



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 13 February 2025 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:21 P.M., 13 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

ATTORNEY GENERAL

■ International Law: Legal Opinion

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[30056\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, how much has been spent on external legal advice on international law since 5 July 2024.

Lucy Rigby:

The Attorney General's Office (AGO) has spent £0 on external legal advice that covers international law matters commissioned from 5th July 2024.

However, the AGO has spent £7,028.40 for external legal advice covering international law matters that was sought and received by the previous administration prior to 5th July 2024.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Business Growth Service: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes:

[\[28453\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to promote the Business Growth Service with small business owners in Lincolnshire.

Gareth Thomas:

We are engaging widely with stakeholders across the country, including with small business owners and entrepreneurs, on the design, and the implementation of the Business Growth Service (BGS) later this year, to ensure that we deliver on our mission to make it easier for businesses to get the support they need to grow and thrive.

■ Business Rates: Tax Allowances

David Simmonds:

[\[29624\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 9 January 2025 to Question 19680 on High Streets Task Force, what discussions his Department had with retailers on the impact of the reduction in retail, hospitality and leisure business rate relief from April 2025.

Gareth Thomas:

Across Government, Ministers and officials meet with a range of retailers to understand the challenges they face. I have met with the Retail Sector Council where I heard members' views about the impact of the Budget. More recently, I attended a roundtable organised by the British Retail Consortium, attended by CEOs and Senior

Executives from leading retailers, with discussion points including the impact of the Budget and Business Rates.

More broadly, HMT are conducting engagement on future business rate reform and are open to receiving written evidence from stakeholders on the priority areas, prior to March 2025. This will provide retail businesses of any size the opportunity to share their concerns directly with HMT.

■ Chemicals: Manufacturing Industries

Jim Shannon:

[\[24848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to help protect the chemical industry from (a) site closures and (b) job losses.

Sarah Jones:

The chemicals sector underpins almost all manufacturing in the UK and is fundamental to maximising growth and productivity across the economy to drive forward the government's missions, including delivering growth for all. Reforms are underway to address planning barriers to growth, channel finance towards growth priorities and accelerate the transition to net zero.

This will be supported by our modern Industrial Strategy which will implement targeted policy interventions to drive long-term sustainable, inclusive and secure growth.

Last autumn's Budget announced continued support for Energy Intensive Industries – including chemical companies - through £350M of additional funding across the next two years.

■ Construction Skills Certification Scheme Card

James McMurdock:

[\[25967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the Construction Industry Training Board's decision to end the use of Construction Skills Certification Scheme cards.

Sarah Jones:

Construction Skills Certification Scheme Limited is the organisation responsible for providing cards to individuals working on construction sites. The Construction Industry Training Board has not ended the use of Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards.

Holding a CSCS card is not a legislative requirement. Most principal contractors and major house builders require workers on their construction sites to hold a valid card.

Standardising the approach to construction skills certification was made by the industry to improve standards of safety and competency on construction sites. This specifies and promotes card schemes displaying the CSCS logo with no equivalents accepted.

■ Construction: Employers' Contributions

Blake Stephenson:

[\[28604\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an estimate of the potential impact of changes to employers' National Insurance contributions on employment in the construction industry.

Gareth Thomas:

More than half of employers, including small businesses in the construction sector will see no change or gain overall. The Government has protected small businesses and charities from the impact of the increase to Employer National Insurance by increasing the Employment Allowance from £5,000 to £10,500, and 865,000 employers will pay no NICs next year. Eligible employers will be able to employ up to four full-time workers on the National Living Wage and pay no employer NICs.

Meeting the Government's commitments to build the infrastructure we need, and deliver 1.5m homes over this Parliament, will need an increased workforce. We are committed to working with industry to do that.

■ Construction: Staff

James McMurdock:

[\[25968\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to help increase the number of workers in the construction industry.

Sarah Jones:

The Department for Business and Trade is working across Government to understand the demand impacts for the construction sector to deliver our built environment and infrastructure commitments.

This includes working with industry and the Construction Industry Training Board to support recruitment initiatives such as GoConstruct, and Open Doors, which aim to attract people to the industry. We are also working with DfE Skills England and the sector to improve routes to achieving qualifications and entering the industry, to ensure there are enough skilled workers to achieve our ambitions for housing and infrastructure delivery.

■ Drinks and Food: Manufacturing Industries

John Glen:

[\[29453\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he (a) is taking with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to encourage (i) growth and (ii) investment in food and drink manufacturing and (b) plans to take to support food and drink manufacturing through the forthcoming Industrial Strategy.

Sarah Jones:

Growth is the number one mission of the government. The UK's agriculture food and drink sector plays a significant role in the UK economy, contributing £146.7bn to GVA. The UK presents many opportunities for investment right across the food and

drink supply chain stages of product development. All sectors can shape and will benefit from policy reform through the Industrial Strategy's cross-cutting policies alongside the broader Growth Mission. This will create the pro-business environment for all businesses to invest and employ, with growth that supports high-quality jobs and ensures that the benefits are shared across people, places, and generations.

John Glen: [\[29454\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of his Department's support for advanced manufacturing within the industrial strategy on food and drink manufacturers.

Sarah Jones:

The Industrial Strategy Green Paper identified eight growth-driving sectors, including advanced manufacturing. All sectors can shape and benefit from policy reform through the Industrial Strategy's cross-cutting policies alongside the broader Growth Mission. This will create the pro-business environment for all businesses to invest and employ, with growth that supports high-quality jobs and ensures that the benefits are shared across people, places, and generations.

The UK's food and drink sector plays a significant part in the UK economy, with £146.7bn contribution to GVA. The government is engaging with the food and drink industry regularly to explore all avenues for growth.

■ **Fraud: Communications**

David Chadwick: [\[29816\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what regulatory mechanisms are in place to help consumers verify the legitimacy of communications from (a) banks, (b) energy providers and (c) telecommunications companies to help prevent scams.

Justin Madders:

Although the Department of Business and Trade does not directly regulate these sectors, Companies House and the Insolvency Service supply data on UK registered companies to assist law enforcement targeting online fraud and other economic crimes. Furthermore, through the Consumer Protection Partnership, we raise awareness about how to spot, avoid and report scams.

Across Government, the Home Office works with Ofcom to prevent phone number 'spoofing', which is the practice of scammers impersonating UK phone numbers to trick people into thinking they are speaking to legitimate businesses.

■ **Housing: Building Alterations**

Munira Wilson: [\[29507\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of creating an ombudsman for home owner property extensions.

Justin Madders:

The Government continues to consider ways in which consumers can be supported in accessing redress and regularly reviews how standards of consumer protection within the construction sector could be improved.

The Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 contains measures to improve Alternative Dispute Resolution in consumer markets by raising standards of consistency and quality, and encouraging business take up.

The Government-funded Citizens Advice consumer service offers free advice to consumers on their rights and how to take complaints forward. A list of Alternative Dispute Resolution bodies and their related sector is available on the [Chartered Trading Standards Institute website](#).

■ Manufacturing Industries**John Glen:**[\[29436\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how his Department intends to define the subsectors within Advanced Manufacturing in the forthcoming Industrial Strategy.

Sarah Jones:

The Government committed in the Industrial Strategy Green Paper – Invest 2035 to identify subsectors within Advanced Manufacturing that meet our objectives and for which there is evidence that policy can address barriers to growth.

This includes consideration of the contribution to Net Zero, regional growth, and economic security and resilience. Input from the Sector roundtable's and industry feedback from responses to this Green Paper to inform this programme of analysis.

The industrial strategy, alongside sector plans for the growth-driving sectors, will be published in spring 2025, aligned with the multi-year spending review.

■ Minerals: Supply Chains**Noah Law:**[\[25924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to ensure that social value for communities and workers is prioritised in the forthcoming Critical Mineral Strategy.

Sarah Jones:

The new Critical Minerals Strategy will support the industries of tomorrow, be explicitly targeted at UK strengths, articulate the impacts on people's lives, deliver for businesses and create new jobs across the UK.

In developing the Strategy, the UK Government is committed to the sustainable development of natural resources in the UK and overseas, in close collaboration with local communities and their workforce to ensure they benefit in turn. The UK Government places a high priority on mining and mineral processing being carried out to the highest standards.

■ Oxford-Cambridge Arc

Blake Stephenson:

[\[29577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an estimate of the potential impact of increases to employers' National Insurance on employment in the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor.

Gareth Thomas:

Prior to the Government's recent announcement on the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor, a Tax Information and Impact Note that covers the employer NICs changes was published by HMRC on 13 November.

We have protected small businesses from the impact of the increase to Employer National Insurance by increasing the Employment Allowance from £5,000 to £10,500, meaning that 865,000 employers will pay no NICs next year, and more than half of employers will see no change or will gain overall from this package.

We are considering ways to drive business growth and build on our world-leading strengths in the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor.

■ Trade Promotion: Israel and Occupied Territories

Andy Slaughter:

[\[30065\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what the (a) role and (b) responsibilities are of the trade envoys to (i) Israel and (ii) the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Gareth Thomas:

Trade Envoys support HMG export and investment services already provided in a market. Each Trade Envoy role is tailored according to the requirements of their respective markets and the Trade Envoys to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories will align with the Departmental priorities identified for those markets.

■ UK Export Finance: Artificial Intelligence

Sir John Hayes:

[\[30039\]](#)

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

Gareth Thomas:

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.

UK Export Finance (UKEF) is currently exploring various scenarios and use cases where AI can assist the department. This involves conducting internal trials and learning exercises to better understand AI's potential. Throughout this process, UKEF remains committed to adhering to the government's AI policy and guidance.

CABINET OFFICE■ **Arms Length Bodies****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[29024\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's guidance entitled The Approvals Process for the Creation of New Arm's-Length Bodies, published on 15 March 2018, which of the three tests in Chapter 2 the Industrial Strategy Council meets.

Georgia Gould:

The Department for Business and Trade is currently working through the approval process to establish the Industrial Strategy Council as an Arm's Length Body.

■ **Baroness Casey of Blackstock****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[29030\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 16 January 2025 to Question 22993 on Cabinet Office: Directors, for what reason the declaration of political activity was not published with the announcement of the appointment.

Georgia Gould:

As was the case under the previous administration, the relevant interests of non-executive board members and public appointments will continue to be updated and published bi-annually as part of an established process as set out in the Non-Executive Board Member declaration of interests process - GOV.UK. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-executive-board-member-declaration-of-interests-process/non-executive-board-member-declaration-of-interests-process>)

■ **Brexit****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[29028\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 20 January 2025 to Question HL3924 on Brexit, what steps he is taking in response to each of those active infringement proceedings.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

We are committed to the full and faithful implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement and fulfilling our international obligations. Disputes are a normal part of a mature relationship with international partners. It is not appropriate to comment on ongoing legal proceedings.

■ Buses: Manufacturing Industries**Euan Stainbank:** [\[28728\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the National Procurement Policy Statement on the domestic bus manufacturing industry.

Georgia Gould:

The government is committed to supporting the UK's domestic bus manufacturing industry and ensuring a fair, competitive procurement process. The new National Procurement Policy Statement will be focused on our missions, growing the economy, creating high-quality local jobs, driving innovation and opening up opportunities to small businesses and social enterprises. Contracting authorities are encouraged to consider how their procurement strategies can support domestic supply chains, including the bus manufacturing sector.

■ Cabinet Office: Equality**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[29027\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the recent Employment Tribunal settlement between Mrs Eleanor Frances versus the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology.

Georgia Gould:

As a Civil Service Department, the Cabinet Office's policy in this area is aligned with the Government People Group's Civil Service model policy. As such, the Cabinet Office policy will be revised in due course to reflect planned updates to the model policy and guidance, which is currently under review.

Rupert Lowe: [\[29138\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will publish the total cost to the public purse for the provision of diversity, equality and inclusion courses for staff in her Department in 2024.

Georgia Gould:

The total cost to the public purse for the provision of diversity, equality and inclusion courses for staff in Cabinet Office in 2024 was £0.

■ Cabinet Office: Media**Uma Kumaran:** [\[29166\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 3 February 2025 to Question 23666 on Cabinet Office: Media, which Ministers received that training.

Georgia Gould:

Information about attendees of the training sessions is not being disclosed to protect individual confidentiality.

■ Cabinet Office: Public Relations

Bradley Thomas: [\[29169\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, 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.

Georgia Gould:

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

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

■ Civil Servants: Flexible Working

Bradley Thomas: [\[29134\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many civil servants across Government are compressed hours workers on a four day week.

Georgia Gould:

This information is not held centrally.

Decisions on terms and conditions of employment, including flexible working, are made by the employing department, depending on their specific business requirements and the nature of the role.

■ Civil Servants: Recruitment

Mr Richard Holden: [\[29019\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 6093 on Civil Servants: Recruitment, what is the process by which a Minister can request a department (a) appoint and (b) consider appointing a specific individual to the Civil Service without open and fair competition.

Georgia Gould:

The Commission's Recruitment Principles allow for specific time-limited 'Exceptions' to the legal requirement to recruit on merit on the basis of a fair and open competition.

Appointment by exception must be either to meet the needs of the government or to enable the Civil Service to participate in a government employment initiative. In such instances, ministers are important stakeholders in the appointment process.

Ministers can also, with agreement from the Civil Service Commission, bring in experts and specialist talent without competition - for up to two years – to meet an urgent business need.

In most cases, departments determine the case for an Exception themselves. The Civil Service Commission audits departmental use of exceptions as part of its audit programme.

The Commission's approval is however required for:

- Any appointment by Exception at Senior Civil Service Pay Band 2
- Any extension or variation of any fixed-term appointment previously agreed by the Commission at Senior Civil Service Pay Band 2 or above
- The use of an Exception within 12 months of an earlier Exception for the same individual
- Any fixed-term appointment by Exception in excess of two years

■ Crown Commercial Service: Artificial Intelligence

Sir John Hayes:

[\[28455\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, for what purposes the Crown Commercial Service has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

Georgia Gould:

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 Crown Commercial Service's (CCS) vision is to integrate AI tools and models into its operational fabric, to deliver insights to commercial decision makers, make CCS simpler, quicker and easier to use, and create efficiencies.

CCS is currently experimenting with AI-driven solutions in development environments to improve customer access and usability of its services. Pending successful testing and evaluation, CCS plans to integrate these tools into our services and processes.

■ Eurostat: Office for National Statistics

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[28580\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 17 January 2025 to Question 23894 on Eurostat: Office for National Statistics and the associated correspondence of 17 January 2025 from the National Statistician, if he will make it his policy to (a) publish on gov.uk and (b) deposit in the Library of the House the agreement with Eurostat.

Georgia Gould:

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

A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 4th February is attached.

Attachments:

1. Letter from the UK Statistics Authority [PQ28580.pdf]

■ Euthanasia: Scotland**Rebecca Paul:** [\[29868\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what involvement the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel had in drafting the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill in (a) 2023 and (b) 2024.

Georgia Gould:

The Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill from both 2023 and 2024 are Scottish bills. Therefore, there has been no involvement from the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. The Office of the Parliamentary Counsel draft Government legislation for Westminster.

■ Immigration: Overseas Students**Martin Wrigley:** [\[29255\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many and what proportion of immigrants were international students in the latest period for which data is available; and what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of including international students in those figures.

Georgia Gould:

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

A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 5th February is attached.

Attachments:

1. Letter from the National Statistician [UKSA response to PQ29255.pdf]

■ Infected Blood Compensation Scheme: Hepatitis**Pippa Heylings:** [\[29626\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 23 January 2025 to Question 25004 on Infected Blood Compensation Scheme: Hepatitis, what assessment he has made of the sufficiency of funding for compensation for the affected families of people with hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

In the Autumn budget, the Government announced £11.8 billion of funding to compensate eligible infected and affected people. Each eligible person will get the compensation they are due.

■ Ministers: Aviation**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[29022\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 21 October 2024 to Question 8434 on Prime Minister: Aviation, which (a) company and (b) commercial facility

the Government uses to carbon offset its (i) domestic and (ii) international flights for Ministerial air travel.

Georgia Gould:

All travel using the HMG wet-leased A321 aircraft (known as GBNI) is fully offset. This is done at the end of the financial year to correctly reflect the emissions.

The Cabinet Office utilises the HMG Crown Commercial Services (CCS) RM6251 Energy Supply Framework with EDF to offset these emissions.

■ **Ministers: Dual Nationality**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[28584\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what guidance his Department has issued to Ministers on declaring dual nationality to (a) their department and (b) the Independent Adviser on Ministerial Standards.

Georgia Gould:

There is an established process in place for the declaration and management of ministers' private interests, which ensures that steps are taken to avoid or mitigate any actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

More information about the process by which ministers declare interests and the categories of interests declared is available in the List of Ministers' Interests, which is published on Gov.uk

■ **Ministers: Peers' Interests**

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[29420\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what guidance his Department has issued on the disclosure of past earnings for members of the Cabinet appointed from the House of Lords.

Georgia Gould:

Information about the process by which ministers declare interests, including details of the categories of interest declared, is available in the introduction to the List of Ministers' Interests published on Gov.uk

■ **National Wealth Fund: Statistics**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[28568\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the UK Statistics Authority plans to lay a new Official Statistics Order to designate the National Wealth Fund's statistical outputs as official statistics.

Georgia Gould:

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

A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 4th February is attached.

Attachments:

1. Letter from UK National Statistician (PQ28568) [PQ 28568.pdf]

■ Population: Bromsgrove**Bradley Thomas:**[\[29159\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what estimate his Department has made of the level of population growth in Bromsgrove constituency in the next five years.

Georgia Gould:

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

A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 5th February is attached.

Attachments:

1. Letter from the National Statistician [PQ29159 (1).pdf]

■ Public Bodies: Finance**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[29021\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 9 January 2025 to Question 21401 on Public Bodies: Finance, if he will list specific hyperlinks for where this information is published on gov.uk.

Georgia Gould:

The Cabinet Office does not hold a central list of where sponsoring departments publish information regarding public bodies reviews and efficiency savings.

Sponsoring departments determine the format, contents, and publishing location of this information.

■ Special Advisers: Industrial Disputes**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[29023\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 9 August 2024 to Question 1667 on Prime Minister: Special Advisers, whether special advisers who (a) are part of a trade union and (b) not part of a trade union are permitted to go on strike.

Georgia Gould:

Special advisers are employees of their appointing minister's department and as such have the same legal rights as other employees.

■ Trade Union Officials: Facilities Agreements**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[29026\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 8126 on Trade Union Officials: Facilities Agreements, for what reason the public sector trade union facility time data was not published before the end of 2024; and when that data will be published.

Georgia Gould:

The latest public sector trade union facility time data for the year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 has been published on gov.uk

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/public-sector-trade-union-facility-time-data>)

■ Unemployment**Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[29679\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many people not in education, employment or training there are in (a) the UK, (b) Leicestershire and (c) Mid Leicestershire constituency.

Mr Peter Bedford:[\[29680\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make an estimate of the number and proportion of migrants who arrived in the UK in the last five years who are not in education, employment or training in (a) the UK, (b) Leicestershire and (c) Mid Leicestershire constituency.

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 National Statistician [PQ29679_ 29680 (1).pdf]

■ Vetting**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[30160\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of ending the vetting transformation programme on (a) national security and (b) staff recruitment delays.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The security of our people, assets and information is a Government priority.

The Vetting Transformation Programme (VTP) was first announced in October 2020. The programme was subject of a number of reviews and audits under the previous administration, including by the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA) and Cabinet Office Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) Hub. These reviews concluded that there were weaknesses in governance and stakeholder engagement. As a result, the programme was closed in September 2024.

In its place, this Government is undertaking a range of initiatives to modernise and improve vetting services, delivered through three core workstreams:

1. Rationalising Policy and Process - Government Security Group (GSG) and UK Security Vetting are working with departments to standardise and centralise decision making.
2. Enhancing Digital and Cyber Security - UKSV are currently in the process of migrating the National Security Vetting System (NSVS) platform to the cloud to enhance the reliability of the current service and bring capabilities in line with industry best practice.
3. Increasing Assurance - GSG and UKSV are moving to an approach of continuous improvement across the assurance offered by vetting investigations.

In line with the practice followed by successive administrations, the Government does not otherwise comment on security matters.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Advertising: Children

Mark Pritchard:

[\[28905\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Broadcasting Code by Ofcom on reducing the sexualisation of children through broadcast advertising.

Chris Bryant:

The Advertising Standards Authority co-regulates broadcast advertising under contract with Ofcom and its sister organisation, the Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP), sets the advertising codes. The codes require that advertisements must not portray or represent anyone who is, or seems to be, under 18 in a sexual way and care must be taken when scheduling advertisements in or around children's programmes or programmes likely to be seen by significant numbers of children.

The Broadcast Advertising Code has a dedicated section on protecting children, with rules designed to ensure that adverts do not contain anything that is likely to cause children physical, mental or moral harm, and the ASA administers these rules robustly. All broadcast advertising is pre-approved to ensure it is compliant with the BCAP Code before it is aired, through a system known as Clearcast. Clearcast has well established processes to ensure advertising content is thoroughly checked before it appears on television and puts restrictions in place when necessary.

■ Arts: Artificial Intelligence

Fabian Hamilton:

[\[29423\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to manage the potential impact of AI on (a) illustrators and (b) creatives.

Alex Ballinger:

[\[29697\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to (a) protect the creative industries and (b) ensure copyright legislation remains strong in response to proliferated use of AI.

Chris Bryant:

The government recognises the importance of the UK's copyright regime to the economic success of the creative industries, one of eight growth-driving sectors as identified in our Industrial Strategy. We are committed to supporting rights holders by ensuring they retain control over and receive fair payment for their work, especially as technology advances to include AI. We are actively working with stakeholders to ensure copyright protections remain robust and fit for purpose.

On the impact of AI, our next step is a 10-week consultation, published on Tuesday 17 December and closing 25 February, to engage AI and creative industries stakeholders widely on the impact of AI on the copyright regime.

Consultation responses will inform our approach to the design and delivery of a solution to the current dispute over the use of copyrighted material in AI training. Our aim is to clarify the copyright framework for AI – delivering certainty through a copyright regime that provides creators with real control, transparency, and helps them licence their content, while supporting AI developers' access to high-quality material.

Following the consultation we will continue to develop our policy approach in partnership with creative industries, media and AI stakeholders - supporting our brilliant artists and the creative industries to work together with the AI sector to harness the opportunities this technology provides.

■ **Broadcasting Programmes: Cornish Language**

Perran Moon:

[\[29827\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she plans to take to help increase the (a) production and (b) programming of Cornish language content.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government wants broadcasters to commission content in every part of the country and for British storytelling to reflect the full diversity of people, communities and experiences across the UK so that more people can see themselves reflected on screen and as part of our national story.

The Media Act makes clear in legislation the importance of the UK's indigenous regional and minority languages - including Cornish - by including their provision in the public service remit for television.

The BBC additionally has an obligation to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all the UK's nations and regions, set out in its current Royal Charter.

The forthcoming Charter Review is a key opportunity to set the BBC up for success long into the future. It will look at a range of issues and, as a priority for this

Government, will start a national conversation to make sure the BBC truly represents and delivers for every person in this country.

■ **Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Equality**

Rupert Lowe: [\[29140\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will publish the total cost to the public purse for the provision of diversity, equality and inclusion courses for staff in her Department in 2024.

Stephanie Peacock:

The only expenditure on D&I training in 2024 was £6,600 for a British Sign Language training programme of workshops for 12 staff in Manchester.

■ **Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Flags**

David Simmonds: [\[29620\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what information her Department holds on departmental plans to fly flags other than the Union flag in 2025.

Stephanie Peacock:

The flags other than the Union Flag that will be flown from the DCMS building in London in 2025 will be announced in due course. Currently, in addition to flying the Union Flag throughout the year, the Department flies a flag of Ukraine above the building.

■ **Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Technology**

Mr Richard Holden: [\[29559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many large technology firms she has met since her appointment; and how many times she has met (a) small companies and (b) groups representing small challenger technology firms.

Stephanie Peacock:

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

■ **Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Written Questions**

Bradley Thomas: [\[29247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 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 yet received a substantive response in each month since August 2024 .

Stephanie Peacock:

An annual correspondence report, across all departments, will be published in due course.

■ Football: Clubs

Mr Peter Bedford:

[\[29682\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Football Governance Bill on football clubs in the Premier League.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Premier League is a global success story. It is one of our greatest cultural exports. It attracts more viewers and higher revenues than any of its international rivals. It is a product we want to protect and enhance.

The Football Governance Bill will create a clearer and more certain regulatory environment for investors which will drive future investment and growth so that English football remains a global success story. A more sustainable game is a more investable game, and this in turn should drive continued economic growth in the market.

The Independent Football Regulator will take a light-touch, targeted and proportionate approach. The requirements on clubs will reflect their circumstances, meaning they might vary based on factors like league, club size, and a club's financial health or riskiness. This will allow regulation to be light-touch wherever possible - meaning, where clubs are already well run, the Regulator will not look to intervene.

The Government's estimate of the economic impact of introducing a football regulator is set out in our Impact Assessment.

■ Gambling: Advertising

Cat Smith:

[\[28991\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to consider evidence related to advertising when strengthening protections against gambling harms.

Stephanie Peacock:

We are committed to considering the best available evidence, including on advertising, from a wide range of sources to inform decisions on strengthening protections. Developing quality evidence is a key priority for the statutory levy and funding will be directed towards high-quality, independent research to fill key gaps in the evidence base. This could include research on the impacts of advertising. We will continue to monitor developments in the evidence and take action when appropriate.

■ Gambling: Age

David Simmonds:

[\[29622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether the Government plans to reduce the legal age to (a) buy Lottery tickets and (b) gamble.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government has no plans to reduce the legal age to buy lottery tickets or to gamble.

■ Holiday Accommodation: Registration**Rachel Blake:**[\[29177\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what information will be collected by the proposed registration scheme for short-term lets.

Chris Bryant:

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is in the process of designing and delivering a short-term lets registration scheme for England. The data collected by the registration scheme will help local authorities understand the number and location of short-term lets in their areas, enabling them to address housing impacts in their communities. The scheme will ensure providers comply with their legal responsibilities, particularly regarding health and safety standards including gas, fire, and electrical safety. While the specific details of information to be collected are still being determined, we are committed to designing a scheme that supports a thriving Visitor Economy.

■ Local Press**Jo Platt:**[\[28637\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how (a) the Local News Commission and (b) other similar organisations will be able to contribute to the development of her planned local media strategy.

Stephanie Peacock:

We have been working across Government as the Local Media Strategy develops and are also engaging with key external stakeholders, from industry, academia, civil society and local government. Officials have already met with the Public Interest News Foundation, founders of the Local News Commission, as part of that engagement. Our work is also being informed by the range of studies conducted into the state of local journalism in the UK in recent years. With this in mind, we look forward to publication of the Local News Commission's report and any new insights or recommendations that the Commission is able to offer.

■ Multi-sport Grassroots Facilities Programme**Ian Sollom:**[\[28619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 3 February 2025 to Question 26625 on Multi-sport Grassroots Facilities Programme, if she will publish the 521 projects that remain incomplete.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government published a list of funded Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities projects on 8th October 2024 on Gov.uk. The lists can be found [here](#) and include funded projects that are either due to start, in progress or complete.

We are committed to publishing a regularly updated list of funded and completed projects, with the next to be published in Spring 2025.

■ Rugby: Listed Events**Adam Dance:**[\[29369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of adding the Six Nations rugby union championship to the category A list of events not permitted to be broadcast solely on paid television services.

Stephanie Peacock:

The current listed events regime is designed to ensure that sporting events of national significance are available to as wide an audience as possible, by prohibiting exclusive broadcasting of the event without prior consent from Ofcom. Listing does not guarantee that an event will be broadcast live, or on a free to air channel. Rights holders are not required to sell live rights for listed events and free-to-air broadcasters are not obliged to purchase them.

The Government believes that the current list of events works well and that it strikes an appropriate balance between access to sporting events and allowing sports to maximise broadcasting revenue. Therefore, the Government has no plans to review the list at this time.

It is right that the Rugby Football Union (RFU) and Six Nations Rugby take a considered and balanced approach: recognising the need to achieve reach with existing and new fans, the importance that the Six Nations has for the cultural pride of each of the Home Nations, all the while maximising broadcast revenue.

■ Tickets: Fees and Charges**Chris Bloore:**[\[29167\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of commissioning a review into event booking fees.

Chris Bryant:

On 10 January, the Government launched a call for evidence on pricing practices in the live events sector, which closes on 4 April 2025.

It is important that consumers experience openness and transparency when buying tickets. We are seeking evidence on the impact of current pricing practices on consumers and businesses and whether the current legal framework provides sufficient protection. We encourage responses, including on issues such as booking fees.

DEFENCE**■ Strategic Defence Review: Staff****James Cartlidge:**[\[30154\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether any contracts for the lead members of the Strategic Defence Review team have been extended beyond their original termination date.

Luke Pollard:

The Reviewers will make their final report to in the this Spring. The Secretary of State will then subsequently report to Parliament. The Strategic Defence Review will then be implemented by the Ministry of Defence.

■ Ukraine: Ammunition**James Cartlidge:**[\[30151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans he has to increase the provision of all types of mortar rounds to Ukraine.

Luke Pollard:

We continue to work closely with the Ukrainian Government to ensure the capabilities we provide meet the priorities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Since 2022, we have provided over 12,000 mortar rounds to Ukraine across various calibres.

■ Veterans: City of Durham**Mary Kelly Foy:**[\[30263\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to support veterans in City of Durham constituency.

Al Carns:

This is a Government of service that will always stand up for those who serve our country, no matter which community they are based in. I am working across government and with civil society to ensure veterans, including those in the City of Durham, and throughout the North East of England, get access to the health, housing, employment and other support they need. The 2021 census recorded 3623 veterans in the City of Durham constituency, representing 4.2% of the population aged 16 and over.

A range of support is in place for veterans. In England Op RESTORE provides specialist care to veterans who have physical health problems, and Op COURAGE, a mental health specialist service helps veterans and their families. Over 100,000 veterans have used Op RESTORE to date. The Government is investing more than £800,000 each to run this service. Op COURAGE has received over 35,000 referrals. The Government is investing more than £21 million each year to run this service.

Housing support is available across the United Kingdom via Op FORTITUDE, a single referral pathway to connect veterans with help and support. This system provides housing guidance and assistance to veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness. As of 9 February 2025, over 3100 referrals have been made and over 880 veterans have been supported into housing.

Veterans can also access a range of tailored employment support, including the Career Transition Partnership, which is the initial point of provision for those leaving military service in search of new job opportunities.

Armed Forces Champions are also based across the UK's JobCentre Plus network to help support members of the armed forces community into work.

EDUCATION

■ Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

Terry Jermy: [\[29204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans she has to extend to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support fund.

Janet Daby:

I refer my hon. Friend, the Member for South West Norfolk to the answer of 29 January 2025 to Question [26025](#).

■ Children: Identification

Jess Brown-Fuller: [\[29211\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing a unique ID for every child to (a) facilitate data sharing between public bodies and (b) identify children not in school or any form of education.

Stephen Morgan:

Implementing a unique ID for every child has been regularly cited as a potential solution to bring together data on children's interactions with different services. The government's manifesto for the 2024 election included a commitment to this end (on page 81) and the government is committed to improving data sharing across services, with a single unique identifier, to better support children and families.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, currently before Parliament, introduces a legal provision for a consistent identifier to be specified and the organisations required to use it, to be determined later through regulations. Alongside this, the department will initiate a pilot to establish how a consistent identifier can be effectively implemented.

The Bill also includes provisions for compulsory 'Children Not in School' registers in each local authority area in England. While the introduction of these registers does not depend on a consistent identifier, it may enhance data linking, which the department will explore through future piloting.

■ Disabled Students' Allowances**Josh Fenton-Glynn:** [\[29297\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the average waiting time was for a needs assessments for Disabled Students Allowance applications from the date of application to the date of (a) the assessment being carried out and (b) entitlement letters being issued in the latest period for which data is available.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: [\[29298\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance spelling and grammar assistive technology packages were required to undertake a needs assessment in each year since 2015.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: [\[29299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many assistive technology products funded via the Disabled Students Allowance for spelling and grammar support require a needs assessment before being approved.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: [\[29300\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance have been provided with spelling and grammar assistive technology packages (a) as of 5 February 2025 and (b) in each year since 2015.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: [\[29301\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many assistive technology products for spelling and grammar support are funded under the Disabled Students Allowance; and what the total cost to the public purse is of each product.

Janet Daby:

The average waiting time for a needs assessment from the date of application to the date of the assessment being carried out comprises the time taken by the Student Loans Company (SLC) to process an application and then the time taken by the contracted suppliers Capita and Study Tech to process the needs assessment.

The time taken by SLC to process an application is published online at GOV.UK here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sfe-current-application-timescales>. The latest weekly update, for February, shows that the average time taken for SLC to process an application, shown under the heading "a DSA application", is currently 7 working days. The average time taken for the contracted suppliers to offer and complete the needs assessment is currently 28 days. Each supplier has been set two individual KPIs to cover the offer and completion of the needs assessment. These are KPI 1, "Booking of a Needs Assessment Appointment (Minimum of 95% of offer of needs assessment appointment made within 2 working days of referral of customer by SLC)" and KPI 2, "Completion of a Needs Assessment (Minimum of 95% of needs assessment interviews should be offered and completed within 7 working days of successful contact (excluding those where the customer has requested an alternative date))".

Following completion of the needs assessment, both suppliers are required to return the needs assessment report to SLC for review within 5 working days, as stipulated by KPI 3, “Minimum of 95% of NARs made available to SLC within 5 working days of when needs assessments undertaken (excluding those where the customer has requested to review the needs assessment report)”. It is currently taking suppliers on average 14 days to return the needs assessment report to SLC. The needs assessment is then reviewed by SLC, following which confirmation of entitlement is communicated to the customer on the DSA2 letter. It is currently taking SLC 10 working days to complete this stage of the journey, as noted on the GOV.UK page under the heading “a Needs Assessment report”.

Information on the suppliers’ performance against their KPIs is published online on a quarterly basis here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/ds>. The next update will be published at the end of February.

All students applying for Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA) are required to have a needs assessment. This means that assistive software for spelling and grammar support has only been awarded when recommended in a needs assessment and agreed by SLC.

Data on the number of students awarded specific assistive software for spelling and grammar support through DSA for the time periods specified in the question is not immediately available, but in the 2023 calendar year this was around 36,000.

A list of the assistive software products for spelling and grammar support that have previously been awarded through DSA is published online here: <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/exchange-blog/2017/april/dsa-product-review-process/>. This list is for administrative purposes only. Products that are not on the list can also be funded through DSA if they are recommended by a needs assessor and agreed by SLC. Overall, agreed spend on spelling and grammar software through DSA is in the region of £4.5 million to £5 million annually. The total spend on each software product within that varies, as it depends on which products are recommended by needs assessors as being most suitable for students’ needs. As an illustration, in the 2023 calendar year, around 80% of total spend was on non-specialist grammar and spelling products, with Grammarly Premium making up 53% of total spend and Global Autocorrect 24% of total spend. Around 20% of total spend was on specialist grammar and spelling products for specific subject areas such as medicine and law, with Medinle products making up 16% of total spend.

■ GCE A-level

Natalie Fleet:

[29604]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of 18-year-olds have taken (a) three or (b) more A-levels in (i) Bolsover constituency, (ii) Derbyshire and (iii) England in each of the last five academic years.

Catherine McKinnell:

The attached table shows the number and proportion of students entering at least three A levels in England, the Bolsover constituency and the Derbyshire local authority over the past five academic years, broken down by the number of A level entries.

There were zero A level students in the Bolsover constituency in the years in question.

Data is based on students attending schools and colleges located in each geographic area who have reached the end of 16-18 study.

Attachments:

1. A level Students in Bolsover and Derbyshire [29604_PRD__A-Level students_Derbyshire_and_Bolsover.xlsx]

GCSE**Natalie Fleet:****[29619]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of key stage four students who completed their GCSEs went on to each destination in (a) Bolsover, (b) Derbyshire and (c) England in each of the last five academic years for which data is available.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department publishes information on the percentage of pupils continuing to a sustained education, apprenticeship or employment destination in England in the year after completing key stage 4 study (after year 11) from state-funded mainstream schools.

The data in the links below contain the data requested.

Bolsover: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/4125b56e-229e-4fa5-800f-08dd45163c72>.

Derbyshire: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/d0be6793-1dd3-41a7-800e-08dd45163c72>.

England: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/3b73cf3a-e357-4b8a-800d-08dd45163c72>.

Internet: Education**James McMurdock:****[29402]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans she has to include online safety education into the national curriculum in (a) primary and (b) secondary schools.

Catherine McKinnell:

As part of the statutory relationships and health education (RHE) in primary schools and relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) in secondary schools, pupils are taught about online safety and harms. This includes being taught about what positive,

healthy and respectful online relationships look like, the effects of their online actions on others, how to recognise and display respectful behaviour online and where to get help and support for issues that occur online. The RHE statutory guidance is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/relationships-education-primary>, and the RSHE statutory guidance is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/relationships-and-sex-education-rse-secondary>.

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

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-computing-programmes-of-study>.

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

In addition, the statutory 'Keeping children safe in education' guidance, which all schools and colleges must have regard to when drawing up and implementing their own safeguarding policies, has been strengthened with regards to online safety in recent years. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure online safety is a running and interrelated theme whilst devising and implementing their whole school or college approach to safeguarding and related policies and procedures, including doing all that they reasonably can to limit children's exposure to the harmful online content on the school's or college's IT system.

■ Overseas Students

Martin Wrigley:

[29254]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of the most recent long-term migration figures were accounted for by international students.

Janet Daby:

According to the latest Office for National Statistics estimates, net migration to the UK (immigration minus emigration) of international students was 262,000 in the year ending June 2024. Total net migration for the same period was 728,000, meaning international students' net migration made up 36% of total net migration.

■ Overseas Students: Ukraine

Jess Brown-Fuller: [29279]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the level of support provided to Ukrainian refugees in applying to UK universities.

Jess Brown-Fuller: [29281]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department plans to create a pathway for Ukrainian refugees to apply to UK universities.

Janet Daby:

The government remains committed to giving all Ukrainians in the UK the same access to education as enjoyed by UK citizens.

Persons granted leave under one of the Ukraine Schemes, including the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme, have access to higher education (HE) student support and home fee status on the same basis as those within other protection-based categories, such as refugees.

Support on applying to HE courses can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/higher-education-courses-find-and-apply>, where students can explore a range of resources to help them apply to UK HE providers.

Organisations such as the UK Council for International Student Affairs also provide extensive information and support for Ukrainian students wishing to study in the UK, including a student advice line.

■ Special Educational Needs: Bromsgrove

Bradley Thomas: [29238]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has plans to increase funding for SEND provision in Bromsgrove constituency.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

Following the 2024 Autumn Budget, the department is providing an increase of £1 billion for high needs budgets in England in the 2025/26 financial year, bringing total high needs funding for children and young people with complex SEND to £11.9 billion. Of that total, Worcestershire County Council is being allocated over £97 million through the high needs funding block of the dedicated schools grant (DSG), an increase of £7.5 million on this year's DSG high needs block, calculated using the high needs national funding formula (NFF). This NFF allocation is an 8.3% increase per head of their 2 to 18-year-old population, on the equivalent 2024/25 NFF allocation.

In addition to the DSG, local authorities will also receive a separate core schools budget grant (CSBG), and funding in respect of the increase in employers' National

Insurance contributions in 2025/26. This CSBG continues the separate grants payable this year, which are to help special schools and alternative provision with the costs of teachers' pay and pension increases, as well as the costs of pay increases for other members of staff. Individual local authorities' allocations for both grants for the 2025/26 financial year will be published in due course.

■ Special Educational Needs: Devon

Martin Wrigley:

[\[29258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of potential impact of the time taken for education, health and care plan applications to be processed on children in Devon.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department wants to ensure that, where required, education, health and care (EHC) plan assessments are progressed promptly and, if needed, plans are issued as quickly as possible so that children and young people can access the support they need.

The department has been working closely with all statutory partners involved in delivering special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services in Devon since their local area SEND inspection in May 2022, which found that insufficient progress had been made against the four areas of significant weakness identified during their previous inspection in December 2018, including on the timeliness and quality of EHC plans.

In response to these findings, the department issued an improvement notice in September 2022, and an accelerated progress plan was developed with the local authority and integrated care board. In addition, the department and NHS England have both deployed SEND advisers to assist the local area and to offer advice and support. This includes analysis of EHC plans data and trends, facilitation of best practice exchange from other regions and guidance to enhance the quality of EHC plans.

The department also holds regular formal monitoring meetings with the local authority and partners as part of holding the local area to account for making the necessary improvements in services. As part of this work, there is robust monitoring of Devon's EHC plans, including their timeliness, quality and the clearance of backlogs.

The latest monitoring meeting highlighted that the local authority and partners are taking steps to improve services, with some early impact on outcomes regarding the timeliness and quality of EHC plans. However, there remains substantial progress needed to ensure that all children and families receive the service they require and deserve, and we will continue to work closely with the local area and our support partners to closely monitor and ensure they deliver further improvements in services.

■ Special Educational Needs: Finance**Steve Darling:** [\[30238\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, which local authorities are part of the review into safety valve schemes.

Catherine McKinnell:

The areas taking part in this research are: Barnsley, Croydon, Darlington, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kent, Kirklees, Torbay, Salford, Surrey and York.

■ Young Futures Hubs**Bobby Dean:** [\[29085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she plans to publish further information on proposed Young Future Hubs.

Janet Daby:

The government's is committed to a Young Futures programme made up of Young Futures prevention partnerships and Young Futures Hubs.

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 them to thrive.

To roll out Young Futures Hubs, the department will first establish early adopter hubs. These, and work with local areas, will inform the longer-term development of the programme, including how quickly we move to a greater number of hubs. Young Futures Hubs will build upon the successes of existing infrastructure and provision. We will set out more details in due course.

Young Futures Hubs are one part of delivering this within a much wider youth landscape. They will be designed to complement core services and wider initiatives spanning youth, education, employment, social care, mental health, youth justice and policing.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO**■ Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage: Finance****Seamus Logan:** [\[30506\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of increasing funding for (a) carbon capture, usage and storage projects and (b) track two processes.

Sarah Jones:

This Government is committed to the delivery of CCUS, as demonstrated by our record investment of £21.7 billion in October and the signing of contracts to launch the first CCUS projects in the UK in December. CCUS requires significant resources, and it is right that it is considered within the Spending Review. My officials continue to

engage with Track-2 clusters, and further decisions for future CCUS deployment will be taken in due course.

■ Carbon Emissions: Artificial Intelligence

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [30260]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the environmental impact of running artificial intelligence technologies and the UK's Net Zero ambitions.

Kerry McCarthy:

The Department regularly engages across Government to promote the sustainable development of AI technologies in line with the UK's Net Zero goals. This includes inter-departmental collaboration through initiatives such as the recently announced AI Energy Council and AI Growth Zones, aimed at addressing the growing energy demands of AI through sustainable, efficient, and scalable solutions.

■ Chemicals and Energy Intensive Industries: Carbon Emissions

Nick Timothy: [29112]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential impact of increasing the UK carbon price to £147/tCO₂ by 2030 on (a) energy-intensive manufacturing industries and (b) chemical industries.

Sarah Jones:

The Department has no plans to make an assessment of the potential impact of increasing the UK carbon price to £147/tCO₂ by 2030. The Department previously published an impact assessment in July 2023 of the impact of the moving to the current United Kingdom Emissions Trading Scheme (UK ETS) using the analysis at that time :

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64b91b522059dc00125d267b/developing-uk-ets-main-impact-assessment.pdf>

The Department produces its own traded carbon values for modelling purposes which are used to estimate the financial cost of purchasing allowances in the UK ETS under different scenarios. This figure of £147/tCO₂ is higher than in any of the scenarios in those projections. The Department's most recent projections can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traded-carbon-values-used-for-modelling-purposes-2024/traded-carbon-values-used-for-modelling-purposes-2024>

■ Coal: Mining

Ann Davies: [30533]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department plans to introduce legislation to ban future coal licensing.

Michael Shanks:

The Government announced on 14th November 2024 its intention to introduce new legislation to restrict the future licensing of new coal mines. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-11-14/hcws215>

Ann Davies:**[30534]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will meet with coal tip safety groups in Wales to discuss his Department's proposals to ban future coal licences.

Michael Shanks:

The responsibility for ensuring the safety of coal tips is a matter for the landowners and/or the Local Authority in most instances and is separate to the coal licensing duties in the 1994 Coal Industry Act.

The Government recognises the importance of ensuring coal tip safety and just how much this issue resonates with local communities, particularly in the South Wales valleys, that is why the Government announced funding of £25m in 25/26 to the Welsh Government in the Budget, for making coal tips safe.

■ Community Energy**Dr Simon Opher:****[30192]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will publish a timeline for the implementation of his local power plans policy.

Michael Shanks:

We are progressing the Great British Energy (GBE) Bill through Parliament, and in October's Spending Review the Chancellor announced £25 million to establish the company, with a further £100 million of capital funding to spend in 2025/26 so that GBE can start its important work to drive forward clean energy deployment this year.

GBE, once fully operational, will provide funding and support to local and combined authorities, and community energy groups, to roll out renewable energy projects. Plans are under development and further details will be announced in due course.

■ EU Emissions Trading Scheme**Nick Timothy:****[29115]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether her Department is preparing for the UK to enter the EU Emissions Trading Scheme.

Sarah Jones:

The UK has had its own standalone Emissions Trading Scheme since 2021. 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.

■ Nuclear Power: Skilled Workers**Andrew Bowie:**[\[29480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether the Energy Skills Passport will encourage oil and gas workers to find opportunities in the nuclear industry.

Sarah Jones:

The initial version of the digital passport was launched in January 2025. This first phase will help oil and gas workers identify routes into several career roles in the offshore wind sector.

The Department and Scottish government are working with RUK/OEUK industry partners to identify how best to expand the scope and functionality of passport in the future.

■ Skilled Workers: Recruitment**Andrew Bowie:**[\[29489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions his Department has had with employers on the levels of (a) recognition and (b) uptake of the Energy Skills Passport in the recruitment process.

Sarah Jones:

The Department is a strategic partner of the Energy Skills Passport project in collaboration with industry stakeholders and the Scottish Government. The initial version of the passport launched on 22nd January 2025.

The project has wide support amongst the Oil and Gas and Offshore Wind sectors, and DESNZ continues to monitor the impact of the Passport.

■ Small Modular Reactors: Tees Valley**Luke Myer:**[\[29988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what plans his Department has for the construction of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) in Teesside.

Michael Shanks:

The Government has published a refreshed planning framework for new nuclear reactors (EN-7), including small and advanced modular reactors, for consultation.

The proposed planning framework provides a robust set of siting criteria to enable the identification of potentially suitable sites. Government would welcome private developer interest in identifying potentially suitable sites once EN-7 is designated.

■ UK Emissions Trading Scheme

Nick Timothy:

[\[29114\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether her Department plans to align carbon pricing under the UK Emissions Trading Scheme with the EU Emissions Trading Scheme.

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.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ African Swine Fever: Disease Control

Sarah Bool:

[\[29821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of implementing a permanent personal imports policy for travellers entering the UK from the EU in the context of African swine fever.

Daniel Zeichner:

Preventing an outbreak of African swine fever in the UK is one of Defra's key biosecurity priorities. The department keeps policy on personal imports under constant review and works closely with the devolved Governments on contingency planning and preventing an incursion from possibly infected goods.

We have already strengthened controls on personal imports of pork and pork products from the EU through the measures we introduced in September last year. We are working to develop a long-term policy on personal imports of products of animal origin and animal by-products, taking account of international examples.

■ Bovine Tuberculosis: Disease Control

Adam Dance:

[\[27414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the average cost was of compensating farmers for cattle culled due to bovine tuberculosis in (a) 2023 and (b) 2024 to date.

Daniel Zeichner:

In 2023 a gross amount of £29,450,689.00 was spent on compensating farmers for cattle culled due to Bovine Tuberculosis in England. The average gross amount of compensation per animal culled was £1,454.86.

Data for 2024 is currently only available for the period 1 January to 30 September inclusive. During that period a total of £23,411,612.00 was spent on TB

compensation for cattle, meaning an average gross payment per animal of £1,464.23.

TB compensation is determined by the GB average market value for cattle.

■ Dairy Farming

Jim Shannon:

[24169]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of trends in the number of dairy farmers in the last ten years.

Daniel Zeichner:

Information relating to the question on the number of UK dairy producers can be found publicly available here: ([Livestock populations in the UK](#), [Latest UK milk prices and composition of milk](#), [Structure of the agricultural industry in England and the UK at June](#), [Results by size of Farm in the UK](#))

From 2021 to 2023, data on the milk production-to-supply ratio showed a stable trend, consistently remaining at 105%. This indicates the UK produces a milk surplus, exceeding domestic consumption needs. The production-to-supply ratio is generally understood as a broad measure of national self-sufficiency, indicating the ability of UK agriculture to meet consumer demand. We lack detailed farm type and labour data for the UK, however, hold this for England. While not all dairy herds are on these holdings, the majority are. Over the last decade (2014 – 2023), the number of dairy farm holdings in England decreased by 24%, while the number of agricultural workers on holdings classified as dairy farm type decreased by 15%. Although production of milk in the UK has increased in the last decade, the number of UK producers and employment on English dairy farms has fallen.

Defra Officials Statistics: [Agriculture in the UK 2023 Chapter 14: The food chain](#)

Defra Officials Statistics: [Numbers of holdings and agricultural activity by farm type at 1 June each year in England](#)

■ Dangerous Dogs

Sir Ashley Fox:

[30517]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 15 November 2024 to Question 13354 on Dangerous Dogs, if he will take steps to set out a more detailed timeline on when he plans to publish guidance on withdrawing a Certificate of Exemption for XL Bully dogs.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra is currently working to develop a withdrawal scheme and will provide more information about this process soon.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Mckinsey and Company**Joe Robertson:** [\[27787\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much his Department spent on consultancy work undertaken by McKinsey and Company as part of its Arm's Length Body Transformation Programme; and if he will publish the (a) reports and (b) recommendations made by McKinsey and Company on that work.

Daniel Zeichner:

This information is in the public domain and can be accessed through [here](#).

The cost towards "ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY WORK" for McKinsey was £403,385.

Defra does not plan to publish the McKinsey report and its recommendations, as it relates to work under the previous Government.

■ Fly-tipping: Bromsgrove**Bradley Thomas:** [\[29945\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many successful prosecutions for (a) fly tipping and (b) environmental crime there were in 2024 in Bromsgrove constituency, by category.

Mary Creagh:

Local authorities in England are required to report fly-tipping incidents and enforcement actions, such as prosecutions, to Defra, which are published annually at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fly-tipping-in-england>. This data isn't available at a constituency level and excludes the majority of private-land incidents.

Data for the 2023/24 reporting year will be published on 26 February 2025. Data for the 2024/25 reporting year is still being collected.

The Environment Agency investigates fly tipping where the waste is more than 20 tonnes, a specified amount of hazardous waste, or is suspected to be linked to organised.

■ Food**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[29408\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to establish a cross-government working group on food.

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.

■ Food: Health

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[29407]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to introduce mandatory reporting by food and beverage companies on nutrition, health and sustainability metrics.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra, DHSC and FSA have worked in partnership with food and beverage businesses and academics through the Food Data Transparency Partnership (FDTP) to identify approaches to health and sustainability reporting. Minutes from the FDTP's working groups are available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/food-data-transparency-partnership>.

The FDTP's eco workstream, led by Defra, is currently developing an approach to standardise how environmental impacts are quantified and communicated across the food system. This will empower agri-food businesses to make data-driven actions to reduce environmental impacts and meet net zero goals.

The Government is not planning to introduce a sector-specific legislative requirement for food and beverage companies to report on sustainability metrics. The Government is currently considering the endorsement of the IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Standards, led by the Department of Business and Trade, to create UK Sustainability Reporting Standards that include reporting against some sustainability metrics. The Government and Financial Conduct Authority will consider whether to mandate these standards for certain economically significant entities across all sectors.

The FDTP's health workstream, led by DHSC with support from the FSA, was to explore how businesses with more than 250 employees across retail, manufacturing and the out of home (OOH) sector, could report on the healthiness of their sales.

Work on the health workstream of FDTP paused for the general election, and DHSC are reviewing FDTP alongside other policies.

■ Food: Labelling

Alison Hume: [\[29989\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department plans to introduce mandatory labelling of food products.

Daniel Zeichner:

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Newton Abbot, Martin Wrigley, on 28 January 2025, [PQ 25017](#).

■ Food: Supply Chains

Rebecca Long Bailey: [\[27551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of private equity acquisitions in the groceries retail sector on trends in the level of employment across the food supply chain.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra does not hold any information on the impact of private equity acquisitions in the groceries retail sector on trends in the level of employment across the food supply chain. Any impact on competition as a result of private equity acquisitions are the responsibility of the Competition and Markets Authority. Levels of employment across the groceries retail sector are commercial decisions to be taken by retailers.

■ Rainforests: Amazonia

Sarah Olney: [\[28943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 14 January 2025 to Question 21168 on Amazonia: Rainforests, if he will provide a breakdown of the funding to the Andes-Amazon Biodiverse Landscape Fund.

Mary Creagh:

The UK funded Biodiverse Landscapes Fund supports developing countries to fight poverty, protect nature, and tackle climate change in six landscapes, spanning 18 countries. In the Andes Amazon landscape, covering parts of Ecuador and Peru, the £12.3 million funding will be targeted to deliver three aims including: strengthening Indigenous Peoples and local community organisations; developing bio-business value chains that drive nature-friendly economic growth; and improving the connectivity and quality of conserved areas. Implementation is through a consortium of international and national organisations led by the global development charity Practical Action, selected through a competitive bid exercise, working in partnerships with the Governments of Ecuador and Peru. It is not possible to give a full breakdown of funding per activity at this stage as this will change over the course of delivering the seven-year programme.

■ Sandeels: Conservation

Joe Robertson: [27026]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the ban on sandeel fishing on the ecology of seabird populations.

Joe Robertson: [27027]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what indicators will be used to monitor the potential impact of the ban on sandeel fishing on (a) the recovery of seabird populations and (b) broader marine biodiversity.

Joe Robertson: [27028]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish his Department's assessment of the potential risks of continued sandeel fishing for (a) biodiversity and (b) marine ecosystems.

Joe Robertson: [27029]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if his Department will maintain its policy of a ban on the industrial fishing of sandeels in negotiations with the European Union on fisheries access post-2026.

Joe Robertson: [27030]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the EU on (a) environment policy and (b) sandeel fishing.

Joe Robertson: [27034]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will list the (a) bilateral and (b) multilateral forums through which his Department is engaging with the European Commission in relation to the UK's sandeel fishing ban.

Daniel Zeichner:

The UK Government published its [assessment of the ecosystem risks and benefits of a full prohibition of industrial sandeel fishing in the UK waters of the North Sea](#) in 2023. This report, which is publicly available, includes an assessment of the impacts and benefits accruing to seabirds and other marine life.

In March 2024, and following separate public consultations, the UK and Scottish Governments closed English Waters of the North Sea and all Scottish Waters to sandeel fishing.

The closure shields sandeel as an essential food source for threatened seabird populations (such as kittiwakes and puffins), commercially valuable fish (such as haddock and whiting) and for marine mammals (such as porpoise and minke whales).

The UK will continue to support the ongoing monitoring of sandeel stocks in the North Sea. We will work with ICES to ensure that sufficient data are available to provide

stock status information for sandeel stocks and to ensure that multispecies/ecosystem models for the North Sea still have appropriate levels of information.

The EU has raised a dispute that the UK's decision to prohibit fishing for sandeel within UK waters is not compliant with the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). The UK is defending its decision. We anticipate the tribunal will deliver its report by April 2025.

UK officials continue to engage with representatives of all Coastal States, including the EU, on fisheries management measures and policy.

Joe Robertson: [\[27031\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what representations his Department has made to the European Union on the compatibility of the UK sandeel fishing ban with the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Joe Robertson: [\[27032\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of suspending participation in the arbitration mechanism of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement in disputes over sustainable fishing policies on (a) trade and (b) legal outcomes.

Daniel Zeichner:

The EU has raised a dispute that the UK's decision to prohibit fishing for sandeel within UK waters is not compliant with the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). The UK is defending its decision. The dispute proceedings are ongoing.

■ Shellfish: Animal Welfare

Sarah Champion: [\[27227\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to make a decision on the inclusion of decapod crustaceans in the Animal Welfare Act 2006; and what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on their inclusion in the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government is committed to an evidence-based approach to improve welfare standards for decapod crustaceans and cephalopod molluscs. Defra is commissioning research and expert opinion to inform any future policy decisions and welcomes the continued dialogue with stakeholders. No policy decisions have been made.

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a range of issues, and Cabinet discussions are considered confidential.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ **Baha'i Faith: Religious Freedom****Satvir Kaur:**[\[29849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to improve freedom of religion for Bahá'ís globally.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK remains strongly committed to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad. It is our firm opinion that no one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. We are championing the right to FoRB and promoting tolerance and mutual respect through our engagement in multilateral fora, our bilateral work, and our programme funding.

The continued systematic targeting of the Baha'i community, which includes unfair arrest and detention, land grabs, and denial of burial rights, is unacceptable. We are committed to working with international partners to hold countries to account for its repression of the Bahai's, and other religious or belief minorities, including at the United Nations.

■ **Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Speeches****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[29029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to his speech entitled The Locarno Speech by the Foreign Secretary: January 2025, published on 9 January 2025; for what reasons were part of the speech redacted; and whether the Government issues guidance on party political speeches in Government buildings.

Catherine West:

In this speech, the Foreign Secretary set out his vision for how the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) will help deliver this Government's Plan for Change and its approach to foreign policy. The essential nature of the speech was not party political. Any party political content was redacted from the gov.uk publication, as per guidance.

■ **Gaza: Ceasefires****Tom Morrison:**[\[29636\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps he is taking to ensure a lasting ceasefire 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. 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.

■ **Hamas: Hostage Taking**

David Reed:

[\[30489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with the International Committee of the Red Cross on its role in hostage handovers conducted by Hamas.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are in regular contact with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) which is facilitating the handover of hostages and the delivery of aid into Gaza. The UK reaffirms its support for the ICRC as the only humanitarian actor with the experience, capability, independence and mandate to carry out its important responsibilities. We believe it is critical that the ICRC is given regular access to the hostages, to fulfil its independent visiting role, as enshrined within the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

■ **Mahvash Sabet**

Satvir Kaur:

[\[29847\]](#)

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 detention of Mahvash Sabet by Iranian authorities.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We condemn the unfair detention of all religious minorities in Iran. The UK was instrumental in delivering the Iran Human Rights Resolution, adopted by the United Nations Third Committee in November 2024, which called on Iran to release all religious practitioners imprisoned for their membership in or activities on behalf of a minority religious group, and to ensure that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief. We will continue to work with international partners to hold Iran accountable for its severe and unacceptable repression of Baha'is.

■ **Middle East: Baha'i Faith**

Satvir Kaur:

[\[29848\]](#)

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 persecution of Bahá'ís in (a) Iran and (b) the Middle East.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We condemn any instance of state repression against Baha'is globally. The UK was instrumental in delivering the Iran Human Rights resolution, adopted by the United Nations Third Committee in November 2024, which spotlighted Iran's appalling treatment of Baha'is and called on Iran to release all religious practitioners imprisoned for their membership in or activities on behalf of a minority religious group, and to ensure that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief.

We also track the treatment of the Baha'is across the Middle East, including in Yemen through meeting their representatives in the UK and lobbying the relevant authorities. The Government strongly condemns the continued persecution of the Baha'is and other religious minorities. We are working with our international partners to raise these concerns directly with the Houthi authorities and urge the release of all Yemenis detained for their beliefs or nationality.

■ Palestinians: Schools**David Reed:**[\[30000\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 3 February 2025 to Question 27041 on Palestinians: Schools, what the timeline is for the full implementation of the recommendations of the Colonna report on the neutrality of educational materials in UNRWA-run schools in (a) Gaza and (b) the West Bank; and whether he has had discussions with UNRWA on replacing the current curriculum.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UN conducts quarterly progress reports on UNRWA's implementation of the recommendations made in the Colonna report, with the latest having issued in January 2025. This includes eight recommendations relating specifically to education. As noted in the answer to PQ 27041, on 28 January, the Minister for Development informed the House that she had discussed the issue of neutrality with UNRWA's leadership, including directly with Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini.

■ Syria: Kurds**Fabian Hamilton:**[\[30057\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure the safety of the Syrian Kurdish population in Northeast Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are concerned by increased tensions in northern Syria and the impact this may have on civilians and stability in the region. Our priority is de-escalation, and we are in regular contact with both Turkey and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to this end. We are urging all sides to refrain from activity that will lead to further loss of civilian life, or damage to civilian infrastructure, to avoid further destabilisation and

civilian suffering in the region. We continue to advocate for an inclusive political transition process that is representative of all Syrians, including Kurdish communities.

■ UNRWA: Finance

David Reed:

[\[29999\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 4 February 2025 to Question 27042 on UNRWA: Finance, what mechanisms are in place to ensure that UK funding to UNRWA is not used (a) directly or (b) indirectly to support Hamas activities; and what assessment he has made of UNRWA's compliance with these safeguards.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

A Memorandum of Understanding governs UK financial support to the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and we monitor UNRWA's activity through due diligence and annual assessments. The UK is also providing £1 million to support implementation of the recommendations in Catherine Colonna's Independent Review of Mechanisms and Procedures to Ensure Adherence by UNRWA to the Humanitarian Principle of Neutrality. 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.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Analgesics: Prescriptions

Jim Shannon:

[\[28925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an estimate of recent trends in the number of people prescribed pain medication in the last 12 months.

Karin Smyth:

The Prescription Cost Analysis data release gives items and quantities of each medicine dispensed in the community in England. The following table shows the total number of items dispensed for analgesics in England, regardless of where prescribed, as well as the unique number of patients that were dispensed medicines listed in British National Formulary (BNF) Section 4.7 Analgesics, from December 2023 to November 2024:

| MONTH AND YEAR | TOTAL NUMBER OF ITEMS | UNIQUE IDENTIFIED PATIENTS |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| December 2023 | 5,000,000 | 3,100,000 |
| January 2024 | 5,200,000 | 3,200,000 |
| February 2024 | 4,800,000 | 3,100,000 |

| MONTH AND YEAR | TOTAL NUMBER OF ITEMS | UNIQUE IDENTIFIED PATIENTS |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| March 2024 | 4,900,000 | 3,100,000 |
| April 2024 | 5,100,000 | 3,200,000 |
| May 2024 | 5,200,000 | 3,200,000 |
| June 2024 | 4,800,000 | 3,100,000 |
| July 2024 | 5,200,000 | 3,200,000 |
| August 2024 | 5,000,000 | 3,100,000 |
| September 2024 | 4,900,000 | 3,100,000 |
| October 2024 | 5,200,000 | 3,200,000 |
| November 2024 | 5,000,000 | 3,200,000 |
| Total | 60,400,000 | 7,500,000 |

For further information, BNF 4.7 includes:

- non-opioid analgesics and compound preparations;
- opioid analgesics;
- neuropathic pain medicines; and
- antimigraine medicines.

No data has been captured relating to the clinical indication a prescription is intended for. Some of these products can be used for a variety of clinical indications and therefore the figures provided may include items that were prescribed for a different condition, rather than for pain relief.

It is important to note that this data does not capture medicines classified elsewhere within the BNF, which are primarily used for other reasons, but may also be used for analgesic purposes. This includes, for example, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, which feature in 10.1 'Drugs used in rheumatic diseases and gout', and antidepressants, used off-label in chronic primary pain, which feature in 4.3 'Antidepressant drugs'.

■ Baby Care Units: Standards

Liam Conlon:

[\[29808\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help NHS Trusts improve neo-natal care.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England is implementing recommendations from the Neonatal Critical Care Review (2019) by investing £45 million in increasing neonatal cot capacity and assigning care coordinators for all Neonatal Operational Delivery Networks to implement care programmes, improving parent and family experiences.

The Government continues to work with NHS England as it delivers its 3-year maternity and neonatal plan to grow its workforce, develop a culture of safety, and ensure women receive safe, compassionate care. NHS England has made good progress already, with 548 full-time equivalent (FTE) cot-side nurses having been recruited to expand the neonatal workforce, as well as the consultant obstetrician workforce increasing to 1,968 FTE. NHS England has funded a lead midwife focusing on retention for every trust, with the retention programme continuing in 2024/25.

Additionally, neonatal nurses can undertake a Qualification in Specialty (QIS) training for neonatal care. This enables them to provide a higher level of care to critically ill or premature babies and offer crucial support to other nurses in the daily care of these babies.

■ Basildon University Hospital: Maternity Services**James McMurdock:**[\[29403\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to assist Basildon Hospital in improving their maternity services.

Karin Smyth:

The Basildon Hospital entered the NHS England Maternity Safety Support Programme (MSSP) in October 2020 due to safety concerns identified in a Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection which rated it 'Inadequate'. Its latest CQC report in March 2024 rated the maternity services as 'Requiring Improvement' for safety, effectiveness, and leadership, and responsiveness was rated as 'Good'.

To assist Basildon Hospital to improve their maternity services, the MSSP has increased support by adding a second Maternity Improvement Advisor to oversee all three maternity sites at the trust. Key improvements include midwifery vacancies being at their lowest in three years at less than 1%, ensuring staff complete training and regular audits being conducted to monitor service quality. The latest CQC report also acknowledged progress, particularly in patient involvement and efforts to reduce care disparities.

The integrated care board will continue to support the trust to enhance safety, care quality, and patient experience. The Regional Maternity Team and Local Maternity and Neonatal System continue to work closely with Basildon Maternity Unit on its journey of improvement.

■ Breastfeeding

Anna Sabine:

[\[29336\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what support is available for mothers experiencing poor mental health post-partum related to breastfeeding.

Stephen Kinnock:

Whilst the relationship with breastfeeding and postnatal depression is complex, a successful breastfeeding experience may protect against mental health issues such as postnatal depression.

Through the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme, the Department is providing £18.5 million in 2025/26 to 75 local authorities in England with high levels of deprivation to improve infant feeding services and provide practical support with breastfeeding. Local authorities are using this investment to put in place a range of specialist support and advice to help parents to meet their infant feeding goals no matter how they choose to feed their baby.

We are also helping the early years workforce to better understand the links between breastfeeding and perinatal mental health. In August 2023, a free e-learning package was launched which has already been taken up by hundreds of staff.

■ Cannabis: Medical Treatments

Helen Maguire:

[\[30422\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will review the regulatory framework for prescribing cannabis-based medicinal products to allow GPs to prescribe those treatments.

Karin Smyth:

General practitioners (GPs) can only prescribe unlicensed cannabis-based products for medicinal use if under the direction of a specialist.

These medicines are not first-line treatments and patients will be at a stage in their treatment pathway where they will be under the care of a specialist doctor. Whilst the evidence-base remains limited on the safety, quality, and efficacy of these products, it is right that the decision to prescribe remains essentially with specialist doctors. As with all laws, we will keep its impact under review.

■ Community Health Services: North East and Rural Areas

Joe Morris:

[\[30195\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to shift care from hospitals into the community in (a) Hexham, (b) Northumberland, (c) Newcastle, (d) the North East and (e) rural areas.

Karin Smyth:

As part of our mission to build a National Health Service fit for the future, we launched a 10-Year Health Plan. The plan will set out an agenda to deliver on the

three big shifts needed, to move healthcare from hospital to the community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention.

We are committed to moving towards a Neighbourhood Health Service, with more care delivered locally to create healthier communities, spot problems earlier, and support people to stay healthier and maintain their independence for longer.

Integrated care boards (ICB) are responsible for planning health services for their local area and are best placed to make decisions on care services in the community according to local need.

Neighbourhood Health Guidelines have been published alongside the 2025/26 NHS Operational Planning Guidance and 2025/26 Better Care Fund policy framework, published 30 January 2025, to help ICBs, local authorities, and health and care providers to continue to progress neighbourhood health in 2025/26, in advance of the publication of the 10-Year Health Plan.

We will provide further details of a National Implementation Programme in the coming months, designed for all parts of the health and social care system involved in delivering neighbourhood health. This programme will adopt a test and learn approach, to help identify what is working most effectively and the conditions required to deliver a set of target outcomes.

Community health services are an essential building block in developing a neighbourhood health service, working closely with primary care, social care, and other community services to provide more care in the community.

■ Compulsorily Detained Psychiatric Patients

James McMurdock:

[\[29392\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the patient detention provisions in the Mental Health Act 1983.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Mental Health Bill, currently making its way through Parliament, will deliver the Government's commitment to modernise the Mental Health Act 1983. It will give patients greater choice, autonomy, enhanced rights and support, and will ensure everyone is treated with dignity and respect throughout treatment. It is important to get the balance right to ensure that people get the support and treatment they need, when necessary, for their own protection, or for that of others.

The bill will make the Mental Health Act fit for the modern world, redressing the balance of power from the system to the patient, and ensuring that people with the most severe mental health conditions get better, more personalised, care.

■ Dementia: Diagnosis**Martin Wrigley:** [\[28718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the removal of the dementia diagnosis rate target on the adequacy of dementia care.

Martin Wrigley: [\[28723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to NHS England's guidance entitled 2025/26 priorities and operational planning guidance, published on 30 January 2025, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the removal of the dementia diagnosis target rate on people with dementia.

Martin Wrigley: [\[28724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to NHS England's guidance entitled 2025/26 priorities and operational planning guidance, published on 30 January 2025, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the removal of the dementia diagnosis target rate on access to care for non-diagnosis dementia patients.

Martin Wrigley: [\[28725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to NHS England's guidance entitled 2025/26 priorities and operational planning guidance, published on 30 January 2025, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the removal of the dementia diagnosis target rate on (a) support and (b) treatment for non-diagnosis dementia patients.

Martin Wrigley: [\[28726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to NHS England's guidance entitled 2025/26 priorities and operational planning guidance, published on 30 January 2025, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the removal of the dementia diagnosis target rate on the number of patients at risk of going into urgent care.

Martin Wrigley: [\[28727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to NHS England's guidance entitled 2025/26 priorities and operational planning guidance, published on 30 January 2025, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the removal of the dementia diagnosis target rate on the NHS.

Martin Wrigley: [\[28730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to NHS England's guidance entitled 2025/26 priorities and operational planning guidance, published on 30 January 2025, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the removal of the dementia diagnosis target rate on local health service accountability.

Stephen Kinnock:

We remain committed to increasing dementia diagnosis rates and agree that early diagnosis is vital to ensure people with dementia can access the treatment and support they need.

We have taken a new approach to NHS Planning Guidance this year, reducing the number of national directives from 32 to 18. We will only turn the National Health Service around by doing things differently. These are the first steps on our journey for long-term reform of the NHS.

NHS Planning Guidance is not an exhaustive list of everything the NHS does, and the absence of a target does not mean it is not an area of focus. The Darzi Investigation found that there are too many targets set for the NHS, which made it hard for local systems to prioritise their actions or to be held properly accountable.

Our aim is to give more power to local systems and let them decide how they use local funding to best meet the needs of their local population. This approach signals our ambition for reform, recognises the role of the NHS in driving economic growth, and enshrines our commitment to financial rigour in the system.

Through our extensive public engagement as part of the 10-Year Health Plan, we will continue to listen to patients' priorities and keep focused on what matters most to the public.

Lord Darzi's independent review showed that a timely diagnosis is vital to ensuring that a person with dementia can access the advice, information, care, and support that can help them to live well and remain independent for as long as possible.

The 10-Year Health Plan will address the challenges diagnosed by Lord Darzi and set the vision for what good joined-up care looks like for people with a combination of complex health and care needs. It will set out how we support and enable health and social care services to work together better to provide that joined-up care.

■ Dental Services: North East**Joe Morris:**[\[30196\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce NHS dental service waiting lists in (a) Hexham, (b) Northumberland, (c) Newcastle and (d) the North East.

Stephen Kinnock:

Patients in England are not registered with a National Health Service dental practice, although many NHS dental practices do tend to see patients regularly. There is no geographical restriction on which practice a patient may attend. Some dental practices may operate local waiting list arrangements.

It is a contractual requirement for NHS dentists to update their NHS website profiles at least every 90 days to ensure patients have up-to-date information on where they can access care. This includes information on whether they are accepting new patients. Integrated care boards can review which practices in their area have not

updated their profile in a 90-day period, and work with practices to ensure websites are up to date.

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, we will reform the dental contract with the sector, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

■ Dental Services: Pregnancy

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[30276\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he has taken to increase capacity in appointments for NHS dental treatment for pregnant and postpartum women who are entitled to free NHS dental care.

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 the 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 the integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. For the Warrington North constituency, this is the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB.

■ General Practitioners

Blake Stephenson:

[\[29567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 30 January 3035 to Question 26149, if his Department will give direction to integrated care boards to provide new GP surgeries where GP to patient ratios are not keeping track with population growth.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Primary Care Utilisation & Modernisation Fund was announced during the 2024 Spending Review and provides new capital funding of £102 million to support improvements in the primary care estate.

Each general practice (GP) is required to provide services to meet the reasonable needs of their patients. There is no NHS England recommendation for how many patients should be assigned to a practice or individual general practitioner, or any set ratio of GP doctors or other practice staff to patients. Practices and commissioners consider how all staff can respond to their communities' health needs, through both GP doctors and the range of health professionals in GP teams who work in practices and primary care networks.

The National Health Service has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient medical services, including general practice, in each local area, with funding and commissioning reflecting population growth and demographic changes. As commissioners of primary care, integrated care boards (ICBs) are best placed to understand the needs of the local population, and we expect them to act if services are not meeting the reasonable needs of their patients. ICBs may consider that setting up a new practice can be patients' interest, for example where current practices are unlikely to be able to absorb increasing demand and where Care Quality Commission inspections indicate that the quality of services is inadequate.

■ Health Mission Board: Recruitment

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[29007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Health Mission Delivery Board has appointed external experts.

Karin Smyth:

We have established a cross-Government Health Mission Delivery Board to take forward work on the health mission. The core membership of the board is made up of key ministers including my Rt. Hon. Friends, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care as Chair and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster as the Deputy Chair. Other attendees, including external partners, are invited according to the agenda.

Outside of the Mission Board, the Department is engaging with wider partners from across civil society, business and local government on the health mission, including through our engagement on the 10-Year Health Plan.

■ Health Professions: Training

Peter Prinsley:

[\[29285\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to provide more training places in (a) core anaesthetics and (b) across all medical specialties.

Peter Prinsley:

[\[29286\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will hold discussions with NHS England on the potential merits of making 70 extra higher anaesthetic training places available every year.

Karin Smyth:

We are committed to training the staff we need, including anaesthetists and all other medical specialities, to ensure patients are cared for by the right professional, when and where they need it. We have launched the 10-Year Health Plan which will set out a bold agenda to reform and repair the National Health Service. Ensuring we have the right people, in the right places, with the right skills will be central to this vision. NHS England has invested in 70 additional training posts in anaesthesia in 2022,

2023, and 2024. Further expansion will be determined by the upcoming Spending Review and the planned refresh of the Long Term Workforce Plan.

■ Health Services: Prisoners

Martin Wrigley: [\[29261\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to meet the health needs of elderly prisoners.

Stephen Kinnock:

NHS England has the responsibility to provide a full range of healthcare services to meet the needs of the prison population. Every prison will have a health needs assessment undertaken on a regular basis which is then used to locally determine the health needs and requirements of that prison's population. This includes supporting elderly prisoners on their health needs, such as dementia care. Local authorities also have a duty to support elderly prisoners with their social care needs.

As a signatory to the National Partnership Agreement for Health and Social Care for people in contact with the criminal justice system, the Department is committed to working with the Ministry of Justice, HM Prison and Probation Service, NHS England, and the UK Health Security Agency to ensure safe, legal, decent, and effective care that improves health outcomes and reduces health inequalities is provided for all prisoners, including those who are elderly.

■ Health Services: Women

Luke Taylor: [\[28242\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the NHS 10-year plan will incorporate the Women's Health Strategy for England, published on 20 July 2022.

Karin Smyth:

We are committed to the Women's Health Strategy, which will be taken forward as part of the 10-Year Health Plan.

■ Heart Diseases: Devon

Martin Wrigley: [\[29240\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support cardiology units in south Devon.

Karin Smyth:

At the end of November 2024, the cardiology waiting list in Devon Integrated Care Board stood at 11,228 with only 56% of those waiting 18 weeks or less for treatment. The Government has committed to returning to the Referral to Treatment (RTT) standard that patients can expect to be treated within 18 weeks by March 2029, with the expectation that RTT performance will increase to 65% by March 2026.

There is a concerted focus in Devon on improving cardiology services, with support from NHS England's regional and national teams, after being identified as an area for

action. As a result, the number of cardiology patients waiting over a year in Devon has fallen from 930 to 577, representing a 38% drop, in the past 18 months.

Cardiology is one of five priority specialties identified in the recently published Elective Reform Plan for significant elective reform. Reforms will include increasing specialist cardiology input earlier in patient care pathways and developing standard and efficient care pathways for common cardiology symptoms, such as palpitation. It also includes improving access to cardiac diagnostic tests, including through implementing more 'straight to test' pathways where the general practitioner can refer a patient directly to secondary care for a test which can reduce unnecessary outpatient appointments and improve waiting times even further for patients in south Devon and across England.

We are supporting National Health Service performance across elective and emergency care including for patients requiring urgent and elective cardiac care, with approximately £1.5 billion capital funding in total in 2025/26. Funding will provide new surgical hubs and diagnostic scanners to build capacity for over 30,000 additional procedures and over 1.25 million diagnostic tests as they come online, as well as new beds across the estate.

■ Hormone Replacement Therapy

Sojan Joseph:

[\[30342\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the supply of HRT products in Kent.

Karin Smyth:

The Department manages medicine supply issues at a national level so that stocks remain available to meet regional and local demand. Information on stock levels within Kent is not held centrally.

There are over 70 hormone replacement therapy (HRT) products, and the vast majority are in good supply. Previously there has been issues with the supply of a limited number of these products, primarily driven by very sharp increases in demand. Following the Department's intensive engagement with industry, the supply position has improved considerably. As part of this we have met with suppliers on a very regular basis and have held seven HRT supply roundtables since April 2022, with the most recent in September 2024, with suppliers, wholesalers, and community pharmacists, to provide updates on the supply position and actions being taken to address them, to share data, and to discuss relevant policy developments and potential impacts.

We are aware of the supply issues affecting Estradot (estradiol) 50 microgram/24 hour, 75 microgram/24 hour, and 100 microgram/24 hour patches, for which we have issued comprehensive management guidance to the National Health Service, including Serious Shortage Protocols allowing community pharmacists to supply the equivalent strength patch of an alternative brand without the need for a new prescription. Alternative brands of estradiol patches remain available. There are also

shortages for Indivina[®] 1mg/2.5mg and 1mg/5mg tablets until mid-April and a discontinuation of Tridestra[®] tablets which we have also communicated to the NHS. Alternative combined continuous and cyclical preparations of oral HRT products remain available.

■ Hospitals: Artificial Intelligence

Bradley Thomas:

[\[29944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of AI on (a) hospital waiting times and (b) the number of missed appointments.

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.

Patients have been let down for too long whilst they wait for the care they need. Currently, the waiting list stands at 7.48 million, with only 59% waiting less than 18 weeks for treatment. The Elective Reform Plan, published in January 2025, sets out the productivity and reform efforts needed to return to the constitutional standard that 92% of patients wait no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment. The plan includes exploring opportunities for digital innovation and looking at where these can be adopted more widely to improve patient experience and care. For example, some trusts are using AI as part of their process for waiting list validation in addition to clinical validation, which helps to ensure waiting lists are accurate and up to date as well as enabling more efficient use of clinical time.

Other areas of digital innovation across the NHS include the use of AI prediction that helps prevent missed appointments and maximise clinic utilisation by supporting teams to fill appointments that patients can no longer use. The Elective Reform Plan commits to enhance two-way communication between hospitals and patients and use the results of AI work to predict who will miss appointments to target communications and prevent up to one million missed appointments.

■ Hospitals: Concrete

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[29229\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the risk of using hospital buildings containing RAAC beyond their maximum lifespan.

Karin Smyth:

The Secretary of State has commissioned a comprehensive report into the seven predominantly RAAC hospitals being replaced through the New Hospital Programme,

including Hinchingsbrooke hospital. The last report was undertaken in Autumn 2022 and covered the five hospitals not at that time within the New Hospital Programme.

The site-by-site report on the seven predominantly RAAC hospitals will help inform individual development plans, which continue to progress at pace. The report objectives include assessing the clinical and operational impacts of the running of the existing hospital beyond the estimated life of the current hospital site or 2030, whichever is sooner.

Keeping capacity open but being scrupulous about RAAC monitoring and mitigation until the RAAC can be removed is fully in line with the current evidence and recommendations of the Institution of Structural Engineers.

■ Hospitals: Construction

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[29227\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the planned date of completion is for all hospitals within Wave 1 of the New Hospital Programme.

Karin Smyth:

The expected completion dates for all schemes will be confirmed following the approval of a Full Business Case as set out in HM Treasury Green Book, as is usual for large infrastructure projects.

■ Hospitals: Parking

Martin Wrigley: [\[30939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of parking costs on NHS staff in Devon.

Martin Wrigley: [\[30941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of NHS hospitals use private parking companies.

Martin Wrigley: [\[30942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of annual income received by the NHS from parking payments from visitors.

Martin Wrigley: [\[30943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of annual income received by the NHS from parking payments from staff.

Martin Wrigley: [\[30944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of annual income received by the NHS from parking fines.

Martin Wrigley: [\[30945\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions he has had with NHS England on private parking companies.

Martin Wrigley:

[30946]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of annual income received by parking companies from the NHS.

Karin Smyth:

No assessment has been made of the potential impact of parking costs on National Health Service staff in Devon. All NHS trusts that charge for hospital car parking provide free parking for those 'in-most need'. This includes frequent outpatient attenders, parents of sick children staying overnight, blue badge disabled holders, and NHS staff working overnight.

Data on the income from car parking charges is published annually through the NHS Estates Return Information Collection. Data on the income from patients and visitors is combined. The latest figures, from 2023/24, show that the income received from patients and visitors for parking on NHS hospital sites was £101,812,089. The income received from staff for parking on NHS hospital sites in 2023/24 was £70,510,110. Data for the income from NHS trusts for carparking is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/estates-returns-information-collection/summary-page-and-dataset-for-eric-2023-24>

No data is collected on the income generated by the number of parking fines issued or the amount of annual income received by parking companies from the NHS. No data is collected to determine the number of NHS hospitals that use a private parking company.

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has had no recent discussions with NHS England on private parking companies. NHS trusts are expected to comply with the NHS car parking guidance 2022 for NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts. This applies to all NHS trusts, including those that use private parking companies to operate their hospital car parks.

■ Hospitals: Waiting Lists

Joe Morris:

[30194]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of people on NHS waiting lists in (a) Hexham constituency, (b) Northumberland, (c) Newcastle and (d) the North East.

Karin Smyth:

Tackling waiting lists is a key part of our Health Mission and a top priority for the Government. On 6 January 2025, NHS England published the new Elective Reform Plan, part of the Government's Plan for Change to ensure that patients are seen on time and have the best possible experience during their care, including those using National Health Services in the Hexham constituency, Northumberland, Newcastle and the North East. Further information on the Elective Reform Plan is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/reforming-elective-care-for-patients.pdf>

We have set an ambition to make progress on the 18-week standard in 2025/26, to 65% of patients waiting no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment nationally. At the end of November 2024, the rate at the Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust was 80.3%, and the rate at the Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals was 68.4%. This compares to 59.1% nationally. These two trusts are performing better than the average, which is very much welcomed, but we are pressing to ensure we build on that, and have set out our expectation that all English trusts will deliver a minimum 5% improvement by March 2026.

To support this ambition, my Rt. Hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced £1.5 billion of capital funding, including for new surgical hubs and diagnostic scanners, at the Autumn Statement. This will build capacity for over 30,000 additional procedures and over 1.25 million diagnostic tests as they come online, as well as new beds which will create more treatment space and reduce waiting times.

The Elective Reform Plan sets out a number of ways which we will increase productivity and improve patient experience, including increasing the number of surgical hubs, and expanding and increasing the opening times of Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs). Three hubs are currently operational in the North-East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System, which serves patients across Hexham, Northumberland, Newcastle and the North-East, with one due to open at the South Tees Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, namely the Friarage Hospital Elective Hub.

There are currently five CDCs located across the North East of England, including the Metrocentre CDC in Gateshead.

■ Integrated Care Boards: Finance

Sadik Al-Hassan:

[\[29283\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on multi-year funding settlements for integrated care boards.

Karin Smyth:

Integrated care board (ICB) allocations for 2025/26 were published on 30 January alongside the 2025/26 NHS Planning Guidance, with further information available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/allocations/>

The pre-requisite for multi-year settlements for ICBs is a multi-year settlement for the Department, and phase two of the Spending Review is currently underway. There have not yet been discussions with Cabinet colleagues on what the Department's settlement in the Spending Review will then mean for ICB allocations beyond 2025/26.

■ Maternity Services

Liam Conlon: [\[29807\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the NHS 10-year-plan will include measures on (a) midwifery and (b) neo-natal care.

Karin Smyth:

While there are outstanding examples of maternity and neonatal care, there are also real issues that need to be addressed. We are determined to ensure that all women and their babies receive safe, personalised, and compassionate care, but improvements will take time to implement.

We have committed to develop a 10-year plan to deliver a National Health Service fit for the future. As we work to develop and finalise the plan, I would encourage those concerned about maternity care 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/>

■ Maternity Services: Safety

Michelle Welsh: [\[28346\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve safety within maternity services.

Karin Smyth:

The Government continues to work with the National Health Service as it delivers its three-year plan for maternity and neonatal services. The plan sets out how the NHS will make maternity and neonatal care safer, more personalised, and more equitable for women, babies, and families.

As part of the delivery plan, an updated version of the 'Saving Babies Lives Care Bundle' is being rolled out across England, which is a package of interventions aimed to reduce stillbirths, neonatal brain injury, neonatal death, and preterm birth, as well as initiatives to reduce inequalities. Additionally, 14 Maternal Medicine Networks have been developed across England to ensure that women with chronic and acute medical problems related to pregnancy have access to specialist management and care.

Additional funding has also been provided for Maternity and Neonatal Voice Partnerships to ensure local voices are used to inform decisions and services. All local leadership teams are taking part in a Perinatal Culture and Leadership Programme, helping them to develop and maintain a positive safety culture.

The Government is also currently piloting a training programme to help avoid brain injury in childbirth to improve safety for mothers and their babies. If successful, national rollout is expected to commence this year.

While good progress has been made, the Government recognises that there are real issues within maternity services. Whilst change will not happen overnight, we are

determined to go further to ensure all women and babies receive the care they deserve, and we have committed to providing support to trusts failing on maternity care, recruit thousands of new midwives, and tackle the unacceptable inequalities that exist.

■ **Maternity Services: Standards**

Jessica Toale: [\[29271\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve NHS maternity services (a) nationally and (b) in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Jessica Toale: [\[29272\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of maternity services in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Karin Smyth:

The maternity services at University Hospitals Dorset (UHD) have made many improvements since the most recent Care Quality Commission inspection in 2022. Maternity is moving from St Mary's in Poole to the Beach building at Royal Bournemouth Hospital in April. This is part of the £500 million investment across UHD's hospitals to help improve healthcare for the residents of Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole, and beyond.

Since September 2024, the service has become Maternity and Neonatal, working as one department to ensure families in Dorset have the most joined up care. UHD has recruited all obstetric and neonatal consultant posts and continues to have excellent retention rates for midwives and neonatal nurses. UHD have also introduced more senior midwifery posts in the last two years, to ensure more senior support on the labour ward and within its audit and practice development team.

Nationally, we continue to work with the National Health Service as it delivers its three-year maternity and neonatal plan to grow our maternity workforce, develop a culture of safety, and ensure women receive safe, compassionate care. We are also looking at how we better support trusts failing on maternity care to make rapid improvements, and we are already training thousands more midwives to better support women throughout their pregnancy and beyond.

■ **Medical Equipment: Procurement**

Martin Wrigley: [\[29725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of national purchasing of NHS England equipment.

Karin Smyth:

NHS Supply Chain is responsible for procuring products, warehousing and delivering consumables and medical equipment on behalf of the National Health Service. It became fully operational in April 2019, under the ownership of my Rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care; since 2021, NHS Supply Chain has been owned by NHS England.

The merits of NHS Supply Chain are that it leverages the collective buying power of the NHS to drive savings and provide a standardised range of clinically assured quality products at the best value. NHS Supply Chain manages more than eight million orders per year across more than 129,000 order points and over 16,000 locations, delivering over 35 million lines of ordered goods to the NHS annually.

■ Mental Health Services**Charlotte Cane:**[\[29233\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department plans to take to improve access to mental health services.

Stephen Kinnock:

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

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

■ Mental Health Services: Children and Young People**Munira Wilson:**[\[29918\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding has been allocated to each integrated care board in England to provide for child and adolescent mental services for the next financial year.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is for individual local commissioners to allocate funding to children and young people's mental health services to meet the needs of their local populations and this information is not collected centrally. Integrated care boards are expected to continue to meet the Mental Health Investment Standard in 2025/26 by increasing their investment in mental health services in line with their overall increase in funding for the year.

■ Mental Health Services: Community Interest Companies

Melanie Onn: [\[29445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support community interest companies that are mental health providers.

Melanie Onn: [\[29446\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of community interest companies that are no longer able to offer free mental health support due to financial constraints on the NHS.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is for individual local commissioners to allocate funding to children and young people's mental health services to meet the needs of their local populations and this information is not collected centrally. Integrated care boards are expected to continue to meet the Mental Health Investment Standard in 2025/26 by increasing their investment in mental health services in line with their overall increase in funding for the year.

■ Mental Health: Young People

Mike Amesbury: [\[30106\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support young people with mental health issues.

Stephen Kinnock:

Too many young people are not receiving the mental health care they need, and we know that waits for mental health services are too long. As part of our mission to build a National Health Service that is fit for the future and that is there when people need it, we will recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers across child and adult mental health services in England to reduce delays and provide faster treatment.

We will also provide access to a specialist mental health professional in every school in England, and roll out Young Futures hubs in every community. We are working with our colleagues at NHS England and across Government to consider options to deliver these commitments.

■ Mental Illness: Prisoners' Release

Bob Blackman: [\[28498\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the press article entitled Mind the gap: supporting prison leavers with mental illness from the University of Manchester, published on 27 March 2024, what steps he is taking to ensure that prison leavers with severe mental health issues receive the necessary support with (a) housing, (b) access to services, and (c) community reintegration.

Stephen Kinnock:

The National Health Service's RECONNECT care after custody service supports prison leavers with an identified health need, including severe mental illness, to transition to community-based services, and starts working with them before they leave prison.

NHS England is piloting Enhanced RECONNECT in four areas to support people leaving prison who are identified as being of high risk of harm to the public and who have complex health needs to access appropriate community services.

NHS England is also piloting new models of care in the community for those with severe mental illness in six neighbourhood areas from this spring. These will provide people and their families with 24/7 support if they are in crisis without needing to book an appointment, as well as provide housing or employment advice to support them to stay well.

■ Mentally Disordered Offenders: Crimes of Violence**James McMurdock:**[\[29393\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of monitoring measures used to prevent people with (a) mental illness and (b) a history of violence and aggression from committing violent crimes.

Stephen Kinnock:

In response to the Care Quality Commission's review of the care and treatment provided to Valdo Calocane and of the services provided by the Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, NHS England asked every provider of mental health services to review the care received by people with serious mental illness who require intensive community treatment and follow-up where engagement is a challenge. This highlighted areas of good practice and opportunities to strengthen services and integrated care boards have developed action plans to address any gaps in service provision. To ensure these action plans deliver lasting change they will be assured of progress in July 2025 and January 2026.

NHS England also set out clear, evidence-based national guidance, so providers are clear on the standards of care expected for this patient group. Following the publication of the independent investigation into the care and treatment provided to Valdo Calocane on 5 February, the National Director for Mental Health has written to all mental health trusts in England to ask them to review the investigation's findings and develop action plans, building on the work so far, to address the issues identified for patients who require intensive and assertive community treatment by 30 June 2025.

NHS England and the Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust have accepted all of the recommendations in the reports and are responsible for taking forward those recommendations. My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, has asked NHS England to provide regular updates on its work in response to the recommendations.

■ Neurological Diseases: Drugs

Martin Wrigley:

[\[29256\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of medicine shortages on people with (a) epilepsy and (b) Parkinson's disease.

Karin Smyth:

No assessment has been made of the potential impact of medicines shortages on people with epilepsy and Parkinson's disease.

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

We are currently aware of an ongoing supply issue with all strengths of topiramate tablets from one manufacturer. This supply issue is expected to resolve by the end of May 2025. We are also aware of a shortage of phenobarbital 15 milligram tablets from one manufacturer with the resupply date to be confirmed. In both cases, alternative suppliers are in stock with sufficient supply to support patients and these issues have been communicated to the National Health Service.

The Department is aware of supply constraints with one supplier of amantadine 100 milligram capsules used in the management of Parkinson's disease, however stocks remain available from alternative suppliers to cover demand. The Department have also been notified of a discontinuation of Apomorphine (APO-go PFS) 50 milligram/10 millilitre pre-filled syringes from April 2025. Alternative formulations of apomorphine remain available for patients and management guidance has been issued to the NHS.

■ NHS Business Services Authority: Artificial Intelligence

Sir John Hayes:

[\[29872\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what purposes the NHS Business Services Authority has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

Karin Smyth:

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 NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) has identified opportunities for the utilisation of AI tools and services and has categorised those into three areas of opportunity: personal efficiency and productivity; applying Generative AI (GenAI) at a professional level; and GenAI at an organisational or service level.

The NHSBSA has therefore used AI in a number of proof of concept pieces over the past 12 months to test its fit for purposefulness in these environments. These include

drafting meeting minutes, customer insights and data extraction, job specifications, supporting coding, and chatbot development.

The NHSBSA is in enabling discussions with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology to work in step with other departmental Arm's Length Bodies in GenAI development in health and social care, and can draw on a range of resources, published on the GOV.UK website, to inform AI usage.

■ NHS England: Pay

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[29421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 4 February 2025 to Question 27118 on NHS England: Pay, what the difference is between (a) operational max and (b) max exception zones in NHS Executive Senior Manager pay bands.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 13 February 2025]: The operational maximum is the maximum salary rate NHS England can appoint without seeking permission from the Department. Salaries above the operational maximum require as a minimum approval from the Department's Remuneration Committee, and depending on the amount, may also require approval from ministers and HM Treasury. Any salary above £150,000 requires approval from the Department's ministers.

The exception zone max is the highest figure that the Department has been delegated from HM Treasury, and appointing a salary above the exception zone requires HM Treasury's approval. It is also important to note that there are different operational and exception zone maximums depending on the grade of the NHS Executive Senior Manager role being appointed.

■ NHS Trusts: Essex

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[29439\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much and what proportion of the capital expenditure promised to Basildon, Broomfield and Southend hospitals as part of their merger into Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust has been (a) allocated, (b) paid and (c) spent by that Trust.

Karin Smyth:

The trust was awarded £118.6 million as part of the National Health Service upgrades programme for the reconfiguration of hospital services across three acute sites, namely Broomfield Hospital in Chelmsford, Southend Hospital in Southend, and Basildon Hospital in Basildon. Between 2019/20 and 2024/25, the trust has accessed funding totalling £16.3 million that has been spent so far. More funding may be provided for completed work before the end of the financial year.

■ NHS: Artificial Intelligence**Victoria Collins:**[\[28836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will establish a standard process for the implementation of AI applications in the NHS.

Karin Smyth:

The implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in the National Health Service is still at a relatively early stage. To address this, the Department is carrying out work to assess the barriers of effective adoption and improve the way AI tools are implemented across the NHS.

The Department is supporting the NHS to adopt the latest innovations in digital technology, such as AI. £2 billion has been allocated to digitise the NHS and £113 million has been provided to accelerate the evaluation and deployment of the most promising AI technologies.

Additionally, the Department has supported the launch of regulatory projects to begin to create a standardized process for AI implementation, such as with the AI and Digital Regulation Service (AIDRS) and the AI Airlock.

The AIDRS, in partnership with healthcare regulators, gives innovators and health and care providers a one-stop-shop for support, information, and guidance on the regulatory and evaluation pathways that need to be followed before an AI tool can be safely implemented across the NHS. The AI Airlock is a Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency-led initiative, supported by the NHS AI Lab, 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, and integration into existing healthcare workflows.

Following the announcement of the Government's AI Opportunities Action Plan, the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England have been working with Prime Minister's Office to develop specific proposals of how they will promote the implementation of AI. This includes using a Scan, Pilot, Scale model approach to investing and supporting AI development, to ensure that useful AI tools are quickly identified, tested and, where successful, implemented to improve the lives of United Kingdom citizens.

Victoria Collins:[\[28837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to monitor quality control of new AI products used in the NHS to ensure (a) value for money and (b) return on investment.

Karin Smyth:

Against a backdrop of increasing demand for National Health Services and significant workforce pressures, artificial intelligence (AI) presents significant opportunities for improving the delivery of care and outcomes for patients, while also saving money and staff time.

Continuous monitoring after deployment is essential to ensure rigorous quality control of new AI products, value for money, and return on investment. The Department is working closely with regulators to identify new measures for providing assurance.

The Department has launched regulatory projects, such as the AI Airlock, to support this aim. AI Airlock is a Medicines and Healthcare products Regulation Agency-led initiative 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. This initiative provides valuable feedback for developers to refine their products to ensure a return on investment, when eventually 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 and value for money. As part of this, the NICE conducts Early Value Assessments (EVA) for developers, reviewing their AI tools, including their value for money and return on investment, 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.

In the United Kingdom, the vast majority of AI products being used in health and care are regulated as medical technologies. This means they are subject to stringent requirements, primarily set out in The Medical Devices Regulations 2002, and robust monitoring by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulation Agency.

The responsibility for spending decisions rests with individual NHS trusts. As public bodies, NHS trusts should maintain the highest standards of rigour, value for money, and propriety in the use of public funding. All spending must contribute to organisational objectives and support the delivery of high-quality patient care.

Victoria Collins:

[\[28842\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the (a) 10 Year Health Plan and (b) Long-Term Workforce Plan will link to the AI Opportunities Plan.

Karin Smyth:

As part of the 10-Year Health Plan we are reviewing how the National Health Service should focus its resources to ensure that 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. This will also be reflected in the refreshed Long-Term Workforce Plan.

Artificial intelligence (AI) will play an important role in achieving this long-term ambition, allowing clinicians to focus more on direct patient care and allowing staff to spend more time on high value, high impact tasks. The AI Opportunities Action Plan sets out a desire to shape the AI revolution on principles of shared economic prosperity, improved public services, and increased personal opportunities.

■ NHS: Crimes of Violence

Manuela Perteghella:

[\[29280\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of measures in place to prevent violence against NHS staff.

Karin Smyth:

Individual employers are responsible for the health and safety of their staff, and they put in place many measures to ensure their health and safety, including appropriate security, training, and emotional support for staff affected by violence.

To support them, NHS England is working on initiatives to prevent and reduce violence and aggression from patients, their families, and the public. In December 2024, NHS England updated its violence prevention standard. This sets out guidance for employers to help them identify risks and develop local policies for dealing with violence and supporting staff.

■ NHS: Employers' Contributions and Minimum Wage

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[29232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate his Department has made of the potential impact of changes to (a) the minimum wage and (b) employer's National Insurance contributions at the Autumn Budget 2024 on NHS wage costs.

Karin Smyth:

We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at Autumn Budget 2024, which enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26.

The Employer National Insurance rise will be implemented from April 2025. The Government will provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional Employer National Insurance contributions costs only, and the level of funding will be confirmed at main estimates shortly.

As the 2025/26 pay round will not have concluded by 1 April 2025, it will be necessary to implement an increase to Agenda for Change (AfC) entry pay from 1 April 2025 to maintain compliance with the National Minimum Wage. This will be an advance payment of the 2025/26 pay recommendations, and the final pay award will be given following the conclusion of the Pay Review Body process.

This advance will apply to approximately 250,000 AfC staff across band 1 (closed grade), both pay points in band 2 and the entry point of band 3 to ensure National Health Service pay sits above the National Living Wage. These pay points will receive an advance pay uplift of 28p per hour, representing a temporary 2.3% pay uplift.

■ NHS: Standards

Dave Robertson:

[29277]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the steps taken to improve the provision of care in the period in the period since the publication of the Independent review into the death of Clive Treacey, published in December 2021.

Stephen Kinnock:

Following publication of the independent review, organisations directly involved in Clive's care were invited to reflect on their practice and went on to develop high-level actions in response to its findings. There was an overwhelming commitment from all organisations engaged to address the systemic issues raised in the report. NHS England Midlands set up a group which became known as the Clive Treacey Conscience Group, including Elaine, Clive's sister, to drive meaningful improvement. In July 2024, the Midlands region published Clive's Way: A Conscience Manual, which outlines in detail the progress in taking forward the learning from Clive's review, and which is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/midlands/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2024/07/July-2024-Report-Progress-in-Implementing-Learning-from-Clive-Treacey-Review.pdf>

Significant time and resources have been invested in this process, designing the programme and following up on the recommendations in the review, and Clive's Way remains a thread through the work of the National Health Service regional team. The report was shared with all Learning Disability and Autism Programmes nationwide and integrated care systems were encouraged to draw on its recommendations to appraise the effectiveness of their improvement programmes and look at areas needing further attention.

■ Nurses: Training

Dr Simon Opher:

[30274]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the number of entry level nursing roles.

Karin Smyth:

Decisions about recruitment, including for entry level nursing roles, are matters for individual National Health Service trusts. NHS trusts manage their recruitment at a local level, ensuring they have the right number of staff in place, with the right skill mix, to deliver safe and effective care.

We have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS and will refresh the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan next summer to ensure the NHS has the right people, in the right places, with the right skills to deliver the care patients need when they need it, and working with partners, we are committed to recruiting the staff we need to get patients seen on time.

■ Occupational Therapy: Prescriptions

Chris Bloore:

[\[29736\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to extend independent prescribing responsibilities to Occupational Therapists under the Medicines and Medical Devices Act (2021) where it is safe to do so.

Karin Smyth:

Appropriately trained occupational therapists can already supply/administer medicines under a Patient Specific Direction (PSD) or a Patient Group Direction (PGD). A PSD is a written instruction from a prescriber for medicines to be supplied or administered to a specific patient or person. PGDs are a set of instructions which allow healthcare professionals to supply and administer specific medicines to pre-defined groups of patients without the need for them to be referred to a prescriber.

There is a process in place for making changes to prescribing responsibilities to ensure those changes are safe and beneficial for patients.

In late 2020, NHS England launched a series of public consultations seeking views on proposals to amend responsibilities for the prescribing, supply and/or administration of medicines for specific healthcare professionals.

The Department is working with NHS England to consider these consultations and other requests to progress the extension of responsibilities to supply, administer or prescribe medicines under the Human Medicines Regulations 2012 to regulated healthcare professionals, where a clear need and benefits have been identified.

■ Older People: Protection

Martin Wrigley:

[\[29785\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to protect older people from (a) violence, (b) abuse and (c) neglect.

Stephen Kinnock:

Any form of violence, abuse, or neglect is unacceptable. The Government makes it clear, in the statutory guidance of the Care Act 2014, that local authorities must ensure the adult social care services they commission are safe, effective, and of high quality.

Since April 2023, the Care Quality Commission has had a duty to assess local authorities' delivery of their duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014 .

The Home Office has provided funding to Hourglass to provide enhanced helpline support for older victims of abuse and a focus on reaching older victims across England and Wales by providing more training to staff in their organisation and external agencies.

The Government is also launching an independent commission into adult social care as part

of our critical first steps towards delivering a National Care Service. The commission will

start a national conversation about what working age adults, older people, and their families expect from adult social care.

■ Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy

Alex Ballinger:

[\[29695\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to address the shortages in Pancreatic enzyme replacement medication.

Karin Smyth:

The Department is continuing to engage with all suppliers of pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT) to boost production to mitigate the supply issue. Increased volumes of PERT are expected for 2025, and specialist importers have sourced unlicensed stock to assist in covering the gap in the market. In December 2024, the Department issued further management advice to healthcare professionals. This includes actions for clinicians to consider unlicensed imports when licensed stock is unavailable and for integrated care boards to ensure local mitigation plans are put in place and implemented. The Department, in collaboration with NHS England, has created a public facing page to include the latest update on PERT availability and easily accessible prescribing advice.

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[30385\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the supply of Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy.

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[30386\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has had discussions with medical suppliers on the availability of Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy.

Karin Smyth:

The Department continues to engage with all suppliers of pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT) to boost production to mitigate the supply issue. Suppliers have managed to secure additional pharmaceutical ingredient resulting in expected increased volumes of PERT for 2025. The Department has also reached out to specialist importers who have sourced unlicensed stock to assist in covering the gap in the market and provided advice to clinicians on prescribing and ordering these imports.

In December 2024, the Department issued further management advice to healthcare professionals. This includes actions for clinicians to consider these unlicensed imports when licensed stock is unavailable and for integrated care boards to ensure local mitigation plans are put in place and implemented.

■ Patients: Older People

Blake Stephenson:

[\[29231\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential causes of the increase in the number of over-65s being hospitalised in November and December (a) 2023 and (b) 2024.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England publishes information on admissions by age group, including for those aged 65 years old and over. The proportion of admissions has remained relatively stable between the years at approximately 4%. There is a long-term growth trend overall in the number of hospital admissions. The following table shows the number of admitted hospital attendances for people aged 65 years old and over, and the proportion of total admitted attendances for people aged 65 years old and over, in England, in November and December 2023 and in November and December 2024:

| MONTH | ADMITTED HOSPITAL ATTENDANCES FOR PEOPLE AGED 65 YEARS OLD AND OVER, ENGLAND | PROPORTION OF TOTAL ADMITTED ATTENDANCES FOR PEOPLE AGED 65 YEARS OLD AND OVER, ENGLAND |
|---------------|--|---|
| November 2023 | 141,500 | 45% |
| December 2023 | 154,665 | 47% |
| November 2024 | 160,630 | 43% |
| December 2024 | 154,995 | 45% |

Source: NHS England, available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ae-waiting-times-and-activity/ae-attendances-and-emergency-admissions-2024-25/>

Notes:

1. this data is provided as a percentage of total admissions, therefore, the figures have been calculated from these percentages and rounded to the nearest whole number; and
2. the data publication is released monthly, with December 2024 being the most recent publication, and therefore the December figures are provisional and are subject to revisions.

■ Patients: Transport

Alex Mayer:

[\[29840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of reviewing the polices on issuing Penalty Charge Notices for patient transport service vehicles.

Karin Smyth:

No assessment has been made by this Department of the potential merits of reviewing the policies on issuing Penalty Charge notices for patient transport service vehicles.

NHS Trusts are expected to comply with the NHS Car Parking Guidance, from 2022, which covers both NHS Trusts and NHS Foundation Trusts. This applies to all NHS Trusts, including those that use private parking companies to operate their hospital car parks.

■ Perinatal Mortality**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**[\[29472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether it is his Department's policy that babies in the third trimester that have been removed from their mother after her death should not be (a) recognised and (b) recorded as stillborn.

Karin Smyth:

The definition of a stillborn child in England and Wales is contained in the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 section 41, and was amended by the Stillbirth (Definition) Act 1992 section 1(1). This act defines a stillbirth as 'a child which has issued forth from its mother after the 24th week of pregnancy and which did not at any time breathe or show any other signs of life'.

It is expected that babies are recognised and recorded as stillborn in accordance with this definition.

■ Prescription Drugs**Steve Yemm:**[\[29288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence for reducing waiting times for medicines assessed through the cost-comparison approach.

Steve Yemm:[\[29289\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data his Department holds on the length of appraisals conducted by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) under its cost-comparison appraisal process; and whether he has plans for NICE to align the timing of the outcomes of such appraisals with that of granting of marketing authorisations by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

Karin Smyth:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) aims, wherever possible, to issue recommendations for the National Health Service on whether new medicines should be routinely funded around the time of licensing, to support rapid patient access to clinically and cost-effective new medicines.

The NICE has introduced the cost-comparison process for the appraisal of lower risk treatments where a lighter-touch approach is considered appropriate. The cost-comparison process enables the NICE to make recommendations on medicines within 100 working days compared with 195 days for a standard appraisal, freeing up resources for more complex appraisals. In 2024, the NICE carried out appraisals through its cost-comparison process on average 83 days faster than its standard process.

Mr James Frith:

[\[29534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care what discussions he has had with NICE on the potential impact of its approval of medicines for use in the NHS on (a) economic productivity, (b) health outcomes and (c) reducing the burden of disease on (i) patients and (ii) caregivers.

Karin Smyth:

Departmental officials regularly discuss a range of issues with colleagues in the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), including the impact of its recommendations.

NICE develops its guidance independently and based on an assessment of the available evidence, considering all health-related costs and benefits for patients and caregivers, including health outcomes, in line with its established methods and processes.

NICE does not take account of economic productivity in its assessments. It would involve valuing interventions differently based on the working status of the recipient population, which would be methodologically and ethically challenging and could systematically disadvantage certain groups including children, long-term sick and unemployed people, and result in fewer treatments being recommended for these populations.

Mr James Frith:

[\[29535\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has targets for the time it takes to complete evaluations of new medicines.

Karin Smyth:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) aims wherever possible to publish recommendations for the National Health Service on new medicines within 90 days of the date of a marketing authorisation. NICE uses key performance indicators to report on the timeliness of its technology appraisals. NICE has achieved a 28% improvement in the timeliness of its medicines appraisals since April 2024.

■ Preventive Medicine

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[29006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions he has had with the health mission delivery board on the prevention of ill health.

Karin Smyth:

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

The Health Mission, which the Department leads, is focused on shifting towards a more preventative approach to healthcare.

■ Psychiatry and Social Workers: Training**Alex Ballinger:** [\[29711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of mandatory training for (a) psychiatrists, (b) psychiatric nurses and (c) social workers on legal obligations under section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Alex Ballinger: [\[29715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a mandatory and formal way for recording if and when patients have had an assessment for section 117 aftercare.

Stephen Kinnock:

Section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983 requires local social services authorities and National Health Service commissioners to provide or arrange for the provision of aftercare to adults or children detained in hospital for treatment under section 3, 37, 45A, or transferred under section 47 or 48 of the Act who then leave hospital. No assessment of patients is required to determine whether they are eligible for s117 aftercare although professionals would of course be expected to work with a patient to understand their individual needs.

There are no plans at present to introduce any such mandatory training or require mandatory recording of the number of people eligible for section 117 who local social services authorities and NHS commissioners have responsibility for.

■ Radiology: Recruitment**Bradley Thomas:** [\[28849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to increase the provision of radiographers in the NHS.

Karin Smyth:

The refreshed Long Term Workforce Plan, which will be published this summer, will deliver the transformed health service we will build over the next decade, and will ensure that the National Health Service has the right people, including radiographers, in the right places, with the right skills to deliver the care patients need when they need it.

To supplement the student loan support provided by the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care provides non-repayable and non-income

assessed funding via the NHS Learning Support Fund. All eligible nursing, midwifery and allied health professions students, including those studying radiography, receive a grant of £5,000 per academic year. Radiography students receive an additional specialist subject payment of £1,000 per year, with a further £2,000 per year available for childcare, as well as support for placement travel and accommodation costs. Students in exceptional hardship can also access up to a further £3,000 per year.

■ Schizophrenia

James McMurdock:

[\[29390\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of care available for people with paranoid schizophrenia.

Stephen Kinnock:

NHS England has made significant progress in expanding community-based services for people with severe mental illness, including paranoid schizophrenia.

In the last 12 months more than 400,000 adults have received help through new models, which aim to give people with serious mental illness better care.

NHS England is also piloting new models of care in the community for those with the most serious illnesses. New mental health centres open in six neighbourhood areas from this spring and will provide people and their families with 24/7 support if they are in crisis without needing to book an appointment, as well as providing housing or employment advice to support them to stay well.

Furthermore, the Mental Health Bill, currently making its way through Parliament, will deliver the Government's commitment to modernise the Mental Health Act 1983.

Finally, in response to the Care Quality Commission's review of the care and treatment provided to Valdo Calocane and of services provided by the Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, NHS England set out clear, evidence-based national guidance, so providers are clear on the standards of care expected for patients who may be at risk of disengaging from services.

■ Semaglutide

Bradley Thomas:

[\[28385\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of demand for Ozempic on the NHS.

Karin Smyth:

The following table, while not reflecting demand, does provide the total number of Ozempic injections that were dispensed under the National Health Service in England, prescribed each year from January 2019 to November 2024:

| YEAR | NUMBER OF INJECTIONS DISPENSED |
|-------|--------------------------------|
| 2019 | 111,388 |
| 2020 | 420,998 |
| 2021 | 747,205 |
| 2022 | 1,155,174 |
| 2023 | 1,174,806 |
| 2024 | 794,729 |
| Total | 4,404,302 |

The Prescription Cost Analysis data release gives items and quantities of each medicine dispensed in the community in England.

■ Stepping Hill Hospital: Finance

Tom Morrison: [\[29934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what purpose his Department has provided funding from the critical infrastructure risk fund to Stepping Hill Hospital.

Karin Smyth:

Repairing and rebuilding our hospital estate is a vital part of our ambition to create a National Health Service that is fit for the future.

In this context, Stockport Foundation NHS Trust has been provided with £11.5 million in 2024/25 to facilitate the restoration of outpatient capacity at Stepping Hill Hospital. In December 2024, construction work began on the new outpatient building, which will deliver much needed improvements to capacity as well as patient and staff safety.

■ Surgical Mesh Implants

Mrs Sharon Hodgson: [\[28902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on (a) how much each mesh centre received in specialised commissioning funding and (b) how many removals took place in each month since this service began.

Karin Smyth:

The Department does not hold information on how much each mesh centre received in specialised commissioning funding and on the number of removals that have taken place each month since the service began.

There are nine specialist mesh centres across England, ensuring that women in every region with complications of mesh inserted for urinary incontinence and vaginal

prolapse get the right support. Each mesh centre is led by a multi-disciplinary team to ensure patients get access to the specialist care and treatment that they need, including pain management and psychological support.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson:

[28903]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent estimate he has made of the average waiting times for mesh centres; and what steps he is taking to reduce this.

Karin Smyth:

There are nine specialist mesh centres across England, ensuring that women in every region with complications of mesh inserted for urinary incontinence and vaginal prolapse get the right support. Each mesh centre is led by a multi-disciplinary team to ensure patients get access to the specialist care and treatment that they need, including pain management and psychological support. NHS England publishes data on referral to treatment waiting times. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/rtt-waiting-times/>

The Department does not hold information on the average waiting times specifically for mesh centres. Tackling waiting lists is a key part of our Health Mission and we are taking steps to return to the 18-week standard. The Elective Reform Plan sets out how the National Health Service will reform elective care services and meet the 18-week referral to treatment standard by March 2029.

■ **University College Hospital: Surgical Mesh Implants**

Mrs Sharon Hodgson:

[29424]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many removals of surgical mesh have taken place at the University College London Hospital in each month since this service began.

Karin Smyth:

There are nine specialist mesh centres across England, ensuring that women in every region with complications of mesh inserted for urinary incontinence and vaginal prolapse gets the right support. Each mesh centre is led by a multi-disciplinary team to ensure patients get access to the specialist care and treatment that they need, including pain management and psychological support.

According to information held by NHS England, since going live in July 2021, there have been 281 surgical mesh removal operations at the University College London Hospital. Monthly data is not available due to very low patient numbers per month.

HOME OFFICE■ **Animal Experiments: Animal Welfare****Mr Peter Bedford:****[29815]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the Animals in Science Regulation Unit annual report 2023, published on 17 December 2024, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her Department's policies of case in which seven birds were caught in bags, accidentally not released and found dead four days later; and what steps she plans to take to help prevent such instances in future.

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) 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.

For this particular case, two letters of reprimand were issued to the establishment.

All cases of non-compliance are thoroughly investigated, and the outcomes are published in ASRU's annual report. No further assessment has been made.

■ **Asylum****Rachael Maskell:****[30126]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish the safe and legal routes for asylum seekers to enter the UK.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Those individuals who need international protection should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach – that is the fastest route to safety.

Information on the UK's safe and legal routes is published on gov.uk.

■ **Asylum: Deportation****Rachael Maskell:****[30127]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what offences would require an asylum seeker to be deported.

Dame Angela Eagle:

All foreign nationals, including asylum seekers and refugees, can and do face prosecution for criminal offences in the same way as any other individual in the UK, and routinely have their immigration status reviewed if convicted.

Under existing legislation, an individual convicted of a particularly serious crime, resulting in a custodial sentence of 12 months or more, will be routinely denied asylum and considered for removal from the UK.

All asylum claimants are subject to mandatory security checks to establish their identity and to link it to their biometric details for the purpose of immigration, security and criminality checks - including war crimes, crimes against humanity and terrorism. These checks are critical to the delivery of a safe and secure immigration system.

■ Asylum: Slavery

Rachael Maskell:

[\[30130\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to support people who arrive in the UK as a result of being trafficked to apply for asylum.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office is committed to identifying and safeguarding those who are exploited or vulnerable in the United Kingdom. All operational staff complete the required Home Office Modern Slavery First Responders training. This content was developed by the Home Office Modern Slavery Unit and is also used by a number of First Responder Organisations.

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the process by which people who may have been victims of modern slavery are identified, referred, assessed and supported in the United Kingdom. The aim of the NRM is to be the bridge to recovery, providing victims with a short period of intensive support and specialist care and put people in a position where they can begin to rebuild their lives with increase resilience against future exploitation.

■ Asylum: Standards

Siân Berry:

[\[29851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the report by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration entitled An inspection of Asylum Casework June-October 2023, whether her Department has taken steps to introduce a published service standard for deciding asylum claims.

Siân Berry:

[\[29852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the report from the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration entitled An inspection of asylum casework June-October 2023, published on 29 February 2024, whether she has taken steps to (a) identify vulnerable claimants in the asylum work in progress queue and (b) prioritise their claims.

Dame Angela Eagle:

This report deals wholly with the Asylum Casework system under the previous administration.

The Home Office partially accepted the recommendation made in the report by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration 2024 "ICIBI annual report for 2023-24" to introduce a published service standard for deciding asylum claims.

We are reviewing that recommendation but this is a complex area that needs to balance operational efficiency, the needs of asylum seekers and the integrity of our asylum system, so we cannot provide an immediate answer on the proposed implementation timetable.

The Home Office accepted the recommendation made in the report by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration 2024 "ICIBI annual report for 2023-24" to (a) identify vulnerable claimants in the asylum work in progress queue and (b) prioritise their claims and we can confirm this work has been completed.

■ **Border Security Command**

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[30372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when the Border Security Commander plans to set strategic priorities for border security.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[30382\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, who the members of the board of Border Security Command are.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Hon Member to the Answer I gave him on 23 January to Question 22404.

■ **British Nationality: Applications**

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[30234\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much revenue has been raised from citizenship applications since the fee waiver was introduced.

Seema Malhotra:

Since fee waivers were introduced in June 2022 the revenue received for all Citizenship applications - virtually all Naturalisation and Registration - is £734.7m. The data provided covers the period July 2022 to January 2025.

■ **British Nationality: Fees and Charges**

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[30264\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 10 February, to Question 28684 on British Nationality: Fees and Charges, for what reason her Department does not hold specific data on the amount of revenue received from child citizenship applications?.

Seema Malhotra:

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

We are looking to develop more granular management information during the new financial year 2025-26.

■ Crime

Bradley Thomas:

[\[29764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to tackle crime that crosses police force boundaries.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government is committed to ensuring that law enforcement has the resources it needs to tackle crime effectively, including when crime crosses police force boundaries.

When it does, the National Crime Agency (NCA), which leads the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime, and policing's Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU) network, have specialised intelligence and investigative teams that are deployed across the full range of threats to bring offenders to justice. This includes tackling 'borderless' serious crimes including fraud, cyber-enabled criminality, online child sexual exploitation and abuse and County Lines.

Both the NCA and ROCU network have been allocated significant resources to enhance their capacity and capability to continue tackling serious crime at both national and regional levels.

The Home Office is also funding the National County Lines Co-ordination Centre to monitor the intelligence picture and co-ordinate the national law enforcement response to County Lines. This is vital in strengthening the law enforcement response and enabling police forces to work together to tackle this complex issue.

■ Criminal Investigation

Martin Wrigley:

[\[29242\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to reduce the number of cases under investigation by police for over one year.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Timely investigation of crime is important for victims and to ensure swift justice. Official statistics on crime outcomes, published by the Home Office for the year ending September 2024, shows that 86% of all offences (without fraud) are closed within 100 days.

I welcome that HMICFRS is currently undertaking an 'investigations' thematic inspection and we will work with the sector on its recommendations. We will work closely with policing partners to continue to equip them with the tools needed to investigate crime and progress cases through the system swiftly, I welcome that HMICFRS is currently undertaking an including those which can significantly reduce the time taken to process digital forensic material.

■ Deportation**Rupert Lowe:** [\[29962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average cost of each deportation is, broken down by expense.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The requested information is not centrally held, and could only be collated and verified at disproportionate cost.

■ Electronic Travel Authorisations**Blake Stephenson:** [\[29187\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of recent increases in the cost of Electronic Travel Authorisations on future trends in economic growth over the next five years.

Seema Malhotra:

The published Impact Assessment supporting the Immigration and Nationality (Fees) Order provides provisional estimates of economic impacts from increasing ETA fees from current levels to the proposed fee maxima:

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2025/9/pdfs/ukia_20250009_en.pdf

■ Electronic Travel Authorisations: British National (Overseas)**Neil Coyle:** [\[20972\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made on the potential impact of introducing electronic travel authorisations on British National (overseas) passport holders.

Seema Malhotra:

Electronic travel authorisations (ETAs) have been introduced to enhance our ability to screen travellers upstream and stop those who pose a threat from travelling to the UK.

ETAs were expanded to BN(O) passport holders on 27 November 2024 and are currently a requirement for this population when travelling to the UK. But this aspect of the policy remains under review and we will update the House on any changes in due course.

Alicia Kearns: [\[29009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of exempting people that have British National Overseas status and hold a UK passport from the Electronic Travel Authorisation requirement.

Seema Malhotra:

Electronic travel authorisations (ETAs) have been introduced to enhance our ability to screen travellers upstream and stop those who pose a threat from travelling to the UK.

ETAs were expanded to BN(O) passport holders on 27 November 2024 and are currently a requirement for this population when travelling to the UK. This aspect of the policy remains under review and we will update the House on any changes in due course.

Alicia Kearns:

[\[30222\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the introduction of Electronic Travel Authorisation on British National (Overseas) Passport holders without UK visas.

Seema Malhotra:

Electronic travel authorisations (ETAs) have been introduced to enhance our ability to screen travellers upstream and stop those who pose a threat from travelling to the UK.

ETAs were expanded to BN(O) passport holders on 27 November 2024 and are currently a requirement for this population when travelling to the UK. But this aspect of the policy remains under review, and we will update the House on any changes in due course.

■ **Electronic Travel Authorisations: British National (Overseas) and Hong Kong**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[21568\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of requiring Electronic Travel Authorisation on (a) BN(O) and (b) Hong Kong passport holders seeking sanctuary.

Seema Malhotra:

Electronic travel authorisations (ETAs) have been introduced to enhance our ability to screen travellers upstream and stop those who pose a threat from travelling to the UK.

ETAs were expanded to BN(O) passport holders on 27 November 2024 and are currently a requirement for this population when travelling to the UK. But this aspect of the policy remains under review, and we will update the House on any changes in due course.

■ **Essex County Fire and Rescue Service: Capital Investment**

James McMurdock:

[\[28759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to support Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's capital investment in its (a) estate, (b) fleet and (c) equipment.

James McMurdock:

[\[28761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of (a) continuing existing government grants for the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service and (b) uplifting such grants by inflation.

James McMurdock:

[\[28762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to provide funding for infrastructure for fire and rescue services to help mitigate risks in relation to contaminants.

Dame Diana Johnson:

On 3 February 2025, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published the Final Local Government Finance Settlement 2025/26 which sets out grant allocations for all local authorities including fire and rescue.

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

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[29790\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, to ask the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, what discussions she has had with fire and rescue services on the (a) adequacy of the Settlement Funding Assessment for 2024-25 and (b) potential impact of the size of the workforce of those services on their ability to meet demand.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Overall, fire and rescue authorities will receive around £2.87 billion in 2024/25. Decisions on how their resources are best deployed to meet their core functions are a matter for each fire and rescue authority based on its analysis of risk and local circumstances.

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

Alex Ballinger:

[\[29349\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to ensure national standards in the training of fire service personnel.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Fire and rescue authorities are responsible for ensuring that firefighters receive the training they need in order to safely respond to the wide range of incidents that they attend. The National Fire Chiefs Council maintains national operational guidance for fire and rescue services to draw upon when developing operational policies, procedures and training.

The Home Office funds the independent Fire Standards Board (FSB) to develop and maintain a comprehensive set of professional standards for fire and rescue services in England. The FSB has published 19 national standards for fire and rescue services

covering a range of topics from emergency response driving to leading and developing people and a code of ethics.

The Home Office will continue to work with stakeholders to build on the work of the FSB in the context of the Government's fire and rescue service reform agenda.

■ Firearms: Licensing

Nick Timothy: [\[29066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the revenues from increased firearms licensing fees will be hypothecated to improve the firearms licensing service.

Nick Timothy: [\[29067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans she has to improve the firearms licensing service.

Nick Timothy: [\[29068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what service level agreements exist for firearms licensing.

Dame Diana Johnson:

On 5 February 2025, increased fees came into effect to provide full-cost recovery for firearms licensing applications processed by police forces. This gave effect to a commitment in the Government's manifesto.

The fees were previously increased in 2015 and they no longer met the cost of the service provided. It is essential for both public safety and police efficiency that the fees provide full cost recovery so that service improvements can be made. The need to increase firearms licensing fees to help address shortcomings in firearms licensing was highlighted by the Senior Coroner in his Preventing Future Deaths reports into the fatal shootings in Plymouth in August 2021.

I have written to all Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables to make clear that the income from increased fees must be used to support improvements in the service provided by their firearms licensing teams.

The NPCC Lead on Firearms Licensing is currently developing a new performance framework for firearms licensing teams and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services will later this year be undertaking a thematic inspection of police forces' arrangements in respect of firearms licensing.

Improvements in police performance will be supported in addition by the introduction of national training, the Statutory Guidance to Chief Officers of Police, and the refreshed Authorised Professional Practice for firearms licensing. We will also be shortly publishing the Government response to the consultation held in 2023 on recommendations for improvements in firearms licensing.

Nick Timothy: [29069]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many firearms licence (a) applications and (b) renewals were completed in (i) the UK, (ii) the East of England and (iii) West Suffolk constituency in each year since 2015.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office publishes information annually on the number of firearm and shotgun certificate applications and renewals that have been granted and refused in England and Wales in the statistical publication on firearm and shotgun certificates. The latest available data is for the year ending 31 March 2024 and can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/firearm-certificates-in-england-and-wales>

The number of firearm and shotgun certificate applications and renewals that have been granted and refused in England and Wales, the East of England region and Suffolk police force area in each year since 2015 can be found in data tables 2 and 4.

Data are not available by constituencies specifically. Police Scotland publish broadly comparable [annual statistics](#) on the number of firearm and shotgun certificates granted and renewed in Scotland:

<https://www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/what-we-do/firearms-and-explosives-licensing/>

There are no comparable statistics for Northern Ireland.

■ Immigration

Alex Burghart: [30134]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have had their Indefinite Leave to Remain revoked by her Department's status review unit in each of the last five years.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The information requested is not currently available from published statistics, and the relevant data could only be collated and verified for the purpose of answering this question at a disproportionate cost.

Alex Burghart: [30135]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have had their Indefinite Leave to Remain revoked by the special cases unit in each of the last five years.

Seema Malhotra:

The information requested is not centrally held and could only be collected and verified for the purpose of answering this question at disproportionate cost.

■ Immigration: Enforcement

Rupert Lowe:

[29965]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish a breakdown of immigration enforcement visits by local authorities in 2024.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Hon Member to the Answer I gave him on the 10 February to Question 27935.

Rupert Lowe:

[29966]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average number of people (a) detained, (b) prosecuted and (c) deported per immigration enforcement visit was in 2024.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Information about the average outcomes of Enforcement Visits is not available in our published data. Our published national data on enforcement is available at the following link: [Immigration system statistics, year ending September 2024 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-september-2024)

■ Immigration: Ukraine

Rachael Maskell:

[30131]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of enabling Ukrainian refugees who are living in the UK to obtain the right to remain.

Seema Malhotra:

This Government stands with Ukraine and is committed to providing stability for those we have welcomed to the UK and those who still need our sanctuary.

To provide certainty to those who have been provided with temporary sanctuary in the UK under the existing Ukraine schemes, the Government has introduced a bespoke Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) scheme, which opened to applications on 4 February 2025. This scheme allows those with existing sanctuary to apply for a further 18 months' permission to remain in the UK with the same rights and entitlements as they have been given under the existing Ukraine schemes.

The Ukrainian Government has been clear about its strong desire for the future return of its citizens to help rebuild Ukraine when it is safe to do so. It is important that our approach respects these wishes.

We will, of course, continue to keep the Ukraine schemes under review in line with developments in Ukraine.

■ Knives: Crime

Bobby Dean:

[29074]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of existing knife crime prevention programmes.

Bobby Dean:

[\[29109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of potential merits of (a) enforcement and (b) early intervention in the prevention of knife crime.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Halving national levels of knife crime over the next decade is a key part of the Government's mission to ensure the safety of our streets. Both early intervention and enforcement will be crucial in meeting this mission.

On enforcement, we have implemented the ban on zombie-style knives and zombie-style machetes approved by Parliament in April. The ban came in to force on 24 September 2024 and it is now illegal to sell or own these weapons.

We launched a consultation on 13 November 2024 seeking views on the legal description of a Ninja sword to help our plans for an effective ban.

We know that more needs to be done to tackle the sale of knives online which is why last October, the Home Secretary commissioned Commander Stephen Clayman, as the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for knife crime, to carry out a full review into the online sale and delivery of knives. The report was received at the end of January and once we have considered the review in full, the Government will set out its next steps for strengthening the controls and processes around the online sale and delivery of knives.

Ahead of this, the Home Secretary has already announced that the Government intends to strengthen age verification controls and checks for all online sellers of knives at the point of purchase and on delivery.

We have also consulted on introducing personal liability measures on senior executives of online platforms or marketplaces who fail to take action to remove illegal content relating to knives and offensive weapons. The consultation closed on 11 December 2024, and we are carefully considering the responses as we plan our next steps.

Additionally, the Home Secretary and Policing Minister have set up a new Knife-Enabled Robbery Taskforce, which brings together Chief Constables and other criminal justice partners to take immediate operational action to tackle the fastest rising type of knife crime. Working with the College of Policing, the Taskforce has completed a Call for Practice to establish what the evidence tells us works when tackling knife-enabled robbery.

On early intervention, a new Young Futures programme has been created, which will include the establishment of Young Futures Prevention Partnerships across England and Wales, bringing partners together to intervene earlier to stop young people being drawn into crime. It is vital we have a system that can identify and support those young people who need it most.

Independent evaluation found that Violent Reduction Units, in combination with additional hotspot police patrols, have delivered a statistically significant reduction in

hospital admissions for violent injuries since funding began in 2019 (an estimated 3,220 admissions have been prevented in areas where the programmes operate).

We recognise the valuable work and significant progress VRUs have made in understanding and preventing serious violence. The proposed Police Funding Settlement for 2025/26 includes £49.7m for the continuation of work to prevent serious violence, delivered via the VRU programme.

The Youth Endowment Fund, was established to learn ‘what works’ in preventing children and young people becoming involved in violence and crime, as well as transforming the local and national response to serious violence through disseminating new knowledge and best practice. The Home Office works closely with the Youth Endowment Fund to ensure that their findings are carefully considered to positively influence services for young people.

The Government will continue to draw on the best available evidence on both prevention and enforcement and will closely monitor trends in national and local levels of knife crime.

Bobby Dean:

[\[29099\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help reduce knife crime in Sutton.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Halving knife crime over the next decade is a key part of the Government’s Safer Streets mission and we are taking a range of steps to realise this ambition.

We have implemented the ban on zombie-style knives and zombie-style machetes approved by Parliament in April. The ban came in to force on 24 September 2024 and it is now illegal to sell or own these weapons.

We launched a consultation on 13 November 2024 seeking views on the legal description of a Ninja sword to help our plans for an effective ban.

We know that more needs to be done to tackle the sale of knives online which is why last October, the Home Secretary commissioned Commander Stephen Clayman, as the National Police Chiefs’ Council lead for knife crime, to carry out a full review into the online sale and delivery of knives. The report was received at the end of January and once we have considered the review in full, the Government will set out its next steps for strengthening the controls and processes around the online sale and delivery of knives.

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We have also consulted on introducing personal liability measures on senior executives of online platforms or marketplaces who fail to take action to remove illegal content relating to knives and offensive weapons. The consultation closed on

11 December 2024, and we are carefully considering the responses as we plan our next steps.

Additionally, over £9.3m has been made available this financial year to the London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). VRUs bring together police, local government, health, community leaders and other key partners to tackle violent crime and its underlying causes. London VRU is using this funding to deliver a range of interventions across all 32 boroughs to divert young people from a life of crime. This includes intensive mentoring by YOUthink for children and young people in Sutton to reduce re-offending.

We have also created a new Young Futures programme, which will include the establishment of Young Futures Prevention Partnerships across England and Wales, bringing partners together to intervene earlier to stop young people being drawn into crime. It is vital we have a system that can identify and support those young people who need it most.

Bobby Dean:

[\[29107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of knife bans on the level of knife-related incidents.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The legislation in this area is kept under review in the interests of public safety and in line with this we implemented a ban on zombie-style knives and zombie-style machetes on 24 September 2024 and it is now illegal to sell, supply, manufacture or own these weapons.

The Government is also committed to banning Ninja swords, and following a consultation between 13 November and 11 December 2014, we are working on plans for an effective ban.

The prohibition of certain types of knives and other bladed articles gives the police powers to seize the weapons and to prosecute offenders, a valuable tool in addressing knife crime and wider criminality.

Statistics on knife related offences do not record the level of detail necessary to assess the effectiveness of specific knife bans.

■ Non-crime Hate Incidents

Mr Peter Bedford:

[\[30028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many non-hate crime incidents have been recorded in (a) the United Kingdom, (b) Leicestershire and (c) Mid Leicestershire constituency since 5 July 2004.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office does not currently centrally collate information on the number of non-crime hate incidents (NCHIs) recorded by individual police forces – this data is held by individual forces.

The Home Secretary has been clear that a consistent and common-sense approach must be taken with NCHIs. The Government has also been clear that its top priority for policing is delivering on the safer streets mission to rebuild neighbourhood policing, restore public confidence, and make progress on the ambition to halve knife crime and violence against women and girls.

The Home Office has agreed that the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), supported by the College of Policing, will conduct a review on the use and effectiveness of NCHIs, which is currently underway.

The Government welcomes this review and will work closely with the NPCC and the College as they develop their findings and any proposals on this issue.

■ **Offenders: Deportation**

Sir Julian Smith:

[\[30062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people are currently in custody who have exhausted all rights of appeal and have signed deportation orders but have not yet been deported; and what steps her Department is taking to expedite their removal from the United Kingdom.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The number of individuals who simultaneously fall into all these categories cannot be readily obtained from available data, and such a snapshot exercise could only be conducted for the purpose of answering this question at disproportionate cost.

■ **Offenders: Migrants**

Mr Peter Bedford:

[\[29676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many migrants residing in Mid Leicestershire constituency have committed crimes in each of the last five years.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The specific data requested is not available from published statistics and could only be obtained for the purposes of answering this question at disproportionate cost. However, nobody should be in any doubt regarding this Government's determination to crack down on crime, including that committed by foreign nationals, and where appropriate - to pursue the deportation of those foreign nationals.

■ **Offensive Weapons**

Liam Conlon:

[\[29817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing criminal sanctions for the irresponsible (a) sale and (b) use of catapults.

Liam Conlon:

[\[29860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing new and specific criminal offences relating to the

irresponsible sale and use of catapults used to (a) injure people, (b) maim or kill animals and (c) damage property.

Dame Diana Johnson:

We are clear that catapults should not be used for illegal purposes, whether against wildlife, people or property.

The law already provides the police with powers relating to the use of any item as an offensive weapon including a catapult, for example if used with anti-social behaviour or for criminal damage.

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996, there are also offences around injuring and inflicting unnecessary suffering on wildlife. These measures give the police powers to deal with cases where wildlife is attacked, including cases involving the misuse of catapults.

We continue to keep all relevant legislation under review in the interests of public safety.

■ **Police**

Patrick Spencer:

[29303]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how her Department calculates the number of police officers required per 100,000 of the population in (a) Suffolk, (b) Kent, (c) Norfolk and (d) England.

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>.

Table 11 of the data tables accompanying the 'Police Workforce, England and Wales: 30 September 2024' release includes data on the number of police officers per 100,000 resident population, both nationally and at a police force area level.

Data on the number of police officers per 100,000 resident population is provided for comparative purposes and is not used as a measure of a required rate.

■ **Police: Council Tax**

David Simmonds:

[29090]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the written statement of 30 January 2025, HCWS407, on Police Funding Settlement 2025-26, what estimate he has made of the (a) increase in council tax receipts in monetary terms, (b) absolute level and (c) increase in the average Band D council tax police precept on which the increase in funding is assumed.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Forces will be able to raise up to £329.8 million in funding from council tax precept, based on current forecasts and assuming all PCCs maximise their precept flexibility of £14 for a Band D property.

Precept levels are a decision that must be taken by each locally elected PCC.

Police: Equality**Nick Timothy:**[\[29063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department holds (a) written and (b) statistical evidence on how police forces treat different identity groups based on (i) ethnicity, (ii) nationality, (iii) gender and (iv) sexuality.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office collects and publishes regular statistics on the use of police powers. A range of data on different characteristics are collected across the different policing collections. Specifically, on police powers (including stop and search and arrest), data is collected on sex, ethnicity and age.

The collection of statistics, along with other policing statistics such as police misconduct and police workforce, are available at the following link:

[Policing statistics - GOV.UK](#)

Official statistics published by the Home Office are kept under review in line with the [code of practice for statistics](#), taking into account a number of factors including user needs, the resources required to compile the statistics, as well as quality and availability of data. These reviews allow us to balance the production of our regular statistics whilst developing new statistics for future release.

Police: Mental Health Services**Lisa Smart:**[\[29564\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to introduce mandatory mental health support for police officers who have been exposed to distressing or traumatic incidents.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Chief Officers have a duty of care to manage their workforce effectively, including ensuring the wellbeing of all their officers and staff. This Government has been clear that the wellbeing of our police is a priority. We will continue to work with police partners to ensure that all police officers and staff have the appropriate support in place to thrive in their careers and deliver the best service to the public.

We continue to fund the National Police Wellbeing Service. The Service provides evidence-based guidance, advice, tools and resources to support forces and individual officers, including guidance on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Policing. All officers receive pre-deployment mental health training and through the Police Covenant, and all forces now meet the new Occupational Health (OH)

foundation level standards. Measures are also in place to ensure forces continually develop and improve their OH standards.

■ **Police: Mental Illness**

Lisa Smart: [\[29565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps with police forces to review the (a) effectiveness of policies to place police officers potentially experiencing mental ill-health on restricted duties and (b) adequacy of (i) the provision of psychological support and (ii) recovery time for those officers.

Dame Diana Johnson:

It is the responsibility of Chief Officers to effectively manage their workforce, including ensuring appropriate health and wellbeing support is in place for all officers and staff. The Government has been clear that the health and wellbeing of our police is a priority, and we continue to work with police partners to ensure that consistent standards apply across all forces.

Police Regulations require forces to follow standard procedures in the management of officers placed on limited duties following a period of ill health and this includes for periods of recuperation. The College of Policing has also provided specific guidance for line managers on the use of reasonable adjustments, including a toolkit for forces, a Workplace Adjustment Toolkit and a disability passport.

The Government continues to fund the National Police Wellbeing Service which provides evidence-based mental health guidance, advice, tools and resources to support forces and individual officers.

■ **Police: Workplace Pensions**

Connor Naismith: [\[28695\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to (a) comply with the McCloud remedy and (b) provide assurances to members of the Police Pensions Scheme.

Dame Diana Johnson:

While the Home Office has responsibility for overarching policy and legislative changes to the police pension regulations, the police pension scheme is locally administered by individual police forces. The regulations governing the McCloud remedy for the police pension schemes were made in July 2023.

It is for each Chief Constable, in their role as scheme manager for their force, to determine their administrative timetable, including when remedy payments will be distributed.

The Home Office is actively collaborating with policing to support the effective implementation of the McCloud remedy for all affected individuals.

Christine Jardine:

[\[30122\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to address the pension shortfalls experienced by police officers who, affected by the McCloud judgement, are classified as being in Immediate Detriment.

Dame Diana Johnson:

While the Home Office has responsibility for overarching policy and legislative changes to the police pension regulations in England & Wales, the police pension scheme is locally administered by individual police forces. The Home Office is working with the policing sector to support the effective implementation of the McCloud remedy for all affected individuals.

It is for each Chief Constable, in their role as scheme manager for their force, to determine their administrative timetable, including when remedy payments will be distributed.

The devolved governments have overarching policy and legislative responsibility in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

■ **Social Services: Migrant Workers**

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[29156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to implement sector sponsorship for immigrant social care workers.

Seema Malhotra:

The Government keeps all aspects of the immigration system under review, subject to our objective to reduce levels of net migration, but we have no plans to change the current rules in this area.

■ **Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill**

Neil Coyle:

[\[29451\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will engage with (a) the British Healthcare Trades Association and (b) other organisations in the first aid industry on the (i) adequacy and (ii) accessibility of first aid provisions in the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill.

Neil Coyle:

[\[29452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if (a) she and (b) her Department will hold discussions with the British Healthcare Trades Association on the role of first aid kits in ensuring public safety in the context of the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill.

Dan Jarvis:

The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill does not include a specific requirement relating to the provision of first aid or associated equipment.

The Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 already make requirements for employers, including provision of adequate and appropriate equipment, facilities and

personnel to ensure their employees receive immediate attention if they are injured or taken ill at work.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) oversee compliance with the regulations. Where appropriate, the HSE engages with a range of stakeholders within the medical and first aid sector, including standard setters in the first aid industry, such as St John Ambulance and the British Red Cross.

Wider work is ongoing to strengthen Healthcare Standards. The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) is working with partners to put in place updated guidance for health care at events. Once published the Event Healthcare Standard will be assessed in partnership with NHS England to determine whether this standard should become a statutory obligation.

The Home Office will continue to engage with sectors within the scope of the legislation, to support them to understand their obligations.

■ Undocumented Migrants

Rupert Lowe:

[\[29986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the section entitled Roles and responsibilities on the About Us webpage for Immigration Enforcement, what options are presented to illegal migrants during face-to-face meaningful conversations.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Those conversations might be, for example, including informing migrants subject to immigration bail of options for fulfilling the Home Office reporting requirements, and consequences of failing to do so.

■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel

Neil O'Brien:

[\[30211\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of people who have arrived on small boats since 4 July 2024 have been deported.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office publishes data on small boat returns in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on quarterly enforced and voluntary returns of people who arrived by small boat, by return date, are published in table Irr_02e of the '[Irregular Migration to the UK summary tables](#)'.

Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbook. The latest data relates to the end of September 2024. Data to the end of December 2024 will be published on 27th February.

Deportations are a specific subset of returns which are enforced either following a criminal conviction or when it is judged that a person's removal from the UK is conducive to the public good. The deportation order prohibits the person returning to

the UK until such time as it may be revoked. Data on deportations are not published separately.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Repatriation

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[30203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many individual voluntary returns have been awarded (a) up to £1,000, (b) between £1,000 and £2,000 and (c) between £2,000 and £3,000 by the Voluntary Returns Service since 4 July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[30204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many voluntary returns have been given financial support by the Voluntary Returns Service under the criteria of returning to a developing country since 4 July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[30205\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many voluntary returns have been given financial support by the Voluntary Returns Service under the criteria of their claim for asylum in the UK having been refused since 4 July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[30206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many voluntary returns have been given financial support by the Voluntary Returns Service under the criteria of having received a letter from the Home Office confirming they are a victim of modern slavery since 4 July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[30207\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many voluntary returns have been given financial support by the Voluntary Returns Service under the criteria of being part of a family group that will travel together, including someone under 18 years old since 4 July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[30349\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many voluntary returns have been given financial support by the Voluntary Returns Service under the criteria of being under 18 and travelling alone since 4 July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[30350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many voluntary returns have been given financial support by the Voluntary Returns Service under the criteria of being under 21 and a care leaver since 4 July 2024.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[30351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many voluntary returns have been given financial support by the Voluntary Returns Service under the criteria of having been sleeping rough since 4 July 2024.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Hon Member to the Answer I gave him on 6 February to Question 28420.

■ Vehicle Number Plates: Fraud**Mr Calvin Bailey:**[\[29549\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what guidance her Department has issued to (a) the police, (b) local authorities and (c) other authorities on removing covers from illicitly-covered licence plates in public spaces to help enforce existing legislation and regulations; and whether she has received representations on the risk of criminal damage complaints if authorities remove coverings.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Disguising a vehicle's identity is an offence and should be reported to the police to be investigated and, where appropriate, taken through the courts.

The Home Office has not issued any specific guidance on the removal of covers from licence plates.

■ Visas: Families**Warinder Juss:**[\[29292\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a geographical based income threshold for family visas.

Seema Malhotra:

We must ensure that the Family Immigration Rules maintain the balance between respecting the right to family life and protecting the economic wellbeing of the UK. Any change must be underpinned by a solid evidence base and form part of a system that is fair, clear and consistent. To achieve this the Home Secretary has commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to review the financial requirements in the Family Immigration Rules.

The MAC is an independent body and their review will be robust and transparent. It is expected the MAC will issue their report in the Summer. We will carefully consider the MAC's recommendations before making any further changes.

His Majesty's Government is not considering a regional visa scheme.

■ Visas: Married People**Alex Ballinger:**[\[29723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of reforming spousal visa regulations to (a) reduce the 10-year duration, (b) remove renewals and (c) prevent penalisation due to a partner's benefit claims.

Seema Malhotra:

The Family Immigration Rules provide the requirements to be met for those seeking to establish or maintain their family life in the UK and these rules are kept under regular review to ensure that there are clear incentives to comply with the rules and clear disincentives for failing to do so. Specifically, on 10 September the Home Secretary commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to review the financial requirements in the Family Immigration Rules, and we will reflect any recommendations arising from that review.

■ Visas: Palestinians**Tim Roca:**[\[29239\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of a visa scheme for Palestinians.

Seema Malhotra:

Palestinians who wish to come to the UK can already do so via the existing range of routes available which allow a person to apply to work, study, settle or join family in the UK. More information on all routes available for a person to apply to work, study or settle/join family in the UK can be found here: [Visas and immigration - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

■ Visas: Ukraine**Alison Taylor:**[\[29326\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with relevant stakeholders on the potential merits of extending the duration of visas for Ukrainians with three-year visas that are approaching expiry.

Seema Malhotra:

To provide future certainty, Ukrainians provided with temporary sanctuary in the UK under the Ukraine visa schemes can apply for a further 18 months' permission to remain in the UK through the Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) scheme, which opened to applications on 4 February 2025.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme remains open, uncapped and free of charge for Ukrainians in need of sanctuary to apply to come to the UK.

The Government keeps the Ukraine schemes under review and engages, where appropriate, with relevant stakeholders while closely monitoring developments in Ukraine.

■ West Midlands Fire Service**Alex Ballinger:**[\[29351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the West Midlands fire authority plan to bring back familiarisation visits.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Familiarisation visits, and other types of training and community engagement, are a local operational matter. It is for the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority and Service to determine their priorities on these types of activities.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ Aviation: Infrastructure****Chris Coghlan:**[\[29757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she plans to take to integrate the proposals outlined in the English Devolution White Paper with important strategic transport infrastructure such as Gatwick Airport.

Jim McMahon:

The White Paper sets out the comprehensive devolution of local transport functions to strategic authorities in England, including a comprehensive rail devolution offer for the first time. Combined with their new powers over strategic spatial planning, this will empower them to deliver strategic transport infrastructure to deliver growth across England. However, the proposals and Devolution Framework set out in the English Devolution White Paper do not cover aviation policy and would not have any direct impact on the operation of Gatwick Airport.

■ Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[28053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will publish all correspondence, including electronic communications, between the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and her Department on the planning application for the proposed Chinese Embassy.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government does not routinely publish correspondence between departments.

■ Constituencies**Sir Julian Lewis:**[\[30033\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her policy is on retaining parliamentary constituency boundaries when grouping the areas currently covered by county councils to form the wider areas to be covered by new unitary authorities.

Jim McMahon:

Local government boundaries are not directly related to Parliamentary constituency boundaries. Local government boundary changes may be considered when undertaking a future Parliamentary constituency boundary review.

■ Freehold and Landlords: Fraud

Clive Lewis: [\[27868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department is taking any steps to (a) identify and (b) tackle fraudulent activity by (i) landlords and (ii) freeholders.

Matthew Pennycook:

The reforms introduced in the Renters' Rights Bill will be underpinned by an effective, consistent and proportionate enforcement framework.

We are extending councils' powers to collect and retain revenue for future enforcement work from financial penalties against landlords in the private rented sector who flout the rules. Initial or minor non-compliance will incur a civil penalty of up to £7,000 and serious, persistent or repeat non-compliance a civil penalty of up to £40,000, with the alternative of a criminal prosecution.

We are also providing local authorities with a range of new investigatory powers which will allow them to enforce our new reforms, including powers to require information from relevant persons and any persons and powers of entry to business and residential premises.

The [Remediation Acceleration Plan](#) published in December 2024 committed the government to supporting regulators to hold bad actors – whether freeholders or landlords – to account in relation to fixing dangerous buildings, including via robust new powers to enforce remediation.

Freeholders who breach the terms of their lease, or fail to hold service charge monies in a trust fund, may be challenged by leaseholders in the courts.

■ High Rise Flats: Home Insurance

Darren Paffey: [\[29688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to tackle increases in building insurance premiums for leaseholders in high-risk buildings.

Alex Norris:

Buildings insurance premiums remain unacceptably high for many leaseholders in buildings with fire safety issues, who have been paying too much for too long.

My officials have already started working with the insurance industry, as announced in the Remediation Acceleration Plan, to consider whether, for the duration of remediation programmes, government might support industry to reduce fire related liabilities, in order to reduce the high insurance bills some leaseholders are facing.

We have also launched a public consultation on the introduction of a fair and transparent fee for leaseholders to pay to those who manage insurance for their buildings.

■ High Streets Task Force**Ms Polly Billington:** [\[29829\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to announce a successor body to the High Streets Task Force.

Alex Norris:

This Government is fully committed to rejuvenating our high streets and supporting the businesses and communities that make our town centres successful. The Chancellor confirmed at Autumn Budget 2024 that the Long-Term Plan for Towns will be retained and reformed as part of a new regeneration programme. This will include specialised support to communities during the delivery phase of the programme, learning from the support offered through the High Streets Task Force. Further information on the Long-Term Plan for Towns programme will be provided in due course.

■ Housing: Construction**Chris Coghlan:** [\[25482\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of her policies on house-building on house prices.

Matthew Pennycook:

The effects of housing undersupply can be seen in affordability and rent pressures. That is precisely why the government's Plan for Change includes an ambitious milestone of delivering 1.5 million safe and decent homes in this Parliament and why we remain committed to delivering the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation. We continue to review the impacts of our policies on a range of outcomes as they develop.

Blake Stephenson: [\[R\] \[28339\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to paragraphs 24 and 26 of the National Planning Policy Framework, published on 12 December 2024, if she will issue guidance to councils on joint working to meet housing targets across different (a) local and (b) neighbourhood plans.

Matthew Pennycook:

The changes made to paragraphs 24 – 28 of the National Planning Policy Framework in December 2024 will ensure that we are making the most of opportunities for greater collaboration between local planning authorities and that the right engagement is occurring in respect of the sharing of unmet housing need and other cross-boundary issues.

There is existing government guidance to support authorities in complying with the relevant policy in this area.

Bradley Thomas: [\[28369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the labour force to meet the Government's housing targets over the course of this Parliament.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government recognises the need to expand and upskill the construction workforce to meet our ambitious Plan for Change milestone of delivering 1.5 million safe and decent homes in this Parliament.

We are working with industry to ensure the housebuilding sector has access to the skilled workers needed. This includes a £140 million package of industry investment to deliver 5,000 more apprenticeship places through 32 new Homebuilding Skills Hubs.

■ Local Government

James McMurdock: [\[29691\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the system of elected mayors in managing of local issues across large geographical areas.

Jim McMahon:

Mayors have become vital local leaders, delivering on the promise of change in their area to drive growth, more joined-up delivery, and earning trust. We want to see all of England benefit from devolution and it is the government's strong preference that in filling the map, places do so with a Mayor over a strategic geography.

To deliver devolution successfully, it is vital that we build evidence of how best to implement our policies over time. In the English Devolution White Paper, we committed to exploring a public evaluation on the outcomes of devolution to date, a feasibility study on the impact of different devolution commitments and ongoing process and impact evaluation to capture evidence on devolution as it becomes available.

■ Local Government: Devolution

Martin Wrigley: [\[25411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with the National Park Authorities on the English Devolution White Paper.

Jim McMahon:

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has not met with any National Park Authorities in relation to the English Devolution White Paper. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will continue to work with the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, other Government

Departments and local government as we take forward the commitments in the English Devolution White Paper.

■ Local Government: Devon

Martin Wrigley: [\[29796\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department is taking steps to address funding shortfalls faced by local government in Devon, in the context of the local government reorganisation.

Jim McMahon:

We are providing a significant boost to local authorities in England. The final Local Government Finance Settlement 2025-26, alongside funding announced at the Budget, will deliver over £5 billion of new funding for local services over and above council tax. This includes an additional £2 billion of grant through the Settlement.

The final Settlement for 2025-26 therefore makes available over £69 billion for local government, which is a 6.8% cash terms increase on 2024-25. For Devon County Council, this makes available a total of up to £837.2 million in 2025-26. Spending decisions beyond 2025-26 are a matter for the upcoming Spending Review.

■ Local Government: Elections

Sir Julian Lewis: [\[30030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what positions other than (a) new regional mayors and (b) parish and town councillors will elections be held in May 2026 in areas where local authority elections have been postponed for 12 months.

Jim McMahon:

The postponed elections of councillors to the county councils of East Sussex, Essex, Hampshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey and West Sussex and the unitary councils of Isle of Wight and Thurrock are due to take place in May 2026. In addition, scheduled elections of councillors to district councils within the county areas listed above are due to take place in May 2026.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[30148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Answer of 30 January 2025 to Question HL4145 on Local Government: Elections, for what reason her Department is using the provisions in the Local Government Act 2000 rather than the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

Jim McMahon:

Our use of the power under the Local Government Act 2000 to postpone local council elections is consistent with precedent in areas preparing for local government reorganisation, for example: Buckinghamshire (S.I. 2018/1355), Cumbria (S.I.

2021/174), North Yorkshire (S.I. 2021/175), Northamptonshire (S.I. 2018/1324), Somerset (S.I. 2021/176) and Weymouth and Portland (S.I. 2018/256).

In contrast, the power in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 is for use in the context of a structural changes Order implementing a proposal for local government reorganisation.

Lee Anderson: [\[30212\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with (a) local authority officers and (b) local authority elected representatives on the cancellation of local elections in East Sussex; and if she will publish those discussions.

Lee Anderson: [\[30213\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with (a) local authority officers and (b) local authority elected representatives on the cancellation of the local elections in West Sussex, and if she will publish those discussions.

Nigel Farage: [\[30337\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with (a) local authority officers and (b) local authority elected representatives on the cancellation of the local elections in Essex, and if she will publish such conversations.

Richard Tice: [\[30361\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with (a) local authority officers and (b) local authority elected representatives on the cancellation of the local elections in Surrey; and if she will publish those conversations.

Richard Tice: [\[30362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with (a) local authority officers and (b) local authority elected representatives on the cancellation of the local elections in the Isle of Wight; and if she will publish those discussions.

Jim McMahon:

The Secretary of State has not had discussions with these local authorities on the cancellation of the local elections. Discussions on the applications to the Devolution Priority Programme have been had with all upper tier and unitary councils in the preparation of the programme, and those discussions covered all matters related to the timetable and process by both officials and ministers, as you would expect.

■ Local Government: Reorganisation

Chris Coghlan: [\[29749\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the compatibility of recent parliamentary constituency boundary changes with proposed local government reorganisation.

Jim McMahon:

Local government boundaries are not directly related to Parliamentary constituency boundaries. Local government boundary changes may be considered when undertaking a future Parliamentary constituency boundary review.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[29927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her oral statement of 5 February 2025 entitled English Devolution and Local Government, Official Report, column 767, if she (a) plans to legislate to direct local government restructuring in areas where principal authorities do not submit a request to restructure or (b) will consent to the decision not to submit a request.

Jim McMahon:

The English Devolution White Paper set out that *“We will expect all two tier areas and smaller or failing unitaries to develop proposals for reorganisation”* and *“We will deliver this process as quickly as possible, including through legislation where it becomes necessary to ensure progress.”*

I will set out detail on any further plans in due course.

■ Local Government: Worcestershire

Bradley Thomas: [\[29763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with hon. Members from Worcestershire on local government reform.

Jim McMahon:

The Secretary of State has not had discussions with Members from Worcestershire on local government reform.

■ National Identity

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[23793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 18 December 2024 to Question 18960 on Council of the Nations and Regions: National Identity, if she will make it her policy to champion (a) the English national identity and (b) pride in England as a constituent nation of the United Kingdom.

Jim McMahon:

We want to see all of England access devolved power by establishing Strategic Authorities that can make key decisions to drive economic growth, preferably with a

Mayor. This will ensure that all parts of England have the powerful voice they need in national policymaking through attending the Council of Nations and Regions and the Mayoral Council for England's Mayors.

■ Planning Authorities: Staff

Michael Payne: [\[28327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of numbers of local authority planning officers to support planning reform.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government appreciates 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.

■ Planning Inspectorate: Artificial Intelligence

Sir John Hayes: [\[27966\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what purposes the Planning Inspectorate has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

Matthew Pennycook:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is key to delivering the outcomes set out in the blueprint for modern digital government published on 21 January 2025. The policy paper can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

The Planning Inspectorate has undertaken the following exploratory work in relation to AI in the past 12 months:

- The Inspectorate issued [guidance](#) on use of artificial intelligence as part of any appeal, application or examination being dealt with by the Planning Inspectorate.

- The Inspectorate established an Artificial Intelligence Governance Board as per the government's [Generative AI Framework](#).
- The Inspectorate investigated the use of Artificial Intelligence tools to support in the redaction of the data and documents it publishes, as necessary.
- The Inspectorate investigated the use of tools powered by artificial intelligence to create visualisations and extract insights from data about casework for internal staff use only.
- The Inspectorate undertook the first phase of internal testing of Microsoft CoPilot tools for staff to establish their impact and ensure appropriate security measures are in place.

The Planning Inspectorate 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.

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

■ **Property Development: Land Drainage**

Blake Stephenson:

[\[28338\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the National Planning Policy Framework, published on 12 December 2024, which new measures within the framework have implications for sustainable urban drainage systems.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government is committed to securing the delivery of high-quality sustainable drainage systems to help manage flood risk and adapt to the effects of climate change.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework we published on 12 December 2024 amended an existing paragraph regarding incorporating sustainable drainage systems in new development to make clear that developments of all sizes are expected to make use of sustainable drainage techniques where the development could have drainage impacts. These systems should be appropriate to the nature and scale of the proposed development.

We will consider whether further changes are required to manage sustainable drainage systems provision through the planning system when we consult on further reform.

■ Unitary Councils

Chris Coghlan: [\[29748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to ensure that there is sufficient local representation in the new unitary authorities.

Jim McMahon:

I wrote to all councils in two-tier areas and to neighbouring small unitaries on 5th February to formally invite unitary proposals, with interim plans to be provided on or before 21 March 2025. The interim plans should include a view as to the councillors' numbers that will ensure both effective democratic representation for all parts of the area and also effective governance and decision-making arrangements which will balance the unique needs of your cities, towns, rural and coastal areas, in line with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance. These letters are published at [Local government reorganisation: invitation to local authorities in two-tier areas - GOV.UK](#)

■ Unitary Councils: Elections

Sir Julian Lewis: [\[30031\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the (a) earliest and (b) latest dates are at which she expects elections to be held to (i) the new unitary authority for the area currently covered by Hampshire County Council and (ii) other new unitary authorities for areas covered by County Councils whose elections have been postponed.

Jim McMahon:

Government has agreed to postpone scheduled local elections for Surrey, Norfolk and Suffolk; Essex and Thurrock; Hampshire and the Isle of Wight; East Sussex and West Sussex from May 2025, until May 2026 only. This postponement is crucial in order to ensure that we can reorganise local government and deliver devolution as quickly as possible. For any area in which elections are postponed, we will work with areas to move to elections to new 'shadow' unitary councils as soon as possible as is the usual arrangement in the process of local government reorganisation. The exact date of elections to new unitary authorities in any area will depend on the proposals that are developed and submitted to government by councils in that area, and the decisions that are taken on implementing any such proposal. We also intend for Mayoral elections to take place as soon as possible in these areas.

JUSTICE

■ Criminal Injuries Compensation

Laurence Turner:[\[30367\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the expenditure of her Department's criminal injuries hardship fund has been in each year since its creation.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The below table shows the compensation spend under the Hardship Fund in each financial year. It does not include the running costs of the Hardship Fund. The Hardship Fund opened on 27 November 2012.

| FINANCIAL YEAR | AMOUNT PAID |
|----------------|-------------|
| 2012/13 | £883.03 |
| 2013/14 | £1,116.05 |
| 2014/15 | £1,475.85 |
| 2015/16 | £312.68 |
| 2016/17 | £313 |
| 2017/18 | 0 |
| 2018/19 | 0 |
| 2019/20 | 0 |
| 2020/21 | 0 |
| 2021/22 | 0 |
| 2022/23 | 0 |
| 2023/24 | 0 |

Laurence Turner:[\[30369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 25 October 2012 to Question 124834, on Criminal Injuries Compensation, if she will uprate the figures given in that Answer to 2024 prices.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The following table sets out the value of each of the tariff bands in the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (CICS) along with how much each of the tariff bands would be worth in 2012 and 2024, if they had increased by the rate of inflation since 1996 using each of the indices (a) RPI and (b) CPI:

| <i>BAND</i> | <i>TARIFF AMOUNT [1996]</i> | <i>(A) INFLATED AMOUNT (RPI) [2012]</i> | <i>(B) INFLATED AMOUNT (CPI) [2012]</i> | <i>(A) INFLATED AMOUNT (RPI) [2024]</i> | <i>(B) INFLATED AMOUNT (CPI) [2024]</i> |
|-------------|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | £1,000 | £1,540 | £1,358 | £2,532 | £1,946 |
| 2 | £1,250 | £1,925 | £1,697 | £3,166 | £2,433 |
| 3 | £1,500 | £2,310 | £2,036 | £3,799 | £2,919 |
| 4 | £1,750 | £2,695 | £2,376 | £4,432 | £3,406 |
| 5 | £2,000 | £3,081 | £2,715 | £5,065 | £3,892 |
| 6 | £2,500 | £3,851 | £3,394 | £6,331 | £4,866 |
| 7 | £3,300 | £5,083 | £4,480 | £8,357 | £6,423 |
| 8 | £3,800 | £5,853 | £5,159 | £9,623 | £7,396 |
| 9 | £4,400 | £6,777 | £5,973 | £11,143 | £8,563 |
| 10 | £5,500 | £8,472 | £7,467 | £13,928 | £10,704 |
| 11 | £6,600 | £10,166 | £8,960 | £16,714 | £12,845 |
| 12 | £8,200 | £12,630 | £11,132 | £20,766 | £15,959 |
| 13 | £11,000 | £16,943 | £14,933 | £27,857 | £21,408 |
| 14 | £13,500 | £20,794 | £18,327 | £34,188 | £26,274 |
| 15 | £16,500 | £25,415 | £22,400 | £41,785 | £32,113 |
| 16 | £19,000 | £29,265 | £25,793 | £48,116 | £36,978 |
| 17 | £22,000 | £33,886 | £29,866 | £55,713 | £42,817 |
| 18 | £27,000 | £41,587 | £36,654 | £68,375 | £52,548 |
| 19 | £33,000 | £50,829 | £44,799 | £83,570 | £64,225 |
| 20 | £44,000 | £67,772 | £59,732 | £111,426 | £85,634 |
| 21 | £55,000 | £84,715 | £74,665 | £139,283 | £107,042 |
| 22 | £82,000 | £126,303 | £111,319 | £207,658 | £159,590 |
| 23 | £110,000 | £169,430 | £149,330 | £278,566 | £214,084 |
| 24 | £175,000 | £269,548 | £237,571 | £443,173 | £340,589 |
| 25 | £250,000 | £385,069 | £339,387 | £633,104 | £486,555 |

■ Criminal Legal Aid Independent Review

Alex Burghart:

[\[30138\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether it is her policy to implement in full all of the recommendations of the Bellamy Review of Criminal Legal Aid.

Sarah Sackman:

The previous Government commissioned the Criminal Legal Aid Independent Review (CLAIR), chaired by Lord Bellamy KC, to provide analysis of the criminal legal aid system and explore the ways in which the Government could ensure its long-term sustainability. This Government continues to keep the Review's findings under consideration as we look at options for reform in the criminal legal aid sector.

For example, in November 2024, in response to the Crime Lower consultation, we announced fee uplifts totalling £24 million. That included £18.5 million to uplift police station fee schemes to begin the process of removing financial disparities between police station schemes to establish uniformity, meaning most police station fee schemes in the same region attract one fixed fee as recommended by CLAIR.

We also introduced a separate Youth Court fee scheme, responding to CLAIR's recommendation for the importance of youth work to be reflected. We invested £5.1 million, enhancing fees for the most serious cases. This will help to reduce the disparity between the Youth and Crown Courts by prioritising cases that would be paid at the Crown Court rates if the defendant were an adult.

In December 2024, we announced that criminal legal aid solicitors will receive up to £92 million more a year to help address the ongoing challenges in the criminal justice system. This is in addition to the £24 million and will take the total uplift in funding for criminal legal aid solicitor fees since CLAIR to 24%.

The previous Government established the Criminal Legal Aid Advisory Board (CLAAB) in October 2022. This followed the CLAIR recommendation that an advisory board be created to encourage a more joined-up approach to criminal legal aid within the criminal justice system. CLAAB published its first annual report in November 2024 which the Government is considering and Ministers remain committed to working with the sector, including representatives from the solicitor and barrister professions, on further opportunities for reform.

■ Employment Tribunals Service

James McMurdock:

[\[29777\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the average time was between application to the Employment Tribunal and hearing in each of the last three years.

Sarah Sackman:

HM Courts and Tribunals Service does not hold the requested information.

■ Fines: Surcharges

Laurence Turner:

[\[30368\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what funds have been raised through the victim surcharge in each year since its creation.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The surcharge (often referred to as the victim surcharge) was first introduced in April 2007 and changes were introduced on 1 October 2012, 1 September 2014, 8 April 2016, 28 June 2019, 14 April 2020 and then again on 16 June 2022.

When a court passes a sentence, it must also order that the relevant surcharge is paid. The amount of the surcharge depends on the sentence and whether at the time the offence was committed the offender was an adult or a youth (under 18 years of age), or if the offender is an organisation.

Revenue raised from the surcharge provides a contribution towards Ministry of Justice-funded victim and witness support services.

HMCTS accounts for the amount of victim surcharge imposed and collected in the annual HMCTS Trust Statement. The Trust Statement was introduced in 2010-11, prior to that the data was not collated centrally. The table below illustrates the amounts imposed and collected each year since April 2010. The amounts collected will include receipts for amounts imposed in prior years.

| FINANCIAL YEAR | VICTIM SURCHARGE IMPOSED £000 | VICTIM SURCHARGE COLLECTED £000 |
|----------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2010-11 | 12,552 | 10,516 |
| 2011-12 | 11,234 | 10,165 |
| 2012-13 | 14,331 | 10,518 |
| 2013-14 | 30,970 | 19,548 |
| 2014-15 | 35,203 | 24,569 |
| 2015-16 | 37,866 | 28,307 |
| 2016-17 | 44,785 | 31,029 |
| 2017-18 | 46,603 | 35,022 |
| 2018-19 | 45,521 | 33,529 |
| 2019-20 | 44,424 | 39,689 |
| 2020-21 | 36,647 | 35,039 |
| 2021-22 | 46,654 | 37,852 |

| FINANCIAL YEAR | VICTIM SURCHARGE IMPOSED £000 | VICTIM SURCHARGE COLLECTED £000 |
|----------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2022-23 | 65,270 | 41,314 |
| 2023-24 | 104,032 | 65,496 |

■ Valdo Calocane

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[29037\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, when she expects the inquiry into Valdo Calocane to commence.

Sarah Sackman:

As previously stated by the Prime Minister, the Government is committed to establishing a judge-led inquiry in relation to the issues raised by the attacks in Nottingham. Work is underway to establish the Inquiry and Ministers will update Parliament on it in due course.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

■ Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[30221\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, what steps she is taking to provide parliamentary scrutiny of Government involvement in amendments to the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill by hon. Members not on the bill committee.

Lucy Powell:

While the Government have a neutral position on the principles of the Bill, we have a responsibility to ensure that any Bill passed by the House is workable and operable. The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill was passed by the House at Second Reading, and the Government has therefore been in discussion with the Member in charge about the Bill's deliverability and the overall coherence of the statute book.

The Member in charge has tabled amendments based on these discussions. It is for the Committee to decide whether to accept each amendment. As with any Public Bill Committee, any Member can table amendments to the Bill during the Committee's consideration, and Members not appointed to the Committee are free to observe the Committee's proceedings (although only Members of the Committee can speak or move tabled amendments). Following the Committee stage, the whole House will have a further opportunity to scrutinise the Bill at Report stage.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ Artificial Intelligence**

Alan Mak: [\[28510\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether trade unions were consulted on the AI Opportunities Action Plan.

Feryal Clark:

The AI Opportunities Action Plan sets out how we will achieve our ambitions by laying the foundations for AI growth, driving adoption and building UK capability at the frontier.

The Action Plan has been informed by a series of external roundtables and wide engagement with experts from across the AI ecosystem. These discussions covered key areas such as the collaboration between the public and private sectors to create a robust AI ecosystem and to unmask the potential economic impact of AI technologies.

DSIT ministers recently met with the Assistant General Secretary of the Trade Unions Congress to discuss the AI Action Plan. As the Government takes the Plan forward, it will continue to engage widely with stakeholders, including trade unions, to ensure its implementation.

■ Artificial Intelligence: Finance

Alan Mak: [\[28505\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department has allocated funding to the AI Opportunities Action Plan.

Alan Mak: [\[28506\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether additional funding was allocated to his Department for the AI Opportunities Action Plan.

Alan Mak: [\[28507\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what estimate he has made of the funding required for the AI Opportunities Action Plan.

Alan Mak: [\[28508\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what the budget of the AI Opportunities Unit is.

Alan Mak: [\[28509\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what the budget for UK Sovereign AI is.

Alan Mak:

[\[28940\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what budget has been allocated to the construction of the supercomputing facility included in the AI Opportunities Action Plan.

Feryal Clark:

AI is advancing at an extraordinary pace, and its benefits extend far beyond economic growth. By investing in AI now, we are ensuring that the UK is prepared to harness its transformative potential.

The government invests in AI in several ways, including through investing in the UK's compute capacity, the latest research and innovations, and upskilling the workforce with AI skills.

The recently announced AI Opportunities Action Plan, which was developed by Matt Clifford, is fully funded under the current Spending Review. We have already funded parts of the AI Action Plan through Spending Review Round One, including compute, R&D, and sovereign AI commitments. Departments are working through the policy details, which will be integrated into future spending plans as part of the spending review process.

As we approach the 2025 Spending Review, we will outline the next steps to ensure these commitments continue driving progress, but it would not be appropriate to speculate on spending review decisions.

■ International Telecommunication Union: China

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[30055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment his Department has made of the potential implications for UK national security of paragraph 368 of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament's report entitled China, published on 13 July 2023, HC 1605, on Chinese influence in the International Telecommunication Union.

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 we must. To safeguard our democratic societies, we are taking steps with our allies to promote the international rules-based system that underpins our security.

TRANSPORT■ **[Subject Heading to be Assigned]****Mr Jonathan Brash:**[\[902777\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to improve rail services in Hartlepool.

Simon Lightwood:

As well as allocating significant investment to reopen Hartlepool platform 3 in June 2024, we are working with train operators to make the best use of the available infrastructure and to improve reliability to deliver the services passengers need.

Alison Taylor:[\[902778\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help ensure that the transport system supports economic growth.

Steve Race:[\[902783\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help ensure that the transport system supports economic growth.

Simon Lightwood:

Growth is the priority Mission of this government. Transport provides the connectivity needed to achieve it.

We are improving connectivity through infrastructure programmes such as HS2, East West Rail, and the Transpennine Route Upgrade.

We are empowering leaders, improving bus services, and better integrating networks to improve access to opportunities.

Christine Jardine:[\[902780\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help increase the availability of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Lilian Greenwood:

We have committed £200m funding in the Autumn budget to support charging infrastructure rollout. This is on top of over £6 billion in private investment committed out to 2030, and bolsters existing grants and funding to support chargepoint installation. There are now over 74,000 public chargepoints in the UK, with almost 20,000 new chargepoints added and a 45% increase in rural chargepoints in 2024. On 24 December, we announced a range of measures to remove barriers to chargepoint rollout, including to improve grid connections for chargepoints.

■ A19**Emma Foody:** [\[29643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much funding was allocated to (a) the A19 North of Newcastle junctions scheme and (b) improvements to (i) Moor Farm and (ii) Seaton Burn during the allocation of RIS3 pipelines schemes before July 2024.

Lilian Greenwood:

The second Road Investment Strategy (RIS2) identified 32 schemes to be developed for possible delivery as part of a future Road Investment Strategy, including proposed improvements to both Moor Farm and Seaton Burn junctions as part of the A19 North of Newcastle scheme. Pipeline schemes are funded for their development stages only, and no funding is allocated for their full delivery. A provision of £472 million was originally made in RIS2 for the development of future road investment strategies. This covered development of pipeline schemes and National Highways assessment of the current performance and future investment priorities of its network through its Routes Strategy process. Development of individual Pipeline schemes is through a combination of internal National Highways project and analytical resource and external support and funding is not allocated at an individual scheme level.

■ Active Travel England: Artificial Intelligence**Sir John Hayes:** [\[29879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, for what purposes Active Travel England has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

Simon Lightwood:

Active Travel England (ATE) currently does not use Artificial Intelligence (AI) for any formal decision making. ATE uses some AI tools to summarize large sets of publicly available information and is exploring the use of AI to support administrative tasks relating to case management.

ATE does use machine learning and advanced data science techniques in its analytical work, but these techniques lie outside of the commonly accepted definition of AI.

■ Active Travel: Finance**Alex Mayer:** [\[29846\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of increasing the allocation of the transport budget in England for walking and cycling initiatives.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government recognises that investment in active travel supports its economic growth, health and net zero missions by helping to revitalise high streets, reduce emissions, and enable people to live longer, healthier lives.

We have already announced an additional £100 million investment in walking and cycling infrastructure for 2025/26, to enable local authorities to install cycling infrastructure and upgrade pavements and paths. Decisions on funding for active travel for 2026/27 and beyond will be a matter for the Spending Review.

■ Agriculture: Biofuels

Munira Wilson:

[\[29478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an estimate of the proportion of farmland that will be used to produce alternative aviation fuels in (a) 2030, (b) 2040 and (c) 2050.

Mike Kane:

The Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) mandate introduced in January 2025 sets targets for the future supply of low carbon alternatives to fossil fuels used in aviation. The scheme only supports SAF 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 there is no impact on farmland.

■ Aircraft: Electric Vehicles

Dr Scott Arthur:

[\[29314\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps the Government is taking to support the development of Electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing vehicles.

Mike Kane:

The Government is supporting and accelerating the introduction and use of new aviation technologies, including electric Vertical Take-off and Landing (eVTOL) and other zero-emission regional air mobility aircraft.

My Department is working closely with industry, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and community representatives on the uses of these aircraft to ensure that they are sustainable, safe and offer benefits and opportunities across the UK.

I have committed my Department to working toward seeing initial demonstrations of piloted eVTOLs, followed by routine operations and then demonstrations of autonomous eVTOL flights - once the technology has been proven. I will be chairing the Future of Flight Industry Group, bringing government and the CAA together with industry leaders to discuss future of flight technologies, including eVTOLs.

The Jet Zero Taskforce Expert Group, convening representatives from government, industry, and academia with an interest in aviation decarbonisation, have agreed to establish a dedicated group to unlock barriers to the commercial operation of zero-carbon hydrogen aircraft.

■ Aircraft: Electric Vehicles and Hydrogen

Dr Scott Arthur:

[\[29315\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps the Government is taking to support the development of Electric/hydrogen Regional Air Mobility.

Mike Kane:

The Government is supporting and accelerating the introduction and use of new aviation technologies, including electric Vertical Take-off and Landing (eVTOL) and other zero-emission regional air mobility aircraft.

My Department is working closely with industry, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and community representatives on the uses of these aircraft to ensure that they are sustainable, safe and offer benefits and opportunities across the UK.

I have committed my Department to working toward seeing initial demonstrations of piloted eVTOLs, followed by routine operations and then demonstrations of autonomous eVTOL flights - once the technology has been proven. I will be chairing the Future of Flight Industry Group, bringing government and the CAA together with industry leaders to discuss future of flight technologies, including eVTOLs.

The Jet Zero Taskforce Expert Group, convening representatives from government, industry, and academia with an interest in aviation decarbonisation, have agreed to establish a dedicated group to unlock barriers to the commercial operation of zero-carbon hydrogen aircraft.

■ Airports: Finance

Grahame Morris:

[\[28932\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of (a) debt levels and (b) regulated asset base gearing by UK airports.

Mike Kane:

The UK aviation sector operates predominantly within the private market, and decisions regarding asset financing are at the discretion of individual airports and their owners.

Heathrow Airport is unique amongst UK airports in maintaining an active Regulatory Asset Base as part of its economic regulation by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). Since this regulation is independent from Government, the Department does not conduct routine analysis of debt and gearing levels in relation to Heathrow.

■ Blue Badge Scheme

Sojan Joseph:

[\[30341\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing blue badge holders to temporarily use an expired badge while its renewal is being processed.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department has no plans to allow the temporary use of an expired Blue Badge. It is an offence to use an expired badge which should be returned to the issuing local authority.

Allowing the use of expired badges would undermine the effective enforcement of the scheme.

■ Bridges: Safety**Chris Bloore:**[\[29384\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he plans to review the safety measures and responsibilities of local authorities on water crossings.

Lilian Greenwood:

Under the Highways Act 1980, local highway authorities are responsible for the maintenance and safety of the highway network in their area, which may include bridges, fords and other types of river crossing. The Act does not set out specific standards of safety or maintenance for these assets. It is for each individual local highway authority to assess which parts of its network need repair and what standards should be applied, based upon their local knowledge and circumstances, and the Government has no plans to change this. The Department does, however, plan to update its guidance to local highway authorities on the management of their highway networks. As part of this it will consider whether more guidance is needed on the management of river crossings.

■ Bus Services: Bromsgrove**Bradley Thomas:**[\[29760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of bus services in Bromsgrove constituency.

Simon Lightwood:

The government knows that a modern public transport network is vital to providing access to services and keeping communities connected. The government introduced the Bus Services (No.2) Bill on 17 December to put the power over local bus services back into the hands of local leaders. 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. Worcestershire County Authority have been allocated over £9 million of this funding, helping to improve bus services across the area, including Bromsgrove.

■ Bus Services: Fares**Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[29681\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information her Department holds on the potential impact of the increase in the bus fare cap on the number of bus journeys taken in (a) the UK, (b) Leicestershire and (c) Mid Leicestershire constituency.

Mr Peter Bedford:

[\[29745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the impact of increasing the bus fare cap on people living in Mid Leicestershire.

Simon Lightwood:

The government is investing over £150 million to deliver the new £3 cap on single bus fares in England outside London from 1 January until 31 December 2025, which prevented a cliff-edge return to commercial fares. Under the plans of the previous administration, the £2 cap on bus fares had been due to expire on 31 December 2024, and prior to the Budget, there was no further funding available to maintain a cap on bus fares beyond this point.

The published interim evaluation of the £2 fare cap showed that patronage continued to recover following the COVID 19 pandemic and early evidence from the first two months of the scheme suggested the £2 fare cap may have played a role in this recovery. The final evaluation of the £2 fare cap, including a further assessment of its impact on patronage will be published in due course.

■ **Buses: Sales**

Alex Mayer:

[\[29838\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 24 January 2025 to Question 25028 on Buses: Sales, for what reason an end-of-sale date is not set for coaches.

Simon Lightwood:

No decision has been taken on whether to set an end of sale date for new non-zero emission coaches. We will consider all options to support the decarbonisation of the coach fleet.

■ **Community Transport: Regulation**

Alex Mayer:

[\[29836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of existing regulations for community transport provision.

Simon Lightwood:

Community transport operators play a vital role in connecting people with their communities, enabling access to employment, education and other essential services. Recognising the value of these services of social benefit, often provided by charities, the system of section 19 and section 22 permits provided in the Transport Act 1985 allows not-for-profit community transport operators to operate public service vehicles (PSVs) without the associated costs of a PSV operator's licence.

The section 19 and section 22 permit system continues to support community transport services across the country and the Government provides guidance on the rules for permits and how to apply for them at [Section 19 and 22 permits and obligations: not for profit passenger transport - GOV.UK](#).

■ Department for Transport: Equality**Rupert Lowe:** [\[29145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will publish the total cost to the public purse for the provision of diversity, equality and inclusion courses for staff in her Department in 2024.

Mike Kane:

The Department for Transport provides an online training course entitled "Civil Service Expectations". The course focuses on diversity and inclusion, The Equality Act 2010, Civil Service code, and Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. This course is provided by Government Campus and is free at the point of delivery.

■ Electric Bicycles**Munira Wilson:** [\[29061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of requiring e-bike owners to (a) have a driving license, (b) have vehicle insurance, (c) pay road tax and (d) take an annual MOT.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government has no plans to require e-cycle owners to do any of these things, provided that their e-cycles comply in full with the requirements of the Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycle Regulations. If their e-cycles do not comply with these requirements, they are in effect e-mopeds and must be registered, taxed and insured, with riders also required to have a valid driving licence and wear a motorcycle helmet that meets British safety standards.

A national licensing scheme for people who ride e-cycles would be required to underpin all of the above. This would be expensive to design and administer, and the costs would be likely to outweigh the possible benefits. Requirements of this sort would also be likely to put people off cycling, with negative health and other impacts.

■ Electric Bicycles: Accidents**Munira Wilson:** [\[29059\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many accidents involving the police have involved e-bikes in the last five years.

Lilian Greenwood:

The information requested is not held by the Department.

Munira Wilson: [\[29060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many e-bike riders were held responsible in an accident involving an e-bike in each of the last five years.

Simon Lightwood:

The information requested is not held by the Department.

■ Electric Scooters

Munira Wilson:

[29058]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will publish the (a) schedule for e-scooter trials and (b) data obtained from those trials.

Simon Lightwood:

There are currently 17 e-scooter trials running in England and they are currently due to run until May 2026. Guidance for the trials, including the requirements for users, operators and local authorities are published on gov.uk.

Published findings from the first national evaluation of the e-scooter trials included trip data and e-scooter deployment numbers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-evaluation-of-e-scooter-trials-report>).

A second evaluation of the e-scooter trials is due to start in Spring 2025. The evaluation will gather new evidence and build on findings from the first evaluation including: the journeys e-scooters are replacing; how they integrate with public transport; their safety for users and for others; and the accessibility impacts of e-scooters.

The findings from this evaluation, including trip data, will be published once the second evaluation has concluded.

■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

Mike Amesbury:

[30186]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of electric cars charging infrastructure.

Lilian Greenwood:

A widespread, easy-to-use and reliable network of public chargepoints is crucial to support the electric vehicle transition. As of 1 February 2025, the Government and industry have supported the installation of 74,234 publicly available charging devices in the UK, alongside over 680,000 private chargepoints in England alone, supporting drivers to switch to EVs.

In 2024, nearly 20,000 public charging devices were added to the network, making it a record year. Government investment will continue to support public chargepoint rollout, including the £381m Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund which, alongside private investment, is estimated to deliver a further 100,000 chargepoints alone.

■ Global Centre of Rail Excellence

David Chadwick: [\[29751\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps the Government is taking to help the Welsh Government ensure the Global Centre of Rail Excellence facility in South Wales is being supported to project completion.

David Chadwick: [\[29752\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions her Department has had with the Welsh Government to ensure that the opportunity of the Global Centre of Rail Excellence is maximised as part of its Industrial Strategy.

David Chadwick: [\[29754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to use rail industry procurement to support the Global Centre of Rail Excellence opportunity.

David Chadwick: [\[29759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what role the Global Centre of Rail Excellence will have in supporting offline testing of new trains.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department of Transport continues to engage closely with the Global Centre of Rail Excellence (GCRE) in developing its proposal for world-class research, testing and certification site in South Wales. Department for Transport officials contribute through the cross-government GCRE steering group, which also includes representatives from the Department for Business and Trade and Welsh Government, to discuss options for Government support for the proposal and to ensure alignment with Government Industrial Strategy and other priorities.

■ Heathrow Airport

David Simmonds: [\[29617\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to revise the Airports National Policy Statement, published on 5 June 2018, in the context of the proposed Heathrow Airport expansion.

Mike Kane:

The Government has invited proposals for a third runway at Heathrow to be brought forward by the summer and is clear that any scheme must be delivered in line with the UK's legal, climate and environmental obligations.

Once proposals have been received, the government will review the Airports National Policy Statement in line with the requirements of the Planning Act 2008.

■ Large Goods Vehicles: Concrete**Mr Will Forster:**[\[29805\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing permanent weight limits of (a) 38.4 tonnes for four-axle rigid Volumetric Concrete Mixers (VCMs) and (b) 44 tonnes for five-axle rigid VCMs, in the context of the expiration of the derogation agreement in 2028.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department ran a call for evidence from October to December 2023 seeking views on three potential options on weight limits for Volumetric Concrete Mixers (VCMs). Evidence was provided to the Department on both the pros and cons of allowing VCMs to continue to operate at higher weights. The Department has reviewed the evidence provided and will publish its findings shortly. Any potential changes to the current policy position on VCM weight limits will need to consider the implications for road safety, infrastructure, the environment, and maintaining fair competition in the market.

Tom Gordon:[\[30230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 13 January 2025 to Question 22818 on Large Goods Vehicles: Concrete, what her Department's timetable is for publishing the findings from the call to evidence on weight limits for Volumetric Concrete Mixers.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department will publish its findings shortly.

■ Lower Thames Crossing: Private Finance Initiative**Brian Mathew:**[\[29976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate she has made of the cost of the proposed local Thames Crossing funded as a private finance initiative.

Lilian Greenwood:

Officials and National Highways are exploring all funding options for the Lower Thames Crossing, including private finance. As with all capital projects, spending decisions will be subject to the upcoming spending review. The assured cost estimate in line with the 2023 baseline for publicly funding the project is £8.95bn, but it is important to recognise that there is a normal level of uncertainty at this early stage of the development of a project of the size and complexity of the Lower Thames Crossing.

■ Minibuses**Ben Maguire:**[\[29304\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of raising the maximum age threshold of driving volunteer minibus services to 80.

Simon Lightwood:

An individual driving a minibus using additional entitlements through a Category B (Car) driving licence, may drive a minibus after the age of 70 but must demonstrate they meet higher Group 2 medical standards for reasons of passenger safety and safety to other road users. There are no plans to change this.

Ben Maguire:[\[29305\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the maximum authorised mass permitted for volunteer minibus drivers to over 3.5 tonnes.

Lilian Greenwood:

Drivers wishing to operate a passenger carrying vehicle with 8-16 seats must have the D1 entitlement on their driving licence. For drivers using their car licence to drive a minibus where the licence was first obtained after 1 January 1997, this weight is limited to 3,500kgs. Many minibuses come under the proscribed weights and can therefore be driven using additional entitlements on a category B (Car) licence. Any decision to amend existing rules would require a careful assessment of the road safety implications and our international obligations. The Department has no current plans to conduct such an assessment.

Motor Vehicles: Exhaust Emissions**Perran Moon:**[\[29828\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a scrappage scheme for older higher polluting vehicles.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government is committed to cleaning up our air and protecting the public from the harms of pollution. We review the various policy levers available to us on an ongoing basis.

Parking: Databases**Daisy Cooper:**[\[29015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 4 February 2025 to Question 26600 on Parking: Databases, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of (a) retaining the National Parking Platform in the public sector and (b) allowing it to recoup its operating costs by charging fees to car park operators.

Lilian Greenwood:

This Government has had to make many difficult decisions about public spending. We recognise the merits of the National Parking Platform and are continuing to support this by working with the parking industry, who we believe are best placed to take the initiative forward, as set out in my previous reply.

■ Public Transport: Franchises

Alex Mayer:

[\[29835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of updating her Department's guidance for local transport authorities to require them to have an alternative dispute resolution when franchising services.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department for Transport published guidance to local authorities on tendering for road passenger transport contracts in 2013. This included advice on dispute resolution. There are no plans to revise that guidance because there are no specific rules or requirements for tendering or awarding bus contracts in buses legislation. It is for individual franchising authorities to determine the appropriate dispute resolution process when tendering or awarding local service contracts.

■ Public Transport: Regulation

Alex Mayer:

[\[29837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of existing regulations for demand responsive transport.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department has supported sixteen demand responsive transport (DRT) trials through the Rural Mobility Fund (RMF). Each scheme is taking part in a detailed monitoring and evaluation process which will provide a better understanding of challenges associated with introducing and operating DRT, including those arising from regulation. An interim monitoring data collection and process evaluation report was published in September 2023 and a second concluding process evaluation report will be published later this year.

There is recognition that the regulatory framework covering DRT is complex, not least because it includes elements of taxi, private hire vehicle and bus legislation, including vehicles using community transport permits.

We keep all policies under review and my officials have regular engagement with a range of stakeholders across the DRT sector, ensuring that key regulatory issues are considered.

■ Railways: Greater London

Ruth Cadbury:

[\[29444\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions (a) she and (b) officials in her Department have had with the Mayor of London on proposals for the West London Orbital railway.

Simon Lightwood:

Transport in London is devolved to the Mayor of London and Transport for London (TfL). The Department for Transport works closely with TfL to understand the long-

term needs of London's transport infrastructure and opportunities to enhance its network, including potential major projects such as the West London Orbital.

■ Railways: Shropshire

Shaun Davies: [\[30202\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of a direct train services from Shropshire (via Telford) to London on economic growth; and what her planned timetable is for announcing a decision on the application for the new line between Wrexham General and London Euston (via Telford).

Simon Lightwood:

The Department for Transport provided a response to the Office of Rail and road regarding the live Open Access application from Wrexham, Shropshire & Midlands Railway to operate services between Wrexham General and London Euston on 4 February 2025. This letter set out our broad support for the proposal. We note the benefits of improved connectivity that these services would bring to a number of communities, but access to the rail network is ultimately a decision for the regulator, who will weigh stakeholder views against statutory duties and publish its decision in due course.

■ Roads: Capital Investment

Emma Foody: [\[29642\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what her Department's timetable is for the consideration of potential RIS4 pipeline schemes.

Lilian Greenwood:

Alongside other preparatory activities for RIS4, RIS pipeline schemes will continue to be considered on an ongoing basis throughout RIS3.

■ Roads: Forest of Dean

Matt Bishop: [\[29722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to support the maintenance of roads in the Forest of Dean constituency.

Matt Bishop: [\[29738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the condition of roads in (a) Forest of Dean constituency and (b) Gloucestershire.

Lilian Greenwood:

This Government takes the condition of our country's roads very seriously and is committed to supporting local authorities in maintaining and renewing their local highway networks. Under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980, Gloucestershire County Council is the local highway authority responsible for the condition and maintenance of roads in the Forest of Dean constituency.

The Government has allocated Gloucestershire County Council £35.3 million for 2025/26 to help them carry out their local highway maintenance responsibilities. This is £9.4 million more than in the current financial year, an increase of around 36%. It is Gloucestershire County Council's responsibility to decide how that funding is used, based on local needs and priorities. The Government publishes statistics each year on the condition of local roads in different local highway authorities, and these are available on gov.uk.

■ Roads: Mid Leicestershire

Mr Peter Bedford:

[\[30430\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department has taken to reduce the number of pot-holes in Mid Leicestershire constituency.

Lilian Greenwood:

Leicestershire County Council is the local highway authority for the Mid-Leicestershire constituency. The Government takes the condition of local roads very seriously and is committed to helping local highway authorities such as Leicestershire maintain and renew their local highway networks.

At Budget 2024, the Chancellor announced an extra £500 million for local highway maintenance for the 2025/26 financial year, with funding allocations to individual English local highway authorities announced on 20 December 2024. Leicestershire County Council will receive up to £28.7 million for local highway maintenance in 2025/26, an increase of around 36% compared to the current financial year.

In addition, the Government publishes data annually on the condition of the local road network in England, including Leicestershire, with the data available on gov.uk. The Department has worked with the British Standards Institute and the wider sector to produce PAS 2161, a new standard for road condition monitoring to help local authorities such as Leicestershire utilise new technologies when monitoring the condition of their road networks.

■ Roads: Repairs and Maintenance

Max Wilkinson:

[\[30248\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department (a) is undertaking research projects and (b) has issued recent guidance on best practice on pothole repairs.

Lilian Greenwood:

This Government takes the condition of local roads very seriously and is committed to enabling local highway authorities to maintain and renew the local highway network.

As well as providing highway maintenance capital funding allocations to local highway authorities in England, it also funds the Transport Research Innovation Grant (T-TRIG) programme, run jointly with the Connected Places Catapult, and is funding the £30 million "Live Labs" Decarbonising Roads programme, which enables local authorities to trial innovative low-carbon ways of maintaining their highway networks.

In addition to the funding that the Department provides to local highway authorities, it endorses guidance such as the UK Roads Leadership Group's Code of Practice on Well Managed Highway Infrastructure. This recommends that local highway authorities take an integrated, risk-based approach to managing their highway infrastructure, and offers advice on all aspects of highway maintenance, including the frequency of inspections recommended for various types of structures. The Department has committed to updating this guidance and has begun scoping changes with the UKRLG.

■ Roads: Safety

Dr Roz Savage:

[\[29704\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when she plans to publish the Road Safety Strategy; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of implementing graduated driving licences for young people in that strategy.

Lilian Greenwood:

Whilst we are not considering Graduated Driving Licences, we absolutely recognise that young people are disproportionately victims of tragic incidents on our roads, and we are exploring options to tackle the root causes of this without unfairly penalising young drivers.

My Department is developing our road safety strategy and will set out more details on when it will be published in due course.

■ Taxis: Electric Vehicles

Dr Scott Arthur:

[\[29327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the plug-in taxi grant on levels of uptake of purpose-built ultra-low emission taxis.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Plug-In Taxi Grant (PITG) was introduced in 2017 to support the early market growth of zero emission capable (ZEC) taxis and has supported the purchase of over 10,000 vehicles of this type.

The grant 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.

■ Transport

Jo Platt:

[\[29501\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of a regional transport strategy to improve connectivity between towns.

Simon Lightwood:

Transport doesn't stop at local authority boundaries. It is therefore important that transport is also considered at a regional level to provide context for transport schemes and help improve connectivity between areas.

In England, regional transport strategies have been developed by the seven Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) which represent the entirety of England except London, which is covered by separate arrangements. The strategies produced by STBs reflect the collective priorities of their constituent authorities who are represented by local leaders and Mayors.

The devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each publish their own National Transport Strategies.

Partnership working is also further facilitated by the Council of the Nations and Regions and Mayoral Council. These forums provide unparalleled opportunities for Mayors, working hand in glove with other local leaders, to engage government at the highest levels on a systematic basis.

This government is committed to resetting the relationship with local and regional government, empowering local leaders and Mayors to make the right decisions for their communities, and working together to grow an inclusive economy, reform public services and secure better outcomes.

■ Transport: Disability**Sir Julian Lewis:****[30029]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will expand the statutory requirements for local authorities to make mandatory the provision of free journeys for companions of people with (a) physical disabilities, (b) visual impairment and (c) learning disabilities who cannot travel on buses without those companions.

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, such as extending the eligibility criteria, would therefore need to be carefully considered for its impact on the scheme's financial sustainability.

Local authorities in England have the power to go beyond their statutory obligations under the ENCTS and offer additional discretionary concessions, such as offering companion passes for those travelling with someone eligible for the ENCTS.

Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[30837]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that disabled travellers are not discriminated against when using (a) aircraft, (b) trains and (c) ferries and cruise ships.

Mike Kane:

Discrimination on transport is not acceptable, and this Government is committed to making our transport networks safe and easy to use, allowing disabled passengers to travel confidently and with dignity.

Aviation must be accessible; everyone should be able to fly with dignity and ease. There is specific legislation that prevents discrimination against disabled passengers in air travel, which is enforced by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the UK's aviation regulator.

The Department launched the Aviation Accessibility Task and Finish Group in November that is led by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, bringing together industry and consumer representatives to develop practical and achievable actions to improve aviation accessibility.

Similarly accessibility for all rail passengers is at the heart of our passenger-focused approach. Train and station operators are required by their operating licences to establish and comply with an Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) which must be approved by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR). An ATP sets out, amongst other things, the arrangements and assistance that an operator will provide to protect the interests of disabled people using its services and to facilitate such use.

Accessible travel also extends to the seas, including crucial lifeline ferry services. Maritime officials and the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) work together to understand passenger needs, through initiatives including the annual passenger surveys. As the designated regulatory National Enforcement Body, the MCA has powers to enforce compliance with the accessibility standards.

■ Transport: Gloucestershire**Cameron Thomas:**[\[902782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to improve transport infrastructure in Gloucestershire.

Simon Lightwood:

This Government recognises that dynamic transport infrastructure like the new Arle Court Transport Hub in Cheltenham is essential for helping people go about their daily lives. We have already awarded Gloucestershire nearly £4.2m capital funding for bus service improvements in 2025/26 and will make further funding announcements later this year.

■ Transport: Greater London**Ruth Cadbury:**[\[29443\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of improving cross-borough public transport links in London on (a) the economy, (b) air quality and (c) social mobility in London.

Simon Lightwood:

Transport in London is the responsibility of the Mayor of London and Transport for London, including assessment of the economic, air quality and social mobility impacts of changes to London's transport network. However, the Government recognises importance of London's transport network for the capital's and UK's economy and for London's air quality and social mobility, and at Autumn budget confirmed £485m of capital funding for investment in London's transport infrastructure.

■ **Transport: Refrigeration**

Terry Jermy: [\[29196\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to reduce emissions from transport refrigeration units.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department has commissioned research on emissions from auxiliary engines mounted on road freight vehicles. The interim reports were published on 9 February and 28 October 2024. The final report is due shortly.

■ **Travel Cards: Spelthorne**

Lincoln Jopp: [\[29253\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with Transport for London on including Spelthorne within the Oyster Zone.

Simon Lightwood:

Ministers and officials have regular conversations with Transport for London on a variety of issues. Transport in London is devolved to the Mayor and TfL is responsible for operational decisions. Operators can consider and propose zonal changes where a positive business case can be demonstrated.

■ **Unadopted Roads**

Alex Mayer: [\[30464\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the average time taken was for a local authority to adopt a road in each local authority in each of the last five years.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department does not hold this information. Adoption of roads that are not maintainable at public expense is a matter for the relevant local highway authority, and the Department does not typically intervene in such matters. The Department provides advice to developers and highway authorities on the process, which can be found on gov.uk at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-of-roads-by-highway-authorities>.

■ Unmanned Air Systems: Freight**Dr Scott Arthur:** [\[29312\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department is taking steps to support the use of non-passenger-carrying drones to convey freight.

Mike Kane:

This Government is supporting and accelerating the use of drone technologies for freight logistics in both the commercial and public sectors, such as for the transport of vital medical supplies within the NHS.

I am committed to enabling Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) drone operations at scale in integrated airspace. I will be chairing the Future of Flight Industry Group, bringing together industry leaders, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), and local representatives to help realise the benefits of drones and other future flight technologies for freight and other uses in a safe and sustainable way.

My Department is also funding the CAA to deliver on its BVLOS Technical Strategy which was published in September 2024 and sets out a roadmap towards routine BVLOS operations; as well as funding the £7 million Freight Innovation Fund which supports the commercialisation of late-stage innovative solutions, including drones.

■ Vehicle Certification Agency: Artificial Intelligence**Sir John Hayes:** [\[28885\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, for what purposes the Vehicle Certification Agency has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA) is trialling Microsoft 365 Copilot to support its activities across Microsoft productivity tools (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and Teams). No other AI or machine learning has taken place.

Sir John Hayes: [\[29873\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, for what purposes the Vehicle Certification Agency has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA) is trialling Microsoft 365 Copilot to support its activities across Microsoft productivity tools (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and Teams). No other AI or machine learning has taken place.

TREASURY**■ Agriculture and Business: Inheritance Tax****Blake Stephenson:****[29188]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 29 January 2025 on Question 25795 on Agriculture and Business: Inheritance Tax, how many of the 2,000 estates will contain woodlands.

James Murray:

Woodlands may be eligible for certain inheritance tax reliefs and exemptions, depending on the type of woodland and its purpose. Guidance is available at www.gov.uk/guidance/woodland-owners-tax-guidance.

It is estimated that a total of around 2,000 estates will pay more inheritance tax in 2026-27 following the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief. The previous answer outlined that around half of those estates are expected to only hold shares designated as not listed on recognised stock exchanges, such as the Alternative Investment Market. While estates include supporting documentation about the type of assets on which they claim these reliefs when submitting their claims, only the value of eligible assets is digitally captured in a format available for further analysis. As such, this level of detail is not available from historic claims to estimate how many future estates might contain woodland.

■ Amazon: Business Rates**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:****[29411]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many hereditaments are used for (a) distribution and (b) warehousing by Amazon in England and have a rateable value of £499,999 or below.

James Murray:

Due to legislation protecting taxpayer confidentiality, I am unable to disclose information about individual ratepayers or properties.

[The Non Domestic Rating Lists](#) are publicly available to view and can be searched by postcode and Special Category Code.

The Valuation Office Agency also publishes statistics on [the Non Domestic Rating Stock of Properties](#) on gov.uk.

■ Bank Services: Charities**Noah Law:****[30020]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to ensure that banks are applying (a) Know Your Customer and (b) other compliance checks transparently for humanitarian charities operating in vulnerable countries.

Emma Reynolds:

Banks are required to apply 'know your customer' and other checks to mitigate the risk that banks accounts may be used for money laundering or terrorist financing. The Treasury works closely with the Financial Conduct Authority and industry groups such as UK Finance to ensure that financial crime controls are applied proportionately and on a risk-sensitive basis.

The Treasury and the Home Office are currently updating the National Risk Assessment of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (NRA). This sets out the latest assessment of threats, including in relation to the risks to which charitable organisations operating overseas may be exposed, to help regulated firms to take account of these risks when applying financial crime controls. The updated NRA will be published later this year.

Business Rates**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:**[\[29412\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of applying a 10p increase in the business rate multiplier for all hereditaments in England with a rateable value of £500,000 or more on business rate income in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:[\[29413\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of applying a 10p increase in the business rate multiplier for all hereditaments in Greater London with a rateable value of £500,000 or more on business rate income in (a) the City of London and (b) each of the London boroughs in the (i) 2023-24, (ii) 2024-25 and (iii) 2025-26 financial year.

James Murray:

The Government will confirm the rates for the new multipliers at Budget 2025, taking account of the outcomes of the 2026 revaluation as well as the broader economic and fiscal context.

Tax policy and legislation is not subject to the Better Regulation Framework Guidance which requires an Impact Assessment to accompany policy decisions. Nevertheless, when the new multipliers are set at Budget 2025 – to take effect in the 2026-27 billing year – HM Treasury intends to publish analysis of the effects of the new multiplier arrangements.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:[\[29414\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of reducing the business rate multiplier by 20p for all hereditaments in England used for retail, hospitality and leisure with a rateable value of (a) under £51,000 and (b) £51,000 to £499,999 on business rate income (i) including and (ii) excluding the (A) existing and (B) planned Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Rates Relief scheme in the (1) 2023-24, (2) 2024-25 and (3) 2025-26 financial year.

James Murray:

The Government will confirm the rates for the new multipliers at Budget 2025, taking account of the outcomes of the 2026 revaluation as well as the broader economic and fiscal context.

Tax policy and legislation is not subject to the Better Regulation Framework Guidance which requires an Impact Assessment to accompany policy decisions. Nevertheless, when the new multipliers are set at Budget 2025 – to take effect in the 2026-27 billing year – HM Treasury intends to publish analysis of the effects of the new multiplier arrangements.

Charities: Government Assistance**Rachel Gilmour:**[\[29273\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if her Department will make an assessment of the adequacy of the eligibility criteria for Rateable Charity Relief for charity organisations using (a) tidal mooring and (b) harbour spaces.

Rachel Gilmour:[\[29274\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending business rate relief to include angling boats as small businesses.

James Murray:

Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) is available to businesses with a single property below a set rateable value (RV). Eligible properties with an RV under £12,000 will receive 100 per cent relief and there is also tapered support available to properties valued between £12,000 and £15,000. More information about SBRR can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-business-rate-relief/small-business-rate-relief>

Charitable rates relief provides 80% relief to eligible properties. More information about charitable rates relief can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-business-rate-relief/charitable-rate-relief>

To be considered a rateable hereditament, a boat has to have a sufficient degree of permanence, as defined by case law. Examples include floating restaurants, nightclubs and tourist attractions. Further information on the business rates treatment of boats can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rating-manual-section-6-part-3-valuation-of-all-property-classes/section-670-moorings>

At the Autumn Budget, the Government published the 'Transforming Business Rates' Discussion Paper, which sets out priority areas for reform. This paper invited stakeholders to help co-design a fairer business rates system that supports investment and is fit for the 21st century. As set out in the Discussion Paper, the government is open to receiving written evidence on priority areas.

■ Corporation Tax: Public Consultation

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[29639\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility to people who are digitally excluded of the consultation on Multinational Top-up Tax and Domestic Top-up Tax: Supplementary draft guidance.

James Murray:

As with all government consultations, paper copies and alternative formats are available free of charge on request. There has been no change to policy on ensuring the accessibility of government consultations, and the approach followed by this administration remains consistent with the approach followed under the previous administration.

■ Drinks: Prices

Martin Wrigley: [\[29252\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make a comparative assessment of the price of (a) non-alcoholic drinks and (b) alcoholic ones.

Emma Reynolds:

The independent Office for National Statistics is responsible for measuring prices. Further information on the prices of commonly bought goods and services, including alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, can be found on the ONS's shopping prices comparison tool.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/shoppingpricescomparisonstool/2023-05-03>

■ Economics of Biodiversity Review

Fabian Hamilton: [\[29415\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her Department's policies of the Dasgupta Review, published on 2 February 2021.

Emma Reynolds:

The Government agrees with the central conclusion of the Dasgupta Review that nature, and the biodiversity that underpins it, sustains our economies, livelihoods and wellbeing. It is therefore committed to integrating nature into economic and financial decision-making, and the institutions and systems that underpin it.

As set out at the Budget, the Government is investing in the natural environment, confirming £5 billion over two years to support the transition to a more productive and environmentally sustainable agricultural sector in England, and at least £400m for tree planting and restoration to protect soils, rivers and biodiversity.

The Treasury continues to explore ways to strengthen processes for assessing the climate and environmental impacts of fiscal decisions and improve the Green Book in

line with emerging evidence and best practice, building on the extensive guidance already provided for evaluating and monetising natural capital impacts.

■ **Employers' Contributions: Mid Leicestershire**

Mr Peter Bedford: [\[29813\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps to support businesses in Mid Leicestershire constituency with changes to employer National Insurance contributions.

James Murray:

The Government decided to protect the smallest businesses from these changes by increasing the Employment Allowance from £5,000 to £10,500. This means that next year, 865,000 employers will pay no NICs at all, and more than half of all employers will either gain or will see no change.

Businesses will still be able to claim employer NICs reliefs including those for under-21s and under-25 apprentices.

■ **Hospitality Industry: Employment**

Blake Stephenson: [\[29193\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Autumn Budget 2024 on trends in the level of employment in the hospitality sector in (a) 2024-25 and (b) 2025-26.

James Murray:

The Office for Budget Responsibility's October 2024 forecast, which considers the impact of all the Budget measures, expects the employment level to increase from 33.1 million in 2024 to 34.3 million in 2029.

The Autumn Budget 2024 introduced measures that benefit the hospitality sector. Cutting alcohol duty on qualifying draught products represents an overall reduction in duty bills of over £85m a year and is equivalent to a 1p duty reduction on a typical strength pint. On business rates, for 2025-26, the government will provide a 40 per cent discount to Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) properties up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business and has frozen the small business multiplier. This will save the average pub, with a rateable value (RV) of £16,800, over £3,300 in 2025. From 2026-27, the government intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for RHL properties with an RV below £500,000 .

■ **Individual Savings Accounts: Children**

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[30044\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will review eligibility rules to allow grandparents to take out share based ISAs for grandchildren.

Emma Reynolds:

To ensure that the Junior Individual Savings Accounts (JISA) regime remains simple and sustainable, HMRC specify who can open and manage an account to prevent more than one JISA of each type (cash or stocks and shares) being opened in error. It also ensures that there is a single point of contact for the giving of instructions. Given the nature of the role, the ISA rules require this to be someone with parental responsibility for the child. A grandparent who does not have parental responsibility is therefore unable to open or manage a Junior ISA on behalf of their grandchild but can add funds to the account, up to the value of £9,000 a year.

The Government continues to keep all aspects of savings policy under review.

Motor Vehicles: Excise Duties**Jerome Mayhew:**[\[29031\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what reason there is a surcharge on vehicle tax payments on periods shorter than a year.

Jerome Mayhew:[\[29032\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the additional unit cost of processing vehicle tax payments on periods shorter than one year.

James Murray:

Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) can be paid annually, or in monthly or 6-monthly instalments. Revenue from motoring taxes helps to fund vital public services and infrastructure, including investment in roads and transport.

The cost to the exchequer is higher when VED is paid monthly or six-monthly, rather than annually, because of lost interest. To reflect this impact on the public finances, monthly and six-monthly payments for vehicle licences include an extra charge to make up for the lost interest.

A six-monthly vehicle licence paid by direct debit is set at 52.5 per cent of the annual rate, and a six-monthly vehicle licence paid by non-direct debit is set at 55 per cent of the annual rate. A monthly vehicle licence paid by direct debit is set at 105 per cent of the annual rate.

As with all taxes, the Government welcomes representations on how the tax system can be improved. The Chancellor makes decisions on tax policy at fiscal events in the context of public finances.

National Insurance Contributions: Self-employed**Tom Morrison:**[\[29237\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the number of sole employer self-employed people that may face increased national insurance payments in the next 12 months.

James Murray:

The self-employed do not pay Employer NICs unless they hire employees to work for them. Sole traders who are registered as self-employed will therefore not be paying ER NICs, and therefore not be affected by the changes coming into effect from April 2025.

North Sea Oil: Tax Allowances

Carla Denyer: [29659]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate her Department has made of the potential impact of new UK oil and gas extraction on (a) GDP and (b) tax receipts in each of the next five years.

Carla Denyer: [29660]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has budgeted for any (a) investment tax credit and (b) ringfenced expenditure supplement to be paid to (i) Equinor and (ii) Ithaca in connection to Rosebank oil field development after February 2025.

Carla Denyer: [29661]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether (a) Equinor and (b) Ithaca have received (i) investment tax credit and (ii) ringfence expenditure supplement in connection to Rosebank oil field development in the period leading up to January 2025.

James Murray:

It is a long-standing convention that the government does not discuss individual taxpayers, and so the government cannot discuss the amount of tax relief available to individual companies in relation to the oil and gas fields they may have a commercial interest in.

The Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) most recent forecast of tax revenues from the oil and gas sector was published at Autumn Budget 2024 in the Economic and Fiscal Outlook October 2024 (<https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-october-2024/>), which also includes other economic projections. The OBR's tax revenue forecast does not give a breakdown by field or company to protect taxpayer confidentiality but takes into account the impact of relevant, available tax reliefs.

Where data is available, estimates of the cost of tax reliefs available to oil and gas companies are published on gov.uk (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tax-relief-statistics>). This publication contains non-disclosive estimates of the number of claimants for each relief.

Personal Savings: Tax Allowances

Alison Taylor: [29328]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of increasing the personal savings allowance for basic rate taxpayers.

Emma Reynolds:

The Personal Savings Allowance (PSA) allows basic rate taxpayers to receive up to £1,000 in savings income tax free. Higher rate taxpayers can receive up to £500 in savings income tax free.

Individuals can also save up to £20,000 into an Individual Savings Account (ISA) each year, where savings income is received tax free. In addition, the Starting Rate for Savings allows for tax free savings income of up to £5,000 for those with earned income below £17,570. Taken together, this means that around 85 per cent of people with savings income pay no tax on that income.

The Government keeps all aspects of the tax system under review.

Ray McCann**Gregory Stafford:**[\[29236\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what reason Ray McCann was appointed Chair of the Independent Review of the Loan Charge.

James Murray:

As I set out in my letter to the reviewer, which was published alongside the terms of reference, I asked Ray McCann to lead the review on the basis of his experience, understanding of the issue, and respect across the tax industry.

Revenue and Customs: Internet**Julia Buckley:**[\[29799\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the accessibility of HMRC online services for older people with limited forms of ID.

James Murray:

Users may gain access to HMRC online services by signing up for a Government Gateway account.

A new Government Gateway account can be created with only an email address with no documentation required. The customer is provided with a unique username (Government Gateway ID) and is asked to create a password.

This account will not have identity verification associated to it, so can only be used to access Government services which do not require identity proofing.

Where a customer needs to access services requiring identity checking, additional Identity Verification steps are provided by Government Gateway, based on the identity information the customer has available to them.

It is recognised that this can be difficult for some customers, particularly those with limited digital skills or limited documented identity sources.

To prove their identity users will need their National Insurance number or postcode and can use any 2 of the following:

- a valid UK passport
- a UK photocard driving licence issued by the DVLA (or DVA in Northern Ireland)
- details from a Self Assessment tax return if one was made
- information held on their credit record if they have one

From Spring 2025 onwards, HMRC will begin to migrate new and existing Government Gateway customers to GOV.UK One Login. This is the Government's new strategic authentication and identity checking system, operated by the Government Digital Service in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, which is making it easier and faster for users to prove and reuse their identity to access the government services they need.

Improving accessibility is at the heart of GOV.UK One Login; it offers multiple ways for people to prove who they are, including an in-person option, and a customer support centre to help users with lower digital skills.

■ Santander Group

Alison Taylor:

[\[29322\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has had discussions with Santander on (a) its banking presence on high streets and (b) the impact of that on (i) consumers and (ii) businesses.

Emma Reynolds:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer meets regularly with all major banks to discuss a wide variety of topics.

The Government understands the importance of face-to-face banking to communities, high streets and businesses across the UK, and is committed to championing sufficient access for all as a priority. Access to financial services is key to ensuring all citizens and businesses can both contribute to and benefit from growth in the UK.

The Government continues to work closely with banks to roll out 350 banking hubs by the end of this parliament, which will provide local residents and businesses up and down the country with critical cash and banking services.

■ Tax Avoidance: Suicide

Gregory Stafford:

[\[29244\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Government plans to provide the independent review of the loan charge with data on recent trends in the level of suicides from people subject to the loan charge.

James Murray:

The Government takes issues relating to loss of life or serious injury extremely seriously.

It is for the independent reviewer to decide how to conduct the review.

As the terms of reference set out, the reviewer is expected to draw upon information and analysis provided by HM Treasury and HMRC during the review. HM Treasury and HMRC must make all possible efforts to support the review team's work by providing them with any information that they request in a timely fashion unless there is a legal reason not to.

■ Tax Collection: Debts

Alex Ballinger:

[\[29363\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with HMRC on instructions given to debt collection agencies in the event of (a) an unresolved dispute or (b) error on a taxpayer's account.

James Murray:

The debt collection agencies (DCAs) that HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) collaborates with are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and are strictly bound by HMRC's processes and guidance.

HMRC undertakes regular reviews, including the monitoring of calls and examination of messages, to ensure compliance with these stringent processes and guidelines.

In the event of an unresolved dispute, or an error on a taxpayer's account, the DCAs must return the taxpayer's case to HMRC for direct handling. HMRC will then work with the taxpayer to ensure that any disputes or errors are resolved.

■ Tax Yields: British Nationals Abroad

Blake Stephenson:

[\[29562\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer to Written Question 25789 on Tax Yields: British Nationals Abroad, whether her Department made an assessment of the potential impact of (a) changes Capital Gains Tax and (b) the Autumn Budget on the number of wealthy taxpayers domiciled in the UK before they were announced.

James Murray:

The Government assessed the impacts of all Budget measures across all levels of income. This includes the impact upon wealthy taxpayers domiciled in the UK. These impacts, grouped together cumulatively, are published online here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/672156834da1c0d41942a8c9/Impact_on_households.pdf

In determining the Capital Gains Tax (CGT) costings, which were signed off by the OBR, a range of potential behavioural responses were analysed. CGT is paid by fewer than 1% of adults every year, and the Budget changes to CGT will primarily affect people selling financial assets beyond the ISA allowance. The UK's CGT rates remain internationally competitive.

The Government publishes Tax Information and Impact Notes (TIINs) for all Budget measures, and the TIIN for CGT can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-rates-of-capital-gains-tax/1cf25453-5b0c-4e7b-9165-65cf117e0af0>

■ Taxation: International Cooperation

Jon Trickett: [\[28901\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of the UN's proposed global tax convention.

James Murray:

The UK is committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure inclusive and effective international tax cooperation, and has been actively engaging in negotiations at the UN over a future Framework Convention.

The UK believes that a UN Tax Framework Convention has the potential to further advance international tax cooperation, but to be successful, it needs to be clear in its aims, avoid duplicating initiatives, and seek to secure the broad support and participation of members.

■ Travel: Tax Allowances

Mary Kelly Foy: [\[29477\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make it her policy to update Overseas Scale Rates in the upcoming Spring Forecast.

James Murray:

As with all taxes and allowances, the Government keeps flat rates expenses, including Overseas Scale Rates, under review.

Any decisions on future changes in this area will be taken in the context of the wider public finances.

■ Treasury: Equality

Rupert Lowe: [\[29149\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will publish the total cost to the public purse for the provision of diversity, equality and inclusion courses for staff in her Department in 2024.

James Murray:

HM Treasury has spent £0 on diversity, equality and inclusion courses for staff in the calendar year 2024.

■ Wealth: Equality

Munira Wilson: [\[29097\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to Fairness Foundation and King's College's report Identifying and mitigating the risks of wealth inequality in the UK, published on 26 January 2025, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of the findings of that report.

Munira Wilson:

[\[29098\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of the recommendations outlined in the Fairness Foundation's report entitled Wealth Gap Risk Register, published on 15 October 2024.

James Murray:

While income and wealth are not always directly correlated, distributional analysis shows that Government decisions at Autumn Budget 2024 and Spending Review 2025, Phase 1 are progressive and benefit households in the lowest income deciles the most, on average as a percentage of income in 2025-26.

The Government is committed to making sure the wealthiest in our society pay their fair share of tax. That is why the Chancellor announced a series of reforms at Autumn Budget 2024 to help fix the public finances in as fair a way as possible. The increases in tax are concentrated on the highest income households. Overall, on average, all but the richest 10% of households will benefit from policy decisions in 2025-26.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Carer's Allowance

Lisa Smart:

[\[29575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has specific time targets for processing Carer's Allowance claims for individuals with an underlying entitlement.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Department does not have any processing targets for Carer's Allowance claims when there is an underlying entitlement element.

The current average clearance time for all Carer's Allowance claims is 16.5 working days. This includes claims when there is underlying entitlement.

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[30043\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the impact of occupational and state pension payments on eligibility for Carer's Allowance.

Sir Stephen Timms:

I refer the honourable member to the answer I gave on 14 October 2024 to question UIN [6904](#), this outlines the interaction between Carer's Allowance and State Pension. Personal pensions paid to the carer are not treated as earnings and therefore do not affect their Carer's Allowance award. Some contributions to personal pensions can be deducted from earnings so as to calculate the net earnings figure for Carer's Allowance purposes.

Social security is a transferred matter in Northern Ireland.

■ Economic Crime

Mr Peter Bedford: [\[30001\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Home Affairs on tackling financial crime in relation to the Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill.

Mr Peter Bedford: [\[30002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with the National Crime Agency on tackling financial crime in relation to the Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill.

Andrew Western:

The Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill will help government better identify, prevent and deter public sector fraud and error and enable the better recovery of debt owed to the taxpayer. DWP has close links with other government departments and law enforcement agencies, including strong collaborative relationships with HMRC, Home Office and National Crime Agency, and will continue to build upon these to ensure the Bill measures are designed effectively.

■ Employment Schemes: Young People

Noah Law: [\[29855\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to support the delivery of the Youth Guarantee.

Alison McGovern:

The Department is taking a number of steps to deliver the Youth Guarantee, to ensure all 18-21 year olds in England have access to quality education, employment and training opportunities.

The Get Britain Working White Paper announced £45 million of funding to test delivery of the Youth Guarantee in eight trailblazer areas that will start delivering support from April 2025. These are: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, East Midlands, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, West of England, West Midlands, and two areas within the Greater London Authority. The trailblazers will be led by the Mayoral Strategic Authorities, providing learnings that will inform the future roll-out of the Guarantee across England.

The Guarantee will also be supported by our first national partnerships with The Premier League, Channel 4 and the Royal Shakespeare Company, who will generate a range of opportunities that engage young people and set them on the path to success.

There is already a range of existing provision available to young people, including the Department's Youth Offer, which provides individually tailored Work Coach support for young people aged 16 to 24 and claiming Universal Credit.

■ Medical Certificates: Public Consultation

Helen Whately: [\[29912\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 27 January 2025 50 Question 22715 on Medical Certificates: Public Consultation, whether she plans to launch the fit note trailblazers.

Alison McGovern:

In 2024, the previous government announced that fit note trailblazers would be included in some of the 15 WorkWell pilot areas across Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) in England. Due to the timings of the General Election, they were not launched.

As part of £240m investment to support our employment reforms in the Get Britain Working White Paper, we are providing three ICBs with a share of £45m to become 'Health and Growth Accelerators'. These 3 ICBs are North East and North Cumbria, South Yorkshire, and West Yorkshire.

We are working with the accelerator ICBs to deliver an intervention aimed at improving the quality of work and health advice and support following a request for a fit note. This will ensure the fit note process is part of our wider system designed to get support to people who are already economically inactive or at risk of falling out of work due to ill health.

■ Pensions Ombudsman: Artificial Intelligence

Sir John Hayes: [\[30570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what purposes the Pensions Ombudsman has used artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

Andrew Western:

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 Pensions Ombudsman has not engaged in the use of artificial intelligence in the last 12 months.

■ Social Security Benefits: Disability

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[30219\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what disability rights organisations and campaigners her Department is consulting with on planned reforms the disability welfare system; and whether any user-led organisations have been consulted.

Sir Stephen Timms:

This government is committed to putting the views and voices of disabled people at the heart of all that we do. We have already started discussing the case for reform, including with representatives from the Disability Charities Consortium and the

Disabled People's Organisations Forum England. We intend to publish a Health and Disability Green Paper ahead of the Spring Statement later this year. After publication, the proposals will be subject to a consultation involving disabled people and representative organisations, with the conclusions to be set out in a white paper later in the year.

■ Social Security Benefits: Fraud

Richard Burgon: [\[30109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate her Department has made of fraud in the social security system in financial year 2023-24 by benefit.

Andrew Western:

Estimates of the levels of fraud and error in the benefit system for the financial year 2023-24 can be found at: [Fraud and error in the benefit system, Financial Year Ending \(FYE\) 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

■ Universal Credit

Michelle Welsh: [\[29800\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of assessing money received from the settlement of an estate claim to be treated in line with money received from a (a) personal injury claim and (b) special compensation scheme settlement for cases related to (i) maternity and (ii) death of a baby for the purposes of Universal Credit entitlements.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We have no plans to change the Universal Credit capital rules to disregard the settlement payments from estates for cases related to (i) maternity and (ii) death of a baby for the purposes of Universal Credit entitlements.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Arts

Clive Jones:

[\[7090\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support the screen and creative industries in (a) Berkshire and (b) the UK.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 14 October 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Chris Bryant:

Our creative industries showcase the best of our creativity and culture to the world and drive both regional and national growth. They employ over 2 million people, are worth over £124 billion to the UK economy and have seen GVA growth twice that of the national rate. We will ensure that the sector can continue to drive growth, boost opportunities and help people to fulfil their creative potential across the UK, including in Berkshire. Our support includes:

- almost doubling studio capacity through funding for the British Film Commission of £6million over four years, which includes support for Shinfield and Bray studios in Berkshire;
- expanding the global reach of independent content through the £28 million UK Global Screen Fund;
- the screen sector tax relief (for film, high-end TV, animation, children's TV, and video games) which **supported over £10 billion of production for over 1000 projects between July 2023 and June 2024** ~~has supported over £9.5 million of production for over 1000 projects~~; and
- £13.4 million funding between 2022 and 2025 for the UK Games Fund to support independent video games studios and graduate talent.

We're also supporting the next generation of indie films with the introduction of the Independent Film Tax Credit, which will allow eligible films to apply for tax reliefs of 53% on qualifying expenditure up to £15 million, creating jobs and growth.

Opportunities to drive growth exist across the whole of the UK and in places such as Berkshire, which has benefited from the £56 million Creative Industries Clusters programme. This funded the StoryFutures Cluster bringing together creative businesses and universities to provide a research platform to develop cutting edge technologies. We will be launching the next wave of the Clusters programme next year.

Finally, the British Film Institute has committed £34.2 million National Lottery funding over 2023-2026 for education and skills programmes. This includes £8.1 million to

develop skills clusters, one of which has been set up in Berkshire, led by Resource Productions, the University of Reading, and Shinfield Studios.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CABINET OFFICE

■ National Procurement Policy Statement

Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): [\[HCWS449\]](#)

Today the Government is publishing a National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS), which sets out our priorities for public procurement and maximises the impact of every pound spent. This will come into effect alongside the commencement of the Procurement Act 2023 on Monday 24 February. The Government is determined to ensure the £400 billion of public money spent on public procurement annually delivers economic growth, supports small businesses, champions innovation, and creates good jobs and opportunities across the country.

For too long, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs) have been held back by government procurement processes that are too slow, bureaucratic, and difficult to navigate. Therefore, today, the Government is also announcing new measures to support the transformation of public procurement and deliver on the Government's Plan for Small Businesses.

New rules will require all government departments and their arm's length bodies to set three-year targets for direct spend with SMEs (from 1 April 2025) and VCSEs (from 1 April 2026) and publish progress annually. On top of this, regular spot checks will ensure smaller companies in the supply chain are paid within 30 days. This builds on previous interventions in the Budget that require government departments to exclude suppliers from bidding for major contracts if they cannot demonstrate prompt payment of invoices. We will be reforming the way social value is taken into account in central government procurement, streamlining the current model to focus on delivery of our missions, and taking forward new standards on fair work in support of our growth mission.

The new National Procurement Policy Statement sets out an expectation for the public sector to maximise procurement spend with SMEs and VCSEs. It sets out how early market engagement and collaboration combined with a clear pipeline of projects can help deliver this. To support local businesses the Government has listened to concerns from local authorities and is working to implement changes to allow them to reserve competitions for low value contracts for local small businesses and social enterprises.

A new Commercial Innovation Hub will foster procurement innovation, by trialling new approaches to service design and procurement. Delivering on the commitment in the blueprint for modern digital government, we will explore establishing a Digital Commercial Centre of Excellence bringing together digital and commercial expertise to make it possible to buy once and well, and to open up opportunities for small and medium businesses to work on digital transformation.

This Government is clear we want the value of contracts to go into delivering for citizens and are making changes to deliver value for money in procurement through stronger

expectations around commercial capability and contract management. A new online register of commercial agreements will increase visibility of frameworks and fees, curbing excessive profits. We will deploy new AI commercial tools to cut bureaucracy, boost productivity, and free-up commercial staff for higher-value tasks.

To build on this progress, the Government will consult on further reforms to our public procurement processes to drive economic growth, support small businesses, and better support innovation. This consultation is intended to inform the development of primary legislation when parliamentary time allows.

The Government will update its Sourcing Playbook and consult on introducing a new public interest test for contracting authorities to assess, at the outset of a procurement process, whether work should be outsourced or if it could be done more effectively, and drive better value for money, in-house. This will strengthen market stewardship in procurement and ensure there is a rigorous evaluation of the broader public interest of inhouse, outsourced or hybrid delivery models, ensuring that decisions properly reflect the long-term value for taxpayers and are aligned with government priorities.

This transformative package of reform ensures public procurement delivers real benefits for taxpayers, businesses and communities alike. By setting ambitious targets for small business spend and aligning social value with our missions, we are driving economic growth, strengthening supply chains, and fostering innovation. By maximising the power of public procurement, we will fuel job creation around the country, drive local and national outcomes and ensure that every pound spent delivers the maximum value for the people of this country.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Syria sanctions

Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories (Stephen Doughty):

[\[HCWS451\]](#)

Today I am updating the House on the future of the UK's Syria sanctions regime following the welcome fall of Assad's dictatorship late last year.

Sanctions remain a powerful foreign and security policy tool, and this Government is committed to maximising their impact, which includes reviewing their use in light of changing circumstances.

Therefore, I am pleased to inform the House that the Government will bring forward measures in the coming months adapting the Syria sanctions regime, including amendments to the Syria Regulations, which Members of Parliament will have the opportunity to debate.

We are making these changes to support the Syrian people in re-building their country and promote security and stability. They will include the relaxation of restrictions that apply to the energy, transport and finance sectors, and provisions to further support humanitarian delivery.

The Government remains determined to hold Bashar al-Assad and his associates to account for their actions against the people of Syria. We will ensure that asset freezes and travel bans imposed on members of the former regime remain in force.

In this way, the FCDO will continue to use sanctions in a manner that is targeted, proportionate and robust to hold accountable those responsible for atrocious crimes committed during Assad's reign and to support what we hope will be Syria's transition to a more secure, prosperous and stable future.

HOME OFFICE

■ Firearms Licensing

The Minister of State for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention (Dame Diana Johnson): [\[HCWS450\]](#)

The Government is today publishing its response to the public consultation that was run by the previous Government on firearms licensing controls. The consultation ran between 29 June and 23 August 2023. The consultation sought views on recommendations that were made to the Government by the Senior Coroner in his Prevention of Future Deaths reports following inquests into the deaths of the five people who were shot and killed in Keyham on 12 August 2021; on recommendations made by the Independent Office for Police Conduct following its investigation into the police force involved; and recommendations made by the Scottish Affairs Select Committee following its review of firearms licensing regulations which followed on from a fatal shooting by a licensed shotgun holder on the Isle of Skye on 10 August 2022.

A total of 91,385 responses to the consultation were received either online or by post and email and we are grateful to all those who took the time to respond. The Government response sets out the actions that the Government intends to take to further strengthen firearms licensing controls.

The previous Government decided not to consult on the recommendations that had been made to consider greater alignment of shotgun and firearms controls and legislation. The Government is, however, mindful that the shootings in both Keyham and Skye involved lawfully held shotguns, and that there have been other incidents involving shotguns since these tragic events occurred. We therefore take the view that it is right to look again at the differences in the controls and to consider whether changes should be made to better protect the public. We intend to publish a new consultation on this issue later this year.

A copy of the Government response will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and published on gov.uk.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ Crown Development**

Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): [\[HCWS454\]](#)

Planning is principally a local activity, but it is a well-established principle that in limited circumstances, and where issues of more than local importance are involved, it is appropriate for the Secretary of State to make planning decisions.

Recent experience, including the response to COVID-19, has exposed that the existing route for securing planning permission on Crown Land, namely the Urgent Crown Development route under Section 293A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 introduced in 2006, is not fit for purpose and it is telling that it has never once been used.

I am therefore confirming today that the government will implement two new routes by which Crown bodies can apply for planning permission for development on Crown land in England, as legislated for through the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

The first route, referred to as the Crown Development route, will allow planning applications for Crown developments which are considered of 'national importance' to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate directly instead of to local planning authorities.

Allowing such planning applications to be determined in this manner will allow for a more timely and proportionate process. Applications taken through this route will still be determined on the basis of their planning merits, with due consideration of local and national planning policy, and local communities and local planning authorities will still be fully engaged throughout the decision-making process and their views taken into account.

This process will be led by an independent Planning Inspector, with the inspector usually taking the decision, with provision for the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to make the final decision where deemed appropriate.

The second route, an updated Urgent Crown Development process, will enable applications for 'nationally important' development that is needed 'urgently' to be determined rapidly under a simplified procedure. Applications under the urgent route will be submitted to, and dealt with directly by, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities, and Local Government.

The government believes that it is vital to ensure these routes are in place, and it is our sincere hope that it will remain a matter of cross-party consensus that where circumstances warrant it, decisions on nationally important development by the Crown can and should be made appropriately at the national level.

However, as I argued from Opposition during the passage of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act, it is imperative that such powers are used only where necessary, and that appropriate safeguards to their use are put in place. Where they are used, I also want to ensure there is transparency not just with those involved, but with Parliament. In implementing these routes, we have been careful to account for both points, which I will address in turn.

First, these new routes can only be used if the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities, and Local Government considers the proposed development from a Crown body to be of 'national importance'. To this end, all applications must be accompanied by a statement setting out why the development is considered to meet that criteria.

The Secretary of State will in general only consider a development to be of national importance if, in her opinion, the development would:

- involve the interests of national security or of foreign Governments;
- contribute towards the provision of national public services or infrastructure, such as new prisons, defence, or border infrastructure;
- support a response to international, national, or regional civil emergencies; or
- otherwise have significant economic, social, or environmental effects and strong public interest at a regional or national level.

For Urgent Crown Development, the Secretary of State must in addition be satisfied that the development subject to the application is genuinely needed as a matter of urgency. The Secretary of State will only consider this to be the case where the applicant can demonstrate the need for an expedited planning process. The applicant will need to demonstrate that the proposed development will need to be made operational to an accelerated timeframe that is unlikely to be feasible using other application routes, including Crown Development, and will need evidence of the likely consequences of not securing a decision within the accelerated timeframe.

Second, where these routes are used, the government is committed to ensuring proper transparency at every stage. This will take the form of three distinct steps:

- First, where an application is accepted by the Secretary of State, the relevant Members of Parliament will be notified at the same time as the applicant and the relevant local planning authorities. A notification will also be deposited in the libraries of both Houses and will include details as to where the application can be viewed and the process that will follow.
- Second, at the point of decision, and again at the same time as the applicant and relevant local planning authorities, the relevant Members of Parliament will be notified of either the grant or refusal of planning permission, and this letter will also be deposited in the libraries of both Houses.
- Third, on an annual basis, I will publish a report of all decisions taken under these routes, including a link to the decision letters, which again will be deposited in the libraries of both Houses.

I am confident that, taken together, these steps will ensure Members are properly appraised of any applications being considered through these routes that relate to their constituencies, and will provide the House as a whole will the opportunity to consider and scrutinise their general operation. The government will keep these steps under review as the routes begin to be used.

Finally, with regards to implementation, I have today laid draft regulations which make consequential amendments to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and other primary legislation, as well as to planning application fee regulations, to reflect the two new Crown Development routes.

These regulations are subject to the affirmative procedure enabling Parliament to debate them. To support scrutiny ahead of Parliamentary debates, I will publish in draft the regulations setting out the procedures for both routes, which will be laid following Parliamentary approval of the affirmative regulations. Our aim, subject to parliamentary approval, is to bring both routes into force in April 2025. Further guidance will be published on the operation of the two routes closer to implementation.

■ Large-scale housing site delivery

Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): [\[HCWS452\]](#)

The delivery of significant numbers of large-scale housing developments in England is integral to driving economic growth and meeting the government's ambitious Plan for Change milestone of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes in this Parliament.

I am today updating the House on the progress that is being made to build out large sites across the country and to take forward the next generation of new towns.

The next generation of new towns

The post-war new towns programme was the most ambitious town-building effort ever undertaken in the UK. It transformed the lives of millions of working people by giving them affordable and well-designed homes in well-planned and beautiful surroundings. This government will continue to invest in their regeneration, but we also remain committed to bringing forward the next generation of new towns.

In September 2024, we established an independent [New Towns Taskforce](#) and tasked the experts on it with identifying and recommending locations for new towns within 12 months. Over the past five months, the Taskforce has made significant progress. Its nationwide call for evidence, which invited proposals for sites with the potential to accommodate large-scale new communities of at least 10,000 homes, attracted over 100 submissions from every region in England, demonstrating the enthusiasm that exists across the country to be part of this transformative programme.

Today, the Taskforce is publishing an update on its work, setting out the vision and aims of the programme, as well as the unique benefits it would deliver and the lessons learnt from a comprehensive review of the three phases of the post-war new towns programme.

The government has been clear that we want exemplary development to be the norm not the exception, so that more communities feel the benefits of new development and welcome it. We remain fully committed to creating high-quality, beautiful, and sustainable buildings and places.

We are therefore determined to ensure that the next generation of new towns are well-connected, well-designed, sustainable and attractive places where people want to live and have all the infrastructure, amenities and services necessary to sustain thriving

mixed communities, including public transport and services like GP surgeries and schools.

The Taskforce is also today sharing its emerging thinking on how to best to meet these expectations, setting out what principles should guide the delivery of the kind of new large-scale communities we want to create through the programme. The intention is to begin a national conversation about what constitutes an ideal new town and a series of engagement events will be held with the residents of existing new towns to secure their insight.

The government is clear that public investment, leadership, and focus will be needed to kickstart the delivery of the next generation of new towns. However, our clear long-term objective is to ensure that the settlements brought forward under the programme pay for themselves through the value they create. This requires that the price paid for land reflects the costs of quickly and efficiently providing the infrastructure, amenities and affordable housing essential to the creation of high-quality places. We look forward to receiving the Taskforce's recommendations as to how this can be best achieved.

The Taskforce will submit its final report to the Deputy Prime Minister and I in the summer, setting out its recommended locations for potential new towns, and its view on how best to fund and deliver them. The government will then make decisions on the basis of those recommendations and begin the process of initiating the programme.

The Spending Review will confirm the government's plans to provide certainty for this transformative programme, demonstrating our commitment to bringing forward sustainable new communities and unlocking economic growth across the country. In the immediate term, an initial £15 million has been allocated for the next financial year, to enable early scoping work on new sites to begin, ensuring delivery can start as soon as ministerial decisions have been made.

New Homes Accelerator

Following its launch in July 2024, the New Homes Accelerator has been working with national and local partners to speed up housing delivery on a series of large sites across the country.

These include seven sites that were previously announced, namely Liverpool Central Docks, Northstowe, Worcestershire Parkway, Langley Sutton Coldfield, Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community, Stretton Hall, and Biggleswade Garden Community, which together have the potential to deliver more than 28,500 homes.

Through intensive engagement with other government departments and statutory consultees as a convener and broker, the Accelerator has also helped progress a number of other sites with the capacity to deliver more than 20,000 homes.

The call for evidence that the Accelerator launched last year identified 350 sites, with a combined potential delivery pipeline of approximately 700,000 homes, as requiring some form of support to progress.

Today, the Accelerator is announcing that it will focus attention on three new sites: Frome Gateway Regeneration Area in Bristol, South of Cayton in Scarborough, and Beam Park in London. Together, these have the potential to deliver more than 7,400 homes.

The New Homes Accelerator is also providing £3 million of grant funding to local authorities for site-specific support. This will be supplemented by the ongoing direct advice provided by its dedicated team of built environment specialists. We are also announcing £1 million of funding to key statutory consultees and £2 million of funding to the Building Safety Regulator to accelerate processing of applications.

Regeneration funding

To further increase the supply of new homes, I am today announcing several new investments. These include confirming £29.6 million from the Brownfield Infrastructure and Land Fund to unlock one thousand new homes in Bradford City Village; announcing £1.5 million to support a joint venture between Manchester City Council and private partners to deliver a new district in Manchester Victoria North; and £20 million towards remediating small council owned brownfield sites, as part of the Brownfield land Release Fund.

PRIME MINISTER

■ **Machinery of Government**

Prime Minister (Sir Keir Starmer):

[\[HCWS455\]](#)

I am making this statement to bring to the House's attention the following Machinery of Government change.

On 4 September 2024 I announced that the Government would respond in full to the Grenfell Phase 2 Inquiry report within six months. In response to one of the recommendations from the report, I am confirming today that responsibility for fire will move from the Home Office to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This change will bring responsibility for building safety and fire under a single Secretary of State, providing for a more coherent approach to keeping people safe from fire in their homes. The Home Office will retain management of the Airwave Service Contract on behalf of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and will remain responsible for the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

This change will be effective from 1 April 2025. The Government will respond to the full report in due course.

TREASURY**■ Contingencies Fund Advance: National Savings and Investments**

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Emma Reynolds): [\[HCWS453\]](#)

HM Treasury has agreed additional Resource DEL and Capital DEL funding of £88,414,000 for National Savings and Investments (NS&I) as part of Spending Review 2025 phase 1 during the 2024 Autumn Budget. The additional resource supports NS&I's Business Transformation Programme which will see it transition to a modernised operating model, with multiple service delivery partners. The funding also supports the Capital DEL requirements for NS&I's moving between offices in London.

Parliamentary approval for additional resource of £40,630,000 and capital of £17,120,000 has been sought in a Supplementary Estimate for NS&I. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £57,750,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

■ The Bank of England and HM Treasury financial relationship

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Emma Reynolds): [\[HCWS456\]](#)

I can announce today the conclusion of a Bank of England and HM Treasury 5-yearly review of the Bank's capital framework parameters, as set out in Section 2B of the Bank and HM Treasury Financial Relationship Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The Review concluded that:

- the capital framework has been effective in delivering its intended objectives at inception in 2018: to ensure that the Bank is equipped with capital resources consistent with the monetary and financial stability remits it has been given by Parliament.
- the existing parameters of the capital framework remain adequate to support the Bank's balance sheet. [1]
- the existing Bank-HMT financial arrangements, as set out in the MoU, are sufficient to support the Bank's planned transition to a demand-driven operating framework fully backed by repo. [2]

The Bank and HM Treasury will keep these arrangements under review during the Bank's balance sheet transition to a new steady state in coming years, ensuring close engagement as per the existing governance and information sharing channels set out in the MoU.

The Bank and HM Treasury have updated the MoU accordingly:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/memorandum-of-understanding-between-hm-treasury-and-the-bank-of-england-2025>

[1] The parameters of the capital framework include a target, a floor, and a ceiling. As set out in the 2018 letter from the Governor of the Bank of England to the Chancellor, the

values of the capital parameters are £0.5bn for the floor, £3.5bn for the target and £5.5bn for the ceiling.

[Letter from the Governor to the Chancellor - 21 June 2018](#)

[2] Further detail on the transition of the Bank's operating framework can be found at:

- [Transitioning to a repo-led operating framework | Bank of England](#)
- [The importance of central bank reserves - lecture by Andrew Bailey | Bank of England](#)
- [Let's get ready to repo! - speech by Victoria Saporta](#)