 police pension scheme on 6 April 2006, all eligible police officers were able to join a pension scheme that provides life-long survivor benefits for spouses, civil partners and unmarried partners, including those who remarry or cohabit after losing a spouse.

Police pension schemes prior to the 2006 police pension scheme did not have life-long survivor benefits and any retrospective changes to those schemes would need to be fully costed and affordable.

There are no plans at this time to make any such changes to benefits accrued in previous schemes.

■ Road Traffic Offences: Hertfordshire**David Taylor:**[\[28795\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help tackle speeding by motor vehicles in rural areas of Hertfordshire.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Excess speed is still a major cause of death and serious injury on our roads. Anyone who breaks the speed limit should expect to face sanction.

Enforcement of speeding offences in rural areas of Hertfordshire and the deployment of available resources and capabilities is an operational matter for Hertfordshire Constabulary's Chief Constable and Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner to determine, taking into account the specific local problems and demands with which they are faced.

■ Southport Public Inquiry

Chris Philp: [\[28529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will instruct the Southport public inquiry to make an assessment of the adequacy of public communications by the Government in the aftermath of those murders.

Dame Diana Johnson:

We are moving swiftly to set up the inquiry.

We will consult the families and other interested parties on its scope to ensure all critical issues are addressed while remaining manageable and sensitive to the needs of those most affected.

We will announce further details about the inquiry in due course.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Albania

Chris Philp: [\[28942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of the Italian Government decision to use naval ships to transport migrants to Albania.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Italian navy has competence for the transfer of migrants rescued in international waters to the centres in Albania run by the Italian government.

As part of this Government's expansion of international cooperation in the fight against Organised Immigration Crime, we constantly monitor the impact of the methods, techniques and technology that other partner nations and agencies are employing in that fight.

The UK government is monitoring the Italian government implementation of their deal with Albania as an innovative approach to manage migration flows.

■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel

Rupert Lowe: [\[27936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's transparency data entitled Small boat arrivals: last 7 days, last updated 31

January 2025, if she will make it her policy to include data on the number of small boat arrival deportations.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office publishes data on the return of small boat arrivals in the [“Immigration System Statistics quarterly release”](#). Quarterly data on returns of small boat arrivals is published table Irr_02e of the [“Irregular migration summary tables”](#). This covers the period 2018 to September 2024.

■ **Visas**

Dr Lauren Sullivan:

[\[28324\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to reduce the backlog of visa applications.

Seema Malhotra:

Visa processing times are published on the UKVI website at Visa decision waiting times: applications outside the UK - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) and Visa decision waiting times: applications inside the UK - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). UKVI are currently processing applications on the overwhelming majority of its visa routes within their published customer service standards.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ **Affordable Housing: Rural Areas**

Martin Wrigley:

[\[25804\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she plans to take to deliver more affordable homes annually in rural areas.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government is committed to delivering the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation. We will set out details of new investment to succeed the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme at the Spending Review. This new investment will deliver a mix of homes for sub-market rent and homeownership, with a particular focus on delivering homes for Social Rent.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December 2024 includes a number of changes designed to support the delivery of social and affordable homes. These include new Golden Rules for development on the Green Belt. Prior to development plan policies for affordable housing being updated in accordance with the revised NPPF, the affordable housing contribution required to satisfy the ‘Golden Rules’ is 15 percentage points above the highest existing affordable housing requirement that would otherwise apply to the development, subject to a cap of 50%. We estimate that under this model, the median Green Belt local planning authority affordable housing requirement will be 50%.

Outside of the Green Belt, it is for local authorities to assess the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community, including those who require affordable housing, and to reflect this in their planning policies. However, the government have made clear that authorities should consider the particular needs of those who require Social Rent homes when undertaking needs assessments and setting policies on affordable housing requirements.

The government is committed to strengthening the existing system of developer contributions to ensure new developments provide necessary affordable homes and infrastructure. Further details will be set out in due course.

We are giving further consideration to how policy can better promote rural affordable housing as part of our work to produce a set of national policies for decision making in 2025.

■ **Community Development: Radicalism**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[26476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in response to the question from Hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner during the Urgent Question on Community Engagement Principles and Extremism Definition of 21 January 2025, Official Report, Column 967, what the Government's policy is on engaging with (a) people who and (b) organisations which publicly condone criminal activity.

Alex Norris:

The government does not knowingly engage with any individual or group that condones criminal activity.

■ **Local Government Boundary Commission for England**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[28045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, whether additional resources will be provided to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Jim McMahon:

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is independent of Government and accountable to Parliament through the Speakers Committee. The Commission is resourced via that committee on estimates approved by Parliament.

■ Local Government Finance

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[29102\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the inclusion of measures of deprivation as part of funding reform for local government.

Jim McMahon:

Building on the measures in the 2025-26 Local Government Finance Settlement, the Government is committed to introducing an improved and updated approach to funding local authorities from 2026-27.

We are inviting views on our principles and objectives for funding reform through a consultation (18 December – 12 February), as well as engaging with the local government sector more broadly. As part of this, we are inviting views on the drivers of councils' spending need, including measures of deprivation.

This consultation and engagement will inform the development of our detailed proposals, which we will consult on in late Spring following the multi-year Spending Review and ahead of the provisional multi-year Settlement for 2026-27.

■ Local Government Finance: Northern Ireland

Claire Hanna:

[\[29046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much financial support the Government has provided for local government in Northern Ireland to support with the impact of changes to employer National Insurance Contributions.

Jim McMahon:

At the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, the government announced an additional £515 million of support for local government in England to manage the impact of changes to employer NICs.

The devolved governments will receive funding through the Barnett Formula in the usual way in 2025-26.

■ Local Government Services: Rural Areas

Simon Hoare:

[\[27866\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an estimate of the impact of the provision of council services in rural areas on the cost of those services in (a) North Dorset constituency and (b) other rural areas.

Jim McMahon:

The government is absolutely committed to tackling the issues that matter to rural communities. Places with a significant rural population will on average receive almost a 6% increase in their Core Spending Power (CSP) next year, which is a real terms

increase. No council will see a reduction – and new funding will be available to rural areas in 2025-26 through guaranteed EPR payments.

For Dorset Council this represents an increase of 5.9% in CSP - making available a total of up to £451.1 million in 2025-26.

The government is currently inviting views on how best to consider the impact of rurality on the costs of service delivery, and demand, as part of our longer-term consultation on local authority funding reform. Within this, we propose continuing to apply Area Cost Adjustments to account for relative cost differences between local authorities, including differences between rural and urban areas.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Bidfood

Laurence Turner:

[R] [26749]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what contracts (a) BFS Group Limited and (b) subsidiary companies of BFS Group Limited hold with (i) her Department and (ii) agencies of her Department.

Alex Norris:

Information about contracts awarded by Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government and its agencies is available on Contracts Finder or Find a Tender Service, as required under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

Details can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/contracts-finder> and <https://www.find-tender.service.gov.uk/Search>.

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

Charlie Dewhirst:

[26612]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reason her Department publishes all Government Procurement Card transactions.

Alex Norris:

MHCLG's spend publication thresholds were set by an historic Ministerial decision. We have been reviewing this and all future spend data will be published in line with Cabinet Office requirements.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Written Questions

Kevin Hollinrake:

[28996]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when she plans to answer Question 16192 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Corporate Hospitality and Official Gifts, published on 26 November 2024.

Jim McMahon:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer to Question UIN [16192](#) on 6 February 2025.

■ Permitted Development Rights

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[28567]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of increasing permitted development rights.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government has announced its intention to amend the existing permitted development rights for air source heat pumps and electric vehicle charging points to support homeowners. Further information is available on gov.uk [here](#) and [here](#).

We continue to keep permitted development rights under review.

■ Planning Permission

Kevin Hollinrake:

[27158]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 18 December 2024 to Question 18957 on Devolution: East of England, for what reason planning powers are being transferred to a regional level.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government does not intend to transfer planning powers to a regional level. The English Devolution White Paper, Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth, published in December 2024, confirmed our commitment to implement strategic planning at a sub-regional level through the production of Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs).

■ Religious Hatred: Christianity

Andrew Rosindell:

[26448]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many instances of religiously aggravated criminal damage were reported in (a) England and (b) Romford constituency in the last 12 months.

Andrew Rosindell:

[26449]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking with relevant organisations to help tackle anti-Christian hate crimes.

Andrew Rosindell:

[26450]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking with relevant organisations to help tackle anti-Christian religiously-aggravated criminal damage.

Andrew Rosindell:

[26451]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many anti-Christian hate crimes were reported in (a) England and (b) Romford constituency in the last 12 months.

Alex Norris:

We are absolutely clear that all forms of racial and religious discrimination are completely unacceptable, including that directed at Christians, and we committed to protecting the right of individuals to freely practise their religion. Churches and Christian charities occupy a valuable position in society through their access to active citizens, their role within local communities and their good relationships with other faith groups. Government and police routinely assess potential threats to ensure that protective measures are in place to protect Christian communities and their places of worship against terrorism and hate crime. Government however does not hold detailed hate crime data broken down per constituency.

■ Social Rented Housing: Mould**David Taylor:**[\[29318\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to help tackle mould in (a) council and (b) housing association properties in Hertfordshire.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government is committed to working with social housing providers to ensure that homes are safe, decent, warm, and free from damp and mould.

The Deputy Prime Minister made a Written Ministerial Statement on 6 February ([HCWS423](#)) confirming that the government will be bringing Awaab's Law into force for damp and mould in October 2025.

Awaab's Law is vital legislation that will empower social tenants to hold their landlords to account using the full force of the law if they fail to investigate and fix hazards within their homes within set timescales. It will also allow tenants to access the Housing Ombudsman if their landlord does not adhere to strict timelines for action.

The government is also committed to consulting on a new Decent Homes Standard and Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards this year.

■ Social Services: Council Tax**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[28149\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Council Tax (Demand Notices and Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2025, for what reason the Government is changing the requirements for councils to display information related to the amount of council tax used to fund adult social care services.

Jim McMahon:

Since 2016-17 councils with responsibility for adult social care services have been given additional flexibility to increase their council tax without a referendum, provided this revenue is spent exclusively on these services. This flexibility is known as the adult social care precept.

From 2025-26 the council tax charge of social care authorities must be displayed as a single line on council tax bills. This will simplify bills and provide greater clarity on the total annual increases set by these councils.

■ Temporary Accommodation: Children

Helen Maguire:

[\[28284\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the findings from the National Child Mortality Database, if her Department will bring forward legislative proposals to mandate local authorities to provide cots for children under the age of two in temporary accommodation.

Rushanara Ali:

These statistics are shocking. Homelessness levels are far too high and we are taking action to fix the current system that has left too many families without security or stability.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance is clear that temporary accommodation should not be considered suitable for a family with children under two if there is not enough space for a cot and that housing authorities should support families to secure a cot where needed. The legislation sets out that all temporary accommodation must be suitable, and local authorities should keep the suitability of accommodation under review. Where an individual feels that the council has applied their statutory duties incorrectly, they can take action in the courts or bring their concerns to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

The Deputy Prime Minister is leading cross-government work to deliver the long-term solutions we need to get us back on track to ending all forms of homelessness. This includes chairing a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group, bringing together ministers from across government to develop a long-term strategy.

As announced at the Budget, funding for homelessness services has been increased by £233 million compared to last year (2024/25). This increased spending will help to prevent rises in the number of families in temporary accommodation and help to prevent rough sleeping. This brings total Homelessness spend to nearly £1 billion in 25/26, a record level of funding.

JUSTICE

■ Knives: Crime

Gregory Stafford:

[\[28781\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing sentences for knife crime perpetrators.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Tackling knife crime is a priority and this Government is determined to do all it can to break the deadly cycle of violence that devastates the lives of individuals, families,

and communities. It is important that those who commit violent crimes receive appropriate, proportionate and robust sentences.

It is the function of the independent courts to decide the sentence in each case subject to the maximum that Parliament has provided and any guidelines that may be laid down by the Sentencing Council or the Court of Appeal. We have a robust legal framework in place to respond to knife crimes, with the maximum penalty for carrying a knife or threatening with an offensive weapon being 4 years imprisonment.

Where someone is actually harmed by a knife or offensive weapon, there are a range of offences that the offender may be charged with, such as causing grievous bodily harm. These can result in lengthy sentences, up to life imprisonment.

The Government has launched an Independent Review of Sentencing chaired by former Lord Chancellor, David Gauke. The Review aims to ensure that the sentencing framework is consistent, protects the public and that there is always a place in prison for violent offenders.

■ Ministry of Justice: Correspondence

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[28961\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of items of correspondence from Parliamentarians received by (a) her Department, (b) her and (c) her Ministers in each month since August 2024 have not yet received a substantive response.

Alex Davies-Jones:

For the months of August and September all correspondence from Parliamentarians have received a substantive response. The table below covers October-January.

MONTH	OUTSTANDING	PERCENTAGE
October	6	1.5%
November	9	2.5%
December	58	19.5%
*January *Many of these cases remain within Cabinet Office target of 20 working days.	255	67.5%

These figures reflect correspondence sent directly to MoJ HQ from Parliamentarians, and do not include correspondence sent directly to its executive agencies such as HMCTS or HMPPS.

Ministers and the Department place great value on effective and timely handling of ministerial correspondence and keep performance of this under review.

The Cabinet Office publishes routine statistics on Departmental performance which can be found on GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/data-on-responses-to-correspondence-from-mps-and-peers>(opens in a new tab).

■ Prison Officers: Pay

Grahame Morris: [\[28487\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of prison officer salary levels on staff retention rates.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The 2024/25 Prison Service pay award delivered a pay rise of at 5% for all Band 3 – 5 Prison Officers on modernised terms and conditions. This brings the starting salary for an entry level officer (on the national rate, 39 hours with unsocial hours) from £32,851 to £34,494.

As of 30 September 2024, there are 23,571 Band 3-5 Full Time Equivalent Prison Officers in post, and nationally across establishments we are at 99.5% of our Target Staffing Figure (when using hours adjusted FTE). We have seen indications of an improving retention picture in the past two years – as of September 2024, the resignation rate for Band 3-5 prison officers was 8.5%, which is an improvement of 3 percentage points since September 2022 (11.5%).

When asked about their primary reason for leaving the prison service, Pay and Reward no longer consistently features in the top five reasons for leaving as cited by staff in exit interviews.

Grahame Morris: [\[28488\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of prison officer salaries given the levels of (a) risk and (b) stress of this role.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Prison Service staff are some of our finest public servants. Despite their hard work, the Prison Service has been under immense pressure due to an increasing population and ageing estate.

One of the first things this Government did upon coming into office was to accept the independent recommendations of the Prison Service Pay Review Body in full. This delivered a pay rise of 5% for Band 3-5 Prison Officers on modernised terms and conditions. This brings the starting salary for an entry level officer (on the national rate, 39 hours with unsocial hours) from £32,851 to £34,494.

Given the challenges of working in a prison, we provide extensive mental health support, including a 24-hour helpline, confidential counselling, and online wellbeing services. Our Trauma Risk Management practitioners and Care Teams provide further support following any incidents while on duty.

Grahame Morris:

[\[28489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent estimate she has made of the level of pay rise required by prison officers for salaries to be at the same real-terms levels as they were in 2010.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Pay for Prison Officers is informed by independent recommendations made by the Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB).

HMPPS' written evidence to the PSPRB for 2025/26 was published on 10 December 2025. This noted that the rate of economic growth since the global financial crisis of 2008 has been substantially lower than in previous decades. Annual real productivity growth (GDP per hour worked) fell by around 1.5% from an average of 2.1% in the decade prior to 2008, to 0.6% between 2010 and 2019. Higher productivity enables higher wages, and only sustained productivity growth over the medium-term can deliver sustainable long-run economic growth and real-terms wage rises.

In making their independent recommendations, the PSPRB takes account of the written and oral evidence submitted by Government as well as evidence and representations made by the recognised Trade Unions, including the Prison Officers' Association. The PSPRB considers a range of factors such as private sector wage growth, inflation, and future Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasts.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ 5G: Rural Areas

Simon Hoare:

[\[27863\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what the coverage is of 5G in Dorset; and what steps he is taking to improve 5G coverage in rural areas.

Chris Bryant:

I have raised my concerns about the reporting of mobile connectivity with Ofcom, but Ofcom reports that 5G is available outside 86% of premises across the Dorset local authority area from at least one mobile operator.

In order to realise the full economic and social benefits of 5G, our ambition is for all populated areas, including communities in rural areas, to have higher-quality standalone 5G by 2030.

We work closely with the mobile industry and are committed to ensuring we have the right policy and regulatory framework to support investment and competition in the market. As part of this work, the Government intends to reform the planning system to make it easier to build digital infrastructure.

■ AAT Deficiency: Research**Ben Obese-Jecty:** [\[27663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what estimate he has made of the potential cost to the public purse of Government funding for Alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency research in financial year 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[27664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what estimate he has made of the potential cost to the public purse of Government funding for Wilson's disease research in financial year 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[27665\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what estimate he has made of the potential cost to the public purse of Government funding for Gilbert syndrome research in financial year 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[27666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what estimate he has made of the potential cost to the public purse of Government funding for intrahepatic cholestasis of pregnancy research in financial year 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Feryal Clark:

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) funds medical research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). NIHR funds, enables, and delivers high-quality research to improve patient care and public health and [supports liver research](#) through a range of funding programmes, training, support for researchers and facilities.

UKRI delivers a substantial portfolio of researcher-led projects. UKRI's Medical Research Council also plays a key role in funding underpinning research which may not be attributable to a specific condition but will benefit medical research more generally. UKRI has funded £1,613.772 to the University of College London for a research project into antitrypsin, to form long chains of linked molecules (called "polymers") that are trapped inside liver cells. The build-up of polymers damages the cell and increases the chance of developing liver cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Funding for health-related research is also available through the UK's association with the Horizon Europe Programme, worth more than £80 billion.

■ Arts and Humanities Research Council**Ben Obese-Jecty:** [\[27671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with the Arts and Humanities Research Council on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[27673\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with the Economic and Social Research Council on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[27676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[27680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[27681\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with the Medical Research Council on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[27682\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with the Natural Environment Research Council on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[27684\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with the Science and Technology Facilities Council on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[27685]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with Innovate UK on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[27686]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with Research England on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[27687]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with UK Research and Innovation on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024.

Feryal Clark:

Ministers and officials meet regularly with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) including its constituent councils, on a range of issues. The UKRI Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2020-2025 sets out UKRI's ambition to protect and enhance the environment across its investments and operations, while ensuring that the research and innovation it supports stays at the cutting-edge. The UKRI Environmental Sustainability Strategy is available at:

<https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-environmental-sustainability-strategy/>.

As part of this Strategy, UKRI established a carbon fund, which identified and funded quick wins in their research facilities and as of April 2025 will support the implementation of a pilot scheme for carbon budgets.

UKRI's councils provide broad support for research and innovation to improve sustainability, including over £22.7 million funding over five years through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council to support research that drives the transition to sustainable technologies and operations.

■ **Broadband: Rural Areas**

Simon Hoare:

[27864]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what the coverage is of superfast broadband in (a) Dorset and (b) North Dorset constituency; and what steps he is taking to improve superfast broadband coverage in hard-to-reach areas.

Chris Bryant:

According to the independent website Thinkbroadband.com, over 97% of premises in Dorset can access superfast broadband speeds (≥ 30 Mbps) and over 61% have access to a gigabit-capable broadband connection (>1000 Mbps). In the North Dorset constituency, over 98% can access superfast broadband speeds, and over 78% have access to a gigabit-capable broadband connection.

To improve this coverage further, Wessex Internet is delivering two contracts under Project Gigabit, targeted at bringing fast, reliable broadband to premises in hard-to-reach areas that are unlikely to be otherwise reached by suppliers' commercial rollout.

■ Internet: Infrastructure

Chi Onwurah: [\[28485\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department has made an assessment of the (a) resilience and (b) reliability of cloud services, in the context of its plans to designate cloud services as Critical National Infrastructure.

Feryal Clark:

The Government process for designating infrastructure as Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) requires an assessment of the sector's resilience, and its reliability, in performing its essential function to society and the economy. This was assessed prior to the designation of cloud infrastructure as CNI in September 2024.

Cloud computing services have also been subject to the security requirements of the Network & Information Systems (NIS) Regulations since 2018 and are subject to ongoing oversight by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). This will be further strengthened by the Cyber Security and Resilience Bill, which will give the ICO additional regulatory powers for the sector.

■ Life Sciences: Northern Ireland

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[28458\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what outcomes there were through Innovate UK's Launchpad initiative in Northern Ireland in 2024.

Feryal Clark:

Innovate UK has allocated up to £7.5 million for the Life and Health Sciences Launchpad in Northern Ireland. An initial allocation of funding was made to 14 business-led projects in April 2024. 18 additional projects targeting early-stage businesses in this cluster were funded in summer 2024. Competitions are currently in planning to allocate the remaining Launchpad funds.

Innovate UK is evaluating the impact of all the Launchpads, including the one in Northern Ireland. It will publish interim findings from early 2027 via UKRI's public website. A full impact evaluation will subsequently report from late 2028.

■ Social Media: Children

Ian Byrne: [\[27902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what recent assessment has he made of the impact of social media use on children's well-being.

Feryal Clark:

In November 2024 DSIT announced a feasibility study to further understand the impact of smartphones and social media on children.

The study will review existing evidence on the topic and assess which research methods will be most effective in determining the causal effect of social media and smartphones on children's developmental outcomes. The study will conclude in May 2025.

Universities: Research**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[27688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with universities on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024; and with which universities he has had such discussions.

Ben Obese-Jecty:[\[27690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with businesses on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024; and with which businesses he has had such discussions.

Feryal Clark:

The Department has regular discussions with businesses and universities on a range of issues, including environmental sustainability. UKRI has close engagement with the Research & Innovation sector within the UK through their Environmental Strategy, as well as the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice. The concordat aims to help the sector act responsibly to protect and promote the environment, and representation includes universities, research institutes, catapults and funding organisations. Internationally, UKRI is also part of the Heidelberg Agreement. Nine European countries collaborated on developing the agreement, through which research funders take a proactive approach to promoting sustainability in scientific research.

SCOTLAND**Exports: Scotland****Andrew Bowie:**[\[29079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what the value of Scottish exports is to (a) England, (b) Wales and (c) Northern Ireland.

Kirsty McNeill:

The latest official statistics, published on 29 January 2025, show that Scotland's exports to the rest of the UK was worth over £60.5 billion in 2023, and valued at over

£47.7 billion during the first three quarters of 2024. The rest of the UK includes England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

■ Scottish Environmental Protection Agency

Andrew Bowie:

[\[29096\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, when he (a) last met and (b) plans to next meet with the Chief Executive of the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency.

Kirsty McNeill:

Scotland Office Ministers meet with a variety of stakeholders on a regular basis, including from the environmental sector, as required.

The positive reset of relations with the Scottish Government and, as appropriate, its agencies, is a priority for this Government. While the majority of environmental policy is devolved, we work with the Scottish Government on matters that fall within the scope of both of our administrations. We also meet their Ministers regularly at the Inter-Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs where matters relating to the environment are often discussed.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY

■ Members' Staff: Pay

Jim Shannon:

[\[28876\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Warrington North, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing staff salary pay scales so parliamentary advisors can be paid at the same level as hon. Members.

Charlotte Nichols:

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) keeps MPs' staff pay under review and periodically assesses benchmarking data so that pay scales remain in line with the salaries of other similar roles within the public sector.

There are seven standard MPs' staff roles plus interns, each having different job descriptions, required skills and competencies, experience, and levels of responsibility. IPSA's benchmarking process insures that salary differentials reflect the market rates for different roles.

IPSA annually presents its recommendations to the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority as part of the committee's review of IPSA's main estimate.

TRANSPORT**■ Aviation: Carbon Emissions****Gareth Bacon:**[\[29041\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what comparative assessment she has made of trends in the level of investment in (a) operational trials and (b) infrastructure development for zero-emission aviation by (i) the UK and (ii) other countries.

Gareth Bacon:[\[29042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to facilitate the commercialisation of hydrogen-powered aircraft for passengers; and whether she is allocating additional resources for that process.

Mike Kane:

The Government is supportive of new forms of zero-emission aircraft being brought into commercial use.

The Department for Business and Trade is co-investing with industry through the Aerospace Technology Institute Programme in R&D on aerospace technology, including projects focussed on zero emission aircraft. The budget confirmed a five-year extension to the programme with nearly £1bn funding.

In addition, from January 2025 the use of low carbon hydrogen as an aviation fuel is eligible for reward under the SAF mandate where it meets sustainability criteria. The Civil Aviation Authority's Hydrogen in Aviation Regulatory Challenge is being supported by a £0.9m grant from the Government's Regulatory Pioneers Fund. Future government funding will be considered within the ongoing Spending Review.

The Jet Zero Taskforce Expert Group, convening representatives from government, industry, and academia with an interest in aviation decarbonisation, have agreed to establish a dedicated group to unlock barriers to the commercial operation of zero-carbon hydrogen aircraft.

The Department for Transport has not made a comparative assessment of trends in operational trials nor infrastructure development.

■ Chiltern Railways: Rolling Stock**Freddie van Mierlo:**[\[29350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 22 January 2025 to Question 24061 on Rolling Stock, if she will ensure that the Rolling Stock Strategy procures adequate capacity on the Chiltern Rail route between Haddenham and Thame Parkway.

Simon Lightwood:

I and my officials continue work with Chiltern Railways to improve passenger experience. Chiltern periodically adjust its timetable in response to passenger demand.

We are closely engaged with Chiltern's fleet renewal programme. The option to procure additional trains to increase capacity is being investigated, while considering the value for money for taxpayers.

■ Department for Transport: Correspondence

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[28592\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many and what proportion of items of correspondence from Parliamentarians received by (a) her Department, (b) herself and (c) her ministerial team have not received a substantive response in each month since August 2024.

Lilian Greenwood:

The information requested is in the table below. Please note that some correspondence received in January will not be due for reply until February and so that month has been excluded.

MONTH	NUMBER OF CASES	NUMBER CLOSED	NUMBER STILL OPEN	% STILL OPEN
August	383	382	1	0.2%
September	343	338	5	1.5%
October	402	398	4	1%
November	385	366	19	5%
December	382	337	45	12%
Total	1895	1821	74	4%

■ High Speed 2 Line: Tatton

Esther McVey:

[\[27848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many residential properties have been purchased in preparation for HS2 Phase 2b; and what proportion of these have been vacant for longer than six months in Tatton Constituency.

Lilian Greenwood:

720 residential properties in total have been acquired on the former HS2 Phase 2b route. Of these, 59 are in the Tatton constituency, of which 19 have been vacant for more than six months.

■ **Motor Insurance: Fees and Charges**

Edward Morello: [\[27903\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with the motor insurance sector on trends in the level of insurance prices for first-time drivers.

Edward Morello: [\[27904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of trends in the level of car insurance costs on the ability of young people to access employment.

Lilian Greenwood:

The cross-Government motor insurance taskforce, launched in October, is comprised of ministers from relevant government departments and the Financial Conduct Authority and Competition and Markets Authority. The taskforce is supported by a separate stakeholder panel of industry experts representing the insurance, motor, and consumer sector.

The taskforce has been set up to support the Government's missions to grow the economy and break down the barriers to opportunity for drivers of all ages, by acting on the cost pressures facing industry. We will provide updates on the taskforce's work in due course.

■ **Railway Stations: Runnymede and Weybridge**

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[28597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to improve accessibility at railway stations in Runnymede and Weybridge constituency.

Simon Lightwood:

We are carefully considering the best approach to the Access for All programme. Since April 2024, 19 stations have been completed with a further 8 due to be completed by April 2025. This will be the most stations completed in one year since the programme started in 2006. We will shortly be updating MPs and other stakeholders on our approach to Access for All. This Government is committed to improving the accessibility of the railway and recognises the social and economic benefits this brings to communities.

■ **Railways: Birmingham and Leicester**

Shivani Raja: [\[27928\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the (a) frequency and (b) capacity of rail services between Birmingham and Leicester.

Simon Lightwood:

The scope for increased frequency on the Birmingham to Leicester route beyond the current two trains per hour is limited by current infrastructure. The infrastructure

capacity is being considered as part of the proposed Midlands Rail Hub project. In terms of train capacity, CrossCountry has recently declassified First Class accommodation on services from Birmingham to Cardiff, Nottingham and Stansted Airport to provide a number of additional seats on each train for all ticket holders.

■ Railways: Coventry and Leicester

Shivani Raja: [\[27924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an estimate of the proportion of journeys between Coventry and Leicester that are made by train.

Simon Lightwood:

The rail mode share between Coventry and Leicester is estimated to be approximately 3 per cent.

■ Railways: Midlands

Shivani Raja: [\[27926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of building a rail connection between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham on (a) Leicester East, (b) Leicestershire and (c) England.

Simon Lightwood:

In December, the Chancellor launched the second stage of the Spending Review. This is a zero-based Spending Review, to ensure every line of spending – including the transport infrastructure portfolio – delivers the Plan for Change and provides good value for taxpayers. We expect the Spending Review, which includes consideration of previously unfunded schemes such as Coventry-Leicester-Nottingham connectivity, to conclude by June 2025.

Shivani Raja: [\[27927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of building the Midlands Rail Hub on people in (a) Leicester East constituency and (b) Leicestershire.

Simon Lightwood:

We are working with Network Rail, Midlands Connect, and West Midlands Rail Executive, to maximise the benefits of Midlands Rail Hub for people throughout the region, including in Leicester and Leicestershire. In December, the Chancellor launched the second stage of the Spending Review. This is a 'zero-based' review, to ensure every line of spending – including the transport infrastructure portfolio – delivers the Plan for Change and provides good value for taxpayers. Midlands Rail Hub will be assessed as part of this review alongside other planned rail infrastructure investment schemes.

■ Railways: Scotland

Jerome Mayhew:

[\[27582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has conducted a study of the (a) financial and (b) operational impact of rail nationalisation in Scotland.

Simon Lightwood:

Decisions regarding ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper services are a devolved matter for the Scottish Government. My officials engage closely with devolved counterparts on their experiences of nationalisation.

■ Railways: Season Tickets

Laurence Turner:

[\[28794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information her Department holds on the cost of a standard-class annual rail season ticket from (a) Longbridge, (b) Northfield and (c) Kings Norton stations to Birmingham New Street in 2010.

Simon Lightwood:

In 2010, annual season tickets from both Longbridge and Northfield to Birmingham New Street cost £597.00, and from Kings Norton to Birmingham New Street cost £523.00.

■ Roads: Investment

Simon Hoare:

[\[27862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when her Department plans to publish the Road Investment Strategy 3; and what funding is available via that scheme.

Lilian Greenwood:

The third Road Investment Strategy (RIS3) will cover the five-year period from April 2026 to March 2031. We expect to publish that Strategy at the end of 2025 with a draft Strategy published in the summer of 2025. An Interim Settlement for National Highways will be in place covering 2025-26.

■ Rolling Stock

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[29345\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 22 January 2025 to Question 24061 on Rolling Stock, if she will (a) provide a timeline for the (i) development and (ii) publication of the Rolling Stock Strategy and (b) make available opportunities for stakeholders to contribute their input.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government is working at pace to develop the framework for a rolling stock strategy which will include considerations around the timelines for new build, refurbishments, and potential cascades.

Once Great British Railways is established it will take the strategy forward providing a long-term approach to future rolling stock needs.

■ Taxis: Licensing

Manuela Perteghella: [\[28191\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will take steps to require local authorities to use the same licensing regulations for (a) private hire vehicles and (b) taxis.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government is responsible for setting the regulatory structure within which licensing authorities in England administer the taxi and private hire vehicle licensing regime. Under this system licensing authorities have the flexibility to set standards they consider appropriate.

The Department for Transport has however issued statutory and best practice guidance to assist licensing authorities with this function, to promote safe and accessible services through proportionate regulation. This should increase consistency in requirements and policies for taxis and private hire vehicles.

■ Transport: Midlands

Shivani Raja: [\[27925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of improving transport connections between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham on economic growth in the region.

Simon Lightwood:

Economic growth is the number one mission of this Government. The Department for Transport is playing a key role in this, as we recognise the potential for transport investment to have a significant impact on local economic development across the country, including for Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham.

My Department is currently developing an Integrated National Transport Strategy, which will set the high-level direction for how transport should be designed, built and operated in England over the next 10 years. It will set out a single national vision that will put people who use transport and their needs at its heart and empower local leaders to deliver integrated transport solutions that meet the needs of their local communities.

■ West of England Line: Electrification

Edward Morello: [\[27943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department has taken to support the electrification of the Salisbury to Exeter railway line.

Lilian Greenwood:

Future rail infrastructure investment will be considered as part of the current Spending Review, which will be concluded in June 2025.

■ West of England Line: Repairs and Maintenance

Edward Morello:

[\[27944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department plans to take steps to upgrade the Salisbury to Exeter railway line from a single track with passing points to a double-track system.

Lilian Greenwood:

Future rail infrastructure investment will be considered as part of the current Spending Review, which will be concluded in June 2025.

TREASURY

■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax

Ben Maguire:

[\[28190\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment with the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the potential merits of implementing a tapered clawback mechanism for agricultural property relief for farmers whose agricultural assets marginally exceed the £1 million threshold.

James Murray:

The Government believes its reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief from 6 April 2026 gets the balance right between supporting farms and fixing the public finances in a fair way. The reforms reduce the inheritance tax advantages available to owners of agricultural and business assets, but it still means those assets will be taxed at a much lower effective rate than most other assets. Despite a tough fiscal context, the Government will maintain very significant levels of relief from inheritance tax beyond what is available to others and the position before 1992.

The Government has no plans to implement a tapered clawback mechanism.

Carla Lockhart:

[\[28647\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much revenue she expects to raise from changes to Agricultural Property Relief in Northern Ireland; and what assessment she has made of the potential impact of those changes on farming families in Northern Ireland.

James Murray:

The overall changes to both agricultural property relief and business property relief from 6 April 2026 are expected to raise £520 million in 2029-30, based on the latest available data. This is the total UK revenue expected to be raised from estates with relevant assets across all types of businesses.

Up to around 520 estates making claims for agricultural property relief, including those that also claim for business property relief, across the UK are expected to be affected by this policy in 2026-27. This means almost three-quarters of estates claiming agricultural property relief, including those that also claim for business

property relief, will not pay any more tax as a result of these changes in 2026-27, based on the latest available data.

The Government is aware of the concerns from the farming industry in Northern Ireland. Information from claims is not recorded to enable regional or national breakdowns of the revenue or number of estates expected to be affected. For more information, please see my recent letter to the Chair of the Northern Ireland Select Committee:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/46267/documents/232537/default/>.

Dr Simon Opher: [28653]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether land farmed under the Environmental Land Management Scheme will be exempt from new inheritance tax rules for farms.

James Murray:

The environmental value of land farmed or managed under the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) will be eligible for Agricultural Property Relief (APR) of up to 100% from 6th April 2025. From 6th April 2026, the 100% rate of relief will continue for the first £1 million of combined agricultural and business property, and it will be 50% thereafter. This will include land in ELMS.

Harriet Cross: [29306]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many farms impacted by changes to (a) Agricultural Property Relief and (b) Business Property Relief she expects to have previously claimed solely for Business Property Relief.

Harriet Cross: [29307]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assumptions on marital status were used in forecasts of farms impacted by changes to (a) Agricultural Property Relief and (b) Business Property Relief.

Harriet Cross: [29308]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assumptions on the timing of intergenerational farm transfers were used in forecasts of farms affected by changes to (a) Agricultural Property Relief and (b) Business Property Relief.

Harriet Cross: [29332]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what criteria on (a) total acreage, (b) agricultural land usage, (c) livestock numbers and (d) Rural Payments Agency claim data were used to define an agricultural holding for impact assessments of changes to (i) Agricultural Property Relief and (ii) Business Property Relief.

Harriet Cross: [29333]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to (a) Agricultural Property Relief and (b) Business Property Relief on (i) food security, (ii) agricultural investment and (iii) the viability of family-run farms.

Harriet Cross:[\[29334\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of (a) changes to (i) Agricultural Property Relief and (ii) Business Property Relief and (b) interest rates on (A) family farm succession planning and (B) food security.

James Murray:

The Chancellor wrote to the Chair of the Treasury Select Committee about the reforms to agricultural and business property reliefs announced at the 2024 Autumn Budget:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/45691/documents/226235/default/>.

The UK Government's analysis is based on the number of estates expected to pay more inheritance tax rather than the number of farms or businesses affected. This is because inheritance tax is a wealth transfer tax on the estate (the property, money, and possessions) of someone who has died.

The number of claims for these reliefs, meaning how many estates would be impacted by this change, is affected by many things such as: who owns the business; the nature of that ownership; how many owners there are; the level of debt; and how they plan their affairs. The UK Government remains firmly of the view that claims data is the correct way to understand an inheritance tax liability.

The reforms are expected to result in up to around 520 estates claiming agricultural property relief, including those that also claim business property relief, paying more inheritance tax in 2026-27. Almost three-quarters of estates claiming agricultural property relief, including those that also claim for business property relief, would not pay more tax in 2026-27.

Around 1,500 estates claiming only business property relief are expected to be affected in 2026-27, with around 1,000 of these holding shares designated as "not listed" on the markets of recognised stock exchanges, such as the Alternative Investment Market. The remaining 500 estates will include business assets from sectors across the economy that are eligible for business property relief.

These reforms mean that around three-quarters of estates claiming business property relief in 2026-27 (excluding those only relating to holding shares designated as "not listed" on the markets of recognised stock exchanges) will not pay more inheritance tax in 2026-27.

The costing for this tax change was certified as 'reasonable and central' by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) at Autumn Budget 2024. The OBR has published more detail about the assumptions underpinning the costing here:

<https://obr.uk/download/october-2024-economic-and-fiscal-outlook-costing-of-changes-to-agricultural-and-business-property-relief/?tmstv=1738846567>.

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

■ Air Passenger Duty**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[27983\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has plans to amend the rates of Air Passenger Duty.

James Murray:

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government announced APD rates for 2026-27, including a partial adjustment to help compensate for two recent years of inflation that was higher than expected.

As with all taxes, the Chancellor makes decisions on APD rates at fiscal events in the context of public finances.

■ Armed Forces: Private Education**James Cartlidge:** [\[28539\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 8 November to Question 11947 on Armed Forces: Private Education, whether the decision to not offer any exemptions from the VAT policy for service families included an assessment of the exemption of US personnel whose children attend British independent schools.

James Murray:

The Government greatly values the contribution of our serving military personnel. The Ministry of Defence has increased the funding allocated to the Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) to account for the impact of any private school fee increases on the proportion of fees covered by the CEA in line with how the allowance normally operates. The changes mean that UK military families with a child at a mainstream boarding school can now claim over £30,000 per year.

US personnel do not receive funding from the UK Government for their school places. They can only claim back the VAT element of fees, under a scheme that entitles UK military personnel to reciprocal reliefs when visiting other NATO countries. The NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) means that visiting NATO personnel have access to Visiting Forces Relief (VFR), for example the VAT free purchase scheme which provides relief on goods and services to US personnel in the UK.

■ Barclays: ICT**Adam Jogee:** [\[28267\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an estimate of the number of people impacted by the Barclays IT outage in (a) Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency and (b) Staffordshire.

Adam Jogee: [\[28280\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions her Department has had with Barclays Bank on technical issues impacting (a) payments and (b) transactions for customers in (i) Newcastle-under-Lyme and (ii) Staffordshire since 31 January 2025.

Emma Reynolds:

The Government was sorry to hear of the issues impacting Barclays customers over the weekend including those in my Hon. Friend's constituency but understands that Barclays' services are restored, and the firm has committed to ensure customers are not left out of pocket as a result of the issues.

Engagement with specific firms is a matter for the sector's regulators, including the Bank of England, Prudential Regulation Authority and Financial Conduct Authority, who will continue to monitor the firm and the impact of the issues.

Alex Mayer:[\[28278\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to ensure people who could not pay their Self Assessment Tax because of the Barclays outage do not have to pay a fixed penalty.

James Murray:

No Barclays customers who filed their tax return and paid their Self Assessment tax liability by 3rd February will face a penalty.

■ Cash Dispensing: Rural Areas**Stuart Anderson:**[\[28090\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to (a) protect and (b) enhance access to cash in rural areas.

Emma Reynolds:

The Government is committed to protecting access to cash for the millions of people across the UK that use it, including those in vulnerable groups.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) assumed regulatory responsibility for access to cash in September 2024. Its rules require the UK's largest banks and building societies to assess the impact of a closure or material alteration of a relevant cash withdrawal or deposit facility and put in place a new service if necessary.

The FCA's rules require designated firms to consider a range of factors in their assessments which will account for challenges in cash access faced in rural areas. For example, firms are required to consider the actual travel times and costs to reach cash access facilities and identify gaps in provision where these are unreasonable.

Where a resident, community organisation or other interested party feels access to cash in their community is insufficient, they can submit a request for a cash access assessment. Further information about submitting a cash access request can be found at the following link: <https://www.link.co.uk/helping-you-access-cash/request-access-to-cash>

■ Economic Crime

Blake Stephenson:

[\[28335\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department took to help tackle (a) illicit finance and (b) economic crime between 4 July 2024 and 14 January 2025.

Emma Reynolds:

The Government is committed to tackling illicit finance and economic crime. We have appointed an Anti-Corruption Champion Baroness Hodge to support the government's agenda in tackling corruption at home and overseas.

HM Treasury has been working with partners across the public and private sector to update our National Risk Assessment for money laundering and terrorist financing; and to deliver Economic Crime Plan 2, our public-private strategy to combat economic crime and strengthen the UK system. This includes work on HM Treasury owned actions to reform our Anti-Money Laundering/Counter Terrorist Financing supervisory regime, and to improve the effectiveness of the Money Laundering Regulations.

HM Treasury has also continued its work to tackle international illicit finance flows and strengthen the global system, representing the UK at the Financial Action Task Force; and conducting regular engagement with governments around the world on how to improve their anti-money laundering systems.

■ Employers' Contributions

Simon Hoare:

[\[27865\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the proposed increase in employer National Insurance contributions on employment rates (a) nationally, (b) in Dorset and (c) in North Dorset constituency in the next 12 months.

James Murray:

The Office for Budget Responsibility's [October 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook \(EFO\)](#) contains forecasts and assessments of government policy, including the changes to employer National Insurance Contributions.

The OBR expects the 16+ employment rate to remain relatively flat across the forecast, falling by 0.1ppts from 60.0% in 2024 to 59.9% in 2029. Paragraph 3.11 of the EFO provides a detailed analysis of the total impact of the changes to employer National Insurance Contributions on wages, profits and labour supply.

The OBR's forecast does not disaggregate these impacts by region or constituency.

■ Employers' Contributions: Transport

Edward Morello:

[27955]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the increase in employer National Insurance contributions on transport companies who provide services for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

James Murray:

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

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

At Autumn Budget 2024 and the recent provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, the Government announced £2 billion of new grant funding for local government in 2025-26. This includes £515m to support councils with the increase in employer National Insurance Contributions.

The £515m of additional funding made available to compensate local government for the impact of changes to employer NICs has been determined based on a national assessment of the costs for directly employed staff across the public sector.

However, this funding is unringfenced and it is for LAs to determine how to use this funding across relevant services and responsibilities.

■ Employment: Migrant Workers

Chris Philp:

[28963]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of % December 2024 to Question 16739 on Employment, what proportion of the increase in employment level is due to net immigration.

Emma Reynolds:

The independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is responsible for producing forecasts of the UK economy. The OBR's latest forecasts, including detail of its forecasts of employment and net migration, are set out in the OBR's October 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook, available on the [OBR's website](#).

■ Film: Tax Allowances

Nesil Caliskan:

[27908]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has made an assessment of the equitability of film tax relief schemes.

James Murray:

The government is committed to supporting the creative industries, and film and TV companies benefit from a number of generous and equitable tax reliefs, ranging from

a rate of 34% for the standard Audio Visual Expenditure Credit to 53% for the Independent Film Tax Credit.

The credits are available to all companies that meet the eligibility criteria, which are outlined in the BFI's [Creative Sector Expenditure Credits and Tax Relief guidance](#). The criteria ensure that the credits meet their objectives of incentivising investment in culturally British film and TV productions and support the domestic industry. As with all taxes, the government keeps the film and TV reliefs under review.

The government also provides significant funding for the film and TV sector and has included the creative industries in its Industrial Strategy. A £60 million package of support for the creative industries announced in January included including £7 million for the Global Screen Fund and funding to 6 Mayoral Authorities to help develop creative clusters. The British Film Institute (BFI) administers the Global Screen Fund on behalf of government and follows the BFI Diversity Standards for all BFI funding.

■ **Forests: Inheritance Tax**

Dr Simon Opher: [\[28654\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether woodlands qualify for inheritance tax relief.

James Murray:

Woodlands can qualify for relief from inheritance tax. That relief may be Agricultural Property Relief (APR) if the woodlands were occupied and used with agricultural land, such as a shelter belt. Alternatively, Business Property Relief (BPR) may be available where the woodlands were actively used for commercial purposes, subject to certain conditions. Furthermore, Woodlands Relief may apply where the woodlands don't qualify for APR and BPR. This relief defers the charge to inheritance tax on the value of trees (not the value of the land) transferred on death to the point at which the trees are disposed of.

■ **Government Internal Audit Agency: Artificial Intelligence**

Sir John Hayes: [\[28456\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what purposes the Government Internal Audit Agency has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

James Murray:

The Government Internal Audit Agency has made advancements with the development of three innovative AI-powered engines: the Writing Engine, Risk Engine, and Insights Engine. These engines have been utilised to draft audit reports, identify and express potential risks, and analyse document collections to perceive themes within the collection. The systems have been crucial in significantly reducing the time spent on planning and researching audit activities and writing reports. The Writing Engine has reduced the time taken to produce a first draft from two days to 20 seconds.

■ **Holiday Accommodation: Taxation**

Harriet Cross:

[\[27711\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the policy paper entitled Abolition of the furnished holiday lettings tax regime, updated on 7 November 2024, on what evidential basis her Department determined that the furnished holiday let tax regime created market distortions in relation to (a) property investment patterns and (b) tax advantages.

James Murray:

The Government will abolish the Furnished Holiday Lettings (FHL) tax regime from April 2025.

The FHL tax regime has created a distortion that favours short-term holiday lets over longer-term rentals, by providing a tax incentive to invest in and provide the former over the latter.

Abolishing the regime will remove this incentive by equalising the tax treatment of FHL and non-FHL landlords' income and gains.

Harriet Cross:

[\[27712\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of changes in tax liabilities and reliefs on small-scale furnished holiday let operators transitioning to long-term residential letting; and what the difference in tax relief will be between (a) the current Furnished Holiday Lettings tax regime and (b) the standard residential letting arrangements from April 2025.

James Murray:

The Government will abolish the Furnished Holiday Lettings (FHL) tax regime from April 2025. The FHL tax regime has created a distortion that favours short-term holiday lets over longer-term rentals. Abolishing it will equalise the tax treatment of FHL and non-FHL landlords' income and gains, making the tax system fairer.

Tax reliefs will still be available to individuals providing furnished holiday letting services, including mortgage interest relief at 20 per cent and relief for the replacement of domestic items. These reliefs will be at the same level as those available to landlords who provide long-term residential lets.

■ **Hospitality Industry: Employers' Contributions**

Bradley Thomas:

[\[28376\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes made to the level of employer National Insurance contributions at the Autumn Budget 2024 on hospitality businesses in Bromsgrove.

James Murray:

A Tax Information and Impact Note (TIIN) was published alongside the introduction of the Bill containing the changes to employer NICs. The TIIN sets out the impact of the policy on the exchequer, the economic impacts of the policy; and the impacts on

individuals, businesses, and civil society organisations as well as an overview of the equality impacts.

Estimates of the impact on businesses in Bromsgrove from changes to Employer NICs announced at Autumn Budget 2024 are not available.

■ Independent Review of the Loan Charge

Sir Julian Lewis:

[28445]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she made an assessment of the potential merits of including within the terms of reference for the Independent Review of the Loan Charge consideration of the (a) mis-selling by scheme promoters, (b) advice on legality given by accountants, (c) impact of retrospective pursuit on mental health and welfare and (d) measures for protection against recurrence in future; and if she will take steps to revise the terms of reference to include those matters.

James Murray:

On 23 January, the Government launched the Independent Review of the Loan Charge, honouring a commitment made at the Budget.

The objectives of the review are to help bring the matter to a close for those affected; ensure fairness for all taxpayers; and ensure that appropriate support is in place for those subject to the Loan Charge. The terms of reference for the review have been published here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-the-loan-charge.

As I set out in my letter to the reviewer, we want the review to bring the Loan Charge to a close for those people who still owe substantial amounts of money but can see no way to resolve their debts. It is now for the reviewer to conduct his review and make recommendations to the Government.

The Government is also taking action to prevent disguised remuneration in the future. At the Budget, the Government announced the most ambitious ever package to close the tax gap, raising £6.5 billion of additional tax revenue in 2029-30. The package includes measures to tackle promoters of tax avoidance schemes and to address non-compliance in umbrella companies, where most disguised remuneration now takes place.

■ Insurance: Corruption

Steve Darling:

[28617]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps the Government is taking to (a) investigate and (b) raise awareness of (i) unethical and (ii) potentially corrupt practices within the insurance industry.

Emma Reynolds:

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) is the independent body responsible for regulating and supervising the financial services industry, including insurance firms. Insurers must treat customers fairly under the FCA's rules. The FCA monitors firms to

ensure compliance with its rules and has robust powers to take action where necessary.

■ International Monetary Fund: Finance

James McMurdock: [\[28437\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has plans to increase funding to the IMF.

Emma Reynolds:

The UK's core contribution to the IMF is determined by the UK's share of the IMF's quota resources as well as our contributions to the Fund under the New Arrangements to Borrow (NAB) and Bilateral Borrowing Agreements (BBA).

The UK's total IMF contribution is 46,103.26m SDR (approximately £48.55 billion.) There are no current proposals at the IMF that will require the UK to further increase our funding.

■ Landfill Tax

Sir Alec Shelbrooke: [\[28006\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact of taxable waste being disposed of at unlicensed sites on the level of unpaid landfill tax.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke: [\[28007\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact of the misclassification of waste into the wrong landfill tax band by the operators of licensed sites on the level of unpaid landfill tax.

James Murray:

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) estimates the size of the tax gap, which is the difference between the amount of tax that should, in theory, be paid to HMRC, and what is actually paid. These statistics are published annually and are available at: [Measuring tax gaps 2024 edition: tax gap estimates for 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/measuring-tax-gaps-2024-edition-tax-gap-estimates-for-2022-to-2023). The latest estimate for England and Northern Ireland of the Landfill Tax gap is 14.5% of the theoretical Landfill Tax liabilities, or £100 million, in the 2022 to 2023 tax year.

The illustrative estimates of the monetary components of the 2022-23 Landfill Tax gap are £75 million at unauthorised sites and £90 million of misclassified plus £35 million underdeclared waste at authorised sites less £100 million compliance yield (tax gap estimates are calculated net of compliance yield).

■ Lloyds Bank: Closures

Blake Stephenson: [\[28664\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she discussed bank branch closures with the Chief Executive Officer of Lloyds during their meeting on 28 January 2025.

Emma Reynolds:

Ministers and treasury officials regularly meet with the retail banks to discuss a wide variety of topics.

Banking has changed significantly in recent years with many customers benefitting from the ease and convenience of remote banking. FCA guidance expects firms to carefully consider the impact of planned branch closures on their customers' everyday banking and cash access needs and put in place alternatives where reasonable.

The Government recognises the importance of face-to-face banking to communities and high streets, and is committed to championing sufficient access for all. This is why the Government continues to work with banks, including Lloyds Banking Group, to roll out 350 banking hubs across the UK by the end of this Parliament. Currently over 200 banking hubs have been recommended and over 100 are already open.

Local Government Finance: Northern Ireland**Claire Hanna:**[\[29045\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the Barnett consequential for Northern Ireland will be in relation to the Local Government Finance Settlement.

Darren Jones:

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have announced final allocations for the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025-26. Part of this funding comes from Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) agreed at the Phase 1 of the Spending Review 2025.

The Barnett formula applies to all increases or decreases to UK Government department DEL, including at the Spending Review, as set out in the Statement of Funding Policy.

The Barnett formula does not apply to spending financed by council tax.

The Northern Ireland Executive's Spending Review settlement for 2025-26 is the largest in real terms of any settlements since devolution. It is for the Northern Ireland Executive to allocate their funding in devolved areas as they see fit.

Motor Vehicles: Excise Duties**Bradley Thomas:**[\[28704\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps to change the historic vehicle tax exemption threshold to 30 years.

James Murray:

At Budget 2014 the previous Government announced that it would introduce a rolling 40-year VED exemption for classic cars. This means that currently vehicles constructed before 1 January 1984 are exempt from paying VED.

The law does not specifically define a vehicle as historic or classic for registration purposes, and it is widely recognised that there are many factors other than age which influence whether a car is considered as classic. The previous Government therefore set 40 years as being a fair cut-off date to distinguish classic cars from older cars.

While there are no plans to reduce the tax exemption age for classic cars from 40 years, the Government keeps all taxes under review, and welcomes representations from the public about how the tax system could be improved.

■ Revenue and Customs: Telephone Services

Dave Doogan:

[28686]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what is the average wait time for callers to HMRC helplines; what action is being taken to reduce wait times on HMRC helplines; and if she will make it her policy implement a freephone service when wait times are high.

James Murray:

Information regarding the average speed of answer is published as part of HMRC's monthly performance report:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-monthly-performance-reports>

HMRC know that their service levels have, until recently, been below published standards. They aim to answer calls as quickly as possible but wait times may be longer than usual during busy periods.

HMRC received extra funding last year to recruit more customer service advisers to help improve telephony performance. They met their helpline service standard in Quarter 3.

HMRC do not have plans to introduce a freephone service.

HMRC helplines use 03 numbers (0300 or 0345), which cost the same as landline 01 or 02 numbers, but actual call charges depend on the customer's phone provider. For mobile networks, 03 numbers are typically included in airtime plans, but customers should verify with their specific network provider.

HMRC is a public body and does not profit from customer contacts.

■ Small Businesses: Business Rates

Kevin Hollinrake:

[28055]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how the proposed lower multiplier for hospitality, leisure and retail from 2026-27 will interact with small business rate relief; and what estimate she has made of the impact of the lower multiplier on the cost of small business rate relief.

James Murray:

The government is committed to retaining Small Business Rate Relief, which is a permanent relief set down in legislation.

Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) is available to businesses with a single property below a set rateable value. Eligible properties under £12,000 receive 100 per cent relief, which means over a third of businesses in England (more than 700,000) pay no business rates at all.

There is also tapered support available to properties valued between £12,000 and £15,000.

Business rates bills are calculated by applying the relevant multiplier before reliefs are applied.

■ Treasury: Correspondence

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[28944\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many and what proportion of items of correspondence from Parliamentarians received by (a) her Department, (b) her and (c) her Ministers in each month since August 2024 have not yet received a substantive response.

James Murray:

In line with Cabinet Office guidance, HM Treasury aims to respond to ministerial correspondence from parliamentarians within 20 working days. Correspondence performance data is published within HM Treasury's Annual Report and Accounts. The 2023-24 Report noted that 62% of replies to parliamentarians were answered within the timeframe.

■ UK Debt Management Office: Artificial Intelligence

Sir John Hayes:

[\[28448\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what purposes the UK Debt Management Office has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

Emma Reynolds:

The UK Debt Management Office ("DMO") has not used artificial intelligence ("AI") functionality in the past 12 months. However, the DMO continues to explore the potential use of AI to support its core objectives, whilst taking account of issues including its security and resilience, as well as its overall suitability to support aspects of the DMO's critical mission to deliver government financing.

■ Valuation Office Agency: Artificial Intelligence

Sir John Hayes:

[\[27827\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what purposes the Valuation Office Agency has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

James Murray:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is at the heart of the Government's plan to kickstart an era of economic growth, transform how we deliver public services, and boost living standards for working people across the country.

The VOA is conducting initial discovery work to identify where Generative AI tools might improve productivity and quality, including through trialling Microsoft's Copilot tools.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Access to Work Programme: Applications

Olly Glover:

[\[28421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent progress she has made on reducing the time taken for Access to Work applications to be processed.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We are committed to reducing wait times for Access to Work, and we have deployed additional staff to process claims and streamlined our delivery processes. We prioritise applications from customers starting a job in four weeks, and renewals.

Access to Work continues to be in high demand and we recognise that further work is needed to ensure that it is providing a timely and effective service for customers.

■ Asbestos: Industrial Diseases

Jim Shannon:

[\[28479\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the adequacy of the financial compensation available to those that have been exposed to asbestos in the workplace.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provides specific support for people with asbestos-related conditions via a range of schemes.

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) provides non-contributory, "no-fault" benefit for disablement because of an accident at work, or because of one of over 70 prescribed diseases known to be a risk from certain jobs. IIDB is a weekly award that can be worth up to £11,500* per year and has been consistently uprated in line with inflation.

The department also provides one-off lump-sum compensation payments under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 (the '1979 Act scheme') to individuals who suffer from one of the dust-related diseases covered by the scheme, subject to the wider eligibility criteria being satisfied. This scheme is designed to cover people who are unable to claim damages from any relevant employers because they have gone out of business.

Asbestos-related diseases covered by IIDB and the 1979 Act scheme include pneumoconiosis (including asbestosis), diffuse mesothelioma, unilateral or bilateral diffuse pleural thickening and asbestos-related primary carcinoma of the lung. Subject to Parliamentary approval, both IIDB and the 1979 Act scheme are due to be uprated by 1.7 per cent from April this year.

In addition to these schemes someone suffering from long-term disabling affects due to an asbestos-related condition may be eligible for further financial support via Personal Independence Payment, or through Universal Credit and New Style Employment and Support Allowance for those with a health condition that limits their ability to work.

Those who have been exposed to asbestos in the workplace may pursue a civil compensation claim against an employer. Where their employer no longer exists or their employer's insurer cannot be traced, individuals diagnosed with diffuse mesothelioma may also be eligible for an award under the 2014 Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme if there is evidence that their exposure was due to employer negligence.

*Figure rounded to the nearest hundred.

■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Employment

Edward Morello:

[\[27941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the level of support provided by employers to their employees with ADHD.

Alison McGovern:

Neurodivergent people bring many positive benefits to businesses but face particular barriers to employment, which is reflected in a poor overall employment rate. As a government, we want to support all forms of neurodiversity in the workplace, including ADHD, by encouraging employers to adopt neuro-inclusive working practices so that everyone can thrive at work.

On 29th January, the Government launched an independent panel of academics with expertise and experiences of neurodiversity to advise us on boosting neurodiversity awareness and inclusion at work.

In keeping with the Government's pledge to bring disabled voices closer to decision-making, at least half of the panel are neurodiverse themselves.

The panel will consider the reasons why neurodivergent people have poor experiences in the workplace, and a low overall employment rate. They will make recommendations in the Summer which consider likely mechanisms for change.

In parallel, we are working with other areas of government to promote awareness of neurodiversity amongst employers, and we recently announced Keep Britain Working, a major independent review of the employer's role in reducing health-related inactivity and to promote healthy and inclusive workplaces, led by the former Chair of John Lewis, Sir Charlie Mayfield.

■ Child Poverty Taskforce

Stephen Gethins:

[\[28504\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when she will provide an update on the (a) strategy and (b) expected publication date of the work of the Ministerial Child Poverty Task Force including on (i) child poverty and (ii) review of the two-child benefit cap.

Alison McGovern:

Delivering our manifesto commitment to tackle child poverty is an urgent priority for this Government, and the Ministerial Taskforce is working to publish a Child Poverty Strategy which will deliver lasting change.

The Strategy will look at all available levers across four key themes of increasing incomes, including considering social security reforms, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience; and better local support especially in the early years.

This will build on the reform plans underway across Government and work underway in Devolved Governments.

■ Children: Maintenance

Ben Lake:

[\[29053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of (a) Paying Parents and (b) Receiving Parents using the Child Maintenance Service disclosed domestic abuse in 2023-24.

Andrew Western:

Child Maintenance Service (CMS) did not capture the data requested on proportion of (a) Paying Parents and (b) Receiving Parents using the Child Maintenance Service who disclosed domestic abuse in 2023-24. Therefore, this information is not readily available to provide. To extract this data would involve the manual review of all CMS cases, at a significant cost to the department and taxpayer.

The Department is assessing how it can provide statistics on domestic abuse now the application fee exemption statistics are no longer published. The Department's Chief Statistician will oversee the development of these statistics to make sure they meet the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Ben Lake:

[\[29054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of child maintenance service cases are being dealt with by the specialist domestic abuse caseworker team.

Andrew Western:

The Child Maintenance Service takes the issue of domestic abuse extremely seriously and is committed to ensuring victims of abuse get the help and support they need to access and use the service safely and securely.

CMS caseworkers are provided with domestic abuse training to ensure they understand, recognise and respond safely and appropriately to customers who are experiencing domestic abuse, or are survivors of domestic abuse. In July 2024, the training was updated with input from external stakeholders, and covers different types of abuse, including economic, post-separation, coercive and controlling behaviour.

Specialist Case Team is one of the measures CMS have introduced to manage cases with the most challenging or complex domestic abuse concerns. This has minimised the need for parents to recount their history of domestic abuse and caseworkers to deliver support to some of the most vulnerable customers.

As of February 2025, the volume of cases in the Specialist Case Team was 301, this equates to 0.04% of CMS total customer caseload.

David Taylor:

[\[29342\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure that the Child Maintenance Service takes action against people who are in arrears.

Andrew Western:

The Child Maintenance Service (CMS) will do everything within its powers to make sure parents comply and has made significant improvements to the process to speed up action when payments first break down and to target enforcement action more effectively.

Where parents fail to take responsibility for paying for their children, the CMS will not hesitate to use the full range of strong enforcement powers available. These include, using Enforcement Agents (previously known as bailiffs) to take control of goods, forcing the sale of property, removal of driving license or UK passport, deductions directly from earnings and bank accounts or even commitment to prison.

8% (£682.1 million) of the total maintenance due to be paid since the CMS began, remains to be collected through Collect & Pay but this is falling.

In the past year to September 2024, the CMS collected £16.8 million from paying parents with civil enforcement actions in process and an additional £5.4 million from paying parents with our most serious enforcement action in process.

In the twelve months to September 2024, there were 2,857 applications to the courts in England, Wales and Scotland for our most serious enforcement powers. Of these the courts issued two immediate prison sentences and 316 suspended prison sentences.

David Taylor:

[\[29343\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure that the Child Maintenance Service takes action against people committing fraud by hiding assets in order to avoid paying child maintenance.

Andrew Western:

Most parents pay some or all their maintenance liability without issue however, the Child Maintenance Service is aware of a small number of parents whose

maintenance liability is inconsistent with their financial resources, usually because they can choose to support themselves via a complex arrangement of assets instead of, or in addition to, taking a salary.

Cases involving complex income or suspected fraudulent behaviour can be looked into by the FIU. This is a specialist team which can request information from financial institutions to check the accuracy of information the CMS is given.

In the quarter ending September 2024, 300 financial investigation cases were referred to the Financial Investigations Unit (FIU) in addition to 875 ongoing cases from previous quarters. In the same quarter, 340 financial investigations were completed of which 210 resulted in a maintenance assessment change.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Correspondence

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[28591\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of items of correspondence from Parliamentarians received by (a) her Department, (b) herself and (c) her ministerial team have not received a substantive response in each month since August 2024.

Andrew Western:

The Department does not keep this information centrally and therefore it is not readily available. Providing the information that the Department does hold would incur disproportionate costs.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Reviews

Ellie Chowns:

[\[28233\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make it her policy to automatically publish her Department's (a) internal process review statistics on an annual basis and (b) all internal process reviews.

Sir Stephen Timms:

For the last two operational years the department has reported on the Internal Process Reviews it undertakes in its Annual Report and Accounts. This is alongside reporting on the wider activities of its Advanced Customer Support Teams (available here: [DWP annual report and accounts 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK](#) and here: [DWP annual report and accounts 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#)). The department continues to consider what further information can be published in future Accounts.

The department also already has plans to publish further, separate information on its Internal Process Review in a way that shows what the Department has learned from these cases and the improvements that have been made, but which importantly does not disclose the sensitive, personal and confidential information that can surround these cases. Publication is planned to start by 31 March 2025.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Translation Services**Rupert Lowe:** [\[28401\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much was spent on (a) translation and (b) interpretation for people contacting her Department in 2024.

Andrew Western:

A) The spend on translation for people contacting the Department in 2024 was £882,118.

B) The spend on interpretation for people contacting the department in 2024 was £6,345,275. This includes access costs such as BSL etc.

■ Pensioners: Winter Fuel Payment**Blake Stephenson:** [\[29296\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 22 January 2025 to Question 24303 on Pensioners: Winter Fuel Payment, if she will make an estimate of the number of those pensioners who are on the basic state pension.

Torsten Bell:

At May 2024, there were 3.5m pensioners with a basic State Pension income above £218.15: the Pension Credit Standard Minimum Guarantee (SMG) threshold for single pensioners. (Source: [Stat-Xplore](#))

However, some pensioners with a basic State Pension income below the SMG will also have incomes from other sources, such as a private pension, which takes their total income above this threshold.

■ Personal Independence Payment**Helen Whately:** [\[28984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department's policy on assessing Personal Independence Payments claims remotely has changed since 7 July 2024.

Helen Whately: [\[28985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she is taking steps to increase the number of Personal Independence Payments assessments that are conducted face-to-face.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Since July 2024, there has been no change in policy regarding assessing Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claims remotely.

With effect from September 2024 assessment suppliers deliver the 'Health Assessment Advisory Service' on behalf of the department through the Functional Assessment Services (FAS) contracts. These contracts bring together all functional health assessment services within a geographic area (Lot). Individuals now have the same supplier for their separate PIP and Work Capability Assessments (WCA).

As part of the FAS process, the feasibility of a paper-based assessment will always be considered in the first instance, for all cases. Where a paper-based review is not possible the claimant will be invited to an assessment.

Before an invitation to an assessment is sent, consideration will be given to claimants who need a specific assessment channel due to their health condition or circumstances. Other claimants who can undertake any assessment type will be allocated to the next available appointment; however, this can be changed if the claimant informs us that a reasonable adjustment is appropriate in their circumstances.

The department audits FAS suppliers to ensure that the correct channel type has been selected for the claimant. This provides assurance that claimants are routed to the most appropriate assessment type. The FAS suppliers are also increasing their capacity to deliver more face-to-face assessments, and the department expects the reported percentage of face-to-face assessments to increase towards Autumn 2025.

We remain committed to enabling a multi-channel assessment approach. Any future decisions will be evidence-based and to ensure this we will draw on existing evidence, as well as continuing to build our understanding via research and analysis.

■ **Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill**

Alicia Kearns:

[\[28627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of holding a public consultation before implementing the Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill.

Andrew Western:

DWP continues to seek feedback on the Bill through regular engagement with key stakeholders, including at official and ministerial level. This will ensure the measures are designed to be effective and take into consideration wider feedback from the financial sector, welfare organisations, business representative organisations and others.

There will be Codes of Practice for the Eligibility Verification Measure, Information Gathering and Debt Recovery powers, which DWP will publicly consult on before publication.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Veterans**

Sarah Bool:

[\[28386\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of excluding military compensation from income calculation when determining eligibility for (a) Universal Credit and (b) sickness benefits.

Sir Stephen Timms:

War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Payments are not taken into account in Universal Credit. Guaranteed Income Payments, Service Attributable

Pensions and service-attributable, non-taxable Service Invalidation Pensions are also not taken into account. New Style Employment Support Allowance (ESA) disregards any guaranteed income scheme payable under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.

In the legacy income-related benefits, e.g. income-related ESA, there is a statutory £10 weekly disregard. However, Local Authorities have discretionary powers fully to disregard 'war pension' income in the assessment of Housing Benefit.

■ Social Security: Wales

Ann Davies: [\[28767\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with the Welsh Government on the potential merits of devolving powers related to the administration of the social security system to Wales.

Andrew Western:

The Secretary of State has not had any discussions with the Welsh Government about the devolution of the administration of the social security system to Wales.

The Government's commitments on further devolution were outlined in our manifesto. We have no plans to devolve the administration of social security to Wales.

■ Work Capability Assessments: South West Norfolk

Terry Jermy: [\[29203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to increase access to work capability assessments in South West Norfolk.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We have interpreted your question as referring to the accessibility of Work Capability Assessments (used in supporting the department in the determination of the health element of Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance and other specialist benefits) within the South-West Norfolk area.

We take our responsibility to ensure all individuals have access to our services, without disadvantage, very seriously. We have a range of provisions in place to ensure assessments are accessible to all individuals, in line with the standards under the Equality Act 2010. DWP meets legal accessibility requirements by ensuring individuals can access our services.

Consideration will be given to individuals who need a specific assessment channel due to their health condition or circumstances. At all stages of the claim, individuals are asked to advise us of any mobility restrictions. If the assessment supplier is made aware of mobility restrictions, they will consider booking a different assessment channel.

As part of the Functional Assessment Services process, the feasibility of a paper-based assessment will always be considered in the first instance. Where a paper-based review is not possible individuals will be invited to an assessment.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CABINET OFFICE

■ **Publication of the Government Response to the House of Lords Statutory Inquiries Committee report *Public Inquiries: Enhancing public trust***

Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds):
[\[HCWS425\]](#)

I am today publishing the Government's response to the House of Lords Statutory Inquiries Committee report *Public Inquiries: Enhancing public trust*.

Public inquiries are a valued and well-established part of our administrative justice system. Recent years have provided ample demonstration of their value. They are widely considered to be an independent, legitimate and trusted method of investigating complex issues of deep public concern. Inquiries have shown themselves to be a way to shed light on injustices of the past, have provided a means for victims and survivors to finally have their voices heard, and to help to rebuild trust in national institutions.

The House of Lords Statutory Inquiries Committee was appointed last year to consider the efficacy and practice of inquiries established under the Inquiries Act 2005. The evidence it heard and the thoughtful report it published recognised that despite the value of inquiries, there is scope for improvements to make them more efficient and effective, and in particular, to ensure greater transparency and accountability in response to inquiry recommendations.

The Committee's report is a valuable contribution to a timely discussion and the Government is grateful to Lord Norton and his colleagues for their report. Our response, which is published on gov.uk, signals my intention to build on this important work with a wider review of the policy and operational framework around public inquiries and I look forward to providing an update to Parliament on this work in due course.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ **Improving the Energy Performance of Privately Rented Homes in England and Wales**

Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): [\[HCWS429\]](#)

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero is today publishing a consultation on reforms to the minimum energy efficiency standards that are applied to private rented sector homes under the Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015. Improving the energy efficiency of private rented homes is essential to cutting bills, tackling fuel poverty, reducing carbon emissions and increasing our energy independence.

Everyone deserves the security and comfort of a warm home. Our aim is to raise as many households in the private rented sector out of fuel poverty as possible. This

consultation is a key step towards meeting our fuel poverty target and ensuring tenants have the warmer homes that they deserve. We are seeking views on a range of proposals to address poorly insulated homes to help improve living standards and the enforcement of regulations to ensure tenants are better protected.

The Government is also seeking views on how best to support landlords deliver effective and high-quality changes, such as the EPC metrics the new standard should be set against, the implementation timeline, and the maximum required investment, including whether the maximum required investment should be the same for all properties, or whether it should be varied, and under what circumstances a reduced investment might be allowed. Government also seeks views on whether short-term let properties should be regulated under these standards, as well as what role smart meter installation and letting agents should play.

Once we have considered the responses to the consultation, we intend, subject to Parliamentary time and approvals, to bring forward changes to both primary and secondary legislation so that we can implement improvements to the Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015.

Government welcomes responses to the consultation from all stakeholders, tenants, landlords, letting agencies and local authorities. We look forward to receiving feedback through the consultation and working with all those with an interest in improving the domestic private rented sector and tackling fuel poverty.

■ **Statement by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero**

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Energy) (Michael Shanks):
[\[HCWS424\]](#)

In January 2024, the previous government launched a consultation on supporting large scale biomass generators when existing support ends in 2027. Since this government came to office, we have carefully considered responses to the consultation and assessed the case for a new support mechanism.

Biomass currently plays an important role in our energy system, but we are conscious of concerns about sustainability and the level of subsidy biomass plants have received in the past.

The department will very shortly publish our response to the consultation. Alongside it, I want to report on our conclusions about the role of Drax Power Station in Yorkshire in the years 2027 to 2031.

In coming to this view, we have taken advice from the National Energy System Operator (NESO) on security of supply; analysed the effect on consumers of support for biomass versus alternatives; looked at issues around subsidy and sustainability in existing arrangements; and considered longer term issues around decarbonisation.

First, on security of supply, we inherited a situation from the previous government where there was no long-term planning for our energy system and its resilience. In the system

we have inherited, large-scale biomass provides around 5% of our annual electricity generation, serving a specific role as a source of firm power.

To meet our needs between 2027 and 2031 we could seek to replace Drax with new gas fired power stations, but in the timescale we have there would be significant risks to relying on this approach. In that context, NESO have advised us that Drax plays an important role in delivering security of supply between 2027 and 2031.

Second, on price, we have undertaken comprehensive analysis of the costs of biomass against alternatives. Our central projections show that, on the right terms and in a much more limited role than today, biomass generation at Drax is the lowest cost option, including when compared to gas-fired power stations, for billpayers during this period.

Third, we have looked at previous arrangements for subsidy and sustainability. We believe that they simply did not deliver a good enough deal for billpayers and enabled Drax to make unacceptably large profits.

At the same time, they demanded levels of sustainability that are not now in line with the latest scientific evidence or global best practice, including supply chain emissions well above the European standards.

We have concluded that if Drax is to continue to play a role in our power system these arrangements must urgently be improved going forward.

Fourth, we have looked at issues around decarbonisation. Our finding is there is a potential role for bioenergy with carbon capture and storage, or Power BECCS, but realistically this will take time to implement and therefore cannot form the primary basis of this decision.

Following this assessment, and given the circumstances we have inherited, the clear evidence is that Drax is important to delivering a secure, value for money power system in the period 2027 to 2031. But we have also concluded that we cannot allow Drax to operate in the way it has done before or with the level of subsidy it received in the past.

On this basis, we have secured Heads of Terms that will form the basis of a very different agreement with Drax for support during the period 2027 to 2031. A summary of this agreement is included at the end of this statement.

First, it will ensure Drax plays a much more limited role in the system, providing low carbon dispatchable power only when it is really needed.

Drax currently operates as a baseload plant, running around two thirds of the time. This means it provides power even when other renewable sources are abundant. This must not continue in the same way. Under the new arrangement, Drax will be supported to operate at a maximum load factor of just 27% – operating less than half as often as it currently does.

This will be guaranteed by the design of the dispatchable Contract for Difference that we have agreed. When renewable power is abundant, Drax won't generate, and consumers will benefit from cheaper wind and solar instead.

Second, the contract will deliver much better value for consumers. It will significantly reduce the amount paid in subsidies compared to the existing support mechanism. This new deal halves the subsidies for Drax – equivalent to a saving of nearly £6 per household per year.

Furthermore, our analysis shows this will save consumers £170m in subsidy in each year of the agreement compared with the alternative of procuring gas in the capacity market.

The deal limits the expected rate of return for Drax to a level below that of monopolies regulated by Ofgem. But while this is our central estimate, we are not prepared to take the risk of prices soaring in response to volatile fossil fuel markets. As a result, the agreement includes a built-in windfall mechanism with rates of 30% and 60% that would claw back excess profits made by Drax. This will guarantee a much fairer deal for consumers than the past.

Third, we will introduce tough new measures on sustainability. We will increase the proportion of woody biomass that must come from sustainable sources from 70% to 100%. We will also significantly cut the allowable supply chain emissions to a level in line with the much stricter regulations currently operating in the rest of Europe. And we will exclude material sourced from primary forests and old growth forests from receiving support payments.

There will be substantial penalties on Drax if these criteria are not met.

We will go further to ensure greater confidence that these standards will be met. The government will appoint an independent sustainability adviser to work with my department, the Low Carbon Contracts Company and Ofgem to ensure our monitoring and enforcement measures are robust and keep pace with the science.

These measures represent a profound shift from the past on sustainability and on value for money. In this context, this is the right deal for security of supply and price in the period 2027 to 2031, given the circumstances we have inherited from the previous government.

But nevertheless, we recognise the strength of concerns about the use of unabated biomass. It is not a long-term solution. We are determined that the next time these decisions are made government is not left in the circumstances we have been. So we will do the work that was not done by the previous administration on strong and credible low carbon alternatives, so that we have proper options in 4 years' time.

To help that process, we are setting up an independent review to consider how respective greenhouse gas removal, including large-scale power BECCS and DACCS, can assist the UK in meeting our net zero targets and ensuring security of supply, out to 2050. Further details of the review will be shared in due course.

These steps are about fulfilling our duty to ensure security of supply and the best deal for billpayers.

We have faced up to the circumstances left by the previous government and delivered a step change in value for money and sustainability. This government will do whatever it takes to deliver energy security and protect billpayers now and into the future.

Overview of Heads of Terms for a Low Carbon Dispatchable Contract for Difference with Drax Power Ltd - related to electricity generation at their Selby plant.

Overview

Government has agreed Heads of Terms with Drax Power Ltd for a Low Carbon Dispatchable Contract for Difference (CfD) at their 2.6GW Selby power station. The Heads of Terms define the commercial terms that will underpin a new contract to be finalised over the coming months.

Following advice from the National Energy System Operator as to the utility of this plant for security of supply purposes, the Heads of Terms for a four-year CfD was agreed that ensures Drax will provide low carbon dispatchable electricity when the system, and in turn consumers, most require it.

Heads of Terms Summary

The key terms are as follows:

- Duration - 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2031.

This arrangement will commence on 1 April, the day after existing support arrangements conclude, and be limited to four years in duration.

- Strike price - £113MWh (2012 prices).
- Generation collar – that caps the annual load factor eligible for subsidy at 27%.

Together the strike price and the capped load factor are projected to halve the subsidy that Drax will receive during this contract period, compared against Drax's current arrangements (under the Renewables Obligation and CfD). This is equivalent to savings of nearly £6 per household per year.

Furthermore, Drax is obliged to generate to a minimum annual contract floor of 22%, ensuring the system, and consumers, can rely on their presence.

- Excess Returns Mechanism on Profit.

This contract has been calibrated to provide Drax with a limited return over the contract period. However, should Drax make higher than anticipated profits in an extreme price scenario, a profit clawback mechanism is in place to protect the consumer.

- Enhanced sustainability criteria.

The CfD substantially tightens sustainability criteria. It, i) increases the proportion of biomass that must be sustainably sourced from 70% to 100%; ii) reduces the supply chain emission threshold from 55.6 gCO₂e/MJ to 36.6 gCO₂e/MJ (aligned with international best practice, eg. EU's RED III); and, iii) will include provisions to exclude material sourced from primary and old growth forests from receiving support payments.

- Robust contract compliance arrangements.

Should Drax not comply with the sustainability criteria, then subsidy payments for electricity generated from whole consignments of biomass generation can be revoked and there is a termination right for repeated breaches of those requirements.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**■ Local Authority Public Health Grant**

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention (Ashley Dalton): [\[HCWS431\]](#)

On 7 February, the Government published the Public Health Grant allocations to local authorities in England for 2025/26.

Funding for local government's health responsibilities is an essential element of our commitment to invest in preventing ill health, promoting healthier lives and addressing health disparities.

It is an important component of our Plan for Change in health, through which we will build an NHS fit for the future, tackle the underlying drivers of ill health and health inequalities, and deliver three fundamental shifts: from hospital to community, from analogue to digital and from sickness to prevention.

In 2025/26 we are increasing funding through the Public Health Grant, and the 100% retained business rate arrangement for local authorities in Greater Manchester, to £3.858 billion. This represents an average 5.4% cash increase, or 3.0% real-terms increase, compared to 2024/25.

The 2025/26 Public Health Grant will continue to be subject to conditions, including a ring-fence requiring local authorities to use the grant exclusively for public health activity.

Following the next phase of the Spending Review in Spring, we will aim to issue multi-year allocations from 2026/27 and will also consider whether further funding reforms could support local authorities to improve health outcomes for their local populations.

Full details of the Public Health Grant allocations to local authorities for 2025/26 can be found on gov.uk. This information has been communicated to local authorities in a Local Authority Circular.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ Homeowners next steps**

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Homelessness and Democracy (Rushanara Ali): [\[HCWS427\]](#)

The current home buying and selling process is notoriously slow, with transactions taking 21 weeks on average whilst countries like Norway manage this in as little as 4 weeks. This is costly and uncertain for households with one in three transactions falling through. The cost of these failed transactions is felt by households who lose around £400m each year in direct costs alone as a result, and much larger indirect impacts on people's ability to make the right choices for their work and families. This government is committed to reforming the housing market, making transactions easier and giving people more control over the management of their homes.

That is why, this week, the Government has set out new plans to modernise and streamline the way in which people buy and sell property. These modern, digital transactions will revolutionise the information available to consumers, delivering the right data at the right time, reducing the number of collapsing chains. The system will be enabled by accessible, standardised data, meaning that trusted information can be shared easily between customers and property professionals. This improved system will support our economy, increasing the volume of property transactions, and facilitating the labour market.

We have unveiled a package of measures to push this vision forwards. This includes: piloting approaches to digitalising and opening up crucial property data; committing to the introduction of common data standards across the home buying and selling sector and continuing to drive adoption of digital identity services and electronic signatures in home buying and selling; and harnessing the information and expertise held by HMLR to drive innovation in the proptech sector and develop new services.

We know that this Government cannot do this on its own. That is why this work will be carried out in conjunction with the Digital Property Market Steering Group: representatives of industry and government experts committed to digitalising home buying and selling, and delivering this change that is so badly needed.

Our vision is for a housing market that works for people of all ages, across all tenures, and in communities across the country. We therefore intend to publish a long-term housing strategy later this year setting out this vision, the steps we will take to achieve this, and how we will provide long-term certainty to the market.

■ Plan for Barrow

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Local Growth and Building Safety (Alex Norris): [\[HCWS428\]](#)

Economic stability, secure borders and national security are the foundations of the Government's Plan for Change. To deliver long-term change and achieve the Government's missions, everything possible must be done to secure these foundations.

This Government is committed to supporting the town of Barrow-in-Furness to play its crucial role in supporting and sustaining the Defence Nuclear Enterprise. The BAE Systems' Barrow shipyard is the only facility in the UK with the infrastructure, site licence and resource to design and build the UK's nuclear submarines – including the new *Dreadnought* class. At the heart of that role is Barrow's community, and that is why the £200 million Barrow Transformation Fund is a long-term investment in the people of Barrow.

The Barrow Delivery Board is the local governance institution that will decide on use of the Transformation Fund and deliver the Plan for Barrow. The Board, including representation from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Ministry of Defence, will embody this Government's commitment to empowering local leadership, taking independent and bold decisions in Barrow's best interests.

The Government is today announcing the appointment of Dr Simon Case as Chair of the Barrow Delivery Board. This is a crucial, outward-facing role that will set the strategic vision of the Board, deliver the Plan for Barrow, and ensure that Barrow's community sees the fullest benefits. Dr Simon Case was most recently Cabinet Secretary and Head of the UK Civil Service, bringing with him a wealth of leadership experience and understanding of complex policy and delivery challenges. As Cabinet Secretary, Dr Case was part of the development of the Plan for Barrow, providing him with an understanding of both the area and the defence imperative of the work required.

The Government is confident in the Board's ability to deliver the Plan for Barrow and committed to continuing to work with local partners on this important priority.

JUSTICE

■ Review into Handling of Prison Capacity

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Sir Nicholas Dakin):
[\[HCWS426\]](#)

My Noble Friend, the Minister of State for Justice (Lord Timpson), has made the following statement:

"Unlike the previous Government, this Government has a plan to ensure we are never again in a position where we have more prisoners than prison places. We have launched the Independent Sentencing Review to ensure that our future prison system is sustainable, in balance and that there is always space in prison for dangerous offenders. In December, we published the 10-year Prison Capacity Strategy and the first Annual Statement on prison capacity. Our strategy is detailed, setting our commitment to build the 14,000 places the last Government failed to deliver, with the aim of completing the build programme by 2031. Our plan is realistic, recognising that prison building is complex. We are also committed to improving transparency via the publication of an Annual Statement on prison capacity.

The Lord Chancellor announced that we would be launching a review into the handling of prison capacity. The previous Government's approach to the criminal justice system was flawed and this review will consider the reasons why prison supply and demand did not meet, making recommendations that may help future Governments avoid the cycle of repeated prison capacity crises, helping to guide our strategy.

Specifically, the review will consider strategic supply and demand choices and how these choices affected remaining prison capacity. It will shine a light on relevant decision making and an analysis of impacts on the wider criminal justice system. Alongside this Written Ministerial Statement, the Terms of Reference for the review have been published on gov.uk.

The Lord Chancellor has appointed Dame Anne Owers to lead the review. Her extensive knowledge of the criminal justice system means that this review will be conducted to the highest standards. The review will report its findings in spring 2025."

TRANSPORT**■ Driving eligibility extension for certain Ukrainian licence holders and exemptions from VED/registration for certain Ukrainian plated and registered vehicles**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood):
[\[HCWS430\]](#)

The UK is continuing to support Ukrainians following the illegal invasion by Putin.

The Government is extending by 18 months the period for which certain Ukrainian driving licence holders can drive Mopeds, motor bicycles and cars (category B) in Great Britain (GB), beyond the current 36-months. This will allow certain Ukrainian licence holders to drive in GB for a period of up to 54 months (4 years and 6 months) after becoming resident.

This will continue to support Ukrainian licence holders' ability to get around and adapt to living in GB.

Separate to the driving licensing extension SI, the Government will extend the existing exemption for certain Ukrainians on specific visa schemes from registering, and paying vehicle excise duty (VED), on their Ukrainian-plated and registered vehicles to align with the length of their UK visas. The extension is effective from 4 March 2025, to ensure Ukrainians can continue to use their vehicles without needing to register or pay VED. Further information will be posted on Gov.UK.

Finally, driver licensing is devolved in Northern Ireland so the relevant regulations would need to be followed by those Ukrainian Refugees resident there.