



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 17 March 2025 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:50 P.M., 17 March 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

#### ■ Human Trafficking: Cambridgeshire

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[36473\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, how many prosecutions for child-trafficking there have been in Cambridgeshire since 2010.

**Lucy Rigby:**

This Government is committed to tackling the scourge of child trafficking. Children who are exploited by gangs for criminal purposes will now receive greater protection under the Government's flagship Crime and Policing Bill, with the introduction of a new offence of child criminal exploitation. The Bill represents the biggest package of measures on crime and policing for decades, with new measures to cut crime and make our streets safer.

From January 2010 to September 2024, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecuted 56 cases flagged for modern slavery in the Cambridge Police Force Area.

Data is recorded by defendant, rather than victim, and therefore modern slavery flagged cases may involve adult or child victims. Of these 56 cases, 11 cases also had a case monitoring flag applied for child abuse, which covers several different offences, including child trafficking.

The CPS is working closely with law enforcement via the Modern Slavery Criminal Justice Action Group – a joint working group led by CPS National Lead for Human Trafficking and the National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime – to identify areas of improvement to promote early advice and increase referrals and prosecutions of modern slavery cases.

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

#### ■ Delivery Services: Compensation

**Tom Gordon:**

[\[36157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent discussions he has had with delivery firms on ensuring that delivery drivers are adequately compensated.

**Justin Madders:**

This Government believes that hard work deserves fair pay and is determined to deliver a genuine living wage for all that takes account the impact on business, competitiveness, the labour market, the wider economy and the cost of living.

Our Ministers value feedback received from businesses across the country, details of the meetings held by Ministers of the Department for Business and Trade and its

predecessor the Department for International trade are available on transparency pages of gov.uk and are released as part of the Government's transparency agenda.

## ■ **Delivery Services: Conditions of Employment**

**Tom Gordon:**

[\[36158\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to protect delivery drivers from exploitative working practices.

**Justin Madders:**

Our Plan to Make Work Pay represents the biggest upgrade of workers' rights in a generation.

The Government does not condone the exploitation of workers in any form and we are committed to strengthening protections for workers. Individuals' entitlement to employment rights is determined by their employment status. Delivery drivers can fall under any one of the three statuses: employee, limb (b) worker, or self-employed.

This Government recognises the complexity of the current employment status framework and we remain committed to reviewing it.

## ■ **Horizon IT System: Compensation**

**Mary Kelly Foy:**

[\[36447\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he has taken to tackle compensation delays for people impacted by the Horizon Post Office scandal; what steps he is taking to (a) close the loophole that allows the Post Office to reset the compensation timeline by requesting information and (b) improve (i) transparency and (ii) accountability in the process.

**Gareth Thomas:**

The Government is doing all it can to increase the pace of redress across all four Horizon compensation schemes. We are making upfront fixed offers and making interim and partial payments where possible. We continue to seek options to speed up redress in discussion with the Horizon Compensation Advisory Board.

Requests for information are intended to enable the Post Office and Department to increase its offers to claimants, including where there is a reasonable concern about the basis of calculation. We continue to work to ensure that requests are only issued where necessary, with communication of these requests handled sensitively and in the interests of claimants.

## ■ **Import Duties: USA**

**Llinos Medi:**

[\[37754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the tariffs introduced by the US on 12 March 2025 on steel and aluminium on the steel industry in Wales.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

My Department continues to engage closely with the industries affected by the US' tariffs on steel and aluminium, and to assess the potential impact on the steel industry in Wales and across the UK.

We are resolute in our support for the UK steel and aluminium industry, which is vital to the UK economy. We have committed up to £2.5 billion to rebuild the steel sector and our upcoming Steel Strategy will be published in the Spring. We will continue to make the case for the UK to be exempted from these tariffs.

■ **ISG Limited: Audit****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[36792\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions his Department had with ISG on its internal audit functions prior to that company going into administration; and what steps he is taking to ensure the adequacy of (a) audit and (b) governance legislation.

**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[36793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to help resolve issues around the administration of ISG; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring construction firms awarded major public infrastructure projects to have an internal audit function.

**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[36795\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring the largest (a) private and (b) public companies to publish a triennial Audit and Assurance Policy mandating them to report (i) internal audit and (ii) other assurance capabilities.

**Justin Madders:**

The Government announced that it would publish a draft audit reform and corporate governance bill in the King's Speech, which is expected to include extending enhanced Public Interest Entity audit requirements to very large private companies.

The Government is currently undertaking a review of non-financial reporting and aims to consult later in 2025 on reforms to simplify the UK's corporate reporting framework. This will provide an opportunity to consider the potential merits of additional reporting requirements like an Audit and Assurance Policy statement.

The financial resilience of major suppliers to government, including firms working on infrastructure projects, is monitored on an ongoing basis by the Crown Commercial Service.

**■ Mexico: Renewable Energy****Andrew Rosindell:** [\[36378\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of energy reform policies in Mexico on investment by British companies in the renewable energy sector in that country.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

We are closely following the regulatory reforms in Mexico, including most recently the presentation of new secondary laws on 29 January in respect of the energy sector. We continue to maintain a dialogue with counterparts in the Mexican Government to support UK companies navigating this period of regulatory change.

**■ Trade Agreements: USA****Andrew Griffith:** [\[37724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department has allocated a lead negotiator to negotiate a potential UK-US free trade agreement.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The Department for Business and Trade's Trade Policy, Implementation and Negotiations (TPIN) Group operates a flexible resourcing model to maximise efficiency across priorities. The DBT team for UK-US trade includes an allocated lead negotiator.

**Andrew Griffith:** [\[37725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions he has had with the United States Secretary of Commerce.

**Andrew Griffith:** [\[37726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the Prime Minister's oral contribution of 5 March 2025, Official Record Column 273, what discussions (a) he and (b) Ministers in his Department have had with the US administration on a UK-US trade deal.

**Andrew Griffith:** [\[37727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the Prime Minister's oral contribution of 5 March 2025, Official Report, column 273, what discussions officials in his Department have had with US officials on a UK-US trade deal.

**David Chadwick:** [\[37898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions his Department has had with the farming sector on a trade deal with the United States.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The UK-US relationship is already very strong, with trade of around £300 billion, and shared investment of over £1.2 trillion at the end of 2023. The Prime Minister and President Trump met on 27 February and agreed to deepen this relationship and to

work together on a trade deal focused on tech. The Secretary of State for Business and Trade has also been engaging with the US Administration including Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, to make the case for stronger UK-US trade that benefits both our countries, and will continue to make every effort to support British business.

## CABINET OFFICE

### ■ **Advisory Committee on Business Appointments and House of Lords Appointments Commission**

**Charlie Dewhirst:** [\[37807\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answers of 26 November 2024 to Question 14115 on House of Lords Appointments Commission and to Question 14114 on the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, whether he plans to publish a framework document.

**Georgia Gould:**

The consolidated Framework Document for the Independent Offices (covering the Civil Service Commission, Advisory Committee on Business Appointments and the Commissioner for Public Appointments) was published on 18 February 2025.

There is not currently a Framework Document between HOLAC and the Cabinet Office. As with all independent advisory bodies, the Government keeps its arrangements with HOLAC under review.

### ■ **Civil Servants: Remote Working**

**Nadia Whittome:** [\[34657\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of policies aimed at increasing office attendance on civil service staff, including regional employees.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Government renewed its commitment to the 60% office attendance expectation on 24 October, emphasising the importance of collaboration through face-to-face interactions. This decision is supported by a variety of studies highlighting the benefits of hybrid working.

By collocating departments and fostering great workplaces tailored to support local communities, Places for Growth is helping improve office attendance in regional areas. This strategic approach not only enhances collaboration among civil service staff but also strengthens ties within the local community, making the office a more attractive and supportive environment for employees.

**■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Northern Ireland****Charlie Dewhirst:** [\[37810\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2024 to Question 14974 on Procurement: National Security, for what reason the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Northern Ireland Programme evaluation is exempt from publication.

**Georgia Gould:**

The information related to this programme is exempt from publication, as it meets one or more of the seven reasons for exemption listed in the Freedom of Information Act.

**■ English Language****Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[37573\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make an estimate of the number of adults resident in the UK unable to (a) read and (b) write in English.

**Georgia Gould:**

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

A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 12th March is attached.

**Attachments:**

1. Letter from the National Statistician [PQ37573 (1).pdf]

**■ Ministers: Redundancy Pay****Charlie Dewhirst:** [\[37799\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 12 December 2024 to Question 18209 on Ministerial and Other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991, what progress she has made on her review of eligibility for ministerial severance payments based on time in office.

**Georgia Gould:**

The review of ministerial severance payments under the terms of the Ministerial and Other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991 is ongoing. An update will be provided in due course.

**■ Official Residences: Furniture****Charlie Dewhirst:** [\[37813\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 27 January 2025 to Question 24442 on 10 Downing Street: Furniture, if he will publish an itemised list of the furniture and fittings that have been purchased for 10-12 Downing Street since 4 July 2024.

**Georgia Gould:**

Any associated costs relevant to the Cabinet Office would be detailed in its next Annual Report and Accounts.

**■ Permanent Secretary Remuneration Committee****Charlie Dewhirst:**[\[37805\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 26 November 2024 to Question 14113 on Permanent Secretary Remuneration Committee, whether the Permanent Secretaries on the Committee can influence their own salaries.

**Georgia Gould:**

Permanent Secretary members of the Permanent Secretary Remuneration Committee have no influence on their own salaries. Proposals on the performance and pay of these members are made by the non-civil servant members of the Committee, and agreed by the Prime Minister.

**■ Prime Minister: Public Relations****Charlie Dewhirst:**[\[37798\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister's Office keeps minutes of calls for public affairs professionals.

**Georgia Gould:**

Details of ministerial meetings with external organisations are published on gov.uk as part of the government's transparency agenda.

**■ Public Bodies: Information Officers****Charlie Dewhirst:**[\[37803\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 16512 on Government Communication Service, if he will provide a breakdown of the 6,500 communications staff employed by each individual public body.

**Georgia Gould:**

I refer the Hon. Member to [Question 1208](#), answered on the 31st July 2024.

**■ United Kingdom****Brendan O'Hara:**[\[37564\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the Prime Minister's specific duties are in his role as the Minister for the Union.

**Georgia Gould:**

As Minister for the Union, the Prime Minister works to ensure that all of government is acting on behalf of the entire United Kingdom: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.



**CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT****■ Arts and Culture: Young People****Dr Al Pinkerton:**[\[37477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to promote (a) youth arts and (b) cultural festivals in Surrey Heath Constituency.

**Chris Bryant:**

The government promotes and supports the arts predominantly through Arts Council England (ACE).

ACE's open funding programme, National Lottery Project Grants, is currently accessible to organisations and individuals across the country, including those in Surrey Heath. This programme provides over £100 million of support annually to individuals and organisations. Since 2019, ACE has allocated over £280,000 of funding to individuals and arts organisations based in the Surrey Heath constituency. Last November, Surrey Youth Arts and Culture Festival received £13,311 of funding. The festival, based at Camberley Library and Camberley Theatre was a Surrey County Council partnership led project which aimed to raise aspirations and break down barriers to engagement for young people accessing creative skills development pathways in Surrey.

In addition, Local Authorities remain one of the largest supporters of arts and culture in England, and DCMS will continue to advocate and help local decision-makers understand and recognise the benefits that the arts can bring for young people.

**■ Arts: West Midlands****Preet Kaur Gill:**[\[36743\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment she has made of the contribution of the creative sectors in (a) Birmingham, Edgbaston, (b) Birmingham and (c) the West Midlands to the UK economy.

**Chris Bryant:**

The creative industries sector is one of eight growth-driving sectors identified in the government's Industrial Strategy. We will publish a Creative Industries Sector Plan to drive growth in the late spring. The creative industries can be found in clusters throughout the UK, with the Creative Policy and Evidence Centre noting 55 clusters making a strong contribution to the sector's contribution of £124bn to the UK's GVA.

In 2023, the West Midlands was one of the top three regions in terms of median annual earnings for the creative industries (£40,650). The West Midlands' Creative Industries contributed £4 billion to the UK economy and there were 138,000 filled jobs in the sector in the region. This includes a strong presence in video games, film and television as well as in the wider culture and creative industries.

Government support for the sector has included £520,000 to the West Midlands region to provide creative industries specific business support and develop regional

investor readiness through the Create Growth Programme. This is delivered in combination with the West Midlands Combined Authority, Creative UK, Create Central and Innovate UK with funding from DCMS. A further £425,000 will be provided by DCMS via the Integrated Settlement during the 2025/26 Financial Year.

In November at the Beyond Conference, we announced £6.74m to deliver the CreaTech Futures Creative Industries Cluster with funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. This will drive research and development, business innovation and skills within the creative industries ecosystem across the West Midlands. This will be led by Birmingham City University with Coventry University, the University of Birmingham, the University of Warwick and the Royal Shakespeare Company. The Cluster will create a network of four complementary, interconnected R&D labs in immersive audio and video technologies, virtual production, applied AI for createch and gaming, esports, and animation.

At the Creative Industries Growth Moment in January, we announced additional funding, to be agreed as part of the Spending Review to six Mayoral Combined Authorities including the West Midlands Combined Authority to drive business growth.

#### ■ **Cathedrals: Conservation**

**Chi Onwurah:**

[\[37147\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 4 March 2025 to Question 34259 on Cathedrals: Conservation, whether her Department recognises cathedrals as heritage assets.

**Chris Bryant:**

Cathedrals are amongst some of the country's finest heritage, with the great majority of them on the National Heritage List. There is no set definition of what constitutes a 'heritage asset'. This country has many significant heritage sites and government cannot afford to maintain them all alone.

#### ■ **Charities: Lotteries**

**Wendy Morton:**

[\[36403\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what plans her Department has to remove the cap on charity lottery ticket sales.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

Society lotteries are a vital fundraising tool for many charities, community groups, sports clubs and other non-commercial organisations.

We are carefully considering calls to increase or remove limits on ticket sales, alongside the results of independent research into the lotteries sector.

We will provide an update on our policy position before the Summer Recess.

**Wendy Morton:**

[\[36404\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to increase the (a) transparency and (b) accountability of lottery fundraising by charities.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The transparency and accountability of society lottery operators is a matter for the Gambling Commission through its Licence Conditions and Codes of Practice (LCCP).

The Minister for Gambling has no current plans to take action in this area.

## ■ **Coronavirus: Monuments**

**Dr Roz Savage:**

[\[36566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make funding available to support the creation of a Covid-19 memorial in South Cotswolds constituency.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will never be forgotten, and the recent COVID-19 Day of Reflection was an opportunity for communities to come together to remember the lives of those who died, and the sacrifices made by so many. The UK Commission on Covid Commemoration consulted on how to commemorate the COVID-19 pandemic and mark this distinctive period in our history at a national and community level. This Commission made a number of recommendations, including the creation of new COVID-19 memorials in local communities.

This government wants to carefully consider all the Commission's recommendations, working closely with Bereaved Family groups, other departments and the Devolved Governments to do justice to the hard work of the Commission, and will publish a response in due course.

## ■ **Cricket: Franchises**

**Paulette Hamilton:**

[\[37729\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had discussions with the English Cricket Board on the recent sale of its equity in the Hundred cricket franchises.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

We want a thriving sector, with robust National Governing Bodies that can use their nationwide remit to deliver sport to people across the country. Sustainable investment is important for achieving this. The Hundred will see additional investment into grassroots cricket from the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), which is welcomed.

I met with the ECB in September to hear about the ECB's priorities and challenges, including investment into cricket. I also met with the ECB as well as other governing bodies in November to discuss the future of sport, including the financial sustainability

of the sector; and most recently at a roundtable with the Department for Education this month to discuss the future of PE and sport.

### ■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Secondment

**Jon Trickett:** [\[36596\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many of their Department's officials have been seconded from (a) the Institute for Economic Affairs, (b) the Policy Exchange, (c) the Adam Smith Institute and (d) Labour Together since July 2024.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

DCMS has not seconded any employees from the places listed.

### ■ Gambling: Complaints

**Mr Louie French:** [\[36798\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what data her Department holds on the number of gambling-related complaints filed with the Gambling Commission in 2024.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Gambling Commission publishes annual and quarterly data on the type and number of complaints received to the Gambling Commission Contact Centre on [their website](#). In 2024 the Gambling Commission received 6896 complaints.

### ■ Performing Arts: Finance

**Mr James Frith:** [\[36442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the UK Live Comedy Sector Survey Report 2024, published on 6 February 2025, if her Department will take steps to recognise live comedy as an art form, in the context of eligibility for funding from (a) Arts Council England, (b) the National Lottery and (c) other organisations.

**Chris Bryant:**

Comedy is a vital performing art and contributes to the mental health and wellbeing of people, not just in the UK, but around the world. It forms part of our cultural landscape, enriching lives, shaping our collective identity.

Arts Council England funds numerous organisations and venues that support comedy. For the purposes of ACE funding, comedy is considered under the broad term of 'theatre.' This means that as long as a performer, club or promoter meets the eligibility criteria for specific programmes, then ACE welcomes funding applications. Between the financial years covering 2010/11 to 2024/25 ACE has awarded £12,296,254 in funding where an applicant name, project title or subclassifier contains the word "comedy".

Venues such as theatres also benefit from tax relief. The government believes tax relief is essential to help incentivise investment in productions, and to contribute to innovation and economic growth, enabling arts organisations to continue to produce new content which is vital in keeping them competitive on an international stage.

## ■ Public Libraries

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

[\[36739\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many public libraries across England and Wales were open in the most recent 10 years for which data is available.

**Chris Bryant:**

DCMS has policy responsibility for public libraries in England only.

The following table shows the number of open static libraries in England in the most recent 10 years for which data is available. The data is taken from the Arts Council England Basic Dataset for Libraries 2023 which consolidated and validated previous datasets.

	1/7/2016	31/12/2019	31/12/2021	31/12/2022	31/12/2023
Number of open static libraries included in the dataset	3,010	2,938	2,914	2,894	2,8771
Number of open static libraries within the statutory provision	2,727	2,585	2,550	2,576	2,5781

1. Figures do not include 10 static libraries for which the operating model is unknown

## ■ Rugby: Wales

**Ann Davies:**

[\[37437\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions she has had with the Welsh Government on (a) the future availability of (i) international rugby tournaments and (b) Six Nations on free-to-air television in Wales and (b) including the Six Nations in Group A of listed sporting events.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

I intend to visit Wales in the near future and discuss sporting and other issues with the Welsh Government and other Welsh stakeholders.

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, whilst maximising broadcast revenue.

BBC and ITV have now agreed a new four-year deal for the rights to the Six Nations, which will ensure that the Six Nations will remain on free to air television for people to enjoy for the foreseeable future.

## ■ Sports: Lincolnshire

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[36355\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support all-weather sports facilities in Lincolnshire.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Government is committed to ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, has access to and benefits from high-quality, inclusive sports facilities.

The Government provides the majority of funding for grassroots sport through our Arm's Length Body, Sport England, which annually invests over £250 million in Exchequer and Lottery funding.

We are also supporting more players in getting onto the pitch wherever they live via the Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme, which has invested £123 million UK-wide throughout 2024/25. Projects funded through the programme include artificial grass pitches, new changing facilities, and floodlights, helping sites to improve availability and increase participation all year round.

Funding from the Programme continues to be invested in England through our delivery partner, the Football Foundation. This funding is designed so that areas that need it most are prioritised, taking account of deprivation and inactivity rates on a local level.

The Football Foundation plans their investment pipeline based on Local Football Facility Plans (LFFPs). These plans have been developed in partnership with local authorities and are in the process of being refreshed to reflect the current landscape. The LFFP for South Holland can be found [here](#), and a full list of LFFPs covering Lincolnshire can be found on the Lincolnshire FA website.

At Autumn Budget, the Government committed to continued support through future investment for elite and grassroots sport. Further details will be confirmed in due course.

## ■ Swimming: Lincolnshire

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[36579\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to increase investment in local swimming facilities in (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Government recognises that sports facilities, in communities up and down the country, help to support more people to get active wherever they live.

The responsibility of providing access to public swimming pools lies at Local Authority level. The Government continues to encourage Local Authorities to support swimming facilities.

**UK City of Culture**

**Steve Darling:** [\[36829\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, when she plans to launch the next Cities of Culture prospectus.

**Steve Darling:** [\[36830\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the competition for the UK City of Culture enables all participants to enhance their cultural offer.

**Steve Darling:** [\[36831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if her Department will consider changing the terms of reference for the UK City of Culture competition to allow towns to participate.

**Chris Bryant:**

The Government's approach to a future City of Culture competition will be announced in due course.

The current application guidance for the UK City of Culture competition already allows towns to enter. We keep under review our competition criteria feeding in lessons from previous rounds to provide the best support to each bidding place.

Towns have great potential to benefit from culture driven development.

**Video Games**

**Mike Martin:** [\[37451\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) protecting consumers from planned obsolescence in (i) video games and (ii) other digital software and (b) requiring publishers to make game content available for offline use upon server shutdown.

**Chris Bryant:**

The Government is aware of issues relating to the life-span of digital content, including video games, and we appreciate the concerns of players of some games that have been discontinued. We have no plans to amend existing consumer law on digital obsolescence, but we will monitor this issue and consider the relevant work of the Competition and Market Authority (CMA) on consumer rights and consumer detriment.

Video games sellers must comply with existing consumer law, including the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (CRA) and Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs). However, there is no requirement in UK law for software companies to support older versions of their products. Decision-making is for those companies, taking account of commercial and regulatory factors and complying with existing consumer law.

There may be occasions where companies make decisions based on the high running costs of maintaining older servers for games with declining user bases. If software is offered for sale that is not supported by the provider, then this should be made clear, for example on product webpages and physical packaging.

## DEFENCE

### ■ Afghanistan: Resettlement

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[36481\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many (a) men, (b) women, (c) male children and (d) female children have come to the UK via the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy since 1 April 2021.

**Luke Pollard:**

The Home Office publishes data on the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP) – the cross-Government delivery pipeline for all Afghan resettlement schemes - in the [‘Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release’](#). Data on resettled arrivals is published in table Asy\_D02 of the [‘Asylum and resettlement detailed datasets’](#), with breakdowns by resettlement scheme, sex and age. Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the ‘Notes’ page of the workbook. The latest data relates to December 2024.

### ■ Air Force: Termination of Employment

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[36585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many RAF pilots have (a) retired or (b) left the profession for other reasons in each of the last ten years.

**Al Carns:**

The outflow of Regular Royal Air Force Pilots by Training Indicator and Exit Reason by Calendar Years 2015 to 2019 can be found in the table below:

	TRAINED		UNTRAINED
Calendar Year	End of Engagement	All Other Outflow	All Other Outflow
2015	60	92	~
2016	49	84	~



	TRAINED		UNTRAINED
2017	41	81	~
2018	54	57	~
2019	63	61	6

Please note the following:

- Outflow includes outflow to Civil Life, transfers to another Service, transfers to a Reserve population, and movements within the RAF Regular population to different branches/trades.
- End of Engagement for Officer includes personnel opting to leave at an option point.
- Figures which are 5 or fewer are represented by '~' due to the risk of individuals being identified.

The outflow for Calendar Years 2020 to 2024 has been withheld as its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the capability, effectiveness, or security of the Armed Forces.

This withholding of data for later years reflects the continual review of information suitable for release and considers a variety of factors including the current threat and risk factors.

## ■ Ajax Vehicles

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[37372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when the Armoured Cavalry Programme will reach initial operating capability.

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[37373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Ajax armoured vehicles the Army will have taken delivery of by 31 December 2025.

**Maria Eagle:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to Question 438 dated 22 July 2024.

The Armoured Cavalry Programme (Ajax) is projecting the delivery of over 180 operationally deployable platforms by the end of 2025.

### Attachments:

1. Ajax Vehicles: Procurement [438 - Ajax Vehicles Procurement.docx]

**■ Armed Forces**

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Joint Office Areas are operational in the United Kingdom.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many housing officers were employed by the Ministry of Defence as of 10 March 2025.

**Maria Eagle:**

Currently, 15 Joint Office Areas are operational in the United Kingdom. The Ministry of Defence continues to review the number to ensure we best support the families we serve.

Currently, there are 120 Housing Officers and 16 Senior Housing Officers employed by Pinnacle on behalf of the Ministry of Defence.

**■ Armed Forces: Deployment**

**James Cartlidge:** [\[37588\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his Department's policy is on the use of the Expenditure Period Support System.

**Maria Eagle:**

In year controls are used across the Department to manage its performance against the Defence budget as part of good financial management. This ensures we continue to spend on our priorities and secure value for money for taxpayers.

**■ Armed Forces: Finance**

**James Cartlidge:** [\[37604\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans he has to give other Front Line Commands financial freedoms of a similar nature to the Defence Nuclear Enterprise.

**Luke Pollard:**

As part of Defence Reform, we will review the financial structures of the Department to strip out bureaucracy to cut costs and drive faster delivery, while increasing accountability.

**■ Armed Forces: Housing**

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36431\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to implement the Modernised Accommodation Offer.

**Al Carns:**

This Government is clear that our people are our greatest strength, and provision of Service accommodation is essential to their operational effectiveness. An attractive

accommodation offer helps deliver military capability and contributes to retaining Service personnel.

Changes to family accommodation entitlements under the Modernised Accommodation Offer are still under review and will be confirmed in due course. The Ministry of Defence remains committed to widening the entitlement to family accommodation to maintain a mobile, deployable, and winning force, whilst also meeting the varying needs of all its people. This includes widening entitlement to those personnel with children resident over 80 nights per year.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36708\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his target date is for the publication of the Military Housing Strategy.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his target date is for the completion of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation's Year 3 review.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his target date is for the launch of the Defence Homes website.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his target date is for the launch of the Home Hub portal.

**Al Carns:**

Work on a new Military Housing Strategy has begun, with plans for publication in Summer 2025.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation's (DIO) Year three Review of the Future Defence Infrastructure Service Accommodation Contracts has started and is on target to complete by Summer 2025.

The target date for the launch of the Defence Homes Website is Spring 2025.

The Home Hub Portal will be launched this Spring to a closed user group of 200/300 families.

The launch date of a Home Hub Portal with Full Operating Capability to all families will follow at the end of the year, once actions following the closed user group testing have been completed.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to introduce higher minimum standards for energy efficiency for Service Family Accommodation by 2029.

**AI Carns:**

Work on a new Military Housing Strategy has begun, with plans for publication in Summer 2025. This will set out the Ministry of Defence's intent for energy efficiency in Service Family Accommodation.

**■ Armed Forces: Workplace Pensions**

**Sarah Gibson:** [\[36966\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of ensuring that all Armed Forces Personnel are entitled to the same pension scheme.

**AI Carns:**

As of 1 April 2022, all Serving personnel are members of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme 2015 (AFPS 15). AFPS 15 is the only open pension scheme for both Regular and Reserve personnel, having replaced all existing prior legacy schemes.

**■ Army: Food**

**Derek Twigg:** [\[37535\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 35639 on Army: Food, if he will he publish the results of the Army Messing Survey 2021.

**Derek Twigg:** [\[37536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 35639 on Army: Food, for what reason there was a period of three years between the 2021 survey and the launch of the Defence Catering Strategy.

**Derek Twigg:** [\[37537\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his planned timetable is for the next Army Messing Survey.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Army Messing Survey 2021 document was developed for an internal audience and there are no current plans to publish the results. The Department incorporated the feedback of this survey into the Army *Exploring the Appetites of Today Soldiers* (EATS) proposition, trialled across a series of 14-18 month pilots. The results of the pilots led to a final report published in 2023 and informed the development of the Defence Catering Strategy (DCS) - the implementation of which began in May in early 2024.

There are no plans for another wholesale review in the near term and, as referred to in my answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 35639, the DCS provides personnel with the opportunity to provide regular feedback through a wide variety of existing means so that we can continually improve food quality across Defence.

**■ Army: Recruitment****Derek Twigg:** [\[37538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the most frequent reasons were for new applicants to the Army being refused on medical grounds in each year since 2020.

**Al Carns:**

It is taking time to interrogate the data and therefore it has not been possible to provide the answer in the time available. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as practical and will place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

**■ Defence****Derek Twigg:** [\[36605\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to produce a National Defence Plan.

**Luke Pollard:**

Defence is supporting the Cabinet Office on the design and implementation of an internal-to-government Home Defence Programme. This will further enhance UK national security and resilience through bolstering civilian-military coordination and HMG's overall preparedness.

The upcoming Strategic Defence Review will reflect the importance of strengthening national resilience and reinforcing the UK's homeland security to keep the country safe and protect its citizens.

**■ Defence Equipment: Manufacturing Industries****Callum Anderson:** [\[37440\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to expand UK-based production of critical components for defence equipment.

**Callum Anderson:** [\[37442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of increasing the levels of UK-produced components in defence procurement programmes.

**Maria Eagle:**

This Government is committed to supporting UK based manufacturers, including producers of the vital components used within our defence programmes, and will bring forward a new Defence Industrial Strategy later this year to align the imperatives of national security and a high-growth economy.

The Government has been clear that it will use the additional investment in defence announced by the Prime Minister on 25 February 2025 to maximise jobs, growth, skills and innovation in the UK. This investment in defence will protect UK citizens from threats and also create a secure and stable environment in which businesses

can thrive, supporting the Government's number one mission to deliver economic growth.

## ■ Defence: Business

**Callum Anderson:**

[\[37443\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to support the growth of UK-base defence (a) start-ups and (b) small businesses.

**Maria Eagle:**

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), including start-ups, make a vital contribution to economic growth and are a valuable source of technical innovation in defence. This is recognised in the Defence Industrial Strategy Statement of Intent, as well as the Department's Social Value policies. We work with our largest suppliers through a network of their SME Champions, trade associations and SME representatives to ensure that SMEs have fair access to opportunities in our supply chain and that our prime contractors are adopting policies, such as fair payment practices, that support small businesses working in defence.

We have announced the launch of a new hub to provide SMEs with better access to the defence supply chain and have committed to set direct SME spending targets for the Ministry of Defence by June this year, ensuring that thousands of small businesses in the UK will benefit from the decision to increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP. This is a chance for small, often family-owned, firms to bring their innovations, agility and their expert workforce to the task of strengthening Britain's defences.

## ■ Defence: Education

**Graeme Downie:**

[\[37019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he last held discussions with the (a) Scottish Government and (b) (i) further and (ii) higher education sector in Scotland to encourage the effective supply of skills for the defence industrial sector from Scotland.

**Maria Eagle:**

This Government recognises the critical importance of attracting new entrants into the defence sector in order to ensure we have the skilled workforce needed to sustain a vibrant, innovative and competitive defence industrial base. While discussions with the Scottish Government and education establishments in Scotland have not been held by the Secretary of State for Defence, the Ministry of Defence welcomes engagement and consultation with stakeholders across the United Kingdom to ensure our defence sector has the right people and skills to meet the challenges of the future.

## ■ Defence: Expenditure

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[37758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the answer of 11 November 2024 to the urgent question on Defence: 2.5% GDP Spending Commitment, Official Report, column 508, what the outcome was of the NATO test he conducted.

**Luke Pollard:**

We conducted a NATO Test in the first 100 days of this Government and was completed in October 2024. The Honourable Gentleman will understand that detail is classified, but it offered a clear assessment of how well the UK currently meets NATO's ask on defence as inherited by this Government, following the General Election. The outcomes were fed into the Strategic Defence Review which will ensure that we have a NATO-first policy at the heart of Britain's defence plans for the future.

## ■ Defence: National Security

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[36428\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the average time taken was for the issuing of security clearances by his Department for businesses in the defence sector in the latest period for which data is available.

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[36429\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether there have been any changes to the process of issuing security clearances to representatives of defence businesses by his Department since 5 July 2024.

**Maria Eagle:**

UKSV (Cabinet Office) is the sole provider of National Security Vetting and is responsible for issuing security clearances. Ministry of Defence (MOD), including Defence suppliers accredited by MOD to act as a sponsor for National Security Vetting, is a customer of UKSV.

There have been no changes to the process of issuing security clearances to representatives of Defence businesses since 5 July 2024.

## ■ Defence: Procurement

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[36725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 34904 on Defence: Procurement, whether the target for direct SME spending will be published separately to the Strategic Defence Review.

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[37237\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 34904 on Defence: Procurement, whether the target for direct SME spending will be published separately to the Spending Review.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[37238\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 34904 on Defence: Procurement, whether he plans to publish the target for direct SME spending separately from the Defence Industrial Strategy.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Ministry of Defence is required, along with all other Government Departments, to agree and publish a target for direct spend with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) by June 2025. The Department is committed to publishing a stretching but achievable target to meet this requirement. Work on the SME direct spend target is being undertaken separately but in parallel with development of other departmental publications and the spending review.

#### ■ Defence: Skilled Workers

**Callum Anderson:** [\[37439\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the availability of skilled workers for the defence manufacturing sector.

**Callum Anderson:** [\[37445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to support (a) apprenticeships and (b) skills development in the defence manufacturing sector.

**Maria Eagle:**

This Government recognises the critical importance of supporting the defence sector in order to benefit from the skilled workforce needed to sustain a vibrant, innovative and competitive defence industrial base.

Defence supports Defence Industry apprenticeships and graduate opportunities, including national apprenticeship awards, National Apprenticeship Week, the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network, and university careers fairs.

There is also ongoing engagement between defence and industry to address sector-wide issues, including recruitment and retention challenges. A dedicated joint MOD-industry working group is collaborating to identify and address skills gaps, including around UK defence sector STEM challenges.

#### ■ Defence: West Midlands

**Preet Kaur Gill:** [\[36742\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent assessment he has made of the contribution of the defence sector in (a) Birmingham, Edgbaston, (b) Birmingham and (c) the West Midlands to the UK economy.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Ministry of Defence generally holds data at a regional level and, therefore, cannot make this kind of assessment for either Edgbaston or Birmingham specifically.



However, the defence sector in the West Midlands makes a significant contribution to the UK economy. In 2023-24, Ministry of Defence expenditure with UK industry and commerce totalled £1.6 billion, including a spend of £137 million with small and medium sized enterprises, in the West Midlands. In 2022-23, Ministry of Defence expenditure supported approximately 7,100 direct jobs with industry in the West Midlands.

#### ■ **EU Countries: US Air Force**

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[36468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact on European security of a drawdown of US Air Force in Europe – United Kingdom (USAFE-UK) forces; and what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the potential impact of such a drawdown for local economies in areas surrounding USAFE-UK bases.

**Luke Pollard:**

Decisions on the deployment of US forces are for the US Administration. We welcome the continued presence of United States forces in the UK, their engagement with the local communities in which they are based and the role they play in contributing to European defence, security and deterrence.

#### ■ **F-35 Aircraft**

**Dave Doogan:**

[\[37700\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the average monthly flying hours are for each F-35 by airframe since they entered full operational capability.

**Luke Pollard:**

Average monthly flying hours of individual airframes is not a metric that is collated and as the information is not held in this format it could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The metric that is collated is the total airframe hours since delivery for which I refer the hon. Member to the Answer to Question 34922 on 6 March 2025.

#### ■ **F-35 Aircraft: Procurement**

**Dave Doogan:**

[\[37701\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 11 March 2025 to Question 36131 on F-35 Aircraft: Procurement, if the Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry will meet with the hon. Member for Angus and Perthshire Glens to discuss that answer.

**Maria Eagle:**

I would be happy to meet the hon. Member to discuss that answer.

**■ Guided Weapons: Manufacturing Industries**

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36430\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the £1.6bn funding for air defence missiles announced on 2 March 2025, whether he has held discussions with relevant stakeholders on a potential expansion of the Belfast manufacturing site.

**Maria Eagle:**

Any expansion of the Thales manufacturing site in Belfast would be a matter between the company and the local authorities in Northern Ireland.

**■ HMS Lancaster: Guided Weapons**

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36436\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the deployment of Peregrine on HMS Lancaster.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36437\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to expand the deployment of Peregrine on naval vessels beyond HMS Lancaster.

**Maria Eagle:**

The performance of the Peregrine system has been continuously monitored since it was deployed on HMS Lancaster, and it continues to be assessed. There is a significant focus on improving integration and maximising performance as the crew's operating experience of the Peregrine system grows.

The Royal Navy's transition to uncrewed systems is expected to be addressed in the Strategic Defence Review.

**■ HMT Lancastria**

**Adam Thompson:** [\[36820\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Veterans and People will meet with (a) survivors, (b) relatives and (c) friends of people affected by the sinking of RMS Lancastria during the Second World War to discuss recognition of this matter.

**Al Carns:**

The sinking of the HMT Lancastria remains the United Kingdom's worst maritime disaster. Although it occurred almost 85 years ago, the loss of several thousand servicemen and civilians, and the fortitude of those who were saved that day, must never be forgotten.

A number of memorials commemorate the sinking, and loss of life, most notably in England at the National Memorial Arboretum, at St Nazaire in France, and at the former Dalmuir shipyard at Clydebank, Scotland. The HMT Lancastria Association also has its own memorial in the Church of St. Katherine Cree in the City of London, which is the site of an annual memorial ceremony.

Unfortunately, it is impractical to commemorate the anniversaries of all wartime tragedies with a bespoke Government-led event and thus I have no plans to discuss further recognition.

## ■ Military Aircraft

**Ben Obese-Jecty:** [\[36469\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential suitability of developing a capability similar to the USAF's Light Attack Experiment to provide close air support in operations characterised by UK air dominance for the (a) Royal Air Force or (b) Army Air Corps.

**Maria Eagle:**

The ongoing Strategic Defence Review is considering our combat air and Armed Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) force mix in an increasingly contested world. The Protector RG (Reconnaissance/Ground-Attack) Mk1 is currently entering service to replace Reaper as the next generation Medium Altitude, Long Endurance - Remotely Piloted Air System - in the Armed ISTAR role.

## ■ Ministry of Defence: Asbestos

**Cameron Thomas:** [\[36568\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of asbestos on sites owned by his Department on (a) local communities and (b) surrounding infrastructure.

**Al Carns:**

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has robust policies in place to safely manage asbestos in accordance with relevant legislation and Health and Safety Executive guidance.

Where asbestos is being remediated and/ or removed from MOD sites, we notify local residents in accordance with the appropriate legislation.

## ■ Ministry of Defence: Food

**Sir John Hayes:** [\[36360\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what proportion of food procured by his Department is sourced in the UK.

**Maria Eagle:**

Under the terms of Ministry of Defences' (MOD) food contracts, the procurement of all produce is the responsibility of the prime contractors.

Although the contracts do not specify the use of British produce, the MOD encourages contractors to source locally wherever possible.

All food procured for MOD personnel must comply with MOD food quality standards, which, in turn, comply with all UK and EU production standards, Farm Assurance or equivalent.

#### ■ Ministry of Defence: Secondment

**Jon Trickett:** [\[36597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many of their Department's officials have been seconded from (a) the Institute for Economic Affairs, (b) the Policy Exchange, (c) the Adam Smith Institute and (d) Labour Together since July 2024.

**AI Carns:**

No staff have been seconded from the Institute for Economic Affairs, the Policy Exchange, the Adam Smith Institute nor Labour Together into the Ministry of Defence or its Executive Agencies since July 2024.

#### ■ MOD Ashchurch: Asbestos

**Cameron Thomas:** [\[36567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the presence of asbestos at Ashchurch military barracks since 2019.

**AI Carns:**

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is committed to the health and safety of our people and we have robust policies in place to safely manage asbestos in Defence in accordance with relevant legislation and Health and Safety Executive guidance. MOD complies with its legal obligation not to construct any new infrastructure containing asbestos and to maintain a risk register for legacy asbestos, treating it as appropriate.

In 2019 routine sampling identified asbestos within buildings on the Ashchurch site. The MOD immediately implemented measures and controls to reduce exposure risk and provide additional safeguards on site. Significant amounts of asbestos have now been removed and work continues to ensure any remaining asbestos is removed or made safe.

#### ■ Navy: Termination of Employment

**Sir John Hayes:** [\[37113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Royal Navy service personnel (a) retired and (b) left the profession for other reasons in each of the last ten years.

**AI Carns:**

The number of Royal Navy service personnel who retired and left the profession for other reasons by Calendar Years 2015 to 2019 can be found in the table below:

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CALENDAR YEAR	END OF ENGAGEMENT	ALL OTHER OUTFLOW
2015	1200	1500
2016	1150	1480
2017	1180	1460
2018	1170	1450
2019	1160	1430
2020	1140	1420
2021	1130	1410
2022	1120	1400
2023	1110	1390
2024	1100	1380

#### ■ Strategic Defence Review

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[37240\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has had discussions with the Prime Minister on the publication date for the Strategic Defence Review since 25 February 2025.

**Luke Pollard:**

The Strategic Defence Review is well advanced, but not yet complete. As soon as it is completed the Prime Minister will put it before the House.

#### ■ Trident Submarines: Dockyards

**Graeme Downie:**

[\[37013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many docks will be required to hold Dreadnought submarines by 2035.

**Graeme Downie:**

[\[37014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many docks in the UK are able to hold Dreadnought class submarines for (a) repairs and (b) maintenance.

**Graeme Downie:**

[\[37015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what bases in the UK will have capability to hold Dreadnought class submarines for (a) repairs and (b) maintenance by 2035.

**Maria Eagle:**

There is a strategy in place to upgrade infrastructure and provide suitable docking for the new Dreadnought Class submarines across existing UK naval bases and dockyards.

For operational security reasons further details cannot be released as to do so could be used to undermine the security and capability of our Armed Forces.

**■ Type 23 Frigates: Repairs and Maintenance****Ian Roome:**[\[36904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department has (a) spent and (b) committed to spend on Life Extension refits of Royal Navy Type 23 Frigates since October 2014.

**Maria Eagle:**

£941.2 million has been spent on the delivery of T23 upkeeps completed since 2014. A further £63.7 million is currently contractually committed for the delivery of T23 upkeeps. These are a planned series of upkeep periods in order to maintain ship condition and to introduce, where appropriate, capability updates.

It should be noted that the figure given includes upkeeps undertaken to two ships that started prior to 2014. Because of the length of time passed it is not possible to break down the figures further.

**■ Type 26 Frigates: Procurement****James Cartlidge:**[\[37233\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 34636 on HMS Northumberland: Decommissioning, what the target date is for the delivery of the Type 26 Frigates.

**James Cartlidge:**[\[37234\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 34636 on HMS Northumberland: Decommissioning, what the target date is for the delivery of the Type 31 Frigates.

**James Cartlidge:**[\[37235\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 34636 on HMS Northumberland: Decommissioning, what the target date is for the delivery of the multi-role support ships.

**James Cartlidge:**[\[37236\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 34636 on HMS Northumberland: Decommissioning, what the target date is for the delivery of the fleet solid support ships.

**Maria Eagle:**

Each of the Ships Programmes are progressing.

All of the Type 26 Ships are expected to enter service between 2028 and 2035. The five Type 31 ships are planned to be in service by the early 2030s and the three Fleet Solid Support Ships by 2032.

The Multi-Role Strike Ship programme continues to progress through the Concept Phase. The Outline Business Case is due for submission mid-2025 which will detail the schedule for future contract award milestones.

## ■ Type 83 Destroyers: Procurement

**Graeme Downie:** [\[37020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he plans to announce the next stages of the Type 83 Destroyer programme.

**Maria Eagle:**

The next stage of the Type 83 Destroyer programme, which is one element of the Future Air Dominance System (FADS) programme, will be announced following the completion of the Strategic Defence Review.

## ■ Unmanned Air Systems

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36432\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when the VXE30 drone will reach minimum deployable capability.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36433\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when Indago 4 will reach minimum deployable capability.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36434\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the out of service date is for Desert Hawk III.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36435\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what progress he has made on Project Tiquila.

**Maria Eagle:**

Project TIQUILA is delivering next-generation Remotely Piloted Air Systems (RPAS) that will enhance decision superiority and enable the delivery of kinetic effects on the modern battlefield. Project TIQUILA has delivered VXE30 and INDAGO 4 equipment to front-line units, who are currently being trained on them ahead of reaching Initial Operating Capability (IOC).

The VXE30 RPAS will reach IOC in April 2025, and the INDAGO 4 RPAS will reach IOC in June 2025.

The Desert Hawk III Mini-Uncrewed Aerial System exited service at its Out of Service Date in March 2023.

## ■ Unmanned Marine Systems

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has placed orders for M500 remote operated vehicles for the Royal Navy.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Royal Navy (RN) purchased one M500 Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) to support the initial capability investigation into autonomous mine hunting concepts leading into Project WILTON in 2015. WILTON informed the capability requirements for the RN's transformation of Mine Countermeasures, under the Mine Hunting Concept (MHC); the first elements of MHC will enter service this year.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[36724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent progress he has made on Project CABOT.

**Maria Eagle:**

Project CABOT is the Royal Navy's plan to develop remotely operated and autonomous Anti-Submarine Warfare capabilities, aiming for a "Digitalisation of the North Atlantic".

Project CABOT was launched on 5 of March 2025, and the Royal Navy is now working with industry, academia, allies and Defence partners to seek out potential technologies that could provide a suitable capability. Scaling of any capability identified under Project CABOT is dependent on the outcome of the Strategic Defence Review.

## ■ War Graves: Seas and Oceans

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** [\[37109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to protect Royal Navy war graves in international waters.

**Al Carns:**

The term "war graves" is one which applies to the final resting places of fallen soldiers on land, and locations designated as a war grave by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

However, as a matter of customary international law, all naval warships, state vessels and associated artefacts are afforded protection through the principle of Sovereign Immunity. The UK is of the view that, unless expressly relinquished or abandoned by the Flag State, the Sovereign Immunity of the wreck of any Crown vessel remains in place, regardless of where the wreck in question is located, and those who lost their lives in service of our country should be left in situ and undisturbed.

Some warships are also afforded additional protection under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986.



## EDUCATION

### ■ Academies: Asbestos

**Julia Buckley:**

[\[36528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what requirement her Department has placed on academy trusts to monitor school buildings where asbestos is present.

**Stephen Morgan:**

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

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), as the regulator, sets the legal requirements and standards to manage asbestos and produces guidance for trusts and other responsible bodies to follow, as duty holders. The department provides guidance, tools and support to help all schools and responsible bodies effectively manage their school buildings, including guidance on the day-to-day monitoring and management of asbestos in schools and colleges, which was updated in October 2024. The Academy Trust Handbook 2024 is clear in its health and safety guidelines that “academy trusts have a duty to manage asbestos in their schools effectively, compliant with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012” (clause 1.19).

The department follows the advice of the HSE as the regulator that, so long as asbestos-containing materials are undamaged and not in locations where they are vulnerable to damage, they should be left undisturbed and their condition monitored. However, the department has been clear that when asbestos does pose a risk to safety and cannot be effectively managed in place, it should be removed. The decision to remove asbestos should be considered on a case-by-case basis and annual condition funding provided by the department can be used for this purpose. In many cases, asbestos will be removed as part of wider rebuilding or refurbishment work.

### ■ Carers

**Luke Myer:**

[\[36910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support kinship carers in (a) financial and (b) other ways.

**Janet Daby:**

I refer my hon. Friend, the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland to the answer of 25 February 2025 to Question [31239](#).

**■ Schools: South Cambridgeshire**

**Pippa Heylings:** [35817]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment has she made of the adequacy of the level of funding for schools in South Cambridgeshire constituency.

**Pippa Heylings:** [35818]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make a comparative assessment of per-pupil funding in South Cambridgeshire constituency with other regions.

**Pippa Heylings:** [35819]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to address regional disparities in school funding.

**Pippa Heylings:** [35820]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will making it her policy to review the national funding formula for schools and high needs.

**Pippa Heylings:** [35821]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure sustainable funding for (a) mainstream education and (b) SEND provision in (i) South Cambridgeshire constituency and (ii) other areas.

**Pippa Heylings:** [36466]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much funding she plans to provide to schools in South Cambridgeshire in the 2025-26 financial year.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Core funding allocations for schools is distributed through the dedicated schools grant (DSG). Annual DSG allocations are published at local authority level. Allocations are not available by constituency, since local authorities are responsible for distributing the funding they receive locally through their own local formulae.

Funding for schools in South Cambridgeshire constituency is determined by reference to Cambridgeshire's local formula.

Through the DSG, Cambridgeshire is receiving £518.9 million for mainstream schools in the 2025/26 financial year. This represents £5,405 per primary pupil and £6,924 per secondary pupil, and is an increase of 2.4% per pupil compared to the 2024/25 financial year, excluding growth and falling rolls funding.

The DSG allocations for each local authority can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026>.

The schools national funding formula (NFF) distributes funding for mainstream schools based on schools' and pupils' needs and characteristics. The purpose of the NFF is not to give every school the same level of per pupil funding. It is right that schools with more pupils with additional needs, such as those indicated by measures

of deprivation, low prior attainment, or English as an additional language, receive extra funding to help them meet the needs of their pupils. In addition, schools in more expensive areas, like London, attract higher funding per pupil than other parts of the country to reflect the higher costs they face.

Due to the timing of the general election and the need for certainty for schools, the schools NFF for the 2025/26 financial year has the same structure as the previous year. This continuity minimises disruption to local authorities and schools. Longer term, the department will consider changes to the formula, recognising the importance of establishing a fair funding system that directs funding where it is needed.

The department is also 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 special educational needs and disabilities to £11.9 billion. Of that total, Cambridgeshire County Council is being allocated over £114 million through the high needs funding block of the DSG, which is an increase of £7.5 million on this year's DSG high needs block, calculated using the high needs NFF. This NFF allocation is a 7% increase per head of their 2 to 18 year-old population, on their 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 the 2025/26 financial year. 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 and other staff pay increases. Individual local authorities' allocations of this funding for 2025/26 will be published in due course.

## ■ **Special Educational Needs: Cornwall**

**Ben Maguire:**

[\[36029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of changes to the High Needs National Funding Formula on Cornwall County Council's SEND funding for 2025/26.

**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.

The structure of the high needs national funding formula (NFF) is largely unchanged in the 2025/26 financial year as the government needs time to consider what changes are necessary, both to make sure that we establish a fair education funding system that directs funding to where it is needed and to support any SEND reforms.

Following the Autumn Budget 2024, 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, Cornwall County Council is being allocated over £86 million through the high needs funding block of the dedicated schools grant (DSG), an increase of £7.1 million on this year's DSG high needs block, calculated using the high needs national funding formula (NFF). This NFF allocation is an 8.7% increase per head of their 2 to 18 year-old population, on their equivalent 2024/25 NFF allocation. We have also announced £740 million high needs capital funding for the 2025/26 financial year. We will confirm plans to allocate this funding to local authorities later in the spring.

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 the 2025/26 financial year. 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 and other staff pay increases. Individual local authorities' allocations of this funding for 2025/26 will be published in due course.

#### ■ **Special Educational Needs: Devon**

**Martin Wrigley:**

**[35870]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what additional SEND (a) funding and (b) assistance has been made available for Devon since 5 July 2024.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

As announced at the Autumn Budget 2024, the department is providing an additional £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 special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to £11.9 billion. Of that total, Devon County Council is being allocated over £125 million through the high needs funding block of the dedicated schools grant (DSG). This represents an increase of £8.9 million on this year's DSG high needs block, calculated using the high needs national funding formula (NFF). This NFF allocation is an increase of 7.7% per head of their 2 to 18 year-old population, against their 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 relation to the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions, in the 2025/26 financial year. The CSBG, alongside other separate grants payable this year, are designed to help special schools and alternative provision with the costs of teachers' pay and pension increases, as well as other staff pay increases. Individual local authorities' allocations of this funding for 2025/26 will be published in due course.

The department has also been working closely with all statutory partners involved in delivering 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.

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.

As part of the department's intervention, there are robust monitoring arrangements in place. The department is holding regular formal monitoring meetings with the local authority and partners to hold the local area to account for making the necessary improvements in services and to consider what further support can be provided as part of our SEND intervention in Devon.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has now also announced £740 million for high needs capital funding in 2025/26 to support children and young people with SEND or who require alternative provision.

This new funding can be used to adapt classrooms to be more accessible for children with SEND and create specialist facilities within mainstream schools that can deliver more intensive support adapted to suit the pupils' needs, alongside continuing to provide places to support pupils in special schools with the most complex needs.

We will confirm plans to allocate funding for the 2025/26 financial year later in the spring.

**Martin Wrigley:**

**[35873]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will publish the waiting times for (a) SEND assessments, (b) EHCP packages, (c) places at SEND schools and (d) total SEND provision in Devon.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Where a request is made, a local authority must decide within a statutory six-week deadline, unless exceptions apply, whether to conduct an education, health and care (EHC) needs assessment for a child or young person. Where appropriate, the local authority must then draw up a plan which names a setting within a statutory twenty-week deadline, unless exceptions apply. In some circumstances the local authority will name a special school on an EHC plan and the school must then admit the pupil. This is the usual way in which a pupil gets a place at such a school.

Information relating to the time between the date of a request for an assessment and the date of an assessment outcome at local authority level was released in the answer of 29 July 2024 to Question [2202](#).

The department publishes official statistics on EHC plans annually here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-health-and-care-plans>. This includes data at local authority level on the rate of EHC plans issued within the statutory deadline of twenty weeks.

The department does not collect information on waiting times for placements for specialist provision.

**■ Special Educational Needs: Dyslexia****Adam Dance:****[35922]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans she has to improve specialist teacher training on supporting dyslexic students in the post-16 education sector.

**Janet Daby:**

We are the department for opportunity. As part of this we are committed to help every learner to achieve and thrive, through excellent teaching and high standards. This includes a focus on children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The department has put measures in place to support students with SEND. All publicly funded further education (FE) teacher training routes are required to support trainees to achieve the learning and skills teacher occupational standard. The standard requires trainee teachers to actively promote equality of opportunity and inclusion by responding to the needs of all students, including children and young people with SEND and/or dyslexia.

The department has also continued to offer financial incentives for those undertaking teacher training for the FE sector in priority subject areas. We confirmed that FE teacher training bursaries will be offered for a further year, the 2025/26 academic year. We have set the bursaries for SEND at £15,000.

All education and training providers, including technical colleges, and other related service providers, have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, so they are not disadvantaged compared to non-disabled students. This includes people with a learning difficulty. This duty is set out under section 20 of the Equality Act 2010, which is available here:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/20>.

**■ Special Educational Needs: Recruitment****Matt Bishop:****[36001]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she plans to take to increase recruitment in SEND services.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department knows that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) frequently require access to additional support from a broad specialist workforce across education, health and care, including speech and language therapy and educational psychologists.

This is why the department introduced the speech and language degree apprenticeship, which is now in its third year of delivery and offers an alternative pathway to the traditional degree route into a successful career as a speech and language therapist.

The department is working closely with NHS England to improve access to community health services, including speech and language therapy, for children and young people with SEND.

The department is also investing a further £21 million to train 400 more educational psychologists from 2024, in addition to the £10 million currently being invested in the training of over 200 educational psychologists, who began their training in September 2023.

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### ■ **Alternative Fuels: Manufacturing Industries**

**Gareth Snell:**

[\[37684\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the capability of UK ceramics manufacturers to transition to lower-carbon fuels.

**Sarah Jones:**

Carbon savings through fuel switching from fossil fuels to low carbon alternatives are needed for the industrial sector to transition to net zero. Government is developing a suite of policies to deliver these savings.

As it does so, it is closely engaging with sector trade association Ceramics UK, as well as ceramics manufacturers directly, to identify and understand the challenges and barriers to decarbonisation of this diverse sector.

### ■ **Clean Energy: Nuclear Power**

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**

[\[37706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the Answer of 3 March 2025 to Question 32098 on Nuclear Power, what estimate he has made of the proportion of clean electricity generated by nuclear energy by 2030.

**Michael Shanks:**

As set out in the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, nuclear is estimated to have an installed capacity range of between 3 – 4 GW in 2030.

### ■ **Electricity Generation**

**Llinos Medi:**

[\[37756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when he plans to (a) conclude and (b) publish his Departments review of electricity market arrangements.

**Michael Shanks:**

The government aims to conclude the policy development phase of the REMA Programme by mid-2025.

We intend to announce REMA's final decisions and the timetable for implementation before the Contracts for Difference, Allocation Round 7 auctions open, giving investors clarity for prospective bids.

## ■ Energy Intensive Industries

**Gareth Snell:** [\[37686\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions he has had with energy companies on reducing prices for (a) UK ceramic manufacturers and (b) other energy intensive industries.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

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

The Government believes that our mission to deliver clean power by 2030 is the best way to break our dependence on global fossil fuel markets and protect billpayers permanently.

The creation of Great British Energy will help us to harness clean energy with less reliance on volatile international energy markets and help in our commitment to make Britain a clean energy superpower by 2030.

Companies in the ceramics sector are eligible to apply to the British Industry Supercharger scheme, which has provided energy bill support to hundreds of firms in energy intensive sectors. Financial relief to support energy intensive industries with electricity costs is worth £470 million per year through a mixture of spending and bill discounts.

I understand that Minister Jones is due to meet with representatives of the ceramics sector later this month to discuss challenges faced by manufacturers, including high energy costs. Government is committed to continuing to listen and engage with the sector.

## ■ Energy Intensive Industries: Energy Bills Discount Scheme

**Gareth Snell:** [\[37683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he plans to reintroduce an energy bills discount scheme for energy and trade intensive industries.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Government believes that our mission to deliver clean power by 2030 is the best way to break our dependence on global fossil fuel markets and protect billpayers permanently.

The creation of Great British Energy will help us to harness clean energy with less reliance on volatile international energy markets and help in our commitment to make Britain a clean energy superpower by 2030. We are working relentlessly in this Parliament on how we reduce wholesale energy costs, and we want to make sure this follows through onto domestic and non-domestic bills.



Financial relief to support energy intensive industries with electricity costs is worth £470 million per year through a mixture of spending and bill discounts.

Additionally, 300 energy intensive businesses across the UK will benefit from the British Industry Supercharger, which has targeted measures to ensure the energy costs for key UK industries are in line with other major economies around the world.

## ■ Energy Supply: Manufacturing Industries

**Gareth Snell:**

[\[37685\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of GB Energy on UK ceramic manufacturers.

**Michael Shanks:**

Ceramics manufacturing is an energy-intensive process, and we recognise that price shocks in recent years have left businesses and families struggling with energy bills.

In an unstable world, the only way to guarantee energy security and protect billpayers is to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels.

We have a sustainable, long-term plan to protect all UK billpayers. Great British Energy will be part of this plan by driving the deployment of homegrown energy to boost our energy independence. By delivering clean, secure energy, Great British Energy will help reduce our exposure to volatile international markets.

## ■ Energy: Prices

**Dr Scott Arthur:**

[\[36532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the support provided by (a) his Department and (b) energy suppliers for vulnerable households for the cost of energy.

**Dr Scott Arthur:**

[\[36533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the support provided by (a) his Department and (b) energy suppliers for people with chronic ill health for the cost of energy.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Government believes the only way to protect consumers permanently is to speed up the transition towards homegrown clean energy. The creation of Great British Energy will help us to harness clean energy and have less reliance on volatile international energy markets and help in our commitment to make Britain a clean energy superpower by 2030.

The Warm Home Discount provides a £150 rebate off winter energy bills for eligible low-income households. On 25 February, we published a consultation on the expansion of the Warm Home Discount, giving more eligible households £150 off their energy bills. These proposals would bring around 2.7 million households into the scheme – pushing the total number of households that would receive the discount

next winter up to around 6 million. The Warm Home Discount regulations expire in 2026, and we will want to consider all options for future bill support beyond this point.

We continue to monitor energy prices and the price cap and are working to ensure bills are affordable for consumers in the long-term, including through our work with Ofgem to reform standing charges, and through our Warm Homes Plan which will upgrade millions of homes to make them warmer and cheaper to run.

## ■ Fuel Poverty

**Helen Maguire:**

[\[36562\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that fuel poverty interventions are (a) sufficient and (b) well targeted.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Government believes the only way to protect consumers permanently is to speed up the transition towards homegrown clean energy. The creation of Great British Energy will help us to harness clean energy and have less reliance on volatile international energy markets and help in our commitment to make Britain a clean energy superpower by 2030.

We continue to monitor energy prices and the price cap and are working to ensure bills are affordable for consumers in the long-term, including through our work with Ofgem to reform standing charges, and through our Warm Homes Plan which will upgrade millions of homes to make them warmer and cheaper to run.

The Government's review of the 2021 fuel poverty strategy reveals progress towards the statutory target has stalled. A new strategy is required, with a consultation open until 4 April.

## ■ Great British Energy: Finance

**Dave Doogan:**

[\[37702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what the budget is for GB Energy in the 2024-25 financial year; how much and what proportion of that budget has been spent; and what GB Energy has spent its funding on.

**Michael Shanks:**

Great British Energy (GBE) was allocated £11.1million for 2024/25, and a further £125 million was allocated in the Autumn Budget 2024 to set up GBE in FY 25-26. This will enable GBE to begin the roll out of local projects alongside other functions.

Information on departmental expenditure is made publicly available the usual way through the Department's annual report and accounts.

## ■ UK Emissions Trading Scheme: Ceramics

**Gareth Snell:**

[\[37682\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential impact of the UK Emissions Trading Scheme on employment levels in ceramic manufacturers.

**Sarah Jones:**

The Government is committed to supporting UK industry to decarbonise and protecting hundreds of thousands of jobs in regions across the UK. A strong UK Emissions Trading Scheme (UK ETS) will drive green investment as part of a broader industrial strategy, helping deliver a just transition, grow the economy, and secure good jobs for people across the country.

UK ETS participants, including those in the ceramics sector, receive free allocations to protect energy-intensive, trade-exposed industries from carbon leakage. As part of the review into free allocations, an assessment of impacts to sectors will be conducted before any final decisions are taken.

## ■ Warm Homes Plan: Epsom and Ewell

**Helen Maguire:**

[\[36561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many and what proportion of households are (a) eligible for and (b) in receipt of the Warm Homes Discount in Epsom and Ewell constituency.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The latest published [Warm Home Discount statistics](#) are for 2023/4 and use the constituency boundaries operating prior to the 2024 General Election. Most (87%) of the residential premises in Epsom and Ewell constituency come from Epsom and Ewell constituency under the previous boundaries, in which 2,369 households received the Warm Home Discount rebate in 2023-24. The statistics only cover receipt of the Warm Home Discount and not eligibility.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### ■ Agriculture: Seasonal Workers

**Jade Botterill:**

[\[36964\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help farmers recruit people on Seasonal Worker visas.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

We know how important securing the right workforce is to the agri-food chain, for both skilled (such as butchers and vets) and temporary (such as seasonal horticulture harvesting) jobs. The Government has confirmed the Seasonal Worker visa route for 2025, with a total of 43,000 Seasonal Worker visas available for horticulture and 2,000 for poultry. At the NFU conference, the Government announced a five-year

extension to the Seasonal Worker visa route, until the end of 2030, giving farms a pipeline of workers and certainty to grow their businesses. Annual quota reviews will ensure we strike the right balance – supporting farms while gradually transitioning away from seasonal migrant labour. This will help secure the labour and skills needed to bring high quality British produce, such as strawberries, rhubarb and daffodils to market.

## ■ **Agriculture: West Yorkshire**

**Jade Botterill:** [\[36965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent steps he has taken to help support farming businesses in West Yorkshire.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

This Government wants to improve profitability for farmers, including for those in West Yorkshire, to make their businesses viable for the future. That is why we were pleased to announce £5 billion for the farming budget over 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The farming budget will be £2.4 billion in 2025/26. This will include the largest ever budget directed at sustainable food production and nature's recovery in our country's history: £1.8 billion for environmental land management schemes to boost Britain's food security and accelerate the transition to a more resilient and sustainable farming sector.

## ■ **Animal and Plant Health Agency**

**Callum Anderson:** [\[33726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of the transformation of the Animal and Plant Health Agency facility at Weybridge into a National Biosecurity Centre on bio-security measures for farms in Buckinghamshire.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Defra has committed to transforming the Animal and Plant Health Agency facility at Weybridge into a state-of-the-art National Biosecurity Centre. This will ensure that the UK continues to prevent, detect and respond to the increasing threats from animal diseases. Outbreaks are costly so this will provide a boost to farmers in Buckinghamshire and across the country, by protecting their livelihoods from the catastrophic and distressing impacts of animal diseases.

## ■ **Animal Experiments: Chemicals**

**Ruth Jones:** [\[37695\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of (a) public and (b) civil society engagement on UK REACH testing proposal consultations since 2021.

**Emma Hardy:**

Animal testing of chemical substances is permitted under UK REACH only as a measure of last resort; this principle is reinforced by the Environment Act 2021. The last resort principle underpins the REACH testing proposal procedure. This procedure already requires that HSE, as the UK REACH Agency, must publish all testing proposals to facilitate the submission of relevant information by third parties. Moreover, UK REACH states that test methods should be regularly reviewed with a view to reducing animal testing and it encourages the use of alternative methods. The Environment Act 2021 includes powers to amend UK REACH and consultation is a legal requirement under those powers.

In 2024 the Government consulted on an Alternative Transitional Registration model (ATRm). The aim of the ATRm is to consider the information needs under UK REACH to provide substance hazard data in the registration dossier for UK REACH transitional registrations (for those substances previously registered on EU REACH), including the need to generate new data. The consultation also included proposals to introduce further protections against unnecessary animal testing as part of our ongoing project to improve UK REACH. We are currently considering our approach to chemicals regulation, including UK REACH. We will provide a summary of the responses during 2025.

Both UK REACH and EU REACH recognise studies performed outside the UK or the EU. This means that there is no need to repeat a study because it was previously carried out elsewhere.

**■ Animal Products: Import Controls****Adrian Ramsay:**[\[34166\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will implement an immediate moratorium on import permits for hunting trophies of (a) polar bears and (b) other endangered species.

**Mary Creagh:**

We committed to a ban on the import of hunting trophies of endangered animals in our manifesto and we will deliver on this. We are currently engaging with a range of stakeholders in order to decide on the most effective approach.

**■ Animals: Euthanasia****Noah Law:**[\[35139\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to prevent the euthanasia of healthy animals without their owners' prior consent.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) provides guidance on obtaining consent before euthanasia. The person presenting the animal is required to sign a consent form attesting to the fact they are the owner or are authorised by the owner.

Defra has worked closely with the veterinary profession to provide greater assurance that alternatives to euthanasia are explored before a healthy dog or cat is put down. Following these discussions, the RVCS agreed to incorporate the principle of microchip scanning before euthanasia into the guidance that underpins their Code of Professional Conduct.

## ■ Biodiversity: West Midlands

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

[\[36608\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to increase biodiversity in the West Midlands.

**Mary Creagh:**

Improving biodiversity is a key objective for the Government, and we are taking action to deliver on our legally binding biodiversity targets on species abundance, species extinction, and habitat creation and restoration.

These targets, alongside other statutory targets on tree canopy and woodland cover, water and air quality, marine protected areas, and resource efficiency, will drive action for nature recovery.

The West Midlands Combined Authority is the responsible authority for preparing the West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which will agree priorities for nature recovery in the area and identify and map the best locations for action to be taken to benefit nature and the wider environment. Defra has provided funding to responsible authorities to prepare their strategies, as well as dedicated advice and support from Natural England, the Environment Agency, and the Forestry Commission.

## ■ Climate Change

**Pippa Heylings:**

[\[32429\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to increase the use of nature-based solutions to help tackle climate change.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Government is supporting farmers to implement nature-based farming practices through a range of measures. These include habitat restoration and creation; activities to reduce the impact of invasive non-native species on sites or to address pressures on sensitive areas; improvements in water storage and management; and changes to limit emissions while maintaining agricultural profitability and increasing productivity.

These measures will be delivered through our Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes. We now have more than half of farmers in an ELM scheme, putting us on the path to a more resilient and sustainable farming sector. In the October 2024 budget, we committed £5 billion for farming over two years, including £1.8 billion for our ELM schemes - the largest ever budget directed at sustainable food production and nature's recovery in our country's history.

Trees and peat are at the forefront of our plans to reduce emissions. We are working towards our Environment Act targets to reach 16.5% tree canopy cover in England by 2050. We have pledged up to £400 million for tree planting and peatland restoration over the current and next financial year.

We also recognise the potential to scale up private investment for carbon and nature projects. Learning from the success of the established UK Woodland Carbon Code and UK Peatland Code, the government is funding the British Standards Institution to build a more comprehensive framework of UK Nature Investment Standards. This includes a UK Natural Carbon Standard, which will be available to support the development of high integrity investment schemes for nature recovery and sustainable farming projects around the UK. As announced in November 2024 at COP29 in Baku, the government is committed to delivering confidence in the integrity of these growing markets and will consult on further potential measures later this year.

#### ■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Paternity Leave

**Andrew Griffith:**

[\[25350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department offers paternity leave to its staff from their first working day.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

All staff working for the department and its arm's length bodies are entitled to paternity leave, subject to qualifying service, which varies between organisations.

Some staff could qualify for statutory paternity leave on their first day of service with their department because they already have qualifying service with another Civil Service organisation, or because their organisation offers it on day 1.

As with any changes to employment legislation, internal policies and processes will be updated as appropriate in preparation for when the Employment Rights Bill 2024 comes into effect.

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

**Stuart Anderson:**

[\[35367\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to Question 25742 tabled by the hon. Member for South Shropshire on 22 January 2025.

**Emma Hardy:**

An answer to Question 25742 is being prepared and will be provided as soon as possible.

## ■ Domestic Animals: Import Controls

**Sarah Edwards:**

[\[37340\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to introduce a digitalised equine ID and traceability system to prevent illegal export of (a) horses, (b) donkeys (c) and ponies.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

This is a devolved matter, and the information provided therefore relates to England only.

The Government recognises the importance of the equine sector to the UK economy and of improving equine identification and traceability. We have no current plans to implement mandatory digital identification, but we remain in close touch with the industry to look at potential improvements.

Defra also regularly engages with officials in the devolved governments to discuss matters of equine identification and traceability. Officials also share data on equines located in the UK with the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland and with the Department for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in the Republic of Ireland. The majority of equine movements into and out of GB take place between the island of Ireland and GB.

## ■ Domestic Waste: Fylde

**Mr Andrew Snowden:**

[\[35816\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what support his Department offers to household waste recovery firms in Fylde constituency.

**Mary Creagh:**

We take household waste recovery firms to mean private waste collectors. We are working to support private waste collectors in England ahead of the upcoming Simpler Recycling reforms, which will ensure that across England, people will be able to recycle the same materials, whether at home, work or school. Guidance has been published to assist local authorities, other waste collectors and workplaces in implementing the new requirements:

- [Paper and card guidance](#)
- [Household waste services guidance](#)
- [Workplace recycling guidance](#)

Defra has launched a [Simpler Recycling Communications Toolkit](#) to help local authorities and private waste collectors inform their business and non-domestic customers about the required changes.

We are continuing to engage with stakeholders to support successful delivery of the reforms, in the lead up and following the 31 March 2025 implementation date for workplaces, and 31 March 2026 for households.



## ■ Environment Protection

**Sarah Edwards:** [\[37341\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when his Department will publish the revised Environmental Improvement Plan for 2025.

**Mary Creagh:**

The Government has concluded a rapid review of the existing Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23). We published a statement of the rapid review's key findings on 30 January 2025. Publication of the revised EIP will follow later this year.

## ■ Fish Products: Faroe Islands

**Alex Mayer:** [\[36513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 10 October 2024 to Question 6928 on Fish Products: Faroe Islands, when his response to the public consultation on fairer food labelling will be published.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Government is now carefully considering all responses before deciding on next steps and will publish a response to this consultation in due course.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I provided to [PQ 6928](#).

## ■ Fly-tipping and Litter

**Nadia Whittome:** [\[37328\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to education people on the potential impact of (a) littering and (b) fly-tipping on local communities.

**Mary Creagh:**

Littering and fly-tipping are crimes which blight our communities and harm the environment. Defra chairs the National Fly-Tipping Prevention Group which aims to develop and disseminate various practical tools on tackling fly-tipping. These include a guide on how local authorities can raise awareness of the household waste duty of care, which helps to prevent householders from giving their waste to a fly-tipper. The guide provides suggested messaging, including the impact of fly-tipping locally.

Defra is also proud to support and endorse national clean-up initiatives such as the Great British Spring Clean, and we will continue to use our influence to encourage as many people and businesses as possible to participate in these types of events.

## ■ Food: Labelling

**Jayne Kirkham:** [\[37104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the Government plans to publish the results of the fairer food labelling consultation.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central, Gareth Snell on 23 December 2024, [PQ 20692](#).

■ **Forests: Supply Chains****Sarah Champion:**[\[36653\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to tackle the use of products created through illegal deforestation in supply chains.

**Mary Creagh:**

We recognise the need to take action to ensure that UK consumption of forest risk commodities is not driving deforestation, and we will set out our approach to addressing this in due course.

■ **Glass: Packaging****Sarah Edwards:**[\[37338\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made on the potential impact of extended producer responsibility for packaging on the glass industry.

**Mary Creagh:**

Defra officials have engaged extensively with the glass sector in developing these reforms since 2019.

Minister Creagh met with British Glass on 21 October 2024 and attended a glass re-use roundtable hosted by the British Beer & Pub Association on 14 January. Minister Creagh and Minister Jones, Minister of State at the both the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Department of Business and Trade, met British Glass on the 11th February to discuss points raised by the glass sector in detail.

Defra has responded to concerns from the glass sector about the inclusion of glass in the Deposit Return Scheme, it has remained out of scope as a result. Although packaging weight is a key driver of waste management costs, estimated packaging volumes, not packaging weight, are used to calculate kerbside dry recycling collections costs in pEPR to reflect practical limitations with collection systems. This is especially important for heavier materials such as glass, which would otherwise see higher base fees.

Defra continues to monitor the potential impact of EPR fees on the glass industry through continued engagement and extensive analysis of the packaging market.

## ■ Glass: Recycling

**Mr James Frith:**

[\[36446\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to ensure that fees under the Extended Producer Responsibility scheme are sustainable for businesses using glass packaging.

**Mary Creagh:**

The 2024 pEPR impact assessment assessed the impact of introducing the pEPR scheme on packaging producers as a whole and the transfer of monies from producers to Local Authorities and impacts on other market actors such as Government for tax implications, reprocessors and exporters, and wider business benefits. The impact assessment estimated the pEPR producer fees would generate over £1 billion annually to support local authority collection and disposal services, including recycling services. We expect Greenhouse Gas Emissions savings of approximately 0.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent over the 10-year appraisal period.

## ■ Inland Waterways: Grants

**Freddie van Mierlo:**

[\[37092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of increasing the Environment Agency's grant in aid for navigation infrastructure.

**Emma Hardy:**

Longer term Government funding decisions, including the Environment Agency's grant in aid for navigation infrastructure, will be made at the next Spending Review.

## ■ Internal Drainage Boards: Cambridgeshire

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[36866\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 35001 on Sewage: Cambridgeshire, what the eight internal drainage boards projects in Cambridgeshire are.

**Emma Hardy:**

The eight grants awarded to Cambridgeshire IDBs under the IDB Fund are supporting repairs and refurbishments to their assets, including pumping stations.

The eight projects are:

APPLICATION ID	IDB NAME	PROJECT TITLE	TOTAL GRANT AWARDED - £
AT2-0058	Conington & Holme Internal Drainage Board	Conington Fen Pumping Station Improvement Scheme	130,000.00
AT2-0087	Middle Level Commissioners	Middle Level Commissioners Mobile Pumps	539,710.00
AT2-0088	Middle Level Commissioners	Bevill's Leam Pumping Station Resilience Works Phase 1	254,596.00
AT2-0091	Middle Level Commissioners	Middle Level Commissioners Operational Depot Resilience	145,450.00
AT2-0098	Middle Level Commissioners	IDB Weedscreens Package 1	250,000.00
AT2-0100	Middle Level Commissioners	MLC IDBs Pumps & Channels Package	636,600.00
AT1-119	Curf & Wimblington Combined IDB	Curf & Wimblington combined IDB catchment	78,636.81
AT1-124	Middle Level Commissioners	Middle Level catchment	747,266.18
<b>Total:</b>			<b>2,782,258.99</b>

The fund, whilst allocated at the values shown, is subject to end review and the values may change based on completed scheme costs.

#### ■ Livestock: Animal Housing

**Josh Babarinde:**

[\[36863\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will have discussions with representatives from the agricultural industry on (a) animal welfare and (b) ending the use of cages for farm animals; and if he will take steps to publish a strategy for animal protection until 2029.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

We remain firmly committed to maintaining and improving animal welfare and want to work closely with the farming sector to deliver high standards. The use of cages and other close confinement systems for farmed animals is an issue which we are currently considering very carefully.

We are engaging with key stakeholders as part of the development of our overarching approach to animal welfare. We will be outlining more details on this in due course.

■ **Meat: Smuggling****Ben Goldsborough:**[\[25892\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many tonnes of (a) dangerous and (b) otherwise illegal meat have been intercepted by the Dover Port Health Authority in each of the last 10 financial years.

**Rachel Gilmour:**[\[26241\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many tonnes of (a) illegal and (b) banned products of animal origin (POAO) have been seized at the Port of Dover since September 2022.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Please see the table below for total seizures of illegal meat year on year. The figures quoted are seizures from all ports who had returned seizure data to us from September 2022 onwards as part of Defra African Swine Fever programme. This does not reflect all illegal meat seizures.

We are unable to provide further levels of detail as we do not release details of the location of seizure; this information could risk undermining border security, by providing intelligence in our resource deployment and targeting

Total seizures for full year on year are as follows:

<b>2022 (SEPT-DEC)</b>	3745KG
<b>2023</b>	44,482kg
<b>2024</b>	92,270kg

■ **Microplastics: Washing Machines****Stuart Anderson:**[\[25742\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help (a) mitigate the impact of and (b) reduce the quantity of microplastics released into the environment by domestic washing machines.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Government is concerned about the risks microplastics in our water environment may pose to public health and to the environment. Regulations for products and appliances are covered by the Ecodesign for Energy-Related Products Regulations 2010 and are routinely reviewed by the Government, and previous collaborative work with the water industry found that microplastics from clothing and textiles make up a small proportion (around 1%) of the total microplastics found within wastewater treatment works. There is no work planned to amend the relevant regulation for this product at the present time. Defra is continuing to work with water companies to investigate microplastics detected during wastewater treatment and their potential to enter the receiving aquatic environment.

**■ Packaging: Recycling****Jayne Kirkham:**[\[37103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of changing the criteria of the proposed EPR fee tariff to a units-based metric.

**Mary Creagh:**

The Government is not considering the adoption of a units-based metric. In accordance with the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging and Packaging Waste) Regulations 2024, Extended Producer Responsibility disposal fees for packaging are calculated in £ per tonne of household packaging placed on the market. Producers report the packaging they supply on a weight basis, and the costs for managing different material types, such as glass, are apportioned according to relevant cost drivers for their collection and management, including the volume of the container in bins and collection vehicles. This ensures the fair apportionment of costs between material types in line with the regulations.

**■ River Frome: Beavers****Dr Simon Opher:**[\[32119\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support the release of wild beavers in the River Frome.

**Mary Creagh:**

This is a devolved matter, and the information provided therefore relates to England only.

The Government recently confirmed its position on the wild release of beavers in an announcement on 28 February. A licence is needed to release any beavers into the wild. Applications will be considered against comprehensive [wild release criteria](#). These criteria have been designed to ensure only high-benefit, low-risk projects are licenced, and that beavers are reintroduced at a measured pace in a well-managed way.

We want to make sure that support is available to help beavers and people live alongside each other. Our [5-step beaver management approach](#) ensures effective management of beavers and supports people to live alongside them.

Building on the approach that we have already developed for wild release and management, we will collaboratively develop a management plan for the long-term reintroduction and recovery of beaver populations in England.

## ■ Soil: Flood Control

**Cameron Thomas:**

[\[36569\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with farmers on ensuring that agricultural soil health adheres to recommended guidelines to mitigate flooding.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Working with farmers and landowners is an important part of the Environment Agency's [Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy Roadmap up to 2026](#). A priority is to support farmers and land managers adapt their land management practices to be more resilient to the changing climate. The National Farmers Union and the Country Land and Business Association are both represented on the Flood Resilience Taskforce.

The Rural Flood Resilience Partnership unites six organisations including the Environment Agency, to support agricultural businesses and rural communities. The Partnership and its [workplan](#) was launched on the 23 September 2024. This details shared actions to look at how farming practices can enhance flood resilience in rural areas, alongside sustainable food production.

In addition, the Government's ongoing investment in the environment will also support natural flood management measures – including measures that support soil health.

## ■ Sustainable Farming Incentive: Educational Visits

**Dr Simon Opher:**

[\[36816\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to include (a) educational access payments within the Sustainable Farming Incentive and (b) extend those payments to (i) social prescribing programmes and (ii) other adult educational visits.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

We are developing educational access as a new 3-year capital item, which we expect to be available later in 2025. This will be a stand-alone capital item, though applicants must have an agri-environment or woodland agreement with management actions. Whilst there aren't any specific links to social prescribing, we are extending the range of groups that are eligible for payable visits. The current criteria for educational access in CS is school age children and care farming groups only, but in the new

educational access capital item, more diverse groups of people can visit, benefitting from an educational experience on farms and woodlands across England.

## ■ Waste Disposal: Local Government

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[35697\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 21 February 2025 to Question 29081 on Waste Disposal: Local Government, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of gate fees on local authorities' collection of household residual waste.

**Mary Creagh:**

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (Wrap) publishes an annual gate fees report [UK Gate Fees report 2023-24 | WRAP](#).

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[35698\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 21 February 2025 to Question 29081 on Waste Disposal: Local Government, whether state taxes, charges or levies are placed on municipal incineration of household waste.

**Mary Creagh:**

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (Wrap) publishes an annual gate fees report, including those for Energy from Waste (EfW).

No taxes, charges or levies are placed on municipal incineration of household waste.

## ■ Water Companies: Infrastructure

**Jon Trickett:** [\[36586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the annual additional cost to households will be of each of Yorkshire Water's four Direct Procurement for Customers (DPC) schemes; and what the additional cost will be per household for each (a) DPC and (b) Specified Infrastructure Project (SIPR) scheme broken down by water company region.

**Emma Hardy:**

Yorkshire Water has four direct procurement schemes as listed in the table below with the estimated whole life totex (total expenditure) for each scheme as detailed in Ofwat's [PR24 Final Determinations: Major Projects Development and Delivery](#).

These schemes will be mainly delivered in conjunction with other water companies or organisations as shown in the table below.

Ofwat's final determinations provide Yorkshire Water with a major project development allowance of £97.16 million to fund pre-construction development, commercial and procurement strategies, land acquisition and enabling works. The allowances will be reflected in the wholesale revenue limits set for the 2025- 30 period. Delivery of projects through DPC or SIPR competitive models means that for



each project, the level of bill impact cannot be confirmed until final bids are received and evaluated, and Ofwat have approved that it is in customers' best interests to proceed with the project.

COMPANY(S)	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT TYPE	DELIVERY MODEL	WHOLE LIFE TOTEX (£M)	CONSTRUCTION START DATE
Yorkshire Water / Northumbrian Water/UU	Kielder Transfer SRO	Transfer	In-House /DPC[1]	1,146	2032
Severn Trent, Yorkshire Water and the Coal Authority	Nottinghamshire Water Mine Water Treatment	Water treatment/ Transfer	DPC	755	2038
Yorkshire Water	West Yorkshire Water Treatment Works	Water Treatment works	DPC	310	2029-30
Severn Trent/ Yorkshire	<a href="#">South Yorkshire Sources[2]</a>	Source and Transfer	DPC	419	2031

[\[1\] THIS PROJECT HAS SOME COMPONENTS WHICH QUALIFY FOR DPC AND SOME WHICH DON'T AND WILL NEED IN-HOUSE DELIVERY.](#)

[\[2\] Now includes York Water Treatment Works which was included in draft determinations as a project in its own right.](#)

The full programme of all 30 major projects is listed in [PR24 Final Determinations: Major Projects Development and Delivery](#) but we will not know the bill impacts until companies have finished the procurement process and final bids are received and approved.

## ■ Water: Climate Change

**Clive Lewis:**

[\[36702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of climate change on water security.

**Emma Hardy:**

Water companies are required by law to publish a water resources management plan (WRMP) that sets out how they will provide secure public water supplies for a 25-year period (as a minimum). This includes a detailed assessment of the effect of climate

change on water supply (and demand). Water companies have just published the latest WRMPs, and this assessment shows that, in England, the quantity of water needed to replace water that will be lost due to the impacts of climate change on water supplies by 2050 is 642 million litres per day. Water companies outline in WRMPs how they plan to manage water supplies to ensure that they are resilient to climate change and other factors such as improving resilience to droughts, population growth, business growth needs and protecting and improving the water environment. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs provides permission to publish the WRMPs, once he is satisfied the plans produced by water companies demonstrate a secure supply of water.

In addition, the Environment Agency's National Framework for Water Resources published in March 2020, set out the strategic water needs for England up to 2050 and beyond. This included an assessment of the likely effect of climate change on water availability. The Framework sets out how water security will be maintained through actions such as halving leakage, reducing demand and developing new water supply infrastructure. A new framework will be released in late spring/early summer.

The most recent WRMPs (WRMP24) have been assessed by the Environment Agency and a summary published ( [A summary of England's revised draft regional and water resources management plans - GOV.UK](#) ).

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### ■ Artificial Intelligence: Religious Freedom

**Ruth Jones:**

**[37272]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the use of artificial intelligence to target minority religious communities on freedom of religion or belief globally.

**Stephen Doughty:**

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. The development and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents both opportunities and risks for the enjoyment of human rights, including FoRB. It is important that we champion the positive potential of technology, whilst taking action to mitigate risks. We do this by working with international partners and through multilateral fora including the UN and on FoRB specifically, through our engagement in the Article 18 Alliance, which has a dedicated workstream on AI and FoRB.

## ■ Asylum: Hotels

**Wendy Morton:**

[\[36069\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 10 February 2025 to Question 27263 on Development Aid: Asylum Hotels, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the use of asylum hotels in advance of the first meeting of the re-established ministerial ODA board.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Foreign Secretary has regular discussions with his Cabinet colleagues.

The Official Development Assistance Board's first meeting in February 2025 focused on in-donor refugee costs. The co-chairs were joined by the Minister for Border Security and Asylum.

## ■ Bangladesh: Ahmadiyya

**Brendan O'Hara:**

[\[37183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made representations to his Bangladeshi counterpart on the attack on the 98th Annual Convention of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Panchagarh district.

**Catherine West:**

The UK has a long-standing commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). Our support in Bangladesh aims to ensure that the rights of religious minorities, including the Ahmadiyya community, are respected, and that these communities are protected from discrimination. At the time of the attack, the previous UK Government raised the importance of FoRB with the former Bangladesh Government. In November 2024, I visited Bangladesh and discussed the importance of the protection of religious minorities with Chief Adviser Yunus. The UK will continue to support FoRB through regular dialogue with the Interim Government of Bangladesh and through our development programme funding.

## ■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Mauritius

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[37368\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 10 March 2025 to Question 35007 on British Indian Ocean Territory: Mauritius, what access the UK would have to any economic exclusion zone implemented by Mauritius around the British Indian Ocean Territory.

**Stephen Doughty:**

Under the Treaty, the UK will retain full control over Diego Garcia, including unrestricted access to and use of the base for the UK and US. Further details will be set out when the Treaty is published after signature.

**■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty****Priti Patel:** [\[36634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 5 March 2025 to Question 32981 on British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty, whether provisions for the continuation of the current marine protected area are included in the proposed treaty with Mauritius; and if the proposed treaty includes restrictions on fisheries activities.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The agreement will be supported by an enhanced partnership between the UK and Mauritius on conservation. This partnership will prioritise high conservation standards, with the UK supporting Mauritius' ambitions to establish a Marine Protected Area (MPA) that protects the globally significant ecosystems in the Chagos Archipelago. The Treaty reflects both Parties' shared commitment to uphold international environmental law, ensuring high conservation standards across the Archipelago in line with global frameworks, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) guidelines.

**Mr Mark Francois:** [\[37137\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Minister for Development's oral contribution of 25 February 2025, Official Report, column 873, which international courts and tribunals could issue a legally binding judgment on UK sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory.

**Stephen Doughty:**

There are numerous avenues through which Mauritius could pursue a legally binding judgment, including relevant provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea or under dispute provisions of treaties to which both states are parties. Such cases could be brought rapidly and include seeking provisional measures, themselves legally binding, which could be introduced within weeks. This would have had serious implications for base operations. The status quo was not sustainable and ignoring these issues was not a responsible approach for a government serious about protecting the UK's national security.

**■ British Overseas Territories: Biodiversity and Fisheries****Andrew Rosindell:** [\[36374\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help support British Overseas Territories to (a) tackle illegal fishing and (b) protect marine biodiversity.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office's Blue Belt Programme supports the UK Overseas Territories (UKOT) to tackle illegal fishing, including through the provision of maritime domain awareness capabilities. This includes risk-based satellite surveillance, tasking of satellite imagery to detect illegal activity,

intelligence support and training for fisheries patrols. The Programme also provides regional coordination through relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, supports Flag State engagement, and supports the implementation of compliance and enforcement frameworks to deter illegal fishing activity. This has resulted in fewer illegal incursions and a high level of compliance within UKOT waters. The Blue Belt supports the protection of the unique biodiversity of over 4.4 million square kilometres of UKOT waters through marine protected areas and other area-based conservation measures, which are underpinned by thorough scientific evidence, as well as ensuring they are well monitored, managed, and protected against the threat of harmful activity.

### ■ **British Overseas Territories: Companies**

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[36372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent progress has been made on adopting publicly accessible registers of beneficial ownership in the British Overseas Territories.

**Stephen Doughty:**

At the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) in November 2024, all Overseas Territories (OT) committed to implementing registers with the maximum possible degree of access and transparency by June 2025. The registers will be fully public, or at least accessible to those with a legitimate interest in the interim.

UK Officials are working proactively with OT officials to ensure their proposals meet the JMC requirements. I have and will continue to raise this directly with elected leaders, including in my meeting with Premier Wheatley of the British Virgin Islands, in his own capacity, and as President of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA) last week.

### ■ **British Overseas Territories: Emergencies**

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[36375\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help support British Overseas Territories to improve their disaster (a) preparedness and (b) response capabilities in the context of trends in the number of natural disasters.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The UK continues to support UK Overseas Territories to develop preparedness, capability, and capacity to respond to disasters effectively.

This Financial Year, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has funded crisis leadership and technical skills training for disaster management stakeholders across the Overseas Territories. The FCDO has also supported efforts to improve emergency shelter capacity and standards, grow emergency communications resilience, and understand future threats linked to climate change.

I visited the emergency response centre in Anguilla on my recent visit and have regularly discussed these issues with Overseas Territories leaders, representatives, and Governors, including at the Joint Ministerial Council.

#### ■ Canada: British Nationals Abroad

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[36381\]](#)

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 recent changes in Canada's border security measures for UK citizens traveling to Canada.

**Stephen Doughty:**

We have taken note of Canada's new border policies, which include expanded surveillance, heightened screening, and enhanced tools to detect fraud. We will continue to monitor any impact on British travellers.

UK citizens travelling to Canada should ensure they have an Electronic Travel Authorisation or visa as required, and they should ensure their passport is valid for the length of their stay. They should also consult FCDO Travel Advice, which is kept up to date with the latest requirements.

#### ■ Canada: Energy

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[36383\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the recent discovery of lithium deposits in Quebec on UK-Canada energy cooperation.

**Stephen Doughty:**

Critical minerals are pivotal to the net zero transition and we welcome Canada's focus on this during their G7 Presidency this year. We have welcomed the Canadian Global Minerals Action Plan, which helps set out a path to ensure diverse, resilient and sustainable supply chains around the world. We look forward to further collaboration with Canada and our partners in this field.

#### ■ Canada: Nature Conservation

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[36382\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with Canadian authorities on the preservation of the endangered Vancouver Island marmot and its implications for UK-Canada biodiversity initiatives.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Foreign Secretary has not spoken to his Canadian counterparts about the endangered Vancouver Island marmot. He speaks regularly to Foreign Minister Joly about a whole range of issues, including the importance of tackling climate change and biodiversity loss in this important year of the Canadian G7 Presidency. We are proud of our strong partnership with Canada, and together, we will continue to

champion delivery of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity framework to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

#### ■ **Canada: Trade Agreements**

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[36380\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Canadian counterpart on the potential impact of interprovincial trade barriers on UK-Canada trade relations.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Foreign Secretary speaks regularly with Canadian Foreign Minister Joly, most recently in late February, where they discussed a range of bilateral and global issues. They also spoke on 28 January 2025. I met my counterpart Rob Oliphant last week. Canada is one of our closest allies, underpinned by a broad trade and investment relationship which we are committed to deepening further. The Foreign Secretary has not discussed interprovincial trade with his counterpart.

#### ■ **Caribbean: Freedom of Circulation**

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[36384\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to engage with CARICOM authorities on the issue of freedom of movement for CARICOM nationals and its implications for UK citizens in the region.

**Catherine West:**

The UK has regular engagement with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat through our High Commission in Georgetown, Guyana. Part of this engagement includes discussions on issues which affect UK nationals and British Overseas Territories. Immigration is a matter for the local governments in each of the Caribbean Overseas Territories.

#### ■ **China: Audit**

**Priti Patel:** [\[36633\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when his Department's China Audit will be completed.

**Catherine West:**

The China Audit will conclude in spring 2025.

#### ■ **China: Foreign Influence Registration Scheme**

**Priti Patel:** [\[36632\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will place China in the enhanced tier of the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme.

**Catherine West:**

It would not be appropriate to comment at this point or speculate on which countries or entities may or may not be specified in the future.

**China: Foreign Relations****Wendy Morton:**[\[36664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is considering on UK-China cooperation on (a) climate change, (b) artificial intelligence and (c) clean energy.

**Catherine West:**

From 14-17 March, The Secretary of State for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero will visit Beijing to discuss energy and the climate crisis with Chinese Ministers. He will sign a UK-China Clean Energy Partnership, hold the eighth UK-China Energy Dialogue, and formally invite counterparts to London to take part in a Climate Dialogue and sign a Climate Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Since China was represented at Vice-Ministerial level at the Bletchley AI Safety Summit in November 2023, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office officials maintain regular contact with Chinese counterparts on AI safety issues.

**China: Religious Freedom****Blair McDougall:**[\[36840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of China's treatment of (a) Falun Gong, (b) The Church of Almighty God and (c) Christian practitioners.

**Catherine West:**

The environment for freedom of religion or belief in China is restrictive, which includes the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners and Christians. This Government stands firm on human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief. We raise our concerns at the highest levels: the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Chancellor have all raised human rights recently with their Chinese counterparts.

More broadly, this Government champions freedom of religion or belief for all abroad. We work to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora.

**Commonwealth: Finance****Andrew Rosindell:**[\[36371\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of recent changes in the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation on (a) capacity building, (b) technical assistance, (c) development projects and (d) the implications for UK-funded initiatives.



**Stephen Doughty:**

The UK is deeply committed to the Commonwealth. We are the largest donor to Commonwealth inter-governmental organisations and their programmes, including the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC). We believe the Commonwealth's institutions can deliver even more tangible benefits to its members and have encouraged them to focus on those areas where they can add most value. We therefore support reform of the Commonwealth Secretariat to help place the organisation on a more sustainable financial footing.

**■ Developing Countries: Food****Wendy Morton:**[\[35269\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking with multilateral development banks to better support small agrifood businesses in developing countries.

**Catherine West:**

The UK works closely with Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) to influence policy discussions and investments in food and agriculture, including in support of small agrifood businesses and producer organisations, which are critical to building resilient local food systems and for inclusive growth. This includes engagement through initiatives like the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme, which involves all relevant MDBs, and the Private Sector Financing Programme at the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

**■ Developing Countries: Women****Pippa Heylings:**[\[36844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to include older women in international development (a) policies and (b) commitments.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The UK Government is committed to equality and opportunity for all, with a particular focus on those most likely to be marginalised and discriminated against, including on the grounds of their age. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) focuses on those with intersecting forms of disadvantage, like women and girls with disabilities, and we include age as a dimension in our efforts to ensure inclusion and our approach to leaving no one behind.

The FCDO recognises that meaningful engagement on ageing is impossible without good quality data. Our Inclusive Data Action Plan details our approach to ensure that data is disaggregated by age, disability, sex and geography. At a multilateral level, the UK has engaged closely with the work of the UN's Open Ended Working Group on Ageing and has supported UN resolutions on the human rights of older people.

**■ Development Aid****Mr Andrew Snowden:** [\[36190\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that international development funding is spent more efficiently.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Prime Minister has set out a new strategic vision for government spending on defence and security and Official Development Assistance (ODA). Detailed decisions on how the ODA budget will be used will be worked through as part of the ongoing Spending Review based on various factors including effectiveness, impact and value for money.

**Monica Harding:** [\[37852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, which (a) geographical regions and (b) thematic programmes will be prioritised in the allocation of official development assistance.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Prime Minister has set out a new strategic vision for government spending on defence and security and Official Development Assistance (ODA). Detailed decisions on how the ODA budget will be used will be worked through as part of the ongoing Spending Review based on various factors including impact assessments.

**■ Development Aid: Climate Change and Nutrition****Wendy Morton:** [\[35271\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to integrate nutrition initiatives with climate adaptation in its international development programs.

**Catherine West:**

The Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office reports annually in its Nutrition Accountability Report on the level of International Climate Finance (ICF) that is nutrition sensitive. Data is published two years in arrears and on most recent figures 3 per cent of UK ICF is nutrition sensitive. The UK continues to champion the integration of improved nutrition outcomes alongside policy objectives in other sectors including health, agriculture, humanitarian, and climate adaptation. The UK government is looking forward to the upcoming 2025 Nutrition for Growth Summit in Paris and is working closely with the French government to call for the integration of nutrition into climate programming at the summit.

## ■ Ekrem İmamoğlu

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[36366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has held recent discussions with his Turkish counterpart on the ongoing legal proceedings against Ekrem İmamoğlu.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The Government looks to Turkey, as a modern democracy and a fellow member of the Council of Europe, to undertake any legal processes fairly, transparently and with full respect for the rule of law. The Government regularly raises human rights and rule of law issues with Turkey. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right.

## ■ EU Countries: Christianity

**Ruth Jones:**

[\[37271\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking with his European counterparts to help tackle anti-Christian hate crimes in Europe.

**Stephen Doughty:**

There is no space for religious intolerance in pluralistic, modern societies. We are championing the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and promoting tolerance and mutual respect through our engagement in multilateral fora, our bilateral work, and our programme funding. The Special Envoy for FoRB met with European and US counterparts in the margins of the 58th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in March. We actively participate in the Article 18 Alliance - bringing together 38 Member States, 26 of whom are European, to discuss actions our nations can take so that together we can promote respect for FoRB worldwide. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office officials attended the Article 18 Alliance and International Contact Group meetings in Geneva in March. We will continue to recognise the issue of persecution of Christians globally on account of their faith, alongside the persecution of other groups.

## ■ Financial Services

**Liam Byrne:**

[\[36045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if his Department will hold a summit of international financial centres.

**Stephen Doughty:**

Tackling corruption and illicit finance is a central priority of the Foreign Secretary to support the Government's Plan for Change by supporting UK growth and national security, including safer streets. The Foreign Secretary's Campaign Against Illicit Finance, launched in November 2024, will work in partnership with the rest of His Majesty's Government to deliver a powerful whole of UK Government approach both at home and internationally. The Foreign Secretary is exploring a range of options to

galvanise global collective action against this transnational threat, including the idea to host an international summit.

### ■ Foreign Influence Registration Scheme

**Priti Patel:** [\[36631\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether (a) he, (b) his Ministers and (c) his officials have discussed the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme with their Chinese counterparts since July 2024.

**Catherine West:**

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office officials speak regularly with the Chinese Government about a range of issues. National Security is the first duty of government, and we will always act to protect it. Decisions on which foreign powers will be placed on the enhanced tier of the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme are taken on a country by country basis, based on robust security and intelligence analysis.

### ■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: China

**Priti Patel:** [\[36629\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will list the (a) dates of and (b) names of those in attendance at meetings (i) he and (ii) his Ministers have had with representatives of the Chinese Government since July 2024.

**Catherine West:**

Meetings between Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ministers and representatives of the Chinese government can be found through publicly accessible means either on GOV.UK or ministers' social media accounts. We cannot provide a full list of names in attendance for GDPR reasons.

### ■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Equality

**Joe Robertson:** [\[35955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Answer of 26 September 2024 to Question HL1117 on Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Equality, how many staff in his Department have been permitted to undertake diversity-related network time during core working hours since 1 January 2025.

**Catherine West:**

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office does not hold the data requested. The majority of staff time spent on diversity staff networks is voluntary and unpaid.

## ■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Public Consultation

**Wendy Morton:**

[\[36064\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what plans he has to develop internal guidance for including child and youth consultation for policymaking across his Department.

**Stephen Doughty:**

As a ratifier of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UK Government is committed to the promotion, protection and realisation of children's rights at home and overseas, with the meaningful engagement of children and young people a core part of this commitment.

For example, youth sit on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) External Gender Challenge Board and the Girls' Education Department regularly consults with the Youth Council on Global Education, including in preparation for the first Global Ministerial Conference on Violence Against Children.

Moreover, children and young people are at the heart of the Foreign Secretary's new global campaign on children's care reform. Engagement sessions with care-experienced children and young people have directly contributed to the development of a Global Charter which will be launched later this year.

## ■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Secondment

**Jon Trickett:**

[\[36600\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many of their Department's officials have been seconded from (a) the Institute for Economic Affairs, (b) the Policy Exchange, (c) the Adam Smith Institute and (d) Labour Together since July 2024.

**Catherine West:**

Since July 2024 the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has had no staff seconded from (a) the Institute for Economic Affairs, (b) the Policy Exchange, (c) the Adam Smith Institute or (d) Labour Together.

## ■ Georgia: Religious Freedom

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[35657\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with international counterparts on freedom of (a) religion and (b) belief in Georgia.

**Stephen Doughty:**

All Georgians, regardless of their religion or belief, must be protected by their government and feel safe to gather peacefully. No one should live in fear for what they do, or do not, believe in. The UK regularly discusses the promotion and protection of human rights with international counterparts and vocally supports the right to freedom of religion or belief and other rights in Georgia, including through our

work in the Council of Europe, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

## ■ International Development Association

**Preet Kaur Gill:** [\[36738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what contribution he will make to the World Bank IDA's 21st replenishment.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The impact on the UK contribution to the World Bank International Development Association's (IDA) 21st replenishment is being worked through following the decision to reduce UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) from 0.5% of GNI to 0.3% in 2027. We will be taking a rigorous approach to ensure all ODA delivers value for money. We will set out our spending plans following the completion of the Spending Review and departmental resource allocation processes.

## ■ Israel: Arms Trade

**Euan Stainbank:** [\[37397\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of any open arms licences granted for export to Israel since the partial arms licence suspension.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We have continued to review export licences for items to Israel and assess that there are no extant licences for items that might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law. This is subject to the specific measures set out to Parliament excluding exports to the global F-35 programme from the scope of the suspension. There are a number of export licences which we have assessed are not for use by the Israeli Defense Forces in military operations in Gaza and therefore do not require suspension. These include military items such as components for trainer aircraft or components for air defence systems, and other, non-military, items such as food-testing chemicals, telecoms, and data equipment.

## ■ Israel: Syria

**Chris Law:** [\[34857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what his Department's policy is on the presence of Israeli armed forces in positions within Syria since 8 December 2024.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We continue to call on Israel, and all actors, to uphold their obligations to peace, stability, and security under international law. We are increasingly concerned by Israel's actions in Syria and are raising these concerns directly with the Israeli authorities. Israel have said their presence in the buffer zone in the Golan Heights will be limited and temporary, and we have been clear that we expect them to adhere to

this commitment. We recognise current threats to Israel, Israel's presence in the buffer zone must not become permanent.

## ■ Jagtar Singh Johal

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[36118\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his Indian counterpart on Jagtar Singh Johal's recent acquittal.

**Catherine West:**

The Foreign Secretary raised Mr Johal's case with the Indian External Affairs Minister on 5 March, during his visit to the UK. The UK Government will continue to make clear to the Government of India that faster progress is needed toward a full resolution of Mr Johal's cases, including a full and independent investigation into his allegations of torture.

**Jas Athwal:**

[\[36951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Indian counterpart on the release of Jagtar Singh Johal.

**Catherine West:**

The UK Government is committed to pushing the Government of India for faster progress to resolve Jagtar Singh Johal's case. The Foreign Secretary has raised Mr Johal's case with his Indian counterpart on several occasions, most recently on 5 March. The Prime Minister raised Mr Johal's case with Prime Minister Modi on 18 November 2024 and raised it with the Indian External Affairs Minister on 4 March, during his visit to the UK.

## ■ Lebanon: Humanitarian Aid

**Wendy Morton:**

[\[36668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what plans his Department has to continue supporting the delivery of humanitarian aid to Lebanon.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK is committed to supporting Lebanon to meet the humanitarian needs of both refugees and vulnerable Lebanese communities. The UK has played a leading role in addressing the humanitarian situation in Lebanon and announced £41 million in humanitarian aid in Financial Year 24/25 to support thousands of displaced and host communities to meet their basic needs and access essential services. We recognise post-ceasefire needs remain high and the UK's ongoing response will continue, including working with international partners to support the Government of Lebanon to respond to the UN Flash Appeal extension.

**■ Lebanon: Reconstruction****Wendy Morton:**[\[36667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support the reconstruction of (a) water networks and (b) other essential infrastructure in Lebanon.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK is committed to supporting Lebanon to meet the humanitarian needs of both refugees and vulnerable Lebanese communities. The UK has played a leading role in addressing the humanitarian situation in Lebanon, providing over £41 million in humanitarian funding since April last year. This includes support to provide clean water, emergency latrines and showers for people displaced by the conflict as well as the delivery of food, shelter, health, education, and protection services.

We will continue to work in partnership with the Lebanese Government and international partners to support the stability, security and long-term prosperity of Lebanon and its people. This includes supporting Lebanon's new Government to prioritise enacting the necessary political and socio-economic reforms needed to facilitate the recovery, reconstruction, and state-building efforts.

**■ Mauritius: Trade Agreements****Priti Patel:**[\[36638\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the latest draft of the proposed UK-Mauritius Treaty contains provisions for the UK being authorised to exercise the sovereign rights and authorities of Mauritius on Diego Garcia.

**Stephen Doughty:**

We will retain full control over Diego Garcia with robust provisions to keep adversaries out. These include unrestricted access to and use of the base for the UK and US, including control over the electromagnetic spectrum; a buffer zone around Diego Garcia; a comprehensive mechanism to ensure no activity in the other islands threatens base operations; and a ban on the presence of any foreign security forces. The details will be set out when the Treaty is laid before Parliament after signature.

**■ Naftna Industrija Srbije: Sanctions****James Naish:**[\[34955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to place sanctions on Naftna Industrija Srbije.

**Stephen Doughty:**

On 10 January the UK designated Gazprom Neft, one of Russia's energy giants. We do not comment on future designations as this could affect their impact. We keep all evidence and potential designations under review.



## ■ Oppression

**Luke Taylor:**

[\[36232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with the international community on the recognition of transnational repression as a distinct human rights threat.

**Stephen Doughty:**

The UK takes the protection of individuals' rights, freedoms, and safety in the UK very seriously. Attempts by foreign States to coerce, intimidate, harass, or harm individuals overseas, or undermine democracy and the rule of law, are unacceptable. We regularly assess potential threats to the UK and use a range of measures, including operational, policy, and legal tools, to counter them, in co-ordination with international partners.

The UK is working closely with international partners to tackle transnational repression. We also work closely with Canada as part of their G7 Presidency in 2025 to better align international efforts to counter this activity and publicly call out all forms of transnational repression.

The Defending Democracy Taskforce is reviewing the UK's response to transnational repression, to develop our understanding of the issue and ensure a strong, system-wide, response. This review will inform our approach to internationalising this issue.

## ■ Pakistan: Ahmadiyya

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[36652\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Pakistan on the recent arrests of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan's Punjab Province.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Promoting the rights of religious minorities is a core part of the UK's diplomatic engagement in Pakistan. I raised the deteriorating situation for Ahmadi Muslims when I met Pakistan's Human Rights Minister on 19 November 2024 and discussed this issue in Parliament on 28 November 2024. Our High Commissioner in Pakistan raised the issue of Ahmadi rights in a meeting with Prime Minister Sharif on 3 March 2025. On 6 March 2025, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) officials visited the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Rabwah to discuss key issues impacting the community. The UK remains committed to promoting minority rights in Pakistan - a commitment I discussed with representatives from the UK-Pakistan diaspora on 18 February 2025. We are not prepared to discuss the detail of individual cases where to do so could put individuals at risk.

**■ Pakistan: Human Rights****Jas Athwal:**[\[36950\]](#)

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

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Promoting human rights is a core part of the UK's diplomatic engagement in Pakistan. I raised the importance of upholding civil and political rights with senior Pakistani Ministers, including the Minister for Human Rights and Interior Minister, during my visit to Pakistan in November 2024. Our High Commission in Islamabad also regularly raises human rights issues, including minority rights, with the Pakistani authorities at the highest levels. For example, on 3 March 2025, our High Commissioner in Islamabad raised the rights of the Ahmadi community in a meeting with Prime Minister Sharif. We will continue to urge the Government of Pakistan to guarantee the rights of all people in accordance with international standards.

**■ Russia: Ukraine****Sir Julian Lewis:**[\[37107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of (a) Russian advocacy of and (b) US support for holding elections in Ukraine as part of any agreement to cease fighting on the risk of (i) installing a pro-Russian government in Kiev and (ii) facilitating Russian control of the entirety of the country.

**Stephen Doughty:**

It is for Ukraine to decide when and how to hold elections. On 19 February, the Prime Minister spoke to President Zelenskyy and reiterated his ongoing support and recognition of him as Ukraine's democratically elected leader. Ukraine's laws are clear that it cannot hold elections during martial law. Martial law continues to be in place due to Russia's ongoing war of aggression. Ukraine has a strong record of free and fair elections, and we are supporting Ukraine to hold them when it is appropriate to do so. We have been clear about the threat of Russian interference in the region and have been a long-standing partner in countering the threat from Russian disinformation.

**■ Rwanda: Bilateral Aid****Brendan O'Hara:**[\[37182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much direct bilateral financial aid to Rwanda has been paused; and whether this funding will be reallocated for urgent humanitarian assistance in Eastern DRC.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK has called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access, respect for international humanitarian law, meaningful engagement with African-led

peace processes, and the withdrawal of all Rwanda Defence Forces from Congolese territory.

Until significant progress is made towards this, we have made the decision to pause direct bilateral financial aid to the Government of Rwanda, excluding support to the poorest and most vulnerable. In this financial year (2024/25), we have paused £3 million in direct bilateral financial aid. Future financial years' budgets are yet to be confirmed and subject to the outcome of the current Spending Review.

The humanitarian situation in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is critical. We remain committed to supporting those most in need and are providing over £80 million in lifesaving humanitarian assistance to the DRC this year.

## ■ **Said Ferjani**

**Kate Osamor:**

[\[36705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Tunisian counterpart on the imprisonment of Said Ferjani.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK monitors the situation in Tunisia closely, including the recent sentence and ongoing case against Said Ferjani. During his visit to Tunisia in January, the Foreign Secretary noted the importance of political participation and human rights in discussions with the Tunisian Government. and on On 17 February, our the British Ambassador to Tunisia raised the case of Mr Ferjani with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Officials are observing ongoing trial proceedings against Mr. Ferjani to signal our support for the importance of a free and fair trial, and met members of his family on 27 February to discuss his case.

## ■ **Syria: Minority Groups**

**Andrew Gwynne:**

[\[36614\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the level of (a) security and (b) welfare of the Alawite population in Syria.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The events in Syria at the start of March were deeply concerning, and reports that large numbers of civilians have been killed are horrific. We continue to work to establish from reliable sources of information what exactly happened and who was responsible. We welcome the interim authorities' announcement of the establishment of a fact-finding committee to investigate and prosecute individuals who committed crimes during the clashes. Following the Foreign Secretary's public statement on 9 March, I made clear in my Statement to the House on 10 March that the interim authorities have a responsibility to ensure the protection of all Syrian civilians and to make progress towards an inclusive political transition. We will judge them by their actions.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

[\[36615\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the Alawites in Syria.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has consistently advocated for an inclusive political transition and underlined the importance of protecting the rights of all Syrians, both publicly and as part of our engagement with international partners and the interim Syrian authorities. Over the past week, the Foreign Secretary has discussed developments in Syria with French Foreign Minister Barrot (9 March) and Turkish Foreign Minister Fidan (10 March), and the UK Special Representative for Syria has spoken directly to affected Alawite communities.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

[\[36616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with (a) refugee and (b) other aid agencies on the Alawites in Syria.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We are in regular discussion with our UN and NGO partners, as well as with other international partners, to get a fuller understanding of the impact of recent violence in coastal areas on Alawites and other communities living there, and to assess needs and responses. We continue to support humanitarian organisations to provide aid across Syria. The White Helmets, supported by UK funding, are responding in coastal areas by providing lifesaving medical services, responding to fires in civilian facilities, providing clean drinking water, and recovering bodies.

## ■ Ukraine: Military Aid

**Sir Julian Lewis:**

[\[37106\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment with the Secretary of State for Defence of the potential merits of appointing a cross-departmental co-ordination unit to oversee efforts to (a) liaise with other countries on initiatives to support Ukraine and (b) maximise (i) efficiency and (ii) productivity in supplying (A) weapons and (B) ammunition to the Ukrainian armed forces.

**Stephen Doughty:**

In September 2024, the Government announced a new joint Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Ministry of Defence Ukraine Unit, led by the Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary. This Unit integrates expertise across the two departments and helps ensure a joined-up approach to international engagement, in support of the Government's efforts to put Ukraine in the strongest possible position. The two departments are working seamlessly together to maximise the impact of UK defence support, ensure that Ukraine gets the military equipment it needs to resist Russian aggression; to deny the Kremlin the resources it needs to sustain its illegal war; and to build a coalition of countries willing and able to help ensure Ukraine's future security.

## ■ Urban Areas: Carbon Monoxide

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[37157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure its consular guidance raises awareness of cities with high levels of carbon monoxide.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) travel advice remains under regular review to ensure it reflects our latest assessment of risks to British nationals. The risks from carbon monoxide poisoning are covered in travel advice for China and Nepal, Solo and independent travel and Volunteering and adventure travel pages as well as our Foreign travel checklist.

We aim to include information in our travel advice on the issues most likely to be of relevance to British nationals visiting or living in each country/territory. In determining what we include in our travel advice we assess a range of factors, including drawing on local knowledge and monitoring trends in consular cases.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ Addictions: Health Services

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[36238\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help patients with a (a) history and (b) risk of addiction; and if he will take steps to identify that risk before addictive medication is prescribed.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The government is committed to supporting those most vulnerable to experiencing harms from drugs and alcohol, and ensure they are supported to live healthier lives for longer. We are committed to ensuring that anyone with an illicit drug or alcohol dependency can access the help and support they need through evidence-based and high-quality treatment and recovery services.

The Department funds local authorities to deliver drug and alcohol treatment services through the Public Health Grant (PHG). In addition to the PHG, the Department allocated local authorities £267 million in 2024/25 to improve the quality and capacity of drug and alcohol treatment and recovery.

When prescribing medication, clinicians are expected to work with patients to make decisions about their care and treatment as part of shared decision-making, including discussing risks, benefits, and possible consequences of different options through information-sharing.

## ■ Alcoholic Drinks: Labelling

**Dan Aldridge:**

[\[36919\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has any plans to introduce legislation requiring alcoholic beverages to display (a) full ingredient lists and (b) nutritional information in line with the labelling requirements for other food and drink products.

**Ashley Dalton:**

It is mandatory for alcohol labels to state the product's strength, namely alcohol by volume, and whether the product contains any of the 14 main allergens. There is also voluntary guidance on communicating the UK Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines. There are no current plans to change mandatory labelling requirements on alcoholic products.

A National Institute for Health and Care Research-funded study on alcohol calorie labelling is underway to assess the impact of alcohol calorie labelling on product selection, purchasing, and consumption, which will report in 2026.

## ■ Alcoholic Drinks: Misuse

**Will Stone:**

[\[36817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to review the Department's approach to tackling alcohol harm; and whether he will consider introducing an alcohol strategy in this Parliament.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Under our Health Mission, the Government is committed to prioritising preventative public health measures to support people to live longer, healthier lives. The Department will continue to work across Government to better understand how we can best reduce alcohol-related harms.

## ■ Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Disorders: Ethnic Groups

**Ellie Chowns:**

[\[34128\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help reduce health disparities amongst ethnic minority communities in the treatment of (a) arthritis and (b) musculoskeletal conditions.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Race Equality Foundation's report, Musculoskeletal conditions and Black, Asian and minority ethnic people: addressing health inequalities, commissioned by what was then Public Health England, identified that some Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in the United Kingdom are disproportionately represented due to the risk factors for musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions. MSK pain is more widespread among people in minority ethnic groups that may reflect social, cultural and psychological differences. The report is available at the following link:

<https://raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/health-and-care/musculoskeletal-conditions-and-black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-people-addressing-health-inequalities/>

We have set a Health Mission with the aim of tackling the social determinants of health such as those described in the report, focusing on prevention, and ensuring that everyone lives longer, healthier lives. We have also committed to delivering a 10-Year Health Plan, which will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts needed, to move healthcare from the hospital to the community, from analogue to digital, and from treatment to prevention. Addressing healthcare inequity is a core focus of the 10-Year Health Plan, including for people from minority ethnic groups.

Integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for commissioning services that meet the needs of their local population, including for MSK conditions such as arthritis. Under the Health and Care Act 2022, ICBs have a duty to consider reducing inequalities with respect to people's ability to access services within the National Health Service and the outcomes achieved for them by the provision of those health services, including for people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

#### ■ **Arthritis: Children and Young People**

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**

**[36055]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to NCEPOD's report entitled Joint Care? A review of the quality of care provided to children and young adults with juvenile idiopathic arthritis, published on 13 February 2025, whether he will take steps to implement the recommendations of that report as they relate to recognition of juvenile idiopathic arthritis by healthcare professionals.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**

**[36056]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support older children with arthritis as they transition to adult health and care services.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Department has not yet considered the recommendations of the report published by the National Confidential Enquiry into Patient Outcome and Death on 13 February 2025, Joint Care? A review of the quality of care provided to children and young adults with juvenile idiopathic arthritis.

NHS England Specialised Commissioning has a Clinical Reference Group for specialised paediatric rheumatology, which has produced a service specification for these services. This service specification names juvenile idiopathic arthritis as one of the conditions that should be managed by a specialist paediatric rheumatology team. The service specification also sets out that specialised paediatric rheumatology teams will provide transitional care to facilitate transfer and ongoing care in adult rheumatology. Transitional care planning will involve paediatric rheumatology teams, adult rheumatology teams and local hospitals under a shared care arrangement. Specialised paediatric rheumatology services are expected to be commissioned in line with this service specification.

In the NHS Long Term Plan, NHS England committed to delivering a service model for people aged between zero and 25 years old to improve young people's experience and health outcomes. To aid implementation of this model, the Children and Young People's Transformation Programme collaborated with key partners to develop national guidance on how the National Health Service can better support young people transfer into adolescent and adult services. The guidance is due to be published shortly and will be hosted on the NHS England website.

The policy aligns with existing National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines and outlines the principles and steps of a service model for people aged between zero and 25 years old, along with best practice examples from across the country.

NICE's published guidance on the transition from children's to adult services for young people includes recommendations on transition planning, support before and after transfer and the development of transition infrastructure. This guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng43>

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**

**[36057]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take through the 10-year health plan to support children and young people with arthritis.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The 10-Year Health Plan will deliver the three big shifts our National Health Service needs to be fit for the future: from hospital to community; from analogue to digital; and from sickness to prevention. All of these are relevant to improving arthritis care for children and young people in all parts of the country.

More tests and scans delivered in the community, better joint working between services, and greater use of apps and wearable technology will all support children, young people, and their families to manage their long-term conditions, including arthritis, closer to home.

## ■ Arthritis: Women

**Manuela Perteghella:**

**[36509]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support women living with arthritis.

**Ashley Dalton:**

We are committed to prioritising women's health, and we know that musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions, including arthritis, disproportionately impact women.

Integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for commissioning services that meet the needs of their populations, including women with arthritis. To support this, the Department of Health and Social Care is delivering the Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) MSK Community Delivery Programme jointly with NHS England and the



Department for Work and Pensions. With a £3.5 million funding boost, GIRFT will work with ICBs to reduce MSK community waiting times, including for women.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) also publishes guidance for the diagnosis and treatment of people with long-term conditions for use by healthcare professionals and commissioners. NICE has published guidance to support health and care professionals in the early diagnosis and management of rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, including for women, which are available at the following links:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng100>

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng226>

### ■ **Bowel Cancer: Screening**

**Jim Shannon:**

**[33884]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the Northern Ireland Executive on lowering the threshold for bowel screening to 50.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) advises ministers and the National Health Service in the four United Kingdom nations about all aspects of screening. As screening is a devolved matter, it is then for each individual Government to decide on how and whether to implement the UK NSC's recommendations.

### ■ **Cancer: Bereavement Counselling**

**James McMurdock:**

**[37510]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve support available for families who have lost a relative to cancer.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Government recognises how important it is for grieving families and friends who have lost loved ones have access to the support they need, when they need it. Bereavement support is commissioned locally, to meet the needs of the local population. NHS England has developed guidance for integrated care boards which requires local commissioners to ensure there is sufficient access to bereavement support services.

Improving support for patients and carers is also an area of focus for the National Cancer Plan for England, which will seek to improve both physical and mental health aspects of cancer care. Those who wish to share their views on improving cancer support can do so via the Call for Evidence, which is available at the following link:

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

NHS England strongly encourages anyone struggling with their bereavement to contact their general practitioner who can help provide support, signpost to specialist bereavement support organisation or refer to a counsellor.

## ■ Cancer: Children and Young People

**Dr Simon Opher:**

[\[35791\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what consideration his Department has given to including a separate faster diagnosis target for children and young people with cancer.

**Ashley Dalton:**

*[Holding answer 11 March 2025]:* The Faster Diagnosis Standard (FDS) includes children and young people and ensures that cancer is diagnosed or ruled out, within 28 days from referral. The latest FDS data, for December 2024, shows that 89.8% of children and young people with suspected cancer received a diagnosis or all-clear within 28 days of referral, above the overall FDS rate.

We are committed to getting the National Health Service diagnosing cancer earlier and treating it faster so that more children and young people survive. That is why on 4 February 2025, we relaunched the Children and Young People Cancer Taskforce to identify tangible ways to improve outcomes and experience. The Taskforce will explore opportunities for improvement, including detection and diagnosis, genomic testing and treatment, research and innovation, and patient experience

The Taskforce will ensure that the unique needs of children and young people with cancer are carefully considered as part of the National Cancer Plan.

## ■ Cancer: North West

**Patrick Hurley:**

[\[37352\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve (a) one year and (b) five year survival rates for cancers of the (i) liver, (ii) lung, (iii) pancreas, (iv) oesophagus and (v) stomach in Cheshire and Merseyside.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Improving early diagnosis of cancer, which is integral for improving survival rates, is a priority for this government. Rapid diagnostic centres (RDCs), which are designed to speed up the diagnosis of cancer, have now been successfully rolled out across England. RDCs provide a non-specific symptom (NSS) pathway for patients who display symptoms that could indicate cancer but do not align to specific cancers. NSS pathways are very important for diagnosing cancers such as liver, pancreas, oesophagus and stomach cancers whose symptoms may not be obvious and mimic other conditions. NSS pathways complement other cancer diagnostic pathways, as well as providing elements that can be applied to existing pathways.

We set out expectations for renewed focus on cancer targets in the Elective Reform plan, published on 6 January 2025. We have asked systems and providers to identify local opportunities in both community diagnostic centres and hospital based

diagnostic services to improve performance against the Faster Diagnosis Standard, to reduce the number of patients waiting too long for a confirmed diagnosis of cancer. Cheshire and Merseyside has been at the forefront of developing the new centres, with 10 across the region.

Furthermore, the Department has also committed support to the Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce, which targets cancers with poor survival rates. This partnership focuses on liver, pancreas, lung, brain, oesophagus, and stomach cancers, raising awareness of these less survivable cancers so more people understand their symptoms and go to see their general practitioner if they have concerns. We will build on recent successes, including roll out of the targeted lung screening programme, to diagnose cancer earlier and boost one and five year survival rates. This has already been rolled out to at least five areas of Cheshire and Merseyside and is making a real impact on early detection of lung cancer.

Finally, the recently announced Cancer Plan, which will complement the 10-Year Health Plan and support delivery of the Government's Health Mission, will set out further actions to improve early diagnosis and transform survival rates, saving thousands of lives and putting us on a stronger footing with our international peers.

#### ■ **Cannabis: Health Education**

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**

**[36766]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has considered funding public health campaigns to educate young people on the risks of cannabis use within a regulated market.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Cannabis is controlled as a Class B drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The Government recognises the clear medical and scientific evidence of the harms of this drug.

The Government will continue to work with our partners to discourage drug use and to alert people, particularly young people, to the potential dangers of cannabis.

The Government has a drug information and advice service called Talk to FRANK, which aims to reduce drug misuse and its harms by increasing awareness, particularly for young people and parents. FRANK offers easy to read information on the risks of using cannabis and basic harm reduction advice. Information on cannabis is available at the following link:

<https://www.talktofrank.com/drug/cannabis>

The website also has details of drug treatment services and support organisations.

#### ■ **Cardiovascular Diseases: Waiting Lists**

**Paulette Hamilton:**

**[37335]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to support NHS patients on the waiting list with Cardiovascular Disease.

**Ashley Dalton:**

We have prioritised cutting waiting lists and getting back to the standard that at least 92% of people should wait no longer than 18 weeks from referral to treatment, including those with cardiovascular disease. We recently published the Elective Reform Plan that sets out how we will do this, including optimising clinically led pathways, and shifting care from hospital to community. This will start with five initial specialities, including cardiology.

The Plan also outlines how there will be a reduction in the number of unnecessary cardiology diagnostics, freeing up capacity for those patients who need faster treatment. This will be done by increasing specialist input earlier in care pathways, developing standard pathways for common outpatient presentations, such as palpitation, and increasing timely access to cardiac diagnostic tests, including through straight to test.

Whilst we have already made progress, by delivering on our First Step commitment to provide two million extra appointments, we know there is more to do. We are also prioritising the experience of patients while they wait, as well as throughout their care journey. The Plan sets out how we will support patients with greater choice and control over their care, including options of whether they want to be seen in person or remotely, and whether they want routine follow up appointments, and a commitment to co-develop minimum standards of experience with patients, from which we can build and improve everyone's experience of care.

**■ Cauda Equina Syndrome: Health Services****Jonathan Davies:****[37033]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support individuals living with Cauda Equina Syndrome with access to (a) treatment, (b) rehabilitation and (c) financial assistance.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Government is committed to improving the lives of those living with rare diseases, such as cauda equina syndrome. The UK Rare Diseases Framework sets out four priorities collaboratively developed with the rare disease community: these include improving access to specialist care, treatments, and drugs. We remain committed to delivering under the Framework and published the annual England action plan in February 2025.

The Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) programme is a national NHS England programme designed to improve the treatment and care of patients through in-depth review of services, benchmarking, and presenting a data-driven evidence base to support change.

GIRFT has worked collaboratively with a multidisciplinary group of more than 60 health professionals to develop an interactive pathway for those patients with suspected cauda equina syndrome, designed to support clinical teams to diagnose and treat the condition without delay and improve patient outcomes. The pathway

offers best practice along all stages of the patient pathway, including post-operative care and best practice for surgical techniques, pain control and other post-operative support, which includes a section on finances. More information is available at the following link:

<https://girft-interactivepathways.org.uk/cauda-equina-1/>

## ■ Community Diagnostic Centres

**Clive Jones:**

[R] [36926]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding his Department plans to provide for Community Diagnostic Centres in the 2025-26 financial year; and if he will take steps to improve access to these centres in each region.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Elective Reform Plan, published in January 2025, committed to expanding existing community diagnostic centres (CDCs), as well as building up to five new ones in 25/26, to support the National Health Service to return to meeting the elective waiting time constitutional standard. The plan also commits to CDCs opening 12 hours a day, seven days a week, delivering more same-day tests and consultations, an expanded range of tests, with direct referral from primary and community care, new consulting rooms and at least 10 straight-to-test pathways by March 2026.

NHS England will work with local NHS systems to identify the most appropriate locations for investments, including new CDCs, and expansions of existing CDCs. A key factor they will consider is that new CDCs are positioned in a location which addresses local need and will address health inequalities.

The 2025/25 capital guidance confirmed that £1.65 billion of capital funding will be allocated to support NHS performance across secondary and emergency care across 2025/26 more broadly.

This includes £450 million which has been provisionally allocated for diagnostics including CDCs. This includes funding to enable the completion of 2024/25 schemes; as well as to expand existing and build new CDCs. £20 million has also been allocated directly to relevant trusts via separate processes for CDC pathway productivity.

As detailed in the 2025/26 capital guidance, published on 30 January 2025, NHS England has also provided systems with their operational capital envelopes. These allocations are managed locally, with systems prioritising investments in line with their clinical and operational needs.

Future capital investment beyond 2025-26 will be considered as part of the next Spending Review.

## ■ Community Diagnostic Centres: Finance

**Mr Louie French:**

[\[36806\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of changes to treatment tariffs on the ability of Community Diagnostic Centres to provide care.

**Karin Smyth:**

As set out in the Plan for Change, we will ensure that 92% of patients return to waiting no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment by March 2029, a standard which has not been met consistently since September 2015.

We have delivered an additional two million appointments between July and November 2024 compared to the same period in 2023, seven months ahead of schedule. This includes operations, consultations, diagnostic tests, and treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy and endoscopy.

The consultation on proposals for the 2025/26 NHS Payment Scheme closed on 28 February 2025. NHS England is currently reviewing the feedback received, including the aligned payment and incentive mechanism for community diagnostic centres (CDCs). NHS England will confirm decisions about the final scheme as soon as possible.

Diagnostic activity continues to be undertaken in non-CDC settings, as well as in CDCs. As set out in the consultation, NHS England has proposed that the same payment approach is used for all diagnostic activity to ensure that the payment system is not a barrier to delivery.

## ■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[34093\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many yellow card reports on covid-19 vaccines there were in 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is responsible for ensuring that medicines, medical devices, and blood components for transfusion meet the applicable standards of safety, quality, and efficacy. The MHRA rigorously assesses the available data, including from the Yellow Card scheme, and seeks advice from the Commission on Human Medicines, the MHRA's independent advisory committee, where appropriate, to inform regulatory decisions, which includes amending the product information.

All COVID-19 vaccines used in the United Kingdom have been authorised by the MHRA after meeting the MHRA's standards of safety, quality, and effectiveness. As with all vaccines and medicines, the safety of COVID-19 vaccines is continuously monitored, and benefits and possible risks remain under review. The MHRA has received a total of 6,912 spontaneous suspected side effects to COVID-19 vaccines

in 2024 from over 15 million doses estimated to have been administered across the UK.

When considering the above spontaneous data, it is important to be aware that a reported reaction does not necessarily mean it has been caused by the vaccine, medicine, or device, only that the reporter had a suspicion it may have been. The fact that the symptoms reported to the Yellow Card scheme occur after the use of a vaccine, medicine, or device does not in itself mean that they are proven to have been caused by it. Underlying or concurrent illnesses may be responsible, and such events can also be coincidental.

It is also important to note that the number of reports received via the Yellow Card scheme does not directly equate to the number of people who suffered adverse reactions, and therefore they cannot be used to determine the incidence of a reaction or compare the safety profile of different vaccines, medicines, or devices. Adverse drug reactions and device incident reporting rates are influenced by the seriousness of the adverse reactions, their ease of recognition, and the extent of use of a particular medicine or device, and may also be stimulated by promotion and publicity. Reporting tends to be highest for newly introduced medicines during the first one to two years on the market, and then falls over time.

#### ■ **Department of Health and Social Care: Hakluyt**

**Jon Trickett:**

[\[37124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many staff their Department has seconded from Hakluyt since July 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department has seconded no staff from Hakluyt since July 2024.

#### ■ **Department of Health and Social Care: Secondment**

**Jon Trickett:**

[\[36595\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many of his Department's officials have been seconded from (a) the Institute for Economic Affairs, (b) the Policy Exchange, (c) the Adam Smith Institute and (d) Labour Together since July 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department has seconded no individuals from the aforementioned institutions since July 2024.

#### ■ **Diabetes: Dietetics**

**Imran Hussain:**

[\[37185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to expand dietitian-led diabetes prevention programmes in (a) Bradford East constituency and (b) other constituencies with high prevalence rates.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Government is committed to tackling the burden of diabetes in England and to reduce the variation in access to diabetes prevention and treatment services across the country.

A central mission of the Government is to build a health and care system fit for the future. To achieve this, it is crucial that we tackle preventable ill health, such as type 2 diabetes, by ensuring those at risk of developing, or already living with, the disease are identified and can in turn, be effectively treated.

We have committed to develop a 10-year plan to deliver a National Health Service fit for the future. We will carefully be considering policies, including those that impact people with diabetes, as we develop the plan.

The Department is taking steps to reduce overall prevalence of type 2 diabetes through programmes such as the [NHS Health Check](#) and the [Healthier You NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme](#) (NHS DPP).

The NHS DPP is highly effective for those that attended. More than 840,000 people have been supported through this programme, and it has been found to reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 37% compared to those who did not attend. NHS England has responsibility for delivering the programme.

**■ Diabetes: Ethnic Groups**

**Jas Athwal:** [\[36941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help tackle the levels of diabetes among (a) Black and (b) South Asian people.

**Ashley Dalton:**

NHS England has established a focused engagement campaign, using social media and more traditional approaches, to raise awareness and boost uptake from these groups as part of its approach to address the poorer outcomes for those of south Asian and black ethnicity.

NHS England has provided funding of £3 million to systems to provide clinical leadership to ensure that clinical diabetes metrics, such as the eight key diabetes care processes and treatment targets, are reviewed at integrated care board level and unwarranted variation identified. A resource hub of materials has been set up on Future NHS, including examples of innovation and best practice for improvement of care process delivery, and achievement of treatment targets.

**■ Doctors: Overseas Workers**

**Pippa Heylings:** [\[36842\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on the number of UK-trained doctors that have emigrated because of high competition ratios in the last three years; and if he will make an assessment of the



potential implications for his policies of trends in the number of those doctors that have emigrated because of high competition ratios.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 17 March 2025]:* The Department does not hold the specific data requested. Data from the General Medical Council in 2022 showed that approximately 7% of doctors in England did not hold a licence to practice five years after they completed the foundation programme in 2016. More information is available at the following link:

[https://www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/workforce-report-2022---full-report\\_pdf-94540077.pdf](https://www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/workforce-report-2022---full-report_pdf-94540077.pdf)

Internationally educated staff remain an important part of the workforce, and our Code of Practice for International Recruitment ensures stringent ethical standards when recruiting health and social care staff from overseas. However, the Government is also committed to growing homegrown talent and giving opportunities to more people across the country to join the National Health Service.

■ **Doctors: Recruitment**

**Lee Anderson:**

[\[36132\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to prioritise British medical graduates for medical posts in the NHS.

**Lee Anderson:**

[\[36133\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the increase of international medical graduates coming to the UK for work on the employment rate of British medical graduates.

**Karin Smyth:**

There is no obligation on employers to prioritise British nationals before foreign nationals for medical posts in the National Health Service. Internationally educated staff remain an important part of the workforce, and our Code of Practice for International Recruitment ensures stringent ethical standards when recruiting health and social care staff from overseas. However, the Government is also committed to growing homegrown talent and giving opportunities to more people across the country to join the NHS.

In summer 2025, we will publish a refreshed Long Term Workforce Plan to deliver the transformed health service we will build over the next decade and treat patients on time again.

**■ Endometriosis: Health Services****Shivani Raja:****[36171]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support women diagnosed with endometriosis in (a) Leicester and (b) the United Kingdom.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government is committed to prioritising women's health and improving the care received by those suffering from gynaecological conditions, including endometriosis.

Women in Leicester experiencing symptoms of endometriosis should go to their general practitioner (GP) for an initial consultation. GPs across Leicester can refer women with suspected endometriosis to a local women's health hub where available. There are three women's health hubs in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, which are North-West Leicestershire Women's Health Hub, Rutland Women's Health Hub and The Willows Women's Health Hub. GPs can also refer women to the endometriosis pathway, provided by University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust. There are also a range of local support groups available to patients in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

Health is a devolved matter. In England, we have taken urgent action to tackle gynaecology waiting lists through the Elective Reform Plan. In gynaecology, the plan supports innovative models offering patients care closer to home, and piloting gynaecology pathways in community diagnostic centres. Women's health hubs also have a key role in shifting care out of hospitals and reducing gynaecology waiting lists. Clinical guidelines support healthcare professionals to diagnose and treat conditions. In November 2024 the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence published updated recommendations on the diagnosis, management and treatment of endometriosis. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng73>

**■ Exercise: Young People****Mr Andrew Snowden:****[36174]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking with the Secretary of State for Education to educate young people on the benefits of active lifestyles.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Government recognises the physical and mental health benefits that leading an active lifestyle can bring for all children and young people.

The Department for Education has recently launched an independent curriculum and assessment review that will advocate for a rich, broad, and inclusive curriculum that includes physical education, which the Department of Health and Social Care is also feeding into.

## ■ Fast Food: Schools

**Jas Athwal:** [\[36943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ban fast food outlets near schools.

**Ashley Dalton:**

On 12 December 2024, the Government published the revised National Planning Policy Framework for local government. As part of this, local authorities were given the stronger, clearer powers they have told us they need to block new fast-food outlets near schools and where young people congregate, unless the location is in a designated town centre.

The framework also indicates that applications should also be refused where there is evidence that a concentration of such uses is having an adverse impact on local health, pollution or anti-social behaviour.

## ■ Food: Advertising

**Jas Athwal:** [\[36945\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made on the potential merits of a total ban on the advertising of unhealthy food across all media.

**Ashley Dalton:**

No such assessment has been made. However, we are implementing restrictions on the advertising of less healthy food or drink products on television and online from October 2025. This includes a 9pm watershed on television and a 24-hour restriction on paid-for advertising of these products online. These restrictions are expected to remove up to 7.2 billion calories from United Kingdom children's diets per year and reduce the number of children living with obesity by 20,000. We continue to review evidence of the impacts on children of advertising for less healthy food and drink products and will consider where further action is needed.

## ■ Gluten-free Foods: Rural Areas

**Freddie van Mierlo:** [\[37485\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the adequacy of access to gluten-free products on people with coeliac disease in rural areas.

**Ashley Dalton:**

In addition to the wide variety of naturally gluten-free food, a wide range of gluten-free products is now readily available for purchase. The national prescribing position in England remains that gluten free bread and mixes can be provided to coeliac patients in England, including in rural areas, on National Health Service prescription and a wide range of these items continue to be listed in part XV of the Drug Tariff.

Decisions about the commissioning and funding of local health services are the responsibility of local integrated care boards (ICBs). NHS England guidance should be considered when ICBs formulate local policies, and prescribers are expected to reflect local policies in their prescribing practice. Guidance does not remove the clinical discretion of prescribers in accordance with their professional duties.

## ■ Health Services

**Samantha Niblett:**

[\[37849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to encourage Integrated Care Boards to commission Referral Management Systems to reduce the significant time taken by primary care in chasing secondary care referrals and appointments.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government is committed to cutting waiting times for secondary care appointments, which in turn should minimise the time that general practitioners spend chasing referrals. As a first step, we have seen the waiting list reduce by over 190,000 and have provided 2.5 million extra appointments since July 2024.

The Government is also committed to optimising referrals through more effective models of triage which allow patients with the most urgent health needs to be prioritised and can be used to redirect referrals to an alternative service better suited to the patient's needs (including in primary or community services where that is best for the patient). Referral management systems are one model of triage. The Elective Reform Plan (ERP), published in January 2025, commits to developing an implementation toolkit for triage services, by March 2026, and to working with integrated care boards to put in place clinical triage standard operating procedures for high-volume specialties.

The NHS Electronic Referral System (e-RS) is a national digital platform for referring patients from primary care into elective secondary care service. The ERP commits to improving e-RS throughout 2025/26 and beyond, to enhance information sharing between primary and secondary care and will help referrers in general practice know sooner what care their patient will receive and where, including whether their referral has been accepted in hospital.

## ■ Health Services: Standards

**Samantha Niblett:**

[\[37822\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress his Department has made on the The Getting It Right First Time programme.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) programme is a national NHS England programme designed to improve treatment and care by reviewing health services in England.

The GIRFT team is working with systems and regions to help the National Health Service embed best practice in elective care, to reduce waiting times, improve patient outcomes and, ultimately, to support delivery of the commitment to return to the NHS constitutional standard that 92% of all patients will wait no longer than 18 weeks from referral-to-treatment, by March 2029.

Surgical hubs are part of the GIRFT High Volume Low Complexity programme and mainly focus on driving improvement in six high volume specialties. With GIRFT support, there are currently 114 elective surgical hubs that are operational across England as of March 2025. These surgical hubs help separate elective care facilities from urgent and emergency care, improving outcomes for patients and reducing pressures on hospitals. GIRFT's role also includes delivering an accreditation scheme for surgical hubs. To date, 44 surgical hubs have been accredited for clinical and operational excellence.

Within the Elective Reform Plan, the Government has committed to providing quicker access for patients to common surgical hub procedures by opening 17 new and expanded surgical hubs by June 2025 and ramping up the number of hubs over the next three years, so more operations can be carried out.

Through the GIRFT Further Faster programme, a cohort of 20 trusts, and their integrated care systems (ICS), chosen in areas of the greatest economic inactivity, are being given support to improve and streamline pathways for patients and spread good practice in areas with high levels of economic inactivity. All 20 trusts are working to deliver 'High Flow Theatre' lists and super clinics, not only to deliver rapid impact, but also to build into 'business as usual' pathways.

## ■ Hospitals: Hygiene

**Luke Myer:**

**[36912]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) ensure cleanliness in NHS hospitals to prevent infections and (b) address instances where contractors responsible for cleanliness fail to meet their obligations.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Hospitals are responsible for ensuring that third-party service providers (e.g., cleaning, catering, maintenance staff) adhere to infection prevention and control (IPC) standards. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) evaluates whether hospitals have effective oversight of subcontractors and whether their services meet regulatory cleanliness and safety standards. More information on these CQC inspections is available at the following link:

<https://www.cqc.org.uk/what-we-do/how-we-do-our-job/our-infection-prevention-control-inspections>

Guidance for the cleaning of healthcare environments is contained in the NHS England national IPC manual. The manual is mandatory for all healthcare staff delivering services within the National Health Service in England. This includes the

safe management of the care environment, linen and blood and body fluid spillages, and more information is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/national-infection-prevention-and-control-manual-nipcm-for-england/chapter-1-standard-infection-control-precautions-sicps/#1-6>

## ■ Kidney Diseases

**Daisy Cooper:** [37305]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of the UK becoming a signatory to the World Health Organisation's resolution entitled Reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases through the promotion of kidney health and strengthening prevention and control of kidney disease.

**Sorcha Eastwood:** [37868]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will support the ratification of the World Health Organisation Resolution to include chronic kidney disease in its priority list of non-communicable diseases.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The United Kingdom actively engaged in negotiations on the World Health Organization (WHO) resolution, Reducing the Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) through the Promotion of Kidney Health and Strengthening Prevention and Control of Kidney Disease, in advance of the 156th WHO Executive Board in February 2025. The Executive Board recommended adoption of all resolutions considered to the World Health Assembly, including this one, subject to ongoing budget discussions. If adopted, the resolution will apply to the UK as a Member State of the WHO. We remain committed to tackling NCDs, including kidney disease, domestically and internationally.

## ■ Kidney Diseases: Health Services

**Jade Botterill:** [36962]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help (a) prevent and (b) increase the early detection of chronic kidney disease through the 10-year health plan.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The 10-Year Health Plan will deliver the three big shifts the National Health Service needs to be fit for the future, namely from hospital to community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention. All of these are relevant to improving the prevention and detection of chronic kidney disease in all parts of the country.

The 10-Year Health Plan will build on the NHS Health Check which aims to prevent heart disease, stroke and kidney disease among adults aged between 40 and 74 years old, and engages over 1.4 million people a year.

Earlier diagnosis will help people manage their conditions, prevent deterioration and improve survival rates. More tests and scans delivered in the community, better joint

working between services, and greater use of apps and wearable technology will all support the early detection of many long-term conditions such as chronic kidney disease.

## ■ Long Covid

**Dr Scott Arthur:**

**[36934]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support people with long covid; and what steps he is taking to increase awareness of the impacts of long covid.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Across England, services within the National Health Service are available to support people with post-COVID syndrome, often described as long COVID. These services offer physical, cognitive and psychological assessment, and, where appropriate, refer patients onto existing services for treatment and rehabilitation.

NHS England has recently completed a long COVID and myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) stocktake, aimed to provide a national overview of service delivery in commissioning these services. It included assessing access, activity and outcomes. The findings confirmed significant variation in care delivery across England and a lack of comprehensive activity data.

To support clinical leadership in this area, NHS England has worked in partnership with the British Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine to develop a new Clinical Post-COVID Society to facilitate the ongoing sharing of best practice to support people affected by long COVID. More information about the society is available at the following link:

<https://www.clinicalpcs.org.uk>.

Information on long COVID is widely available from the NHS and the Government in a variety of formats. Detailed information for people of all ages and background on symptoms and the healthcare support that is available for long COVID remains available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/post-covid-syndrome-long-covid/>

Over the last five years, the Government, through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and the Medical Research Council, has invested over £57 million in long COVID research, with almost £40 million of this through two specific research calls on long COVID. The NIHR specifically has invested £42.7 million towards research for long COVID. The projects funded aim to improve our understanding of the diagnosis and underlying mechanisms of the disease, and the effectiveness of both pharmacological and non-pharmacological therapies and interventions, as well as to evaluate clinical care. Further information on the research into long COVID commissioned through the NIHR is available at the following link:

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-do/covid-19/long-COVID>

## ■ Low Alcohol Drinks

**Mr James Frith:** [\[36443\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of increasing the alcohol-free threshold from 0.05% ABV to 0.5% ABV.

**Gregory Stafford:** [\[37074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has considered raising the alcohol-free threshold from 0.05% ABV to 0.5% ABV.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Under our Health Mission, the government is committed to prioritising preventative public health measures to support people to live longer, healthier lives.

While the Government has not made a specific assessment of changing the alcohol-free threshold, the Department will continue to work across Government to better understand how we can best reduce alcohol-related harms, including exploring the potential opportunities presented by alcohol-free and low-alcohol drinks.

## ■ Maternity Services: Inquiries

**Katie White:** [\[33763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many independent inquiries into maternity care have been conducted by NHS England in the last 20 years; what the key recommendations of those reviews were; and how many of those recommendations have been implemented.

**Karin Smyth:**

There have been four independent inquiries into maternity and neonatal services provided at the University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust, published in 2015, Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, published in 2020 and 2022, and East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust, published in 2022. There is also an on-going inquiry into maternity care provided at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, expected to publish in June 2026.

These reviews have uncovered issues at both a local and national level related to failing to listen to women and families, staffing, failing to learn from errors, lack of leadership, compassionate care and teamworking.

These inquiries jointly have approximately 130 recommendations aimed at various areas of the system. The Morecambe Bay report had 44 recommendations in total; 18 recommendations were specifically for the trust, all of which have been implemented, and 26 recommendations were aimed at the wider National Health Service, the majority of which have been addressed and implemented.

The Ockenden review at Shrewsbury and Telford had three key asks for my Rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, 15 immediate and essential actions to improve maternity care and safety across England and 60 local



recommendations for the trust. The inquiry into East Kent had eight recommendations across four key action areas for NHS England, the Government and wider system and one additional recommendation for the trust itself. Most of the remaining recommendations, along with those from other reports, were addressed in NHS England's Three-year Delivery Plan for maternity and neonatal services, published in 2023, which sets national measures to make care safer, more personalised and more equitable.

## ■ **Motor Vehicles: Exhaust Emissions**

**Olly Glover:**

[\[36301\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of excess diesel emissions from vehicles using defeat devices on (a) the prevalence of respiratory diseases and (b) public health.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Diesel vehicles significantly impact air pollution in the United Kingdom, primarily through emissions of nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and particulate matter. Poor air quality is one of the largest environmental risks to public health in the UK, and epidemiological studies have shown that long-term exposure to air pollution, over years or lifetimes, reduces life expectancy, mainly due to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and lung cancer. Short-term exposure, over hours or days, to elevated levels of air pollution can also cause a range of health impacts, including effects on lung function, exacerbation of asthma, increases in respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions and mortality.

The Department for Transport is responsible for setting and enforcing standards for NO<sub>x</sub> emissions from diesel vehicles. The Market Surveillance Unit within the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency is undertaking a programme looking at possible non-compliant diesel emissions in Euro 5 and Euro 6A/B/C diesel cars and vans where there is reason to believe that they contain a prohibited defeat device. The programme is designed to ensure any non-compliance found is fixed as soon as reasonably possible, working together with manufacturers to achieve real-world impacts on air quality. There is no current assessment of the potential health impacts specifically related to the use of defeat devices in diesel vehicles.

## ■ **Myasthenia Gravis: Medical Treatments**

**Sadik Al-Hassan:**

[\[37487\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he has taken to increase patient access to new and innovative treatments for Myasthenia Gravis.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Government is committed to improving the lives of those living with rare diseases, such as myasthenia gravis. The UK Rare Diseases Framework sets out four priorities collaboratively developed with the rare disease community: these include improving access to specialist care, treatments, and drugs. We remain

committed to delivering under the Framework and published the annual England action plan in February 2025.

In the 2023 England Rare Disease Action Plan, action 25 was introduced to review the effectiveness of Innovative Medicines Fund (IMF), Early Access to Medicines Scheme (EAMS) and Innovative Licensing and Access Pathway (ILAP) in improving access to treatments for people living with rare diseases.

NHS England, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency will meet annually to continue to discuss progress and the role of EAMS, ILAP and IMF in supporting access to treatments for people living with rare diseases. These meetings will include representatives from patient advocacy groups, industry and clinical researchers. Further progress on action 25 has been reported in the 2025 action plan, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/england-rare-diseases-action-plan-2025>

#### ■ NHS England: Pay

**Mr Mark Francois:**

[37139]

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, whether the annual salary of the Finance Director of NHS East of England is within the maximum exception zone for the salary band.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Finance Director of NHS East of England is remunerated within the maximum exception zone salary band.

**Mr Mark Francois:**

[37140]

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, whether the annual salary of the Chief Operating Officer of NHS East of England is within the maximum exception zone for the salary band.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Chief Operating Officer of NHS East of England is remunerated within the maximum exception zone salary band.

**Mr Mark Francois:**

[37142]

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, which posts within NHS East of England are remunerated at the ESM 1 salary band.

**Karin Smyth:**

Of the 14 roles in the ESM 1 band in NHS East of England, those that are currently filled are:

- Director of Commissioning Finance;
- Director of Nursing - Quality and Transformation;
- Director of Commissioning of Public Health;
- Director of Strategy, Planning and Supply;
- Director of Nursing – Clinical Quality;
- Director of Planned Care and Improvement;
- Director of Digital Transformation; and
- Director of UEC, Emergency Response and Performance.

### ■ NHS: Crimes of Violence

**Luke Myer:**

[\[36909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help prevent NHS clinical staff from experiencing (a) verbal and (b) physical abuse at work.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government takes a zero-tolerance approach to any kind of abusive behaviour. All National Health Service staff, including those in clinical roles, should be able to care for patients without fear of verbal or physical abuse.

Individual employers are responsible for the health and safety of their staff and put in place many measures to do this including appropriate security, training and emotional support.

To support them, NHS England is leading work on violence prevention and reduction to provide better training and support for employers and their staff. In December 2024, NHS England published a refreshed Violence Prevention and Reduction Standard. The standard sets out guidance for trusts to help them identify risks, training requirements and crucially, what support must be made available to those staff affected.

### ■ NHS: Drugs

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

[\[36735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the role of (a) generic, (b) biosimilar and (c) off-patent medicines in addressing medicine shortages.

**Karin Smyth:**

The resilience of United Kingdom supply chains is a key priority, and the Department is committed to helping to build long term supply chain resilience for medicines. The Department recognises the important role all off patent medicines, including generic and biosimilar medicines, together with branded medicines play in ensuring patients

across the UK market have access to the medicines they need and at a price that also ensures value for money.

It is important to note that, like branded medicines, generic and biosimilar medicines can also face issues with supply. While we can't always prevent supply issues from occurring, we have a range of well-established processes and tools to manage them when they arise and mitigate risks to patients. These include close and regular engagement with suppliers, use of alternative strengths or forms of a medicine to allow patients to remain on the same product, expediting regulatory procedures, sourcing unlicensed imports from abroad, adding products to the restricted exports and hoarding list, use of serious shortage protocols, and issuing National Health Service communications to provide management advice and information on the issue to healthcare professionals including pharmacists, so they can advise and support their patients.

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

[\[36736\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what performance improvement targets he has sought from the MHRA on bringing down the licensing backlog of generic and biosimilar medicine applications.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's (MHRA) focus has been to ensure all applications received through all routes are processed on time. The MHRA has now embedded improvements in processing licencing applications into standard working practice. Milestones for licencing clearance during 2024 were achieved in line with the business plan commitment to remove backlogs, including generics and biosimilars by the end of March 2025.

During 2024, the MHRA has been working through a high number of applications to return to working to statutory timelines. From 1 September 2024, all applications submitted, regardless of application pathway, are being completed within statutory timelines. The Agency's original backlog of national marketing authorisation applications has been eliminated, with decisions made for over 1,680 licence applications in 2024.

The MHRA has been working in close collaboration with health system partners and industry to ensure that robust, appropriate and prompt decisions are made. The MHRA is on track to clear all statutory backlog activities by the end of March 2025.

## ■ NHS: Recruitment

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[34017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether NHS providers are obligated to (a) advertise residency positions for British nationals before foreign nationals and (b) hire British residents before overseas residents.

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[34018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how the career experience of British nationals and foreign nationals are compared when NHS providers are considering residency applications.

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[34019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many domestically trained applicants were rejected for residency positions with NHS providers in each year since 2020.

**Karin Smyth:**

The decision to remove the Resident Labour Market Test for doctors in 2020 has meant that more international medical graduates have also been able to apply for speciality training places, increasing the number of candidates for roles.

Residencies, or speciality training positions, are advertised nationally, and the process is administered by a lead deanery on behalf of the four nations of the United Kingdom. There is no obligation on National Health Service providers to advertise residency positions for British nationals before foreign nationals, or to hire British residents before overseas residents. The rules and criteria for recruitment into higher speciality training are agreed by the Medical and Dental Recruitment and Selection committees on behalf of the four statutory education bodies of the UK and must meet standards required by the General Medical Council. Working with NHS England, we continue to keep the selection process for all applicants to medical speciality training under review.

Data provided by NHS England shows that in 2024, 14,620 graduates from UK medical schools applied for medical specialty training posts. Of these 1,299 were unsuccessful or unappointable in any of their applications as individuals can make multiple applications. A further 1,476 UK graduates were deemed appointable at interview but did not receive any offers due to post availability.

Information on medical specialty recruitment in 2021, 2022 and 2023 is published by NHS England. This includes information for each individual medical specialty programme on the number of applications made, the number of appointable applicants, the number of offers made and the number of accepted roles. The information is available by nationality group and country of qualification. The published data does not present this information across all specialties together as presented for the 2024 round. The information is available at the following link:

<https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/equality-and-diversity>

## ■ NHS: Workplace Pensions

**Daisy Cooper:**

[\[36782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 31 December 2024 to Question 20389 on NHS: Workplace Pensions, how many full time

equivalent staff NHSBSA have allocated to administer the remedy implementation for those retirees who will be asked to make a choice about whether to revert to legacy benefits.

**Karin Smyth:**

The NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) has allocated 112 working-time equivalent staff to administer the public service pensions remedy ('McCloud') immediate choice for retired members of the NHS Pension Scheme. This number is flexible and, as the work progresses, the NHSBSA will increase staff numbers to enable remedy implementation to proceed as quickly as possible.

■ **Nurses**

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[36505\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of protecting the title of nurse in law.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government recognises that the protection in law of certain professional titles is important for public safety. Protecting a title provides assurance to the public that someone using that title is competent and safe to practise

Although 'registered nurse' is a protected title, 'nurse' is currently not a protected title. The Government is aware of the concerns which this generates, along with the complications associated with protecting the nurse title, given that it is used in multiple professions; for example, registered nurses, dental nurses, school nurses and veterinary nurses.

The Government will continue to work with the professional regulators, including the Nursing and Midwifery Council, as it considers its priorities for professional regulation and will set out its position shortly.

■ **Obesity**

**Max Wilkinson:**

[\[37358\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential (a) structural and (b) social causes of obesity.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Obesity is a complex public health issue with multiple interacting factors impacting over a life course. Genetic and physiological factors, growth and development early in life, eating and physical activity behaviours, individual beliefs and attitudes and broader environmental (structural), economic and social drivers play a role in determining obesity. As such, the assessment of social and structural factors influencing obesity, diet and physical activity has been, and will continue to be, integral to our assessments.

This includes, for example: assessment of National Diet and Nutrition Survey data by index of multiple deprivation (IMD); assessment of Health Survey for England and

National Child Measurement Programme data on overweight and obesity by region and IMD; assessments set out within Theme 4 of the UK food security report; assessments of Active lives adult survey data and Active lives children and young people survey on physical activity by local authority, region and England, and by IMD; assessment of data on fast food outlets in the built-up environment by local authority, region and England, and by IMD; impact assessments including regulations restricting the placement of less healthy products in key selling locations in store and online; and consideration of vulnerable groups, racially and ethnically diverse groups and health inequality underpins all risk assessments undertaken by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, which advises the Governments of the four United Kingdom nations on nutrition related matters.

Under the Health Mission, the Government is committed to prevention and to tackling obesity, creating a fairer and healthier food environment.

## ■ Obesity: Children

**Jas Athwal:**

**[36942]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help reduce obesity rates amongst children under the age of 16 in East London.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The prevention of ill health is a clear priority for the Government, and the cornerstone of this is supporting children to live healthier lives. We face a childhood obesity crisis, and the Government will take action to tackle the root causes of obesity head on, easing the strain on the National Health Service and creating the healthiest generation of children ever.

The Government has already laid secondary legislation to restrict advertisements of less healthy food and drink to children on TV and online from 1 October 2025, announced changes to the planning framework for fast food outlets near schools and is committed to banning the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to children under 16 years old.

We are also working collaboratively across Government to deliver a resilient food system that promotes health and food security. The Food Strategy will work to provide healthier, more easily accessible food to help people live longer, healthier lives.

Officials in the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities regional teams work closely with local partners including local authorities and the NHS to support them with local initiatives to promote a healthy lifestyle and tackle obesity. In London, there is Every Child a Healthier Weight Delivery Plan. This helps to drive partnership action on healthy weight across the NHS, local and regional government and wider partners. More information is available at the following link:

<https://www.adph.org.uk/networks/london/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/05/Every-Child-a-Healthier-Weight-Delivery-Plan-ECAHW-Final090523.pdf>

## ■ Obesity: Drugs

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[33552\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of the number of deaths caused by weight-loss drugs in each of the last five years.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is responsible for ensuring medicines, medical devices, and blood components for transfusion meet applicable standards of safety, quality, and efficacy. The MHRA rigorously assesses available data, including from the Yellow Card scheme, and seeks advice from their independent advisory committee, the Commission on Human Medicines, where appropriate to inform regulatory decisions.

Patient safety is our top priority, and no medicine would be approved unless it met our expected standards of safety, quality and effectiveness. Our role is to continually monitor the safety of medicines during their use, including GLP-1 receptor agonists (RAs). We have robust, safety monitoring and surveillance systems in place for all healthcare products. When a safety issue is confirmed, we always act promptly to inform patients and healthcare professionals and take appropriate steps to mitigate any identified risk. New medicines, such as GLP-1 RAs, are more intensively monitored to ensure that any new safety issues are identified promptly.

It is important to note that a reaction reported to the Yellow Card scheme does not necessarily mean it has been caused by the medicine, only that the reporter had a suspicion it may have. Underlying or concurrent illnesses may be responsible, or the events could be coincidental.

Based on the current evidence, the benefits of GLP-1 RAs outweigh the potential risks when used for the licensed indications. The decision to start, continue or stop treatments should be made jointly by patients and their doctor, based on full consideration of the benefits and risks. We strongly encourage patients and healthcare professionals to continue reporting suspected side effects to GLP-1 RAs through our Yellow Card scheme.

The following table shows the number of Yellow Card reports received for each GLP1 RA with a fatal outcome up to and including 31 January 2025, along with the number of these which were reported with an indication relating to weight management:

GLP1 RA	NUMBER OF REPORTS WITH A FATAL OUTCOME (OF WHICH INCLUDE AN INDICATION RELATING TO WEIGHT MANAGEMENT)
Semaglutide	29 (4)
Liraglutide	35 (8)
Tirzepatide	18 (10)



Source: MHRA database

As the use of the GLP-1 RAs increases, so have the number of Yellow Card reports associated with these medicines. Yellow Card reporting rates can be influenced by many factors including the seriousness of the adverse drug reactions, their ease of recognition and the extent of use of a particular product. Reporting can also be stimulated by publicity and awareness about a product.

## ■ Paramedical Staff

**Jas Athwal:**

[\[36944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the number of paramedics in England.

**Karin Smyth:**

In November 2024, there were 20,243 full time equivalent paramedics employed across the 10 National Health Service ambulance services in England, representing 1,518 or 8.1% more than a year ago and 4,131 or 25.6% more than five years ago.

In summer 2025, we will publish a refreshed Long Term Workforce Plan to deliver the transformed health service we will build over the next decade. We will 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.

## ■ Plastic Surgery: Regulation

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[37688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of regulatory reform within the aesthetic industry.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[37689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the level of patient safety within the aesthetic industry.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[37690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that practitioners within the aesthetic industry comply with (a) licensing and (b) regulations.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[37691\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to introduce legal requirements for practitioners of non-surgical aesthetic treatments.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government is committed to taking action to address longstanding concerns about the safety of the cosmetics sector and is exploring options for further regulation in this area. We will set out the details of our approach in due course.

**■ Prostate Cancer: Health Services****Martin Wrigley:** [\[36892\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that people with an early prostate cancer diagnosis can quickly access (a) treatment and (b) care.

**Ashley Dalton:**

Improving access to treatment and care are key priorities for the Government for all cancer types, including prostate cancer.

To achieve this, we have delivered an extra 40,000 operations, scans, and appointments each week, during our first year in Government as the first step to ensuring early diagnosis and faster treatment. Additionally, we will spend £70 million on new radiotherapy machines, to ensure the most advanced treatment is available to patients who need it.

Our forthcoming National Cancer Plan will include further details on how we will improve outcomes for cancer patients, as well as improving access to treatment and care.

**■ Radiotherapy: Medical Equipment****Clive Jones:** [R] [\[36265\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 5 March 2025 to Question 32470 on Radiotherapy: Medical Equipment, for what reason his Department has not published the full details of the funding allocation for replacing older radiotherapy machines.

**Ashley Dalton:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to Question [32470](#) on 5 March 2025.

**■ Rare Diseases: Research****Brian Mathew:** [\[36536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to further research into rare diseases.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Department funds rare disease research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). 17 NIHR Biomedical Research Centres support research into rare diseases and the NIHR is working in partnership with the Medical Research Council to co-fund a UK Rare Disease Research Platform which brings together research teams across the United Kingdom with patients, stakeholders and technologies to deliver rare disease research with greater impact.

## ■ Semaglutide

**Bobby Dean:** [\[36861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the qualifying criteria for (a) Ozempic and (b) Wegovy.

**Karin Smyth:**

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is the independent body that develops authoritative, evidence-based recommendations for the National Health Service on whether new medicines represent a clinically and cost-effective use of resources. NICE evaluates medicines in accordance with their marketing authorisations, including any criteria set out in the summary of product characteristics, granted by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. The National Health Service in England is legally required to fund medicines and treatments recommended by NICE under its technology appraisal and highly specialised technologies programmes. NICE develops its recommendations in line with its established methods and processes which include a careful consideration of the evidence and engagement with stakeholders.

NICE has published guidance that recommends the medicine semaglutide subject to specified clinical criteria for use in the treatment of type 2 diabetes, for which it is marketed as Ozempic, and for use in weight management, including weight loss and weight maintenance, alongside a reduced-calorie diet and increased physical activity in adults, for which it is marketed as Wegovy. NICE is currently planning a review of its guidance on the use of semaglutide in the treatment of weight loss and, subject to licensing, developing recommendations on its use for preventing major cardiovascular events in people with cardiovascular disease and living with overweight or obesity.

## ■ Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood: Farnham and Bordon

**Gregory Stafford:** [\[37024\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether health professionals in Farnham and Bordon constituency are currently receiving training on Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood.

**Gregory Stafford:** [\[37025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether local authorities in Farnham and Bordon have access to a dedicated key worker for families affected by Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood; and whether there is a formal referral process to SUDC UK for additional support.

**Gregory Stafford:** [\[37026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to (a) raise awareness of Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood within schools and local

communities and (b) provide educational materials for parents and professionals on this subject.

**Ashley Dalton:**

We recognise the devastating impact of sudden unexplained death in childhood (SUDC) on affected families and communities, and the importance of raising awareness of SUDC amongst relevant professionals, communities and parents.

Information on SUDC is available at the following link, which also signposts to SUDC.UK:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sudden-infant-death-syndrome-sids/>

Additional information for parents on SUDC is available in the form of the booklet "When a Child Dies".

Health visitors in particular play a key role in supporting child health, wellbeing, and parenting confidence. We are committed to strengthening health visiting services, ensuring we have the staff needed so parents and families receive appropriate care from the right professional.

Overall, local authorities determine what public health services they fund, to ensure these are tailored to their local needs. The Department of Health and Social Care does not hold the health workforce data for individual local authorities or the training they receive.

In schools, the Department for Education is funding mental health and wellbeing support for school and college leaders. This includes professional supervision and counselling for those who need it. Support continues to be available and can be accessed by visiting the Education Support website, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

■ **Supermarkets: Nutrition**

**Ian Roome:**

**[29338]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of introducing mandatory healthiness targets for large supermarket retailers.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The Government is committed to raising the healthiest generation of children and tackling the three biggest killers which will require effort from across society on not just obesity but alcohol and smoking. We have made a start with Tobacco and Vapes Bill and will continue to speak to partners across industry and civic society to best understand what actions help to change behaviours in a way that puts power in the hands of consumers.

As part of the Government's Plan for Change, we are committed to achieving our health mission to build a National Health Service fit for the future, and under the 10-

Year Health Plan to shift from 'sickness to prevention'. Making the healthier choice the easier choice is a major part of creating a food environment that is fairer, with the fewest lives lost to the biggest killers and where everyone lives well for longer. Obesity is one of the key drivers of ill health, economic inactivity and premature mortality, as highlighted in the recently published Get Britain Working White Paper.

As part of considerations around mandatory healthiness targets, the Food Data Transparency Partnership (FDTP) was created prior to the 2024 General Election; this was a shared programme of work across the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, and the Food Standards Agency. The FDTP was paused at the election and is being reviewed alongside other obesity policies.

### ■ **Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust: Standards**

**Steve Darling:**

[\[36168\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which services GIRFT have been reviewing as part of the healthcare system that impacts on Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust in the last two years.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Getting It Right First Time team has been supporting the One Devon Programme with a particular focus on orthopaedics, spinal surgery, cardiology, gynaecology and ophthalmology services.

### ■ **Tuberculosis: West Midlands**

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

[\[36732\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of tuberculosis in (a) Birmingham, Edgbaston constituency (b) Birmingham and (c) the West Midlands.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The latest annual and quarterly Tuberculosis (TB) reports for England, published by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), include detailed data analysis up to the end of 2023 and provisional data up to the end of 2024; this includes the West Midlands and Birmingham city local authority area. The full report and data tables are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tuberculosis-in-england-2024-report>

TB notification rates in the West Midlands showed a steady decline between 2012 and 2019, after which notification rates plateaued before beginning to increase in 2022. In 2023, the TB rates for the West Midlands rose by 7.8%, giving the West Midlands the second highest TB notification rate after London.

Provisional data for 2024 indicates a continued and accelerated rise, namely 22.2%, in TB notifications in the West Midlands, increasing from 538 to 709 cases. This is the largest rise in any region during 2024 and is likely due to more arrivals into the area

from high TB incidence countries and a backlog in testing and treatment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Further analysis for the West Midlands region is being undertaken.

Within the West Midlands, Wolverhampton and Birmingham City have the highest rates. In 2023 Birmingham City saw a 17% increase in the number of TB notifications compared to 2022, from 184 to 216.

UKHSA provides three-year annual incidence rates for West Midlands and Birmingham City on the 'Fingertips' website. The three-year annual incidence rate for the West Midlands is significantly higher than the national rate for England. Birmingham City's three-year annual incidence rate ranks 19th highest among local authority areas in England. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/TB#page/1/gid/1/ati/502/iid/91359/age/1/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

There are currently no published analyses of ward level data; therefore, data specific to Edgbaston is not available.

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

**[36733]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of vaccination rates among babies and children for tuberculosis in (a) Birmingham, Edgbaston constituency, (b) Birmingham and (c) the West Midlands.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) monitors trends in the level of childhood vaccination rates, including Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccination, at upper tier local authority, region and country level.

Official vaccine coverage estimates, for the BCG vaccine, are measured for eligible children in England at three months and 12 months of age and are published quarterly by UKHSA. These are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/cover-of-vaccination-evaluated-rapidly-cover-programme-2024-to-2025-quarterly-data>

Annual estimates are published by NHS England at local authority level, and are available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-immunisation-statistics/england-2023-24>

Edgbaston falls within the Birmingham Upper Tier Local Authority. The latest data, published in December 2024, captures BCG coverage at the age of three months for children born April to June 2024 and at age 12 months for children born July to September 2023. Measured at three months, coverage was 87.0% in Birmingham and 87.1% in the West Midlands. Measured at 12 months, it was 85.3% in Birmingham and 87.0% in the West Midlands. These figures are higher than the coverage of 78.4% at 3 months and 84.1% at 12 months in England.

## ■ Vaccination: Children

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

**[36734]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of vaccination rates for routine childhood immunisations in (a) Birmingham, Edgbaston, (b) Birmingham and (c) the West Midlands.

**Ashley Dalton:**

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) monitors trends in the level of childhood vaccination rates by upper tier local authority (UTLA), region and country level.

Edgbaston falls within the Birmingham UTLA. From 2013/14 to 2023/24, coverage of the first dose of the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR1) vaccine in children aged five years old has decreased by 7.1 percentage points to 87.0% in Birmingham and 3.5 percentage points to 91.9% in the West Midlands. In comparison, the 2023/24 MMR1 coverage in England was 91.4%.

The most recent figures, published in December 2024, show immunisations coverage across all vaccines in children aged one and two years old was 80% or higher in Birmingham and 87% or higher in the West Midlands, in comparison to 87% or higher in England overall. Coverage was slightly lower in children aged five years old, at or above 74% in Birmingham and at or above 82% in the West Midlands, in comparison to 81% or higher in England overall. No local authority in the West Midlands had coverage exceeding the World Health Organization (WHO) target of 95% in all the routine childhood immunisations.

Data on coverage of all routine childhood immunisations are published quarterly by UKHSA, and annually by NHS England. They are available at the following links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/cover-of-vaccination-evaluated-rapidly-cover-programme-2024-to-2025-quarterly-data>

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-immunisation-statistics/england-2023-24>

## ■ West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust: Domestic Visits

**Daisy Cooper:**

**[37307]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 25 July 2024 to Question 404 on Watford Hospital: Construction, whether he plans to visit West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust before 4 July 2025.

**Karin Smyth:**

Ministers regularly consider visits across the country to see the impact of their policy areas. Any plans to visit specific locations will be notified to the relevant Members of Parliament in advance.

**HOME OFFICE****■ British Nationality**

**Seamus Logan:** [\[37888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the new guidance on the good character requirement for British citizenship complies with the UK's obligations under Article 31 of the 1951 Refugee Convention.

**Seema Malhotra:**

We take our international obligations very seriously, including those under the Refugee Convention 1951. The good character policy is compliant with those obligations.

Each citizenship application will continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis considering all positive and negative factors. The Secretary of State may choose to apply discretion to grant citizenship on an exceptional basis where there are particularly exceptional, compelling, or mitigating circumstances.

**■ Cannabis: Regulation**

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36755\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of a legally regulated cannabis market on tax revenue.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if her Department will make an estimate of the potential annual public spending savings that could be achieved through the legal regulation of cannabis.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of a regulated cannabis market on (a) public health and (b) drug-related harms.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions her Department has had on the regulation of cannabis as a means to improve public health outcomes and reduce the burden on the NHS.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of legal cannabis regulation on the (a) workload and (b) costs associated with drug-related (i) policing, (ii) courts and (iii) prisons.



**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of reallocating police resources currently spent on cannabis-related enforcement to other public safety priorities.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with international counterparts from countries that have legalised cannabis on the (a) economic and (b) public health impacts of regulation.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of a legal cannabis industry on UK (a) job creation, (b) investment and (c) economic growth.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has considered reallocating police resources currently spent on cannabis-related enforcement to other public safety priorities.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent studies her Department has considered on the effectiveness of regulated cannabis markets in reducing adolescent cannabis consumption.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of a legal cannabis market on criminal exploitation of young people by drug gangs.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36768\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of cannabis legalisation on racial disparities in drug-related arrests and sentencing.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[36769\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has conducted an equality impact assessment on (a) the racial disparities in drug law enforcement and (b) how a regulated cannabis market could address these.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[37290\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential impact of reducing cannabis-related (a) arrests, (b) prosecutions and (c) court cases on the costs of the criminal justice system.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[37291\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of (a) reduced criminal justice costs and (b) increased tax revenue from legal cannabis on the economy.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[37292\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of cannabis legalisation on (a) reducing county lines drug trafficking and (b) associated law enforcement costs.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[37293\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies on the level of police resources for tackling cannabis use of the report by TRANSFORM Drug Policy Foundation, entitled High returns: the economic benefits of UK cannabis legalisation, published on 18 February 2025.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[37295\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential (a) implications for his policies of international examples of state-run cannabis markets and (b) impact of those markets on (i) economic growth and (ii) public health.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

This Government has no plans to legalise cannabis.

Cannabis is controlled as a Class B drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The maximum penalty for possession of a Class B drug is up to 5 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.

The maximum penalty for supply and production of a Class B drug is up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.

**■ Cannabis: Taxation****Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[37286\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of directing tax revenue from regulated cannabis into NHS mental health services.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[37287\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has reviewed international evidence on the impact of legal cannabis markets on (a) healthcare costs and (b) service demand.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

This Government has no plans to legalise cannabis.

Cannabis is controlled as a Class B drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The maximum penalty for possession of a Class B drug is up to 5 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both. The maximum penalty for supply and production of a Class B drug is up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.

## ■ Chinese Embassy

**Priti Patel:**

[\[36630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made with Cabinet colleagues of the potential impact of the proposed Chinese embassy on (a) national security and (b) the risk of transnational repression of diasporic (i) Hong Kong, (ii) Uyghur, (iii) Tibetan and (iv) other communities in the UK.

**Dan Jarvis:**

The planning application has been called in by the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and she will make this quasi-judicial decision independent from the rest of Government.

We are clear that national security is the first duty of Government. The Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary submitted written representations to the Planning Inspector on 14 January. That letter is clear that the Home Office has considered the breadth of national security issues.

We have a broad suite of powers to counter foreign interference, including those actions which amount to transnational repression. We will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to keep people safe.

## ■ Cybercrime: Police

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**

[\[37703\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what support systems are available for whistleblowers within the police to report colleagues (a) misusing police databases and (b) engaging in cybercrimes.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**

[\[37704\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of police (a) officers and (b) staff being convicted of cybercrimes on public trust in law enforcement agencies.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**

[\[37705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to restore public confidence in the police in the context of reports of (a) officer and (b) staff involvement in cybercrimes.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The commission of any criminal offence by police officers or staff is unacceptable and can seriously damage vital public trust and confidence in the police service

That is why the Home Secretary announced a series of reforms in October last year to raise standards in policing. These changes will strengthen the police misconduct system by introducing a presumption of dismissal for proven gross misconduct and mandating that conviction of certain criminal offences will automatically amount to gross misconduct.

Police officers have a statutory duty to report any wrongdoing under their Standards of Professional Behaviour and it is vital that they are supported in doing so. There are a number of routes, both internal and external, to raise such concerns, including through the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) Reporting Line, which enables police officers and staff to report concerns of wrongdoing that a criminal offence has been committed, or where there is evidence of conduct that would justify disciplinary proceedings.

### ■ **Emergency Services: Domestic Abuse**

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[36865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 7 March 2025 to Question 34055 on Emergency Services: Domestic Abuse, when she expects the first phase of embedded external domestic abuse specialists in police force control rooms to be completed in (a) Northumbria, (b) Northamptonshire, (c) Bedfordshire, (d) Humberside and (e) West Midlands police forces.

**Jess Phillips:**

Raneem's Law is the first time the Government is delivering a national, coordinated approach to embedding specialism into 999 control rooms. We intend to use learning from Phase One of Raneem's Law to inform plans for further national rollout across all 43 forces in England and Wales, as soon as possible. Exact timings for this will be announced in due course.

### ■ **Immigration: Ukraine**

**Maya Ellis:**

[\[36960\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to permit settled status to Ukrainian refugees who entered the UK under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

**Seema Malhotra:**

The Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme opened to applications on 4 February 2025, which enables Ukrainians in the UK under the Ukraine visa schemes to apply for a further 18 months' temporary permission to remain in the UK.

We recognise the Ukrainian government's desire for the future return of its citizens to Ukraine to assist in the rebuilding of the country. It is important our approach respects these wishes.

This is why the temporary sanctuary Ukraine visa Schemes do not lead to settlement in the UK. We continue to keep the Ukraine Schemes under consistent review in line with developments in the ongoing war.

There are other routes available for those who wish to settle in the UK permanently, if they meet the requirements.

## ■ Migration: National Security

**Mark Pritchard:** [\[36620\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will commission research into the (a) role of (i) Russia (ii) Belarus (iii) Iran (iv) China and (v) Yemen in the migration of people and (b) potential impact of that migration on national security.

**Seema Malhotra:**

Tackling irregular migration is a key focus for this government and we regularly research and review the drivers behind it to inform our response. National security, including security at our border, is of the highest importance which is why the Border Security Command was launched and works with colleagues across government and with a range of international partners to disrupt the activity of criminal smuggling gangs.

## ■ Passports: Fees and Charges

**Carla Lockhart:** [\[36149\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how revenue generated from passport fees is allocated.

**Seema Malhotra:**

Revenue generated from passport fees contribute to the recovery of the costs provided for under section 86 of the Immigration Act 2016:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/19/section/86>.

## ■ Police: Artificial Intelligence

**Zarah Sultana:** [\[36140\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of predictive policing methods on freedom of association.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

AI, and other technologies, can provide a wide range of benefits to improve efficiency and productivity in policing, as well as boosting public confidence by improving the prevention, detection and investigation of crime. However, the procurement and deployment of AI technology to assist with forecasting potential areas of crime or disorder, commonly known as 'predictive policing', must always be subject to strong safeguards.

The AI Covenant for Policing was agreed at National Police Chiefs Council in September 2023. This provides practical high-level principles that, if followed, will ensure that the police develop and use AI tools that are lawful, transparent, explainable, responsible, accountable and robust.

The Home Office has provided funding to support the National Police Chiefs Council AI Portfolio to drive consistency and create guidance for forces to develop and deploy AI tools, and we are undertaking further detailed work in this area. There are a number of essential wider protections in place, including the Public Sector Equality Duty, to ensure that all Government policies take account of the human rights impacts on individuals.

## ■ Refugees: English Language

**Rupert Lowe:** [\[36257\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent estimate she has made of (a) the number of contracts and (b) the value of those contracts for providing English language courses for refugees over the last three years.

**Seema Malhotra:**

The Government routinely publishes the details and costs of its procurement contracts on the contract finder website.

## ■ Resettlement: Afghanistan

**Ben Obese-Jecty:** [\[36480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many (a) men, (b) women, (c) male children and (d) female children have come to the UK via the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme since 6 January 2022.

**Seema Malhotra:**

Statistics on individuals resettled or relocated under the Afghan schemes are available in the [Immigration System Statistics](#) release. These statistics provide a breakdown by age and gender. For a summary of the data, see the resettlement section of the 'How many people come to the UK via safe and legal (humanitarian) routes?' chapter; for detailed data, see table Asy\_D02 of the [asylum and resettlement datasets](#).

Afghan Operational Data is published quarterly and is viewable at: [Afghan Resettlement Programme: operational data - GOV.UK](#).

**Wendy Chamberlain:** [\[36770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications were opened under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (a) Pathway 1, (b) Pathway 2 and (c) Pathway 3 in each month since August 2021.

**Wendy Chamberlain:** [\[36771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications were classed as under consideration in the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (a) Pathway 1, (b) Pathway 2 and (c) Pathway 3 in each month since August 2021.

**Wendy Chamberlain:** [36772]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications were closed under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (a) Pathway 1, (b) Pathway 2 and (c) Pathway 3 in each month since August 2021.

**Wendy Chamberlain:** [36773]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications were approved under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (a) Pathway 1, (b) Pathway 2 and (c) Pathway 3 in each month since August 2021.

**Wendy Chamberlain:** [36774]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications were rejected under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (a) Pathway 1, (b) Pathway 2 and (c) Pathway 3 in each month since August 2021.

**Seema Malhotra:**

The Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP) brings together existing Afghan resettlement schemes into a single, efficient pipeline. Further information about this is available on GOV.UK at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-resettlement-programme>.

The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) is not application based. Eligible people are prioritised and referred for resettlement under its 3 pathways, and further information about the scheme can be found on GOV.UK at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme>.

Whilst the Home Office has not published the specific information requested, our latest Afghan resettlement operational data publication (found on GOV.UK at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data>) shows that since the end of Op Pitting (in August 2021) up until the end of December 2024 we have welcomed around 34,940 people to safety from Afghanistan and the region. This includes 31,944 individuals who have been resettled under the ARP.\*

The operational data publication also shows that we have so far granted Indefinite Leave to Remain to:

- 9,784 under ACRS Pathway 1
- 1,247 under ACRS Pathway 2
- 1,594 under ACRS Pathway 3

Further statistics on individuals resettled or relocated under the Afghan schemes are available in the latest Immigration System Statistics release published on 27 February 2025. This can be accessed on GOV.UK at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>.

**■ Visas: EU Countries****Samantha Niblett:**[\[37420\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to enter a reciprocal agreement with the EU to enable visa-free travel entry for six months to EU Member States for UK citizens.

**Seema Malhotra:**

Article 492 of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement already provides for the UK and the EU provide for visa-free travel for short-term visits in respect of their nationals in accordance with their domestic law.

**HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT****■ Affordable Housing****Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[\[29173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to invest in the Affordable Homes Programme after 2026.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

We will set out details of new investment to succeed the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme at the Spending Review. This new investment will deliver a mix of homes for sub-market rent and homeownership, with a particular focus on delivering homes for Social Rent.

**■ Affordable Housing: Construction****Gideon Amos:**[\[36540\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department is taking steps to help reduce delays in Building Safety Regulator processes that relate to the construction of (a) social and (b) affordable homes.

**Alex Norris:**

MHCLG and Building Safety Regulator (BSR) have taken significant steps towards reducing delays relating to the Gateways construction processes. We have put in place a range of mitigations including additional funding aimed at boosting BSR capacity for additional building control caseworkers, who are being trained and have started to make an impact on reducing processing times. This has already resulted in some green shoots of improvement including BSR reporting a reduction in processing times of newly submitted applications. BSR are now informing new applicants to plan on 16 weeks to clear Gateway 2.

Older and more complex applications which were transferred from private building control companies that ceased to trade present a particular challenge to the processing time of new applications, but please be assured that the BSR are focused on clearing this backlog as quickly as possible.



It is important to recognise that BSR is a newly established operational regulator which is critical to upholding the standard of building regulations to industry. We are working closely with BSR to support their plan for improved delivery and guidance to the sector whilst maintaining the building safety standards. If applications for buildings do not meet this standard and pose a risk to life BSR will not approve them.

## ■ Buildings: Insulation

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[36418\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reason BRE group will continue to certify (a) cladding, (b) insulation and (c) other products.

**Alex Norris:**

The BRE is a conformity assessment body accredited by the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS). Following the criticisms of BRE in the Grenfell Inquiry, UKAS has conducted additional assessments of the BRE, and we are working closely with UKAS to understand how BRE intends to address the identified failings.

Government has published a construction product reform green paper which includes proposals on the capacity, competence and oversight of conformity assessment bodies. We are addressing these criticisms through the government response to recommendations as set out in the green paper published on 26 February 2025, as part of measures for system wide reform. Our proposals include new requirements and obligations on conformity assessment bodies, including that they must obtain a licence from the national regulator, and be subject to a statutory code. This will improve confidence in the rigour and competency of conformity assessment bodies. Following this consultation, we will set out the government's initial response and our next steps for long term reform.

## ■ Buildings: Safety

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[36419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 Report: Government response, published on 26 February 2025, what her planned timetable is for (a) primary and (b) secondary legislation on (i) fire and (ii) building safety.

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[36423\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 Report: Government response, published on 26 February 2025, whether she plans to implement recommendations accepted in principle in full.

**Alex Norris:**

The government has accepted all the findings of the Grenfell Inquiry Phase 2 report, and we will take forward all of the recommendations. We are committed to fixing all of the problems highlighted by the recommendations, including those we have accepted

in principle. We will make sure that we achieve the best outcomes for the public where the implementation of a recommendation requires further consideration, such as through public consultation.

Where the delivery of recommendations or wider commitments we have made in the response document require legislation, we will deliver these measures as soon as parliamentary time allows.

### ■ **Children's Play: Business Rates**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[36694\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 24 February 2025 to Question 30226 on Children's Play: Business Rates, whether children's soft play centres are entitled to retail, hospitality and leisure business rate relief; and what Special Category Code the Valuation Office Agency uses to categorise such hereditaments.

**Jim McMahon:**

The administration of business rates, including billing, enforcement and decisions on the award of relief, including for the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief Scheme is the responsibility of local councils. They do so having regard to the guidance published by the government.

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) is responsible for valuation matters. Soft play centres occupy a range of different types of building from retail premises to warehouse units and leisure centres. There is no specific VOA special category code that covers all soft play centres, they are attributed a special category code dependant on the type of premises in which they are located.

### ■ **Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[36696\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 21 February 2025 to Question 30144 on Chinese Embassy: Planning Inspectorate, if she will (a) list the representations that were received after the deadline, but which have been accepted by the Inspector and (b) state how many representations were submitted late but not accepted.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The representations which were received after the deadline that were accepted by the Inspector can be viewed in the inquiry library [here](#).

The number of representations submitted after the deadline and not accepted by the Inspector stands at 33 as of 12 March 2025.

**■ Council Tax: Thurrock****James McMurdock:** [\[37054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with Thurrock Council on council tax rises.

**James McMurdock:** [\[37056\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has had discussions with councils increasing council tax on the potential impact of those increases on residents.

**Jim McMahon:**

Local authorities are responsible for deciding the level of council tax. The government held a consultation on the provisional local government finance settlement, providing opportunity for the public and local authorities to share views on the proposed referendum principles.

**■ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: Wolverhampton****Steve Barclay:** [\[35254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, on how many days she has worked from her Department's office in Wolverhampton since 4 July 2024.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[36090\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many days each of her departmental Ministers has spent working at the Darlington Campus since 5 July 2024.

**Alex Norris:**

The Deputy Prime Minister and ministerial team work from a number of locations and offices across the country. The Deputy Prime Minister does not regularly work from the Wolverhampton office or Darlington Campus.

**■ Empty Property: Retail Trade****Wendy Morton:** [\[36397\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate her Department has made of the number of empty retail units in town centres; and what assessment she has made of the potential merits of introducing new (a) grants and (b) funding streams to encourage small businesses to occupy vacant spaces.

**Wendy Morton:** [\[36398\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to support (a) councils and (b) local authorities to improve high streets.

**Alex Norris:**

The commercial vacancy rate is 13.3% in England and 16.2% in the West Midlands. This government is committed to tackling high street vacancy and supporting small businesses. On 4 March, we launched the Plan for Neighbourhoods, a £1.5 billion investment to help revitalise local areas and fight deprivation in 75 places across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. We also introduced High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs), a power to auction the lease of persistently vacant commercial properties. This is backed by a fund of over £1 million to help local authorities implement these measures. Our Small Business Strategy, to be published in due course, will set out how we intend to further support small businesses on the high street and beyond.

**■ Fire and Rescue Services: Finance****Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[36478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 6 March 2025 to Question 34056 on Fire and Rescue Services: Finance, what specific elements of the Settlement Funding Assessment use population data from the 2001 Census.

**Jim McMahon:**

The 2013/2014 funding formulae for the Settlement Funding Assessment used a mix of 2001 and 2011 Census data. The publication available at [this link](#) provides further detail on which set of Census data each element of the formulae use.

The government is committed to introducing an improved and updated approach to funding local authorities, including Fire and Rescue Authorities, from 2026-27. We sought views on our principles and objectives for funding reform through a consultation which ran from 18 December 2024 - 12 February 2025.

**■ Flats: Fire Prevention****Alison Hume:**[\[32759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to help support leaseholders that have had EWS1 forms issued by Tri Fire.

**Alex Norris:**

As per the answer given to [Question UIN 28103](#) on 11 February 2025, my officials continue to regularly engage with the mortgage lending and insurance industries.

Where a mortgage lender who is a signatory to the statement on cladding is not accepting an EWS1 for a building which requires work to remediate building safety defects, then leaseholders should provide alternative evidence that their building is in the Cladding Safety Scheme, Building Safety Fund or covered by a developer that has signed the Developer Remediation Contract. This evidence could be, for example, a letter from MHCLG or the developer. Leaseholders can also complete a

Leaseholder Deed of Certificate to evidence they qualify for the leaseholder protections in the Building Safety Act.

For buildings which do not need remedial works, then lenders or insurers may accept Fire Risk Appraisals of External Walls.

## ■ **Hate Crime: Ahmadiyya**

**Luke Taylor:**

[\[33171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to help protect Ahmadiyya Muslims from hate crimes.

**Alex Norris:**

All forms of hatred and intolerance are completely unacceptable, including that directed at Ahmadiyya Muslims. We are committed to protecting the rights of individuals to freely practice their religion and we will not tolerate Islamophobia in any form.

The Government has established a working group to provide a definition of Anti-Muslim Hatred/Islamophobia, advising government and other bodies on how to best understand, quantify and define prejudice, discrimination, and hate crime targeted against Muslims. Alongside drawing on their own expertise, members will engage widely to ensure the definition accounts for the variety of backgrounds and experiences of Muslim communities across the United Kingdom.

This announcement builds on existing work with police and community partners to ensure effective monitoring of Islamophobia. The Government has worked with the police to fund True Vision, an online hate crime reporting portal, designed so that victims of hate crime do not have to visit a police station to report. We have also made up to £1 million of funding available this year to monitor Islamophobia and provide support to victims.

## ■ **HM Land Registry: Industrial Disputes**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[36679\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 27 January 2025 to Question 22777 on HM Land Registry: Buildings, and with reference to the Public and Commercial Services Union press release entitled Land Registry Action Short of a Strike begins, dated 22 January 2025, what the status is of the industrial action at HM Land Registry as of March 2025; what assessment she has made of the potential impact of that industrial action on office attendance requirements at HM Land Registry; and what steps she is taking to help resolve that dispute.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The action short of a strike (as per the Public and Commercial Services Union press release of 22 January 2025) is continuing as are talks with PCS to conclude the dispute.

The industrial action in question does not alter the expectation that HM Land Registry staff comply with the government's 60% office attendance requirement.

HM Land Registry has been monitoring office attendance of staff during the action short of a strike, and there has been no discernible impact.

MHCLG is in regular contact with HM Land Registry management and supports their attempts to resolve the dispute.

## ■ Homes for Ukraine Scheme

**Ian Roome:**

**[33223]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help Ukrainian refugees on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme secure private rented accommodation.

**Rushanara Ali:**

The Government provides guidance for Ukrainian guests on renting private accommodation at [Renting private accommodation: Homes for Ukraine - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/renting-private-accommodation-homes-for-ukraine).

Councils receive a tariff of £5,900 per Homes for Ukraine arrival in their area to support guests to rebuild their lives and fully integrate into communities. They have the flexibility to use the funding to support households as best suits the local area. This could include measures to support guests to access employment, English language provision and provide integration measures that support Ukrainians to access private rented accommodation. Councils are also using the funding to support measures such as 12 month rent guarantees, or paying rent in advance.

Ukrainians who hold a Homes for Ukraine visa permission may be entitled to Universal Credit, which could help with the cost of rent. Homes for Ukraine visa holders could be entitled to a 50% Council Tax discount if they live alone or if all adults in the property have a Homes for Ukraine visa.

We know that English language is a key factor to integration and economic independence, a critical enabler of access to the private rented sector, whilst in the UK. The Government has provided £11.5 million of funding for English language courses and employment support for up to 12,500 Ukrainians across the UK through the 'STEP Ukraine' programme. This will support their integration whilst in the UK, and economic independence - a critical enabler of access to the private rented sector (PRS). Ukrainians can also access the Adult Education Offer through councils which provide ESOL classes.

We engage closely with councils and the voluntary and community sector to ensure that we understand the needs of Ukrainians living in the UK and that adequate support is available.

## ■ Housing Estates: Service Charges

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[36422]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of trends in the level of service charges for (a) unadopted roads and (b) community spaces in (i) new build housing and (ii) private estate developments.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

My Department does not hold data on the level of estate management charges for specific services.

Data was, however, provided by the Competition and Markets Authority as part of their recent housebuilding market study which can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

The government is determined to end the injustice of 'fleecehold' entirely and we will consult this year on legislative and policy options to reduce the prevalence of private estate management arrangements, which are the root cause of the problems experienced by many residential freeholders. This consultation will help gather further data on this matter.

The government remain committed to protecting residential freeholders on private and mixed-tenure housing estates from unfair charges. This year we will consult on implementing the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act's new consumer protection provisions for the up to 1.75m homes that are subject to these charges, and bring these measures into force as quickly as possible thereafter. These include ensuring that homeowners who pay an estate management charge have better access to information they need to understand what they are paying for, the right to challenge the reasonableness at the First-tier Tribunal (in England), and to go to the tribunal to appoint a substitute manager.

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[36682]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department is taking steps to (a) reduce the level and (b) increase the transparency of service charges on (i) private estates and (ii) new build developments.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the hon. Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)).

## ■ Housing: Bricks

**Abtisam Mohamed:**

[36908]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help ensure that critical cavity nesting bird habitats are mandated in new housing developments.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer to Question UIN [22080](#) on 15 January 2025.

**■ Housing: Construction****Alex Mayer:** [\[36512\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of making telecommunications companies statutory consultees in the planning process for new housing developments.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the hon. Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 10 March 2025 ([HCWS510](#)).

**■ Housing: Windows****Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[36690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to make changes to the cost of (a) Lawful Development Certificate and (b) householder planning consent application in relation to making changes to the windows of an existing dwelling.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The fee for the enlargement, improvement or other alteration of a dwellinghouse will increase to £528 from 1 April 2025. The fee for lawful development certificates will vary depending on the type of development involved.

**■ Infrastructure: Planning Permission****James McMurdock:** [\[36338\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to improve transparency in the pre-application process for nationally significant infrastructure projects.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Duties set out Chapter 2 to Part 5 of the Planning Act 2008 require applicants for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) to publicise their proposals and consult specific persons and bodies as part of the pre-application process before their application is submitted. Paragraph 006 of the pre-application guidance sets out the statutory requirements applicants need to comply with, which includes publishing their Statement of Community Consultation. The relevant guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/planning-act-2008-pre-application-stage-for-nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects>.

**■ Leasehold: Reform****Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[36415\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to convert existing leasehold flats to commonhold tenure; and whether conversion will be voluntary.



**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[36416\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the (a) abolition of ground rents and (b) creation of commonhold tenure on the purchase price of new build flats.

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[36417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 on types of tenure used in new build development.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

As set out in the [Commonhold White Paper](#) published on 3 March 2025, the government are continuing to develop proposals and consulting with experts on the best way to achieve our aim of a more accessible route to conversion. It is our intention to set out further detail on the approved proposals for conversions in the draft Leasehold and Commonhold Bill later this year, alongside the reforms for commonhold and new supply.

As set out in the Written Ministerial Statement made on 21 November 2024 ( [HCWS244](#) ), the government remains firmly committed to its manifesto commitment to tackle unregulated and unaffordable ground rents, and we will deliver this in legislation.

## ■ Leasehold: Service Charges

**Mike Martin:**

[\[36939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department plans to prevent freeholders holding leaseholders liable for outstanding service charges incurred by the previous leaseholder.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The seller of a leasehold property is legally responsible for service charges owed up until the completion of the sale to the next leaseholder. A freeholder cannot require a leaseholder to pay charges owed by the previous leaseholder if the new leaseholder has not agreed this as part of the sale contract. The government would expect the incoming leaseholder's solicitors to act in their client's best interests in advising them and negotiating the terms of the sale contract.

If a landlord tries to claim that a leaseholder is liable for charges for which they are not liable, we recommend that the leaseholder seeks independent legal advice on how to proceed. Free initial advice is available from the government's Leasehold Advisory Service. The landlord may be able to take action against the previous leaseholder regarding their failure to pay service charges due for the previous leaseholder's period of ownership. The government believes that all liabilities and ongoing financial responsibilities should be made clear to potential purchasers of leasehold properties, prior to purchase.

The landlord should provide relevant information, including on any ongoing or planned service charges, and specify how regularly these charges will be reassessed or increased, during purchase of the property. This is most often set out in a Leasehold Property Enquiry form 1 (LPE1) enquiry form. Prospective buyers and their legal representative are advised to check this information carefully and take it into account when negotiating the purchase price of the property.

### ■ Local Government Finance: Cambridgeshire

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[36479]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the 2013 population projection from the 2011 Census used in the Settlement Funding Assessment estimates the population of Cambridgeshire to be in that year.

**Jim McMahon:**

The estimated projection from the 2011 Census of the population of Cambridgeshire for the 2013/2014 local government finance settlement is 635,923. More detail is available [here](#).

The government is committed to introducing an improved and updated approach to funding local authorities, including Fire and Rescue Authorities, from 2026-27. We sought views on our principles and objectives for funding reform through a consultation which ran from 18 December 2024 - 12 February 2025.

### ■ Local Government: Greater London

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[36100]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to paragraph 2.2.5 of the Devolution White Paper, published in December 2025, CP 1218, whether the Integrated Settlement for London will entail devolution of funding to (a) London Boroughs, (b) the pan-London organisation of London Councils and (c) the Greater London Authority; and whether she plans to transfer power from London Boroughs to the Greater London Authority.

**Jim McMahon:**

At Autumn Budget 2024 the Government committed to exploring how the Integrated Settlement policy could be applied for the Greater London Authority from the 2026-27 financial year onwards, taking into account the capital's unique devolution arrangements. This work is currently taking place and the Government plans to announce further details following the conclusion of Phase 2 of the Spending Review 2025.

In the English Devolution White Paper, the Government committed to working with the Greater London Authority to ensure the capital city benefits from new powers and funding being made available to other Strategic Authorities, while retaining pre-existing bespoke London arrangements. This work is currently taking in place in preparation for the English Devolution Bill.

**Local Government: Thurrock****James McMurdock:** [37053]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent discussions she has had with (a) the Leader of Essex County Council and (b) the Leader of Thurrock council on the potential of Thurrock becoming a London Borough.

**Jim McMahon:**

The Deputy Prime Minister has not had any meetings with either the Leader of Essex County Council or the Leader of Thurrock Council on the potential of Thurrock becoming a London Borough.

**Local Plans****Maya Ellis:** [36958]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that local (a) planning teams and (b) councillors are aware of (i) housing and (ii) growth plans.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

MHCLG Ministers and officials engage regularly with local planning authorities to ensure the government's priorities are understood.

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Aviation****Rupert Lowe:** [34704]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many (a) air miles and (b) flights she has completed since 5 July 2024.

**Alex Norris:**

Data on minister's overseas travel and on senior civil servant's business expenses is published on a quarterly basis. The latest available quarterly publications can be found here: [MHCLG: ministerial gifts, hospitality, travel and meetings, July to September 2024 - GOV.UK](#); [MHCLG: senior officials' hospitality, July to September 2024 - GOV.UK](#).

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Employers' Contributions****Kevin Hollinrake:** [26478]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 17 January 2025 to Question 22929 on Treasury: Employers' Contributions, whether she has received any requests for pricing reviews, in the context of changes to employers' National Insurance contributions.

**Jim McMahon:**

The information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost as it would require collating information from individual contract managers from across the department.

**■ New Towns**

**Blake Stephenson:** [\[36496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Minister for Housing and Planning's oral contribution of 3 March 2025, Official Report, columns 3 and 4, for what reasons her Department has not discussed the suitability of potential locations for new towns with the New Towns Taskforce.

**Blake Stephenson:** [R] [\[36497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Minister for Housing and Planning's oral contribution of 3 March 2025, Official Report, column 4, if she will set out the incentives her Department will offer to local authorities for new towns.

**Blake Stephenson:** [R] [\[36498\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Minister for Housing and Planning's oral contribution of 3 March 2025 in response to a Question from the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire, Official Report, columns 3 and 4, if she will publish guidance on what would happen if a local planning authority was unable to meet its housing target due to construction of a new town on its available sustainable development area.

**Blake Stephenson:** [R] [\[36499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Minister for Housing and Planning's oral contribution of 3 March 2025, Official Report, columns 3 and 4, what her Department's policy is on whether local authorities that accept new towns will be subject to the duty to co-operate for local plans.

**Blake Stephenson:** [R] [\[36500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Minister for Housing and Planning's oral contribution of 3 March 2025, Official Report, columns 3 and 4, what her Department's policy is on whether housing supplied pursuant to a New Towns Taskforce recommendation can be included in a local authority's Five year housing land supply calculation.

**Blake Stephenson:** [R] [\[36501\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Minister for Housing and Planning's oral contribution of 3 March 2025, Official Report, columns 3 and 4, whether the New Towns Taskforce can recommend more than one new town in a local authority area.

**Blake Stephenson:** [\[36502\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled New Towns Taskforce: Terms of Reference, published on 18 September 2024, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of New Towns Taskforce's performance in engaging with (a) central

government, (b) local government and (c) external stakeholders under paragraph 6(b) of those terms of reference.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to Question UIN [36088](#) on 14 March 2025.

■ **Parking: Private Sector**

**Julia Buckley:** [\[36527\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a statutory private parking code of practice.

**Julia Buckley:** [\[36529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has had recent discussions with private parking firms on issuing penalty charge notices where a person has paid for parking but has made a mistake in keying in the car registration number.

**Alex Norris:**

The government recognises the need for high standards in the private parking industry and is committed to delivering a Code of Practice, in accordance with The Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019.

I am arranging to meet with industry representatives soon. My officials meet regularly with the two private parking trade associations and consumer groups.

■ **Planning Authorities: Staff**

**Pippa Heylings:** [\[36847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing funding to local authorities to support attracting and retaining senior planners.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Attracting and retaining senior planners in local planning authority (LPA) planning departments is vital not only to maintaining a proactive, efficient planning service for local communities, but also to ensuring that new developments are well designed and facilitate local growth.

At the Budget, the Chancellor announced a £46 million package of investment into the planning system as a one-year settlement for 2025-2026.

Our manifesto committed us to appointing 300 new planning officers into LPAs. We are on track to meet that commitment through two routes, namely graduate recruitment through the Pathways to Planning scheme run by the Local Government Association and mid-career recruitment through Public Practice.

On 27 February, the government announced funding to support salaries and complement graduate bursaries. Further information can be found in the Written Ministerial Statement I made on 27 February 2025 ( [HCWS480](#) ).

On 25 February, the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) (Amendment and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2025 were agreed. These regulations increase planning fees for householder and other applications, with a view to providing much-needed additional resources for hard-pressed LPAs.

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 LPAs 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.

### ■ **Refuges: Health Services**

**Daisy Cooper:**

[\[36780\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has provided funding to children's therapists to support families residing in women's refuges.

**Rushanara Ali:**

This government is committed to tackling violence against women and girls and supporting victims of domestic abuse, including children.

Since 2021, local authorities in England have had a duty under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to ensure victims and their children have access to support in safe accommodation, including women's refuges. In delivering this duty, local authorities should provide support to children, in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which makes it clear that affected children and young people are victims of domestic abuse in their own right.

For 2025/26, £160 million has been allocated to local authorities to deliver this duty, a £30 million uplift from the previous year. This funding is for crucial support within safe accommodation, including therapeutic support for children. To deliver this duty in 2025/26, Hertfordshire County Council has been allocated £2,615,252 and St Albans District Council has been allocated £37,869 for relevant administrative costs.

### ■ **Rented Housing: Furniture**

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**

[\[37010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of moving into unfurnished homes on (a) prison leavers, (b) people escaping domestic violence and (c) people in poverty.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to Question [UIN 32408](#) on 11 March 2025.

**■ Service Charges: Regulation****Ian Roome:**[\[36510\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to regulate increases in service charges; and what steps she is taking to bring into force the legislative provisions of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 relating to service charges.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to Question UIN [26965](#) on 4 February 2025.

**■ Social Rented Housing: Furniture****Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[\[37008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to update the Decent Homes Standard to ensure that a minimum of 10% of homes for social rent are offered furnished.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[\[37009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with the Child Poverty Taskforce on (a) furnished tenancies and (b) the potential impact of the Decent Homes Standard on levels of furniture poverty.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[\[37011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department plans to halve the number of non-decent (a) social and (b) private rented homes by 2030.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[\[37012\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will publish a timeframe for updating the Decent Homes Standard.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government will consult this year on a reformed Decent Homes Standard for the social and private rented sectors.

The Deputy Prime Minister is part of the ministerial Child Poverty Taskforce, which is aiming to publish a Child Poverty Strategy in Spring 2025. As part of the development of the strategy, the Taskforce is considering the impacts of living in poor quality housing.

People in need may be able to get help for essential furniture from their local council through the 'Household Support Fund' and other services available locally.

**■ Social Rented Housing: Mould****Jim Shannon:**[\[36645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the prevalence of (a) mould and (b) damp in the housing stock of housing associations.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The English Housing Survey sets out levels of overcrowding and the prevalence of damp and mould in people's homes. Nationwide, 10% of private renters were found to be living with damp and mould, followed by 7% of local authority renters, and 4% of those in housing associations.

The government is committed to working with social housing providers to ensure that homes are safe, decent, warm, and free from damp and mould.

The Deputy Prime Minister made a Written Ministerial Statement on 6 February (HCWS423) confirming that the government will be bringing Awaab's Law into force for damp and mould in October 2025.

Awaab's Law is vital legislation that will empower social housing tenants to hold their landlords to account using the full force of the law if they fail to investigate and fix hazards within their homes within set timescales. It will also allow tenants to access the Housing Ombudsman if their landlord does not adhere to strict timelines for action.

The government is also committed to consulting on a new Decent Homes Standard and Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards this year.

**■ Social Rented Housing: Waiting Lists****Jim Shannon:**[\[36649\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent discussions she has had with local authorities on the number of people on social housing registers.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Local authorities report on the number of households on social housing registers in England through the Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS) collection, which is publicly available in live table 600 [here](#).

The government is working in partnership with local authorities to tackle the housing crisis and I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to Question [UIN 31737](#) on 27 February 2025.

**■ Tenant Management Organisations: Freedom of Information****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[36691\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to para 129 of the UK Government Response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry



Phase 2 Report, CP1248, published in February 2025, whether the extension of the Freedom of Information Act to Tenant Management Organisations (a) is limited to matters relating to social housing and (b) covers all information held by the organisation; and what her planned timetable is for secondary legislation on the issue.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government is committed to increasing transparency in the social rented sector, including by enabling residents of Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) to request access to information about the management of their homes in the same way as other social tenants.

We will work closely with TMOs, local authorities and residents of homes managed by TMOs to consider how best to implement the requirements. Our priority will be to ensure tenants can access as much information as possible on their housing services. We will set out next steps in due course.

■ **Tower of London**

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:**

[\[36353\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of the submission by Historic England on potential impact of the Royal Mint Court Development on the Tower of London.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

An appointed Inspector held a public inquiry into the proposals in question, considering a range of evidence.

As this case will come before ministers in MHCLG to determine, it would not be appropriate to comment

■ **Unitary Councils**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[36097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 27 February 2025 to Question 32152 on Unitary councils, what the estimated population per councillor is under the new proposed unitaries with 500,000 populations.

**Jim McMahon:**

The independent Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is responsible for conducting Electoral Reviews of local government, which examine a council's electoral arrangements including determining the total number of members to be elected to the council (council size) and the optimum number of electors per councillor. Local authorities are able to make a submission on council size to the LGBCE when undertaking an Electoral Review, to set out options for the number of councillors and reflecting on the number of councillors required for the local authority.

The LGBCE's guidance states that in calculating the appropriate total number of members per council, they are seeking to propose a council size which is appropriate for the individual characteristics of the local authority in question, and will consider the following factors:

- governance arrangements of the council, how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities, and whether there are any planned changes to those arrangements;
- the council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision-making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies, and whether any changes to them are being considered; and
- the representational role of councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations.

The LGBCE decision on council size marks the start of the formal review process for warding patterns (the number, names and boundaries of individual wards), with final electoral arrangements for the number of members implemented by an Order of Parliament.

The Electoral Review process is subject to a local consultation.

## JUSTICE

### ■ Juries: Compensation

**Luke Myer:**

[\[36911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will take steps to (a) review the adequacy of juror compensation for loss of earnings, (b) ensure compensation reflects wages, (c) require employers to cover shortfalls and (d) provide additional support for self-employed jurors.

**Sarah Sackman:**

Jury service is an important civic duty, and we want to help jurors feel supported as they undertake this important job. The Government will keep under review all support provided to jurors throughout their service. People who are not paid by their employer whilst they are on jury service can claim a loss of earnings allowance from the court. Self-employed people who lose earnings whilst doing jury service are also able to claim loss of earnings.

### ■ Legal Ombudsman

**Julia Buckley:**

[\[36526\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment she has made of effectiveness of the Legal Ombudsman in processing complaints in a timely manner.

**Sarah Sackman:**

The Legal Ombudsman (LeO) plays an important role in ensuring consumers of legal services have access to an independent and effective complaints resolution process. It has been on a challenging journey to improve performance over recent years, having reduced the number of cases awaiting assessment by 42% between 2022-2024. Performance over the same period has also improved with the percentage of complaints resolved within 90 days increasing from 11% to 46%.

LeO acknowledges there is further to go to reach an acceptable position in terms of its queue and wait times. In response to these challenges, the Office for Legal Complaints (OLC), which oversees LeO, has implemented a modernisation plan. This includes increasing frontline staff capacity, enhancing case management systems, and streamlining complaint-handling processes.

**■ Sentencing: Minority Groups****Jack Rankin:**[\[36023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Sentencing Council's publication entitled Comprehensive new guidance on imposing community and custodial sentences, published on 5 March 2025, if she will provide examples that would constitute a cultural minority.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The Sentencing Council has issued new guidance which the last Government was consulted on between November 2023 and February 2024, and then publicly welcomed.

The Lord Chancellor has been clear that these guidelines do not represent the views of this Government, and she has asked the Council to reconsider them.

The Lord Chancellor and the Chairman of the Sentencing Council have since had a constructive discussion. It was agreed that the Lord Chancellor will set out her position more fully in writing, which the Sentencing Council will then consider before the guideline is due to come into effect.

**■ Solicitors Regulation Authority****Julia Buckley:**[\[36525\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Solicitors Regulation Authority in investigating complaints on solicitor conduct.

**Sarah Sackman:**

The legal profession in England and Wales operates independently of government. The responsibility for regulating the sector sits with the approved regulators, overseen by the Legal Services Board (LSB). The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) is responsible for regulating the professional conduct of solicitors and law firms in England and Wales. More information regarding the conduct solicitors must adhere

to can be found here: <https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/code-conduct-solicitors/>.

As part of its role, the SRA investigates consumers' complaints when allegations of solicitor misconduct are made and has a number of disciplinary powers, including the power to issue fines and refer an individual to the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal, which can suspend or strike a solicitor off the roll.

Given the sector's independence, it would not be appropriate for the Ministry of Justice to interfere with decisions made by the SRA during these investigations, or its processes.

If individuals remain unhappy with the decisions reached by the SRA, they can contact their complaints team at: [complaintsteam@sra.org.uk](mailto:complaintsteam@sra.org.uk) or via <https://www.sra.org.uk/home/contact-us/>.

Whilst the LSB oversees the regulators (such as the SRA and the BSB) and ensures they fulfil their statutory responsibilities, it does not have jurisdiction to review regulators' decisions or process on individual cases.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### ■ Northern Ireland Office: Food

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[36364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what proportion of food procured by his Department is sourced in (a) the UK and (b) Northern Ireland.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Northern Ireland Office does not operate any catering outlets, cafes or cafeterias within our office estate. Documentation provided by suppliers who cater official functions and events does not typically feature a proportional breakdown of food items per country of production.

## SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

### ■ Artificial Intelligence: Grants

**Mark Swards:**

[\[35901\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing the timelines for grant disbursement to ensure that AI startups have the cash flow they need to grow.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Government is committed to building an AI sector that can scale and win globally. The AI Action Plan sets out how we will support the growth ambitions of businesses across the AI sector.

Innovate UK awards the majority of DSIT's business-facing R&D grants. Between 2022 and 2025 Innovate UK have achieved a 37.6% improvement on the time taken between grant competition close and grant offer letter approval. The point from which funding competitions close to applicants being notified of a funding decision has reduced from more than 62 days, to around 46 days on average, with Innovate UK continuing to explore how it can deliver further improvements.

## ■ Social Media: Women

**Luke Myer:**

[\[36514\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment his Department has made of the role of social media platforms in facilitating (a) paid-to-party and (b) yachting modelling schemes; and what steps he is taking with the Secretary of State for the Home Department to prevent the recruitment of young women for exploitative purposes through such schemes.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Government continually assesses online service providers' duties to tackle harmful content and activity on their services, including content relating to sexual exploitation. Under the Online Safety Act, social media platforms need to assess the risk of their services being used to facilitate several kinds of priority illegal harms. These include sexual exploitation. Where there is a risk, platforms need to take steps to mitigate it. Ofcom is the regulator for this regime. It sets out steps that providers can take in codes of practice. This includes steps relating to the design and operation of their services, as well as content moderation steps.

## ■ Voice over Internet Protocol

**Mike Martin:**

[\[37452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with BT on the speed of the Digital Voice rollout; and what steps he is taking to ensure (a) elderly people, (b) vulnerable people and (c) people reliant on medical alarm systems are given support.

**Chris Bryant:**

This is an issue the Government takes very seriously. The Government is determined to ensure that any risks arising from the industry-led migration from the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) are mitigated, for all customers across the UK.

I chaired two roundtables with communication providers on this issue in September and November 2024, which included BT. Major communication providers and network operators signed voluntary charters in December 2023 and March 2024, and the Government secured further commitments to protect vulnerable customers during the PSTN migration in November 2024. DSIT officials regularly meet, with signatories of the PSTN charters, including BT, to monitor how they are meeting the safeguards. This includes discussions on the speed of the rollout.

The Department has acknowledged that customers who may be considered vulnerable in the context of the digital switchover may require additional support. A definition of vulnerable customers was published in November 2024. It includes those who are telecare and other social or medical alarm users. Any customer, including the elderly, can also self-identify as requiring additional support.

## SCOTLAND

### ■ Scotland Office: Secondment

**Jon Trickett:** [\[36603\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, how many of their Department's officials have been seconded from (a) the Institute for Economic Affairs, (b) the Policy Exchange, (c) the Adam Smith Institute and (d) Labour Together since July 2024.

**Ian Murray:**

No officials in the Scotland Office have been seconded from the Institute for Economic Affairs, the Policy Exchange, the Adam Smith Institute or Labour Together since July 2024.

## SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

### ■ Electoral Commission: Companies House

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[37580\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, with reference to section 94 of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023, whether the Electoral Commission has been granted enhanced powers to access Companies House information.

**Sir Jeremy Wright:**

Under the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023, Companies House has powers to share information with individuals and public authorities, including the Electoral Commission, as long as the disclosure aligns with the functions of the receiving public authority and is not in breach of data protection legislation.

The Commission has not received information using these powers since the law received Royal Assent in 2023.

### ■ Local Government Boundary Commission for England

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[37585\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, pursuant to the Answer of 3 March 2025 to Question 31951 on Local Government Boundary Commission for England, whether the Local Government Boundary Commission for England has told the Speaker's Committee

that it requires resources for formal structural reviews of local authority (i) wards and (ii) boundaries.

**Sir Jeremy Wright:**

The Speaker's Committee plans to hold a public evidence session with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on 19 March 2025 to consider its draft supply estimate for 2025/26. This session will be made available on Parliament Live.

Following the meeting, the Speaker's Committee is expected to publish the explanatory memorandum produced by the Commission explaining the content of its Estimate and justifying proposed funding requests. The Committee is also expected to consider the Commission's new five year corporate plan which outlines the LGBCE's objectives and expenditure plans over the next five years.

■ **Political Parties: Finance**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[37581\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, for what reason the Electoral Commission briefing entitled Parliamentary briefing: Political finance rules, sent to hon. Members on 4 March 2025, states that unincorporated associations are not required to check that those who donate to them are permissible.

**Sir Jeremy Wright:**

The Political Parties, Election and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) sets out the permissibility rules for political donations.

Unincorporated associations who donate to political parties are required to be permissible donors. However, those who give money to an unincorporated association are not required to be. Unincorporated associations are therefore not required to check that those who donate to them are permissible.

The Commission has recommended a change to the law to require unincorporated associations to ensure that any political donations come from permissible donors. This would strengthen the political finance system and provide transparency for voters.

■ **Political Parties: Fines**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[37582\]](#)

To ask the Right hon. Member for Kenilworth and Southam, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, whether the Electoral Commission issues fines to political parties that narrowly miss a reporting deadline.

**Sir Jeremy Wright:**

The Electoral Commission takes enforcement action, including using investigatory powers and sanctions, where it is satisfied that it is necessary and proportionate to do so. Where it is satisfied it can resolve a matter without enforcement action, it will do

so. It issues fines for missed reporting deadlines where it is not satisfied it can achieve its regulatory aims through other means.

## TRANSPORT

### ■ Active Travel

**Zöe Franklin:**

[\[38299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of prioritising active transport schemes.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Government recognises the merits of prioritising investment in active travel schemes to support its economic growth, health and net zero missions. Active travel can help to revitalise high streets, enable people to live longer, healthier lives and reduce transport emissions. The Department announced the details of almost £300 million of funding for active travel in 2024/25 and 2025/26 on 12 February.

### ■ Bus Services: Concessions

**Ellie Chowns:**

[\[37825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make it her policy to remove time limits on disabled persons concessionary bus passes to improve access to (a) education, (b) work and (c) other opportunities.

**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. The ENCTS costs around £700 million annually and any changes to the statutory obligations, such as extending the travel time criteria, would therefore need to be carefully considered for its impact on the scheme's financial sustainability. The Government recently conducted a review of the ENCTS, which included considering travel times for disabled passholders and is currently considering next steps.

Currently, local authorities in England have the power to go beyond their statutory obligations under the ENCTS and offer additional discretionary concessions, such as extending the travel time criteria for the ENCTS.

The government has confirmed £955 million for the 2025 to 2026 financial year to support and improve bus services in England outside London. This includes £243 million for bus operators and £712 million allocated to local authorities across the country. Herefordshire Council has been allocated £3.2 million of this funding. Funding allocated to local authorities to improve services for passengers can be used in whichever way they wish. This could include extending the discretionary concessions available in the local area.



## ■ East Midlands Railway: Spalding

**Sir John Hayes:** [\[36583\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions she has had with East Midlands Railways on the feasibility of increasing the frequency of train services to and from Spalding.

**Simon Lightwood:**

East Midlands Railway's proposed new regional timetable for December 2025 includes one additional service every weekday and four additional services every Saturday calling at Spalding.

## ■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

**Mark Garnier:** [\[36639\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has considered designating public electric vehicle charger sites as Critical National Infrastructure.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) is defined as those facilities, systems, sites, information, people, networks and processes judged to be critical to the functioning and security of the UK. Loss or compromise of these could result in risk to life or have a significant impact on our national security, national defence, or the functioning of the state.

CNI designation within each sector, including transport, is assessed using a criticalities scale. While the rollout of public electric vehicle charging infrastructure continues at pace, it is currently not classed as CNI. The Government will continue to review this status, as the number of electric vehicle chargepoints increases.

## ■ Great British Railways

**Olly Glover:** [\[37067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the estimated cost of the Great British Railways livery rebrand is.

**Simon Lightwood:**

We're delivering a once in a generation overhaul of the railways and will establish Great British Railways, a new body bringing track and train together, delivering reliable services for passengers and freight customers, and catalysing growth across the country.

We're looking at options for GBR branding and what the roll out options are, taking into account value for money for taxpayers and ensuring minimal disruption to services.

**■ Heathrow Airport: Air Pollution****Mr Paul Kohler:**[\[37079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans she has to mitigate potential health inequalities from air pollution as a result of Heathrow expansion; and whether her Department has developed modelling on the health impact of Heathrow expansion on Heathrow staff by salary band.

**Mike Kane:**

The Government has invited proposals for a third runway at Heathrow to be brought forward by the summer. Once proposals have been received, the government will review the Airports National Policy Statement, which provides the basis for decision making on granting development consent for a new runway at Heathrow. The Government has been clear that any airport expansion proposals need to demonstrate that they contribute to economic growth, can be delivered in line with the UK's legally binding commitments on carbon and meet strict environmental requirements on air quality and noise pollution.

**■ Heathrow Airport: Road Traffic****Mr Paul Kohler:**[\[37080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of Heathrow expansion on road traffic composition.

**Mike Kane:**

The Government has invited proposals for a third runway at Heathrow to be brought forward by the summer. Once proposals have been received, the government will review the Airports National Policy Statement, which provides the basis for decision making on granting development consent for a new runway at Heathrow. The Government has been clear that any airport expansion proposals need to demonstrate that they contribute to economic growth, can be delivered in line with the UK's legally binding commitments on carbon and meet strict environmental requirements on air quality and noise pollution.

**■ M6: Accidents****Mr Paul Foster:**[\[37362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an estimate of the number of road traffic accidents leading to a fatality on the M6 motorway within Lancashire since 2022.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The number of fatal road collisions reported to police which occurred on the M6 within Lancashire was 2 in 2022 with none in 2023. 2023 is the latest year for which figures are available.

## ■ Network Rail: Debts

**Alex Mayer:** [\[36511\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether Network Rail's debt will move to the balance sheet of Great British Railways.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The public consultation for the government's upcoming Railways Bill was launched in February. This consultation sets out our proposals for the most comprehensive reform of Britain's railways in 30 years.

This included the plan to establish Great British Railways (GBR) as the directing mind in charge of Britain's railway, bringing responsibility for train services and rail infrastructure together into one integrated organisation.

GBR will accordingly be designed in an appropriate manner so that it can efficiently and effectively carry out its intended functions. The future of Network Rail's legacy debt will be considered as part of the detailed design process.

## ■ Parking: Pedestrian Areas

**Daisy Cooper:** [\[36777\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to (a) the consultation Managing Pavement Parking, published 31 August 2020 and (b) the update on 29 June 2023 that feedback was being evaluated, whether she plans to publish further information on the findings of that consultation.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department has been considering all the views expressed in response to the consultation in 2020 and is currently working through the policy options and the appropriate means of delivering them. As soon as the Government has decided its preferred way forward, we will announce the next steps and publish our formal response. In the meantime, local authorities can make use of existing powers to manage pavement parking.

## ■ Public Transport: Fares

**Dr Rupa Huq:** [\[36704\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking with local authorities to make public transport more affordable.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Delivering reliable and affordable public transport services is one of the government's top priorities and we know how important this is for passengers and for local growth.

The government is investing over £150 million to deliver a new £3 cap on single bus fares in England outside London from 1 January until 31 December 2025 to help millions access better opportunities and promote greater bus use by passengers. In addition, the government has confirmed £955 million for the 2025 to 2026 financial

year to support and improve bus services in England outside London. This includes £243 million for bus operators and £712 million allocated to local authorities. Local authorities can use this funding to introduce new fares initiatives, introduce new bus routes, make services more frequent and protect crucial bus routes for local communities.

## ■ Railway Stations: Access

**Mr Paul Kohler:**

[\[37953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what proportion of railway stations have level boarding for passengers.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Government is strongly committed to making the oldest railway in the world accessible. We will continue to take the Access for All programme forward as fast as funds allow. The Government programme of rail reform will end years of fragmentation – bringing together track and train to deliver for passengers with more reliable, better-quality services and improved accessibility. Shadow Great British Railways (SGBR) will start to provide the opportunity to take joined up, whole system decisions that improve performance for the benefit of all passengers and taxpayers with accessibility of stations and trains always in mind.

**Mr Paul Kohler:**

[\[37967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress she has made on providing full-step free access at Haydons Road station.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Following a recent nomination for step free upgrades at Haydons Road station, the Department and rail industry unfortunately identified limited passenger benefits. As such, limited funding is being prioritised to progress other stations which will deliver greater passenger benefits. Wimbledon station is already fully accessible and less than a mile from Haydons Road station and the TfL bus network in the local area is also fully accessible for wheelchair users.

**Mr Paul Kohler:**

[\[37969\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of train overcrowding on access to railway stations for wheelchair users.

**Simon Lightwood:**

We know that overcrowding can have an additional impact on those requiring assistance to complete their journeys. The Department for Transport publishes statistics on passenger numbers and overcrowding. The latest release was in September 2024. The Office of Rail and Road is responsible for making sure passengers are protected by train and station operators from any health and safety risks, such as crowding, and operators are responsible for managing the numbers

and flow of passengers using their services. They must also ensure passengers are informed about potential overcrowding.

### ■ Railways: Disability

**Mr Paul Kohler:**

[\[37968\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to increase the number of pre-booked passenger assists.

**Simon Lightwood:**

There was an increase of 22 per cent in the number of bookings for passenger assistance in 2023/2024. We want to see further increases in the number of people who are able to pre-book assistance by making improvements to the assistance that is offered as we know it can still too often fall short of expectations. In November 2024, the Government announced over £10 million in funding to improve the Passenger Assist scheme – the service that enables disabled passengers, or other people who may require help, to book and receive assistance to enable them to make a journey by rail. The improvements, to be delivered over the next two years, will see a step-change in how assistance is provided. For example, the ability for customers to communicate directly with staff on arrival and as they travel, as well as a help function to connect customers to staff in the event of feeling stranded or unsafe.

### ■ Railways: Fares

**Lee Anderson:**

[\[36750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, for what reason she agreed to the recent increase in train fares.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The recent 4.6 per cent increase to the cap on regulated rail fares, announced in last autumn's budget, supports the Government's long-term plan to achieve financial sustainability of the railway and is the lowest absolute increase in three years. Any long-term changes or concessions made to rail fares policy require balancing against the potential impacts on passengers, taxpayers and the railway.

### ■ Railways: Greater Manchester

**Michael Wheeler:**

[\[35098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information her Department holds on the cost of a standard-class annual rail season ticket from (a) Eccles, (b) Moorside, (c) Patricroft and (d) Swinton to (i) Deansgate, (ii) Manchester Oxford Road, (iii) Manchester Piccadilly, and (iv) Manchester Victoria in 2010.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The price of standard class annual season tickets in 2010 for journeys from the requested stations to these Manchester stations was £741.50.

**■ Railways: Infrastructure****Laurence Turner:**[\[37853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the Office of Rail and Road's letter to Network Rail of 11 February 2025, entitled Management of structures – structures examination and assessment noncompliance, what recent assessment she has made of Network Rail's capability to (a) identify and (b) remedy infrastructure failings; and when the Independent Reporter commission that is referred to in that letter will conclude.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR), in its capacity as the independent rail safety regulator for Great Britain, is responsible for assessing the adequacy of the measures taken by Network Rail to examine, assess and evaluate the safety of the structural assets it owns, and for deciding on any appropriate regulatory action. ORR expects the Independent Reporter commission to conclude in approximately 9-12 months.

Safety remains our top priority for the railways, and it is important the independent rail regulator can act proactively to ensure high standards are maintained. We will look to Network Rail to work closely with the ORR to agree a plan for prioritising delivery of its planned structures examinations and assessments.

**■ Road Works: Utilities****Mike Martin:**[\[37847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing local councils to review applications by utility firms for emergency roadworks in order to determine when the roadworks should take place.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Emergency works are defined in legislation as works needed to deal with dangers to life and property and so must be carried out urgently. For these, and other urgent works needed to restore customer connections or deal with leaks, permits must be submitted to the relevant highway authority within two hours of works starting on site. The authority can assess these permits and request works are completed by a particular time.

Authorities are also required to evaluate the operation of their permit schemes, annually for the first three years of operation and then every three years after that.

**■ Taxis: Fares****Tom Morrison:**[\[37378\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of ride-hailing firms setting fares below local taxi tariff rates; and what assessment she has made of the potential impact this has on road safety due to excessive working hours.

**Simon Lightwood:**

All private hire vehicle journeys must be booked in advance, which enables passengers to compare prices. The setting of fares by private hire vehicle operators is a commercial matter for the company in question. As passengers may engage taxi services immediately in the street or at a rank, the 263 licensing authorities in England can set maximum fares to protect passengers.

All road users are required to comply with road traffic law, in the interests of their own safety and that of other road users. Rule 91 of the Highway Code states "Driving when you are tired greatly increases your risk of collision...Do not begin a journey if you are tired". If road users do not adopt a responsible attitude or if their use of the highway creates an unsafe environment, or causes nuisance, they may be committing a number of offences that can make them liable for prosecution.

The Department issues Best Practice guidance to taxi and private hire vehicle licensing authorities in England. The increased risk that factors such as fatigue can play in road traffic collisions is highlighted in the Best Practice Guidance. As professional drivers, an appreciation of the effect of distractions and pressures which can negatively influence their driver behaviours is recognised and the guidance recommends that licensing authorities should require drivers to undertake training and/or assessment focussed on attitudes and behaviours.

**■ Transport: Rural Areas****Stuart Anderson:**[\[37277\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to improve transport infrastructure within rural communities.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The government is committed to delivering the better, more reliable bus services that passengers deserve. In the Budget, the government confirmed investment of over £1 billion to support and improve bus services and keep fares affordable in England outside London, including in rural areas. Shropshire Council has been allocated over £4.4 million for the 2025 to 2026 financial year to support and improve bus services.

Local authorities can use this funding to improve bus infrastructure and make services more frequent for local communities. We have also committed to reforming bus funding to give local leaders more control and flexibility to allow them to plan ahead to deliver their local transport priorities.

Shropshire Council will also receive a share of the £650 million-plus funding for local transport announced in the Budget. This funding aims to support everyday journeys and improve transport connections in our towns, villages, and rural areas.

**TREASURY****■ Agriculture and Business: Inheritance Tax**

**Blake Stephenson:** [\[36887\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 13 February 2025 to Question 29188 on Agriculture and Business: Inheritance Tax, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing her Department's data collection methods to enable the collection of data on the number of estates containing woodlands impacted in the 2025-26 financial year.

**James Murray:**

The reforms to inheritance tax agricultural and business property reliefs come into effect from 6 April 2026.

No estates, with or without woodlands, will be affected by these reforms in the 2025-26 financial year. There are no plans to review data collection on the number of estates containing woodlands for that year.

**■ Alcoholic Drinks: Tax Allowances**

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** [\[36746\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the Australian government's introduction of tax relief for distillers from July 2026 on the UK spirits industry.

**James Murray:**

No formal assessment has been made by the department regarding this specific policy.

As with all taxes, the Government keeps alcohol duty under review as part of its Budget process.

**■ Arms Length Bodies: Costs**

**Charlie Dewhirst:** [\[37427\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 30 January 2025 to Question 24653 on Arms Length Bodies, which financial years Phase 2 savings apply to; whether those savings are from the RDEL budget; what the baseline is for those savings; and whether those savings are in addition to Phase 1 savings.

**Darren Jones:**

Phase 2 of the Spending Review covers financial years 2026/27 to 2028/29 on RDEL to 2029/2030 on CDEL, whilst Phase 1 covers 2025/26.

Over Phase 2, a 5% minimum RDEL savings target has been set for all departments and arm's-length bodies. This is in addition to the 2% productivity, efficiency, and savings target the government set departments in Phase 1 of the Spending Review.

The outcomes of the Spending Review will be set out at its conclusion in June.



## ■ Banking Hubs: Beckenham and Penge

**Liam Conlon:**

[\[37882\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department is taking to support high-street banking hubs in Beckenham and Penge constituency.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Government understands the importance of face-to-face banking to communities and high streets in Beckenham and Penge and across the UK and is committed to championing sufficient access for all as a priority. This is why the Government is working closely with industry to roll out 350 banking hubs across the UK. The UK banking sector has committed to deliver these hubs by the end of this Parliament. Over 200 hubs have been announced so far, and over 100 are already open.

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2023 granted the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) the responsibility and powers to seek to ensure the reasonable provision of cash withdrawal and deposit facilities. Under the FCA's regime, LINK, the operator of the UK's largest ATM network, is responsible for undertaking access to cash assessments. When a cash access facility such as a bank branch closes, or if LINK receives a request directly from a community, LINK assesses a community's access to cash needs and can recommend a new service, such as a banking hub. A community request can be submitted to LINK via its website.

Alternative options to access everyday banking services can be via telephone banking, through digital means such as mobile or online banking and via the Post Office. The Post Office Banking Framework allows personal and business customers to withdraw and deposit cash, check their balance, pay bills and cash cheques.

## ■ Banks: Ilford South

**Jas Athwal:**

[\[36948\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help improve the provision of (a) physical banks and (b) banking hubs in Ilford South constituency.

**Emma Reynolds:**

Banking has changed significantly in recent years with many customers benefiting from the ease and convenience of remote banking. However, the Government understands the importance of face-to-face banking to constituents and businesses in Ilford South and across the UK and is committed to championing sufficient access for all. This is why the Government is working closely with industry to roll out 350 banking hubs across the UK. The UK banking sector has committed to deliver these hubs by the end of this Parliament. Over 200 hubs have been announced so far, and over 100 are already open.

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operator of the UK's largest ATM network, is responsible for undertaking access to cash assessments. When a cash access facility such as a bank branch closes, or if LINK receives a request directly from a community, LINK assesses a community's access to cash needs and can recommend a new service, such as a banking hub.

Alternative options to access everyday banking services can be via telephone banking, through digital means such as mobile or online banking and via the Post Office. The Post Office Banking Framework allows personal and business customers to withdraw and deposit cash, check their balance, pay bills and cash cheques. The Government protects the Post Office network by setting minimum access criteria. These include ensuring that 99% of the UK population lives within three miles of a Post Office and 90% of the population within one mile.

## ■ Charities: Tax Allowances

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**

[\[37540\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of tax reliefs provided to charities who work in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, but are physically based in Northern Ireland and constituted in the Irish Republic.

**James Murray:**

The UK tax regime for charities is among the most generous in the world with tax reliefs for charities and their donors worth over £6 billion for the tax year to April 2024.

In March 2023, the UK Government announced that from April 2024 charitable tax reliefs would be restricted to UK-based charities. This means that, to be eligible for UK charity reliefs, a charity must fall under the jurisdiction of the High Court in England and Wales, Northern Ireland, or the Court of Session in Scotland. This can be achieved through registration with one of the UK charity Commissions or HMRC. Such a charity can continue to support charitable causes in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

## ■ Child Benefit: Inflation

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**

[\[37016\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps to increase the level of child benefit in line with inflation.

**Darren Jones:**

To ensure that Child Benefit retains its value, the Government will increase Child Benefit in line with the consumer prices index for the year to September 2024, which is 1.7%. This means that, from 7 April 2025, the Child Benefit rate for the eldest child will increase to £26.05 per week and the rate for other children will increase to £17.25 per week.

## ■ Credit Unions

**Robin Swann:**

[\[37065\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to (a) support and (b) expand credit unions.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Government has made clear its strong support for the credit union sector, recognising the value that credit unions bring to their members in local communities across the country in providing products and affordable credit. We continue to engage regularly with this sector to understand the current barriers they face and consider further opportunities for growth.

The Chancellor announced new measures to support the growth of the credit union and mutuals sector in her Mansion House speech on 14 November 2024. This included publishing a call for evidence on the potential to reform common bonds for credit unions in Great Britain, asking the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) to produce a report on the mutuals landscape by the end of 2025, and welcoming the establishment of an industry-led Mutual and Co-operative Business Council.

Responsibility for credit unions in Northern Ireland is a devolved matter for the Northern Ireland Executive. Treasury officials engage with their counterparts in the Department for the Economy.

## ■ Development Aid: Public Expenditure

**Richard Burgon:**

[\[37232\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the projected Official Development Assistance allocations are for the fiscal years 2025 and 2026; and whether these projections indicate a phased approach towards the planned reduction to 0.3% of Gross National Income in 2027.

**Darren Jones:**

Future ODA allocations will be decided at Phase 2 of the Spending Review and will deliver on the PM's announcement that ODA will be reduced to the equivalent of 0.3% of GNI by 2027.

## ■ Economic Growth

**Dr Scott Arthur:**

[R] [\[37884\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of staff cuts at Dundee University on economic growth.

**Darren Jones:**

The Government recognises the crucial role of universities in the UK's innovation ecosystem and in delivering the skills needed to drive growth as part of the Industrial Strategy. Education policy is however devolved in Scotland. It is for the Scottish

Government to consider the broader impact of developments in the education sector in Scotland, including of any potential staff cuts in Scottish universities.

## ■ Employee Ownership and Save as You Earn

**Kirsteen Sullivan:** [\[36923\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps to help increase the level of employee participation in (a) the Share Incentive Plan and (b) the Save As You Earn scheme.

**James Murray:**

The Government fully understands the importance of enabling employees to share in the fruits of a company's success, and for businesses to reward and retain employees effectively. The UK share schemes are popular, generous and internationally competitive.

A call for evidence on Save As You Earn (SAYE) and the Share Incentive Plan (SIP) ran from June to August 2023. It sought views on whether the schemes are meeting their policy objectives and opportunities to improve and simplify them. The Government is considering the responses to the call for evidence, and is grateful to those who took the time to respond.

The Government keeps all tax reliefs under review, to ensure they continue to meet their policy objectives in a way that is fair and effective.

## ■ Equitable Life Assurance Society: Compensation

**Dame Caroline Dinenge:** [\[36390\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much and what proportion of funding made available through the Equitable Life Payment Scheme was returned to her Department.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Equitable Life Payment Scheme has been fully wound down and closed since 2016, and there are no plans to reopen any decisions relating to the Payment Scheme or review the £1.5 billion funding allocation previously made to it.

The remainder of the £1.5 billion has been set aside for future payments to the With-Profits Annuitants.

**Munira Wilson:** [\[37315\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 8 January 2025 to Question 21417 on Equitable Life Assurance Society: Compensation, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing full financial redress in cases where the state has accepted responsibility for personal (a) injustice and (b) financial loss.

**Emma Reynolds:**

In 2010 the government allocated up to £1.5 billion, tax free, for payment to affected policyholders and this decision was in line with the Ombudsman's report. More detail

on the history of the action taken on this issue can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equitable-life-payment-scheme-final-report>.

Since the Scheme closed in 2016, the Government's position on this issue has been clear, that there are no plans to reopen any decisions relating to the Payment Scheme and this issue is considered closed.

## ■ Food: VAT

**Patrick Spencer:**

**[36548]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether food for people living at (a) school and (b) home will have VAT payable on it under the VAT guidance published in November 2024 by HMRC.

**James Murray:**

Since 1 January 2025, all education services and vocational training provided by private schools in the UK for a charge have been subject to VAT at the standard rate of 20 per cent. This also applies to boarding services provided by private schools.

Since the announcement of this policy, HMRC has taken action to support private schools through the change. This includes publishing bespoke guidance, which is available here: [Charging and reclaiming VAT on goods and services related to private school fees - GOV.UK](#).

This guidance explains that whether VAT applies will depend on how schools charge for meals.

If meals are part of a single supply of education or boarding, the meals will have the same VAT liability as the main supply. So, for example, if a private school charges one fee for education or boarding services, and meals are included as part of the 'package' covered by those fees, then 20 per cent VAT will normally be charged on that package without splitting it into individual elements with individual liabilities.

Where a school supplies education or boarding and also supplies other elements for a separate fee, such as meals, these will normally be seen as separate supplies.

Where meals are supplied separately, the school must determine if it is closely related to the supply of education, in which case it will be exempt, so no VAT should be applied. Generally, meals supplied during the school day will be closely related to education.

## ■ Infrastructure

**Siân Berry:**

**[37064]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of the report by the Institution of Civil Engineers entitled Paying for Britain's Infrastructure System, published on 25 February 2025.

**Darren Jones:**

The government is committed to delivering a cross-cutting 10 Year Infrastructure Strategy communicating to the public its approach to housing, economic and social infrastructure, alongside a pipeline to give industry a clear sense of the government's long-term priorities.

The government has been engaging openly with industry – including the Institution of Civil Engineers – as it develops this Strategy to ensure that it is credible and deliverable.

As part of this engagement, in January the government published a working paper setting out the government's plans for the Strategy and some key areas under consideration.

**Siân Berry:**[\[37066\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to (a) engage and (b) communicate with the public about major infrastructure projects.

**Darren Jones:**

The government is committed to delivering a cross-cutting 10 year infrastructure strategy communicating to the public its approach to housing, economic and social infrastructure, alongside a pipeline to give industry a clear sense of the government's long-term priorities.

The government is seeking to engage collaboratively with the public, including the construction sector, its supply chain, major investors and other key industry stakeholders as it develops the Strategy to understand how it can support investment in and the delivery of shared objectives for infrastructure.

As part of this engagement, in January the government published a working paper setting out the government's plans for the Strategy and some key areas under consideration.

**Large Goods Vehicles: Taxation****Mr Andrew Snowden:**[\[37750\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the reclassification of double cab pick ups on (a) small businesses and (b) family farms in Lancashire.

**James Murray:**

Double Cab Pick Up vehicles (DCPUs) have in the past been treated as goods vehicles for tax purposes, rather than cars. Following a judgement by the Court of Appeal, Double Cab Pick Ups must be treated as cars, rather than goods vehicles, for certain tax purposes, based on their primary suitability.

The transitional arrangements put in place mean that this will not affect the capital allowances treatment of any business that already owns a DCPU, or that purchases one before April 2025; and businesses that purchase a DCPU after this date will still be able to deduct the cost from their taxable profits at 18% or 6% per year. Under the

transitional arrangements for Benefit-in-Kind treatment, anyone who has accessed a DCPU before 6 April 2025 will not be impacted until the sooner of disposal of the vehicle, 5 April 2029 or when their lease expires.

In addition, there are alternatives to DCPUs (such as Single Cab Pick Ups, or 4x4 vans) that are still treated as goods vehicles.

## ■ **Members: Correspondence**

**Mike Martin:** [\[37871\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when the Chief Secretary to the Treasury plans to respond to the correspondence from the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells on seizing frozen Russian assets, dated 16 January 2025.

**Darren Jones:**

The correspondence from the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells is receiving urgent attention and a response will be issued by HM Treasury in due course.

## ■ **Personal Income: Expenditure**

**Blake Stephenson:** [\[36885\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has considered the marginal propensity to consume when developing policies affecting individuals since 5 July 2024.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The marginal propensity to consume influences the level of consumption in the economy, and is relevant for economic forecasting.

HM Treasury considers data on household consumption published by the Official for National Statistics as part of its ongoing monitoring of the economy.

HM Treasury does not prepare forecasts for the UK economy, including assessments of the impact of policy decisions on UK household consumption. These forecasts are the responsibility of the independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR).

The OBR's next forecast will be published on the 26th March 2025.

## ■ **Private Education: VAT**

**Patrick Spencer:** [\[36549\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much input VAT is forecast to be repayable to private schools for the first quarter that the VAT is levied; how much output VAT is expected to be raised from private schools in the first quarter; and what the net payment is to private schools for the first quarter of this implementation.

**Patrick Spencer:** [\[36550\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much input VAT is forecast to be repayable to private schools for the first quarter that the VAT is levied; how much output VAT is expected to be raised from these schools from these schools in the first quarter; and what

the net payment to private schools is for the first quarter of this implementation under the current HMRC interpretation of the guidance.

**James Murray:**

The Annex to the Government Response to the Technical Note, [Government Response to the Technical Note on Applying VAT to Private School Fees and Removing the Business Rates Charitable Rate Relief.pdf](#), sets out the forecast input VAT and calculation of output VAT and net VAT liability resulting from this measure.

VAT revenue overall is recognised in the National Accounts on an accruals basis. As set out in the above Annex, the VAT liability in 2024/25 is time apportioned for the implementation date of 1 January 2025. The actual VAT input tax and output tax reported on VAT returns for any month or quarter will depend on various factors, including the date when schools meet the requirement to register for VAT (if not already registered), and which of the staggered quarterly accounting periods apply to the business.

■ **Public Houses: Business Rates**

**Mr James Frith:**

[\[36445\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to encourage (a) investment and (b) growth in the beer and pub sector through reforming business rates.

**James Murray:**

To deliver our manifesto pledge, from 2026-27, we intend to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties, including pubs and breweries, with rateable values below £500,000. This permanent tax cut will ensure that they benefit from much-needed certainty and support.

This tax cut must be sustainably funded, and so we intend to introduce a higher rate on the most valuable properties on 2026-27 - those with Rateable Values of £500,000 and above. These represent less than one per cent of all properties, but cover the majority of large distribution warehouses, including those used by online giants.

The Government also published the 'Transforming Business Rates' Discussion Paper at Autumn Budget setting out priority areas for reform. This paper invites industry to help co-design a fairer business rates system that supports investment and is fit for the 21st century. Further information regarding the Discussion Paper can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transforming-business-rates>.

■ **Public Sector: Employers' Contributions**

**Dr Scott Arthur:**

[\[36531\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to provide additional funding to the Scottish Government for the cost of additional National Insurance contributions in the public sector from the 2025-26 financial year.



**James Murray:**

The Scottish Government will receive funding through the Barnett formula in the usual way in 2025-26, including for any support provided to UK Government departments for employer National Insurance contributions. This is the normal operation of the funding arrangements as set out in the Statement of Funding Policy.

**■ Tax Avoidance**

**John Glen:** [\[37547\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she made an assessment of the potential merits of undertaking an impact assessment of her policies on tackling non-compliance in the umbrella company market.

**John Glen:** [\[37548\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of her policies on tackling non-compliance in the umbrella company market on the labour supply chain.

**John Glen:** [\[37549\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of her policies on tackling non-compliance in the umbrella company market on the number of joint employment models.

**John Glen:** [\[37550\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of her policy on tackling non-compliance in the umbrella company market on (a) freelancers and (b) temporary workers seeking to evidence a stable income for mortgage applications.

**John Glen:** [\[37551\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of her policies on tackling non-compliance in the umbrella company market on the level of pension contributions made by affected people.

**John Glen:** [\[37552\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact of her policy on tackling non-compliance in the umbrella company market on revenues to the Exchequer.

**John Glen:** [\[37553\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 2.19 of the Autumn Budget 2024, whether she plans to provide additional funding for tackling non-compliant umbrella companies.

**John Glen:** [\[37554\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of the report by the FCSA entitled Regulating the UK's

umbrella market - FCSA's response to proposals in Budget 2024, published on 11 March 2025.

**James Murray:**

The Government recognises the positive role that compliant and well-managed umbrella companies can play in the functioning of the temporary labour market. However, non-compliance in the umbrella company market is widespread and costs taxpayers billions of pounds a year.

HMRC analysis shows that at least 275,000 workers, and likely significantly more, were engaged at some point in 2022 to 2023 by umbrella companies that were involved in tax avoidance, evasion or fraud. In the same year around £500 million was lost to disguised remuneration tax avoidance schemes, almost all of which was facilitated by umbrella companies. Hundreds of millions more was lost to so called 'mini umbrella company' fraud and other fraudulent attacks by people abusing umbrella company structures.

The Government is committed to closing the tax gap and making the tax system fairer by ensuring temporary workers are protected from large, unexpected tax bills caused by unscrupulous behaviour from non-compliant umbrella companies. That is why the Chancellor announced in her Autumn Budget that the Government will introduce legislation to make recruitment agencies using umbrella companies legally responsible for accounting for PAYE on workers' pay.

The Government set out the expected Exchequer impacts of this measure at the Budget. The Government will publish a full Tax Impact and Information Note later this year.

■ **Warehouses: Business Rates**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[37571]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many and what proportion of hereditaments in England with a Rateable Value above £500,000 are internet retail warehouses.

**James Murray:**

The Valuation Office Agency published official statistics detailing the number of non-domestic properties in England with a rateable value over £500,000, broken down by sector, sub-sector, special category and region here:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-domestic-rating-property-counts-and-rateable-value-rv-for-properties-in-england-with-rv-over-500000](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-domestic-rating-property-counts-and-rateable-value-rv-for-properties-in-england-with-rv-over-500000).

There is no special category code for 'internet retail warehouses'. You may find the data for 'retail warehouses and food stores', and 'large distribution warehouses' helpful.

## ■ Workplace Pensions

**Pippa Heylings:**

[\[36464\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of occupational pension scheme investment supporting economic growth.

**Emma Reynolds:**

I refer the member to the answer given to PQ UIN 34987 on 6 March 2025.

The Government published the Interim Report of the Pensions Investment Review at Mansion House, which sets out proposals to reform the UK Pensions system. These reforms could unlock up to £80 billion in new productive investment including in businesses and infrastructure, including sustainable infrastructure to help reach the Government's net zero targets, and help improve returns for savers.

The proposed reforms to the defined contribution workplace pension market will accelerate consolidation, creating fewer, larger schemes, with a minimum scale requirement. This will allow schemes to deliver better value, governance, and investment opportunities, through larger 'mega-funds' more able to undertake productive investment.

The Review also proposes reforms to the Local Government Pension Scheme (England and Wales) to tackle fragmentation and inefficiency. The LGPS manages £392 billion worth of assets, and the Interim Report proposes to require all 86 administering authorities to delegate investment management to pools. This will create large pools of professionally managed capital, in line with international best practice, and enhance the capacity and capability of the scheme to continue to drive national, local and regional investment and will help to ensure investments are able to reach all corners of the nation.

The final Pensions Investment Review report, including the final proposals to be legislated for, will be published in the Spring ahead of the introduction of the Pension Schemes Bill.

In addition to these reforms, the Government announced in January that it will pave the way for more well-funded DB pension schemes to share surplus funds with sponsoring employers and members, helping to drive growth by freeing up these funds for the benefit of the economy.

## WALES

### ■ NHS: ICT

**David Chadwick:**

[\[37047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what steps he has taken since 5 July 2024 to ensure that NHS IT systems in England and Wales are fully compatible.

**Jo Stevens:**

I regularly meet with Cabinet colleagues and with the First Minister to discuss a range of matters, including the NHS. Our two governments are working in close partnership to deliver for the people of Wales.

I acknowledge the complex challenge of integrating IT systems across England and Wales and I know that both the NHS in Wales and in England are aware of the issue. I am pleased that Digital Health and Care Wales is working closely with the NHS in England to identify ways of addressing this.

We are working in a spirit of genuine collaboration to do everything possible to cut waiting lists and build an NHS fit for the future. Our two Governments are already learning from best practice in areas such as the Welsh Government's work on dentistry and GP practices, and in the UK Government's plans to roll out extra elective capacity, including through new surgical hubs. There is also a Statement of Values and Principles that underpins the arrangements for treatment of patients living on the Wales-England border. We will continue to explore cross-border health arrangements where capacity allows.

In the Autumn Budget, we provided the Welsh Government with an additional £1.7 billion to invest in public services like the NHS. An extra £600 million in funding has now been announced by the Welsh Government for health and social care in their Budget for 2025/26.

**■ North Wales Coast Line: Electrification****David Chadwick:****[37089]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what recent estimate she has made of the total cost of the electrification of the North Wales mainline.

**Jo Stevens:**

The previous Government made a series of unfunded commitments in its Network North plan, including the proposed electrification of the North Wales Main Line.

The Government recognises the case for enhancing levels of service on the North Wales Main Line and is prioritising increasing capacity alongside improving connectivity. In August, Network Rail and Transport for Wales announced that it is undertaking local consultation, planning and development work to close four level crossings along the North Wales Main Line. This has the potential to increase rail capacity by 40%, with 50% more timetabled services on the North Wales Main Line.

This government acknowledges that its predecessors have short-changed Wales for years on rail investment, including because of HS2. The North Wales Transport Commission and South East Wales Transport Commission provide the Government with key recommendations for rail enhancements in these regions that will boost economic growth and provide good jobs and housing.

The UK and Welsh governments have agreed a prioritisation of rail improvement projects developed by the Wales Rail Board which will inform work in the run up to the Spring Spending Review.

## ■ Plan for Neighbourhoods: Wales

**David Chadwick:**

[\[37472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what criteria was used to select the five areas in Wales set to receive funding through the Plan for Neighbourhoods.

**Jo Stevens:**

These areas were identified based on a clear and transparent methodology, which considered a range of socio-economic factors, including:

- Indices of multiple deprivation
- Population size
- Healthy life expectancy
- Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked
- Skill levels

A detailed methodology note outlining the selection criteria is publicly available on the GOV.UK website.

The long-term Plan for Towns programme was not fully funded by the previous government. As part of its Plan for Neighbourhoods, this Government is committed to ensuring that each of the five selected towns in Wales will receive up to £20 million in funding and support over the next decade.

We will work in partnership with the Welsh Government on the Plan for Neighbourhoods to make sure it aligns with the Welsh Governments work to regenerate neighbourhoods. This funding will be used to revitalise high streets, enhance local parks, support libraries, cultural venues, and youth clubs, and invest in essential community services to create thriving, well-connected neighbourhoods.

## ■ South Wales Main Line: Electrification

**David Chadwick:**

[\[37090\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what recent estimate she has made of the total cost of the electrification of the remainder of the South Wales mainline to be.

**Jo Stevens:**

The previous Government made a series of unfunded commitments in its Network North plan, including the proposed electrification of the North Wales Main Line.

The Government recognises the case for enhancing levels of service on the North Wales Main Line and is prioritising increasing capacity alongside improving connectivity. In August, Network Rail and Transport for Wales announced that it is undertaking local consultation, planning and development work to close four level

crossings along the North Wales Main Line. This has the potential to increase rail capacity by 40%, with 50% more timetabled services on the North Wales Main Line.

This government acknowledges that its predecessors have short-changed Wales for years on rail investment, including because of HS2. The North Wales Transport Commission and South East Wales Transport Commission provide the Government with key recommendations for rail enhancements in these regions that will boost economic growth and provide good jobs and housing.

The UK and Welsh governments have agreed a prioritisation of rail improvement projects developed by the Wales Rail Board which will inform work in the run up to the Spring Spending Review.

#### ■ **Wales Office: Hakluyt**

**Jon Trickett:** [\[37131\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how many staff their Department has seconded from Hakluyt since July 2024.

**Jo Stevens:**

No staff in my Department have been seconded from Hakluyt since July 2024.

#### ■ **Wales Office: Secondment**

**Jon Trickett:** [\[36604\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how many of their Department's officials have been seconded from (a) the Institute for Economic Affairs, (b) the Policy Exchange, (c) the Adam Smith Institute and (d) Labour Together since July 2024.

**Jo Stevens:**

No officials from my Department have been seconded from the Institute for Economic Affairs, the Policy Exchange, the Adam Smith Institute or Labour Together since July 2024.

## WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

#### ■ **LGBT+ People: Rural Areas**

**Joe Morris:** [\[36858\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking to improve LGBT+ support in rural communities.

**Joe Morris:** [\[36859\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking to improve LGBT+ support in (a) Hexham constituency, (b) Northumberland, (c) Newcastle, (d) the North East and (e) England.

**Dame Nia Griffith:**

It is crucial that LGBT+ people in all areas of Britain are safe, included and protected from discrimination. To achieve this we must end the recent politics of division. Work is already underway to fulfil the commitments set out in the new Government's manifesto, advancing the rights and protections afforded to LGBT+ people. These include:

- delivering a full trans-inclusive ban on conversion practices, offering protection from these abusive practices while preserving the freedom for people to explore their sexual orientation and gender identity, and also respecting the important roles of those supporting them.
- working with the Home Office to deliver our commitment to equalise all existing strands of hate crime to make them aggravated offences.
- working with the Department of Health and Social Care to improve services for LGBT+ people. This includes implementing the recommendations of the Cass Review and reviewing adult gender identity services to ensure that all trans people receive appropriate and high-quality care.
- modernising, simplifying and reforming the legal gender recognition process to remove indignities for trans people
- continuing our work with our international and European allies to advance LGBT+ rights and reinforce our position as a global leader on Human Rights once again.

In addition to this, Newcastle's Royal Victoria Infirmary is now taking part in one of our biggest successes, the HIV opt out testing in emergency departments. During the last 27 months over 2 million HIV tests have been conducted through the programme, indicatively finding over 800 new HIV diagnoses and 540 people previously diagnosed with HIV but not in care.

We are also pleased that a number of primary care service providers in the North-East, particularly in South Shields and Jarrow, are part of the Pride in Practice scheme that is run by the LGBT Foundation. This scheme aims to improve the experiences of LGBT+ people when accessing primary care services. We would encourage primary care providers in the North-East to consider joining this scheme.

Finally, we recognise that LGBT+ people in rural communities have not always had access to the services they need. That is why we are working on ensuring that rural LGBT+ communities can access the support, healthcare and sense of community that larger cities enjoy. For example, our Conversion Practices Victim Support Service is a national service that anyone can access wherever they are in the country.

**■ Musculoskeletal Disorders: Women****Manuela Perteghella:** [\[36507\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on supporting women living with a musculoskeletal condition.

**Manuela Perteghella:** [\[36508\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology on supporting research into women's health.

**Dame Nia Griffith:**

We are a mission-led Government and women's equality is at the heart of all of our missions. As part of that work Equalities Ministers have regular conversations with colleagues on a range of women's health issues, including on the implementation of the Women's Health Strategy which covers musculoskeletal conditions.

Women's health is a fundamental part of our 10-year plan to Build an NHS Fit for the Future, which is why on 4th February 2025, DHSC announced details of the Early Detection using Information Technology in Health (EDITH) Trial, backed by £11 million of government support via the NIHR. Through this research, almost 700,000 women from across the country will take part in a world-leading trial to test how cutting-edge AI tools can be used to catch breast cancer cases earlier.

**■ Women: Discrimination****Kanishka Narayan:** [\[37344\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether the Government's gender equality strategy will include measures to tackle discrimination against women in (a) healthcare, (b) work and (c) financial security.

**Seema Malhotra:**

We are a mission-led government and women's equality is at the heart of all our missions.

On health, we are continuing to work with NHS England and the Women's Health Ambassador to implement the Women's Health Strategy. Our priorities for delivering the strategy will be aligned with the 10 Year Plan and the government's Missions. The 10 Year Plan will set out how we tackle the inequities that lead to poor health, including those for women.

Women's equality in the workplace and their financial security go hand in hand. As part of our mission to Make Work Pay we will move further and faster to tackle the gender pay gap, provide high-quality, accessible early years education and improve access to flexible working.

Discrimination has no place in society and we will continue to tackle it in every setting through the protections offered in the Equality Act.



**WORK AND PENSIONS****■ Charities: Government Assistance****Terry Jermy:**[\[37524\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to increase support for (a) Citizens Advice and (b) other charitable organisations in (i) Norfolk and (ii) England.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

DWPs funding will be confirmed once the outcome of the Spending Review is known.

**■ Chemicals: EU Law****Ruth Jones:**[\[37694\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to align with recent changes to EU classification, labelling and packaging regulations requiring regular and timely updates on non-animal science.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The United Kingdom (UK) is no longer required to implement changes to European Union (EU) legislation automatically following our withdrawal from the EU. This includes Regulation (EU) 2024/2865 of 23 October 2024, which amends the EU Classification Labelling and Packaging (CLP) Regulation (CLP) Regulation. The assimilated Great Britain (GB) CLP Regulation aims to ensure the effective identification and communication of chemical hazards and the safe and secure packaging of chemicals in order to protect human health and the environment. The EU legislation will apply in Northern Ireland under the terms of the Windsor Framework.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which leads on CLP issues in the UK, is currently examining the scientific and technical basis and the wider policy context and it will advise the Government on whether any of these amendments have any merits that could be incorporated into the GB CLP regulations.

**■ Child Benefit****Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[\[37017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of ending the two-child benefits limit on levels of child poverty.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[\[37018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of ending the two-child benefits limit on levels of family incomes.

**Alison McGovern:**

Delivering our manifesto commitment to tackle child poverty is an urgent priority for this Government, and the Ministerial Taskforce is working to publish a Child Poverty Strategy which will deliver lasting change.

The Strategy will look at all available levers across four key themes of increasing incomes, including considering social security reforms, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience; and better local support especially in the early years. This will build on the reform plans underway across Government and work underway in Devolved Governments.

#### ■ Department for Work and Pensions: Standards

**Mr Will Forster:**

[\[903213\]](#)

What steps she is taking to improve her Department's customer service.

**Andrew Western:**

We are modernising our services, enabling customers to self-serve online, while retaining non-digital channels for those that need them, avoiding digital inclusion and ensuring everyone gets the level of support they need.

For example, we are starting to use conversational platform in some service lines, which provides an automated conversational experience and reduces avoidable contact by signposting customers to more appropriate routeways.

#### ■ Employment: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Long Covid

**Jo Platt:**

[\[36122\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 17 February 2025 to Question 30791 on Employment: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Long Covid, whether the proposed reforms will (a) ensure appropriate assessment of the work capability of individuals with fluctuating conditions and (b) provide adequate support for people with ME who are unable to work due to their illness.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The Government believes there is a strong case to change the system of health and disability benefits across Great Britain so that it better enables people to enter and remain in work and to respond to the complex and fluctuating nature of the health conditions many people live with today. The system must also work to support disabled people and those with health to live independently.

We are therefore working to develop proposals for health and disability reform and will set them out in a Green Paper ahead of the Spring Statement. This will launch a consultation on the proposals, with a conclusion to be set out in a white paper later this year.

This Government is committed to putting the views and voices of disabled people at the heart of all that we do, so we will consult on these proposals, where appropriate, with disabled people and representative organisations.

Ahead of the formal consultation for the Green Paper, we have already started to explore ways of engaging with disabled people and their representatives, including through stakeholder roundtables and public visits. We look forward to progressing these initiatives over the coming months.

## ■ Heathrow Airport: Air Pollution

**Mr Paul Kohler:**

[\[37078\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to help reduce occupational exposure to (a) ultrafine particles and (b) toxic emissions for (i) baggage handlers, (ii) ground staff (iii) and freight workers at Heathrow airport.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The UK has a robust and well-established occupational safety and health regulatory framework in place to protect workers from the health risks associated with exposure to hazardous substances in the workplace.

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) (as amended) Regulations 2002, enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), require employers in GB to protect workers from the health risks associated with exposure to hazardous substances including chemicals. Under COSHH, employers have a duty to assess the risk and ensure that the exposure of their employees to substances hazardous to health is either prevented or, where this is not reasonably practicable, adequately controlled.

HSE has not visited Heathrow Airport to look at this issue specifically. HSE expect all employers to ensure they follow the requirements of COSHH and act accordingly to meet their statutory duties.

The Department for Transport (DfT) seeks to minimise the impact of aviation on people's health and wellbeing, including those who work at airports, in the context of other government priorities. It is in regular contact on issues of air quality with other government departments and their agencies, including the Department of Health and Social Care.

While there are currently no legal limits for ultra fine particulate concentrations, air quality at Heathrow Airport is closely monitored and is reported in its Sustainability Reports. Emissions from aircraft are strictly regulated by ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization). ICAO sets global standards to limit emissions of oxides of nitrogen (NOx), particulates and some other air pollutants from aircraft engines.

The UK has played a leading role in developing these standards and supports the aviation industry's actions to cut airport-related emissions. This includes operating aircraft more efficiently, introducing new lower emission technologies and practices, reducing vehicle emissions within the airport boundary, and improving public transport links to airports.

## ■ Housing Benefit and Universal Credit: Young People

**Tom Morrison:**

[\[36483\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to reform the interaction between Universal Credit and Housing Benefit for young people in supported accommodation to remove disincentives to work.

**Tom Morrison:** [\[36484\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the 65% Housing Benefit taper rate on the employment prospects of young people living in supported accommodation.

**Tom Morrison:** [\[36485\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to align housing support for young people in supported accommodation with the Universal Credit housing element provided to private renters.

**Tom Morrison:** [\[36487\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of lowering the Housing Benefit taper rate and increasing the applicable amount for young people in supported housing to reduce barriers to employment.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The Department acknowledges there is a challenge presented by the interaction between Universal Credit and Housing Benefit for those residing in Supported and Temporary Accommodation and receiving their housing support through Housing Benefit. The department is considering the issue carefully in partnership with stakeholders.

Maintaining Housing Benefit for customers in this type of housing has meant that they are not subject to the same restrictions that apply in general needs housing. We have taken this approach in recognition of the higher costs that can be associated with these types of housing.

Currently, a broad spectrum of customers receive their rent support through Housing Benefit. This includes pensioners, those resident in Supported or Temporary Accommodation as well as those customers who have not yet migrated to Universal Credit. Any amendment to the Housing Benefit taper rate would apply to all these groups.

Therefore, there are no plans to align the Housing Benefit taper with that of Universal Credit. The two benefits have different earnings rules, however, both include tapers that ensure that all customers are better off working than wholly reliant on benefits.

## ■ Housing Benefit: Young People

**Tom Morrison:** [\[36488\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate his Department has made of the potential impact of increasing employment among young people in supported accommodation through benefit reform on costs to the Exchequer.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

We acknowledge there is a challenge presented by the interaction between Universal Credit and Housing Benefit for those residing in Supported Accommodation and receiving their housing support through Housing Benefit.

We recognise that there is potential for savings to the Exchequer from young people in supported accommodation increasing their earnings. In addition to any financial advantage, there are important non-financial benefits of working. These benefits include learning new skills, improved confidence and independence as well as a positive effect on an individual's mental and physical health.

We are considering the issue carefully in partnership with stakeholders.

**■ Independent Living Fund****Tom Morrison:**[\[36486\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to reinstate the Independent Living Fund to provide additional support to young people in supported accommodation.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

There are currently no plans to replace the Independent Living Fund.

DWP provides support with rent and other living costs to those who are eligible and living in supported accommodation through Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. In 2023/24, DWP spent £32 billion on housing support.

Individuals, including young people with low income living in supported accommodation, may be eligible for housing costs to be paid by Housing Benefit if they meet legislative criteria. Housing Benefit may cover all or part of the rent and any eligible service charges, and in most cases, the full rent is paid.

The Department acknowledges there is a challenge presented by the interaction between Universal Credit and Housing Benefit for those residing in Supported Accommodation and receiving their housing support through Housing Benefit. The department is considering the issue carefully in partnership with stakeholders.

**■ Personal Independence Payment****Richard Burgon:**[\[37230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average Personal Independence Payment was in the 2023-24 financial year, broken down by (a) total, (b) daily living part and (c) mobility part.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

*[Holding answer 14 March 2025]:* The average weekly Personal Independence Payment (PIP) award for the 2023-24 financial year can be found in the table below.

**AVERAGE WEEKLY PIP AWARD**

<b>(a) Total</b>	<b>(b) Daily Living Component</b>	<b>(c) Mobility Component</b>
£126	£83	£44

**Source:** PIP Administrative Data

**Notes:**

- Figures provided are for England and Wales only.
- The averages provided are calculated using the daily living and mobility awards during the last month that each claimant was on the caseload in the 2023-24 financial year.
- These figures include claims made under normal rules and special rules for terminal illness and include new claims and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to PIP reassessment claims.
- Figures are rounded to the nearest pound.

**Llinos Medi:****[37363]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average household income is of people who receive the Personal Independence Payment in (a) Wales and (b) the UK.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

*[Holding answer 14 March 2025]:* The average household income of families in receipt of Personal Independence Payment in the UK and in Wales is shown in the table below:

<b>WEIGHTED MEAN OF HOUSEHOLD TOTAL, GROSS WEEKLY INCOME FROM ALL SOURCES (2022-23)</b>	<b>HOUSEHOLD IN RECEIPT OF PIP DAILY LIVING ONLY</b>	<b>HOUSEHOLD IN RECEIPT OF PIP MOBILITY ONLY</b>	<b>HOUSEHOLD IN RECEIPT OF PIP DAILY LIVING AND MOBILITY</b>
<b>UK</b>	£639	£810	£753
<b>Wales</b>	£488	£314	£735

This data is available publicly on the Stat Xplore website ( <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/> ) under the Family Resources Survey folder, in the Household dataset (2022-23).

Please note:

- Average household income is estimated based on sample data from the Family Resources Survey (FRS).

- The data uses grossing factors based on 2011 Census data, so caution should be exercised when making comparisons with published reports and tables prior to 2012-13.
- Relative to administrative records, the FRS is known to under-report State Support and benefit receipt. Please refer to the M6A and M6B tables in the FRS Methodology and Standard Error data tables.
- In 2022-23, income from Pensioner Cost of Living Payment, Disability Cost of Living Payment, low-income benefits and tax credits Cost of Living Payment, Council Tax energy rebate, Energy Bills Support Scheme, Warm Home Discount and Welsh Fuel Support Scheme is included.
- From 2021-22 income from directors' dividends has been included in this data.

## ■ Poverty: Children

**Navendu Mishra:**

[\[36790\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the impact of existing social security policies on children in poverty in (a) Stockport and (b) Greater Manchester.

**Alison McGovern:**

Delivering our manifesto commitment to tackle child poverty is an urgent priority for this Government, and the Ministerial Taskforce is working to publish a Child Poverty Strategy which will deliver lasting change.

The Strategy will look at all available levers across four key themes of increasing incomes, including considering social security reforms, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience; and better local support especially in the early years. This will build on the reform plans underway across Government and work underway in Devolved Governments.

The numbers of children living in low income families before housing costs by local areas are published annually in the Children in Low Income Families Publication, available here: [Children in low income families: local area statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics).

In 2022/23, 9,973 children aged under 16 (17.6% of all children aged under 16) were in relative poverty before housing costs (BHC) in Stockport.

In 2022/23, 179,814 children aged under 16 (30.4% of all children aged under 16) were in relative poverty before housing costs (BHC) in Greater Manchester.

**Navendu Mishra:**

[\[36791\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the effectiveness of national economic policies on addressing the root causes of child poverty.

**Alison McGovern:**

Delivering our manifesto commitment to tackle child poverty is an urgent priority for this Government, and the Ministerial Taskforce is working to publish a Child Poverty Strategy which will deliver lasting change. The causes of child poverty are deep-rooted and complex, and the Taskforce is exploring all available levers to drive forward short and long-term actions across government to reduce child poverty.

The Strategy will look at levers across four key themes of increasing incomes, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience; and better local support especially in the early years. This will build on the reform plans underway across government and work underway in Devolved Governments.

**Private Rented Housing: Social Security Benefits****Kevin Hollinrake:****[R]** [\[37210\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to her Department's press release entitled Powers for landlords to collect rent from benefit payments to be re-examined, published on 25 January 2025, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of ending landlord deductions on (a) landlords' rent arrears, (b) evictions and (c) the supply of property in that part of the private rented sector.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

No assessment has been made as there are no plans to end landlord deductions from benefit payments.

The Press release was in relation to the Nathan Roberts judgement, and the Department is considering the actions required carefully with regards to implementing it.

A key point is that payment of ongoing rent and deductions for rent arrears to landlords were not deemed as unlawful, and the judgement was around operational delivery. In the customer's personal circumstances, it is worth pointing out that whenever a decision is made to apply a deduction to a Universal Credit (UC) award, in respect of rent arrears, UC customers have always had the opportunity to seek a review of the decision by requesting a mandatory reconsideration (MR). If the MR results in the decision remaining unchanged, the UC customer has the right to appeal the decision via the Courts and Tribunal Service.

**Seasonal workers: Agriculture****Chris Law:****[37201]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the Worker Support Centre's Annual Report 2024, published on 14 February 2025, whether the Health and Safety Executive has plans to commission a review into (a) the use of personal protective equipment and (b) repeated injuries on farms employing seasonal workers.



**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety, this includes workplace health and safety risks created in agriculture.

HSE can confirm that the Personal Protective Equipment Regulations 1992 were amended in 2022 to bring all workers into scope. The above regulations will be subject to a post implementation review (PIR) in 2027. These regulations already require that suitable personal protective equipment is provided, at no cost, to the worker and that workers are trained in its use. Therefore, HSE is of the view that the regulations are currently fit for purpose and have no plans to review them before the planned PIR. Farms have a legal duty to ensure that they provide appropriate PPE to all workers, including seasonal workers, and that those workers also use the PPE provided.

Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013, dutyholders such as farmers have a legal duty to report certain work-related injuries to HSE. Where required, HSE can and does investigate individual reports of work-related incidents across all industries, including farming. In addition, HSE also monitors the accident data that it receives under the above regulations, and tailors its subsequent engagement with the industry in the best, most efficient way to drive improvement in onsite health and safety standards. HSE has no plans to commission a specific review of injuries on farms employing seasonal workers.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Children**

**Kim Johnson:**[\[37322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many women have been granted an exemption to the two-child limit as a result of non-consensual conception since April 2017.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The requested information is provided in the table below and shows in April of each year from 2017 to 2024, the number of households with a non-consensual conception exception to the two-child policy, who were women (if single claimants) or couples in which at least one claimant was a woman.

	SINGLE UC HOUSEHOLDS, WITH A NON-CONSENSUAL CONCEPTION EXCEPTION	COUPLE UC HOUSEHOLDS, WITH A NON-CONSENSUAL CONCEPTION EXCEPTION
Apr-17	0	0
Apr-18	10	-
Apr-19	140	10
Apr-20	560	40

	SINGLE UC HOUSEHOLDS, WITH A NON-CONSENSUAL CONCEPTION EXCEPTION	COUPLE UC HOUSEHOLDS, WITH A NON-CONSENSUAL CONCEPTION EXCEPTION
Apr-21	1,000	70
Apr-22	1,500	110
Apr-23	2,100	130
Apr-24	2,400	170

**Notes:**

1. All figures are rounded to the nearest ten or to two significant figures. Where a value is marked with a dash, this indicates it has been rounded to zero. Where a value is zero, this indicates that no households meeting the criteria are recorded in our management information.
2. Single households are counted where the household has a single female claimant.
3. Couple households are counted where the household has at least one female claimant.
4. If a household received the exception in more than one of the months listed above, they will appear in the figures for all of those months.
5. If a woman moved between households and received the exception in both households, she will be counted more than once.
6. All figures show the number of households with an assessment period ending in the corresponding month.
7. These figures only cover UC Full Service and will not include any exceptions for UC Live Service. UC Live Service closed for new claims on 1 January 2018.
8. This data is based on Universal Credit management information and uses a similar methodology to published statistics on the two-child policy.
9. These statistics are based on latest data, they may not always match published statistics for previous years.
10. Figures may not always sum to the total given, because of rounding.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Disability**

**Sarah Smith:**

[\[903215\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the welfare system in supporting families with disabled children.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

Families with disabled children get an extra amount of Universal Credit of up to £487.58 per month, no matter how many children they have. This increased in line

with inflation. If they are receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment, they are also exempt from the benefit cap.

### ■ Social Security Benefits: Disability and Mental Health

**John Milne:**

[\[36559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what proportion of people claiming (a) disability and (b) incapacity benefits with a mental health condition are eligible for those benefits due solely to a mental health condition.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

*[Holding answer 14 March 2025]:* The information requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

### ■ Social Security Benefits: Terminal Illnesses

**Dr Caroline Johnson:**

[\[37253\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people claiming benefits under special rules with a form SR1 have been claiming for (a) more than 12 months and (b) less than 12 months.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

*[Holding answer 14 March 2025]:* The Department supports people nearing the end of life through special benefit rules – called the Special Rules for End of Life (SREL). These enable people who are nearing the end of their lives to get faster, easier access to certain benefits, without needing to attend a medical assessment, serve waiting periods and in most cases, receive the highest rate of benefit.

SREL applies to these benefits Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Universal Credit (UC), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Disability Living Allowance for children (DLAc) and Attendance Allowance (AA).

The department holds some data on special rules for end of life (SREL) claims for PIP and UC based on receipt of the medical evidence form, the SR1, but does not centrally collate equivalent data on SREL claims for AA, DLA and ESA, so we cannot provide the total number of SREL claimants. We have therefore provided data for UC and PIP only below.

BENEFIT*	CLAIM DURATION LESS	CLAIM DURATION OF 12	TOTAL
	THAN 12 MONTHS	MONTHS OR MORE.	
PIP	16,900	15,400	32,300
UC	5,900	4,800	10,700

\*All figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

The PIP data covers England and Wales and is from October 2024. The UC data covers Great Britain and is from September 2024.

The numbers above count the number of claims for each benefit, not the number of individuals. Some individuals may be counted more than once, as they may be in receipt of both benefits.

It is possible, although rare, to make a SREL claim without a SR1 form, so these data do not necessarily present the full picture in terms of total numbers of SREL claims.

' [DLA: Cases in Payment - Data from May 2018](#) ' and ' [AA: Cases in Payment - Data from May 2018](#) ' data is available on [Stat-Xplore](#) by 'Main Disabling Condition', this includes 'Terminally Ill' claims. This data is available by 'Duration of Current Claim'. [ESA - Data from May 2018](#) is available on [Stat-Xplore](#) by 'Medical condition' which includes 'Neoplasms'. This data is available by 'Duration of Current Claim'. A claimant's main disabling condition being 'Terminally Ill' does not necessarily mean they are classed as an SREL claimant. Users can log in or access Stat-Xplore as a guest user and, if needed, can access [guidance](#) on how to extract the information required.

## ■ Social Security Benefits: Veterans

**Jonathan Davies:**

[\[37032\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to review the inclusion of military compensation as income in the means-testing criteria for benefits.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

I refer the honourable member to the answer given on 5 December 2024 to question UIN [16635](#).

## ■ Universal Credit

**Steve Darling:**

[\[37360\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the introduction of Universal Credit on the ease of applying for (a) the Limited Capability for Work and Work-Related Activity element and (b) other incapacity benefits.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

We are always looking to make improvements to the service we provide to customers, including how they apply for benefits

As a modern digital service Universal Credit is iterated all the time. It is developed taking into consideration the users of the service. Before and after any changes are made Universal Credit undertakes user research with claimants, including those with health conditions, to gain feedback on their experience and suggestions for improvements.

## ■ Universal Credit: Childcare

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[36889\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of universal credit childcare support rules on families (a) who home-educate and (b) whose children attend educational settings registered on the early years register.

**Martin Wrigley:** [\[36891\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has considered reviewing Universal Credit childcare rules to provide more support to home-educating families using registered educational settings.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

No such assessment has been made.

Childcare cost claims should be relevant to the hours a customer is undertaking paid work, but allowances are made for reasonable travelling time. For school-age children, eligible childcare costs should be outside of school hours.

Childcare support in Universal Credit is paid in respect of payments to registered childcare providers. This generally means the childcare provider is registered with OFSTED (or the equivalent in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), a child-minder that is registered with a Child-Minding Agency (CMA) or by a domiciliary care provider registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Childcare provided under the direction of the proprietor of a school, on school premises, out of school hours are also eligible.

## ■ Universal Credit: Lone Parents

**Sarah Gibson:** [\[36539\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of Universal Credit provisions for single parent families.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The Child Poverty Taskforce is working to publish a Child Poverty Strategy which will deliver lasting change. The Strategy will look at levers across four key themes of increasing incomes, including considering social security reforms, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience; and better local support especially in the early years.

Benefit rates are reviewed each year, increasing by 6.7% in April 2024 and by a further 1.7% from April 2025, in line with inflation. We have recently announced a Fair Repayment Rate on Universal Credit deductions will be introduced from April 2025, helping approximately 1.2 million households benefit by an average of £420 a year.

**Kim Johnson:** [\[37321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the gender breakdown is for Universal Credit claimants who are single parents.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The information requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

**■ Universal Credit: Work Experience****Helen Whately:**[\[36106\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether it is her Department's policy for claimants eligible only for basic Universal Credit who have not found employment after 18 months to undertake mandatory work experience placements.

**Helen Whately:**[\[36108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to paragraph 3.26 of the Autumn Statement 2023, CP 977, what progress her Department has made on rolling out mandatory work placements for Universal Credit claimants who were unable to find employment at the end of the Restart programme.

**Alison McGovern:**

Decisions about the future direction of the work, health and skills agenda will be set out at the multi-year spending review in 2025, building on the ambitions set out in the Get Britain Working white paper.

**■ Universal Credit: Young People****Bobby Dean:**[\[36200\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will take steps to ensure young people aged under 25 and live independently receive the same amount of Universal Credit as those aged over 25.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

There are currently no plans to pay the higher rate of Universal Credit to those aged under 25. The lower rate of Universal Credit for those aged under 25 reflects the fact that the majority of young people live in someone else's household and are therefore likely to have lower living costs.

Younger workers also typically earn less as they are earlier in their careers, with the lower rate maintaining the incentive for younger people to find and progress in work.

Support is available to help those who live independently or have additional living costs. Depending on their circumstances, they may also be eligible for additional Universal Credit elements, including for housing, children, and disability.

## MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

### WALES

#### ■ South Wales Main Line: Electrification

David Chadwick:

[37090]

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what recent estimate she has made of the total cost of the electrification of the remainder of the South Wales mainline to be.

**An error has been identified in the written answer given on 17 March 2025. The correct answer should have been:**

**Jo Stevens:**

~~The previous Government made a series of unfunded commitments in its Network North plan, including the proposed electrification of the North Wales Main Line.~~

~~The Government recognises the case for enhancing levels of service on the North Wales Main Line and is prioritising increasing capacity alongside improving connectivity. In August, Network Rail and Transport for Wales announced that it is undertaking local consultation, planning and development work to close four level crossings along the North Wales Main Line. This has the potential to increase rail capacity by 40%, with 50% more timetabled services on the North Wales Main Line.~~

~~This government acknowledges that its predecessors have short-changed Wales for years on rail investment, including because of HS2. The North Wales Transport Commission and South East Wales Transport Commission provide the Government with key recommendations for rail enhancements in these regions that will boost economic growth and provide good jobs and housing.~~

~~The UK and Welsh governments have agreed a prioritisation of rail improvement projects developed by the Wales Rail Board which will inform work in the run up to the Spring Spending Review.~~

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## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### HOME OFFICE

#### ■ **Updating the Codes of Practice to Schedule 7 to the Terrorism Act 2000 and Schedule 3 to the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019**

**The Minister of State for Security (Dan Jarvis):**

[\[HCWS526\]](#)

Today, the Government is launching a consultation on our revised Codes of Practice to Schedule 7 to the Terrorism Act (TACT) 2000 and Schedule 3 to the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act (CTBSA) 2019. These powers are key components of the UK's national security infrastructure, providing examining officers (accredited constables and immigration and customs officers) with the power to stop, question and when necessary, search and detain individuals who pass through the UK's borders for the purpose of determining, under Schedule 7, whether that person is, or has been, involved in the commission, preparation, or instigation of acts of terrorism and, under Schedule 3, to determine if they are engaged in hostile activity. These powers are non-suspicion. Officers may stop and question a person whether or not there are grounds for suspecting that the person is or has been concerned in terrorism or hostile state activity.

The Codes of Practice set out the processes and safeguards governing the exercise of Schedule 7 and 3 powers by examining officers. It provides detail on how the power should be used, including examples where relevant, and is intended to ensure the highest standards of professionalism and compliance with these important powers.

The Government is proposing several changes to the Codes of Practice to clarify use of the powers, clarify the rights and protections of individuals subject to the powers, and impose additional modest safeguards. These include responses to recommendations made by the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation.

The consultation will run for six weeks, until 27 April 2025. The Government will publish its response thereafter, and will then amend the Codes through secondary legislation at the next available opportunity. A copy of the consultation will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and made available on GOV.UK.

### HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### ■ **Local Government Best Value**

**Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon):**  
[\[HCWS527\]](#)

All Honourable Members will recognise the importance of having well-functioning local councils which provide essential statutory services local residents rely upon. Local councils must be fit, legal and decent and this Government is aiming to fix the foundations of local government. Today I am updating the House on the statutory inspection of Spelthorne Borough Council and the steps I am proposing to ensure a focus



on reform and recovery, alongside and within the wider context of having invited proposals for unitary local government in Surrey.

#### *Best Value Inspection Report*

It is a matter of public record that Spelthorne Borough Council has significant debt leverage. Spelthorne's debt stands at nearly £1.069 billion (as of Jan 2025), which is 62.2 times its total service expenditure and is the second highest level of debt for a district authority in England, after Woking.

A Capital Review by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) highlighted concerns around governance and decision making. Following this, on 8 May 2024 the then Secretary of State (the Rt Hon. Michael Gove), commissioned an inspection of the Council and their compliance with their Best Value Duty. He appointed Lesley Seary as Lead Inspector, alongside Mervyn Greer, who were later joined by Peter Robinson and Deborah McLaughlin. Inspectors were asked to report their findings by 31 July 2024. The deadline was subsequently extended to 31 January 2025. The Inspectors completed their inspection and submitted their Report to the Secretary of State and, as statute requires, provided a copy to the Council. I am grateful to the Inspection team for their thorough work, and to the Council and all participants for their cooperation.

The Report identifies some positive features at the Council, such as strong resident engagement and positive local partnerships. The Report also notes that the Council has already taken positive steps to make improvements, including against recommendations made in the CIPFA review, such as the suspension of the planned housing developments and cessation of further borrowing for this initiative after determining it was no longer viable. However, the Report documents serious concerns across a number of areas which I consider to be against its Best Value Duty:

- On Continuous Improvement : The Report describes the Council as having a "poor record" of adequately addressing recommendations from external reviews and the inspectors have no confidence in the Council's ability to make the changes "without significant external support".
- On Leadership : The Report highlights that the Council lacks consistent leadership, strategic direction, constructive challenge and a robust corporate plan. Optimism bias clouds officer's awareness of risks, and to some degree the Council has been "blindsided" by the financial situation.
- On Governance : The Report concludes that the Council's "poor, late and incomplete reporting, together with a lack of audit and a reluctance to accept and act on challenge" has "severely undermined informed decision-making" and there is a culture of secrecy.
- On Culture : The Report describes member and officer relationships as poor and deteriorating, with both sides describing a culture of mistrust and broken relationships which are "hindering constructive discussions" on key financial, housing and asset issues. Members and officers do not share an understanding of

their respective roles. Inspectors consider the Council to be insular and in denial of the situation it faces.

- On Use of Resources : The Report concludes that a lack of long-term planning, risk management and an “overly-optimistic reliance” on property markets has led to the Authority’s financial strategy to be unsustainable.

#### *Compliance with the Best Value Duty*

I have carefully considered the Report and other relevant material, including findings from the CIPFA review, recent reports from the Council’s External Auditors, and the Corporate Peer Challenge conducted by the Local Government Association. I am satisfied that Spelthorne Borough Council is failing to comply with its Best Value Duty in relation to Continuous Improvement, Governance, Leadership, Culture, and Use of Resources. I am therefore minded to exercise powers of direction under section 15(5) and 15(6) of the 1999 Act to implement an intervention package that ensures the Council’s compliance with its Best Value Duty. The proposed intervention includes the appointment of Commissioners to exercise certain and limited functions as required, for five years. The Commissioner team, if appointed, would consist of a Lead Commissioner and Commissioners with expertise in finance, commercial investment and governance. The Council will be directed to prepare and agree an Improvement and Recovery Plan to the satisfaction of the Commissioners. I would like the Commissioners to report on progress against this Plan after the first six months, and then at six monthly intervals. I need to ensure the Council’s compliance with its Best Value Duty: the Commissioners’ assessments will provide assurance to residents and strategic partners. The Council will also be directed to actively engage with the Commissioners whilst reviewing and implementing any proposals for unitary local government.

#### *Representations*

I am inviting representations from Spelthorne Borough Council on the respective Inspection Report and on the proposed intervention package by 28 March 2025. I want to provide the opportunity for members and officers of the Council, and any other interested parties, especially the residents of Spelthorne, to make their views on the proposal known.

I made clear in my written statement of 5 February that potential proposals on unitary local government must demonstrate how local councils have sought to work together in coming to a view that best meets local needs and is informed by local views: given the potential implications for the proposals currently being developed by councils in Surrey for unitary local government, I have taken steps to ensure that this report will be seen by all relevant parties across the area. I will carefully consider all representations and any other evidence received, before deciding how to proceed with the Council.

#### *Conclusion*

The proposal to intervene in Spelthorne Borough Council is not taken lightly. The proposed intervention package is designed to strengthen and accelerate the improvement work needed at the Council. I am confident that the proposal will address

the failings identified and are necessary to ensuring the Council's compliance with their Best Value Duty. I hope that with focus and oversight, improvement will come at pace and that it will not be necessary for the Commissioners to use their powers. However, they must be empowered to do so if they consider that the required improvement and reforms are not being delivered.

I am committed to working in partnership with the Council to provide the necessary support to ensure its compliance with this Duty and the high standards of governance local residents and service users expect.

I will deposit in the House library a copy of the Inspection Report I have referred to, which is also being published on gov.uk today. I will update the House in due course.

## TREASURY

### ■ A New Approach to Ensure Regulations and Regulators Support Growth

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):**

[\[HCWS528\]](#)

The government is today publishing an Action Plan, setting out a new approach to ensure regulations and regulators support growth.

Improving regulation in the UK, ensuring that it enables growth and does not unduly hold back investment, is an essential part of this government's growth mission and delivering on the Plan for Change.

When used effectively, regulation provides a mechanism to address economic, societal, and environmental risks and deliver positive outcomes in our communities, for example it safeguards employees from harm at work and it can uphold vital standards in building safety.

However, under our current system, businesses tell us that regulation can be too complex and duplicative, stifling progress and innovation. Businesses endure slow processes and a lack of predictability, and our regulatory approach has become too risk averse.

These challenges manifest themselves in costs on business, which means that they have less time and money to invest and create jobs. Over the last 20 years, billions of pounds of regulatory costs have contributed to our economy being less attractive for new investment. Previous studies suggested that the impact of red tape costs could be as high as 3-4% of GDP.

The government will reform the regulatory system to make sure we ensure the UK's position of global competitive leadership and go further and faster to secure and sustain growth, supporting the objectives of our new Industrial Strategy and the wider growth mission.

This Action Plan builds on the Prime Minister's commitment last week to cut bureaucracy for business, reducing administrative costs of regulation for business by a quarter by the end of the Parliament. It sets out a vision to overhaul our regulatory system so that it:

- Supports growth. We want a regulatory system that not only protects consumers and supports competition, but also encourages new investment, innovation, and growth. When regulation is designed well, and when it is implemented well by regulators, it can protect consumers while supporting investment and growth.
- Is targeted and proportionate. We should regulate only where necessary and allow space for discretion and good behaviour. In most cases, businesses operate in a responsible and sensible manner. The current system too often focuses on regulations and regulatory practices designed to prevent a few bad actors, or very low probability events, rather than trusting and helping most businesses that want to comply.
- Is transparent and predictable. To foster the certainty essential for investment, it is vital that our regulatory regime is stable, predictable, and consistent. Regulation will need to change where it is not fit for purpose; but we must be clear about where that is the case and give business the necessary time to adapt to new rules.
- Adapts to keep pace with innovation. Our approach to regulation must allow the UK to take advantage of new technologies and innovations, including artificial intelligence, digitalisation, decarbonisation, and increased automation. Effective regulation can create the environment and clarity for innovation to take place. Regulators attuned to the challenges facing business should also be able to adapt to new industries and to the challenges posed by new technologies and avoid disproportionate risk averse behaviour.

To reset the UK's regulatory landscape and achieve this vision, the government will implement a package of reforms over the Parliament that focus on:

- Tackling complexity and reducing the burden of regulation, including that the government will commit to reducing the administrative costs of regulation for businesses by 25% by the end of this Parliament; that the Payment Systems Regulator will be consolidated primarily within the Financial Conduct Authority; that the government will work with regulators to improve areas where regulation is most complex starting with environmental and planning regulation.
- Reducing uncertainty across our regulatory system, including that the government will simplify the duties of key regulators including through the reviews of Ofgem and Ofwat; that it will work with regulators to strengthen transparency, so that business and the public can see how regulators are performing; and that the government will bring forward packages of reform, including, if necessary, legislation to improve the effectiveness of environmental regulation.
- Challenging and shifting excessive risk aversion in the system, including that the government will overhaul accountability, formalising and strengthening performance reviews which will be conducted by all sponsoring government departments, and setting out the next stage of commitments secured by the Regulatory Innovation Office, working alongside departments and regulators.

The reforms in the Action Plan are relevant to regulators across sectors such as business, finance, energy, and the environment. Though there is not currently a legal definition of a regulator, the reforms will apply to all bodies exercising regulatory powers and functions.

The government has worked with a set of key regulators over the past few months to develop measures which will have a tangible effect on driving growth and investment and are implementable within the next 12 months, listed in the Action Plan. Some of them, such as the Competition and Markets Authority, have already taken substantial action such as taking forward applying the 4Ps across its digital markets works.

The government will continue working with industry, regulators, and Parliament to ensure that the regulatory system protects consumers and supports competition, but also encourages new investment, innovation, and growth.

The full Action Plan is available on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-new-approach-to-ensure-regulators-and-regulation-support-growth/new-approach-to-ensure-regulators-and-regulation-support-growth-html>

A copy will also be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.