



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 12 February 2025 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:40 P.M., 12 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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**Notes:**

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

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

## ANSWERS

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

#### ■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

**Jamie Stone:**

[\[902713\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help SMEs adopt digital technology.

**Gareth Thomas:**

To support more small businesses' digitisation efforts, we announced at Budget 2024 that we would extend the work of the SME Digital Adoption Taskforce. The Taskforce is made up of industry experts and focuses on addressing the challenge of how to support SMEs to adopt and implement productivity-enhancing technologies, such as customer relationship management, accountancy, and resource planning software. We intend to publish a summary of the Taskforce's draft recommendations soon and their full report will be published later this year.

We will be announcing further measures shortly.

#### ■ Banks: Postal Services

**Rebecca Smith:**

[\[28854\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he is taking steps with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to enable banking hubs to offer postal services.

**Gareth Thomas:**

The Department for Business and Trade continues to engage with His Majesty's Treasury on the Government's commitment to roll out 350 banking hubs. Banking hubs are a voluntary service which were developed by the financial services sector to protect access to cash under the Financial Services Act 2023. Their rollout is overseen by Cash Access UK and funded by the banks for the purpose of coordinating banking hub delivery.

The Government-set Access Criteria ensures that however the network changes, Post Office delivers essential services, including banking and cash services, within local reach of all citizens.

#### ■ Bicycles: Exports

**Pippa Heylings:**

[\[29582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to support businesses which export bicycles.

**Gareth Thomas:**

Under the umbrella of the recently announced Business Growth Service, UK businesses can access DBT's wealth of export support via Great.gov.uk. This

comprises an online support offer and a wider network of support including the Export Academy, UK Export Finance, the International Markets network and one-to-one support from International Trade Advisers.

This support is available to all UK businesses including those that sell and wish to export bicycles.

## ■ **Business: Competition**

**Mike Reader:**

[\[28708\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to help support businesses to compete with direct-to-consumer online retailers that are based offshore.

**Gareth Thomas:**

We intend to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties, including those on the high street, from 2026-27. This tax cut must be sustainably funded, and so we intend to apply a higher rate from 2026-27 on the most valuable properties - those with a Rateable Value of £500,000 and above.

These represent less than one per cent of all properties, but include the majority of large distribution warehouses, including those used by online giants.

Ahead of these changes being made, we have prevented RHL relief from ending in April 2025 by extending it for one year at 40 per cent up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business and frozen the small business multiplier.

We are also working with businesses to understand their barriers to growth and High Streets will be a key pillar of our forthcoming Small Business Strategy.

## ■ **Carers: Leave**

**Mary Glendon:**

[\[28920\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what his planned timeline is for the review of the implementation of unpaid carer's leave.

**Justin Madders:**

The Plan to Make Work Pay set out a commitment to review the implementation of Carer's Leave, and that work is now underway. To deliver on this, we are bringing forward the Post Implementation Review of this legislation to complete before the end of this parliament.

## ■ **Companies: Employment**

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[29782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to monitor companies responsibilities and duties to their employees.

**Justin Madders:**

The Director of Labour Market Enforcement oversees and assesses the work of three enforcement bodies: HMRC's National Minimum Wage Enforcement Team, DBT's

Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate (EAS), and Home Office's Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA). The DLME is required to report annually to both the Business Secretary and the Home Secretary on the scale and nature of labour market

([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/673236dc0d90eee304badb89/uk-labour-market-enforcement-strategy\\_2024-25-accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/673236dc0d90eee304badb89/uk-labour-market-enforcement-strategy_2024-25-accessible.pdf)) to address it.

## ■ Cycling: Industry

**Pippa Heylings:** **[29585]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department has made a recent assessment of the condition of the UK cycling industry.

**Sarah Jones:**

No formal assessment has been completed; however, the Department has engaged with key industry brands on issues and will continue to do so moving forward. The industry has recently faced significant headwinds, impacting growth and profitability. Despite this, the industry is stabilising with some retailers reporting positive financial performance. There are signs of recovery and potential growth in key high-demand areas such as Road, Gravel, and Electric Mountain Bikes.

## ■ Employment Rights Bill

**Blake Stephenson:** **[29194]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Employment Rights Bill on recent trends in economic growth.

**Justin Madders:**

My department has published a set of Impact Assessments that provide a comprehensive analysis on the potential impact of the Employment Rights Bill. This analysis includes consideration of impacts on economic growth. This analysis is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/employment-rights-bill-impact-assessments>

This represents the best estimate for the likely impacts, including on economic growth, given the current stage of policy development. We expect that the majority of reforms will take effect no earlier than 2026. We plan to refine our analysis as policy development continues, working closely with external experts, businesses and trade unions.

## ■ Forced Labour: Uyghurs

**Sarah Champion:** **[28049]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister for Trade Policy and Economic Security of 6 November 2024, Official Report, col 71WH, whether his Department has made an assessment of the effectiveness of the US Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act in tackling the use of forced labour in supply chains.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

We will continue to assess and monitor the effectiveness of the UK's existing measures alongside other policy tools to tackle forced labour in supply chains. The Government views import bans as one of a range of tools that could be used to tackle forced labour in global supply chains. The UK continues to raise issues on human rights, including China's repression of the peoples of Xinjiang.

**■ Horizon IT System: Compensation****Julia Buckley:**[\[28873\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many sub-postmasters in the Group Litigation Order Compensation Scheme have (a) not received any compensation payments and (b) have received above the minimum payment of £75,000.

**Gareth Thomas:**

As of 31 January, the Department had received 408 completed claims from eligible GLO postmasters. 257 claimants have agreed full and final redress, of whom 153 accepted the £75,000 fixed offer. A further 229 individuals have received partial or interim redress payments, including people who have not yet submitted full claims.

The government remains committed to issuing first offers in 90% of cases within 40 working days of receiving complete claims. The same target applies to offers which are challenged after 1 December 2024.

**■ Industry: Investment****Saqib Bhatti:**[\[28690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has conducted an impact assessment into Invest 2035.

**Sarah Jones:**

The Green Paper 'Invest 2035' set out the vision for the government's Industrial Strategy to engage key stakeholders and invite their contributions to the consultation process. As such it does not set out individual policies which can be subject to an impact assessment. Consistent with best practice, policies in the Government's forthcoming Industrial Strategy will have impact assessments carried out where relevant.

**Saqib Bhatti:**[\[28691\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what publications are available for Invest 2035.

**Sarah Jones:**

"Invest 2035", the Industrial Strategy Green Paper, was published 14 October 2024, setting out our vision for a modern Industrial Strategy. The Invest 2035 Prospectus was published alongside this, which sets out the UK's pitch to investors and a roadmap detailing how the Industrial Strategy will help secure investment and kickstart growth across the country. The Industrial Strategy, alongside Sector Plans

for the growth-driving sectors, will be published in Spring 2025, aligned with the multi-year Spending Review.

### ■ **Insolvency Service: Artificial Intelligence**

**Sir John Hayes:** [\[28884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, for what purposes the Insolvency Service 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.

The Insolvency Service has used AI for three Proof of Concepts of internal chatbots which utilise a Large Language Model.

It is working with the Cabinet Office to publish Algorithmic Transparency Reporting Standards (ATRS) on two of its services. These relate to our Director Conduct Reporting Service and our Redundancy Payments Service Calculation Engine.

### ■ **Standard Individual Export Licences**

**Sir Ashley Fox:** [\[26771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what the average length of wait was to receive the result of an application for a Standard Individual Export Licence using the SPIRE system between January to July 2024.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

Between 1 January and 30 June 2024, the median processing time for Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) applications submitted on SPIRE and processed to first outcome was 16 working days.

The Export Control Joint Unit's (ECJU) current performance targets are to complete 70% of applications for SIELs within 20 working days, and 99% within 60 working days.

The Export Control Joint Unit publish comprehensive statistics every quarter about export licence applications, which includes our median processing times. The most recent publication covers the quarter up to June 2024. This data is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-export-controls-licensing-data>.

**Sir Ashley Fox:** [\[26772\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what the average length of wait has been to receive the result of an application for a Standard Individual Export Licence using the new LITE system since it was launched.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

LITE is being introduced gradually as we design, build and iteratively improve the system. It was initially introduced in 2021 for a small number of exporters and this

gradual increase in cases continued through 2022. The then Government concluded a total of 384 cases in LITE over 2021 and 2022 and the median processing time was 38 days.

In 2023, the then Government paused the reporting of LITE processing times whilst new functionality was developed. The Government is planning to return to publishing LITE data during 2025 once this functionality is implemented.

## CABINET OFFICE

### ■ Admiralty House

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[28585\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 21 January 2025 to Question 23478 on Admiralty House, for what reason the Secretary of State for Defence occupied Admiralty House on a time-limited basis.

**Georgia Gould:**

As has been the case under successive administrations, the Prime Minister allocates official residences to ministers, either on the grounds of security or to allow them to better perform their official duties.

### ■ Armed Forces: Equality

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[28577\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 16 January 2025 to Question 21390 on Armed Forces: Equality and with reference to the written ministerial statement of 14 May 2024, HCWS464, on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Civil Service, whether his Department's review of the cost of equality, diversity and inclusion expenditure by civil service organisations in the 2022-23 financial year included the Armed Forces.

**Georgia Gould:**

The review into Equality, Diversity and Equality (EDI) expenditure carried under the previous administration did not include the Armed Forces.

### ■ HMS Achilles

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[28586\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what discussions the (a) Cabinet Office and (b) 10 Downing Street had with the French Government on the renaming of HMS Agincourt.

**Georgia Gould:**

The name was proposed by the Royal Navy Ships Names and Badging committee and approved by His Majesty the King.

**■ Infected Blood Compensation Authority: Correspondence and Telephone Services****Dr Scott Arthur:** [\[28265\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the performance of the Infected Blood Compensation Authority in dealing with (a) calls and (b) correspondence from potential claimants.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:**

I am informed that in January, the Infected Blood Compensation Authority handled 709 calls and responded to 832 emails. The Authority is taking the approach of having single points of contact for claimants, and I was pleased to learn how this has fostered positive relationships with many of those in the infected blood community.

**■ Ministers: Aviation****James Wild:** [\[28652\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether flights made by (a) the Prime Minister and (b) other Ministers in the Royal Air Force's No. 32 Squadron are subject to Air Passenger Duty.

**Georgia Gould:**

Air Passenger Duty (APD) is payable for travel undertaken on aircraft that are on the civilian register – it is not payable for aircraft on the military register.

It is therefore payable for all ministerial travel undertaken on the RAF Envoy as that is currently on the civilian register.

**■ Official Residences****Mr Richard Holden:** [\[28579\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what guidance his Department has issued to Ministers on what costs for moving (a) in and (b) out of official residences can be paid for from the public purse.

**Georgia Gould:**

No standing guidance is issued to Ministers on this specific issue, as was the case under the previous administration. The appropriate use of public resources is a matter for the relevant Accounting Officer and their individual ministers.

**■ Public Houses: Bromsgrove****Bradley Thomas:** [\[29859\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many licensed public houses were operating on (a) 5 July 2024 and (b) 31 January 2025 in Bromsgrove constituency.



**Bradley Thomas:**

[\[29864\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what estimate his Department has made of the number of small businesses in Bromsgrove constituency (a) in July 2024 and (b) as of 6 February 2025.

**Georgia Gould:**

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

A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 6th February is attached.

**Attachments:**

1. Letter from the UK National Statistician [PQ29859\_ 29864.pdf]

■ **Russia: Subversion**

**Brian Mathew:**

[R] [\[28792\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to help prevent Russian interference in UK democratic processes.

**Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:**

I refer the honourable member to my previous answer dated 20/01/2025 [UIN 23400].

■ **Special Advisers**

**Mr Richard Holden:**

[\[28578\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to Cabinet Office's FOI disclosure referenced FOI2024/14571 of 4 December 2024, on which dates the Special Adviser People Board has met since the 5 July 2024; and which special advisers attended each meeting.

**Georgia Gould:**

Alongside the wider work of the Special Adviser People Board, it met on 17 October 2024 and was attended by Morgan McSweeney.

■ **Special Advisers: Official Hospitality**

**Charlie Dewhirst:**

[\[30476\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the publication entitled Number 10 special advisers hospitality, July to September 2024, published on 30 January 2025, for what reason the transparency data does not include an indicative financial value for the lunches received.

**Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:**

The Government is committed to publishing details of all special advisers' gifts, hospitality and meetings with senior media figures on a quarterly basis. As has been

the case under successive administrations, this information does not contain the value of hospitality.

## DEFENCE

### ■ Armed Forces Commissioner: Broxtowe

**Juliet Campbell:** [\[28633\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the establishment of the Armed Forces Commissioner on service personnel in Broxtowe constituency.

**Luke Pollard:**

The Armed Forces Commissioner is the first step in a series of steps that will be taken by the new Government to renew the nation's contract with those who serve, and to improve service life. They will be a direct point of contact for the Armed Forces and their families in every constituency, including Broxtowe, to raise welfare issues that impact on their service life. Through reports and recommendations, the new Commissioner will bring those welfare issues to the attention of Parliament and the public.

The Bill to create an Armed Forces Commissioner is now undergoing consideration in the House of Lords having completed its Commons Stages last month.

### ■ Gaza: War Graves

**James Naish:** [\[28574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he is taking steps with his international counterparts to (a) help ensure that an assessment is made of the condition of and (b) protect the (i) Gaza and (ii) Deir el Belah Commonwealth War Grave Cemeteries in Gaza.

**Al Carns:**

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) reports that as a result of the recent conflict in Gaza, both the Gaza War Cemetery and the Deir al Balah War Cemetery have suffered extensive damage, including to approximately 10% of the headstones.

A more detailed assessment cannot be carried out until the current situation subsides. The CWGC will, however, restore those sites to a befitting standard as and when circumstances allow. Until then, the locally employed maintenance team remain temporarily relocated outside Gaza.

### ■ Military Bases: Members

**Alicia Kearns:** [\[29902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his Department's policy is on Members of Parliament holding surgeries for armed forces personnel in military barracks.

**AI Carns:**

Guidance on the use of Ministry of Defence sites to host MP constituency surgeries is set out in Joint Service Publication 850, entitled Infrastructure and Estate Policy, Standards and Guidance which states that: 'Use of MOD facilities is not to be permitted for any purpose associated with a political party, a group having political associations, an organisation with political aims or for large scale assemblies/rallies which in the judgement of the Budget Holder are likely to cause a breach of the peace or result in unruly conduct.'

**Ministry of Defence: Contracts****Ian Roome:**[\[28746\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to make the process of tending for his Department's contracts is more accessible to SMEs.

**Maria Eagle:**

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) hold a crucial place in UK defence. They are the backbone of the UK economy and vital to delivering the innovation, expertise and agility we need now and in the future. Consideration of SMEs is a key element in our development of the forthcoming Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS). Through this we will consider how we better support SMEs, reduce barriers and set the conditions that unlock the full potential of SMEs to innovate at pace and seize future opportunities. A revised SME Action Plan will follow the DIS with the aim to improve engagement and increase Ministry of Defence (MOD) direct spend with SMEs.

In the meantime, the Procurement at MOD page on the gov.uk website contains detailed information for SMEs looking to become a supplier or contractor in defence.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-defence/about/procurement>

**EDUCATION****Apprentices****Manuela Perteghella:**[\[28709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make it her policy to support more employers to provide technical apprenticeships.

**Janet Daby:**

The government's first mission is to kickstart economic growth. Across the country skills gaps are holding back business growth and the government has committed to widening the apprenticeships offer into a levy-funded growth and skills offer.

Our levy-funded growth and skills offer, with apprenticeships at the heart, will deliver greater flexibility for learners and employers in England, aligned with our industrial strategy creating routes into good, skilled jobs in growing industries. As a first step, this will include shorter duration and foundation apprenticeships in targeted sectors,

helping more people learn new high-quality skills at work, fuelling innovation in businesses across the country, and providing high-quality entry pathways for young people.

In addition, as Skills England have highlighted, employer demand for higher technical skills at levels 4 and 5 is growing. The department is supporting employers to meet the need for higher technical skills, with over 150 apprenticeship standards approved for delivery at levels 4 and 5. Skills England will also help to ensure that there is a comprehensive suite of apprenticeships, training and technical qualifications for individuals and employers to access, which are aligned with skills gaps and what employers need.

**Lauren Edwards:** [\[29669\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans she has to review the adequacy of apprenticeship Qualification Achievement Rates for accurately capturing learner outcomes.

**Janet Daby:**

The department recognises there is a wide range of reasons for non-achievement of an apprenticeship, and that is why we hold training providers to account for quality delivery through the Apprenticeship Accountability Framework, which encompasses a wide range of quality indicators. In addition to Qualification Achievement Rates, these also include Ofsted inspection, retention rates, and employer and apprentice feedback.

Qualification Achievement Rates are one of a range of metrics the department holds on apprentice learner outcomes. We also publish a wide range of other information, including apprentice outcomes, earnings and satisfaction data.

As outlined in the department's further education outcomes publication, 94% of apprentices who achieve their apprenticeships go into work or further training, with 93% remaining in sustained employment. This publication also shows that apprentices benefit from strong wage returns. Median earnings for an apprentice at level 3 were £19,550 one year after achievement, rising 36% to £26,540 five years on. Additionally, the department's Apprenticeship Evaluation Learner Survey found that 86% of apprentices were satisfied with their apprenticeships and 88% felt their career prospects had improved since starting their apprenticeship.

## ■ Apprentices and Training: Carers

**Joe Robertson:** [\[26245\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment has she made of the adequacy of support for young people in kinship care to pursue work based training and apprenticeships.

**Janet Daby:**

The government is determined to give every child and young person the opportunities they deserve, and kinship carers play a crucial role in delivering this. Young people

who receive care from relatives and friends need extra support, including in further education (FE), and the department is working to ensure their needs are met.

The department recently announced a £40 million package to trial a new Kinship Financial Allowance in up to ten local authorities, to test whether paying an allowance to cover the additional costs of supporting the child can help increase the number of children taken in by family members and friends.

This is the single biggest investment made by government in kinship care to date. This investment could transform the lives of vulnerable children who can no longer live at home, by allowing children to grow up within their families and communities, reducing disruption to their early years and allowing them to focus on schooling, building friendships and later employment and training.

We are developing a comprehensive strategy for post-16 education and skills, to break down barriers to opportunity, support the development of a skilled workforce, and drive economic growth.

The department has committed to improve careers advice and guarantee two weeks' worth of work experience for every young person, including those in kinship care. This will underpin our Opportunity Mission, ensuring that every young person has multiple opportunities, tailored to their needs, to learn from different employers about work and the skills that are valued in the workplace.

The department expects schools to develop and improve their careers provision to be inclusive for all young people, in line with the world-class Gatsby Benchmarks, including benchmark 3, which focuses on addressing the individual needs of each pupil.

The department is bringing together Jobcentre Plus with the National Careers Service to create a new jobs and careers service. This will lead to greater awareness and focus on skills and careers, as well as better join-up between employability and careers provision.

The department continues to provide employers and providers with additional funding to support more apprenticeship opportunities for young people, including those who have been in kinship care. We provide £1,000 to both employers and training providers when they take on apprentices aged 16 to 18-years-old, and up to age 24 for apprentices with an education, health and care (EHC) plan or who have been in local authority care. These payments can be used to support costs such as work equipment, uniforms or travel.

The department funds students aged 16 to 19-years-old or up to the age of 25 when they have an EHC plan. This funding enables students to take part in study programmes which include qualifications with other activities including tutorials or work experience, or to take part in T Levels which includes a technical qualification, other activities such as employment, and an industrial placement.

Both are designed to enable students to progress to employment, an apprenticeship, or further study including higher education.

Every local authority in England must appoint a virtual school head, who has a statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of all children in their care, wherever they live or are educated, up to age 18. All looked after children must have a personal education plan, which should set out the support needed to help realise their short and long term academic outcomes. This should include careers advice and guidance and financial information about further and higher education, training and employment.

The department is providing £24 million of pupil premium plus funding to virtual school heads between the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years, to enable them to provide extra support to children in care and care leavers in post-16 education, with £10 million allocated to local authorities in 2023/24 and a further £14 million in 2024/25.

16-19 bursaries are available to help young people who would not otherwise be able to afford to participate in FE and training, such as Study Programmes or T Levels, to help them pay for essential costs like books, food, travel, equipment or other education-related costs. These awards are made by institutions to individual students. It is up to institutions to decide which students will receive a discretionary bursary and how much they will receive. They are targeted at those students who need most financial help to overcome barriers to participation. Most institutions include information about the Bursary Fund on their websites and young people can also contact their school's, or college's, student support services for more information on how to apply.

## ■ Apprentices: Finance

**Ian Roome:**

[\[27442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions her Department has had with Skills England on potential changes to the funding of apprenticeships.

**Janet Daby:**

Apprenticeships and skills will play a critical part in the government's mission to drive growth across the country, supporting people to get better jobs and improve their standard of living.

The government has established Skills England to form a coherent national picture of skills gaps and help shape the technical education system so that it is responsive to skills needs. This will include advising on priorities for the new growth and skills offer.

Skills England engaged with employers and other key partners regarding early priorities for the new growth and skills offer, including proposals to ask more employers to step forward and fund more level 7 apprenticeships themselves.

Skills England spoke to over 700 stakeholders before Christmas as part of their engagement exercise, and have shared their findings with the department. Its findings from this engagement process will be published in early 2025.

## ■ Apprentices: Rural Areas

**Stuart Anderson:**

[\[28595\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to improve the availability of apprenticeships in rural areas.

**Janet Daby:**

This government has a driving mission to break down barriers to opportunity. Meeting the skills needs of the next decade is central to delivering the government's five missions on economic growth, opportunity for all, a stronger NHS, safer streets and clean energy. Through delivering the opportunity and growth missions, the department will ensure that we have the skilled workforce needed to deliver the national, regional and local skills needs. This will align with the government's industrial strategy and break down the barriers to opportunity for learners.

In order to help meet these skills needs, the government has committed to widening the apprenticeships offer into a levy-funded growth and skills offer, with apprenticeships at the heart. This will offer greater flexibility to learners and employers, including those in rural areas. As a first step, this will include shorter duration and foundation apprenticeships in targeted sectors, helping more people learn new high-quality skills at work, fuelling innovation in businesses across the country and providing high-quality entry pathways for young people.

In addition, Skills England will help to ensure that there is a comprehensive suite of apprenticeships, training and technical qualifications for individuals and employers to access, and that regional and national skills needs are met.

The department is committed to supporting employers, including those in rural areas, to offer apprenticeship opportunities. The government continues to pay additional funding to employers and training providers to support them to take on young apprentices, apprentices with learning difficulties and disabilities and care leavers.

The department pays 100% of apprentice training costs for small employers when they take on apprentices aged 16 to 21 and £1,000 to all employers and training providers when they take on apprentices aged under-19. This payment is to support young apprentices in the workplace and can be used to support costs such as travel, work equipment and uniforms.

## ■ Breakfast Clubs: Reading

**Paulette Hamilton:**

[\[27958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department plans to take to encourage pupils to read at breakfast clubs in primary schools.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The department wants to give schools the flexibility to deliver their breakfast club in the way that best meets the needs of their pupils, as well as their parents and local community, and gets the school day off to a strong start.

The non-statutory guidance for early adopters will help schools on how they go further than just the minimum requirements, including ways to incorporate enriching activities into a breakfast club.

The early adopter schools will test and learn how to deliver new breakfast club provision, and the learning from these, including on enrichment, will inform a national rollout.

## ■ Children: Nutrition

**James McMurdock:**

[\[28851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to raise awareness of the impact of poor nutrition on children.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The government is committed to raising the healthiest generation ever.

It is important that children eat nutritious food at school and the department encourages schools to have a whole school approach to healthy eating. The School Food Standards regulate the food and drink provided at lunchtime and at other times of the school day. They aim to ensure that the right foods are available for children every day. School governors have a responsibility to ensure compliance and should appropriately challenge the headteacher and the senior leadership team to ensure the school is meeting its obligations. Schools may use the School Food Standards as a guide when writing their packed lunch policies.

To support governors, the department, along with the National Governance Association, are running a pilot online training course on school food for governors and trustees. By increasing understanding of the Standards, we hope that ultimately school children will have increased access to healthier, more nutritious food, the pilot will be evaluated to embed learning.

All schools are required to follow a broad and balanced curriculum, as exemplified by the national curriculum. The national curriculum sets the expectation that pupils are taught about the importance of healthy eating and nutrition. Healthy eating and opportunities to develop pupils' cooking skills are covered in the design and technology curriculum in key stages 1 to 3.

The importance of healthy eating is also included in the science curriculum for both primary and secondary schools. Healthy eating is covered through topics relating to nutrition and digestion, which cover the content of a healthy diet and the impact of diet on how the body functions.

The principles of a healthy and varied diet are also covered in health education, which emphasises empowering young people to make choices and adopt lifestyles that will increase their chance of living happy and healthy lives, supporting the agenda on tackling obesity. Pupils should be taught how to maintain healthy eating and the links between a poor diet and health risks, including tooth decay and cancer.



More broadly, the government has already taken action to restrict 'junk' food advertising to children, uprated the sugary drinks industry levy and announced stronger local authority powers to block new fast-food outlets near schools. Action to ban the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to children is also underway.

## ■ Children: Social Services

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[27403\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support children's services in Devon.

**Janet Daby:**

The department has been working closely with Devon County Council since Ofsted's inspection of children's services in March 2020, in which services were found to be inadequate overall and were placed in formal intervention under a Statutory Direction.

As part of the department's intervention, it has put in place robust support for the local authority and partner agencies involved in the delivery of children's services. This includes the appointment of a Children's Services Commissioner, in addition to the appointment of both Hertfordshire and Essex local authorities through our Sector Led Improvement Programme. The Sector Led Improvement Programme enables the delivery of peer-to-peer support from the strongest performing local authorities to local authorities like Devon, who are working to improve their services.

The department also holds regular formal monitoring meetings with the local authority and partners as part of holding all parties to account for making the necessary improvements in services, and we will continue with our work with them and our support partners to ensure that all children and families receive the service they require and deserve.

## ■ Construction: Apprentices

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[27693\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help increase the number of construction apprenticeships in (a) Slough constituency and (b) the South East.

**Janet Daby:**

This government has committed to widening the apprenticeships offer into a growth and skills offer, which will provide greater flexibility to employers and learners across the country, including in Slough and the South East. It will also align with the industrial strategy, creating routes into good, skilled jobs in growing industries, such as construction.

As a first step, this will include shorter duration and foundation apprenticeships in targeted sectors, helping more people learn new high-quality skills at work, fuelling innovation in businesses across the country and providing high quality entry pathways for young people.

In addition, as part of this government's ambitious plan to rebuild Britain and deliver 1.5 million homes in England in this Parliament, 32 new Homebuilding Skills Hubs will deliver fast-track training in critical areas such as bricklaying, groundwork, and site carpentry to boost housebuilding and drive forward the government's growth mission. Hubs will be established in areas where large-scale homebuilding projects lead to a surge in demand. These Hubs will help deliver around 5,000 more construction apprenticeship places per year by 2027/28, through a £140 million industry investment to get Britain building again.

## ■ Crimes of Violence: Children and Young People

**James McMurdock:**

[\[28752\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to keep children and young people safe from violence (a) on the streets and (b) in schools.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Children's wellbeing and safety is a priority for this government. In the community, there are a range of interventions from across government aimed at keeping children safe. In addition to existing community-based interventions, Young Futures Hubs will bring together services to improve access to opportunities and support for young people at community level, promoting positive outcomes and enabling young people to thrive.

Education can be a significant protective factor. Statutory guidance including 'Working together to safeguard children' and 'Keeping children safe in education' sets out the safeguarding duties and responsibilities of education settings. This spans action taken within schools, such as through effective whole-school behaviour policies and pastoral support provision, through to the role of schools within multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and action taken by schools to escalate concerns about children to local authority services. Furthermore, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will put in place a package of support to enhance multi-agency working to keep children safe and ensure they can thrive. This includes placing a duty on safeguarding partners to automatically include education and childcare settings in their multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

Through existing statutory relationships, sex and health education, pupils are taught how to build respectful and empathetic relationships and appropriate ways of resolving conflict, including a clear message that resorting to violence is never acceptable.

We currently support those pupils most at risk through two place-based programmes that provide specialist support in serious violence hotspots in England. Support, attend, fulfil, exceed (SAFE) taskforces are school-led partnerships that develop a targeted, local response to serious violence in 10 areas. Interventions delivered include mentoring, social skills training and cognitive behavioural approaches. In alternative provision (AP) settings, Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforces

(APSTs) are joined up, multi-disciplinary teams (including youth workers, family workers and careers workers) embedded within the largest AP schools in 22 areas.

### ■ Department for Education: Correspondence

**Dr Caroline Johnson:**

[\[28589\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, 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.

**Janet Daby:**

The total number of cases received by the department since August 2024 that are due for reply but have yet to receive a substantive response is 31.

The breakdown is as follows:

#### PARLIAMENTARY CASES THAT HAVE NOT YET HAD A SUBSTANTIVE REPLY

Month Received	Secretary of State for Education		Ministerial Team		Department	
	Volume	%	Volume	%	Volume	%
August 2024	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
September 2024	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
October 2024	1	2.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
November 2024	1	1.8%	3	0.5%	4	0.7%
December 2024	3	6.7%	12	2.2%	15	2.5%
January 2025	1	4.8%	10	5.6%	11	5.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>1.0%</b>

### ■ Department for Education: Employers' Contributions

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[27796\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, 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.

**Janet Daby:**

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.

**■ Disabled Students' Allowances****Josh Fenton-Glynn:**[\[29295\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential equality impact of changes to the Disabled Students Allowance on (a) the provision of assistive technology support packages and products, and (b) the removal of the needs assessments from the eligibility criteria.

**Janet Daby:**

The department has not announced changes to the provision of assistive technology support packages and products through Disabled Students' Allowances or the removal of needs assessments from the eligibility criteria.

**■ Educational Institutions: Freedom of Expression****Lee Anderson:**[\[27677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support freedom of speech in (a) schools and (b) universities.

**Janet Daby:**

This government is absolutely committed to freedom of speech and academic freedom in schools, universities and beyond. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, confirmed to Parliament on 15 January the government's plans for the future of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which will create a more effective, proportionate, balanced and less burdensome approach to protecting academic freedom and freedom of speech.

In addition, schools must promote the fundamental British values, including democracy and individual liberty. Schools have a statutory duty to ensure a balanced presentation of political issues, but older pupils can engage with the political issues provided activity is conducted sensitively and not targeted at others. The promotion of fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs is considered by Ofsted in their inspections.

**■ Further Education: Pay****Luke Taylor:**[\[27362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to ensure fair and competitive pay for people working in further education.

**Janet Daby:**

This government is committed to ensuring there is a thriving further education (FE) sector, which is vital to our missions to break down the barriers to opportunity and boost economic growth.

FE colleges, rather than government, are responsible for setting and negotiating pay for their staff. Colleges are not bound by the national pay and conditions framework for schoolteachers. FE colleges were incorporated under the terms of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, which gave them autonomy over the pay and contractual terms and conditions of their staff.

At the Autumn Budget 2024, my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out an additional £300 million revenue funding for FE in the 2025/26 financial year to ensure young people are developing the skills this country needs and a further £300 million to support colleges to maintain, improve and ensure suitability of their estate. We have recently announced that we are making approximately £50 million of the additional revenue funding available to statutory FE providers for April to July 2025. This one-off grant will enable colleges to respond to current priorities and challenges, including workforce recruitment and retention.

The remaining funding will be made available in 16-19 funding rates for the 2025/26 academic year.

This builds on the department's investment to extend targeted retention incentive payments of up to £6,000 after tax to eligible early career FE teachers in key subject areas. We are also delivering funding to support those young people who do not pass mathematics and English GCSE at 16, who are predominantly studying in FE.

The department will continue to offer financial incentives for those undertaking teacher training for the FE sector in priority subject areas. FE teacher training bursaries will be offered for a further year, worth up to £31,000 each, tax-free, in the 2025/26 academic year. Additionally, we are supporting industry professionals to enter the teaching workforce through our Taking Teaching Further programme.

**■ Health Education: Food and Nutrition****James McMurdock:**[\[28848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans she has to improve education on food and nutrition in (a) primary and (b) secondary schools.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department is supporting schools in a number of ways to provide high-quality food and nutrition education for their students.

Nutrition education is a discrete strand of the national curriculum for design and technology and is compulsory for key stages 1 to 3. The curriculum aims to teach children how to cook and how to apply the principles of healthy eating and nutrition. It recognises that cooking is an important life skill that will help children to feed themselves and others healthy and affordable food.

The importance of nutrition is also included in the science curriculum for both primary and secondary schools. Nutrition through healthy eating is covered through topics relating to nutrition and digestion, which cover the content of a healthy diet and the impact of diet on how the body functions.

Pupils also have the option to study for a GCSE in food preparation and nutrition. This requires pupils to understand and apply the principles of food science, nutrition and healthy eating when preparing and cooking food.

Oak National Academy provides adaptable, optional and free curriculum support for schools and has recently published new curriculum sequences in cooking and nutrition from key stages 1 to 3, with associated lesson resources being rolled out this academic year. This curriculum supports teachers to deliver lessons on practical food skills and develops pupils' understanding of healthy and sustainable diets. Pupils will be taught to make informed decisions about food and drink, and to celebrate food as an important part of different cultures, and a source of nourishment, connection and joy. Pupils will learn how to plan, prepare and cook a wide variety of predominantly savoury dishes, safely and hygienically, applying their food knowledge to make informed nutrition and health decisions.

The government has established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, covering ages 5 to 18, chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE. The review will seek to deliver a rich, broad, inclusive and innovative curriculum that readies young people for life and work. The review group will publish an interim report in early spring setting out its interim findings and confirming the key areas for further work, and will publish its final report with recommendations this autumn. The department will take decisions on what changes to make to the curriculum in light of these recommendations.

#### ■ Higher Education and Home Office: Sexual Offences

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[28462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions she has had with (a) the Secretary of State for the Home Department and (b) higher education institutions in England on reducing the number of instances of sexual assault reported in those institutions.

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[28463\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking with higher education institutions to improve (a) training for staff on and (b) levels of awareness of safeguarding at those institutions.

**Janet Daby:**

There is no place for sexual misconduct of any kind in higher education (HE) or anywhere else. The department expects university leaders to take positive action to tackle this blight wherever it grows on their campuses. To support universities to stamp out sexual misconduct, the Office for Students has introduced new requirements for preventing, addressing and investigating incidents. These take

effect in August 2025. Departmental officials are working with sector bodies to ensure HE providers are prepared to implement the new measures that will establish, amongst other things, regulatory requirements for preventative training, reporting mechanisms and providing support to students. All HE providers will need to show they have the capability and resource capacity to implement the new requirements. More details of this condition can be found here:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/student-protection-and-support/harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/prevent-and-address-harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/>.

## ■ Higher Education: Buildings

**Munira Wilson:**

**[28570]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will make an estimate of the number of (a) universities and (b) higher education buildings where reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete is present.

**Janet Daby:**

The higher education (HE) sector is independent from government and it is therefore for individual providers to determine and address any estate issues.

The Institution of Structural Engineers has published guidance that HE institutions can refer to on investigating and assessing reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC).

Departmental officials engaged with Universities UK and HE mission groups during 2023, to direct HE providers to RAAC guidance from the Institution of Structural Engineers and to departmental RAAC guidance for state-funded education buildings.

## ■ Higher Education: National Security

**Jim Shannon:**

**[28475]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to prevent higher education institutions from targeted influence from hostile states.

**Janet Daby:**

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

This government is committed to ensuring our world-leading universities remain free from foreign interference. There are a set of measures that protect against undue foreign interference in our universities. These range from the Academic Technology Approval Scheme, which vets students and researchers seeking to study in sensitive areas, to the provisions of the Higher Education Freedom of Speech Act 2023, which includes the implementation of a new complaints scheme which will offer a new focused route for concerns regarding foreign interference in academic freedom and free speech to be raised.

The government offers practical advice to support the sector to engage with international partnerships in transparent and secure ways. The Research Collaboration and Advice Team, the National Protective Security Authority, the National Cyber Security Centre, and guidance published by Universities UK all support the sector to manage the security-related risks of internationalisation.

The government is currently working at pace on the implementation of the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme, which will apply to universities across the UK, and will require registration of foreign directed activity involving specific governments and entities where it is necessary to protect the safety or interests of the UK. We expect the scheme to commence in summer 2025.

Finally, the government is conducting an internal review, informed by engagement with the regulator, sector, academics impacted by foreign interference, as well as international partners, to assess existing approaches to managing the risk of foreign interference and what more support they might need.

## ■ Home Education

**Gregory Stafford:** [\[28772\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will issue guidance to home educator parents on the steps they will need to take to meet new requirements set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

**Gregory Stafford:** [\[28786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions her Department has had with home educator parents on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

**Stephen Morgan:**

As part of the Children Not in School measures, the department will publish statutory guidance outlining the steps that local authorities and parents need to take to comply with the new provisions. This guidance will be consulted on, ensuring families have sufficient time to feed in, understand and prepare for any requirements.

To engage effectively during the passage and future implementation of the Children in School measures, the department has set up implementation fora to engage with home-educating parents, stakeholders and local authorities.

Through round-table discussions and direct engagement with home-educating communities, we have sought to understand the concerns and priorities of families who choose to educate their children at home.

## ■ Home Education: Costs

**Adam Dance:** [\[27420\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the cost of home schooling a child for (a) parents and (b) local education authorities in this financial year.



**Stephen Morgan:**

The department does not hold data on the cost of elective home education for parents or local authorities.

As set out in our elective home education guidance, parents who home educate assume the full financial responsibility for their child's education, since a state-funded school place is available for their child.

The new duties created by the Children Not in School measures in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will include the creation of a duty on local authorities to create and maintain Children Not in School registers and a duty to provide support to home educating families, should it be requested. Local authority delivery will be funded by central government in line with the New Burdens Doctrine. To determine the level of funding, the department will carry out a new burdens assessment.

**■ National Careers Service: Disability****Alex Easton:**[\[27746\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to ensure the National Careers Service is fully inclusive for disabled people.

**Janet Daby:**

The National Careers Service provides free, up to date, impartial information, advice and guidance on careers, skills and the labour market in England, helping customers make informed choices about their career options.

Adults with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are one of the priority groups for the service and can access in-depth tailored support, drawing on localised labour market information, including face-to-face support from community-based careers advisers, information and advice through webchat, telephone helpline and website.

Prime contractors delivering community-based support are required to comply with all relevant legislation and must develop strategies to encourage people from identified priority groups, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities, to use the community-based service and ensure they meet the specific needs of these customers.

The National Careers Service website provides education advice and job support for people with SEND and content is accessible, in accordance with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.

The education advice is available here:

<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/education-advice-disabled-special-educational-needs>. The job support is available here:

<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/career-and-job-support-for-people-with-a-disability/>.

As outlined in the Get Britain Working White Paper, Jobcentre Plus will be brought together with the National Careers Service in England, to create a new Jobs and Careers Service, transforming the experience for all users.

Part of the digital offer of the new service will include exploring how assistive technology can be used to aid in the accessibility and inclusiveness of the service.

## ■ Overseas Students: Ukraine

**Mike Martin:**

[\[28362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 16106 on Overseas Students: Ukraine, whether Ukrainian students who gain an 18-month extension on their visa through the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme will be eligible for home fees status for the full duration of their degree; and whether she is taking steps with Cabinet colleagues to allow Ukrainian students to extend their visa once the 18-month extension has expired.

**Janet Daby:**

The department has amended the Student Support regulations so that those who have been granted leave under the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme may qualify for higher education student support in England and home fee status without the requirement to meet the normal three-year ordinary residence requirement.

Where a person's Ukraine Scheme permission expires during their course of study and they are granted further permission to remain under one of the standard immigration routes, they will continue to be eligible to access student support and home fee status while they complete their studies. This is in line with those granted leave under the other Ukraine Schemes.

We will continue to keep the Ukraine Schemes under consistent review in line with developments in the ongoing war.

## ■ Prisoners: Parents

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[28734\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help support children who have a parent in prison.

**Janet Daby:**

The department knows growing up with a parent or primary carer in prison can have a devastating impact on a child's life chances. These children can experience the trauma of separation, social isolation and shame, and support is often lacking.

This government has a key mission to break down barriers to opportunity for every child, which includes better supporting and identifying children affected by parental imprisonment.

The department and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) are working together to see how we can support children affected by parental imprisonment. We have also closely

engaged the sector who have provided us with invaluable support during the early stages of policy development.

At the department, we are looking at how best to support children and their families within the community, including as part of our wider reforms to Children's Social Care. The MoJ is looking at how to improve support for parents in prison and the visiting experience for families, with a focus on strengthening family ties where appropriate.

At present, prisons across England and Wales offer a range of services to maintain family relationships including social visits and family days.

### ■ Pupils: Absenteeism

**Max Wilkinson:**

[\[26938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what data her Department holds on the number of pupils who have been absent from school due to a lack of provision of SEND services.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The department does not hold information on the number of pupils who have been absent from school due to the lack of provision of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services. However, we recognise that rates of absence are generally higher for pupils with SEND and children attending special schools.

We also recognise that barriers to attendance are wide and complex, and this is particularly true for pupils with SEND. Addressing these barriers requires a support-first approach and strong relationships between families, schools, local authorities and other relevant local services.

This is why the department has published the 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance, which became statutory in August 2024. The guidance promotes a support-first approach and provides detail on additional support for pupils with SEND. Where a pupil is not attending due to unmet or additional needs, this guidance sets out clear expectations on how schools, local authorities and wider services work together to access and provide the right support to improve attendance.

The department is working closely with schools and local authorities to ensure that education settings are able to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, including announcing £1 billion investment in high needs at the Autumn Budget 2024. This funding will help to ensure all children can access the high quality education that should be their right.

### ■ Pupils: Assessments

**Bradley Thomas:**

[\[28827\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has plans to increase the grading of students that move to state schools from independent schools.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

This is a matter for Ofqual, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation. I have asked its Chief Regulator, Sir Ian Bauckham, to write to the hon. Member for Bromsgrove directly and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

**School Libraries: Standards**

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[28716\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions she has had with Ofsted on the (a) availability and (b) quality of school library provision.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[28717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of professional school librarians on pupils (a) learning and (b) outcomes.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department has not specifically assessed the impact of professional school librarians on pupils' learning or outcomes. It is for individual schools to decide how best to provide and maintain a library service for their pupils, including whether to employ a qualified librarian. Headteachers have autonomy to decide how best to spend the core schools funding that is allocated to them by the department. This school funding can be used to fund librarians, school libraries and book corners.

Ministers and officials have regular discussions with His Majesty's Chief Inspector and his staff on a wide range of matters, including those relating to literacy and ensuring pupils benefit from a knowledge-rich curriculum.

**School Meals: Nutrition**

**James McMurdock:** [\[28850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that school meals are (a) balanced and (b) nutritional.

**Stephen Morgan:**

It is important that children eat nutritious food at school and the department encourages schools to have a whole school approach to healthy eating.

The School Food Standards regulate the food and drink provided at lunchtime and at other times of the school day. Compliance with the School Food Standards is mandatory for maintained schools, academies and free schools. They aim to ensure that the right foods are available for children. For example, one or more portions of vegetables as an accompaniment and one or more portions of fruit must be provided every day. The standards also restrict foods high in fat, salt and sugar, as well as low quality reformed or reconstituted foods, and ensure that pupils always have healthy options.

The department's aim is to deliver better life chances for all through a system which works for all. As with all government programmes, we will keep our approach to the School Food Standards under continued review.

### ■ Schools: Asbestos

**Mrs Elsie Blundell:**

[\[27326\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking with local authorities to expedite the removal of asbestos from schools.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The department takes the safety of children and those who work with them incredibly seriously, which is why we expect all those with responsibility for managing the school estate, which includes local authorities, governing bodies and academy trusts, to have robust plans in place to manage asbestos in school buildings effectively, in line with their legal duties, drawing on appropriate professional advice.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), as the regulator, sets the legal requirements and standards to manage asbestos and produces guidance for responsible bodies to follow, as duty holders. The department provides guidance, tools and support to help schools and responsible bodies effectively manage their school buildings, including guidance on managing asbestos in schools and colleges, which was updated in October 2024.

Asbestos is typically removed when carrying out wider rebuilding or refurbishment work to improve the condition of buildings. The department follows the advice of the HSE as the regulator, that as long as asbestos-containing materials are undamaged, and not in locations where they are vulnerable to damage, they should be left undisturbed, and their condition monitored.

The department has been clear that when asbestos does pose a risk to safety and cannot be effectively managed in place, it should be removed. The decision to remove asbestos should be considered on a case-by-case basis and annual condition funding provided by the department can be used for this purpose. As part of the 2025/26 budget, we have increased capital allocations to improve the condition of school buildings to £2.1 billion, which is £300 million more than the 2024/25 financial year. This is on top of the School Rebuilding Programme and targeted support for reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete.

### ■ Schools: Bromsgrove

**Bradley Thomas:**

[\[28835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department plans to fund new schools in Bromsgrove constituency.

**Stephen Morgan:**

Local authorities are responsible for providing enough school places for children in their area. Where the need for a new school has been identified, local authorities must currently seek proposals for a new academy, or free school, under section 6A of

the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This is known as the 'free school presumption' process.

Changes to the legal framework for opening new schools will be introduced through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. The measures will remove the legal presumption that all new schools are opened as academies, allowing local authorities to welcome proposals for all types of school and to put forward their own proposals where they choose to do so. This will ensure new schools are simply opened by the provider with the best offer for local children and families.

The department provides the Basic Need capital grant to support local authorities to provide mainstream school places, based on their own pupil forecasts and capacity data. We provide High Needs Provision capital allocations to support the provision of new places and improve existing provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities or requiring alternative provision. Local authorities can use this funding to provide places in new schools or through expansions of existing schools.

Financial contributions from housing developers are also an important way of helping to meet demand for new school places when housing developments are driving pupil numbers. It is for the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to secure developer contributions through section 106 agreements or the Community Infrastructure Levy and to decide on the local infrastructure needs that this contribution should support. The department encourages LPAs to secure significant contributions for new school places and work closely with colleagues planning school places in their area, including county councils when the local authority responsible for education is not the LPA.

There are no centrally-delivered free school projects currently planned for the Bromsgrove area.

## ■ Schools: Concrete

**Munira Wilson:**

[\[28569\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, which schools that are awaiting refurbishment through the school rebuilding programme (a) have and (b) have not had those works brought forward due to the presence of RAAC.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The government has committed £1.4 billion to continue the current School Rebuilding Programme (SRP) in 2025/26, reconfirming our commitment to rebuild or refurbish 518 schools and sixth form colleges across England, prioritising delivery based on need.

All schools within the programme, including those with confirmed reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, are prioritised for delivery according to the condition of their buildings, readiness to proceed and efficiency of delivery. The department also takes into account the suitability and longevity of any temporary accommodation schools and sixth form colleges may have in place. Expected delivery timeframes have been communicated to all responsible bodies and specific start dates are

communicated at least a month in advance of the project entering delivery. Since we communicated these timescales, we have not made any significant changes to them to move start dates around.

Just under half of SRP projects have started various stages of delivery activity and the department plans to increase the number of existing school rebuilding projects to 100, of which delivery begins in the next financial year so work can start more quickly.

Once a school enters delivery, a project team carries out a feasibility study which determines the scope of the works. SRP projects typically take 3 to 5 years to complete.

## ■ Schools: Lincolnshire

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[28457\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many schools in (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire have been identified as stuck schools.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

In the 'School accountability reform – school profiles improvement and intervention' consultation, the department defined 'stuck school' as a school that was graded 'requires improvement' or equivalent at its most recent Ofsted inspection and was also graded below 'good' at its previous inspection.

For this purpose, we have considered a sub-judgement of 'requires improvement' for leadership and management and/or quality of education for a school inspected in 2024/25 academic year as equivalent to a previous single headline grade of 'requires improvement'.

Based on the latest published Ofsted inspection data, there were 4 stuck schools in the South Holland and the Deepings constituency and 18 stuck schools in Lincolnshire by the end of December 2024.

## ■ Skills England: Accountability

**Ian Sollom:**

[\[28623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that Skills England is accountable to Parliament.

**Janet Daby:**

It is intended for Skills England to become an Executive Agency of the Department for Education. As with all other Executive Agencies, Skills England will be required to have robust governance arrangements and clear lines of accountability, including to parliament. This will be set out in a publicly available Framework Document.

**■ Special Educational Needs: Coronavirus****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[29558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 30 January 2025 to Question 26566 on Special Educational Needs, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of lockdown restrictions during the covid-19 pandemic on the (a) behaviour, (b) special educational needs requirements and (c) primary socialisation of school children; and what steps she is taking to help support those children.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The UK Covid Inquiry was set up to examine the UK's response to and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to learn lessons for the future. The government is committed to learning from the findings of the Covid Inquiry, which will play a key role in informing the government's planning and preparations for a future pandemic.

The pandemic affected all pupils, particularly those that are disadvantaged, leading to dips in attainment and a substantial widening of the gaps between disadvantaged children and their peers. Prolonged periods of absence from schools and colleges may have also contributed to disengagement whilst at school and increased incidents of misbehaviour. The department has also seen more children starting primary schools without basic levels of development, meaning that teachers cannot focus on teaching, impacting all children in the class.

**■ Special Educational Needs: School Meals****Jim Shannon:**[\[28480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to improve meals in schools for SEN children.

**Stephen Morgan:**

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

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life. It is important that children eat nutritious food at school and the department encourages schools to have a whole-school approach to healthy eating.

The minimum standards for school food are set out in legislation. Beyond this, headteachers, school governors and their caterers are best placed to make decisions about their school food policies that take into account local circumstances. In doing so, schools are expected to make reasonable efforts to cater for pupils with particular requirements, for example to reflect medical, dietary and cultural needs.

School governors have a responsibility to ensure compliance with the School Food Standards. To support governors, the department, along with National Governance Association, are running a pilot online training course on school food for governors



and trustees. The department will evaluate the training programme's reception and effectiveness in the short-term.

Education settings are obliged, under the Equality Act 2010, to make reasonable adjustments for children and young people with disabilities to avoid putting them at a substantial disadvantage in relation to a relevant matter, in comparison with persons who are not disabled. Schools are required to make reasonable adjustments to enable such pupils to access their school meals, should they wish to. Schools should work with the pupil, their family and any other professionals involved, to agree the necessary support. It is for the school to make the decision about what is reasonable in any particular situation.

### ■ **Special Educational Needs: Transport**

**Chris Coghlan:**

[\[29822\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional funding to local authorities for SEND transport for the 2025-26 financial year.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Most central government funding for home-to-school travel is provided through the local government finance settlement administered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This government recognises the challenges local authorities are facing as demand for critical services rises.

The government has announced £1.3 billion of new grant funding for the 2025/26 financial year to help local government deliver core services. Together with local income from council tax and business rates, this will provide a real terms increase in core spending power of around 3.2%.

The government is committed to reforming local government funding, using the best available evidence to direct funding to where it is most needed. We will deliver these reforms in partnership with local government.

### ■ **Standards and Testing Agency: Artificial Intelligence**

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[28451\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for what purposes the Standards and Testing Agency has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

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 Standards and Testing Agency (STA) has used AI to create videos to support schools and local authorities with preparing for and administering the national curriculum assessments. It is also trialling the use of large language models to create stakeholder training materials.

STA can draw on a range of resources, published on GOV.UK, to inform AI usage. For example, the Generative AI Framework, the Ethics, Transparency and Accountability Framework, the Data Ethics Framework, the AI Opportunities Action Plan and the Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard.

## ■ Students: Loans

**Bradley Thomas:** [\[28743\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of a 0% interest rate for student loans for the study of specific courses.

**Janet Daby:**

Student loans are subject to interest to ensure that those who can afford to do so contribute to the full cost of their degree, irrespective of the subject studied. The student loan system has significant borrower protections, and the government has not made an assessment of the impact of making interest rates dependent on the course studied.

Interest rates on student loans do not affect monthly repayments made by borrowers. Regular repayments are based on a fixed percentage of earnings above the applicable student loan repayment threshold, not on amount borrowed or the rate of interest. If a borrower's income drops, so does the amount they repay. If income is below the relevant student loan repayment threshold, or a borrower is not earning, then they do not have to make repayments at all. Any outstanding debt, including interest built up, is written off after the loan term ends, or in case of death or disability, at no detriment to the borrower.

Interest rates are set annually in relation to the Retail Price Index (RPI). The government caps maximum student loan rates when needed to ensure that student loan interest rates do not exceed market rates for comparable unsecured personal loans.

The government is determined that the higher education funding system should deliver for our economy, for universities, and for students. The department is considering the system and will continue to engage with stakeholders on this.

## ■ Students: Northern Ireland

**Carla Lockhart:** [\[28638\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to provide (a) tuition fee, (b) financial and (c) other support to students from Northern Ireland studying at universities in Great Britain.

**Janet Daby:**

The Northern Ireland Executive has devolved responsibility for higher education in Northern Ireland and determines the student finance arrangements for Northern Irish students, including those students studying in England, Scotland and Wales.

## ■ Supply Teachers

**Martin Wrigley:**

**[28736]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure an adequate provision of supply teachers in schools.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Supply teachers perform a valuable role and the department is grateful for their important contribution to schools across the country.

Schools and local authorities are currently responsible for the recruitment of their supply teachers and are best placed to make decisions on their approach to recruitment.

There are various approaches to providing supply teachers, such as using supply agencies.

The department, in conjunction with the Crown Commercial Service, has established the agency supply deal, which supports schools to obtain value for money when hiring agency supply teachers and other temporary school staff. More information on the agency supply deal can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/deal-for-schools-hiring-supply-teachers-and-agency-workers>.

## ■ Teachers: Labour Turnover

**Richard Tice:**

**[28780]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to improve teacher retention in (a) Boston and Skegness constituency and (b) the UK.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The within school factor that makes the biggest difference to a young person's educational outcome is high-quality teaching. Recruiting and retaining more qualified, expert teachers is therefore critical to the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and boost the life chances for every child.

This government has inherited a system with critical shortages of teachers with numbers not keeping pace with demographic changes. That is why the government has set out the ambition to recruit 6,500 new expert teachers across our schools, both mainstream and specialist, and our colleges over the course of this Parliament.

The department has made good early progress towards this key pledge. We accepted in full the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendation of a 5.5% pay award for teachers and leaders in maintained schools for the 2024/25 academic year. Alongside teacher pay, we have made £233 million available for the 2025/26 recruitment cycle to support teacher trainees with tax-free bursaries of up to £29,000 and scholarships of up to £31,000 in some shortage subjects. The department has also expanded its school teacher recruitment campaign, 'Every Lesson Shapes a Life' and the further education teacher recruitment campaign 'Share your Skills'.

A successful recruitment strategy starts with a strong retention strategy and new teachers of mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing in the first five years of their careers will now receive a Targeted Retention Incentive of up to £6,000, after-tax, if working in disadvantaged schools. There are seven schools in the Boston and Skegness constituency where teachers are eligible for Targeted Retention Incentives.

The department is also working closely with teachers and school leaders to improve the experience of teaching, including a more comprehensive school report card in place of Ofsted's single headline grades, providing a clearer picture of schools' strengths and weaknesses for parents, and more proportionate accountability for staff. We are also making key resources to support wellbeing, developed with school leaders, available to teachers.

The department is funding bespoke support provided by flexible working ambassador schools and multi-academy trusts, ensuring schools are capturing the benefits of flexible working, whilst protecting pupils' face-to-face teacher time. Lapal School of Hales Valley Trust is the flexible working ambassador school providing local, tailored peer support for Boston and Skegness schools.

High-quality continuous professional development is also key to ensuring we have and retain an effective teaching workforce. The department has established 87 Teaching School Hubs across the country, providing approved high-quality professional development to teachers at all stages of their careers. These Hubs play a significant role in delivering initial teacher training, the early career framework and national professional qualifications. L.E.A.D. Teaching School Hub is a centre of excellence supporting teacher training and development across Boston, Lincoln, North Kesteven, South Holland, South Kesteven, East Lindsey and West Lindsey.

## ■ Teachers: Qualifications

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:**

[\[28693\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to reduce decision times for qualified teacher status applications.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Since 2021, the end-to-end process for becoming a teacher has been managed through the department's digital services. This means that we have access to real-time recruitment data which allows us to identify the challenges that candidates are facing. From this data, we know that the longer it takes for an initial teacher training (ITT) provider to respond to a candidate, the more likely they are to drop-out.

To alleviate this, the department has set out the need for timely responses to candidate applications in the ITT criteria and we encourage providers to respond to candidates within 30 working days. The department's digital services have also made it quicker and easier for ITT providers to manage and process their applications.

Additionally, the department has implemented changes to encourage providers to make more timely decisions. Now, if a candidate does not receive a response to their application within 30 days, they will be allowed to apply to a different ITT provider.

We have also developed weekly performance reports, which allow providers to compare their recruitment performance to national averages.

The department is aware that large volumes of applications can impact a provider's ability to respond to applications quickly. That is why we implemented functionality last cycle, to prevent candidates from applying to courses that they are ineligible for.

### ■ **Teaching Regulation Agency: Artificial Intelligence**

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[27828\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for what purposes the Teaching Regulation Agency has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

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 Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) has not used artificial intelligence for any purpose during the last 12 months.

The TRA also has access to the Government Digital Service, part of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, for expert advice.

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### ■ **[Subject Heading to be Assigned]**

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[902712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions he has had with the devolved Administrations on innovation in nuclear technology.

**Michael Shanks:**

DESNZ Ministers engage with Devolved Government counterparts on energy matters regularly, including through the Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change Interministerial Group (IMG) which last took place on 17 October 2024. The next IMG is scheduled to meet on 6 March in Belfast with NI Ministers chairing.

### ■ **Adlar: Grants**

**Gregory Stafford:**

[\[28868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, for what reason grant funding for Adlar Limited was paused.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Government is responsible for setting the policy which underpins the Boiler Upgrade Scheme. Ofgem as the scheme administrator make decisions on scheme eligibility in line with the Boiler Upgrade Scheme 2022 Regulations.

**■ Adlar: Warm Homes Plan****Gregory Stafford:** [\[28871\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of involving Adlar Ltd in the rollout of the Government's Warm Homes Plan.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Warm Homes Plan will help people find ways to save money on energy bills and transform our ageing building stock into comfortable, low-carbon homes that are fit for the future. Heat pumps will play a vital role in delivering the Government's Warm Homes Plan, and further details on the Plan will be set out in due course.

**■ Aviation: Fuels****Siân Berry:** [\[28802\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his Department's policies on renewable electricity generation of the Royal Society's report entitled Net zero aviation fuels: resource requirements and environmental impacts published on 28 February 2023.

**Michael Shanks:**

The report in question considers four potential net zero aviation fuels: hydrogen, ammonia, synthetic fuels (efuels) and biofuels. Recommendations include the need for further Research and Development of the efficient production, storage and use of green hydrogen and efuels.

The government is committed to delivering greener transport and supporting its missions to kick start economic growth and make Britain a clean energy superpower, and we will continue to work together with industry to consider the best way to support the aviation industry to decarbonise, including through the Jet Zero Taskforce.

**■ Batteries: Storage****Mr Toby Perkins:** [\[28499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of co-locating solar and onshore wind farms access to battery energy storage systems.

**Michael Shanks:**

A smart and flexible energy system is essential for meeting net zero. Co-locating solar and onshore wind farms with battery storage are a part of this, making it possible for the delivery of stored electricity when the wind is not blowing, or the sun does not shine.

The Government is supportive of renewable energy deployment alongside other functions, such as energy storage, in order to maximise the efficiency of land use and network infrastructure.

## ■ Boiler Upgrade Scheme

**Gregory Stafford:**

[\[28869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking with Ofgem to coordinate grant funding for the Boiler Upgrade Scheme.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Boiler Upgrade Scheme is a demand led scheme, which provides grants up to £7,500, to encourage property owners to replace existing fossil fuel heating with more efficient, low carbon heating systems. Installers apply for and redeem the voucher on behalf of a property owner, to streamline the customer journey.

Ofgem, as scheme administrator, issue and process vouchers providing all eligibility criteria is met, in accordance with the Boiler Upgrade Scheme 2022 regulations.

## ■ British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme

**Dan Carden:**

[\[28634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent discussions his Department has had with the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme (BCSSS) on proposals to transfer the BCSSS investment reserve to members.

**Sarah Jones:**

I refer the honourable member to my response on 29 January 2025 (UIN 25410).

## ■ Energy Company Obligation

**Steve Witherden:**

[\[28361\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many (a) households and (b) listed buildings have been awarded funding for energy efficiency installations under the ECO4 scheme in (i) Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr constituency (ii) Wales and (iii) England.

**Michael Shanks:**

ECO4 does not award funding to households, it is an obligation set by Government on large energy suppliers to install energy efficiency measures.

To the end of September 2024 (the [latest available data](#) by parliamentary constituency and nation), ECO4 has supported: (i) 1,140 households in the Montgomeryshire and Glyndwr constituency, (ii) 18,729 households in Wales, and (iii) 166,258 households in England.

The Department does not hold data on how many listed buildings have received ECO4 measures.

## ■ Energy: Prices

**Gregory Stafford:**

[\[28788\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of a Tiered Energy Proposal for consumer energy bills.

**Michael Shanks:**

A tiered energy pricing system is known as a block tariff. Traditionally, block tariffs are either a rising block tariff where the cost of energy increases in increments the more energy used or, a falling block tariff which acts in reverse. Low energy users benefit more from a rising block tariff and high energy users benefit from a falling block tariff. Since the introduction of the energy price cap in 2018, suppliers can choose to offer block tariffs as a competitive incentive for their business model.

Ofgem, in their recent call for input on standing charges, asked about block tariffs, and feedback from consumer representatives and charities was mixed. As part of Ofgem's continued work on standing charges, they are seeking views on options including increasing tariff diversity in the market, which could include block tariffs.

## ■ Fire and Rescue Services: Carbon Emissions

**James McMurdock:**

[\[28758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate he has made of the cost of net zero targets for Fire and Rescue services.

**Kerry McCarthy:**

Fire and Ambulance Stations account for around 2% of greenhouse gas emissions from public sector buildings in England according to the Building Energy Efficiency Survey ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-energy-efficiency-survey-bees](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-energy-efficiency-survey-bees)).

The Government has previously estimated the cost of decarbonising all UK public sector buildings at £25bn to £30bn in 2022 prices. This estimate will be reviewed this year. The cost of retrofitting different sub-sectors of the public sector will vary according to several factors, including the types of buildings used and their age. This leads to different relative costs across these sub-sectors.

## ■ Great British Energy

**Gregory Stafford:**

[\[28775\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an estimate of the potential impact of GB Energy on the cost of energy bills.

**Michael Shanks:**

Great British Energy is a key part of the government's mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower by achieving clean power by 2030.

This is part of a sustainable, long-term plan to protect all UK billpayers from volatile international gas markets. In an unstable world, the only way to guarantee our energy



security and protect billpayers permanently is to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels and towards homegrown clean energy.

### ■ **National Grid: Weather**

**Carla Lockhart:**

[\[28639\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to improve the resilience of the electricity grid to extreme weather conditions.

**Michael Shanks:**

Great Britain has a highly resilient energy network. Network operators have completed a significant number of improvements to the resilience of Great Britain's electricity network which means the electricity system is in a much better place to mitigate power disruption during extreme weather events such as Storm Darragh and Storm Eowyn. The Energy Emergencies Executive Committee (E3C) work to identify lessons after all large energy incidents to ensure continuous improvement to the network. E3C will work with network operators in Northern Ireland as part of this process to ensure, where necessary, improvements are made across the UK.

### ■ **UK Emissions Trading Scheme: EU Emissions Trading Scheme**

**Noah Law:**

[\[29377\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the potential economic impact of linking the UK and EU emissions trading schemes; and if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of linking UK and EU emissions trading schemes on (a) electricity prices, (b) energy bills, (c) carbon prices and (d) the economic climate for UK industrial investment.

**Sarah Jones:**

Under the terms of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), the UK Government and EU agreed to give serious consideration to linking our respective carbon pricing schemes and to cooperate on carbon pricing. As part of our reset with the EU the Government continues to explore all options to improve trade and investment.

### ■ **Warm Homes Plan: Gloucester**

**Alex McIntyre:**

[\[28699\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent steps his Department has taken to help ensure that people can access support through the Warm Homes Plan in Gloucester.

**Michael Shanks:**

As the first step towards the Warm Homes Plan, the Government has committed an initial £3.4 billion over the next three years towards heat decarbonisation and household energy efficiency, with £1 billion of this allocated to 2025/2026.

This includes support for the most vulnerable, including those in Gloucester, to help slash fuel poverty. To fund energy efficiency upgrades and low-carbon heating for social housing residents, lower income households, and renters, £1.29 billion has been committed to the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund and £500m for the Warm Homes: Local Grant respectively. Delivery is expected to start this year.

Further details on the Warm Homes Plan will be set out in due course.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### ■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

**Sir Desmond Swayne:**

[\[902725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to support the development of new agricultural technologies.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Government recognises the importance of innovation and technologies in supporting farmers to drive productivity and profitability, boosting Britain's food security and improving nature's recovery.

The Government is supporting the development of agricultural technologies through a range of policies.

Defra has announced the Accelerating Development of Practices and Technologies (ADOPT) Fund which will launch in Spring 2025, enabling farmer-led trials to bridge the gap between new technologies and their real-world application.

Legislation to implement the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023 will be introduced in Parliament before the end of March. When in force, this will enable farmers to grow crops with higher yields and that are more resistant to drought, pests and diseases.

Defra will collaborate closely with industry partners, such as The Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture, a professional body established in 2021 that aims to drive greater uptake of professional skills, including in relation to new technologies, among farmers and growers for a more prosperous Sector.

Defra will continue to look carefully at how to position future investment and support to enable the benefits of new technologies to be fully realised and integrated into farming practices.

### ■ Beverage Containers: Polystyrene

**Ruth Cadbury:**

[\[29897\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether people can import polystyrene cups into the UK.

**Mary Creagh:**

The supply of expanded and foamed extruded polystyrene food and drinks containers, including cups, that are used to contain food or drink that is ready-to-consume has been banned since 1 October 2023.

However, you may still import polystyrene cups. This facilitates their movement through the supply chain to allow for other uses.

**Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Employers' Contributions****Rupert Lowe:**[\[27797\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the proposed increase in employer National Insurance contributions for financial year 2025-26.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

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.

**Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Freedom of Information****Richard Tice:**[\[27387\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many staff in his Department are responsible for (a) processing and (b) responding to Freedom of Information Act requests; and if he will make an estimate of the annual cost to the public purse of this work.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Each team within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) that holds information relevant to a request is responsible for providing responses in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs). These teams receive guidance on the application of the legislation from Defra's Information Rights Team, which is responsible for processing such requests. The Information Rights Team consists of six staff members.

Defra does not maintain a cost accounting system to track staff time spent responding to information requests; therefore, no annual cost figure is available.

**Floods: Insurance****Freddie van Mierlo:**[\[29866\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of making insurance cover of properties at risk of flooding mandatory for insurers participating in the Flood Re scheme.

**Emma Hardy:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 5 February 2025, UIN [27724](#).

■ **Sewage: Devon**

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[28344\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of combined sewerage systems on untreated sewage overflow in Devon.

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[28345\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help reduce sewage overflows in Devon.

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[28350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of replacing combined sewerage systems with segregated sewerage in Devon.

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[28351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with water companies on replacing combined sewerage systems with segregated sewerage systems in Devon.

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[28353\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the time needed to reconfigure sewerage systems in Devon.

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[28354\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an estimate the cost to the public purse of reconfiguring sewerage systems in Devon.

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[28696\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of combined sewerage systems in Devon on water quality.

**Emma Hardy:**

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

Storm overflows are safety valves within our combined sewerage system to protect properties from flooding. The Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan sets stretching targets to reduce the harms from storm overflows. This ambitious plan is guiding future investment in sector.

Water companies are investing around £12 billion between 2025-2030, a record amount, to improve nearly 3,000 storm overflows across England and Wales, and

reduce spills by 45% compared to 2021 levels. In Devon, a large spill reduction programme of works will be undertaken by South West Water, in the next 5 years to improve overflows in the Exe river & estuary catchments. This will see improvements to Combined Storm Overflows, pumping stations & sewage treatment works.

We are also carrying out a full review of the water sector to shape further legislation that will transform how our water system works and clean up rivers, lakes and seas for good.

## ■ **Trapping: Animal Welfare**

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[28735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of snares on animal welfare.

**Mary Creagh:**

Defra recognises many people in this country have concerns about the use of snares on animal welfare and bans have now been brought into place in Scotland and Wales. Wildlife management is a devolved matter which means that the Scottish and Welsh Governments are free to make their own laws in relation to snaring.

Free-running snares are currently legal in England and are regulated by law. They must be checked at least once a day and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 prohibits the setting of any type of snare in places where they are likely to catch certain non-target animals. Anyone using snares also has a responsibility under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to ensure their activities do not cause wild animals or pets any unnecessary suffering.

This government was elected on a mandate to introduce the most ambitious plans to improve animal welfare in a generation and this included a commitment to bring an end to the use of snare traps in England. Defra is considering the most effective way to deliver this commitment and will be setting out next steps in due course.

## ■ **Veterinary Medicines Directorate: Artificial Intelligence**

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[27834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for what purposes the Veterinary Medicines Directorate has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

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 Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) has not used AI within any business processes to aid decision making regarding the quality, safety or efficacy of the lifecycle of veterinary medicines within the last 12 months.

The VMD submitted a nil return to Cabinet Office regarding the Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard (ATRS) on 30 August 2024.

The VMD can draw on a range of resources, published on GOV.UK, to inform AI usage. For example, the Generative AI Framework, the Ethics, Transparency and Accountability Framework, the Data Ethics Framework, the AI Opportunities Action Plan and the ATRS.

The Directorate also has access to the Government Digital Service, part of the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, for expert advice.

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### ■ Afghanistan: Women

**Ruth Jones:** [\[28618\]](#)

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 restrictions on (a) education, (b) work and (c) public life placed on women and girls by the Taliban in Afghanistan; and what steps he is taking with his international counterparts to help tackle violations of women's rights and freedom of religion or belief in Afghanistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We condemn the Taliban's draconian restrictions on the rights of Afghan women and girls, which seriously affect their everyday lives. These restrictions and those on freedom of religion and belief hamper Afghanistan's development. We support the initiative to refer the Taliban to the International Court of Justice for violations of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and are working with international partners ways to hold the Taliban accountable, including supporting the UN Special Rapporteur, Richard Bennett. On 20 January, I convened a meeting with senior representatives from the UN and influential countries to underline the importance of addressing Afghanistan's challenges together.

### ■ Akash Karamat

**Bob Blackman:** [\[28919\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has made representations to the government of Pakistan on the case of Akash Karamat.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK Government remains deeply concerned by the use of blasphemy laws to undermine human rights in Pakistan. During my visit to Pakistan in November, I raised the issue of blasphemy-related violence with Pakistan's Human Rights Minister. The misuse of blasphemy laws to target religious minorities is particularly troubling. The UK Government regularly raises this issue at the highest levels - pressing for due process to prevent wrongful convictions and ensure fair trials for those accused. We are not prepared to discuss the detail of individual cases where to do so could put individuals and their families' lives at risk.

## ■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty**

**Priti Patel:**

[\[28014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he last discussed the future sovereignty of the British Indian Ocean Territory with the (a) US and (b) Mauritius government.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Foreign Secretary last spoke to the US Secretary of State on 27 January where they discussed a range of shared UK/US priorities, including the long-term protection of the base on Diego Garcia. Officials and Ministers have regular engagement with Mauritius on the deal, most recently during a phone call on 31 January between the Prime Minister and Mauritian Prime Minister Ramgoolam.

**Bradley Thomas:**

[\[28380\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with the United States Department of State on the British Indian Ocean Territory.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Foreign Secretary and the US Secretary of State had a phone call on 27 January where they discussed a range of shared UK/US priorities, including the long-term protection of the base on Diego Garcia.

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[28536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 30 January to Question 25988 on British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty, how much has been spent on the Chagos Islands negotiations by his Department.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The costs to which I referred in the Answer to Question 25988 have not been centrally aggregated between Departments or within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The negotiations began in 2022, and to identify the costs would incur disproportionate expense.

## ■ **Consular Assistance (Journalists) Bill**

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:**

[\[28447\]](#)

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 Consular Assistance (Journalists) Bill.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Government is considering its response to the Private Member's Bill "to make provision for a right to consular assistance for British journalists abroad who have been detained or held hostage; and for connected purposes" and will respond to the Parliamentary Business and Legislation Committee in due course.

**■ Democratic Republic of Congo: Electricity and Water****Kate Osamor:**[\[28034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help increase supplies of (a) potable water and (b) electricity in North Kivu.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The UK is a leading partner for the humanitarian response in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and is deeply concerned by the humanitarian impacts of the current situation in North Kivu. We are already the second largest donor in country, allocating over £62 million of assistance this year through capable partners. This includes providing £8 million to fund water and sanitation infrastructure to displacement sites, and £10 million to assist with food security, shelter, healthcare and protection. As a result of this humanitarian programming on water supply development, hundreds of thousands of affected people have been supported with clean drinking water through this crisis period. Our partners are now restarting their work to deliver life-saving infrastructure to scale across North Kivu. UK funds have also supported the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to re-establish electricity access there by at least 75 per cent.

**■ Development Aid: Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping Operations****Stephen Gethins:**[\[28519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much and what proportion of his Department's budget he has allocated for (a) civilian peacebuilding and (b) conflict (i) prevention and (ii) resolution in the (A) 2024-25 and (B) 2025-26 financial years.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending on "civilian peace-building, conflict prevention and resolution", as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (sector code 15220), for 2024-25 and 2025-26 is not currently available. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) budget allocations for 24/25 will be published shortly. Each year the FCDO publishes its Provisional and Final Statistics on International Development, providing a comprehensive overview of calendar year ODA spend. Final figures for 2024 will be published in autumn 2025.

**■ Diplomatic Service: British Nationals Abroad****Sir Iain Duncan Smith:**[\[28446\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will support legislative proposals to establish a legal right to consular assistance for British nationals.



**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Government is committed to strengthening consular services, including introducing a right to consular assistance in cases of human rights violations. My department is considering a package of measures to achieve this, which we will announce in due course.

**Rachel Blake:**[\[29719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps to ensure that the protections outlined in the Consular Assistance (Journalists) Bill are extended to all British nationals facing arbitrary detention overseas.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Government is already committed to strengthening support for British nationals abroad, including through a right to consular assistance in cases of human rights violations. The government is considering its response to the "Consular Assistance (Journalists) Bill" and will respond to the Parliamentary Business and Legislation Committee in due course.

■ **Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Correspondence****Bradley Thomas:**[\[29246\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many and what proportion of items of correspondence from Parliamentarians received by (a) his Department, (b) himself and (c) his ministerial team have not yet received a substantive response in each month since August 2024.

**Catherine West:**

The total number and proportion of parliamentarian correspondence received by the FCDO (including the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the ministerial team) each month since August 2024 that has not yet received a substantive response:

FCDO MINISTERIAL CORRESPONDENCE FROM PARLIAMENTARIANS		AUG-24	SEP-24	OCT- 24	NOV- 24	DEC- 24	JAN- 25
Total Volume Received	381		691	796	468	465	501
Total Volume Not Yet responded to	0		4	10	27	69	*256
% of Total Not Yet Responded To	0%		1%	1%	6%	15%	*51%

\*\*Please note that January total includes correspondence received up to and

FCDO MINISTERIAL  
CORRESPONDENCE

FROM

PARLIAMENTARIANS

AUG-24

SEP-24

OCT- NOV- DEC- JAN-  
24 24 24 25

including 31st January  
2025

## ■ Gaza and West Bank: Antisemitism

**Aphra Brandreth:**

[\[28321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of UNRWA in removing antisemitic material from school textbooks used in (a) the West Bank and (b) Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Education is an essential component to the humanitarian response in Gaza, and critical to building the foundations for a sustainable and lasting peace for the Israeli and Palestinian people. It is therefore essential that partners delivering education services across the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), including United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), uphold the highest standards of neutrality. Catherine Colonna's Independent Review of Mechanisms and Procedures to Ensure Adherence by UNRWA to the Humanitarian Principle of Neutrality notes that the most recent UNRWA Rapid Review of textbooks from the Palestinian Authority (2022/2023) "found that 3.85 per cent of all textbook pages contain issues of concern to UN values, guidance, or position on the conflict". The UK supports the Colonna review's conclusion that "the presence of even a small fraction of problematic content in textbooks, supplemental material and teaching content remains a serious issue." We welcome the initiatives launched by UNRWA to ensure neutrality of its educational material and teaching, in addition to its long-standing work with UNESCO and the Palestinian Authority to reform curricula and educational materials. £1 million of UK funding to UNRWA this financial year has been earmarked for the implementation of the Colonna review's recommendations.

## ■ Gaza: International Aid

**Aphra Brandreth:**

[\[28322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an estimate of the proportion of international aid that has been misappropriated by terrorist organisations in Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Aid diversion is an ongoing concern in Gaza, but we welcome reports that more aid is now entering Gaza, and looting has reduced. Israel must now continue to work with partners to ensure law and order is maintained in Gaza so that safe distribution of aid

across the Gaza strip is sustained. Most of our aid budget for the Occupied Palestinian Territories is disbursed as funding to trusted partners. The UK conducts thorough due diligence assessments of partners to ensure procedures are in place to manage the risks of aid diversion and to report losses. Programmes are monitored regularly, including through annual and project completion reviews.

## ■ **Gaza: Politics and Government**

**Paula Barker:**

[\[29121\]](#)

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 comments made by US President Trump on 4 February 2025 in relation to the future of Gaza.

**Paula Barker:**

[\[29122\]](#)

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 comments made by President Trump on 4 February 2025 on Palestinians in Gaza.

**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. Palestinian civilians should be able to return to, and rebuild, their homes and their lives. Our position is clear - we want to see a negotiated two-state solution, with a sovereign Palestinian state, which includes the West Bank and Gaza, alongside a safe and secure Israel. 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 continue to work together with the new US administration to ensure regional security and stability, including ensuring lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians, and we thank the US for the integral role it played in negotiating the ceasefire agreement, alongside Qatar and Egypt. The Prime Minister reiterated this in his call with President Trump on 26 January. Our shared priority must be to work together to ensure the ceasefire is implemented in full, becomes permanent, and supports a pathway to a sustainable peace.

**Carla Denyer:**

[\[29251\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will summon the United States Ambassador to discuss President Trump's proposals on Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We will continue to engage with the US Administration on all our priorities, including the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). We look

forward to working with the incoming US Ambassador to London, once confirmed by the Senate. We have no plans to summon the Chargé d'Affaires.

We would oppose any effort to move Palestinians in Gaza to neighbouring Arab states against their will. There must be no forced displacement of Palestinians, nor any reduction in the territory of the Gaza Strip. Palestinian civilians should be able to return to, and rebuild, their homes and their lives. That is a right guaranteed under international law.

## ■ Georgia: Civil Society and Press Freedom

**Stephen Gethins:**

[\[28518\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take diplomatic steps to support (a) civil society and (b) independent media in Georgia.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Foreign Secretary and I have raised our concerns over the instability and violence in Georgia directly with the Georgian Dream Representatives. I have been clear that Georgia's negative democratic trajectory, violence targeting demonstrators, and journalists is unacceptable. We are working with international partners to support a free and open civil society and media in Georgia. On 30 January our Embassy in Tbilisi issued a statement, on behalf of 14 Media Freedom Coalition members, supporting journalist Mzia Amaglobeli, who has been on hunger strike since 11 January.

## ■ Hamas: Hostage Taking

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**

[\[29417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will hold discussions with funding bodies on the potential implications for their policies of reports of a recently released hostage having been held in UNRWA premises.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

This Government is relieved about the release of hostages, including that of Ms. Damari, and hope all others will also soon return safely to their families. Reports that hostages have been held in United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) premises are very concerning. We welcome the fact that UNRWA has said that they take all allegations extremely seriously, and there should be independent investigations into any misuse of its facilities by Palestinian armed militants, including Hamas. We also note UNRWA's statement that it was forced to vacate all its installations in the north of Gaza Strip, including Gaza City, on 13 October 2023. Following Catherine Colonna's Independent Review, UNRWA set out an action plan with detailed management reforms. As a result, we are assured that UNRWA is taking action to ensure it maintains the highest standards of neutrality. As the Minister for Development told the House on 28 January, she has discussed the issue of neutrality with UNRWA's leadership, including directly with

Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini. She also spoke to UNRWA staff members on their work to implement the recommendations of the Colonna report during her visit to the region on 3-5 December. A Memorandum of Understanding governs UK financial support to UNRWA. We continue to monitor UNRWA's activity through due diligence and annual assessments.

## ■ **Hamas: UNRWA**

**Sir Oliver Dowden:**

[\[28527\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with (a) his counterpart in Israel and (b) the United Nations on reports of potential links between Hamas and UNRWA.

**Sir Oliver Dowden:**

[\[28528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has had discussions with the UN on reports that Hamas hostages have been held in UNRWA facilities.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We welcome the fact that the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has said there should be independent investigations into any misuse of its facilities by Palestinian armed militants, including Hamas. Following Catherine Colonna's Independent Review, UNRWA set out an action plan with detailed management reforms including stronger independent oversight, better detection systems, improved screening procedures, mandatory training for staff on humanitarian principles and more proactive donor engagement. As a result, we are assured that UNRWA is taking action to ensure it maintains the highest standards of neutrality. As the Minister for Development told the House on 28 January, she has discussed the issue of neutrality with UNRWA's leadership, including directly with Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini. She also spoke to UNRWA staff members on their work to implement the recommendations of the Colonna report during her visit to the region on 3-5 December.

## ■ **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham**

**Wendy Morton:**

[\[28979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department plans to review the classification of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham as a terrorist organisation.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Government does not routinely comment on whether a group is being considered for proscription or de-proscription.

**■ International Day of Education****Wendy Morton:** [\[28557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister for Development of 23 January 2025 on International Day of Education, Official Report, column 433WH, what steps he is taking to ensure at least 50% of Government funding is reaching women and girls in Afghanistan; and what steps he is taking to measure this.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

UK officials work closely with partners on the ground to ensure programmes delivered with UK funding are designed to focus on the most marginalised people, including women and girls. Implementing Partners provide the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) with data on the number of beneficiaries they have reached through UK funding, disaggregated by sex. The FCDO uses this to measure whether 50% of all beneficiaries reached are women and girls. We will continue to hold ourselves to account on this commitment.

**■ Israel: Hamas****Wendy Morton:** [\[28971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps his Department is taking to ensure a sustained ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

**Wendy Morton:** [\[28972\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with international partners on the enforcement of ceasefire agreements in Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We welcome the agreement to end the fighting in Gaza. It is the first step in ensuring long-term peace and security for Israelis, Palestinians, and the wider region, bringing much-needed stability, but we have always been clear that an immediate ceasefire is just the first step towards a lasting solution to this crisis. The UK is ready to play a leading role with international and regional partners, in securing a permanently better future for the Israeli and Palestinian people, based on tangible progress towards a Palestinian state, with Gaza and the West Bank united under one government. Palestinians must be given a credible route to a Palestinian state, which is the right of the Palestinian people. The Foreign Secretary spoke to Foreign Minister Sa'ar on 22 January and stressed the UK's eagerness to support the negotiation process. I raised this matter when I spoke with Varsen Aghabekian, the Palestinian Authority's Minister for Foreign Affairs. We will continue working with partners to support a path to long term peace and stability with a two-state solution: a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.

**■ Israel: UNRWA****Steve Witherden:**[\[28745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of Israeli legislation on UNRWA on UK government funding.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK has committed £41 million for UNRWA this financial year, to deliver essential services for civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and to Palestinian refugees across the region. This funding has now been released to United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to spend before the end of the financial year. We remain opposed to Israeli legislation against UNRWA, which plays a vital role in delivering humanitarian assistance in Gaza and enabling the broader international response through its logistics and distribution network.

**Shockat Adam:**[\[28863\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the decision to ban UNRWA operations.

**Shockat Adam:**[\[28864\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of Israel's decision to ban UNRWA on the humanitarian situation in (a) Gaza and (b) the West Bank.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

As the Foreign Secretary said on 13 January, Israeli legislation means the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) faces a cliff edge in its ability to support Palestinian refugees across the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA plays a vital role in delivering humanitarian assistance in Gaza and enabling the broader international response through its logistics and distribution network. We remain opposed to the legislation, and unequivocally reject attempts to undermine or degrade UNRWA. The Foreign Secretary raised our concerns on 13 January with Foreign Minister Sa'ar, during his visit to the region. The Minister for Development set out our concerns with Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Haskel on 4 December, and the Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories also raised this with the Israeli Minister for Strategic Affairs on 23 January.

**■ Leah Sharibu****Claire Hanna:**[\[27931\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Nigerian counterpart on the release of Leah Sharibu.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The UK strongly condemns Leah Sharibu's abduction and has repeatedly called for her release and the release of all those abducted by Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa (ISWA). We have raised Leah's case with the Government of Nigeria, and the Minister for Africa will continue to do so in future engagements. More broadly, we continue to engage with the Government of Nigeria to support efforts to tackle insecurity and prevent further kidnappings, which includes support to Nigeria's anti-kidnap cell, through the UK-Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership.

**■ Moldova: Energy Supply**

**Wendy Morton:** [\[27543\]](#)

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 disruptions to energy supply in (a) Transnistria and (b) Moldova.

**Stephen Doughty:**

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave on 30 January 2025 to Question 25252 [<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2025-01-21/25252>].

**■ Nigeria: Freedom of Expression and Religious Freedom**

**Ruth Jones:** [\[29496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help support Nigeria to tackle (a) marginalisation of minority faith communities, (b) criminalisation of blasphemy and (c) other systemic violations of freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The UK Government is committed to supporting Nigeria to protect freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all. The right of individuals to express their beliefs or non-belief is essential for a free and open society. Our dialogue on human rights, including FoRB, is an important part of the UK's partnership with Nigeria. In addition, the UK government funds the provision of legal and judicial expertise for those countries wishing to make legislative changes to protect FoRB, including addressing blasphemy laws. In Nigeria, ongoing security challenges, including violent extremism and intercommunal violence, also impinge on the rights of FoRB. We work closely with the Nigerian security forces on tackling violent extremism, while the UK provides support to locally-led solutions to tackle the complex root causes of intercommunal violence.

**■ Nigeria: Humanitarian Aid**

**Ruth Jones:** [\[29493\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much humanitarian aid his Department has allocated to Nigeria for 2025; and what steps



his Department is taking to help ensure that this aid reaches vulnerable communities in (a) Benue, (b) Kaduna and (c) Plateau.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

In the Financial Year 2024/25, UK humanitarian support to Nigeria totalled £33.5 million in life-saving assistance. We have reached approximately one million people with our Humanitarian and Resilience Programme (HARP), reducing mortality and increasing resilience, focused on people with the most severe humanitarian needs. At present, our humanitarian aid is not targeted at Benue, Kaduna or Plateau states. The UK is also a donor to the Start Fund which provides rapid financing in response to small to medium scale crises including helping people affected by conflict in central Nigeria.

■ **Pakistan: Ahmadiyya**

**Priti Patel:**

[\[28018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what support his Department provides to organisations working to protect the (a) rights and (b) safety of the Ahmadi Muslim community in Pakistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Promoting the rights of religious minorities is an important part of the UK's diplomatic engagement in Pakistan. I raised Ahmadi rights when I met Pakistan's Human Rights Minister on 19 November in Pakistan and discussed this issue in Parliament on 28 November. The British High Commission continues to raise the issue of safety for the Ahmadi community at the highest levels, including the need to respond swiftly to incidents of violence. UK officials routinely speak with civil society groups in Pakistan and the UK to better understand the issues affecting the Ahmadi community and inform our engagements with the Pakistani authorities. UK programming also brings together influential community and faith leaders and minority representatives to promote interfaith harmony.

**Gregory Stafford:**

[\[28770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Pakistan on ensuring the safety of Ahmadiyya Muslims, in the context of the destruction of the UN mosque in Daska, Pakistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Promoting the rights of religious minorities is an important part of the UK's diplomatic engagement in Pakistan. I underlined the importance of promoting religious tolerance and harmony when I met Pakistan's Human Rights Minister on 19 November, and discussed this issue in Parliament on 28 November. We are aware of reports of the desecration of an Ahmadi Mosque in Daska and continue to monitor the situation. In response to this incident, the British High Commissioner raised the issue of Ahmadi Muslim rights in a message to the Punjab Minorities Minister on 23 January. We will

continue to urge the Government of Pakistan to guarantee the rights of all people in accordance with international standards.

#### ■ **Pakistan: Foreign Aid**

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[28040\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in Pakistan on press freedom within Pakistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK is a champion of media freedom and proud member of the Media Freedom Coalition. We are deeply concerned by restrictions on media freedom in Pakistan and regularly raise this issue at the highest levels. I underlined the importance of upholding freedom of information when I met Pakistan's Human Rights Minister on 19 November, and discussed the safety of journalists in Parliament on 28 November. We will continue to advocate for improved legislation and stronger institutions to enable a free and independent media and ensure the safety of journalists.

#### ■ **Pakistan: Human Rights**

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[28032\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Pakistani counterpart on human rights in Pakistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Promoting human rights is an important part of the UK's diplomatic engagement in Pakistan. I raised the importance of upholding civil and political rights with senior Pakistani Ministers, including the Minister for Human Rights and Interior Minister, during my visit to Pakistan in November. We will continue to urge the Government of Pakistan to guarantee the rights of all people in accordance with Pakistan's Constitution and international standards.

#### ■ **Palestinians: Religious Buildings**

**Mary Kelly Foy:** [\[28660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will hold discussions with his international counterparts on taking steps to protect places of worship in Palestine.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK has always been clear that a ceasefire is just the first step towards a lasting solution to this crisis. We remain focused on pushing for an end to the devastating violence in Gaza, protecting civilians, ensuring the release of all hostages and an increase in humanitarian aid into Gaza. The UK champions, and remains strongly committed to, freedom of religious belief for all. It is our firm opinion that no one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. We are championing the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and promoting tolerance and mutual

respect through our engagement in multilateral organisations, our bilateral work, and our programme funding. The UK is a strong supporter of freedom of religion and belief and calls for places of worship to be respected.

## ■ Red Sea: British Nationals Abroad

**Wendy Morton:**

[28501]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 21 January 2025 to Question 23329 on Red Sea: British Nationals Abroad, what steps is he taking to provide consular support to British nationals in that region.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office stands ready to provide consular support to British nationals abroad 24 hours a day, seven days a week. British nationals requiring consular assistance can contact their nearest Embassy, High Commission or Consulate [<https://www.gov.uk/world/embassies>].

**Wendy Morton:**

[28502]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 21 January 2025 to Question 23329 on Red Sea: British Nationals Abroad, what discussions he has had with (a) the Secretary of State for Defence and (b) other Cabinet colleagues on the potential implications of unexploded ordnance in countries bordering the Red Sea on the safety of British nationals in that region.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Ministers are in regular touch about issues in the region. The FCDO-funded Global Mine Action Programme (GMAP) is the Government's main programme for reducing the threats posed to civilians by mines, cluster munitions and other unexploded ordnance. It is currently active in ten countries, including Sudan (where it is funding education about the risks). As for implications on the safety of British Nationals, we regularly update travel advice to ensure British Nationals have the best advice possible, available at all times, for all countries bordering the Red Sea.

**Wendy Morton:**

[28547]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 21 January 2025 to Question 23329 on Red Sea: British Nationals Abroad, what engagement he has had with the families of victims of recent fatalities in the Red Sea.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The FCDO continues to provide support to those British nationals and families affected by recent tragic incidents in the Red Sea, including the sinking of the Sea Story in November 2024 and the tragic fire on board the Hurricane in June 2023. We remain in contact with the relevant local authorities and our sincere condolences are with all the victims and their families.

**■ Sudan: Development Aid****Wendy Morton:**[\[28085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing multi-year funding to support (a) food-insecure people in Sudan and (b) Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The UK is committed to addressing the humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan. We are deeply concerned by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Famine Review Committee's findings in December 2024 that the famine has spread to at least five areas of Sudan and is projected to expand into at least ten areas by May 2025. In November 2024, the UK announced a further £113 million of aid. With this announcement, the UK has doubled our aid to Sudan and the regional response this year to £226.5 million. During his visit to the Sudan-Chad border at Adré in January, the Foreign Secretary also announced £20 million in additional funding.

Ministers will consider Official Development Assistance allocations for 2025/26 over the coming months, and we will publish them in the Annual Report & Accounts in Summer 2025. The next phase of the Spending Review will set departmental budgets from 2026/27 to 2029/30.

**■ Sudan: Humanitarian Aid****Wendy Morton:**[\[28083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent diplomatic steps he has taken to help secure guarantees from Sudan's warring parties that humanitarian assistance will be delivered (a) safely and (b) unimpeded to people affected by conflict.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The UK remains fully committed to ensuring safe and unimpeded humanitarian access in Sudan. In January, the Foreign Secretary visited the Chad-Sudan border at Adré to see first-hand the impact of conflict on Sudanese refugees. He used the visit as an opportunity to call again on warring parties to urgently improve humanitarian access. On 25 November 2024, the Foreign Secretary also chaired a Sudan session during the G7 + Arab Quint Foreign Ministers' meeting to discuss collective action the G7 and Quint could take with the warring parties to push for improved humanitarian access, protection of civilians, and increased aid. In our statements at the United Nations Security Council, including most recently in an open briefing on 6 January, as well as in our engagements with international partners, the UK continues to push for additional aid routes across Sudan and into it, including through South Sudan. The UK Special Representative, Richard Crowder, met the head of the Sudanese Armed Forces, General Burhan, during his first visit to Sudan in December 2024, and pressed him on current impediments to access such as visas.

## ■ Syria: Development Aid

**Priti Patel:**

[\[28021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what aid he plans to deliver to Syria in 2025.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK continues to provide vital support to those in need in Syria and Syrians across the region. We pledged more than £250 million in 2024, and in December 2024, we announced a further £61 million in support. Through the United Nations and international non-governmental organisations, we are providing food, healthcare, protection, and other life-saving assistance. Financial year 2025/2026 budgets are under consideration by FCDO Ministers.

## ■ Syria: Human Rights

**Priti Patel:**

[\[28019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to (a) support the rights of (i) minority groups and (ii) women and girls and (b) promote religious freedoms in Syria since the appointment of an interim President on 29 January 2025.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Foreign Secretary met interim Syrian Foreign Minister al Sheibani on 12 January and stressed the need for an inclusive political transition. In our engagement with the interim Syrian authorities, we have consistently advocated for an inclusive political process and underlined the importance of protecting the rights of all civilians, including women and religious and ethnic minorities. The UK Special Representative for Syria reiterated these points during her visit to Damascus on 29 January.

## ■ Syria: Internally Displaced People

**Priti Patel:**

[\[28022\]](#)

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 displacement of people in Syria since December 2024.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK continues to monitor displacement in Syria and provide vital assistance to support those displaced inside Syria and across the region. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that over one million people have been internally displaced in Syria since 27 November 2024. As of 30 January, the UN's Refugee Agency, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), estimate that some 237,000 Syrians have returned to Syria. Since the fall of Assad, the UK has announced a further £61 million in humanitarian assistance to support vulnerable Syrians inside Syria and across the region.

**■ Syria: Smuggling****Priti Patel:** [\[28020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help prevent (a) arms, (b) drugs and (c) people trafficking through Syria.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We are taking a regional approach to help prevent arms, drugs and people trafficking networks through Syria. Our efforts include support to the Lebanese and Jordanian Armed Forces to tackle more effectively incursions by drugs and weapons smugglers from Syria, and we provide support to the Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government to respond to threats posed by serious organised crime groups, including those operating in Syria.

Additionally, we are working with international partners to raise awareness and take action on the risks posed by the captagon industry, which fuels regional instability and generates vast revenues for criminal gangs and armed groups in Syria and across the region.

**■ UK Soft Power Council****Wendy Morton:** [\[28973\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what performance indicators his Department uses to assess the impact of the UK Soft Power Council.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Soft Power Council is just beginning its work. It has so far had one introductory meeting. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Department for Culture Media and Sport will explore metrics to assess the impact of soft power as part of work on a new Soft Power Strategy.

**Wendy Morton:** [\[28976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what documents he plans to publish on the work of the Soft Power Council.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The membership list and abridged terms of reference have already been published on gov.uk. Key points from the minutes will be published in the same way.

**■ United Nations: Finance****James McMurdock:** [\[28434\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department plans to increase funding to the (a) United Nations and (b) its agencies.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The UK is a steadfast supporter of the UN. The UK's level of funding to the UN Regular Budget is dictated by the UN's Scales of Assessment process and is based on GDP and population size. For 2025, the UK's obligatory share of the Regular Budget is 3.991% of the total UN Regular Budget. UK voluntary funding to the UN is determined on a case-by-case basis. All future UK funding to UN agencies is subject to the current Spending Review process.

**■ UNRWA: Finance****Priti Patel:**[\[28013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how funding to UNRWA announced in (a) July 2024 and (b) December 2024 has been spent; and whether conditions were imposed on funding provided to UNRWA since July 2024.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK has committed £41 million for United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) this financial year, to deliver essential services for civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, and to Palestinian refugees across the region. On 19 July 2024, the Foreign Secretary announced £21 million towards UNRWA's Flash Humanitarian Appeal for Gaza and the West Bank, which focuses its resources on emergency food, shelter, and other support, as well as its wider work supporting Palestinian refugees across the region. £1 million of this funding was earmarked for implementing the recommendations of Catherine Colonna's Independent Review. On 2 December 2024, The Minister of State for Development announced a further £7 million funding towards UNRWA's Flash Humanitarian Appeal for Gaza. On 13 December, the Prime Minister committed to an additional £13 million to UNRWA to support vital services for Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the region. A Memorandum of Understanding governs UK financial support to UNRWA. We continue to monitor UNRWA's activity through due diligence and annual assessments.

**Greg Smith:**[\[29475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the restoration of funding to UNRWA on the UK's relations with the United States.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Since the Foreign Secretary restored funding to the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in July 2024, the UK has committed £41 million this financial year to UNRWA, to deliver essential services for civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, and to Palestinian refugees across the region. UNRWA plays a vital role in delivering humanitarian assistance in Gaza and enabling the broader international response through its logistics and distribution network. We reiterated this position in our E3 joint Foreign Ministers' statement of 31 January, alongside France and Germany.

We continue to work together with the new US administration to ensure regional security and stability, including ensuring lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians, and we thank the US for the integral role it played in negotiating the ceasefire agreement, alongside Qatar and Egypt. The Prime Minister reiterated this in his call with President Trump on 26 January. Our shared priority must be to work together to ensure the ceasefire is implemented in full, becomes permanent, and supports a pathway to a sustainable peace.

## ■ West Bank: Violence

**Mary Kelly Foy:** [\[28659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of reports of alleged settler violence in the village of Umm al-Khair in the southern West Bank.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

As the Prime Minister said in the House on 22 January, we are deeply concerned by events in the West Bank. We have raised this several times in exchanges that we have had with Israel at both ministerial and official level. It is in no one's interest for further conflict and instability to spread in the West Bank. We are clear that Israeli settlements are illegal under international law and harm prospects for a two-state solution. The UK strongly condemns settler violence and provocative remarks. On 15 October, the Foreign Secretary announced new sanctions targeting three illegal settler outposts and four organisations that have supported and sponsored violence against communities in the West Bank. These measures will help bring accountability to those who have supported and perpetrated such heinous abuses of human rights.

## ■ Western Sahara: Politics and Government

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[27839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant of the Answer of 17 January 2025 to Question 22594 on Western Sahara: Politics and Government, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the policies of the (a) US, (b) French and (c) Spanish governments on this matter.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Officials regularly discuss the Western Sahara with international partners, including the US, France, Spain, and the United Nations (UN), and we continue to encourage constructive engagement with the political process. The UK believes the UN-led process is the best way to solve the long-standing dispute by delivering a solution agreeable to all parties, one which would contribute significantly to regional security and prosperity.



**HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE****■ Alcoholic Drinks: Death****Jim Shannon:**[\[27189\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many alcohol related deaths there have been in England in the last 12 months.

**Ashley Dalton:**

There were 21,912 alcohol-related deaths in England for the 2022 calendar year.

This is from the latest available data, published by the Department, and is available at the following link:

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/local-alcohol-profiles/data#page/4/gid/1938132984/pat/159/par/K02000001/ati/15/are/E92000001/iid/93763/age/1/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

The data for 2023 will be published on 4 February 2025.

**■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Health Services****Edward Morello:**[\[27821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce waiting times for adult ADHD assessments in rural areas.

**Edward Morello:**[\[27822\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent estimate his Department has made of the average waiting time for an ADHD assessment.

**Edward Morello:**[\[27824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of support for people with ADHD outside the school environment.

**Edward Morello:**[\[27905\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the level of support provided by the NHS to people with ADHD after they have left full-time education.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

There is, at present, no single, established dataset that can be used to monitor waiting times for the assessment and diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) nationally or for individual organisations or geographies in England. Although the data requested is not held centrally, it may be held locally by individual National Health Service trusts or commissioners.

It is the responsibility of the integrated care boards in England to make appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including ADHD assessments, in line with relevant National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines.

We are supporting a taskforce that NHS England has established to look at ADHD service provision and support across sectors, and their impact on patient experience. The taskforce is bringing together expertise from across a broad range of sectors, including the NHS, education, and justice, to better understand the challenges affecting people with ADHD, including timely access to services and support.

Alongside the work of the taskforce, NHS England will continue to develop a national ADHD data improvement plan, carry out more detailed work to understand the provider and commissioning landscape, and capture examples from local health systems which are trialling innovative ways of delivering ADHD services to ensure best practice is captured and shared across the system.

### ■ Blood Cancer: Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products

**Sarah Bool:**

[\[29224\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to ensure that the NHS has the (a) ability and (b) resource to roll out (i) CAR-T therapies and (ii) other Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products for blood cancer.

**Karin Smyth:**

The National Health Service in England is required to fund medicines and treatments recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) as a clinically and cost-effective use of NHS resources. NHS England has undertaken considerable activity to support NICE-recommended CAR-T therapies which are currently commissioned and those that may be available in the future.

There are 3 CAR-T products currently available for four types of blood cancer which have treated over 1,500 people to date: these products were made available via the Cancer Drugs Fund which provides early access to promising new cancer medicines. Two additional CAR-T products are currently being evaluated by NICE.

NHS England uses horizon scanning to see what is coming and has a dedicated team to support the adoption of advanced therapy medicinal products (ATMPs) that are recommended by NICE into the NHS. The team works with a variety of internal and external stakeholders to ensure timely patient access to ATMPs that are on the NICE technology appraisal and highly specialised technology workplan. NHS England regularly engages with clinicians who provide CAR-T therapy in order to ensure that there is sufficient capacity within the service to deliver this.

### ■ Blood Cancer: Gene Therapies

**Sarah Bool:**

[\[29222\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will review the medicines and treatment appraisal system to assess its readiness for evaluating cell and gene-based blood cancer treatments.

**Karin Smyth:**

The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is the independent body responsible for developing authoritative, evidence-based recommendations for the

National Health Service on whether new medicines represent a clinically and cost-effective use of resources.

The NICE has evaluated and been able to recommend a number of CAR-T therapies, a type of cell therapy for the treatment of blood cancers, that are now available to NHS patients.

The NICE is responsible for the methods and processes it uses to develop its recommendations and concluded a comprehensive review of the methods and processes it uses for health technology evaluation in January 2022. The NICE carried out the review through extensive engagement with stakeholders, including Department officials. The NICE introduced a number of changes that make its methods fairer, faster, and more consistent, and appropriate to the evaluation of emerging new technologies, such as cell and gene therapies.

The NICE is monitoring the impact of the changes following the methods review and has committed to considering modular updates to its methods and processes in the future.

## ■ Brain: Research

**Clive Jones:**

[R] [\[27786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support (a) research into drug delivery mechanisms in the brain and (b) blood-brain barrier research.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Department delivers research into blood-barrier brain (BBB) and drug delivery research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).

NIHR infrastructure provides world-class research expertise, specialist facilities, a research delivery workforce, and support services, which all help to support and deliver research across the National Health Service and wider health and care system, including on the BBB.

Current projects into drug delivery mechanisms in the brain and BBB delivered through NIHR research infrastructure include filter-exchange imaging, a technique with the potential to lead to new clinical initiatives for improved diagnostic and monitoring tools, and a groundbreaking trial to administer a stem cell gene therapy to a child's brain, circumventing accessibility through the BBB.

## ■ Brain: Tumours

**Daisy Cooper:**

[\[27888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many funding applications the National Institute of Health and Care Research received for brain tumour research on (a) diagnosis and screening and (b) drugs and treatment therapies in each of the last ten years; and how many of those applications secured funding.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Research is crucial in tackling cancer, which is why the Department invests over £1.5 billion per year in research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). NIHR research expenditure for all cancers was £133 million in 2023/24. Cancer is a major area of NIHR spend, reflecting its high priority.

Over the ten financial years from 2013/14 to 2023/24, the NIHR received 179 applications for brain tumour research in total. Of these:

- 54 were for research on diagnosis and screening, five of which were funded;
- 80 were for research on drugs and treatment, 11 of which were funded and one of which is still under consideration;
- 12 were for a combination of both categories of research, six of which were funded; and
- 32 were for other categories of research, five of which were funded.

The NIHR funds research in response to proposals received from scientists rather than allocating funding to specific disease areas. The NIHR continues to encourage and welcome funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including brain cancer. Applications are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards being made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and health and care services, value for money, and scientific quality.

In September 2024, the NIHR announced new research funding opportunities for brain cancer research, spanning both adult and paediatric populations. This includes a national NIHR Brain Tumour Research Consortium, to ensure the most promising research opportunities are made available to adult and child patients, and a new funding call to generate high quality evidence in brain tumour care, support, and rehabilitation. Further information on these new research funding opportunities is available at the following link:

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

**■ Cancer: Artificial Intelligence****Victoria Collins:****[28840]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of levels of workforce requirements needed for AI adoption and innovation in (a) radiology and (b) clinical oncology.

**Karin Smyth:**

As part of the 10-Year Health Plan, we are reviewing how the National Health Service should focus its resources to ensure it maximises the impact of data and technology. This includes how we can make life easier and more productive for those who work in the NHS, and how we can use data more effectively to plan, manage, and deliver services. Artificial intelligence (AI) will play an important role in achieving this long-term ambition by building and delivering AI capabilities which will allow clinicians to

focus more on direct patient care, and will allow staff to spend more time on high value, high impact tasks.

The Government recognises that a cancer-specific approach is needed to meet the challenges in cancer care, and to improve outcomes for people living with cancer. Following publication of the 10-Year Health Plan, we will publish a new National Cancer Plan, which will include further details on how we will improve outcomes for cancer patients.

The Department, with NHS England, has convened an expert group to identify advanced technology that can be used most effectively in the NHS, building on the findings of the Topol Review. Alongside this work, the Department and NHS England will continue to work with professions to embrace technological innovations, such as AI.

**Victoria Collins:**

[\[28843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of AI integration in health on productivity in (a) radiology and (b) oncology.

**Karin Smyth:**

Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have huge potential in improving productivity across the National Health Service by supporting clinicians with faster and more accurate diagnosis, enhancing clinical decision-making about treatment plans, and reducing the administrative burden faced by healthcare staff. The Department and NHS England are developing guidance for the responsible use of these tools and how they can be rolled out to make the day-to-day operations of the NHS more productive.

To further support staff productivity in radiology and oncology, the Department is focusing the £21 million AI Diagnostic Fund on the integration of AI technologies in key, high-demand areas such as radiology, particularly for chest X-Rays and chest computed tomography scans, to enable faster diagnosis and treatment of lung cancer in over half of acute trusts in England.

The Department is also working closely with regulators to assess the impact of AI integration on healthcare staff productivity and identify new measures for providing assurance, with the launch of AI Airlock. A Medicines and Healthcare products Regulation Agency-led initiative, supported by the Department, designed to create a controlled testing environment where developers can rigorously validate AI tools in real-world clinical settings before full-scale deployment, ensuring they meet NHS standards for safety, efficacy, value for money, and integration into existing healthcare workflows, including productivity. This initiative provides valuable feedback for developers to refine their products to ensure assessments are carried out on the impact to staff before eventually being deployed into the NHS.

In addition, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), sponsored by the Department, evaluates new health technologies for NHS use, considering

clinical effectiveness, value for money, and impacts on staff. As part of this, the NICE conducts Early Value Assessments (EVA) for developers, reviewing their AI tools before they are deployed. For the NHS, EVAs aim to give the NHS a clear signal about which innovations work, offer good value for money, and meet system need, including productivity gains for staff.

The NHS also partnered with the Royal College of Radiologists to deliver the first Global AI Conference on 3 and 4 February 2025. AI projects across radiology, oncology, and other clinical specialties were discussed at the conference, including how AI could support radiologists and oncologists to be more productive and offer a high standard of treatment to the public.

The 10-Year Health Plan is committed to reviewing how the NHS should focus its resources to ensure it maximises the impact of data and technology, including how we can make life easier and more productive for those who work in the NHS. AI will play an important role to achieve this long-term ambition by building and delivering AI capabilities, which will allow clinicians, such as radiologists and oncologists, to focus more on direct patient care and staff to spend more time on high value, high impact tasks.

#### ■ Cancer: Health Professions

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[28052\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he is taking steps to increase the number of clinical oncologists working within the NHS.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[28062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of the number of NHS clinical oncologists that will be required for each of the next five years.

#### **Ashley Dalton:**

We remain focused on the continued delivery of education and training, to ensure that patients receive timely, high-quality care delivered by the right professionals, including for clinical oncologists. This includes refreshing our Long Term Workforce Plan demand forecasts, based on the Government's stated objectives and financial settlements for the National Health Service.

We continue to recruit priority medical specialties, including clinical oncologists. As of October 2024, there are over 1,800 full time equivalent (FTE) doctors working in the speciality of clinical oncology in NHS trusts and other core organisations in England. This is over 120, or 7.4%, more than last year, almost 470, or 34.9%, more than 2019, and over 770, or 74.5%, more than in 2010.

## ■ Cancer: Health Services

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[28056]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to meet national targets on urgent cancer referrals.

**Ashley Dalton:**

As we set out in our new plan for reforming elective care, we are committed to improving performance on cancer waiting times to meet national targets. Further details will be set out in our recently announced dedicated National Cancer Plan and the National Health Service's annual operational planning guidance.

We have launched a call for evidence, seeking contributions from individuals and organisations to help shape this plan, including ideas on how to meet national targets. The call for evidence can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/shaping-the-national-cancer-plan/shaping-the-national-cancer-plan>

**Clive Jones:**

[R] [29703]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, who he plans to consult on the National Cancer Plan.

**Clive Jones:**

[R] [29706]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how the National Institute for Health and Care Research will be involved in the formulation of the National Cancer Plan.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department launched the call for evidence for the National Cancer Plan on 4 February 2025. Individuals, professionals and organisations are invited to share their views on our new online platform on how we can improve cancer care and outcomes. The platform is available at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/shaping-the-national-cancer-plan>

The National Cancer Plan will have patients at its heart, and we are committed to working closely with partners and patient groups to shape our long-term vision for cancer. Alongside the call for evidence, we will consult with partners and patient groups to get their views and priorities, and we will keep them updated throughout this process.

Research is a key focus of the National Cancer Plan, which will continue to maximise the access to and the impact of clinical trials in diagnostics and treatments, building on the success of projects such as the NHS Cancer Vaccine Launch Pad. The plan will also consider the ways that we can accelerate the uptake of innovative, life-saving treatments so all NHS patients can benefit. We will work closely with partners including the National Institute for Health and Care Research on this.

## ■ Cerebral Palsy: Health Services

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[\[27577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will have discussions with (a) NHS England and (b) integrated care boards on the adequacy of NICE guidelines on the management of cerebral palsy in people under 25 years old with no cognitive impairment.

**Karin Smyth:**

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) guidelines are developed by experts based on a thorough assessment of the available evidence and through extensive public and stakeholder engagement. They represent best practice and should be taken fully into account by healthcare professionals in the care and treatment of their patients.

NICE is responsible for making decisions on updates to its guidelines and keeps its guidelines under surveillance to ensure that they reflect developments in the evidence base. NICE is not due to update its guideline on the assessment and management of cerebral palsy in people under 25 years old at the current time. If relevant new evidence emerges, NICE will follow its processes and consider whether any update is needed to the current guideline.

To support those people under 25 years old who are diagnosed with cerebral palsy, NHS England has worked with key stakeholder organisations, including children and young people, and their families and carers, to develop a framework targeted to integrated care systems to be used as a supportive tool to aid the commissioning of high-quality services for children and young people with cerebral palsy, including those in the transition period to adult services.

NHS England's Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) Programme aims to improve care for people with neurological conditions in England, including those with cerebral palsy, by reducing variation and delivering care more equitably across the country. The GIRFT National Speciality Report provided the opportunity to share successful initiatives between trusts to improve patient services nationally.

## ■ Community Pharmacy England

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[\[28127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many meetings he has had with Community Pharmacy England since July 2024.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

*[Holding answer 7 February 2025]:* Ministers meet regularly with external stakeholders on a variety of topics, including, but not limited to, pharmacy. Details of ministerial meetings are published quarterly in arrears on the GOV.UK website.



## ■ County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust: Death Certificates

**Mary Kelly Foy:**

[\[28687\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether (a) he and (b) his Department has had discussions with County Durham and Darlington Foundation NHS Trust on delays to death certification.

**Ashley Dalton:**

*[Holding answer 11 February 2025]:* The Government is monitoring the impact of the death certification reforms, which came into legal effect on 9 September 2024, but has not engaged with the County Durham and Darlington Foundation NHS Trust directly.

The median time taken to register a death since the introduction of the reforms in England and Wales has typically been eight days. This figure is for all deaths, as it includes those certified by a doctor and those investigated by a coroner. The median time taken to register a death varies depending on the type of certification. Deaths certified by a doctor, that comprise approximately 80% of deaths registered each week, have typically had a median time to registration of seven days. It is important to note that the medical examiner system was active on a non-statutory basis before the introduction of the statutory system on 9 September, and this makes direct before and after comparisons challenging to draw conclusions from.

The core purposes of the death certification reforms are to introduce scrutiny of the cause of death to detect and deter malpractice, to improve reporting, and crucially to put the bereaved at the centre of the process by offering a conversation with the medical examiner about the cause of death. The expectation on doctors and medical examiners is clear, that they should complete certification as quickly and efficiently as possible, and the Government is working with all stakeholders to make sure this is the case.

## ■ Death Certificates

**Adam Jogee:**

[\[28268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the changes to death certification process support in (a) Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency, (b) Staffordshire and (c) England.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Government is monitoring the impact of the death certification reforms, which came into legal effect on 9 September 2024, but has not made a specific assessment of the impact of the reforms in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency or Staffordshire.

The median time taken to register a death since the introduction of the reforms in England and Wales has typically been eight days. This figure is for all deaths, as it includes those certified by a doctor and those investigated by a coroner. The median time taken to register a death varies depending on the type of certification. Deaths

certified by a doctor, that comprise approximately 80% of deaths registered each week, have typically had a median time to registration of seven days. It is important to note that the medical examiner system was active on a non-statutory basis before the introduction of the statutory system on 9 September, and this makes direct before and after comparisons challenging to draw conclusions from.

The core purposes of the death certification reforms are to introduce scrutiny of the cause of death to detect and deter malpractice, to improve reporting, and crucially to put the bereaved at the centre of the process by offering a conversation with the medical examiner about the cause of death. The expectation on doctors and medical examiners is clear, that they should complete certification as quickly and efficiently as possible, and the Government is working with all stakeholders to make sure this is the case.

**Mary Kelly Foy:** [\[28688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average time taken was to certify a death in (a) hospital and (b) the community in the period since changes were made to the death certification process in September 2024.

**Mary Kelly Foy:** [\[28689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death Regulations 2024 in the context of reports of delays to funeral services.

**Ashley Dalton:**

*[Holding answer 11 February 2025]:* The Government is monitoring the impact of the death certification reforms, including the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death Regulations 2024, which came into legal effect on 9 September 2024. The median time taken to register a death since the introduction of the reforms in England and Wales has typically been eight days. This figure is for all deaths, as it includes those certified by a doctor and those investigated by a coroner. The median time taken to register a death varies depending on the type of certification. Deaths certified by a doctor, that comprise approximately 80% of deaths registered each week, have typically had a median time to registration of seven days. These figures are not broken down by hospital or community setting. It is important to note that the medical examiner system was active on a non-statutory basis before the introduction of the statutory system on 9 September, and this makes direct before and after comparisons challenging to draw conclusions from.

The core purposes of the death certification reforms are to introduce scrutiny of the cause of death to detect and deter malpractice, to improve reporting, and crucially to put the bereaved at the centre of the process by offering a conversation with the medical examiner about the cause of death. The expectation on doctors and medical examiners is clear, that they should complete certification as quickly and efficiently as possible, and the Government is working with all stakeholders to make sure this is the case.

## ■ Dementia

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[29653\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department is taking steps to refine the NHS Health Check to better identify dementia brain health risks.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The NHS Health Check raises awareness of the actions people can take to reduce their risk of dementia and, for people aged 65 to 74 years old, the signs and symptoms of dementia, with signposting to memory services where appropriate. The Department will continue to work with NHS England to ensure the advice and guidance on dementia in the NHS Health Check is up to date.

## ■ Dementia: Departmental Coordination

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[29652\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of creating a cross-government strategy to tackle (a) health and (b) lifestyle factors that increase the risk of developing dementia.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

As part of the Government's Health Mission, we will shift from sickness to prevention, to tackle ill health, prevent premature deaths, and build a fairer United Kingdom where everyone lives longer, healthier lives.

We have committed to developing a 10-year plan to deliver a National Health Service fit for the future. We will carefully be considering policies, including those that impact people with dementia care needs, with input from the public, patients, and health staff as we develop the plan. The plan is being co-produced with the health and care sector and the public.

## ■ Dementia: Diagnosis

**Joe Robertson:**

[\[28290\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure (a) timely and (b) equitable dementia diagnosis.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government and NHS England remain committed to increasing the dementia diagnosis rate to the national ambition of 66.7%. To support recovery of the dementia diagnosis rates and implementation of the Dementia Care Pathway, NHS England has developed a dashboard for management information purposes. The aim is to support commissioners and providers of memory services with appropriate data and enable targeted support where needed.

NHS England has also funded an evidence-based improvement project to fund two trusts in each region, 14 sites in total, to pilot the Diagnosing Advanced Dementia Mandate tool to improve the diagnosis of dementia and the provision of support in

care homes. All pilots completed at the end of May 2024, and it is anticipated that learning will be shared in early 2025.

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. The NIHR is also partnering with the Economic and Social Research Council and Alzheimer's Society to support a £5.5 million investment in four Dementia Network Plus research grants. One of the networks, EQUADEM, seeks to address inequalities in dementia diagnosis and care.

The Government's Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Goals programme is investing in biomarker innovations, ranging from an artificial intelligence tool designed to improve the accuracy of blood tests for dementia, to using retinal scans to detect early-onset dementia decades before symptoms. Some of these innovations could support improved diagnosis in the future, if validated for clinical use.

To reduce variation in diagnosis rates, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities' Dementia Intelligence Network has 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.

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[29651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to strengthen dementia diagnostic pathways.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

To support the implementation of the Dementia Care Pathway, NHS England has developed a dashboard. The aim is to support commissioners and providers of memory services with appropriate data and enable targeted support where needed. NHS England has also supported the development of resources for integrated care boards (ICBs), including an integrated care system self-assessment framework, to support the design of integrated dementia pathways. NHS England's RightCare team has refreshed the RightCare Dementia Scenario. The scenario works through the dementia well pathway journey from diagnosing well through to dying well, detailing optimal and sub optimal approaches, with associated costings for each.

NHS England is hosting a series of webinars to share best practice in dementia for staff in memory assessment services, primary care, urgent and emergency care, and ICBs. To aid improvement in dementia diagnosis rate performance, NHS England has also initiated a regional delivery group to address variation and enhance diagnosis rates.

The Department delivers research into dementia via the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The NIHR funds a range of research into diagnosing dementia, including investing in two dementia and neurodegeneration Policy

Research Units to further boost evidence for policymaking. One of the units is undertaking a project to investigate the United Kingdom's healthcare system's readiness for using blood and cerebrospinal fluid biomarkers at scale outside of specialist services.

The NIHR-funded CONGA trial is also seeking to improve the diagnostic process for dementia, providing more accurate evidence for clinicians and helping patients to get appropriate treatment quickly.

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[29911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how his Department plans to (a) increase the number of scanners available for dementia diagnosis and (b) reduce diagnosis times for patients.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government is committed to transforming diagnostic services and will support the National Health Service to increase diagnostic capacity to meet the demand for diagnostic services through investment in new capacity, including magnetic resonance imaging and computed tomography scanners.

Our Elective Reform Plan, published in January 2025, builds on the investments already made with an ambitious vision for the future of diagnostic testing. This will include more straight-to-test pathways, increasing and expanding community diagnostic centres (CDCs), and better use of technology.

With 170 CDCs due to be up and running by the end of March 2025, CDCs can take on more of the growing diagnostic demand within elective care. We will also deliver additional CDC capacity in 2025/26 by expanding a number of existing CDCs and building up to five new ones.

Alongside Alzheimer's Research UK, Alzheimer's Society, Gates Ventures and the People's Postcode Lottery, the National Institute for Health Research is funding the Blood Biomarker Challenge which seeks to produce the clinical and economic data that could make the case for the use of a blood test in the NHS to support diagnosis of dementia.

## ■ Dementia: Medical Treatments

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[29649\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to integrate the work of (a) NICE, (b) NHS England, (c) health industry representatives and (d) the UK Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency on adopting new dementia treatments.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 12 February 2025]:* The Government wants patients to benefit from rapid access to safe and effective new medicines in a way that represents value to the taxpayer. The Medicines and Health products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) reviews medicinal products for quality, safety and efficacy and if satisfied, will provide

an appropriate marketing authorisation or licence for the United Kingdom, detailing the safe use and target population. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) makes recommendations for the National Health Service on whether new medicines should be routinely funded by the NHS based on an assessment of their costs and benefits. Wherever possible the NICE aims to publish recommendations on new medicines around the time of licensing.

With the consent of the marketing authorisation holders, the NICE and the MHRA have piloted enhanced information sharing arrangements for the new disease modifying treatments for dementia. The pilots have enabled the organisations to fully align their processes and announce marketing authorisation decisions and draft recommendations on the same day for the first two licensed disease modifying treatments. The MHRA, the NICE, NHS England, and counterparts in the other UK nations are working closely together to ensure that the NHS is prepared for the rollout of any licensed and NICE-recommended new dementia treatments.

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[29909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the NICE process on the wider societal cost of dementia when appraising new dementia treatments.

**Karin Smyth:**

The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) develops its guidance independently and based on an assessment of the available evidence. In developing its recommendations, NICE considers all health-related costs and benefits for patients and caregivers, in line with its established methods and processes. NICE does not consider wider societal costs and benefits.

Any changes to NICE methods to broaden its cost-benefit analysis and incorporate wider societal costs would be both methodologically and ethically challenging. Such changes could have unintended consequences, potentially leading to fewer treatments being recommended for populations that are older, economically inactive, or have greater care needs.

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[29910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help improve capacity in dementia diagnostics to facilitate access to new dementia treatments.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government is committed to transforming diagnostic services and will support the National Health Service to increase diagnostic capacity to meet the demand for diagnostic services through investment in new capacity, including magnetic resonance imaging and computed tomography scanners.

Our Elective Reform Plan, published in January 2025, builds on the investments already made with an ambitious vision for the future of diagnostic testing. This will include more straight-to-test pathways, increasing and expanding community

diagnostic centres (CDCs), and better use of technology. With 170 CDCs due to be up and running by the end of March 2025, CDCs can take on more of the growing diagnostic demand within elective care. We will also deliver additional CDC capacity in 2025/26 by expanding several existing CDCs and building up to five new ones.

To prepare for the new generation of dementia treatments in development, NHS England is working closely with regulators to ensure that arrangements are in place to support the adoption of any new licensed and treatments recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence as soon as possible.

Alongside Alzheimer's Research UK, Alzheimer's Society, Gates Ventures and the People's Postcode Lottery, the National Institute for Health Research is funding the Blood Biomarker Challenge which seeks to produce the clinical and economic data that could make the case for the use of a blood test in the NHS to support diagnosis of dementia.

## ■ **Dementia: Ophthalmic Services**

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[29650\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to support the (a) development and (b) use of eye scans for diagnosing dementia.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government is committed to transforming diagnostic services, including the detection and diagnosis of dementia, and will support the National Health Service to increase capacity to meet the demand for diagnostic services.

The Government's Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Goals programme is investing in biomarker innovations ranging from an artificial intelligence tool designed to improve the accuracy of blood tests for dementia, to using retinal scans to detect early-onset dementia decades before symptoms. Some of these innovations could support improved diagnosis in the future, if validated for clinical use.

The Department delivers dementia research via the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The NIHR funds a range of research into diagnosing dementia, including investing nearly £11 million of funding to develop new digital approaches for the early detection and diagnosis of dementia.

As part of the NIHR funded DaRe2THINK sub-study, researchers are using tests, including eye scans, to look at the effects of blood thinning medications on preserving brain function and assessing the real-time disease burden of dementia.

## ■ **Dental Health: Rural Areas**

**Adam Dance:**

[\[25466\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to improve public oral health education in rural areas.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

*[Holding answer 28 January 2025]:* In England, local authorities are responsible for assessing the oral health needs, developing oral health strategies, and commissioning oral health improvement programmes for their local area. We have also published evidence-based resources for dental teams on preventive advice to improve their patients' oral health. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-better-oral-health-an-evidence-based-toolkit-for-prevention>

We will be implementing a national targeted supervised toothbrushing programme to children aged three, four, and five years old living in our most deprived communities.

**■ Dental Services: Cancer****Kim Leadbeater:****[28043]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing subsidised dental care for patients undergoing chemotherapy.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government recognises that patients with a cancer diagnosis can have specific dental needs. Free National Health Service dental care is available to people who meet the following criteria:

- under 18 years old, or under 19 years old and in full-time education;
- pregnant or have had a baby in the previous 12 months;
- being treated in an NHS hospital and the treatment is carried out by the hospital dentist, although patients may have to pay for any dentures or bridges; and
- receiving low-income benefits, or under 20 years old and a dependant of someone receiving low-income benefits.

Support is also available through the NHS Low Income Scheme for those patients who are not eligible for exemption or full remission of dental patient charges. In 2023/24, 49% of NHS dentistry courses of treatment were delivered to children and adults exempt from paying patient charges. While there are no current plans to extend the list of people eligible for free NHS dental care, the Government is working across the system to ensure that patients who have a diagnosis of cancer receive timely, safe and effective dental care. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/who-is-entitled-to-free-nhs-dental-treatment-in-england/>



### ■ Dental Services: Gloucester

**Alex McIntyre:**

[\[28702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps his Department has taken to improve access to NHS dentistry in Gloucester.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access National Health Service dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term and increase access to NHS dental care, we will reform the dental contract, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to Integrated Care Boards across England. For Gloucester constituency, this is NHS Gloucestershire ICB.

### ■ Dental Services: Pregnancy

**Victoria Collins:**

[\[29294\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve the accessibility of dental care during the maternity exemption period.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We are aware of the challenges faced in accessing a dentist and we want to make sure that everyone who needs a National Health Service dentist can get one, including pregnant women and new mothers. The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access NHS dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to areas that need them most.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to Integrated Care Boards across England. For Harpenden and Berkhamsted constituency, this is the Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB.

### ■ Dental Services: Torbay

**Steve Darling:**

[\[28665\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the number of NHS dentists in Torbay constituency.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We are determined to rebuild dentistry in the National Health Service. It will take time and there are no quick fixes. Strengthening the workforce is key to our ambitions. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contract with the sector, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

Integrated Care Boards have started to advertise posts through the Golden Hello scheme. This recruitment incentive will see up to 240 dentists receiving payments of £20,000 to work in those areas that need them most for three years.

The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access NHS dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to areas that need them most.

### ■ **Doctors: Migrant Workers**

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:** [\[28598\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of reinstating the restriction on international medical graduates in the first round of selection for NHS speciality training programmes.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:** [\[28599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the proportion of UK medical graduates in NHS speciality training places.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 11 February 2025]:* Working with NHS England we continue to keep the selection process for all applicants to medical speciality training under review.

We are committed to ensuring that the number of medical specialty training places meets the demands of the National Health Service in the future. NHS England will work with stakeholders to ensure that any growth is sustainable and focused in the service areas where the need is greatest.

### ■ **Doctors: Training**

**Peter Prinsley:** [\[29287\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the number of people waiting for medical training between foundation level and speciality training.

**Karin Smyth:**

We continue to work with NHS England to keep the selection process for all applicants to medical speciality training under review.

We are committed to ensuring that the number of medical specialty training places meets the demands of the National Health Service in the future. NHS England will work with stakeholders to ensure that any growth is sustainable and focused in the service areas where need is greatest.

## ■ **Drugs: Internet**

**Sir Julian Smith:**

**[28938]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has had discussions with internet service providers and with national and international partners on steps taken to prevent unlicensed medicines from entering the UK.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), acting on behalf of my Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, is responsible for the regulation of all medicines and medical devices in the United Kingdom, by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. This includes applying the legal controls on the retail sale, supply, and advertising of medicines, which are set out in the Human Medicines Regulations 2012. These regulations apply equally to medicines advertised, sold, or supplied through the internet.

Public safety is the number one priority for the MHRA, and its Criminal Enforcement Unit works hard to prevent, detect, and investigate illegal activity involving medicines and medical devices.

The MHRA works closely with e-commerce and the internet industry to identify, remove, and block online content promoting the illegal sale of medicines and medical devices. It also seeks to identify and, where appropriate, prosecute online sellers responsible for putting public health at risk. Working with national and international partners, the MHRA successfully seizes millions of doses of illegally traded medicines each year.

The MHRA's #FakeMeds campaign provides advice to people in the UK who are considering buying medication online, outlining how products can be accessed from safe and legitimate sources. It also encourages people to report suspicious medicinal products and adverse side effects via its Yellow Card scheme, which is available at the following link:

<https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/>

## ■ **Epilepsy: Children**

**Helen Maguire:**

**[28282]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that children with severe epilepsy can access second-generation cannabis-based medicines through the NHS.

**Karin Smyth:**

The law allows United Kingdom specialist doctors to prescribe cannabis-based products for medicinal use (CBPMs). Cannabis-based medicines licensed by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) are routinely available on the National Health Service, for example Epidyolex, for the treatment of two rare forms of epilepsy and tuberous sclerosis. However, some patients and families are seeking to access unlicensed forms of CBPMs, which have not been

assessed by the MHRA. Clinical guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence demonstrate a clear need for more evidence to support routine prescribing and funding decisions for unlicensed CBPMs.

We continue to call on manufacturers to conduct research to prove their products are safe, and clinically and cost effective. NHS England and the National Institute for Health and Care Research have agreed funding for two randomised control trials relating to the use of CBPMs for the treatment of drug-resistant epilepsies. These will be world-first trials and will be crucial in furthering the evidence base and informing future NHS funding decisions.

## ■ Fractures: Health Services

**Liz Jarvis:**

[\[25375\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to increase the accessibility of Fracture Liaison Services for people with osteoporosis.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Fracture Liaison Services (FLS) are a globally recognised care model and can reduce the risk of refracture for people at risk of osteoporosis by up to 40%. We remain committed to rolling out FLS across every part of the country by 2030. That is what the Secretary of State promised before the election, and what he is delivering. In the meantime, we are investing in 14 high-tech DEXA scanners, which are expected to provide an extra 29,000 scans to ensure people with bone conditions get diagnosed earlier.

**Kevin McKenna:**

[\[25923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of delivering universal fracture liaison services by 2030 on (a) patients and (b) the NHS; and what the annual cost to the public purse will be of delivering this.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Government and NHS England support the clinical case for services which help to prevent fragility fractures and support the patients who sustain them. According to the Fracture Liaison Service Database 2022, at least 60 Trusts in England had access to a Fracture Liaison Service. This government is committed to ending the postcode lottery for access to these important preventative services, and the Department is working closely with NHS England to explore a range of options to provide better quality and access, including ways to best support local systems.

Costs and benefits will be assessed, as these options are considered, taking into consideration the evidence gathered from the 60 services already in operation in England.

## ■ Functional Neurological Disorder: Medical Treatments

**Alex McIntyre:**

**[28700]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help improve access to treatment for people with functional neurological disorder.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The majority of services for people with neurological conditions, including functional neurological disorder (FND), are commissioned locally. Integrated care board commissioners are best placed to configure services for their populations, and will be supported by clinical guidance.

At a national level, there are a number of initiatives supporting service improvement and better care for patients with neurological conditions, including FND, such as the Getting It Right First Time Programme for Neurology and the Neurology Transformation Programme.

In 2023, the National Neurosciences Advisory Group developed a clinical pathway for FND, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nnag.org.uk/optimal-clinical-pathway-adults-fnd-functional-neurological-disorder>

NHS England is in the process of updating the Specialised Neurology service specification. This will include FND, which is not included in the current published version. Service specifications are important in clearly defining the standards of care expected from organisations funded by NHS England to provide specialised care.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) also has guidance in place to support clinicians in the diagnosis of suspected neurological conditions, including FND. The NICE guidance, Suspected neurological conditions: recognition and referral, updated in October 2023, includes guidance on FND, and outlines symptoms that are often common in FND, such as recurrent dizziness, limb or facial weakness, numbness and tingling, and difficulties with memory and concentration. The guidance also outlines that the severity of the symptoms of FND often fluctuate and increase during times of stress.

The NICE is also currently developing a guideline on rehabilitation for chronic neurological disorders and acquired brain injury, with further information available at the following link:

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

FND will be included in the final guideline, which the NICE expects to publish in September 2025.

## ■ General Practitioners

**Blake Stephenson:**

[\[29569\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 30 January 2025 to Question 26149, what steps his Department is taking to monitor the performance of ICBs in addressing gaps in service.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

It is for integrated care boards (ICBs) to ensure there is sufficient access to local services, which would include making assessments of gaps in provision. ICBs are responsible for planning and commissioning services which meet the healthcare needs of their local population and have a duty to produce a joint forward plan outlining how this will be achieved.

Under the National Health Service Act 2006, as amended by the Health and Care Act 2022, NHS England is required to assess the performance of each ICB and publish a summary of the outcomes of its assessments. This is available on the NHS England website for 2023/24.

NHS England's assessment process involves an assessment of the ICB's capacity and capability to deliver its legal responsibility for arranging healthcare, including primary care services for which NHS England has delegated this responsibility to ICBs. The NHS Oversight Framework sets out NHS England's overall approach to ICB oversight and support. NHS England is planning to update this framework, along with its operating model, to support ICBs to deliver neighbourhood health.

## ■ General Practitioners: Bromsgrove

**Bradley Thomas:**

[\[29858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what changes have there been in the number of GPs working between 5 July 2024 and 31 January 2025 in Bromsgrove constituency.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

General practice workforce data is available for the last working day of every month and is published approximately four weeks after collection. Therefore, we present data for 31 July 2024 and 31 December 2024.

Between 31 July 2024 and 31 December 2024, the number of fully qualified general practitioners (GPs) in general practice in Bromsgrove constituency increased by 0.1 full-time equivalent (FTE). Including GPs in training grade, the number of doctors in general practice increased by 2.3 FTE over the same period.

## ■ General Practitioners: Contracts

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[\[28129\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 23 January 2025 to Question 23850 on Health Services, when he plans to provide an update

on whether Advice and Guidance arrangements are agreed as part of GP Contract negotiations.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

My Department and NHS England started consultation with the General Practitioners Committee in England, of the British Medical Association, on the 2025/26 GP Contract on 19 December and will consider all proposed policy changes, including Advice and Guidance arrangements. Final changes will be announced before April 2025 in the usual way, following the close of the consultation.

■ **General Practitioners: Hospitals**

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[28130]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 23 January 2025 to Question 23855 on General Practitioners: Hospitals, if he will publish data on the variation in the use of Advice and Guidance.

**Karin Smyth:**

Data on the variation in Advice and Guidance by integrated care board (ICB) and provider is published monthly by NHS England and is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/outpatient-transformation/specialist-advice/>

Data by ICB and provider is available for the total number of requests made by general practitioners, by the number of requests that have been responded to in secondary care, known as processed requests, and by the number of processed requests that have been returned to the sender with advice for management in general practice, known as diverted requests.

The proposals in the Elective Reform Plan to significantly increase Advice and Guidance were in recognition of the significant variation that exists in use, and the benefit we know it can have on patients to receive more timely care in the right place. We will be closely monitoring progress throughout 2025/26.

■ **General Practitioners: Recruitment**

**Clive Jones:**

[R] [29834]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS) has led to considerable diversification of the general practitioner (GP) workforce and has been key in delivering additional appointments. The ARRS has enabled primary care networks to recruit a diverse range of professionals into primary care. Between March 2019 and September 2024, 37,891 additional primary care professionals have been recruited into general practice. The scheme has allowed patients to be seen by a wider range

of professionals and access the care they need whilst freeing up capacity for GPs to focus on the work that only GPs can do.

The ARRS is subject to annual review through the consultation on the GP contract with the General Practitioners Committee (England) of the British Medical Association (BMA). NHS England works closely with the Department to implement any changes identified as part of this process.

Following reports of newly qualified GPs struggling to find roles, £82 million of funding was announced in August 2024 to enable the recruitment of over 1,000 newly qualified GPs under the scheme for the year 2024-2025 under the scheme. 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.

The Department and NHS England started consultation with the General Practitioners Committee in England (GPC England) of the BMA on proposed changes to the 2025/26 GP contract on 19 December. Changes will be confirmed before April 2025, which will include details of adjustments to the ARRS. The inclusion of practice nurses into the scheme is among the proposed extra flexibilities for 2025/26.

## ■ Health Services: Disability

**Jen Craft:**

[\[29630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve access to NHS services for disabled people.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We want a National Health Service that is there for anyone who needs it whenever they need it; one in which access to and experience of healthcare services is equitable, effective and responsive. To help achieve this, we have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS. The engagement process for the 10-Year Health Plan is underway, and as we work to develop and finalise the Plan, we are encouraging those concerned about access to services for disabled people to engage with that process so we can identify what the potential solutions are. Further information is available at the following link:

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

Under the Equality Act (2010), health and social care organisations must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged. To make it easier for disabled people to use health services, there is work underway in NHS England to ensure that staff in health settings know if they need to make reasonable adjustments. This includes the development of a Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag, which enables the recording of key information about a patient, and their reasonable adjustment needs, in health records to ensure support can be tailored appropriately.



Since 2016, all NHS organisations and publicly funded social care providers are required to meet the Accessible Information Standard (AIS), to meet the communication needs of patients and carers with a disability, impairment, or sensory loss. A revised AIS is being reviewed with a view to publication, and in the meantime, NHS England is continuing to work to support implementation with awareness raising, communication and engagement, and a review of the current e-learning modules on the AIS.

## ■ Health Services: Women

**Luke Taylor:** [\[28243\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure Integrated Care Boards create more women's health hubs.

**Luke Taylor:** [\[28244\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department has taken to reduce waiting times at women's health hubs.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government is committed to encouraging integrated care boards (ICBs) to further expand the coverage of women's health hubs and to support ICBs to use the learning from the women's health hub pilots to improve local delivery of services to women.

Women's health hubs have a key role in shifting care out of hospitals and reducing gynaecology waiting lists. As of December 2024, 39 out of 42 ICBs reported that they had a women's health hub. Reporting from ICBs to NHS England shows that the pilot funding has been used to open or expand a total of 88 hubs. ICBs are responsible for commissioning services that meet the health care needs of their local population, including women's health hubs.

Data on waiting times for women's health hubs is not collected centrally.

## ■ Health: City of Durham

**Mary Kelly Foy:** [\[28160\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce health inequalities in City of Durham constituency.

**Ashley Dalton:**

*[Holding answer 11 February 2025]:* The United Kingdom faces significant health inequalities, with life expectancy varying widely across and within communities. The Government is committed to building a fairer Britain by tackling the structural inequalities that contribute to poor health, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities' North East and Yorkshire Regional Team collaborates with partners to provide system leadership for public health, reducing health inequalities. The team facilitates the delivery of national and local public health priorities, providing expert advice. It works with Directors of Public

Health in local authorities, integrated care systems, Mayoral Combined Authorities, NHS England, and the wider National Health Service. The team also leads for public health workforce development and with Local Knowledge and Intelligence colleagues, and provides enhanced data, intelligence, and insights for population health.

North East local authorities received a total of £238 million in Public Health Grant funding for 2024/25, with Durham County Council receiving £53.9 million for 2024/25. This provides services such as stop smoking, drug and alcohol treatment, health visiting and school nursing, and sexual health, among others, all of which contribute to addressing health inequalities. Additionally, Directors of Public Health from each local authority are working in partnership with the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board to support action to address inequalities in access, experience, and outcomes associated with health care.

Existing initiatives to reduce inequalities in relation to health services, in England, include NHS England's Core20Plus5, which focuses on improving the five clinical areas in most need of accelerated improvement in the poorest 20% of the population, along with other underserved population groups identified at a local level, including groups that share protected characteristics, and socially excluded groups such as people experiencing homelessness.

Durham County Council is one of 75 local authorities with high levels of deprivation receiving Family Hubs and Start for Life programme funding. The Government has committed a £126 million boost for families in 2025/26 to give every child the best start in life. Of this, Durham County Council will receive £1.68 million.

## ■ Health: Disability

**Jen Craft:**

[\[29631\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to tackle health inequalities for disabled people.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Under the Equality Act 2010, health and social care organisations must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged.

To make it easier for disabled people to use health services, there is work underway in NHS England to make sure that staff in health settings know if they need to make reasonable adjustments for people. This includes the development of a Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag, which enables the recording of key information about a patient, and their reasonable adjustment needs, in health records to ensure support can be tailored appropriately.

Under the Health and Care Act 2022, Care Quality Commission registered health and adult social care providers are required to ensure their staff receive 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 and help to reduce health inequalities for autistic people and people with a learning disability. The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism is being

rolled out to support this. Over two million people have completed the first part of this training.

Being on the learning disability register is crucial to ensuring that people receive the right support at the right time, including access to annual health checks. Annual health checks can help to identify undetected health conditions early and ensure the appropriateness of ongoing treatments. People over 14 years old with a learning disability can receive an annual health check.

## ■ Health: North East

**Mary Kelly Foy:**

**[28159]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to prepare a cross-government strategy to reduce health inequalities in the North East.

**Ashley Dalton:**

*[Holding answer 7 February 2025]:* The United Kingdom faces significant health inequalities, with life expectancy varying widely across and within communities. The Government is committed to building a fairer Britain by tackling the structural inequalities that contribute to poor health, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities' North East and Yorkshire Regional Team collaborates with partners to provide system leadership for public health, reducing health inequalities. The team facilitates the delivery of national and local public health priorities, providing expert advice. It works with Directors of Public Health in local authorities, integrated care systems, Mayoral Combined Authorities, NHS England, and the wider National Health Service. The team also leads for public health workforce development and with Local Knowledge and Intelligence colleagues, and provides enhanced data, intelligence, and insights for population health.

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Existing initiatives to reduce inequalities in relation to health services, in England, include NHS England's Core20Plus5, which focuses on improving the five clinical areas in most need of accelerated improvement in the poorest 20% of the population, along with other underserved population groups identified at a local level, including groups that share protected characteristics, and socially excluded groups such as people experiencing homelessness.

Durham County Council is one of 75 local authorities with high levels of deprivation receiving Family Hubs and Start for Life programme funding. The Government has

committed a £126 million boost for families in 2025/26 to give every child the best start in life. Of this, Durham County Council will receive £1.68 million.

## ■ Health: Women

**Luke Taylor:** [\[28241\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken to tackle health inequalities affecting women.

### **Karin Smyth:**

We have committed to develop a 10-year plan to deliver a National Health Service fit for the future. We will carefully be considering policies, including those that impact women's health, as we develop the plan.

We want to ensure that the 10-Year Health Plan reflects the diversity of the people who use the NHS every day, and it is important that everyone can have their say as we develop it. The Department has held ministerial roundtables on women's health as well as maternity and neonatal care, attended by service users, senior clinicians, and a range of charity partners.

We are committed to the Women's Health Strategy and are continuing work to deliver it. For example, the strategy had an ambition to improve workplace support for menopause, and through the Employment Rights Bill we are making this a reality, by requiring large employers to publish gender equality action plans, including how they are supporting employees through the menopause. Women's health hubs provide integrated women's health services in the community, and have a key role tackling health inequalities faced by women. As of December 2024, 39 out of 42 integrated care boards (ICBs) reported to NHS England that they had at least one operational women's health hub. We continue to engage with and encourage ICBs to use the learning from the women's health hubs pilots to improve local delivery of services to women.

We are also working with NHS England on how to take forward the Women's Health Strategy, by aligning it to the Government's Missions and 10-Year Health Plan.

## ■ Heart Diseases: Sports Competitors

**Jayne Kirkham:** [\[27437\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that amateur athletes have access to an effective screening programme for cardiac conditions.

### **Ashley Dalton:**

*[Holding answer 5 February 2025]:* The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) last reviewed screening for sudden cardiac death (SCD) in people under the age of 39 years old in 2019, and concluded that screening should not be offered. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://view-health-screening-recommendations.service.gov.uk/sudden-cardiac-death/>

Research showed that the current tests are not accurate enough to use in young people without symptoms, and that treatments and interventions to prevent SCD were not based on good scientific evidence.

To stop SCDs in young people, the current consensus is to focus on rapid identification and care of people who are likely to be at risk of SCD, due to a family link or because they have had symptoms, and to train people to carry out cardiopulmonary resuscitation and to use defibrillators.

NHS England has published guidance for inherited cardiac conditions which requires services to investigate patients with a previously undiagnosed cardiac disease, suggestive symptoms, or those from families with sudden unexplained deaths. Where a genetic variation is identified, cascade testing is offered to relatives based on risk.

We are aware that the UK NSC has received a submission via its annual call process to consider SCD screening in young people aged 14 to 35 years old engaging in sport. The UK NSC is currently reviewing all annual call proposals. Further information on the annual call process is available at the following link:

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

## ■ Hospices: Finance

**Helen Maguire:**

**[28283]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will issue additional guidance to Integrated Care Boards on determining appropriate levels of funding for hospices to ensure equitable access to palliative care services across different regions.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

In England, palliative care services are included in the list of services an integrated care board (ICB) must commission. This promotes a more consistent national approach and supports commissioners in prioritising palliative and end of life care. To support ICBs in this duty, NHS England has published statutory guidance and service specifications for adults, and children and young people. ICBs are responsible for commissioning palliative and end of life care services to meet the needs of their local populations. Further information on palliative and end of life care services' statutory guidance, the guidance for adults, and the guidance for children is available, respectively, at the following three links:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/palliative-and-end-of-life-care-statutory-guidance-for-integrated-care-boards-icbs/>

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/service-specifications-for-palliative-and-end-of-life-care-adults/>

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/service-specifications-for-palliative-and-end-of-life-care-children-and-young-people-cyp/>

Whilst the majority of palliative and end of life care is provided by National Health Service staff and services, we recognise the vital part that voluntary sector organisations, including hospices, also play in providing support to people at the end of life, and their loved ones.

Most hospices are charitable, independent organisations that receive some statutory funding for providing NHS services. The amount of funding each charitable hospice receives varies both within and between ICB areas. The variation is dependent on demand in the area, and on the totality and type of palliative and end of life care provision from NHS and non-NHS services, including charitable hospices, within each ICB footprint.

I met with key palliative and end of life care and hospice stakeholders on 3 February to discuss the long-term sustainability of palliative and end of life care, within the context of our 10-Year Health Plan.

#### ■ **Hospitals: Leicestershire**

**Mr Peter Bedford:**

**[29820]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information he holds on the number of hospitals in Leicestershire that have not followed the appropriate discharge procedure for parents in the last five years.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Statutory guidance on hospital discharge procedures that was published in January 2024 sets out how local areas should plan and implement hospital discharge to support safe and timely discharge for all individuals. The guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hospital-discharge-and-community-support-guidance>

Local areas should provide the monitoring of discharge quality and performance to ensure that the agreed hospital discharge procedures are being followed consistently.

#### ■ **Human Tissue Authority: Artificial Intelligence**

**Sir John Hayes:**

**[28452]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what purposes the Human Tissue Authority has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

**Ashley Dalton:**

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 Human Tissue Authority (HTA) has used AI in the form of Microsoft Co-pilot and the Government Communication Service Assist tool. These tools are used to assist the authority to be more responsive and targeted in their regulatory activity, by highlighting opportunities of efficiency and lever changes in performance and practice. This includes the Government Communication Service Assist tool supporting communications professionals in HTA in a number of areas including: the production of first draft communications products; stakeholder management; research; and media handling.

The HTA can draw on a range of resources, published on the GOV.UK website, to inform AI usage. The HTA also has access to the Government Digital Service, part of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, for expert advice.

## ■ Infant Foods

**Anna Sabine:**

[\[29330\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to improve (a) awareness of and (b) access to formula milk for infants.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Infant feeding is critical to a baby's healthy growth and development. The Government is committed to giving every child the best start in life and that includes helping families to access support to feed their baby.

Whilst breastfeeding has significant health benefits, we recognise that for those families that cannot or choose not to breastfeed, it is vital that they have access to infant formula that is affordable and high quality. Infant formula regulations ensure that all infant formula is suitable for meeting the nutritional needs of babies, regardless of the price or brand.

The Competition and Markets Authority is undertaking a market study on infant and follow on formula and is due to publish its final report, with recommendations later this month. We welcome this report and will carefully consider its findings and recommendations including any on increasing awareness of, and access to, infant formula.

## ■ Memory Clinics: Staff

**Joe Robertson:**

[\[28296\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will take steps to increase the (a) number of specialists in and (b) level of training on young onset dementia in memory assessment services.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We recognise that those with young onset dementia who draw on care and support have different ambitions and face different challenges to older age adults.

The Government is committed to transforming diagnostic services, including the detection and diagnosis of dementia, and will support the National Health Service to increase capacity to meet the demand for diagnostic services.

Under Care Quality Commission Regulation 18: Staffing, persons employed by the service provider in the provision of a regulated activity must receive such appropriate support, training, professional development, supervision, and appraisal as is necessary to enable them to carry out the duties they are employed to perform. This would include receiving appropriate support to carry out duties linked to young onset dementia.

The required training needs are set out in the Dementia Training Standards Framework, commissioned and funded by the Department and developed in collaboration with the sector, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/info-hub/dementia-2015-updated-2018/>

#### ■ **Mental Health Services: Offenders**

**Bob Blackman:** [28497]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what funding his Department is providing to support the implementation of ongoing and holistic post-release support for prison leavers with severe mental health issues.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The NHS RECONNECT service supports people leaving prison with identified health needs to make the transition to community-based services, including mental health services, which are funded by local health and care systems.

#### ■ **Mental Health Services: Publicity**

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** [28058]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 13789 on Mental Health Services: Software, if his Department will commission a review into improving the centralised NHS signposting for mental health support; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of reopening the NHS App Library.

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** [28059]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 13789 on Mental Health Services: Software, if his Department will commission a review into the quality of mental health support signposting provided by local NHS providers.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We are working with NHS England to explore solutions that would more effectively meet some of the objectives around an app library, including building awareness of evidenced digital health technologies tailored effectively to the needs of different audiences, including commissioners, clinicians, and patients.



## ■ Mental Health Services: Standards

**Andy Slaughter:**

[\[28891\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will consider the merits of implementing safety recommendation R/2025/055 in the report by the Health Service Safety Investigations Body entitled Mental health inpatient settings: Creating conditions for the delivery of safe and therapeutic care to adults, published on 30 January 2025.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We are grateful to the Health Services Safety Investigations Body for their report on creating conditions for learning from deaths in mental health inpatient settings. The report highlights important concerns and safety recommendations that can help us to improve inpatient mental health services.

We will formally respond to all the recommendations for the Department made within this report in due course.

## ■ Mental Health Services: Waiting Lists

**Joe Robertson:**

[\[28412\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help reduce the backlog of people waiting for elective mental health care.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Patients have been let down for too long whilst they wait for the care they need. Currently, the elective waiting list stands at 7.48 million patient pathways, with over six million people waiting. We are committed to putting patients first, making sure that patients are seen on time, and ensuring that people have the best possible experience during their care.

As set out in the Government's Plan for Change, we will ensure that 92% of patients return to waiting no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment by March 2029, a standard which has not been met consistently since September 2015. This includes those patients waiting for mental health services where the referral is made to a medical consultant-led mental health service.

The majority of National Health Service mental health care is outside the scope of the elective waiting list and the referral to treatment 18-week constitutional standard. With regard to mental health care more broadly, we know that 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 that mental health is given the same attention and focus as physical health, so that people can be confident in accessing high quality mental health support when they need it. We will recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers to reduce delays and provide faster treatment which will also help ease pressure on hospitals. We will also ensure every young person has access to a mental health professional at school, and will set up Young Futures hubs in every community, offering open access mental health services for young people.

**■ Negligence: Costs****Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:**[\[28313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his timetable is for implementing fixed recoverable costs to clinical negligence claims.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Currently, the Government is considering the way forward on a wide range of matters, including clinical negligence costs reform, and we will announce our position in due course.

**■ NHS Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes: General Practitioners****Blake Stephenson:**[\[29566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 30 January 2025 to Question 26149 on General Practitioners, what discussions his Department has had with the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board on GP provision.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We know that patients are struggling to see a general practitioner (GP) and we are committed to improving GP provision across the country, including in the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (ICB) area. 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 both increase the number of GPs employed and the number of appointments delivered in general practice, benefitting thousands of patients that are struggling to receive the care they desperately deserve. This will also help secure the future supply of GPs and take pressure off the existing workforce. Additionally, we have announced a proposed £889 million uplift to the GP contract for 2025/26, with a rising share of total National Health Service resources going to general practice. We are currently consulting the profession on key proposals to improve access, continuity of care and GP recruitment.

The NHS Bedfordshire, Luton & Milton Keynes ICB delivered 496,000 appointments in December 2024. Comparatively, in December 2023, 423,000 appointment were delivered. This is a 17.25% increase in appointments delivered over the last year. Additionally, the ICB also saw an increase of 8.3 full-time equivalent GPs in the last year.

Integrated care boards are responsible for planning and commissioning healthcare services to meet the reasonable needs of the people for whom they are responsible, including evaluating population needs and planning provision for GP services.

## ■ NHS Business Services Authority

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[R] [29034]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many times he has met with the leadership of the NHS Business Service Authority since 4 July 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 12 February 2025]:* The Minister of State for Health met with the leadership of the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) on 9 December 2024, and regular meetings are now being scheduled.

As a Special Health Authority and Arm's-Length Body of the Department, there are quarterly accountability reviews between NHSBSA leadership and Department officials. Department officials also attend the NHSBSA's Audit and Risk Committee and Board meetings, and there is less formal engagement in the form of regular one-to-ones with senior managers.

## ■ NHS Business Services Authority: Standards

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[R] [29035]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will conduct a review into the performance of the NHS Business Services Authority.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 12 February 2025]:* The NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) underwent an independent review in 2023 as part of the Cabinet Office led Public Body Review programme, and was assessed as 'a high performing Arm's-Length Body'. The review is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-business-services-authority-review-report/independent-review-of-the-nhs-business-services-authority-final-report-and-recommendations>

As a Special Health Authority and Arm's-Length Body of the Department, performance is reviewed regularly by Departmental policy teams who sponsor individual services, and a quarterly accountability meeting is held to assess the NHSBSA's performance across all its services.

## ■ NHS Business Services Authority: Workplace Pensions

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[R] [28135]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 28 January 2025 to Question 23857 on NHS Business Services Authority: Workplace Pensions, what steps he is taking to (a) rectify the issue and (b) provide support to impacted individuals.

**Karin Smyth:**

The NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) is proactively rectifying the 2023/24 pension savings calculation errors by providing regular updates and support to

impacted members. They will be issuing an up to date 2023/24 pension saving statement to all members who need one, and they are working on this as a matter of urgency. The NHS Pension Service is also reviewing and updating quality assurance processes with the involvement of key stakeholders.

The NHSBSA is sharing guidance from HM Revenue and Customs with members to support the completion of Self-Assessment Tax Returns, to the relevant deadlines, and to show how to rectify returns and avoid penalties.

The NHSBSA has confirmed that they are able to reimburse impacted individuals for the additional costs they may incur as a result of the calculation error. They are also developing a process to allow affected scheme members to fast track a request for reimbursement, provided they keep evidence of charges.

## ■ NHS Trusts: Artificial Intelligence

**Victoria Collins:**

[\[28838\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to ensure that NHS trusts have access to similar AI technologies by having approved models in line with the provision of medical equipment.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department is working to accelerate the safe, ethical, and effective use of artificial intelligence (AI) across the whole healthcare system. The Department has already provided £113 million, through the NHS AI Health and Care Awards, to 86 AI technologies, which have been used in 40% of National Health Service acute trusts in England, and hundreds of Primary Care Networks across the United Kingdom. This funding has helped to generate the evidence needed to deploy effective AI tools across the NHS.

The NHS operates within a comprehensive regulatory framework for AI, underpinned by rigorous standards established by bodies including the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), the Health Research Authority, and the Care Quality Commission. These agencies ensure that any AI technologies that are made available to the NHS are safe, effective, and ethical to use.

Additionally, the NICE, sponsored by the Department, conducts Early Value Assessments (EVA) which evaluate new health technologies for NHS use, considering clinical effectiveness and value for money. EVAs aim to give the NHS recommendations and highlight the accessibility of AI technologies, including which innovations work, offer good value for money, and meet system need.

For trusts procuring technology there is a standardised procurement route available through specialised procurement frameworks. These frameworks offer NHS trusts access to a list of suppliers who have met a set of standards to be invited to join the framework.

## ■ NHS: Artificial Intelligence

**Victoria Collins:**

[\[28847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to allocate funding for (a) secure data environments for data validation and (b) other infrastructure required for AI implementation in the NHS.

**Karin Smyth:**

Secure access to data to accelerate research and development is an important lever in delivering the Government's health and growth missions. Access to National Health Service data across England has been supported by investments in digital infrastructure between 2022 and 2025 by the Data for Research and Development programme's implementation of Secure Data Environment (SDEs) at a national and regional level. The programme's investment into SDEs supports the full spectrum of data-driven research, including artificial intelligence (AI) development. The budget for the programme for 2025/6 is currently being finalised alongside other priority NHS transformation programmes. Funding plans beyond 2026 will be agreed as part of the Spending Review.

Improved digital and data infrastructure, such as Electronic Patient Records, are essential foundations for digital transformation, such as AI. The NHS has one of the largest and most comprehensive longitudinal patient datasets in the world, making it an attractive location for the development and testing of AI. The centralisation of the healthcare system streamlines data accessibility, integration, and standardisation, all of which benefit the development and deployment of AI. Part of our work will be to create the right environment for the United Kingdom to safely deploy AI at scale, and to attract AI researchers and companies that both develop for, and sell to, UK health and care.

## ■ NHS: Muslims

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[27719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many posts there are in the NHS Muslim Network; what the job titles are of those posts; and what their cost to the public purse was in the last financial year.

**Karin Smyth:**

The NHS Muslim Network is a voluntary staff network, so there are no paid roles. National Health Service staff networks can be an important mechanism of staff support, and help to shape organisational culture within the NHS, to create a fair and inclusive work environment.

## ■ NHS: Pay

**Fabian Hamilton:**

[\[27108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to engage with UNISON to resolve disputes on the NHS pay structure.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government is committed to resetting relationships with the National Health Service workforce and its trade unions, and health ministers have met UNISON officials to discuss their concerns. The Government has been clear that it remains committed to providing a funded mandate to the NHS Staff Council to negotiate changes to the Agenda for Change pay structure.

The Department intends to deliver this mandate in 2025/26, and we have asked the NHS Pay Review Body (NHSPRB) to provide a view on the level of funding that should be provided. Once we receive the NHSPRB's report and the funding has been confirmed, the Department will work closely with the NHS Staff Council, including UNISON, to agree the changes to the pay structure.

■ **NHS: Translation Services****Rupert Lowe:**[\[28399\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the answer of 21 November 2024 to Question 14378 on NHS: Translation Services, what the (a) cost for translation of and (b) proportion of communications in each language was in e-Referral Service communication (i) calls and (ii) letters in 2024.

**Rupert Lowe:**[\[28411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much was spent on (a) translation and (b) interpretation by (i) NHS Trusts, (ii) James Paget University Hospitals Trust and (iii) the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust in 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

The information requested on spend on translation and interpretation services by National Health Service trusts is not held centrally, as data is held at integrated care board level.

Across 2024, the Telephone Appointments Line team used third party translation services for 425 calls, or 0.04% of all answered calls. We are unable to provide a specific cost for this as it is delivered as part of the overall service specification for the provider. 101,431 letters, or 9.03% of all letters, were sent in a language other than English. There was no net cost for this as the translation had been paid for in previous years and the patients would have been sent a letter in English in the absence of a translated letter. The following table shows the total number of calls in a language other than English, what that language was, and the percentage it represents of all calls:

	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CALLS USING LANGUAGE SUPPORT IN SPECIFIED LANGUAGE
Albanian	3	0.71%
Amharic	1	0.24%

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	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CALLS USING LANGUAGE SUPPORT IN SPECIFIED LANGUAGE
Arabic	69	16.24%
Bengali	34	8.00%
Bulgarian	9	2.12%
Cantonese	5	1.18%
Czech	2	0.47%
Dari	3	0.71%
Farsi	20	4.71%
French	3	0.71%
Gujarati	2	0.47%
Greek	2	0.47%
Hungarian	6	1.41%
Hindi	8	1.88%
Italian	4	0.94%
Kurmanji	1	0.24%
Lithuanian	2	0.47%
Mandarin	5	1.18%
Pashto	10	2.35%
Polish	20	4.71%
Portuguese	15	3.53%
Punjabi	21	4.94%
Portuguese Br.	1	0.24%
Romanian	60	14.12%
Russian	5	1.18%
Somali	5	1.18%
Sorani	26	6.12%

	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CALLS USING LANGUAGE SUPPORT IN SPECIFIED LANGUAGE
Slovak	5	1.18%
Spanish	11	2.59%
Sylheti	9	2.12%
Tigrigna	2	0.47%
Turkish	21	4.94%
Ukrainian	7	1.65%
Urdu	28	6.59%
Total	425	
Total calls	105,4942	0.04% of total calls used language support

In addition, the following table shows the total number of letters in a language other than English, what that language was, and the percentage it represents of all letters:

	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL LETTERS SENT IN SPECIFIED LANGUAGE
Albanian	1,700	1.68%
Arabian	7,189	7.09%
Bengali	9,069	8.94%
Chinese	652	0.64%
French	1,917	1.89%
Greek	935	0.92%
Gujarati	3,207	3.16%
Hindi	1,943	1.92%
Hungarian	979	0.97%
Italian	1,961	1.93%
Kurdish	2,218	2.19%



	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL LETTERS SENT IN SPECIFIED LANGUAGE
Lithuanian	1,347	1.33%
Persian	2,380	2.35%
Polish	8,413	8.29%
Portuguese	3,538	3.49%
Punjabi	5,760	5.68%
Romanian	5,427	5.35%
Russian	1,779	1.75%
Slovak	1,680	1.66%
Somali	2,787	2.75%
Spanish	3,481	3.43%
Tamil	2,543	2.51%
Turkish	3,944	3.89%
Urdu	14,876	14.67%
Wolof	26	0.03%
Other languages	11,680	11.52%
Total translated	101,431	
Total letters	1,123,829	9.03% of total letters sent were translated

Source: NHS England

### ■ Nurses: Training

**Bradley Thomas:**

[\[28749\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of reducing academic barriers to entry to the nursing profession.

**Karin Smyth:**

No such assessment has been made.

Universities are responsible for setting their entry requirements in line with standards of proficiency, conduct and performance of nurses, as set out by the Nursing and Midwifery Council. It would not be appropriate for the Government to intervene in this process, to respect the independence and expertise of universities and regulators designing standards and curricular that ensure public safety.

For those whom a traditional full-time university course is not practical or preferred, there is an alternative route into the nursing profession via a registered nurse degree apprenticeship.

## ■ Palliative Care

**James McMurdock:**

[\[30024\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve end-of-life care in the community.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government is determined to shift more healthcare out of hospitals and into the community, to ensure patients and their families receive personalised care in the most appropriate setting, and palliative and end of life care services will have a big role to play in that shift.

We have committed to develop a 10-year plan, to deliver a National Health Service fit for the future and one of the three 'shifts' that the plan will deliver is the shift from hospital to community. We will be carefully considering policies, including those that impact people with palliative and end of life care needs, with input from the public, patients, health staff, and our stakeholders as we develop the plan.

I met with key palliative and end of life care, including hospice, stakeholders on 3 February 2025 to discuss the long-term sustainability of palliative and end of life care, within the context of our 10-Year Health Plan.

We are supporting the hospice sector with a £100 million capital funding boost for adult and children's hospices to ensure they have the best physical environment for care, with hospices able to use this capital funding to benefit community provision, and £26 million revenue funding to support children and young people's hospices.

## ■ Pharmacy

**Phil Brickell:**

[\[29182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the number of community pharmacists.

**Phil Brickell:**

[\[29184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the Pharmacy First service.

**Phil Brickell:**

[\[29185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has plans to consult on extending the list of conditions patients can be treated for under the Pharmacy First scheme.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government will make sure the National Health Service has the staff it needs to be there for all of us when we need it. We have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS. A central part of the 10-Year Health Plan will be our workforce and how we ensure we train and provide the staff, technology and infrastructure the NHS needs to care for patients across our communities.

In summer 2025, we will publish a refreshed Long Term Workforce Plan to deliver the transformed health service we will build over the next decade, and treat patients on time again.

Employers clearly have a key role in retaining staff and making jobs in community pharmacy attractive. To support employers, NHS England has provided several fully funded national training opportunities for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to help support private contractors deliver quality NHS services, including Pharmacy First.

NHS England is keeping the Pharmacy First service under close review. In addition, a National Institute for Health and Care Research evaluation of Pharmacy First will 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 cost for different patient groups.

The Pharmacy First clinical pathways have been informed by guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and were designed with input from an expert panel of clinicians. NHS England is keeping the clinical scope of this service under review.

**Charlotte Cane:**

[\[29234\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support community pharmacies.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government recognises that pharmacies are an integral part of the fabric of our communities, as an easily accessible front door to the National Health Service, staffed by highly trained and skilled healthcare professionals.

The Government is committed to expanding the role of pharmacies and better utilising the skills of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. That includes making prescribing part of the services delivered by community pharmacists. To support these private contractors, NHS England is providing fully funded national training opportunities to help them deliver quality NHS services.

We have now recommenced our consultation with Community Pharmacy England regarding funding arrangements for 2024/25 and 2025/26.

## ■ Pharmacy: Contracts

**Dr Luke Evans:** [\[28126\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 21 January 2025 to Question 23853 on Pharmacy: Contracts, when he expects to conclude the consultation on the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework's 2025 to 2026 funding contract.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

*[Holding answer 7 February 2025]:* The Government recently resumed its consultation on the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework regarding funding arrangements for 2024/25 and 2025/26. As is custom and practice, we expect to announce the outcome in a joint letter to contractors in due course.

## ■ Post-mortems

**Steve Darling:** [\[26955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps with Cabinet colleagues to help reduce the turnaround times for (a) hospital and (b) HM Coroner's Office post mortems in (i) neonatal and paediatric and (ii) other cases.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Workforce shortages in paediatric and perinatal pathology have led to longer turnaround times for hospital post-mortem reports in some areas of England. NHS England has established a national work programme to address these shortages.

A £20,000 recruitment incentive for new trainees has been introduced, with further initiatives underway to review the training pathway, develop advanced practitioner roles, and implement a retention strategy for existing staff.

Additional funding has also been provided in 2024/25 to create capacity in the service, whilst simultaneously exploring opportunities to streamline pathways through the use of digital and imaging techniques supported by the latest clinical evidence and practice.

## ■ Pregnancy: Sodium Valproate

**Chris Evans:** [\[28009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent progress has been made by the (a) Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency and (b) the Commission on Human Medicines to (i) understand the (A) current and (B) historic risks of sodium valproate when taken during pregnancy, and (ii) in communicating these risks to (1) healthcare professionals and (2) patients.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), taking advice from the Commission on Human Medicines (CHM), has worked to raise awareness among healthcare professionals and patients of the risks of valproate when taken during pregnancy through several updates to the valproate Summary of Product Characteristics, for healthcare professionals, and the Patient Information Leaflets, as well as updates to associated educational materials as required.

The magnitude and type of risks associated with valproate use in pregnancy have been communicated in articles in the MHRA bulletin, Drug Safety Update, and via letters cascaded out through the NHS Central Alerting System. These communications have been supported by messages from the relevant professional bodies and regulatory requirements reinforced through changes to clinical guidelines and improved alerts on general practitioner prescribing systems.

The valproate Pregnancy Prevention Programme, implemented in 2018, is supported by educational materials for healthcare professionals and patients which describe the neurodevelopmental disorders and major congenital malformations associated with the use of valproate in pregnancy, and are available electronically and sent in hard copy format to healthcare professionals.

In January 2024, the MHRA communicated, in an article in a Drug Safety Update, the latest advice from the CHM, that valproate must not be started in new patients, male or female, younger than 55 years old unless two specialists independently consider and document that there is no other effective or tolerated treatment, or if there are compelling reasons that the reproductive risks do not apply. It was advised that women and girls of childbearing potential who are already receiving valproate should have their treatment reviewed by two specialists at their next annual review. The requirement for two specialists to review these patients is a one off, and subsequent annual reviews required under the Pregnancy Prevention Programme are undertaken by a single specialist.

Updated educational materials were made available to healthcare professionals and patients electronically, and sent to healthcare professionals in hard copy format, that could be provided to patients and which could support the discussions between healthcare professionals and patients.

**■ Primary Health Care****Joe Robertson:**[\[28297\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help stabilise primary care.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The 10-Year Health Plan will describe a shared vision for the health and care system in 2035, drawing directly from the extensive engagement underway with the public, patients, and staff.

We have 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 since the beginning of the five-year framework and means we are reversing the recent trend with a rising share of total National Health Service resources going to GPs.

By fixing the front door of our health service we will ensure everyone can access GP services. We will make sure the future of GPs is sustainable by training thousands more GPs, guaranteeing a face-to-face appointment for all those who want one, and delivering a modern booking system. We have already started hiring an extra 1,000 GPs into the NHS and uplifted a monthly payment to practices by 7.4%.

We want to take pressure off GPs, by improving access to community pharmacies and creating a Community Pharmacist Prescribing Service. We are currently in consultation with Community Pharmacy England regarding the funding arrangements for 2024/25 and 2025/26 and are unable to say more until this consultation is completed.

The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access NHS dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to the areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term and increase access to NHS dental care, we will reform the dental contract, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

## ■ Public Health: Finance

**Helen Morgan:**

[\[28109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether public health monies under section 7A of the National Health Service Act 2006 will be ringfenced in 2025.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 7 February 2025]:* Currently, there is no ring-fence funding for public health functions delegated by my Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to NHS England, known as section 7A services. Funding for section 7A services is allocated as part of NHS England's Mandate funding total.

## ■ Radiotherapy: Waiting Lists

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[28060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether steps his Department has taken to reduce waiting times for palliative radiotherapy treatment.

**Ashley Dalton:**

We know that patients are waiting too long for cancer treatment, and we will get the National Health Service diagnosing cancer on time or earlier, treating it faster, and we will improve patients' experience across the system. We will also be spending £70 million on new radiotherapy machines, to ensure the most advanced treatment is available to patients who need it.

**■ Social Services: Gloucester****Alex McIntyre:** [\[28701\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support adult social care providers in Gloucester.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

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, which includes an £880 million increase in the Social Care Grant.

The additional funding available to Gloucestershire in 2025-26 means that they will see an increase to their Core Spending Power of up to 6.6% in cash terms.

Local authorities are best placed to understand and plan for the needs of their population, which is why, under the Care Act 2014, they are tasked with the duty to shape their care market to meet the diverse needs of all local people.

**■ Social Services: South Suffolk****James Cartlidge:** [\[24194\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the increase in employer's National Insurance contributions on social care providers in South Suffolk constituency.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We have taken necessary decisions to provide stability to the country's finances. The Government considered the cost pressures facing adult social care at an England level 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% in cash terms.

Suffolk County Council will receive a 5.7% cash terms increase in its core spending power for 2025/26, compared to 2024/25.

**■ Sodium Valproate****Dr Rupa Huq:** [\[27870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will respond to the recommendations on the use of sodium valproate in the Hughes report, published 7 February 2024.

**Ashley Dalton:**

*[Holding answer 7 February 2025]:* The Government is carefully considering the valuable work done by the Patient Safety Commissioner and the resulting Hughes

Report. The report sets out options for redress for those harmed by valproate and pelvic mesh. The Government will be providing an update to the Patient Safety Commissioner's Report at the earliest opportunity.

## ■ Vaccination

**Samantha Niblett:**

[\[28712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 3 February 2025 to Question 27349 on Vaccination, what steps his Department is taking to ensure contemporaneous vaccine delivery across all regions.

**Ashley Dalton:**

*[Holding answer 11 February 2025]:* NHS England is responsible for the operational delivery of the vaccination programmes, including the respiratory syncytial virus programme, in line with recommendations from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), and considering local population needs.

General practices (GPs) are commissioned as a component of essential services, with practices required to offer and provide vaccinations to eligible patients, including their registered patients residing in care homes. NHS England's regional teams monitor operational data to ensure that all providers are vaccinating those eligible.

Routine and seasonal vaccination programmes are commissioned in a nationally consistent way across all regions through inclusion in the GP Contract, GP and community pharmacy advanced and enhanced services, and National Health Service standard contracts. Regional commissioners are also able to stand up vaccination programmes in response to local pressures and outbreaks to supplement this core offer.

## ■ Wood-burning Stoves: Health Hazards

**Dr Roz Savage:**

[\[28295\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of the potential impact of domestic wood burners on public health.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Chief Medical Officer's 2022 annual report on air pollution highlighted that wood burning, particularly in urban locations, significantly worsens local air quality and has links to asthma and poor respiratory health.

The Government recognises that it is important we take action to reduce emissions from domestic burning, and the impact on the health of those in homes which burn and their neighbours. The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is currently evaluating a number of options to reduce emissions of fine particulate matter, including options for reducing emissions from domestic burning. We will support the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in developing a series of interventions to reduce emissions so that everyone's exposure to air pollution is reduced.



**HOME OFFICE****■ Animal Experiments****Ben Obese-Jecty:****[29598]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the 154,904 animals involved in non-compliance incidents in British laboratories in 2023.

**Ben Obese-Jecty:****[29615]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the Animals in Science Regulation Unit annual report 2023, published in December 2024, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of the 553 animals who experienced adverse welfare outcomes due to non-compliance in laboratories in 2023.

**Dan Jarvis:**

Procedures) Act 1986 very seriously. The numbers of non-compliance cases vary in any given year. The total number of non-compliance cases reduced from 175 to 169 cases from 2022-23. Between these same years there was also a 48% reduction in adverse welfare cases.

The Home Office regulator reviews each non-compliance case and provides details in its annual report ( [www.gov.uk/government/publications/animals-in-science-regulation-unit-annual-report-2023](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animals-in-science-regulation-unit-annual-report-2023) ). Sanctions are applied in cases of non-compliance to reduce the risk of future non-compliance. Data regarding non-compliances is used to inform the risk-based audit programme.

**Ben Obese-Jecty:****[29600]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help reduce the number of animals involved in non-compliance cases in British laboratories.

**Dan Jarvis:**

The Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) has published its compliance framework ([www.gov.uk/guidance/animal-testing-and-research-compliance-with-aspa](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/animal-testing-and-research-compliance-with-aspa)) which explains how it identifies and investigates potential incidents of non-compliance and decides on appropriate and proportionate measures and remedies where non-compliance has been found to occur. The Regulator's published compliance policy aims to reduce the risk of future non-compliance.

The Regulator is undertaking a structured programme of reforms. This will increase the total number of Inspectors from 17 at the end of 2023, to 22 by end of 2025.

**■ Animal Experiments: Animal Welfare****Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[29599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to increase the number of inspectors in the Animals in Science Regulation Unit.

**Dan Jarvis:**

The Home Office is in the final stages of delivering an ambitious programme of regulatory reform to assure protections for animals are provided and will ensure we create a regulatory environment that strives towards ever higher benchmarks of reduced harm.

This will increase the total number of Inspectors from 17 at the end of 2023, to 22 by end of 2025.

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[29601\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to increase the number of premises audited by the Animals in Science Regulation Unit.

**Dan Jarvis:**

All establishments licensed to breed or supply animals, or to carry out regulated procedures on animals under ASPA in Great Britain, are subject to the full requirements of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA). This provides for a regulatory regimen of activities that protects animals in science including facilities audits by the Home Office to ensure compliance with the terms of their licences, the Code of Practice and with ASPA.

Each establishment will receive an audit at least every three years if it does not hold special species and at least every year if it holds specially protected species.

The Regulator is undertaking a structured programme of reforms. This will increase the total number of Inspectors from 17 at the end of 2023, to 22 by end of 2025.

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[29616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions she has had with the Animals in Science Regulation Unit on animal harm caused by incidents of non-compliance in UK laboratories.

**Dan Jarvis:**

In October 2024 I announced, in a written ministerial statement, that the animals in science regulator would be making reforms to its organisational design to most effectively deliver its purpose of protecting animals through maintaining compliance with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

I am pleased to announce that those reforms are nearly complete. The effect of the changes will be stronger protections for animals; increased adherence to the principles of replacement, reduction, and refinement; an enhanced quality of service for the science sector; and increased assurance to the public of the protections the UK continues to deliver for animals in science.

**Mr Peter Bedford:**

[\[29814\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's report entitled Animals in Science Regulation Unit: Annual report 2023, published on 17 December 2024, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of trends in the level of cases of failing to provide adequate (a) food and (b) water to animals.

**Dan Jarvis:**

The Home Office takes non-compliance with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 very seriously. The Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) has published its compliance framework ([www.gov.uk/guidance/animal-testing-and-research-compliance-with-aspa](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/animal-testing-and-research-compliance-with-aspa)) which explains how it identifies and investigates potential incidents of non-compliance and decides on appropriate and proportionate measures and remedies where non-compliance has been found to occur. The Regulator's published compliance policy aims to reduce the risk of future non-compliance.

All cases of non-compliance are thoroughly investigated, and the outcomes are published in ASRU's annual report.

Data regarding types of non-compliance is used to inform the risk-based audit programme, as well as targeting educational communications to establishments, to promote compliance. The Regulator has provided recommendations to licensed establishments at p30 of the report ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/animals-in-science-regulation-unit-annual-report-2023](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animals-in-science-regulation-unit-annual-report-2023)).

For cases of non-compliance where animals experienced adverse welfare outcomes cases there was a 48% reduction in 2023 compared to 2022

#### ■ **Animal Experiments: Licensing**

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[29603\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the duration of project licences granted under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

**Dan Jarvis:**

The Home Office intends to conduct an internal review in relation to the duration of project licences for animal research under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA), as announced by the previous administration in a parliamentary debate of 19 February 2024.

#### ■ **Anti-social Behaviour: Greater Manchester**

**Mrs Elsie Blundell:**

[\[28671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with Greater Manchester Police to tackle the (a) prevalence and (b) impact of anti-social behaviour the city-region.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB) is a top priority for this Government and a key part of our Safer Streets Mission.

The Government's Plan for Change, announced by the Prime Minister on 5 December, committed to a zero-tolerance approach to ASB. This will include a dedicated lead officer in every force working with communities to develop a local anti-social behaviour action plan. We will also put 13,000 neighbourhood police and community support officers into local communities so that residents have a named officer they can turn to when things go wrong.

The Government recently announced Respect Orders which will be introduced through the Crime and Policing Bill. Respect Orders can be applied for by the police and local councils and are issued by the courts. They will enable courts to place wide-ranging restrictions on the behaviour of the most persistent and disruptive ASB offenders. Breaching a Respect Order will be a criminal offence, allowing police officers to immediately arrest offenders and disrupt ongoing ASB.

**■ Asylum: Appeals****Siân Berry:**[\[29857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to Official Tribunals Statistics quarterly: July to September 2024, what analysis has been done of the reasons for the increase in asylum appeal cases in the category of Asylum/Protection/Revocation of Protection.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

Both the [Tribunal Statistics Quarterly: July to September 2024](#) to which the question refers, published by the Ministry of Justice, and the latest [Immigration System Statistics quarterly release](#), published by Home Office, explain that the rise in asylum appeals is linked to the increase in asylum claims receiving an initial decision as part of the Home Office's work to reduce the initial decision backlog.

**■ Asylum: Employment****Carla Denyer:**[\[29663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 5 February 2025 to Question 902576 on Employment: Asylum, what the gender balance of dependents of asylum seekers is; what assessment she has made of the impact of the rules that do not allow those dependants to work on the Government's (a) aim to deliver an asylum process that is gender sensitive and (b) wider strategy to tackle violence against women and girls.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

We are committed to delivering an asylum process that is gender sensitive, building on the Government's wider strategy to tackle violence against women and girls. All decision-makers receive mandatory training on considering asylum claims and must

follow published Home Office policy guidance, including guidance on gender issues, which covers specific forms of gender-based persecution.

The Home Office also continues to invest in a programme of transformation to speed up decision making and therefore reduce the time people spend in the asylum system. This approach will ensure that genuine asylum seekers can be accepted quickly and gain access to the labour market, and those who are not can be removed to their home country.

The Home Office publishes data on asylum in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on asylum claims by applicant type and sex is published in table Asy\_D01 of the '[Asylum applications, initial decisions and resettlement detailed datasets](#)'. The latest data relates to the year ending September 2024.

### ■ **Asylum: Essex**

**James McMurdock:** [\[29397\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average cost is of accommodating asylum seekers by Essex local authority.

**James McMurdock:** [\[29398\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the number of hotels required as temporary accommodation for asylum seekers in England on 31 December 2025.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

This Government remains resolute in its commitment to reduce the costs of asylum accommodation, including ending the use of asylum hotels over time, through a number of actions including restarting the processing of asylum claims, establishing the new Border Security Command, and prioritising the acquisition of more sustainable dispersal accommodation.

The Home Office keeps the asylum accommodation estate under constant review, but demand for asylum accommodation is volatile. This means the Home Office often has to work at pace to ensure compliance with its statutory duty to accommodate asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute.

### ■ **Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission**

**David Simmonds:** [\[29609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has had recent discussions with the Metropolitan Police on the application for a new Chinese Embassy.

**Dan Jarvis:**

The planning application has been called in by the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and she will make this quasi-judicial decision independent from the rest of Government.

It would not be appropriate to comment on this process.

The Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary submitted written representations to the Planning Inspector on 14 January. As you would expect, relevant stakeholders, including the Metropolitan Police, were consulted.

## ■ Counter-terrorism

**Gregory Stafford:**

[\[29364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department plans to take to monitor individuals on the Prevent programme.

**Dan Jarvis:**

All Prevent referrals are triaged and assessed by specialist Prevent officers from Counter Terrorism Police. The launch of the new Prevent Assessment Framework across all CT Police regions gives Prevent officers more robust tools and training to triage and risk assess the various Prevent referrals they receive.

At present, if a radicalisation risk is identified, the Prevent referral will be progressed to the Channel programme, where the case will be assessed by a multi-agency Channel panel. The Channel panel is chaired by the local authority and works with multi-agency partners to collectively assess an individual's risk and decide whether an intervention is necessary. If a Channel intervention is required, the panel works with local partners to develop an appropriate tailored support package. The support package is monitored closely and reviewed regularly by the panel, including after case closure. The panel will review closed Channel cases at both 6 and 12 months after closure. If any radicalisation concerns are found during the review period, the case will be reopened. Panels also have the discretion to extend the period of review up to two years.

In addition, the Home Office are launching new pilots to provide additional assurance and review points within the Prevent referral journey, including for those assessed as not meeting Prevent thresholds, but where other vulnerabilities may still exist. The pilots will launch in several local authority areas this month. This includes additional assurance for the handling of cases where people are repeatedly referred into Prevent. We will also be working to achieve better assurance for cases that have been closed to Prevent but require non-CT support from local services, ensuring that re-referral to Prevent is made should any CT concerns re-emerge. An end-to-end review of Prevent thresholds is also underway and will report internally in April. This will look at strengthening our approach to repeat referrals, and ensuring clear and unambiguous guidance and training is in place for the full range of threats we face, from Islamist extremism to fixation with mass violence.

## ■ Domestic Abuse

**Kirith Entwistle:**

[\[28685\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle domestic abuse.

**Jess Phillips:**

This Government is committed to tackling domestic abuse in all its forms. We have unveiled a series of bold measures designed to strengthen the police response to domestic abuse, protect victims and hold perpetrators to account.

From early 2025, under a new approach named 'Raneem's Law', domestic abuse specialists will be embedded in 999 control rooms to ensure that victims are referred to appropriate support services swiftly.

To further strengthen protections for victims, in November we launched the new Domestic Abuse Protection Orders in selected police forces and courts. These will go further than existing orders, making it a legal requirement for perpetrators to inform the police of any change in name or address and imposing electronic monitoring. We will be onboarding two additional sites in early 2025 – offering access to these new orders to a greater number of victims.

We have provided an increase of £30 million, in domestic abuse safe accommodation services in 2025-26, meaning a total investment of £160m. This is part of wider work to empower local commissioners to identify needs and commission appropriate support for victims.

**■ Drugs: Organised Crime****Jo Platt:**[\[28670\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 14 January to Question 22097 on Drugs: Organised Crime, what steps she is taking to tackle cuckooing.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Government is clear that cuckooing is an appalling practice associated with violence, exploitation and anti-social behaviour.

Through the County Lines Programme we are targeting exploitative drug dealing gangs, including those who take over the homes of vulnerable people.

The Government's Safer Streets Mission will continue to tackle these issues and we will make further announcements in the normal way in due course.

**■ Fire and Rescue Services: South East****James McMurdock:**[\[28753\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will implement a South-East Allowance for fire and rescue services.

**James McMurdock:**[\[28754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to ensure fire and rescue services are adequately resourced to meet population growth in Essex.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Home Office have no role in setting firefighter pay or allowances. This is set by the National Joint Council which is comprised of members from the Local Government Association and the Trade Union.

On 3 February 2025, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published the Final Local Government Finance Settlement 2025/26 which sets out grant allocations for all local authorities including fire and rescue. In addition, MHCLG published the referendum principles which confirms that fire and rescue authorities will be able to increase council tax by £5 without the need for a local referendum.

The Home Office will continue to work closely with stakeholders across the sector to ensure fire and rescue services have the resources they need to protect communities.

**■ Fire and Rescue Services: Training****James McMurdock:**[\[28755\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will ensure fire and rescue service personnel receive training on (a) electric vehicle fires and (b) lithium-ion battery incidents.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

It is the responsibility of fire and rescue authorities to ensure that firefighters receive the appropriate equipment and training they need to safely respond to the wide range of incidents which they attend. We will continue to work closely with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) to ensure fire and rescue services have the training, research and equipment they need to keep the public safe.

Through our well-established national Fire Kills campaign, we are working to raise awareness on safe usage, storage and charging of e-bikes and e-scooters to support fire prevention in the home. We have developed educational resources, in partnership with the NFCC and local fire and rescue services, and published advice on the FireEngland.uk website.

**■ Gloucestershire Constabulary: Finance****Dr Roz Savage:**[\[28765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the level of funding provided to Gloucestershire Constabulary for the 2024-25 financial year on the effectiveness of frontline policing in Gloucestershire; and if she will take steps to increase that level of funding.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Gloucestershire Police's received funding up to £158 million in 2024-25. This was in addition to £1.3m provided for the 2024-25 pay award which was allocated outside of the police funding settlement.



In 2025-26, Gloucestershire will receive up to £168.2m, an increase of £10.1m compared to last year's settlement. This represents a 6.4% cash increase and 3.9% real terms increase.

The 2025-26 funding settlement provides new funding of £200 million to kickstart the delivery of 13,000 additional neighbourhood officers, community support officers and special constables.

## ■ Immigration

**Bradley Thomas:**

[\[28715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of capping annual net-migration into the United Kingdom.

**Seema Malhotra:**

I refer the Hon Member to the Answer provided on 05 December to Question UIN 16705.

## ■ Nitazenes

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[28468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to tackle the illegal (a) sale, (b) distribution and (c) use of protonitazene.

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[28496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to work with relevant authorities to tackle the illegal (a) sale, (b) distribution and (c) use of fentanyl in England.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Government takes seriously the threat from potent synthetic drugs, including synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and nitazenes, including protonitazene, and is taking action. Reducing drug harms has important benefits for the Government's mission to deliver safer streets, improve health outcomes and break down barriers to opportunity.

The HMG Synthetic Opioids Taskforce is working with partner agencies such as the National Crime Agency (NCA), the Department for Health and Social Care and the National Police Chiefs Council to counter the distribution and use of these dangerous substances.

To stem the supply of illicit synthetic opioids to and within the UK, the NCA, Police and Border Force are working together to ensure all lines of enquiry are prioritised and vigorously pursued. This involves mapping and targeting key offenders, including those operating within dark web markets, as well as training Border Force dogs to detect a range of nitazenes and fentanyl to stop these substances entering the country in the first place.

Fentanyl and protonitazene are both listed as Class A drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (MDA 1971). This means that the supply of these drugs carries a maximum penalty of up to life in prison, an unlimited fine or both. Possession carries a maximum penalty of up to 7 years in prison, an unlimited fine, or both.

The Government has recently introduced a generic control for nitazenes which is intended to reduce the likelihood that criminals can circumvent existing controls by making minor alterations to the chemical structure of nitazenes that are already controlled as Class A drugs under the MDA 1971. This legislation came into force on 15 January.

Additionally, the unlawful sale of controlled drugs online is listed as a priority offence in the Online Safety Act, meaning that under this legislation technology companies must proactively remove this type of content from their platforms and use proportionate systems designed to minimise the risk of users from encountering such content. Law enforcement agencies continue to work with internet service providers to shut down UK-based websites found to be committing offences such as sale of illicit substances, this includes those operating on the dark web.

Further, to support people with drug dependency who may be at risk of synthetic opioid harm, £267 million has been invested in drug and alcohol treatment this year, improving the quality and capacity of drug and alcohol treatment services in England.

## ■ Offenders and Undocumented Migrants: Deportation

**Chris Philp:**

[\[28531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will accelerate deportations of (a) foreign national offenders and (b) illegal immigrants.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

We pledged to deliver the highest rate of removals since 2018 and this has been surpassed, with a surge in returns activity since the election leading to nearly 19,000 people with no right to be in the UK being removed in the first six months this government was in office.

That included 5,074 enforced returns of people with no legal right to remain in the UK, up 24% compared with the same period 12 months prior, and the removal of 2,925 foreign national offenders (FNOs) – a 21% increase on the same period 12 months prior (FNO returns include both enforced and voluntary returns).

As part of the above, bespoke charter flights have removed immigration offenders to countries around the world, including 4 of the biggest returns flights in the UK's history, carrying more than 800 people in total.

This ramp-up reverses the decline in removals seen over the past 10 years and, as part of the government's Plan for Change, is working to fix the foundations of a broken immigration system.

Further details on this government's returns activity since 5 July can be found here: [Returns from the UK since 5 July 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

## ■ People Smuggling: English Channel

**Sir John Hayes:**

[27969]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been (a) charged and (b) convicted for offences relating to supplying small boat parts to gangs involved in smuggling people across the English channel in (i) 2022, (ii) 2023 and (iii) 2024.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

As the Rt Hon Member will be aware, the recently introduced Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill proposes a new offence relating to the supply of articles for use in Organised Immigration Crime, through which we will seek to clamp down on the activities to which his question refers. In respect of charges and convictions in previous years where these activities were a factor, this data is not held centrally.

## ■ Police: Suffolk

**James Cartlidge:**

[28554]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an estimate of the number of police officers in Suffolk in each financial year this Parliament.

**James Cartlidge:**

[28692]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many police officers there have been Suffolk in each financial year since 2019.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Home Office collects and publishes data on the size of the police workforce in England and Wales on a bi-annual basis in the 'Police Workforce, England and Wales' statistical bulletin, available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-workforce-england-and-wales>.

The latest information at the link above covers the situation as at 30 September 2024. Information on the number of police officers, broken down by police force area, at the end of each financial year (31 March) from 2007 to 2024 can be found in the 'Police Workforce Open Data Table' here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/669a910da3c2a28abb50d34b/open-data-table-police-workforce-240724.ods>

Data on the police workforce as at 31 March 2025 is due to be published in Summer 2025.

## ■ Police: Training

**Dan Carden:**

[28632]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of funding for police training programmes.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The 2025-26 final police funding settlement provides funding of up to £19.6 billion for the policing system in England and Wales. This is an overall increase of up to £1.1 billion when compared to the 2024-25 settlement which equates to a 6% cash terms increase and 3.5% real terms.

Decisions on how funding and resources are utilised are an operational matter for Chief Constables and locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners, who are best placed to make resourcing decisions within their communities based on their local knowledge and experience.

■ **Visas: Overseas Visitors****Susan Murray:**[\[28791\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how her Department assesses references from British nationals during the visitor visa application process.

**Seema Malhotra:**

The Visit caseworker guidance provides guidance to decision makers when assessing Visitor applications. It sets out that all information provided by the applicant must be assessed which may include supporting statements or references provided by British nationals to support the application - Visit caseworker guidance (accessible) - GOV.UK

Visitor visa applications are assessed on their individual merits, considering all aspects of the case. This may include supporting documents provided by a sponsor, which are then evaluated, along with the rest of the application, against the balance of probabilities to determine if the application meets the requirements of the Visitor Immigration Rules - Immigration Rules - Immigration Rules Appendix V: Visitor - Guidance - GOV.UK.

**HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ **Affordable Housing: Construction****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[27567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 16546 on Housing: Construction, what assessment she has made of the potential effect on affordable housing provision of reduced demand for registered providers in acquiring homes built by private sector developers as a Section 106 requirement; and what assessment she has made of the potential merits of greater flexibility on affordable tenure types to help increase take-up.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government recognises the ongoing challenge posed by the reduced appetite of Registered Providers of social housing to buy affordable homes delivered under Section 106 agreements.

Homes England's Section 106 Affordable Housing Clearing Service was launched in December with the aim of supporting buyers and sellers of Section 106 homes to find each other more effectively.

We are calling on all developers with uncontracted Section 106 affordable homes, as well as registered providers and local planning authorities, to engage proactively with this new service.

We will consider what further measures may be necessary to address this problem, informed by data from the new clearing service.

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[28051\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2024 to Question 16935 on Affordable Housing: Construction, how many homes of each type of tenure will be delivered from the £500 million additional funding; and what the estimated average grant subsidy is per unit required under each type of affordable housing tenure.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government has made clear that it expects the £500 million in new funding for the Affordable Homes Programme announced in October 2024 to deliver up to 5,000 homes.

As set out in my answer to Question UIN [16935](#) on 16 December 2024, the government will continue to work with Homes England and the GLA to support them to deliver a mix of homes for sub-market rent and home-ownership, with a particular focus on delivering homes for Social Rent.

While the funding in question remains open to bidding, the matter of average grant rates per home is a commercially sensitive one.

## ■ Civil Society: Islam

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[28148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 3 January 2025, to Question 20228, on Civil Society: Islam, whether her Department has a list of organisations which it does not engage with.

**Alex Norris:**

Individual policy teams are responsible for the stakeholder engagements within their portfolio. As such, there is no centralised list of organisations which the Department will not engage with.

## ■ Community Assets: Public Houses

**Jayne Kirkham:**

[\[29854\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether there is any recourse to funding available to people wishing to buy a pub in their village in the context of the closure of the Community Ownership Fund.

**Alex Norris:**

Community groups seeking funding to preserve community assets, including community pubs, can continue to use the guidance and tools available through the Community Ownership Fund development support provider on the [MyCommunity](#) site.

These tools have been designed to help any organisation seeking to save an asset that is important to them and their local community and will remain available beyond the programme. The development support provider may also be able to help to suggest alternative sources of funding that organisations could look to secure.

This Government remains committed to the communities' sector and to community empowerment. The Devolution White Paper, which was published on 16 December 2024, set out plans which demonstrate our commitment. There will be further announcements relating to communities this year, including on the community ownership of assets.

**■ Council Tax****Gregory Stafford:**[\[28823\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of adding more brackets on the Council Tax band system for the highest value homes.

**Jim McMahon:**

The government currently has no plans to reform council tax. The Government is committed to keeping taxes on working people as low as possible.

**■ Devolution: Cornwall****Ben Maguire:**[\[28793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Prime Minister's oral response to the hon. Member for North Cornwall during Prime Minister's Questions on 16 October 2024, if she will meet with hon. Members representing Cornish constituencies.

**Jim McMahon:**

The Deputy Prime Minister held a meeting with all six Cornish Members of Parliament on 17 December 2024. There has also been a significant number of meetings with Cornish MPs individually and collectively with government ministers.

**■ High Rise Flats: Fire Prevention****James McMurdock:**[\[28757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to improve fire safety in (a) new and (b) existing high-rise buildings in Essex.

**Alex Norris:**

The Building Safety Act 2022 established a comprehensive regulatory framework for fire and structural safety to ensure homes are safe now and in the years to come. A key part of this included the establishment of the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) to oversee new and existing higher-risk buildings, as well as the introduction of new legal duties to ensure there is someone clearly responsible for safety during the design, build and occupation of these buildings across England.

For occupied higher-risk buildings, those responsible must report safety issues, maintain a 'golden thread' of information, produce a safety case report to demonstrate safety risks are being effectively managed, and engage residents to support ongoing risk management. BSR uses the building assessment certificate process to determine whether dutyholders are meeting specific legal duties, and whether they are taking all reasonable steps to manage building safety risks. The BSR began directing applications for building assessments in April 2024.

Since the Grenfell Tower fire, significant updates have been made to fire safety regulations and guidance within Approved Document B to improve safety standards for new buildings. New Measures for residents include a ban on combustible materials in and on the external wall of buildings over 18m, provisions for sprinklers in buildings over 11m, second staircases in high-rise buildings over 18m.

**Homelessness: Taxis****Jim Shannon:**[\[28477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much her Department has spent on taxi expenses for homeless people in the last 12 months.

**Rushanara Ali:**

The Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) is allocated to councils across England based on local homelessness pressures and is used to meet local needs.

HPG funding allocations for the period 2023 through 2025 are available online and can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-prevention-grant-2023-to-2025>

Local authorities can use their funding flexibly to support homeless households.

MHCLG does not hold any data on the proportion of funding that was allocated to taxi expenses.

**Lead: Paint****Terry Jermy:**[\[28817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department is taking steps to help remove lead paint in older homes.

**Terry Jermy:** [\[28818\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department is taking steps to remove toxic lead pipes in housing in (a) England, (b) East Anglia and (c) South West Norfolk constituency.

**Alex Norris:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to Questions UIN [27855](#) on 6 February 2025.

## ■ Local Government Finance

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[29473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to ensure the provision of adequate funding for demand-led local government services in the next spending review.

**Jim McMahon:**

We recognise the challenges that local authorities are facing as demand increases for critical services. Funding allocations from future settlements are subject to the outcome of future Spending Reviews.

The final Settlement for 2025-26 therefore makes available over £69 billion for local government, which is a 6.8% cash terms increase in councils' Core Spending Power on 2024-25.

We are also taking immediate action to begin addressing the significant challenges facing local government by ensuring that funding goes to the places that need it most in 2025-26.

The Ministry works closely with local government and other government departments to understand specific demand and cost pressures facing local government on an ongoing basis.

## ■ Local Government Finance: Northumberland

**Emma Foody:** [\[29645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the core spending power allocation was to Northumberland County Council in (a) 2010-11, (b) 2017-18, (c) 2019-20, (d) 2023-24 and (e) 2025-26.

**Emma Foody:** [\[29646\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the core spending power allocation was to North Tyneside Council in (a) 2010-11, (b) 2017-18, (c) 2019-20, (d) 2023-24 and (e) 2025-26.

**Emma Foody:** [\[29647\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will publish the Core Spending Power allocation to Newcastle City Council for the years (a) 2010-11, (b) 2017-18, (c) 2019-20, (d) 2023-24 and (e) 2025-26.



**Jim McMahon:**

As part of the final Local Government Finance Settlement 2025-26, announced on 5 February, the government published the latest Core Spending Power figures which are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-spending-power-table-final-local-government-finance-settlement-2024-to-2025>

Included within the tables are figures for allocations dating back to 2015. Due to changes in the function and financing of local government, comparable data is not available prior to 2015-16.

**Local Government: Devolution****James McMurdock:****[29689]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Devolution Priority Programme on levels of (a) voter engagement and (b) democratic participation in future elections.

**James McMurdock:****[29690]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to ensure that local councils remain accountable to residents under the Devolution Priority Programme.

**Jim McMahon:**

On 5 February, the Deputy Prime Minister confirmed that the Government will be taking Greater Essex (Essex County Council, Thurrock Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council) forward on the Devolution Priority Programme. The government also agreed that, for Essex County Council and Thurrock Council, postponing local elections from May 2025 to May 2026 is essential for the delivery of the Devolution Priority Programme and complementary local government reorganisation ahead of Mayoral elections.

The Government has also set out in its manifesto several commitments to increase participation in democracy, including introducing votes at 16 for all elections, improving registration, reviewing and amending the voter ID rules, and strengthening the political finance framework.

A Government consultation entitled "Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England" is currently seeking views on proposed measures to strengthen the standards framework, including the introduction of the sanction of suspension. The proposed reforms aim to deliver greater accountability and public confidence that local authorities will uphold the highest standards of conduct.

**Chris Coghlan:****[29743]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, what

checks and balances there will be on directly-elected Mayors when strategic authorities are implemented.

**Chris Coghlan:** [\[29746\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing assemblies akin to the London Assembly for each Strategic Authority.

**Jim McMahon:**

There is an existing system of accountability and scrutiny arrangements for Mayoral Combined Authorities and Mayoral Combined County Authorities to ensure that public spending is achieving value for money.

The government is committed to strengthening the accountability and scrutiny arrangements that will enable central government, Mayors, and Combined Authorities to shift gear into a new mode of genuine partnership. The English Devolution White Paper set out how the government plans to go further.

## ■ Local Government: Reorganisation

**Sir Oliver Dowden:** [\[28524\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the English Devolution White Paper, CP 1218, published on 16 December 2024, what plans she has to introduce legislative proposals for a ministerial directive to allow the creation of Strategic Authorities.

**Jim McMahon:**

The English Devolution White Paper set out the government's ambition for universal coverage of Strategic Authorities with access to devolution in England. We are committed to introducing the English Devolution Bill in this session, subject to parliamentary time. We will legislate for a ministerial power of direction, previously referred to as a ministerial directive, enabling government to create Strategic Authorities in any remaining places where local leaders have not been able to agree a route to devolution and ensure the effective running of public services. The government is fully committed to working in partnership with local authorities, and the Secretary of State will only use this power when other routes to devolution have been exhausted.

**Chris Coghlan:** [\[29773\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she plans to take to ensure there will be no devolution islands following the reorganisation of local government.

**Jim McMahon:**

I refer my Hon Member to the answer I gave to UIN [26698](#) on the 3rd February 2025.

## ■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Written Questions

**Helen Morgan:**

[\[29542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when she plans to respond to Question 24712, tabled on 17 January 2025.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to Question UIN 24712 on 12 February.

## ■ Park Homes: Sales

**Lewis Cocking:**

[\[28107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her planned timetable is for publishing a Government response to the report entitled The impact of a change in the maximum park home sale commission, published on 16 June 2022.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to Question UIN [5693](#) on 7 October 2024.

## ■ Planning Permission

**Helen Morgan:**

[\[24712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to ensure that councils have adequate resources to enforce planning decisions.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government appreciate that planning departments across the country are experiencing challenges with recruitment, retention, and skills gaps and that in many cases these issues are having a negative impact on service delivery.

At the Budget, the Chancellor announced a £46 million package of investment into the planning system as a one-year settlement for 2025-2026. A proportion of this funding will be used to support capacity and capability in local planning authorities, including the recruitment and training of 300 graduate and apprentice planners and developing the skills needed to implement reforms and unlock housing delivery.

This will be further underpinned by increases in planning fees that will help improve the resourcing of planning application services, so that local planning authorities can fund the skills they need.

More broadly, the Department's established Planning Capacity and Capability programme is also developing a wider programme of support, working with partners across the planning sector, to ensure that local planning authorities have the skills and capacity they need, both now and in the future, to modernise local plans and speed up decision making, including through innovative use of digital planning data and software.

It is for local planning authorities to ensure they have the resources in place to carry out their planning enforcement function.

### ■ **Planning: Nature Conservation**

**Gregory Stafford:** [\[28783\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that National Planning Policy reforms protect (a) nature and (b) wildlife.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The revised National Planning Policy Framework we published on 12 December 2024 included several changes designed to enhance and protect the environment. For example, it expects developments to provide net gains for biodiversity, including through incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs.

### ■ **Proof of Identity: Children**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[29928\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many 16 year olds have photographic identification recognised under the Elections Act 2022.

**Rushanara Ali:**

As our manifesto made clear, the government will address the inconsistencies in the voter identification policy so that all legitimate electors are able to vote. As part of our continuing assessment and review of the policy we are in the process of researching ID ownership amongst 16 and 17 year olds ahead of the franchise change planned for this parliament. If any changes to the voter identification policy are found to be necessary or appropriate, we will bring forward proposals for them in due course.

### ■ **Radicalism**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[26030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the oral contribution of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government of 22 January 2025, Official Report, Column 867, on Community Engagement Principles and Extremism Definition, if he will (a) publish the members of the steering group, (b) publish when it has met and (c) place copies of the minutes of each meeting in the Library.

**Alex Norris:**

This information will be published in due course.

## ■ Right to Buy Scheme

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[28054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 16195 on Right to Buy Scheme, if she will publish figures for the amount of Right to Buy receipts retained by local authorities in each individual year since 2009-10.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The Department does not publish the amount of Right to Buy receipts retained by local authorities in each financial year.

## JUSTICE

## ■ Child Trust Fund

**John Milne:**

[\[28782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make it her policy to allow release of Child Trust Funds to family members where those funds are inaccessible to disabled children unable to manage their finances.

**John Milne:**

[\[29206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she plans to take to resolve the issue where Child Trust Funds are inaccessible to disabled children who have been assessed as lacking the mental capacity to manage their own finances.

**Sarah Sackman:**

Where a young adult lacks mental capacity, including due to a disability, the law requires parents or a guardian to have legal authority to make decisions on their behalf about financial assets or property. This includes in relation to accessing funds held in a Child Trust Fund.

On 9 June 2023, the Ministry of Justice published the Making Financial Decisions for young people: parent and carer toolkit explaining the process by which parents and guardians of disabled children are able to obtain legal authority if no other arrangements are in place. This can be done by making an application to the Court of Protection for an order authorising access to monies held in a Child Trust Fund or Junior ISA. The toolkit is available on Gov.UK.

We understand that concerns remain. We are considering the options for improving access to matured Child Trust Funds while balancing the need to maintain safeguards and protect the best interests of individuals that lack capacity.

## ■ Criminal Injuries Compensation

**Laurence Turner:** [\[29946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 08 July 2019 to Question 261492, on Criminal Injuries Compensation, if she will publish the same information for each year since 2017-18.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The information in the table below sets out the criminal injuries compensation spend for each of the years shown (as published in the CICA Annual Report and Accounts). It does not include compensation awarded under the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Compensation Scheme.

YEAR	COMPENSATION SPEND
2017/18	£155,840,000
2018/19	£130,359,000
2019/20	£194,839,000
2020/21	£153,367,000
2021/22	£158,192,000
2022/23	£173,089,000
2023/24	£164,620,000

## ■ Custody

**James Cartlidge:** [\[29532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what percentage of child custody disputes resulted in custody being awarded to the father in the latest year for which figures are available.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

His Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service does not centrally hold this data, this could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

## ■ Family Courts: Legal Aid Scheme

**Mrs Elsie Blundell:** [\[28673\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to ensure legal aid is accessible to people using the family courts in the North West.

**Sarah Sackman:**

With regards to scope, in private family proceedings, legal aid is available for matters such as child arrangements, financial remedy proceedings and divorce if an individual is a victim of domestic abuse or is at risk of being abused.

Legal aid is also available in certain private family proceedings if a child is a victim of child abuse or at risk of abuse. Funding is subject to providing the required evidence of domestic abuse or child abuse as specified in legal aid legislation and meeting the relevant merits and financial eligibility criteria.

A financial eligibility waiver is available for victims of domestic abuse applying for protective injunctions, such as non-molestation orders, which means they can receive legal aid even if they would not otherwise pass the means test, though they may be required to pay a financial contribution towards their legal costs.

In public family proceedings, means-free legal aid is available for parents, those with parental responsibility, and children in public family law special Children Act's cases, including care proceedings and adoption proceedings under the Children Act 1989 as well as in related proceedings.

Legal aid funded services are provided by independent organisations who hold contracts to carry out legal aid work. The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) is responsible for the commissioning and procurement of these contracts. The LAA is satisfied that there is adequate supply of family law services in the North West of England.

**■ HM Courts and Tribunals Service: Artificial Intelligence****Helen Grant:**[\[29431\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she has plans to increase the use of artificial intelligence in the HM Courts and Tribunals Service.

**Sarah Sackman:**

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.

AI has the potential to enable service improvements across HMCTS, and we are exploring how it can be applied responsibly to our operations and services, including to support document processing, transcription, summarisation and translation. The use of AI in the courts and tribunals will be focused on accelerating and assisting people's work, not automating decisions.

All use of artificial intelligence in the Ministry of Justice is aligned with the AI Playbook for the UK Government and the Algorithmic Transparency Reporting Standard. The Lady Chief Justice and Senior President of Tribunals issued AI Guidance for the judiciary in December 2023.

**■ Marriage: Relatives****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[29556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Justice on the potential merits of banning first cousin marriage.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

As I stated in my answer of 5 February, the Government will consider existing marriage law, including the Law Commission's 2022 wedding report, before publicly setting out a position on this important issue.

**NORTHERN IRELAND****■ Police Service of Northern Ireland****Carla Lockhart:**[\[28643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what recent discussions his Department has had with the Police Service of Northern Ireland on (a) staffing levels, (b) recruitment challenges and (c) plans to address workforce shortages.

**Hilary Benn:**

A well staffed and resourced PSNI is vital to the success and stability of Northern Ireland. I regularly engage with the Chief Constable and Justice Minister on issues of shared interest and concern.

The UK Government's Autumn budget delivered a record £18.2 billion for the Northern Ireland Executive in FY 2025/26 – the largest settlement in real terms in the history of devolution.

Policing in Northern Ireland, apart from national security, is a devolved matter and the allocation of budget to the PSNI is a matter for the Northern Ireland Department of Justice (DoJ). I am aware that the DoJ is continuing to work closely with the Chief Constable and his team to build a robust case for the funding required to recover workforce numbers over the course of the current mandate.

We continue to support the PSNI and recognising the unique security situation in Northern Ireland, the UK Government will provide the PSNI with £37.8 million in Additional Security Funding in 2025/26, an increase from c£32m a year.

**■ Small Businesses: Northern Ireland****Jim Shannon:**[\[28923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Executive on small businesses sourcing material.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Windsor Framework established a broad set of arrangements to support Great Britain-based businesses to move goods to Northern Ireland, including to small businesses based in Northern Ireland.



Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and are front and centre of the Government's growth mission. The Government is committed to supporting the Executive as it works to generate economic growth. In support of that, I hold regular discussions with ministers and political parties in the Assembly, as well as with businesses and their representative bodies.

#### ■ **Terrorism: Northern Ireland**

**Carla Lockhart:**

[\[28644\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether his Department plans to take steps to commission a public inquiry into the Kingsmill shooting of 5 January 1976.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Coroner in the Kingsmill Inquest delivered clear and detailed findings on 12 April 2024, setting out that this was a horrific and sectarian terrorist atrocity carried out by the IRA with absolutely no justification.

While these findings will have provided important information to the families, I also recognise that there remain unanswered questions. We now await the publication of the Police Ombudsman's report into the Kingsmill shootings.

I would encourage any family still seeking answers in respect of this or any other Troubles-related death or serious injury to speak to the independent Commission about how they might be able to help.

#### ■ **Trade Barriers: Northern Ireland**

**Bradley Thomas:**

[\[28391\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps he is taking to reduce trade barriers between Northern Ireland and (a) Bromsgrove and (b) other parts of Great Britain.

**Hilary Benn:**

This Government is committed to implementing the Windsor Framework in good faith, to taking all steps necessary to protect the UK internal market, and to taking forward Safeguarding the Union. The Windsor Framework ensures Northern Ireland's businesses have unfettered access to their most important market in Great Britain, including Bromsgrove, and the UK internal market system is helping to smooth the flow of trade from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

We are also seeking a veterinary/SPS agreement with the EU, which would further remove barriers to the movement of animal, food and plant products across the Irish Sea.

**■ USA: Northern Ireland****Carla Lockhart:** [\[28648\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what plans he has to engage with the President of the United States to promote (a) trade, (b) investment and (c) cultural links with Northern Ireland.

**Hilary Benn:**

I hope to visit the US soon to build on the already strong partnership between the US and Northern Ireland - and indeed the whole of the UK - including in the crucial areas of trade and investment. The US has been pivotal in supporting peace, stability and prosperity for Northern Ireland, and we will continue working together, with the support of our Embassy in the US, to make Northern Ireland a great place to live, work and do business.

**SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY****■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]****David Taylor:** [\[902721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to make government digital services accessible to people without strong digital skills.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Government Digital Service supports and incentivises departments to design digital services that are simple and easy to use. The Service Manual provides patterns to help departments design both online services for people with limited digital literacy and offline channels to support users, such as in person support at Post Offices for OneLogin.

**Kevin Bonavia:** [\[902722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to make government digital services accessible to people in rural areas.

**Chris Bryant:**

The new digital centre exists to enable Departments to deliver digital public services that work for everyone. GDS guide, monitor and assure all digital public services, incentivising departments to provide support for service users with low digital skills or limited access to the web.

Through Project Gigabit and the Shared Rural Network, we are continuing to deliver broadband and mobile connectivity to hard-to-reach areas with limited or low coverage.

**Anna Sabine:**

[\[902723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of rural broadband coverage.

**Mr Peter Bedford:**

[\[902724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the roll out of broadband in rural areas.

**Chris Bryant:**

Our assessment is that rural coverage is not good enough which is why we are committed to improving it.

We are committed to delivering nationwide gigabit coverage by 2030. More than £2 billion of contracts have been signed to provide access to gigabit-capable broadband to over a million more premises. The vast majority of the premises to be covered by these contracts will be in rural areas.

## ■ Artificial Intelligence

**Alan Mak:**

[\[28511\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, when Matt Clifford submitted the AI Opportunities Action Plan to his Department.

**Alan Mak:**

[\[28512\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether the AI Opportunities Action Plan submitted by Matt Clifford was edited by his Department before publication.

**Alan Mak:**

[\[28513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department requested changes to the AI Opportunities Action Plan.

**Alan Mak:**

[\[28514\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he made an impact assessment before publication of the AI Opportunities Action Plan.

**Feryal Clark:**

The AI Opportunities Action Plan was an independent report delivered by Matt Clifford CBE, who engaged widely across AI startups, industry leaders, academia and civil society. Matt Clifford regularly updated ministers on progress before submitting the final plan which was published on 13<sup>th</sup> January alongside the Government response setting out the steps departments would take to implement the 50 recommendations. As is usual practice, the impact of these recommendations would be assessed when they are about to be introduced.

**Alan Mak:**

[\[28515\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what meetings he has had with the AI industry since 5 July 2024.

**Feryal Clark:**

We are committed to building an AI sector that can scale and win globally, ensuring global AI companies want to call the UK home, and boosting the responsible adoption of AI across all parts of the economy. The AI Opportunities Action Plan sets out how we will achieve our AI ambitions.

The AI Opportunities Action Plan, which was developed by Matt Clifford, has been informed by a series of external roundtables with experts from across the AI ecosystem, including civil society, academia, investors, and industry. All external meetings with Ministers are listed on the gov.uk website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ministerial-quarterly-transparency-return-2023-2024>

**■ Artificial Intelligence: Fraud****Euan Stainbank:****[28732]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to help protect consumers from (a) deepfake technology, (b) AI-generated phishing scams and (c) other fraud enabled by artificial intelligence.

**Feryal Clark:**

Government takes the threats posed by generative AI extremely seriously. That is why we are taking forward our manifesto commitment to ban the creation of non-consensual sexual deepfakes in the Data (Use and Access) Bill.

AI-generated content is captured by the Online Safety Act where it constitutes illegal content or content harmful to children on an in-scope service. Fraud is designated a priority offence under the Act, and in-scope services will need to take proactive measures to tackle illegal fraud content.

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology also works jointly with the Home Office and HM Treasury through the Joint Fraud Taskforce to address fraud across different sectors.

**■ Artificial Intelligence: Public Sector****Mr Richard Holden:****[29536]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the press release entitled Shake up of tech and AI usage across NHS and other public services to deliver plan for change, published on 21 January 2025, on what evidential basis the press release said that removing the need to queue to register a death would boost growth.

**Feryal Clark:**

There was an initial error in publishing on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) which omitted the reference below to getting driving licences for lorries. This has now been amended.

The press notice that was distributed to journalists read as follows:

“It will do away with insensitive and antiquated processes that have been holding this country back for too long. That means scrapping the need for people to queue at the local council to register the death of a loved one, and doing away with the need to post an advert in your local paper if you want to get a license to drive a lorry – getting in the way of growth.”

## ■ Artificial Intelligence: Visual Impairment

**Mr Luke Charters:**

[\[28789\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of allowing the use of Look and Tell AI glasses for people with visual impairment.

**Feryal Clark:**

AI has the potential to transform everyday life, making services quicker, smarter and more efficient. Embracing AI will directly improve the lives of everyone by personalising services and supporting better outcomes, including those with visual impairments.

The AI Opportunities Action Plan sets out our plans to exploit the potential of AI to positively impact the lives of the British public. For example, the government is adopting a flexible “Scan, Pilot, Scale” approach and delivering mission-focussed national AI tenders to ensure effective and lasting adoption in the public sector.

While we deliver the Plan, we also encourage regulators to take a pro-innovation approach within their sectors, with the new Regulatory Innovation Office having an important role to play across all sectors.

We will continue to work closely with the AI sector and experts to ensure we are aligning innovative outcomes with our world-leading standards and expectations.

## ■ Arts

**Alan Mak:**

[\[28516\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what meetings he has held with the creative industries since 5 July 2024.

**Feryal Clark:**

Ministers, special advisers, and officials have regular meetings with a range of stakeholders, details of ministerial meetings are published quarterly on the gov.uk website.

## ■ British Telecom: Directories

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[28474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions she with BT on the potential impact of the withdrawal of BT's free (a) online and (b) physical directories on (i) the elderly and (ii) people in digital poverty.

**Chris Bryant:**

Ofcom is responsible for ensuring that UK consumers have access to directory and directory information services. Ofcom does not specify the form of the directory.

The Department has not had discussions with BT around the withdrawal of its physical directories or their free online directory. We understand from a public statement made by BT that it took a decision to withdraw these due to a lack of demand and the environmental impact of printing and distributing hard copies.

BT provides free downloadable A-Z directory on their website; hard copies can be purchased online. BT offers a free service, called [195](#) for users with certain additional needs.

**■ Cybersecurity: Finance**

**Alan Mak:** [\[28517\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what funding was allocated to each Cyber Local project announced on 8 January 2025.

**Feryal Clark:**

Cyber Local is a UK government scheme to deliver tailored support for the cyber security sector across regions of England and Northern Ireland. It is part of the government's work to kickstart economic growth and ensure good jobs, skills and growth benefit every part of the country. £1.9 million of funding will be shared by 31 projects, details of which can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cyber-local-projects-2025>

The downloadable spreadsheet indicates whether the project focuses on skills, resilience or innovation.

**■ Internet: Safety**

**Ben Obese-Jecty:** [\[28614\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what the evidential basis is for the Category 1 threshold of 34 million average monthly active United Kingdom users in the Online Safety Act 2023.

**Ben Obese-Jecty:** [\[28615\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how his Department determined the category 2A threshold of seven million average monthly active UK users in the Online Safety Act 2023.

**Ben Obese-Jecty:** [\[28616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how his Department determined the category 2B threshold of three million average monthly active UK users in the Online Safety Act 2023.

**Feryal Clark:**

In March 2024, Ofcom published research and advice on categorisation, as required by the Online Safety Act. Ofcom's advice can be found at the following web address: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/categorisation-research-and-advice/>. In April 2024, Ofcom published a letter which provides some clarification on the approach that Ofcom took to developing its proposals and the results of the testing of threshold options. This letter can be found at the following web address: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/about-ofcom/public-correspondence/2024/04-24-letter-melanie-dawes-categorisation.pdf?v=322334>. On 16 December, the Secretary of State laid regulations in line with Ofcom's recommendations.

**Radio Frequencies****Mr Mark Francois:****[29878]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether the International Telecommunication Union has legal authority over the allocation of (a) military and (b) civilian spectrums.

**Mr Mark Francois:****[29880]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether the International Telecommunication Union has ever challenged the use of civilian spectrum by the (a) UK and (b) US.

**Mr Mark Francois:****[29884]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether the International Telecommunication Union has ever challenged the use of military spectrum by the (a) UK and (b) US.

**Chris Bryant:**

Individual countries have the sovereign right to manage and use the radio spectrum, within their borders, the way they wish, subject to not causing interference with other countries. This right is recognised in the Radio Regulations. The Radio Regulations are the international framework for the use of spectrum by radiocommunication services, defined and managed by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). Individual countries, not the ITU, make their own sovereign spectrum assignments in accordance with the Radio Regulations. The ITU has no legal authority over these assignments regardless of the country's civilian or military classification of spectrum.

The ITU cannot challenge the UK's use of civilian or military spectrum. It is possible that one country could challenge another's spectrum use, for instance if it should cause harmful interference across borders, and if unresolved bilaterally could seek arbitration through an ITU body (Radio Regulations Board).

**■ Research: Expenditure****David Reed:****[R] [902726]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department has set a target for research and development expenditure in 2030.

**Feryal Clark:**

Departmental budgets are currently set up to the end of financial year 2025/26. The government is currently in the middle of a Spending Review, which will set out the government's spending plans for R&D through to 2029/30. This will conclude in June 2025.

At the Autumn Budget 2024, the Chancellor confirmed that total HMG investment in R&D is rising to a record allocation of £20.4bn in 2025/26. As part of this, DSIT's R&D budget is rising to £13.9bn for the 2025/26 financial year.

**■ Space Debris****Mark Garnier:****[28495]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what his planned timetable is for publishing the Active Debris Removal Programme.

**Chris Bryant:**

Active Debris Removal (ADR) is a core part of in-orbit servicing, assembly and manufacturing capabilities to support safe, secure and sustainable access to space. The Government recently awarded £4.7 million to Astroscale and ClearSpace to understand the risks and costs of an ADR mission to rendezvous with and deorbit two UK-licensed satellites. The UK Space Agency is developing the business case for Phase 3 of the ADR programme which, if successful, will be published for tender in mid-2025 to prepare for mission launch in 2028. Any future phase will be subject to funding decisions which will be taken through the Spending Review.

**■ Space Technology: Cornwall****Jayne Kirkham:****[29853]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to support the space industry in Cornwall.

**Chris Bryant:**

During the current spending period, the Government has invested over £6.9 million to support the Cornwall region to develop its local space capabilities, enabling Spaceport Cornwall to conduct the first ever orbital launch attempt from UK soil and supporting Goonhilly Earth Station Ltd to deliver deep space commercial services. The cluster is also being supported to attract investment from international space companies, and progress Cornwall's strategic ambitions to become a global leader in satellite operations and communications and the testing and development of spaceflight systems.



## ■ Telecommunications: China

**Mr Mark Francois:**

[\[29883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the influence of China within (a) the International Telecommunication Union, (b) the Third Generation Partnership Project and (c) other international telecommunications standards-setting bodies on (i) UK national security and (ii) the five eyes intelligence alliance.

**Chris Bryant:**

Upholding national security remains the first duty of this government. The UK takes an active role in organisations including the International Telecommunication Union and the Third Generation Partnership Project, to shape standards to serve innovation while mitigating risks to the security of emerging technologies. We recognise that other states, including China, may seek to shape standards development in ways that differ to UK values. We need to co-operate with China where we can, while challenging where necessary. To safeguard our democratic societies, we are taking steps with our allies to promote the international rules-based system that underpins our security.

## SCOTLAND

### ■ Defence: Scotland

**Andrew Bowie:**

[\[28956\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what assessment he has made of the contribution of Scottish-based defence industries to the UK's national security.

**Ian Murray:**

The first duty of the Government is to keep the country secure and our communities safe - a duty all my Cabinet colleagues take very seriously. This is why the Prime Minister launched the Strategic Defence Review to ensure that we are prepared for the challenges of the future, part of which Scottish-based defence industries will play a key role in.

Scottish-based defence industries are crucial to the UK's national security. I regularly engage with the defence, aerospace, and security sectors in Scotland to understand the current landscape of their work and how it contributes to the UK's broader national security picture. I recently hosted a defence industry roundtable to discuss sector priorities and opportunities, including regional economic development and employment.

**Andrew Bowie:**

[\[28957\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what steps he is taking to support defence-related job creation in Scotland.

**Ian Murray:**

I have regular discussions with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) on supporting Scotland's defence sector, which makes a vital contribution to the economies of both Scotland and the UK.

In 2022/23, the MoD supported 11,200 direct jobs in Scotland through expenditure with industry, and supported 25,600 civilian and military jobs. Under the new Defence Industrial Strategy, UK-based defence firms, including those in Scotland, will be prioritised for government investment.

I maintain regular dialogue with Scotland's defence, aerospace, and security sectors and recently hosted a defence industry roundtable to discuss sector priorities and opportunities, including regional economic development and employment.

Additionally, as part of Brand Scotland, I have been promoting the Scottish defence industry in Norway and in South-East Asia, where I visited HMS Spey, constructed by BAE Systems on the Clyde.

**Andrew Bowie:**[\[28959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what assessment he has made of the impact of the UK defence sector on Scotland's economy.

**Ian Murray:**

Scotland's aerospace, defence, security, and space sectors contribute significantly to both the Scottish and UK economies, contributing £3.2 billion in 2023 as well as directly employing 33,500 people and 1,500 apprentices.

Latest figures show that the Ministry of Defence's expenditure with Scottish industry was £2,140 million in 2023/24. Defence spending in Scotland, including military shipbuilding, generates and maintains high-skilled jobs, creates opportunities for inward investment and drives exports, benefiting both Scotland and the wider UK economy.

I recently hosted a defence industry roundtable to discuss sector priorities and opportunities, including regional economic development and employment.

**■ Electric Cables: Scotland****Andrew Bowie:**[\[28948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on (a) underground and (b) subsea cabling for energy transmission in rural Scotland.

**Ian Murray:**

I engage regularly with my colleague, the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on a variety of issues.

My Ministerial colleagues and I continue to engage regularly with all parts of the energy sector in Scotland.

The UK Government is committed to delivering our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, which will require investment in and expansion of our transmission network. We will work with all interested parties to deliver our plan, which will guarantee energy security, lower bills, and good jobs across the UK.

**■ Energy Supply: Scotland****Andrew Bowie:**[\[28950\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, whether his Department plans to take steps to ensure that energy transmission projects in Scotland prioritise community engagement.

**Ian Murray:**

My Ministerial colleagues and I continue to engage regularly with all parts of the energy sector in Scotland.

The UK Government is committed to delivering our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, which will require investment in and expansion of our transmission network. We will work with all interested parties to deliver our plan, which will guarantee energy security, lower bills, and good jobs across the UK.

**Andrew Bowie:**[\[28951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing Government support for mitigating the (a) visual and (b) environmental impact of new energy transmission infrastructure in Scotland.

**Ian Murray:**

The UK Government is committed to delivering our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, which will require investment in and expansion of our transmission network. We will work with all interested parties to deliver our plan, which will guarantee energy security, lower bills, and good jobs across the UK.

**Andrew Bowie:**[\[28954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, if he will make representations to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero to ensure that all future energy transmission infrastructure projects in Scotland align with best practices for (a) environmental protection and (b) rural development.

**Ian Murray:**

I engage regularly with my colleague, the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on a variety of issues.

My Ministerial colleagues and I continue to engage regularly with all parts of the energy sector in Scotland.

The UK Government is committed to delivering our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, which will require investment in and expansion of our transmission network. We will work with all interested parties to deliver our plan, which will guarantee energy security, lower bills, and good jobs across the UK.

### ■ **Military Bases: Scotland**

**Andrew Bowie:** [\[28955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on the future of military bases in Scotland.

**Ian Murray:**

Scotland's military personnel and our strategic bases, including HMNB Clyde and RAF Lossiemouth, play a crucial role in defending the whole of the UK and our NATO Allies. Scotland hosts 17 regular Armed Forces sites, 7 Royal Navy operated sites and two key RAF bases, representing a significant portion of the UK's defence estate.

I engage regularly with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) on a range of issues and my department has a close, positive relationship with the UK Armed Forces in Scotland. I recently hosted a defence industry roundtable, together with senior members of the Armed Forces, to discuss sector priorities and opportunities, including regional economic development and employment.

Last year, the Prime Minister commissioned a Strategic Defence Review to examine the strategic and operational context for the UK's defence. As part of that Review, I wrote to the Defence Secretary to highlight Scotland's important and ongoing role in the UK's defence capabilities, including the importance of our key military bases. The continued presence of the Armed Forces in Scotland will continue to be important to our overall security and defence.

### ■ **Navy: Scotland**

**Andrew Bowie:** [\[28958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on the role of Scottish shipyards in fulfilling future Royal Navy procurement contracts.

**Ian Murray:**

My Department engages regularly with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) on a range of issues.

Scottish shipyards play a key role in fulfilling Royal Navy procurement contracts. The commitments set out in the National Shipbuilding Strategy have enabled MoD investment in Scotland's yards both at Rosyth and on the Clyde.

BAE Systems in Glasgow is constructing eight Type 26 frigates, which will form the Anti-Submarine Warfare backbone of the future Royal Navy surface fleet into the 2060s.

Simultaneously, Babcock in Rosyth is building five Type 31 frigates to replace the Navy's Type 23 general purpose frigates. This investment ensures Rosyth's shipbuilding capability and capacity can be optimised to support further opportunities.

In late 2024, I had the pleasure of visiting both BAE Systems in Govan and Babcock's Rosyth dockyard to witness the progress of these two key UK Government defence programmes. I also recently hosted a defence industry roundtable to discuss sector priorities and opportunities, including regional economic development and employment.

## ■ Police Scotland

**Andrew Bowie:**

[\[29093\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, when he (a) last met with and (b) plans to next meet with the Chief Constable of Police Scotland.

**Ian Murray:**

I meet regularly with Chief Constable Jo Farrell and discuss with her the wide range of issues facing Police Scotland, as well as sharing our mutual priorities and helping to develop understanding of how the UK Government can support the organisation.

One of the Prime Minister's Missions is to halve serious violent crime and raise confidence in the police and criminal justice system. While Crime and Justice is devolved to Scotland, I share this ambition for Scotland and want to support Police Scotland however possible.

My last meeting with the Chief Constable took place in December 2024 and the next is scheduled for April 2025.

## ■ Pylons: Scotland

**Andrew Bowie:**

[\[28945\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what discussions he has had with (a) the Scottish Government and (b) energy transmission companies on the impact of proposed electricity pylons on rural communities in Scotland.

**Ian Murray:**

I engage regularly with my counterparts in the Scottish Government on a variety of issues.

My Ministerial colleagues and I continue to engage regularly with all parts of the energy sector in Scotland.

The UK Government is committed to delivering our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, which will require investment in and expansion of our transmission network. We will work with all interested parties to deliver our plan, which will guarantee energy security, lower bills, and create good jobs across the UK. We will ensure that these changes are made in partnership with communities across Scotland.

**Andrew Bowie:** [\[28946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of new electricity transmission infrastructure on the (a) economy and (b) environment of rural Scotland.

**Ian Murray:**

My officials work closely with colleagues in the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to ensure the needs of Scottish people are represented in policy development.

My Ministerial colleagues and I continue to engage regularly with all parts of the energy sector in Scotland.

The UK Government is committed to delivering our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, which will require investment in and expansion of our transmission network. We will work with all interested parties to deliver our plan, which will guarantee energy security, lower bills, and good jobs across the UK.

**Andrew Bowie:** [\[28949\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, whether he has received representations from local authorities in Scotland on the proposed expansion of electricity transmission infrastructure in rural areas.

**Ian Murray:**

My Ministerial colleagues and I continue to engage regularly with local authorities in Scotland across a wide range of issues.

The UK Government is committed to delivering our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, which will require investment in and expansion of our transmission network. We will work with all interested parties to deliver our plan, which will guarantee energy security, lower bills, and good jobs across the UK.

**Andrew Bowie:** [\[28952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, if he will have discussions with with (a) National Grid and (b) Scottish transmission operators on technological solutions to reduce the need for overhead pylons in Scotland's rural landscapes.

**Ian Murray:**

My Ministerial colleagues and I continue to engage regularly with all parts of the energy sector in Scotland.

The UK Government is committed to delivering our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, which will require investment in and expansion of our transmission network. We will

work with all interested parties to deliver our plan, which will guarantee energy security, lower bills, and good jobs across the UK.

## ■ **Scottish Ambulance Service**

**Andrew Bowie:**

[\[29095\]](#)

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 Ambulance Service.

**Ian Murray:**

The Scottish Ambulance Service provides a vital, lifesaving service to the people of Scotland.

Health is a devolved matter, and the Scottish Government funds and oversees the work of the Scottish Ambulance Service. The UK Government engages regularly with the Scottish Government on overall matters of security and multi-agency collaboration across Scotland and the UK, including the work of rescue service agencies.

The UK Government is committed to working closely with the Scottish Government and other agencies to ensure that the safety, health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland is protected and prioritised.

## ■ **Scottish Fire and Rescue Service**

**Andrew Bowie:**

[\[29094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, when he (a) last met with and (b) plans to next meet with the Chief Officer of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

**Ian Murray:**

The Scottish Fire & Rescue Service provides a vital service to the people of Scotland.

The Scottish Government funds and oversees the work of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. The UK Government engages regularly with the Scottish Government on overall matters of security and multi-agency collaboration across Scotland and the UK, including the work of rescue service agencies.

The key responsibility of any government is to ensure the safety of its citizens. The UK Government is committed to working closely with the Scottish Government to ensure that the people of Scotland are supported by the emergency services available to them.

**■ Transport: Northern Ireland****Andrew Bowie:**[\[29084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of Northern Irish-Scottish connectivity by (a) road, (b) sea, (c) air and (d) rail.

**Ian Murray:**

There is of course currently no direct road or rail travel link between Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Air routes between Northern Ireland and Scotland are a commercial matter, however the UK Government recognises the importance of strong intra-UK travel routes and is committed to working with all parties as appropriate.

The Scottish Government, via Transport Scotland, holds policy responsibility for direct sea travel between Northern Ireland and Scotland. The UK Government respects devolution and is supporting the Scottish Government to deliver, with a record block grant of £47.7bn for 2025/2026 - with a further £3.4bn via the Barnett formula, the largest settlement in real terms since devolution began.

**SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY****■ Members****Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[30472\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Warrington North, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, what recent discussions she has had with IPSA on its definition of an MP's parliamentary duties.

**Charlotte Nichols:**

The Parliamentary Standards Act 2009 provides for IPSA to support MPs in carrying out their parliamentary functions. MPs are therefore required by IPSA to certify that their use of public funds was for the performance of their parliamentary functions, and that in incurring the expenditure they have complied with IPSA's statutory Scheme.

The Scheme is clear in stating that the following examples of activities are not considered parliamentary for the purposes of this Scheme, and are therefore not eligible for IPSA funding:

- attendance at political party conferences or meetings;
- work which is conducted for or at the behest of a political party;
- activities relating to reviews of parliamentary constituency boundaries;



- activities which could be construed as campaign expenditure within the scope of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, or election expenses within the scope of the Representation of the People Act 1983;
- any other activities whose purpose is to give MPs a campaigning advantage in general elections and referendums;
- work relating to delegations to an international assembly;
- or work relating to the performance of ministerial functions

This is not an exhaustive list, and IPSA will assess each item of expenditure on a case-by-case basis, reviewing evidence to ensure that costs relate to the parliamentary functions of the MP and not to personal, party political, campaigning, or other outside organisational activity.

## TRANSPORT

### ■ Agriculture: Biofuels

**Siân Berry:**

[\[28801\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the amount of agricultural land required for bio-aviation fuels to meet (a) existing and (b) potential demand to allow for expansion of (i) Heathrow airport and (ii) other UK airports.

**Mike Kane:**

The Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) mandate scheme is driving the uptake of lower carbon fuels used in aviation. The scheme does not support the supply of biofuels made from food, feed or energy crops. SAF must be made from sustainable wastes or residues (such as used cooking oil or forestry residues), recycled carbon fuels (e.g. unrecyclable plastics), or be power to liquid fuels made using low carbon (renewable or nuclear) electricity. Given these feedstocks do not require land, no estimate has been made of the amount of agricultural land required for bio-aviation fuels, under current or future demands.

### ■ Aviation: Carbon Emissions

**Gareth Bacon:**

[\[29040\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department plans to fund operational trials of zero-emission aircraft.

**Mike Kane:**

As a private sector, the introduction of new forms of aircraft is primarily a matter for industry. The Government is however 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, 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.

## ■ Aviation: Fuels

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[28676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of progress in meeting sustainable aviation fuel targets.

**Mike Kane:**

The sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) Mandate – which came into effect at the start of this year - is the UK's key policy to decarbonise jet fuel. It obligates the supply of an increasing amount of SAF in the overall UK aviation fuel mix; starting at 2% in 2025, reaching 10% in 2030 and 22% in 2040.

The Government has considered feedstock availability and SAF technology readiness in setting targets which are both ambitious and deliverable. To support delivery of the Mandate's targets, we are taking actions to grow supply of SAF. We are providing £135m to support 13 UK SAF projects through the Advanced Fuels Fund and have allocated an additional £63m of funding to March 2026.

The Government has also committed to introduce an industry-funded revenue certainty mechanism.

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[28677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information her Department holds on the proportion of flights (a) to and (b) from the UK that use sustainable fuel.

**Mike Kane:**

I refer the Hon. Member to the Answer given on 5 February 2025 to PQ UIN 26884.

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[28678\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of increasing levels of production of sustainable aviation fuel in Runcorn and Helsby constituency on the environment.

**Mike Kane:**

The Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) Mandate – which came into effect at the start of this year - could deliver up to 6.3 megatonnes of carbon savings per year by 2040. A supply of UK-produced SAF can help deliver those savings.

In England, SAF production facilities require an environmental permit from the Environment Agency in order to operate. The Environment Agency will only grant a permit if it is satisfied that the process would not give rise to any significant pollution of the environment or harm to human health.

**Mike Amesbury:**[\[28679\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to encourage the aviation industry to use more sustainable aviation fuel.

**Mike Kane:**

The SAF Mandate – which came into effect at the start of this year - is the UK's key policy to decarbonise jet fuel. It obligates the supply of an increasing amount of SAF in the overall UK aviation fuel mix; starting at 2% in 2025, reaching 10% in 2030 and 22% in 2040.

We are also taking steps to grow a UK SAF industry. The Advanced fuels Fund (AFF) provides grants to support SAF projects looking to develop large scale production facilities in the UK. We have extended the AFF for a further year to March 2026, with an extra £63m of funding.

The Government has also committed to introduce an industry-funded revenue certainty mechanism. On 29 January 2025, we published our response to the SAF Revenue Certainty Mechanism consultation, confirming that we are proceeding with the guaranteed strike price model.

**■ Aviation: Older People****Connor Naismith:**[\[28741\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to ensure airlines do not discriminate against elderly people who are not able to digitally check-in.

**Mike Kane:**

Nobody should be discriminated against because of their age when travelling by air.

All passengers have the choice to check in for their flight at the airport.

**■ Bus Services: Concessions****Ellie Chowns:**[\[28870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to her predecessor's oral contribution of 18 November 2024, Official Report, column 49, when she plans to make a decision on concessionary bus travel for young people; and what criteria she plans to use.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Bus services are predominantly run on a commercial basis, where private operators decide on the level at which fares are set. Many bus operators offer reduced fares for young people, and the Department for Transport's latest concessionary travel statistics show that in the year ending March 2025, youth concessions are offered by at least one commercial bus operator in 73 out of 85 local authority areas in England outside London.

Local authorities can also introduce fares initiatives in their local areas. The government has allocated £712 million to local authorities to support and improve bus

services in 2025/26 including Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Bus Service Operators Grant funding. BSIP funding can be used in whichever way local authorities wish to improve services for passengers, which could include introducing fares initiatives for young people.

The government is exploring options for targeted fares measures that deliver value for money to the taxpayer, to ensure affordable bus travel is always available for the groups who need it most – such as young people.

## ■ Bus Services: Rural Areas

**Terry Jermy:**

[\[28822\]](#)

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

**Simon Lightwood:**

The government introduced the Bus Services (No.2) Bill on 17 December as part of its ambitious plan for bus reform. The Bill puts the power over local bus services back in the hands of local leaders right across England and is intended to ensure bus services reflect the needs of the communities that rely on them, including in rural areas. The government has committed to increasing accountability by including a measure on socially necessary services so that local authorities and bus operators have to have regard for alternatives to changing or cancelling services.

In addition, the government has confirmed £955 million for the 2025 to 2026 financial year to support and improve bus services in England outside London. This includes £243 million for bus operators and £712 million allocated to local authorities across the country. Local authorities can use this funding to introduce new bus routes, make services more frequent and protect crucial bus routes for local communities.

The Department has funded 16 innovative demand responsive transport (DRT) pilots through the Rural Mobility Fund, including the Flexibus+ scheme around Swaffham. Each scheme is taking part in a detailed monitoring and evaluation process. This will provide a strong base of evidence and good practice for DRT and a better understanding of both the role it can play in rural areas and the challenges associated with introducing it.

## ■ Cars: Testing

**Bradley Thomas:**

[\[28756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the time period between MOTs for privately registered passenger vehicles under ten years of age from one to two years.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The MOT test is a vital part of keeping our roads safe. Many motorists rely on it to identify and fix potentially dangerous faults with their vehicle. Any changes made to the frequency of testing risk increasing the number of serious injuries and fatalities on our roads and must therefore be considered very carefully.

The Department for Transport published a consultation on changing the date of the first MOT test in 2023. Of those who responded 84% opposed changing the date of the first test with the decision made not to change it. The associated call for evidence also asked for opinions on the frequency of testing, and the Department has been considering those responses as part of a wider review of the MOT. In that context there are currently no plans to alter the frequency of MOT testing.

## ■ **Cycle to Work Scheme: Northern Ireland**

**Claire Hanna:**

[\[30163\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 6 February 2025 to Question 27960 on the Cycle to Work Scheme: Northern Ireland and the Answer of 11 October 2024 to Question 5735 on Bicycles: Subsidies, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of working with the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland on improving access to cycles for people excluded from the cycle to work scheme.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Officials from this Department regularly meet with their counterparts from the other parts of the UK, including the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland, to compare notes on how each is approaching a wide range of active travel issues. The Department's officials would be happy to explore this topic with their counterparts in the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland, but in practice nearly all of the ways of improving access to cycles for those people in Northern Ireland who are unable to use the cycle to work scheme would be devolved matters for the Northern Ireland government.

## ■ **Driving Tests: Oxfordshire**

**Freddie van Mierlo:**

[\[29666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 11 October 2024 to Question 7243 on Driving Tests: Oxfordshire, what further steps she has taken since 11 October 2024 to (a) stop the bulk buying of driving tests by bots and (b) improve the recruitment of driving instructors; and if she will publish a timeline for the implementation of further steps to increase the number of available driving tests.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's (DVSA) main priority continues to be upholding road safety standards while it works hard to reduce car practical driving test waiting times.

To ensure fairness for everyone wanting to book a practical driving test, DVSA continues to work hard to combat the unscrupulous practice of reselling tests and has announced further measures to review the driving test booking system.

A [call for evidence](#) was launched on 18 December 2024, seeking views on the current rules to book tests. This will lead to consultation on improving processes, with potential future legislative changes.

On 6 January 2025, DVSA also introduced tougher terms and conditions for the service driving instructors use to book and manage car driving tests for their pupils.

These steps are part of wider measures [announced](#) on the 18 December, which sets out DVSA's plan to reduce driving test waiting times. These steps include recruiting 450 driving examiners.

DVSA's examiner recruitment campaigns continue to be successful but, like many employers, DVSA is finding the job market extremely competitive. As it moves through each recruitment campaign, DVSA will continually review and make changes and improvements to its recruitment and selection process, and training courses.

### ■ **East West Railway Company: Employers' Contributions**

**Blake Stephenson:**

[\[28609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether funding has been provided from the public purse to offset the impact of changes to employers' National Insurance contributions on the East-West Rail Company.

**Simon Lightwood:**

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government set aside funding for public sector employers for additional NIC costs. This is in line with the government's usual approach to supporting the public sector, as was the case with the previous government's Health and Social Care Levy. 2025-26 allocations will be published as part of the Main Supply Estimates in the Spring.

### ■ **Electric Vehicles: Charging Points**

**Dr Scott Arthur:**

[\[28710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the increase in (a) standing and (b) capacity charges on the commercial viability of EV charging infrastructure deployment.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Standing and capacity charges vary by site and location and are a matter for Ofgem as the independent regulator.

Due to the commercial sensitivities of private companies, it is not possible for us to make a definitive assessment. However, we are aware of this issue through ongoing engagement with industry stakeholders.

We, in collaboration with Ofgem, continue to closely monitor the situation. Ofgem will be undertaking a broad review of system costs and are considering with industry whether there are other cost recovery options.

## ■ Food: Production

**Siân Berry:**

[\[28800\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for his Department's policies on food production of the report by the Royal Society entitled Net zero aviation fuels: resource requirements and environmental impacts, published on 28 February 2023.

**Mike Kane:**

The report in question concluded that a significant proportion of the UK's land would be required for fuel production if crops were used to decarbonise aviation. The UK's Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) Mandate, which is designed to increase the amount of sustainable fuels used in aviation, prevents the diversion of resources away from food production. The Mandate includes strict sustainability criteria and SAF produced from food, feed or energy crops are not eligible under the scheme.

## ■ Heathrow Airport: Construction

**Gregory Stafford:**

[\[28771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the proposed expansion of Heathrow Airport will be privately funded.

**Mike Kane:**

The Government is clear that Heathrow expansion will be financed by the private sector.

Heathrow costs are regulated by the independent CAA, who are set up to ensure costs balance between airlines and the consumer. The specifics would need to be considered at the point proposals came forward.

## ■ High Speed 2 Line: Nottinghamshire

**Juliet Campbell:**

[\[28621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans she has for land safeguarded for HS2 in Nottinghamshire.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

This Government is thoroughly reviewing the position it has inherited on HS2 and wider rail infrastructure and will set out detailed plans in due course, including future plans for HS2 Phase 2b safeguarding in Nottinghamshire and a disposals programme for land and property acquired for HS2 that is no longer required.

**■ M42****Bradley Thomas:** [\[28760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of building Westerly slip road access to the M42 from J1 of the M42.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

There are no plans to introduce westbound access to the M42 at Junction 1 owing to the close proximity of the Junction to the M5 Catshill interchange, half a mile to the west. National Highways has determined that due to the significant amount of weaving and lane changing already required to access Catshill Interchange, adding a new merge at this location off Junction 1 would introduce a considerable and unacceptable level of safety risk to road users.

**■ Oxford Station: Flood Control****Layla Moran:** [\[28680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department consulted the Environment Agency on the flooding components of the Oxford Rail Station Phase 2 project.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Network Rail consulted the Environment Agency on its Environmental Impact Assessment as part of the planning approval process for the Oxford Rail Station Phase 2 project.

**■ Parking Offences: Debt Collection****James Naish:** [\[28651\]](#)

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

**Lilian Greenwood:**

To ensure an enforcement regime that is fair and proportionate, the Department for Transport published the 'Statutory guidance for local authorities in England on civil enforcement of parking contraventions', which sets out the appropriate debt collection practices together with links to the applicable legislation. Local authorities in England with civil parking enforcement powers must have regard to this statutory guidance under Section 87 of the Traffic Management Act 2004. Matters relating to private parking and local authority operated off-street car parks are the responsibility of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

**■ Road Traffic: Hagley****Bradley Thomas:** [\[28841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if her Department will take steps to reduce levels of congestion in Hagley resulting from recurring roadworks.



**Lilian Greenwood:**

Highway authorities have a range of powers to manage and co-ordinate road works on their road network and reduce the impact they have on congestion. Councils can also introduce lane rental schemes to target works on the busiest roads at the busiest times.

But we know how frustrating it is when road works are poorly managed and run over time, which is why we have recently announced increases in penalties for utility companies and the extension of overrun charges to the weekend.

**Roads: Horses****Terry Jermy:**[\[28821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to (a) help improve the safety of (i) horses and (ii) horse riders on roads and (b) increase driver awareness of horse safety.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

In 2022 The Highway Code was updated to improve the safety of all road users, particularly the most vulnerable. Key changes included the introduction of a Hierarchy of Road Users, which ensures that those who do the greatest harm have the greatest responsibility to reduce the danger or threat that they pose to others, along with the strengthening of guidance on safe passing distances and speeds when overtaking horse-riders.

The Government's flagship road safety campaign, THINK!, ran campaigns to alert road users of the changes as they came into effect and broader behaviour campaigns to encourage understanding and uptake of the guidance. Results from the last campaign showed that by September 2023 93% of drivers agreed it was their responsibility to give space to vulnerable road users. We will continue to promote The Highway Code changes on THINK! and DfT social media channels and via our partner organisations.

**Roads: Public Lavatories****Mr Paul Kohler:**[\[27946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many free toilet facilities there are on the road network managed by National Highways; and how many and what proportion of these are accessible for HGVs.

**Mr Paul Kohler:**[\[27947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department is taking steps to help increase the availability of toilet facilities for HGV drivers.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department and industry are jointly investing up to £43.5 million to upgrade truckstops across England. This is on top of up to £26 million joint investment by

National Highways and industry in lorry parking facilities along the strategic roads network.

This investment is supporting operators across 30 counties in England to improve security, toilets, showers and eating facilities and increase lorry parking spaces.

National Highways does not maintain records on the number of toilet facilities across its network. These facilities are operated commercially by private entities, who are responsible for ensuring they comply with legislative requirements and meet customer needs.

All Motorway Service Areas, Motorway Rest Areas, All-Purpose Trunk Road Service Areas, Motorway Truck Stops, Truck Stops on All-Purpose Trunk Roads and Truck Stops which benefit from signs from the strategic road network must provide free parking for a minimum of 2 hours for all vehicles permitted to use the facility and free-to-use toilets with hand washing facilities.

### ■ **Shipping: Skilled Workers**

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[28454\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help support (a) skills development and (b) training in the maritime sector.

**Mike Kane:**

DfT remains committed to delivering a maritime workforce, with the skills and people it needs, both now and for the future.

DfT works with the Maritime Skills Commission in assessing the sector's current and future skills needs. DfT and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency are working with industry to future-proof seafarer training through the Cadet Training and Modernisation Programme and the Ratings Review. This will ensure UK seafarers remain highly skilled, and equipped with the training to handle new vessels, fuels and future technologies.

DfT supports 50% of the cost of cadet training through the £18 million Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) fund and is updating the 2017 SMarT Review and Seafarer Projections report. These reports provide the evidence base and analysis for SMarT and the UK's need for seafarers over the next decade.

### ■ **Taxis: Electric Vehicles**

**Dr Scott Arthur:**

[\[28740\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to extend the Plug-in Taxi Grant scheme beyond April 2025.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Plug in Taxi Grant (PITG) is funded until at least the end of the current financial year. All grants remain under review to ensure best value for the money for the taxpayer. The Department will provide an update on the future of the PITG before the end of the financial year.

## ■ Transport: Greater Manchester

**Mrs Elsie Blundell:**

[\[28672\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she is taking steps with Greater Manchester Combined Authority to improve connectivity between Heywood and Middleton and other towns in Greater Manchester.

**Simon Lightwood:**

We work closely with the Mayor and Greater Manchester Combined Authority to support their plans and strategies to improve connectivity within and across Greater Manchester including Middleton and Heywood. This has included strong endorsement and support for the successful introduction of the Bee Network, including providing £66.3m for buses in 2025/26, protecting and supporting services, and delivering Bus Service Improvement Plans.

We are providing substantial transport funding for the Greater Manchester region, including over £1bn from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) for 2022/23 – 2026/27. This includes the tram/train scheme from Bury-Rochdale that goes through Heywood and is designed to significantly enhance local connectivity. Transport for Greater Manchester is targeting delivery of this scheme in the early 2030's, with an outline business case due with the Department in early 2026.

Additionally, an extra £200m for CRSTS was announced in October to further support transport connectivity in major city regions, including Greater Manchester. Through the Greater Manchester Pathfinder Devolution Deal we are providing Greater Manchester with a single integrated funding settlement, which includes CRSTS, to ensure that funding is prioritised locally to meet local connectivity requirements.

## ■ Transport: Levelling Up Find

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

[\[28459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans she has to support funding for (a) small transport projects and (b) local infrastructure after the latest round of Levelling Up Funds is completed in March 2025.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Budget announcement on 30 October confirmed departmental budgets for the rest of this financial year and the financial year 25/26. This included a commitment of over £650m in local transport funding beyond city regions in 25/26 to ensure that transport connections improve in our towns, villages and rural areas as well as in our major cities. Allocations for individual local authorities will be confirmed by the Secretary of State for 25/26 in due course.

Funding for the Department post 25/26 is subject to a comprehensive bottom-up Spending review process that is planned to conclude in June. Local funding options are being considered as part of this review.

**■ Travel: Concessions****Pippa Heylings:**[\[29597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she has taken to review the effectiveness of the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme for facilitating the travel of wheelchair users to education and work.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) provides free off-peak bus travel to those with eligible disabilities and those of state pension age, currently sixty-six. The ENCTS costs around £700 million annually and any changes to the statutory obligations would need to be carefully considered for its impact on the scheme's financial sustainability. The Department has conducted a review of the ENCTS and we are considering next steps.

**■ UK Internal Trade: Northern Ireland****Carla Lockhart:**[\[28640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to tackle changes in the levels of haulage costs for transporting goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Hauliers play a very important role in supporting trade within the UK. The Government meets regularly with stakeholders involved in trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, including representatives of the road haulage industry, particularly in view of the implementation of the Windsor Framework and cost pressures.

**■ West Midlands Rail Franchise: Standards****Bradley Thomas:**[\[28853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with West Midlands Railway on restoring the number of services between North Worcestershire and Birmingham to six per hour.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Secretary of State has not had discussions with West Midlands Trains on this specific matter, but officials have done so. We keep service provision under constant review but have to balance the costs of providing additional services with the needs of taxpayers.

**TREASURY**■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty****Robert Jenrick:**[\[28962\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has conducted a value for money assessment of the proposed agreement with Mauritius on the Chagos Islands.

**Darren Jones:**

HMT has been working with the FCDO and the MOD on the agreement who, as the lead departments, are responsible for assessing its value for money under the Managing Public Money framework.

■ **Crown Estate: Great British Energy****Gregory Stafford:**[\[28779\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much revenue the Crown Estate will generate from the partnership with GB Energy.

**James Murray:**

Like other commercial businesses, The Crown Estate does not provide forecasts of its future profits.

As announced in July 2024, Great British Energy and The Crown Estate will work together to accelerate the development of the seabed and supporting infrastructure along the coast of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, creating a pipeline of sites for private developers to invest in.

In September 2024, The Crown Estate set out its approach to future offshore wind in a report jointly published with Great British Energy. This established early thinking on a more strategic approach to leasing the seabed for future offshore wind development.

■ **Cycle to Work Scheme: Northern Ireland****Claire Hanna:**[\[29923\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 6 February 2025 to Question 27961 on Cycle to Work Scheme and the Answer of 21 November 2024 to Question 14753 on the Cycle to Work Scheme: Low Incomes, whether her Department plans to consult with the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland during its evaluation of the cycle to work scheme.

**James Murray:**

HMRC has commissioned an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Cycle to Work scheme and will publish its findings in due course.

The government keeps all taxes under review.

## ■ Devolution: Finance

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[28874\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will hold discussions with the devolved Administrations on the adequacy of (a) funding and (b) devolved powers for the provision of public services.

**Darren Jones:**

The UK Government regularly engages with officials and ministers from the devolved governments on a wide range of issues, including their funding to deliver public services.

The devolved governments' settlements for 2025-26 are the largest in real terms of any settlements since devolution. Each devolved government is receiving at least 20% more per person than equivalent UK Government spending in the rest of the UK, amounting to over £16 billion more in 2025-26. In total, the devolved governments will receive over £86 billion in 2025-26, including an additional £6.6 billion through the Barnett formula.

Barnett-based funding is not ringfenced for a specific policy area. This provides the devolved governments with the flexibility to allocate funding across devolved areas according to their own priorities and local circumstances, including public services. The devolved governments remain accountable to their respective devolved legislatures for these decisions.

## ■ Employers' Contributions

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[28478\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of rises in employer National Insurance contributions on victims of domestic and sexual violence.

**James Murray:**

The Government recognises the important role charities play in our society and has made it a priority to reset the relationship with civil society by developing a Civil Society Covenant.

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.

The Government recognises the need to protect the smallest businesses and charities, which is why we have more than doubled the Employment Allowance to £10,500, meaning more than half of employers with NICs liabilities either gain or see no change next year. Charities will still be able to claim employer NICs reliefs including those for under 21s and under 25 apprentices, where eligible.

More broadly, within the tax system, we provide support to charities through a range of reliefs and exemptions, including reliefs for charitable giving., with more than £6

billion in charitable reliefs provided to charities, CASCs and their donors in 2023 to 2024.

**Blake Stephenson:** [\[28606\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate her Department made of job losses when calculating the contribution to the public purse of the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions.

**Blake Stephenson:** [\[28607\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has produced modelling on the potential behavioural impact of increases to employers' National Insurance.

**Blake Stephenson:** [\[28610\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the impact of her policies on employers' National Insurance contributions on economic growth.

**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.

In their October 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) estimated the increase in employer NICs will reduce the level of potential output by 0.1% at the forecast horizon, by reducing labour supply by around 50,000 average hours equivalent.

Overall, once the impact of all Budget measures are taken into consideration, the OBR expect the employment level to increase from 33.1 million in 2024 to 34.3 million in 2029.

The Economic and Fiscal Outlook also sets out the costing for the employer NICs increase, including behavioural impacts, in table 3.2.

[https://obr.uk/docs/dlm\\_uploads/OBR\\_Economic\\_and\\_fiscal\\_outlook\\_Oct\\_2024.pdf](https://obr.uk/docs/dlm_uploads/OBR_Economic_and_fiscal_outlook_Oct_2024.pdf)

## ■ Employers' Contributions: Public Sector

**Blake Stephenson:** [\[28608\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has provided funding from the public purse to offset the impact of changes to employers' National Insurance contributions on public sector arms-length bodies.

**James Murray:**

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, with the Barnett formula applying in the

usual way, which is in line with the approach taken under the previous Government's Health and Social Care Levy.

The Government plans to publish allocations for departments alongside departmental budgets for 2025/26 as part of Mains estimates.

**Claire Hanna:** [\[29925\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will list all Barnett consequentialists that her Department plans to allocate to the Northern Ireland Executive that include additional funding to reflect the public sector cost of increased Employer NIC contributions.

**Darren Jones:**

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Chancellor agreed to provide funding to the public sector to support them with the additional cost associated with changes to employer National Insurance Contributions policy.

The Northern Ireland Executive will receive funding through the Barnett formula for any changes to UK Government department budgets, including on this support, in the usual way at Main Estimates 2025-26. This is the normal operation of the funding arrangements as set out in the Statement of Funding Policy.

This funding will be in addition to the Northern Ireland Executive's record Spending Review settlements for 2025-26, which are the largest in real terms of any settlements since devolution. The Northern Ireland Executive are funded above their independently assessed level of relative need in 2024-25 and 2025-26 when including funding from the 2024 restoration financial package.

## ■ Employers' Contributions: Small Businesses

**Ben Maguire:** [\[28764\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the proposed rise in employers' National Insurance contributions on small businesses.

**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.

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



## ■ EU Budget: Contributions

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[28552\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the total net fiscal impact of no longer paying fees associated with EU membership on overall UK public expenditure.

**Darren Jones:**

The Government has no overall estimate of the impact of the UK's exit from the EU on public finances and it is not possible to accurately estimate the UK's hypothetical contributions to the EU had it remained a Member State.

As part of the Withdrawal Agreement with the EU, the UK agreed the Financial Settlement, which is a methodology for settling pre-existing UK financial obligations to the EU. The European Union Finances Statement 2023 (available in the library of the House and on Gov.uk) sets out HM Treasury's estimates of the size of these obligations. As at December 2023, the UK is estimated to have paid £23.8bn (€27.4bn) in net liabilities to date as part of the EU financial settlement. Estimated UK outstanding net liabilities as of December 2023 were £6.4bn (€7.4bn).

In the next iteration of the EU Finances Statement, expected in Spring 2025, HM Treasury will publish details of UK payments under the Financial Settlement in 2024 and its latest estimate for outstanding UK liabilities as at 31st December 2024.

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[28553\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the total net fiscal impact of no longer paying fees associated with EU membership on overall UK public expenditure in each remaining financial year this Parliament.

**Darren Jones:**

The Government has no overall estimate of the impact of the UK's exit from the EU on public finances and it is not possible to accurately estimate the UK's hypothetical contributions to the EU had it remained a Member State.

As part of the Withdrawal Agreement with the EU, the UK agreed the Financial Settlement, which is a methodology for settling pre-existing UK financial obligations to the EU. The European Union Finances Statement 2023 (available in the library of the House and on Gov.uk) sets out HM Treasury's estimates of the size of these obligations. As at December 2023, the UK is estimated to have paid £23.8bn (€27.4bn) in net liabilities to date as part of the EU financial settlement. Estimated UK outstanding net liabilities as of December 2023 were £6.4bn (€7.4bn).

In the next iteration of the EU Finances Statement, expected in Spring 2025, HM Treasury will publish details of UK payments under the Financial Settlement in 2024 and its latest estimate for outstanding UK liabilities as at 31st December 2024.

## ■ General Practitioners: Employers' Contributions

**Gareth Bacon:**

[\[29049\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make it her policy to exempt GPs who provide more than 90% of their services to the NHS from the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions.

**James Murray:**

The Government will provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional employer National Insurance Contributions, i.e. central government, public corporations and local government. General Practitioners are independent contractors and therefore will not be exempt from these changes.

The Government has taken tough decisions to fix the foundations so that increased funding for the NHS in England could be announced at the Budget. Resource spending for the Department of Health and Social Care is set to increase by £22.6 billion in 2025-26 compared to 2023-24 outturn, providing a real-terms growth rate of 4% for the NHS, the largest since before 2010 excluding Covid-19 years.

Every year, the Government consults with the general practice sector about what services they provide, and about what money they are entitled to in return under their contract. As in previous years, this will be dealt with as part of that process.

The Government has announced a proposed £889m uplift for general practice in 2025-26, the largest uplift to GP funding since 2019-20. The Department of Health and Social Care have started consulting with the General Practitioners Committee in England of the British Medical Association (BMA) on the 2025-26 GP contract, and will consider a range of proposed policy changes. These will be announced in the usual way following the close of the consultation later this year.

**Gareth Bacon:**

[\[29050\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make it her policy to allow GP practices to claim Employment Allowance.

**James Murray:**

The government has not changed the eligibility rules on the Employment Allowance beyond removing the £100k eligibility threshold, so that business size does not dictate whether an employer can benefit from the Employment Allowance.

All the remaining eligibility criteria remain unchanged, including the exclusion of businesses whose work is wholly or mainly public in nature. The eligibility of a specific sector or organisation will depend on the make-up of an individual business's work, and organisations are encouraged to consult HMRC's detailed guidance.

## ■ Income Tax: Tax Allowances

**Bradley Thomas:**

[\[28831\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department plans to increase the Income Tax Personal Allowance.

**James Murray:**

At our first Budget, we decided not to extend the freeze - implemented by the previous Government - on the Personal Allowance. As a result, the Personal Allowance will rise with inflation from April 2028.

**Married People: Tax Allowances****Bradley Thomas:**[\[28742\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of increasing the Married Couple's Allowance.

**James Murray:**

The Married Couple's Allowance allows married couples and civil partners to reduce their tax bill by 10 per cent of the allowance amount, provided that at least one partner was born before 6 April 1935.

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government uprated the Married Couple's Allowance in line with inflation, as is default policy, so that it is valued to be between £4,280 and £11,080 in 2024-25.

**National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority: Public Appointments****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[28658\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the Written Statement of 17 January 2025 on Machinery of Government, HCWS368, whether appointments to the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority will be included in the Public Bodies Order in Council; and whether she plans to classify the chair appointment as a significant appointment.

**Darren Jones:**

The National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) will combine the functions of the National Infrastructure Commission and Infrastructure and Projects Authority. NISTA will bring oversight of strategy and delivery into one organisation, driving more effective delivery of infrastructure across the country.

On 17 January 2025, the Prime Minister announced in a Written Ministerial Statement that NISTA will be a joint unit of HM Treasury and Cabinet Office, effective from 1 April 2025. Further detail on the work and governance of NISTA will be announced in due course.

**National Insurance Credits****Mike Martin:**[\[29797\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make it her policy to amend the definition of relevant carer in Section 23A of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 to include individuals unable to apply for Child Benefit due to (a) extenuating circumstances and (b) domestic abuse.

**James Murray:**

Parents and carers who claim Child Benefit automatically receive National Insurance credits until their child turns twelve. These credits count towards future State Pension entitlement.

Where HMRC is made aware that a person is a victim of domestic abuse, consideration of their Child Benefit claim will be prioritised before other, standard claims.

The Government recognises that some individuals may have missed out on entitlement towards their State Pension if they were eligible to claim Child Benefit but were unable or chose not to. This is why the Government is introducing a new NI credit for people who missed out on National Insurance credits because they did not claim Child Benefit, where no other successful claim to Child Benefit was made for the same period. The credit will be available to claim from April 2026. Transitional arrangements will be in place to ensure those affected from 2013 will be able to claim retrospectively.

Information about the full range of National Insurance credits available, the criteria that must be met to be awarded them and guidance on how to apply for them, is provided on the Government website at: [www.gov.uk/national-insurance-credits/eligibility](http://www.gov.uk/national-insurance-credits/eligibility).

**Mike Martin:****[29798]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department is taking to support parents and carers who are survivors of domestic abuse that caused them to be unable to claim Child Benefit and National Insurance credits; and if she will take steps to support them.

**James Murray:**

Where HMRC is made aware that a person is a victim of domestic abuse, consideration of a claim for Child Benefit will be prioritised before other, standard claims. A Child Benefit claim can be backdated for a maximum of three months. However, only one person can be entitled to Child Benefit for the same period except in exceptional circumstances, those being fraud or misrepresentation.

Parents and carers who are entitled to Child Benefit automatically receive National Insurance credits until their child turns twelve. These credits count towards their future State Pension entitlement. The government recognises that some individuals may have missed out on entitlement towards their State Pension if they were eligible to claim Child Benefit but did not do so. From April 2026 a new National Insurance credit will be introduced for people who missed out on the National Insurance credits because they did not claim Child Benefit and where no other successful claim to Child Benefit was made for the same period. There will be transitional arrangements in place that will allow people to claim the new credit retrospectively as far back as 2013.

## ■ Pensioners: Expenditure

**Blake Stephenson:**

[\[28611\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the marginal propensity to consume of (a) all pensioners, (b) pensioners under the threshold for Pension Credit and (c) pensioners over the threshold for Pension Credit.

**Torsten Bell:**

HM Treasury does not hold this information.

The average award of Pension Credit is worth more than £4,200 a year, providing a safety net for pensioners on the lowest incomes. The UK Government is focused on maximising Pension Credit take-up to ensure those entitled to it are getting the support they need.

Over 12 million pensioners will benefit from our commitment to protect the Triple Lock on the new and basic State Pensions. Based on OBR Autumn 2024 forecasts, over the course of this Parliament, the full yearly rate of the new State Pension is expected to increase by around £1900.

## ■ Retail Trade: Business Rates

**Bradley Thomas:**

[\[28747\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of business rate reform to incentivise retail business investment in (a) Bromsgrove constituency and (b) across the United Kingdom.

**James Murray:**

The Government is creating a fairer business rates system that protects the high street, supports investment, and is fit for the 21st century.

At Autumn Budget 2024, we made the first step with the announcement of permanently lower tax rates for the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure properties with rateable values below £500,000 from 2026-27.

The Discussion Paper published at Budget sets out priority areas for reform and invites businesses to have a conversation with government about transforming the business rates system over the course of this Parliament, including how to incentivise investment.

## WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

### ■ Equal Pay

**Uma Kumaran:**

[\[29284\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the (a) resources and (b) legal powers available to the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the context of the introduction of mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting requirements for large companies.

**Seema Malhotra:**

As set out in the King's Speech in July, the government is committed to introducing mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting for large employers. These measures will be part of the upcoming Equality (Race and Disability) Bill.

We will shortly be consulting on our proposals to help us shape the legislation. This will include considering how the new reporting requirements will be monitored and enforced.

**Women and Equalities: Public Relations****John Cooper:**[\[27758\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, 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.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

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

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is an independent arm's length body. Questions on their spend would need to be directed to the EHRC.

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

**WORK AND PENSIONS****Candidates: Disability****Zöe Franklin:**[\[29278\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if her Department will take steps to establish a funding scheme to support disabled candidates for elections in England.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

It is the Government's ambition to see more disabled people in public office. The Government takes positive action to promote disabled people's participation in public life, including protecting disabled people through the Equality Act 2010. In relation to accessing elected office specifically, political parties have responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that their disabled members who contest any political position are not disadvantaged and can take part in the same processes and opportunities as non-disabled people.

The Government has been clear that it will champion disabled people's rights, and work closely with them so that disabled people's views and voices are at the heart of all we do. We know that some disabled people still face additional financial barriers

when standing for elected office. We are looking at how we might work with political parties and others to help tackle this.

## ■ Chemicals: Health Hazards

**Jayne Kirkham:**

[\[29998\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether the HSE plans to expedite its assessment of the European Chemicals Agency Risk Assessment Committee proposal to reclassify lithium salts as Category A reproductive toxicants.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The three lithium substances (lithium carbonate, lithium hydroxide and lithium chloride) referred to above, do not currently have mandatory classification and labelling in Great Britain (GB). HSE specialists are considering the need to fully evaluate the available data using the Article 37A process under the GB Classification, Labelling and Packaging Regulation (GB CLP) following publication of the Agency Opinion by HSE in August 2023 to determine whether mandatory classification and labelling is warranted.

## ■ Children: Maintenance

**Pippa Heylings:**

[\[29580\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reforming the Child Maintenance Service to (a) increase protections for the victims of domestic abuse and (b) to prevent the withholding or artificial reduction of child maintenance payments being used as a form of economic abuse.

**Andrew Western:**

A consultation on proposed reforms to the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) was published by the previous Government on 8 May 2024. This included:

- removing Direct Pay and managing all CMS cases in one service to allow the CMS to tackle non-compliance faster,
- exploring views on collection fees and the impact of proposals to reduce, but maintain, fees and
- exploring how victims and survivors of domestic abuse can be better supported.

This follows the Child Support Collection (Domestic Abuse) Act receiving royal assent in July 2023. The consultation was extended by this Government at the end of July and ran until 30 September 2024. We are currently analysing the responses we have received, and the Government will publish a response in due course.

CMS Domestic Abuse training has been updated with input from external stakeholders and wider DWP to ensure caseworkers recognise and respond safely and appropriately to customers who are experiencing domestic abuse or are survivors of domestic abuse. This package includes an understanding of abuse,

including economic abuse, and, of course, given the context, covers post separation abuse.

The CMS will use its strong enforcement powers to pursue those who willfully avoid their financial obligations to their children. Cases involving complex income can be investigated by the Financial Investigation Unit (FIU). This is a specialist team which can request information from financial institutions (such as banks, investment companies and mortgage companies) to check the accuracy of information the CMS is given.

## ■ Department for Work and Pensions: Artificial Intelligence

**Helen Whately:** [\[28988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the white mail artificial intelligence programme used by her Department.

**Andrew Western:**

Whitemail scanning complements existing systems. The AI tool flags correspondence for review by operational agents to determine customer vulnerability and appropriate actions. During solution development, digital teams collaborated closely with operational areas to identify vulnerable customers. This approach ensured that communications received by post were prioritised for those most in need. The solution was rolled out using a test and learn method, incorporating feedback from specialist support teams, and was widely adopted due to its positive impact on customer experience.

**Helen Whately:** [\[28989\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what artificial intelligence technologies are used by her Department; and for what purpose each technology is used.

**Andrew Western:**

DWP is working with a range of artificial intelligence technologies, such as Large Language Models (LLMs) and generative AI (gen AI) which will help DWP improve its ability to respond to customers' needs in a more personalised and seamless way. Some of the details of these are already in the public domain as set out in [DWP annual report and accounts 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#).

DWP has already committed to publishing more details about work in this area as part of the Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standards (ATRS) requirements from the Government Digital Service. The [Personal information charter - Department for Work and Pensions - GOV.UK](#) sets out individuals rights when we process their data.

DWP does not use AI to replace human judgement to determine or deny a payment to a claimant.



## ■ Local Housing Allowance: Uprating

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**

[\[29103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make it her policy to increase Local Housing Allowance rates in line with inflation.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was introduced in 2008 and determines the maximum housing support for tenants in the private rented sector. Claimants in similar circumstances living in the same area are entitled to the same maximum rent allowance regardless of the contractual rent paid. LHA rates do not cover all rents in all areas.

In April 2024, LHA rates were restored at the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of local market rents at a cost of approximately £7bn over 5 years.

In relation to LHA rates remaining at current levels for 2025/26, the Government has had to take difficult decisions at Autumn Budget to address the challenging fiscal context. For LHA a range of factors were considered, including rental data, the impacts of LHA rates, the fact that rates were increased in April, and the wider fiscal context.

Decisions on LHA rates for future years will be taken in the context of the Government's missions, housing priorities, and the fiscal context.

For those who need further support, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are available from local authorities. DHPs can be paid to those entitled to housing support who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs.

## ■ Mature Students: Finance

**Adam Thompson:**

[\[29655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education on financial support available for mature students with caring responsibilities.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

Successive Governments have held the principle that the benefit system does not normally support full-time students. Rather, they are supported by the educational maintenance system. Part-time students can receive Carer's Allowance if they meet the entitlement conditions. Certain students when they have additional daily living costs that are not met by the student finance system may be eligible for Universal Credit (UC) and carer element of UC.

If a student with the consent of the educational establishment ceases the course temporarily to care for someone and they are not eligible for a student grant or loan, they may be eligible for UC for that period.

The Department works very closely with other departments and stakeholders, to help ensure young carers get the help and support they need and deserve. How we can

best identify and support young carers to combine study with their caring responsibilities where they can, including taking account of changes in the education system, will form an important strand of our future work.

## ■ Older People

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[29787\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she plans to take to support (a) the right to work and (b) financial security for older people.

**Alison McGovern:**

On 26 November 2024, the Government published the Get Britain Working White Paper which sets out fundamental reforms to employment support to help people into good work and create an inclusive labour market in which everyone can get into and on at work.

Increasing the proportion of older people returning to work and staying in work reduces the risk of later life poverty as it increases pensions saving and improves physical and mental wellbeing. On an individual scale it ensures people can fulfil their potential into later life and save towards a financially resilient retirement.

The Equality Act 2010 is very clear on the need for employers to recruit the best talent based on merit, irrespective of a person's age. The Department for Work and Pensions therefore works across government, and through regular engagement with employers to encourage positive attitudes towards older workers.

The Department already offers employment support through Jobcentres and tailored one-to-one engagement for eligible over 50s on Universal Credit. Midlife MOT reviews, delivered in Jobcentres across the UK and online also support older people to review their health, finances and skills.

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[29788\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she plans to take to promote and support the active participation of older people in society.

**Alison McGovern:**

The Government knows that work can help older people play active and fulfilling roles in society, improve physical and mental wellbeing and build towards a financially comfortable retirement.

The Department already offers employment support through Jobcentres and tailored one-to-one engagement for eligible over 50s on Universal Credit. Midlife MOT reviews, delivered in Jobcentres across the UK and online also support older people to review their health, finances and skills.

Getting more older people who are economically inactive but want to work into employment is crucial to meeting our long-term ambition of an 80 per cent employment rate. Our Get Britain Working White Paper sets out our approach to the employment support system to target and tackle the root causes of unemployment

and inactivity and better join up health skills and employment support based on the needs for all, including older people.

The Government has also launched an *independent review* into the role of UK employers in promoting healthy and inclusive workplaces which will run until Summer 2025.

## ■ Older Workers: Discrimination

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[29784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to tackle (a) age discrimination and (b) ageism in the workplace.

**Alison McGovern:**

The Government recognises the need to recruit on merit, irrespective of a persons' age. The 2010 Equality Act provides strong protection against direct and indirect age discrimination in employment, rendering it unlawful for employers to discriminate against employees or job applicants based on age.

The Government acknowledges the key role employers play in helping older individuals to remain in or re-enter the workforce, and the importance of embracing policies conducive to this support. Age diversity within the workforce brings numerous benefits to businesses, in addition to broader advantages such as fresh perspectives and knowledge-sharing.

The Department for Work and Pensions, (DWP) is therefore working across government, and through regular engagement with employers, to encourage positive attitudes towards older people.

## ■ Pension Credit

**John Milne:**

[\[28826\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what percentage of applicants that started a Pension Credit online application did not complete it or submit the form in the latest period for which figures are available.

**Torsten Bell:**

The total number of Pension Credit online applications started is unavailable because only data from users who opt-in to performance cookies on GOV.UK is collected.

## ■ Pension Credit: Overpayments

**Sarah Champion:**

[\[28921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the value was of Pension Credit overpayments that were written off as resulting from official error in each of the last three years.

**Andrew Western:**

**VALUE OF OFFICIAL ERROR PENSION CREDIT**

<b>SCHEDULED WRITE OFFS</b>	<b>VALUE</b>
<b>February 2022 - January 2023</b>	£28.802m
<b>February 2023 - January 2024</b>	£24.858m
<b>February 2024 - January 2025</b>	£27.856m

ABOVE TABLE IDENTIFIES THE VALUE OF OFFICIAL ERROR PENSION CREDIT OVERPAYMENTS WRITTEN OFF AT SOURCE BY REFERRING BENEFIT OFFICES WITHIN THE LAST 3 YEARS.

These overpayments do not reach Debt Manager for recovery as PC overpayments are not recoverable and are written off when the overpayment is identified at source.

Data is GB only.

## ■ Pensions

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[28824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether the pension review will consider adequacy.

**Torsten Bell:**

This government is committed to enabling tomorrow's pensioners to have security in retirement— which is why we announced the landmark Pensions Review days after coming into office in July.

The first phase is focussed on boosting investment and economic growth and we are committed to a second phase that will include retirement adequacy within its considerations. We will provide further detail on the full scope and timetable for the second phase in due course.

## ■ Personal Independence Payment: Fraud

**Graeme Downie:** [\[29372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate her Department has made of the number of fraudulent claims there were for the Personal Independence Payment in each (a) nation and (b) region in each of the last five years.

**Andrew Western:**

We publish [annual estimates of fraud and error levels in the benefit system in Great Britain](#), however as these figures are produced using sample data, they are not available below the national level.

## ■ Poverty: Telford

**Shaun Davies:**

[28077]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will publish data on levels of child poverty in Telford constituency for each year that data is available.

**Alison McGovern:**

Statistics on the number of children living in absolute and relative poverty on a before housing costs basis by parliamentary constituency are published annually in the "Children in low income families: local area statistics" publication and can be found in tabs "6\_Absolute\_ParIC" and "5\_Relative\_ParIC" at [Children in low income families: local area statistics 2014 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2014-to-2023). The latest statistics published on 21 March 2024 are for the financial period 2022/23. The figures provided for parliamentary constituencies are on the 2010 boundaries.

The latest available data can also be found on Stat-Xplore ( <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/> ) in the Children in low income families dataset. Figures on both the 2010 and 2024 parliamentary constituency boundaries are available here.

Guidance on how to use Stat-Xplore can be found here: [Getting Started \(dwp.gov.uk\)](https://www.dwp.gov.uk/guidance/getting-started). An account is not required to use Stat- Xplore, the 'Guest Login' feature gives instant access to the main functions.

## ■ Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill

**Helen Whately:**

[28602]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with financial services sector stakeholders on 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 the financial services sector, at both official and ministerial level.

Where there are particular areas of interest and expertise, detailed working group discussions are being held to ensure the measures are designed to be effective and take into consideration wider feedback from the sector.

**Helen Whately:**

[28603]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of pilot schemes for third party data sharing powers as set out in the Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill.

**Andrew Western:**

The Third Party Data sharing powers were a proposal under the previous government, separate to the measures proposed in this Bill.

The Eligibility Verification Measure (EVM) is significantly different to the previously proposed Third Party Data power. EVM will be limited to information from banks and financial institutions only and will be used only for the purpose of helping to verify eligibility for benefits. The State Pension will be explicitly excluded, and it will be focussed initially on three benefits only: Universal Credit, Pension Credit and Employment and Support Allowance. A statutory Code of Practice will also be introduced and consulted on. There will be independent oversight reporting annually on the effectiveness of the measure and the legislation tightly defines what data can be gathered and for what purpose providing strong safeguards.

To demonstrate the feasibility and potential of using data from banks to help verify eligibility for benefits, DWP has already conducted two Proof of Concepts which consisted of establishing data-sharing collaborations with two high-street banks. These exercises showed promising results, for example in the first exercise around half of the matches generated for DWP to review led to a positive outcome for the department. Further information about these Proof of Concepts can be found in the published impact assessment for the Bill - [Impact Assessment](#)

The government is committed to rolling out the measure carefully through a test and learn approach to ensure it is workable and as effective as possible.

**■ Skilled Workers**

**Andrew Bowie:** [\[29487\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people have applied for a Skills Passport; and how many of those applications have been approved.

**Andrew Bowie:** [\[29491\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, which employment sectors have the highest number of Skills Passport users securing jobs.

**Alison McGovern:**

Some sectors and organisations use skills passports as a way of recognising accredited training relevant to that sector or organisation, for example, the recently developed Hospitality Skills Passport by UKHospitality and deployed as part of the DWP/UKH Destination Hospitality Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAPs) offer. DWP does not issue or collect data on skills passport. However, DWP does offer tailored, flexible advice and support through Jobcentre Plus as part of its core offer.

Jobcentre Work Coaches offer jobseekers a comprehensive menu of help, including referral into skills provision and job search support. Skills are essential to helping customers secure, retain, and progress in work. Work Coaches help customers to access a broad range of provision including Apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps,

vocational and essential English, maths, digital skills training and ESOL, as well as careers advice and Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs).

DWP Work Coach brokered skills interventions help claimants gain the skills they need to enter and progress in employment, providing the means to enhance career prospects and earnings in line with labour market needs. Creating a highly skilled workforce and contributing to Government's overall growth ambitions.

## ■ **Skilled Workers: South West Norfolk**

**Terry Jermy:**

**[29201]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on steps to help create skilled jobs in South West Norfolk constituency.

**Alison McGovern:**

South-West Norfolk Jobcentres Plus engage directly with local businesses as well as employment and skills forums across the region to both understand local labour market need and to influence the delivery of skills provision in line with these requirements, including training provision needed to deliver our successful Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAPs).

As outlined in the Get Britain Working White Paper, the Government is committed to creating in England a new single universal service that will provide a stronger focus on skills and careers by bringing together Jobcentre Plus and the National Careers Service. The service will be crucial in ensuring more of our domestic workforce, especially those in regions of higher unemployment and economic inactivity can take full advantage of the opportunities and job creation that the Industrial Strategy and Government's wider sectoral priorities will bring.

As the HR department for the Government's growth mission, the DWP ministerial team and officials work closely with colleagues across to help employers including those in sectors crucial to growth, including Industrial Strategy sectors, to help meet their recruitment needs and break down barriers to opportunity across the country.

This includes the steps announced by DWP Secretary of State to overhaul our relationship with employers <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dedicated-team-to-serve-businesses-amongst-dwp-overhaul-of-employer-support-to-get-britain-working> and the forthcoming joint ministerial Get Britain Working sectoral workforce summits, starting with construction, health and social care and clean energy.

## ■ **Social Security Benefits: Migrants**

**Mr Peter Bedford:**

**[29686]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an estimate of the (a) number of migrants who have arrived in the UK in the last five years in receipt of benefits in Mid Leicestershire constituency and (b) the total value of those benefits in the latest period for which data is available.

**Andrew Western:**

The information requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost. The Department is exploring the feasibility of developing suitable official statistics related to the immigration status of non-UK / Irish Universal Credit customers.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Telephone Services**

**Sarah Gibson:**[\[28377\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many calls to the Disability Service Centre helpline (a) were not answered, (b) involved the caller being on hold for more than 10 minutes and (c) were terminated by the Disability Service Centre following the caller being on hold for more than 10 minutes in each of the last 12 months.

**Andrew Western:**

Part (a)

The table below shows the total number of unanswered calls (Calls Abandoned from Agent Queue) for Disability Services, for each of the last 12 calendar months.

<b>MONTH YEAR</b>	<b>DIRECTORATE</b>	<b>CALLS ABANDONED FROM AGENT QUEUE</b>
Feb-2024	Disability Services	189,821
Mar-2024	Disability Services	199,623
Apr-2024	Disability Services	268,374
May-2024	Disability Services	191,549
Jun-2024	Disability Services	133,799
Jul-2024	Disability Services	151,056
Aug-2024	Disability Services	152,973
Sep-2024	Disability Services	162,451
Oct-2024	Disability Services	157,661
Nov-2024	Disability Services	158,028
Dec-2024	Disability Services	118,581
Jan-2025	Disability Services	264,966

Part (b) The department does not hold data that enables us to answer this question.

Part (c) The department does not hold data that enables us to answer this question.



There are many reasons why calls to a service line can attract a high call abandonment rate which can include but is not limited to increased hold times. The abandonment of calls is an area that we are unable to fully analyse as there is no data to tell us exactly why a specific customer terminates a call. We are continuously monitoring the service and reviewing our approach to ensure we are able to deliver for our customers.

### DISCLAIMER

Please note this information is derived from the Department's management information, designed solely for the purpose of helping the Department to manage its business. As such, it has not been subjected to the rigorous quality assurance checks applied to our published official statistics. As DWP holds the information internally, we have released it. However, it is possible information held by DWP may change due to operational reasons and we recommend that caution be applied when using it.

**Sarah Gibson:**

[\[28378\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many calls to the Pension Service helpline (a) were not answered, (b) involved the caller being on hold for more than 10 minutes and (c) were terminated by the Pension Service following the caller being on hold for more than 10 minutes in each of the last 12 months.

**Andrew Western:**

Response:

Part (a)

The table below shows the total number of unanswered calls (Calls Abandoned from Agent Queue) for The Pension Service, for each of the last 12 calendar months.

MONTH YEAR	DIRECTORATE	CALLS ABANDONED FROM AGENT QUEUE
Feb-2024	Pension Service	60,495
Mar-2024	Pension Service	56,400
Apr-2024	Pension Service	72,485
May-2024	Pension Service	36,733
Jun-2024	Pension Service	24,900
Jul-2024	Pension Service	23,709
Aug-2024	Pension Service	25,554
Sep-2024	Pension Service	36,407
Oct-2024	Pension Service	36,412

MONTH YEAR	DIRECTORATE	CALLS ABANDONED FROM AGENT QUEUE
Nov-2024	Pension Service	31,481
Dec-2024	Pension Service	23,077
Jan-2025	Pension Service	34,704

Part (b) The department does not hold data that enables us to answer this question.

Part (c) The department does not hold data that enables us to answer this question.

There are many reasons why calls to a service line can attract a high call abandonment rate which can include but is not limited to increased hold times. The abandonment of calls is an area that we are unable to fully analyse as there is no data to tell us exactly why a specific customer terminates a call. We are continuously monitoring the service and reviewing our approach to ensure we are able to deliver for our customers.

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#### ■ State Retirement Pensions: Uprating

**Gregory Stafford:**

[\[29339\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to ensure the State Pension reflects increases in the cost of living.

**Torsten Bell:**

The Government is committed to the Triple Lock, which means that in April 2025, the basic and new State Pension will increase by the higher of the growth in average earnings, price increases or 2.5%. As a result, the basic and new State Pension will increase by 4.1%, in line with earnings growth. Inflation in the reference period was 1.7%.

This means that over 12 million pensioners will benefit from an increase of up to £470 to their State Pension from April this year. That's £275 more than if pensions had been uprated by the rise in prices.

## ■ Universal Credit

**Danny Kruger:**

[29905]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to accelerate the rollout of Universal Credit.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

I refer the Hon Member to the Statement of 12 November ([Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#))

## ■ Universal Credit: Disability

**John McDonnell:**

[28879]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an estimate of the proportion of claimants who are unfit for work in the Universal Credit (a) limited capability for work and work related activity and (b) (i) income-related and (ii) contributory Employment and Support Allowance group who would not be able to move into work if their additional disability component was removed.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

In the interim findings report of our Work Aspirations research, 62% of ESA/UC customers with no work-related activity requirements, and 36% with work-related activity requirements, felt they would never be able to work or work again. 28% of ESA/UC customers with no work-related activity requirements, and 38% with work-related activity requirements, felt they might be able to work in future if their health improved. 3% of ESA/UC customers with no work-related activity requirements, and 8% with work-related activity requirements, felt they could work right away if the right job or support was available.

The Work Capability Assessment is not working and needs to be reformed or replaced alongside a proper plan to help disabled people into work, which will help them, businesses and the economy.

We know that change is desperately needed but equally these sorts of changes shouldn't be made in haste. So, alongside our Get Britain Working White Paper, we want to engage with disabled people, and others with expertise and experience on these issues, to consider how to address these challenges and build a better system.

We will reconsult on the WCA changes as part of our Green Paper in spring 2025 that will bring forward wider proposals to reform the health and disability benefits system.

## ■ Universal Credit: Young People

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[28927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment has been made of the adequacy of the uptake of Universal Credit in under 21s in the last 12 months.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

Monthly statistics for the number of [Starts to Universal Credit](#) in Great Britain by age, are published quarterly on [Stat-Xplore](#), and are currently available to October 2024, with statistics to January 2025 due to be published on Tuesday 18th February 2025.

Users can log in or access Stat-Xplore as a guest and, if needed, can access [guidance](#) on how to extract the information required. There is also a [Universal Credit Official Statistics: Stat-Xplore user guide](#).

The Department's Youth Offer provides individually tailored Work Coach support to young people aged 16 to 24 who are claiming Universal Credit. This support includes the Youth Employment Programme, Youth Employability Coaches for young people with additional barriers to finding work, and Youth Hubs across Great Britain.

## ■ Winter Fuel Payment

**Blake Stephenson:**

[\[28612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an estimate of the proportion of Winter Fuel Payments that were spent through (a) direct and (b) indirect taxation in 2023-24.

**Torsten Bell:**

The department does not hold information on how Winter Fuel Payments were spent in 2023–24.

**Blake Stephenson:**

[\[28613\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments on consumer spending.

**Blake Stephenson:**

[\[29186\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of changes to the winter fuel payment on recent trends in the level of economic growth.

**Torsten Bell:**

It is not possible to attribute changes in consumer spending or economic growth to any changes to Winter Fuel Payments. It is not possible to disentangle these from other much larger factors that could affect economic growth or consumption.

## ■ Winter Fuel Payment: Sutton Coldfield

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

**[28460]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an estimate of the number of households impacted by changes to the eligibility criteria for Winter Fuel Payments in Sutton Coldfield constituency.

**Torsten Bell:**

Looking back at winter 2023-24, there were around 13,400 pensioner households in Sutton Coldfield Constituency receiving the Winter Fuel Payment but not receiving Pension Credit. This is based on February 2024 Pension Credit statistics which are available via [DWP Stat-Xplore](#) and the [Winter Fuel Payment statistics for winter 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

Please note that the above does not take into account any potential increase in Pension Credit take-up that we might see as a result of the Government's Pension Credit Awareness Campaign.

We do not yet hold data on the number of Pension Credit or Winter Fuel Payment recipients through winter 2024-25.

The published Pension Credit figures refer to households, so the number of individual pensioners in respect of whom Pension Credit is paid will be higher (i.e. taking account of households where a claimant has a partner and / or dependents).

In addition, while Pension Credit claimants constitute the majority of those that will be eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment, pensioners who claim other qualifying means-tested benefits will also be eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment. It is not, however, possible to include those on other qualifying means-tested benefits in these figures.

## MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

#### ■ Trade Agreements: Southern African Development Community

**Adam Jogee:**

[\[28276\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of a free trade agreement with the Southern African Development Community.

**An error has been identified in the written answer given on 10 February 2025. The correct answer should have been:**

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

None of our partner governments in **the** Southern African Development Community (SADC) have requested a collective UK-SADC FTA. There are two customs unions within the SADC grouping, which our existing agreements aim to align with.

Our UK-Southern African Customs Union and Mozambique Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) is with Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa, and our UK-Eastern and Southern African EPA is ~~entered into force~~ with Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Zimbabwe. The remaining SADC countries (Angola, Comoros, **Democratic Republic of Congo** DRG, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia) are not currently covered by our FTAs, but there are provisions available should they wish to join ~~one of our existing agreements~~. These remaining countries are eligible for duty-free quota-free access to the UK (on nearly all goods) through our Developing Countries Trading Scheme.

### HOME OFFICE

#### ■ Animal Experiments

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[29598\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the 154,904 animals involved in non-compliance incidents in British laboratories in 2023.

**An error has been identified in the written answer given on 12 February 2025. The correct answer should have been:**

**Dan Jarvis:**

~~Procedures) Act 1986 very seriously. The numbers of non-compliance cases vary in any given year. The total number of non-compliance cases reduced from 175 to 169 cases from 2022-23. Between these same years there was also a 48% reduction in adverse welfare cases.~~

The Home Office regulator reviews each non-compliance case and provides details in its annual report ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/animals-in-science-regulation-unit-annual-report-2023](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animals-in-science-regulation-unit-annual-report-2023)). Sanctions are applied in cases of non-compliance to reduce the risk of future non-compliance. Data regarding non-compliances is used to inform the risk-based audit programme.

**The Home Office takes non-compliance with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 very seriously. The numbers of non-compliance cases vary in any given year. The total number of non-compliance cases reduced from 175 to 169 cases from 2022-23. Between these same years there was also a 48% reduction in adverse welfare cases.**

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#### ■ Animal Experiments: Animal Welfare

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[29615\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the Animals in Science Regulation Unit annual report 2023, published in December 2024, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of the 553 animals who experienced adverse welfare outcomes due to non-compliance in laboratories in 2023.

**An error has been identified in the written answer given on 12 February 2025. The correct answer should have been:**

**Dan Jarvis:**

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## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### CABINET OFFICE

#### ■ **Progress on the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme**

**Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds):**  
[\[HCWS443\]](#)

In August 2024, I established the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme in regulations. This enabled the Infected Blood Compensation Authority (IBCA) to begin making compensation payments to people who are infected and the work to progress payments quickly continues as an absolute priority.

Today I laid before Parliament the draft Infected Blood Compensation Scheme Regulations 2025. These regulations need to be debated and approved by both Houses before they can come into force. Once in force, the regulations will provide IBCA with the powers it needs to begin making payments to eligible affected people (such as partners, parents, children, siblings and in some instances carers) this year, and to make payments to eligible people through the supplementary routes. This is in addition to maintaining the core route for eligible infected people as established last year. As we set out in August, the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme is tariff-based, with the core route setting out tariffs which are intended to work in a way which would be appropriate for the majority of people applying to the Scheme.

The Government has published an accompanying Explanatory Memorandum and Equalities Impact Assessment alongside the regulations on [legislation.gov.uk](https://legislation.gov.uk). On [gov.uk](https://gov.uk), we have published an updated compensation scheme explainer and an Addendum Report from the Expert Group.

I would also like to welcome the progress being made in delivering compensation. In addition to the over £1 billion of interim compensation payments we have paid, IBCA have now invited 113 people to claim compensation. So far, 23 offers have been made, totalling over £34 million and 14 offers have been accepted and paid, totalling over £13 million. IBCA remains on track to invite 250 people to apply by the end of March and will continue to publish their monthly statistics on their website. However, this is only the beginning, and there is much more work to do.

By laying these regulations, we are one step closer to having the entire Infected Blood Compensation Scheme fully established in law. This will be a significant moment for all those who have waited for this for too long. My aim remains for these regulations to be in place by 31st March and I hope Parliamentarians from across both Houses support these regulations so that we can finally focus solely on delivering compensation to those who have waited for justice for so long.

#### ■ **Security and Intelligence Agencies: Contingencies Fund Advance 2024-25**

**Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office (Ms Abena Oppong-Asare):**

**[[HCWS448](#)]**

The Security and Intelligence Agencies will be seeking a Supplementary Estimate for 2024-25. As it will be some time before the associated legislation receives Royal Assent, the Agencies are seeking an advance from the Contingencies Fund in order to meet contractual commitments. Parliamentary approval for additional resource of £56,879,000, capital of £51,762,000 and cash movements of £168,000,000 will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for the Security and Intelligence Agencies. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £276,641,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund. As the Security and Intelligence Agencies are non-Ministerial departments, I am making this statement on behalf of their Accounting Officer to ensure that Parliament is informed this advance from the Contingencies Fund.

**CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT****■ Statutory gambling levy: update on prevention**

**Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth (Stephanie Peacock):**

**[[HCWS444](#)]**

I am repeating the following Written Ministerial Statement made today in the other place by my Noble Friend, the Minister for Gambling and DCMS Lords Minister, Baroness Twycross:

Today I am updating the House on the Government's plans to introduce the statutory gambling levy, further to the government's response to the levy consultation published on 27 November 2024.

In that response, the Government was clear that delivering prevention activity at the local, regional, and national levels with effective commissioning and oversight arrangements is highly complex and needed further consideration. The levy will for the first time provide increased, independent, dedicated investment for prevention initiatives and we wanted to take the time to get the policy right, while ensuring necessary legislation is passed. It is a priority for the Government to have the levy in place by April 2025 with funding flowing as soon as possible thereafter.

To ensure that there is sufficient trust, expertise and authority in the use of the levy funding for prevention, I can confirm that we have appointed the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) in the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to take on the role as lead commissioning body in this area for England, alongside appropriate bodies in Scotland and Wales.

Prevention remains a crucial part of the government's efforts to tackle gambling-related harm. An effective prevention plan seeks to identify the right mix of interventions to be applied at both the population and individual level. In its broadest sense, prevention will include a wide spectrum of measures, including but not limited to regulatory restrictions on products, place, and provider, as well as tailored measures for at-risk groups and individuals, including education and early intervention activities, with the ultimate goal of

delivering on the government's objective to reduce gambling-related harm in Great Britain.

That is why the government is increasing investment through the levy to facilitate a comprehensive approach to harm reduction in all three nations of Great Britain. We will allocate 30% of levy funding to the prevention stream, up to £30 million each year, alongside the significant funding allocated for research and treatment.

Ringfenced investment in this area will help to encourage innovation and support a strengthened, integrated and coordinated approach to prevention in Britain. As the Government's lead on improving England's health, we are confident OHID is well-placed to capitalise on its expertise and relationships in this area. It will maximise the impact of the dedicated funding the UK Government is putting behind this effort. OHID, working closely with appropriate bodies in Scotland and Wales will seek to develop a comprehensive approach to prevention and early intervention, supporting improvement across respective nations.

OHID and appropriate bodies in Scotland and Wales will undertake necessary design work to determine the final scope of prevention activity, working closely with the research and treatment leads to ensure a joined-up approach. We will develop and provide clear and measurable outcomes for the prevention strand of the statutory levy system, as we have already done for research and treatment. However, future activity may focus on:

- Awareness-raising: building the public's understanding of the risks associated with gambling-related harm, is crucial to preventing harm before it occurs. Population level campaigns could be used to raise awareness of gambling-related harm and reduce the stigma often associated with seeking help.
- Local and regional initiatives: delivery of more upstream interventions to address harms earlier and more effectively at local and regional levels, with interventions tailored to the needs of those communities, and the development of a national approach would be a significant step forward.
- Building capacity: providing investment for organisations, particularly those in frontline settings, to further understand and deliver harm reduction activities that will reduce harm for at-risk people.

The statutory levy will for the first time provide ringfenced investment towards the prevention of gambling-related harms. Together with OHID and the wider levy system, we are confident that the levy will play a crucial role in the government's manifesto commitment to reducing gambling-related harm.

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### ■ Contingency Fund Advance for the UKAEA Pension Scheme

**Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Climate) (Kerry McCarthy):**

[\[HCWS441\]](#)

I hereby give notice of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero's intention to seek an advance from the contingencies fund of £55,000,000 for the UK Atomic Energy Authority Pension Schemes. This is a cash request to enable pension payments to be made as they fall due.

Parliamentary approval for additional cash of £55,000,000 will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for UK Atomic Energy Authority Pension Schemes. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £55,000,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

The cash advance will be repaid upon receiving Royal Assent on the Supply and Appropriation (Anticipation and Adjustments) Bill.

**HOME OFFICE****■ Manston Inquiry**

**The Minister of State for Border Security and Asylum (Dame Angela Eagle):**

[\[HCWS439\]](#)

In fulfilment of the commitments made by the former Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Member for Fareham and Waterlooville, I am today announcing the establishment of an Article 3 ECHR non-statutory Independent Inquiry to investigate the conditions encountered by those detained at Manston Short-Term Holding Facility between June and November 2022.

The Inquiry will investigate the decisions, actions and circumstances which led to those conditions, and will reach conclusions on the treatment of those detained. The Inquiry may make recommendations regarding the conditions and should investigate whether there are lessons to be learned regarding the Home Office's handling of the incident.

The formal start date of the Inquiry will be **17 March 2025** and I will place a copy of the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Inquiry will be chaired by Sophie Cartwright KC, who has experience in inquests and inquiries. Arrangements for the Inquiry will be a matter for her, but as the sponsoring department, the Home Office will provide support and ensure the Inquiry has the resources needed to fulfil its Terms of Reference.

The Government will make no comment on issues which are now in the purview of the Inquiry until it has concluded, but we will encourage all current and former public officials with evidence to provide to the Inquiry to cooperate with its requests for assistance.

**■ Security Service**

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper):** [\[HCWS445\]](#)

The purpose of this statement is to notify the House that MI5 has corrected previously incorrect evidence that it provided to the High Court and the Investigatory Powers

Tribunal, in relation to the case of Agent X and alleged acts of domestic abuse. The High Court has today varied the injunction covering this case which allows further information to be reported. The Investigatory Powers Tribunal case is continuing and is expected to conclude later this year.

It is clearly a very serious matter to provide incorrect information to the court and MI5 has apologised directly for this.

I have commissioned an independent external review to report to me and to the Director General of MI5 to understand what led to incorrect information being provided by MI5 to the High Court. Sir Jonathan Jones KC, former HM Procurator General, Treasury Solicitor and Head of the Government Legal Service, will lead the review and ensure that an independent authoritative view can be taken on what went wrong, and any actions MI5 needs to take to prevent a similar occurrence in the future. Sir Jonathan will report his findings directly to me and Sir Ken McCallum, and I will ensure these are shared with the Investigatory Powers Commissioner and the Intelligence and Security Committee.

MI5 do an incredibly difficult and important job every single day to keep our country safe from a wide range of threats, working to the highest of standards, and it is of course essential that those high standards must always be maintained.

Protecting national security is the first duty of the State, and the work of our intelligence agencies is critical to keeping the UK and its citizens safe. Covert Human Intelligence Sources – or agents – play a crucial role in that work, and maintaining the secrecy of their identities is essential to protect them, their families, the vital intelligence they provide, and the recruitment of future sources.

The Government maintains and supports the principle of neither confirming nor denying allegations about whether individuals may or may not be operating on behalf of the UK intelligence agencies.

The Investigatory Powers Tribunal case related to which this incorrect evidence was provided is still ongoing, and therefore I cannot provide further information or comment to the House on this case at this time.

The Government is also clear that all organisations must have robust safeguarding policies under continuous review and must take any allegation of domestic abuse extremely seriously. The public and Parliament must have the highest confidence in the processes in place to protect the most vulnerable and protect those most at risk in society.

## HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### ■ Further support for social and affordable housebuilding and next steps on supported housing

**Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook):** [\[HCWS447\]](#)

England is in the grip of an acute and entrenched housing crisis. The detrimental consequences of this disastrous state of affairs are now all pervasive. We have a

generation locked out of homeownership; 1.3 million people languishing on social housing waiting lists; millions of low-income households forced into insecure, unaffordable and far too often sub-standard private rented housing; and 160,000 homeless children living in temporary accommodation.

Among the most important causes of the housing crisis is a failure over many decades to build enough homes of all tenures to meet housing demand and housing need. That is why the government's Plan for Change includes an ambitious milestone of delivering 1.5 million safe and decent homes in this Parliament.

We are also determined to deliver the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation. Today, I am announcing further support for the Affordable Homes Programme and the Local Authority Housing Fund, and outlining the steps the government intends to take to raise standards and better regulate supported housing.

### **Affordable Homes Programme**

We will set out details of new investment to succeed the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme at the Spending Review later this year. 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.

In October 2024, [we announced £500 million in new in-year funding](#) for the Affordable Homes Programme. As a result of significant demand from housing providers across the country, that additional funding is already oversubscribed.

I am therefore pleased to announce that the government is allocating a further £300m to the Affordable Homes Programme. This will support the near-term delivery of more social and affordable housing, delivering up to 2,800 new homes with more than half being Social Rent homes.

### **Local Authority Housing Fund**

In addition to further funding for the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme, I am announcing a £50m increase to the third round of the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF 3). This takes the total funding for this round of the programme to £500m, alongside c.£30m of existing funding being reallocated.

LAHF provides funding to local authorities to help them deliver better quality temporary accommodation and to support UK commitments to those on Afghan resettlement schemes who are fleeing persecution. The Fund's Third Round, which we confirmed in July 2024, has had high levels of interest from local authorities, with over 150 taking part. In total, LAHF 3 will deliver more than 2,700 homes by 2026.

The majority of the additional £50m allocated will be used to procure better quality temporary accommodation so that local authorities can appropriately support local families in need of housing.

We recently invited councils to express an interest in delivering additional housing through LAHF, and we will be contacting those councils shortly to confirm the allocation of both the additional and reallocated funding.

## Supported housing

While there are many excellent supported housing providers undertaking crucial work to help vulnerable people get back on their feet and improve their lives, there are still significant numbers of unscrupulous providers who fail to provide high-quality accommodation to their tenants and a minority of rogue exempt accommodation operators who exploit gaps in the existing regulatory regime to profiteer.

The impact of poor-quality, non-commissioned exempt accommodation on vulnerable individuals can be devastating, whether it is the physical and mental consequences of living in squalid conditions, the risks that arise from the absence of effective supervision and safeguarding arrangements, the money gouged from hard-up residents through service charge costs that are ineligible for housing benefit purposes, or simply the inability to sustain an exempt accommodation tenancy, or to move on from one, because of a lack of care or support.

This government is determined to improve the quality of accommodation in the supported housing sector and assisting local authorities to drive up standards in their areas. That is why we are committed to implementing the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023.

We are today announcing that on 20 February 2025, we will publish a consultation on a number of the regulatory reforms contained within it. These include proposals for National Supported Housing Standards and a locally-led licensing regime to give local authorities the powers they need to effectively manage the supported housing markets in their areas.

We are committed to taking a sensible and proportionate approach to the introduction of these planned reforms and we look forward to receiving feedback through the consultation from good providers, local authorities and residents to ensure we get things right.

## ■ Government response to the Electoral Commission's reports on the 2024 elections

### Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Homelessness and Democracy

(Rushanara Ali):

[\[HCWS442\]](#)

Our democratic systems and institutions are strong and are rightly admired around the world. This Government will build on this, further strengthening our democracy and encouraging full participation from eligible voters.

It was a challenge to deliver separate local and general elections in 2024, following complex reforms to electoral law and Parliamentary boundary changes. The entire electoral community rose to this challenge. I am grateful to returning officers, electoral registration officers and their teams for their hard work and dedication to the successful delivery of these polls – and to every volunteer who gave their time to support the democratic process.

The Electoral Commission, in line with its duties, reported in September 2024 on voter identification at the 2024 General Election; and in November 2024 on how that election was delivered, as well as the delivery of the May local elections, Police and Crime

Commissioner elections and Mayoral elections in England and Wales. I am pleased to publish today the Government's response to the Electoral Commission's reports.

I welcome the Commission's views and recommendations and thank them for their work. I note the many positives from their findings: most importantly that the elections were well run, and electors were highly satisfied with the processes of registration and voting, despite delivering two sets of polls in short succession. I welcome the marked increase in voter confidence since 2019: 83% of the public reported a high confidence in the polls and 87% believed the polls were free from fraud and abuse. Those numbers are a testament to the efforts from across the electoral community in the intervening period – but also an encouragement to improve further.

I also note the challenges that the Commission's reports highlight. We treat their recommendations seriously; this response sets out what this Government is doing about them. Disability must not be a barrier to participation: there is clearly more to be done to help disabled voters access the support that is their legal right where they need it. We must also tackle the unacceptable intimidatory and abusive behaviour some candidates face when standing for public office; review and improve voter identification rules, to make it easier for legitimate voters; reduce the risk to delivery through improved electoral processes; and widen participation in our democracy.

This Government will work with our partners to increase participation in elections, to ensure a wider range of voices is heard and that people's views are fairly represented. We will deliver on our manifesto commitments to improve registration, extend the right to vote to those 16 and over for all UK elections, review and improve the voter ID rules, and strengthen the political finance framework.

These reforms are not the sum total of our ambition. We continue to work with our partners to scrutinise and improve our election processes, even as we reflect further on the Commission's reports and develop practical responses.

In parallel to this response to the Electoral Commission's reports, I am also pleased to publish the findings of an independent, nationally representative public opinion survey related to voting in the UK, undertaken by Ipsos. This is the third wave of a set of surveys conducted on behalf of the Government to understand elector attitudes to and experiences of several measures in the Elections Act 2022, including voter ID, accessibility and absent voting. Further work will follow, with this research contributing to the Government's evaluation of the impact of the Elections Act 2022 on the 2024 General Election. That evaluation will be published in spring 2025. This Government is determined that all eligible voters will be able to cast their vote, with support where necessary.

The Government will work closely with the Electoral Commission and key stakeholders from across the sector to further understand and assess the impact of recent and future reforms. I am pleased to announce that we will be bringing all this work together into an overall Government Strategy for Elections, setting out the Government's approach to elections and electoral reform for this Parliament. This will be published later this year.

We are the custodians of an internationally renowned democracy that has endured and evolved over hundreds of years: we will protect our democracy, fix its foundations, and



ensure it continues to grow to become stronger, more inclusive and more vibrant than ever before.

The associated documents will be deposited in the libraries of both Houses.

## ■ Grenfell Tower

**Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Angela Rayner):** [\[HCWS440\]](#)

I want to provide the House with an update on the Government's work with the Grenfell community and on my decision about the future of Grenfell Tower.

### **Supporting the community**

Learning the lessons from the Grenfell tragedy and ensuring lasting change are key priorities for the government. In his statement to this House in September, the Prime Minister committed to supporting the community now and always, and to building a legacy of change in their name.

I am committed to supporting bereaved families, survivors and immediate community, and working to ensure that we never see a repeat of the tragedy. Since my appointment, I have valued hearing directly from the community about the issues that matter to them.

### **Grenfell Tower**

I am responsible for Grenfell Tower and for making a decision about its future. I understand that this is a deeply personal matter for those affected, and I am keeping their voice firmly at the heart of this decision making.

I would like to update the House that over the last week I have met bereaved families and survivors, and residents in the immediate community to explain my decision that Grenfell Tower will be carefully taken down.

### **Listening to the community**

I have reached this decision after listening carefully to the community, and I am grateful to everyone who has shared their personal stories and views, especially bereaved and survivors.

In November last year, I explained to families that I would listen to their views and make sure their voices were heard, as well as to consider expert information before making a decision on the future of the Tower in February.

From November I offered bereaved and survivors the opportunity to meet in-person in North Kensington and Whitehall, or online, at different times and individually when families felt more comfortable with this. I have also spent time with representative groups, residents' associations, schools and faith leaders. I am grateful to everyone who shared their view – whether directly with me, with the Minister or officials – and especially to the bereaved and survivors.

The Tower was the home of the 72 innocent people who lost their lives, and of survivors whose lives were forever changed. It is clear from conversations it remains a sacred site. It is also clear that there is not a consensus about what should happen to it.

For some, Grenfell Tower is a symbol of all that they lost. The presence of the Tower helps to ensure the tragedy is never forgotten and can act as a reminder of the need for justice and accountability. Being able to see the Tower every day helps some people continue to feel close to those they lost. For others it is a painful reminder of what happened and is having a daily impact on some members of the community. Some have suggested that some floors of the Tower should be retained for the memorial, others have said that this would be too painful.

### **Expert advice**

I also considered independent expert advice. Engineering advice says that the Tower is significantly damaged. It remains stable because of the measures put in place to protect it but even with installation of additional props, the condition of the building will continue to worsen over time. Engineers also advise it is not practicable to retain many of the floors of the building in place as part of a memorial that must last in perpetuity.

Taking the engineering advice into account I have concluded that it would not be fair to keep some floors of the building that are significant to some families, whilst not being able to do so for others and knowing that, for some, this would be upsetting.

### **How the Tower will be taken down**

The government is committed to taking the next steps respectfully and carefully. There will be continued support for, and engagement with, the community throughout the process.

In the coming months, the government will confirm the specialist contractor that will develop a detailed plan for taking the Tower down. The work will be led by technical experts with specific health and safety responsibilities and will include a methodology that includes environmental, health and safety measures and a detailed programme of work. The views the community have shared already will inform the plans. The department will continue to work with them, for example on arrangements to pay their respects.

There will be no changes to the Tower before the eighth anniversary. It will likely take around two years to sensitively take down the Tower through a process of careful, progressive deconstruction that happens behind the wrapping.

We continue to support the independent Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission as the community choose a design team to work with them on designing a memorial.

I will ensure that parts of the Tower or materials from the site can be carefully removed and returned for inclusion as part of the memorial, if the community wishes.

The department has regularly consulted the Metropolitan Police, HM Coroner and the Grenfell Tower Inquiry to ensure decisions about the site do not interfere with their important work in pursuit of justice and accountability. The Police and HM Coroner have again recently confirmed they have everything they need.

### **Continued commitment for the community**

My commitment to the community continues. I will ensure bereaved families, survivors and residents continue to have opportunities to speak with me and the Building Safety Minister on issues that matter to them most.

## **JUSTICE**

### ■ **Probation Delivery**

#### **Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood):**

[\[HCWS446\]](#)

The Probation Service is an essential part of our criminal justice system. Keeping our streets safe and cutting crime depends upon the vital work of probation officers and staff. Today, it supervises just over a quarter a million offenders, from those on community sentences to those released from custody. That is not all. The Probation Service provides sentencing advice to judges and magistrates every day in our courts, oversees more than 4 million hours of community payback each year, monitors 9,000 offenders on tags at any given moment, provides a vital link to thousands of victims, through the Victims Contact and the Victims Notification schemes and works in close partnership with policing and the voluntary sector to keep our communities safe.

The pressure facing our probation service is considerable and I am grateful for everyone who works tirelessly across the system. It is only right to acknowledge the incredibly hard, and often hidden, work that probation officers do across England & Wales. These dedicated staff have been the single constant throughout the last decade of change. We need to ensure that the Probation Service can deliver the vital work that needs to be done to keep the public safe and reduce reoffending. However, the Probation Service this government inherited was burdened with a workload that was, quite simply, impossible. We need to be honest and open about the state that the Probation Service was left in by the previous government. The Transforming Rehabilitation strategy failed. The rhetoric was of a revolution in how we manage offenders, but the reality was far different. Workloads increased, as new offenders were brought under supervision for the first time, and scarce resources were stretched further than ever. We know that morale plummeted, and worrying numbers of staff voted with their feet, leaving the service altogether, leading the then Inspector to declare a “national shortage” of probation professionals.

The new structures failed. The privately owned Community Rehabilitation Companies set up to manage medium and low risk offenders underperformed, and between 2017 and 2018, just 5 of 37 CRC audits carried out by HMPPS demonstrated that expected standards were being met. In 2019, 8 out of the 10 CRCs inspected that year received the lowest possible rating – “inadequate” – for supervising offenders. The Chief Inspector of Probation called them ‘irredeemably flawed’. The previous administration reunified the Probation Service but wasted a decade and millions of pounds.

When we took office, we discovered that orders handed out by courts were not taking place. In the three years to March 2024, around 13,000 Accredited Programmes, a type

of rehabilitative course, did not happen. This was not because an offender had failed to do what was expected of them, but instead because the Probation Service had been unable to deliver these courses in the required timeframe.

For that reason, I have asked the Probation Service to put in place a process of prioritisation. Accredited Programmes handed down by the courts to those who are considered to have the higher risk of reoffending will be prioritised. This isn't a decision I take lightly. But it is a decision to confront the reality of the challenges facing the Probation Service. Those who will not complete an accredited course will remain under the supervision of a probation officer. And all the requirements placed upon them will remain in place. Any breach of a community sentence could see them hauled back into court, and any breach of a licence condition could see them back behind bars.

In July, I committed to bringing on 1,000 trainee probation officers by March of this year – a commitment that we are making progress towards. Next financial year, we will onboard at least another 1,300. New probation officers are the lifeblood of the service, and they will guarantee its future. And I want to ensure that we are taking advantage of the latest technology, like AI. We must give probation staff access to modern digital services, drawing in data from across the justice system. Work is already ongoing that is improving the flow of information, so critical to an accurate assessment of an offender's risk, and new tools are beginning to strip away the administrative burden that gets between a probation officer and an offender.

However, given the challenges faced by the Probation Service, new staff and better processes are not sufficient on their own. Faced by a caseload of just over a quarter of a million we need to think about how we use the Probation Service most effectively. If the service is to fulfil its historic purpose – protecting the public by reducing reoffending – we need to look hard at what works, and where officers time is best spent. When it comes to the value of a probation officer's time the evidence is clear that we must shift more of probation officer's time towards the higher risk offenders, spending more time on protecting the public, working with partners, and working with the offender to rehabilitate them and motivate them to change.

This Government will focus the Probation Service on the interventions that have the greatest impact. For lower risk offenders, we will task probation officers with a swifter intervention. They will spend more time with an offender immediately after their sentencing or release from prison to assess the root causes of an offender's crime. Then they will refer them to the services, that will address that behaviour which could be education, training, drug treatment or accommodation. Once they are following that direction, as long as the offender stays on the straight and narrow, we must then focus probation officer's time more effectively. This means more time spent with the offenders who pose the higher risk of harm or reoffending and more time with offenders whose prolific offending causes so much social and economic damage to local communities.