



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 3 April 2025 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:32 P.M., 03 April 2025). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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

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

ANSWERS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Aluminium: USA

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[42222\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of US steel tariffs on (a) finished and (b) semi-finished steel derivative products.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[42263\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of US aluminium tariffs on (a) finished and (b) semi-finished aluminium derivative products.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[42265\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of US tariffs on (a) finished and (b) semi-finished (i) steel and (ii) aluminium derivative products on manufacturing jobs.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[42266\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions he has had with manufacturers on the potential impact of US tariffs on (a) finished and (b) semi-finished aluminium derivative products.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The Department for Business and Trade is working closely with the UK's steel and aluminium industries to anticipate and assess the potential impacts of the US tariffs on UK exports, and we continue to engage closely with affected industries.

We have committed up to £2.5 billion to rebuild the steel sector and recently welcomed the Trade Remedies Authority's (TRA) urgent review of the Steel Safeguard. We are also discussing what interventions might be similarly required to protect the Aluminium sector from any harmful effects of trade deflection. UK-US trade teams will continue to have constructive discussions to agree a UK-US economic prosperity deal in the coming weeks and beyond.

■ Aviation: Exports

Jim Shannon: [\[41421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to increase UK aviation exports.

Sarah Jones:

DBT works with UK aerospace companies to open markets, tackle trade disputes, provide SME support, and connect business to export opportunities.

Through the Aerospace Growth Partnership and Aerospace Technology Institute, we support industry to increase supply chain productivity, competitiveness, innovation and exports. In defence, we work with industry to develop campaigns to pursue a pipeline of global opportunities. In 2024 the UK aerospace industry exported £23 billion of its production and over 5 years to 2023 on average achieved annual orders of £5.4 billion across aerospace products relating to defence.

The Industrial Strategy will set out our further support for these sectors.

■ Beer and Public Houses: Import Duties

Martin Wrigley:

[\[39709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department is taking steps to help protect the (a) brewery, (b) distillery and (c) pub sector from US tariffs.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The UK and US have a strong economic relationship which is fair, balanced and reciprocal. We have £1.2 trillion invested in each other's economies and over 2.5 million jobs across both countries.

Breweries, distilleries and pubs play a key role in the UK economy.

We will continue to engage closely and productively with the US to press the case for UK business interests. We will keep all options on the table and won't hesitate to respond in the national interest.

■ British Steel: Scunthorpe

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[42760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has held any recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Defence on the potential national security implications arising from the planned closure of Scunthorpe steelworks.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[42761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to ensure that the UK retains steelmaking capacity.

Sarah Jones:

National security is a top priority for this government. DBT are working closely with MOD and other Government Departments as we develop the Plan for Steel, the Defence Industrial Strategy, and the Strategic Defence Review respectively, to ensure that key government priorities are reflected across these strategies.

At the recent Business and Trade Committee on 26 March, along with the Minister for Defence, I emphasised the importance of retaining steelmaking capabilities in the UK with the Government providing up to £2.5bn for steel through the National Wealth Fund and other routes.

This is why we continue to work tirelessly to safeguard the future of Scunthorpe and protect its workers. We have made a generous offer to British Steel designed to achieve that.

■ **Consumer Goods: Safety**

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[42417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what meetings he has had Northern Ireland based businesses following the publication of guidance for businesses on the new General Product Safety Regulation.

Justin Madders:

My officials have been engaging regularly with businesses from across the UK on the updated General Product Safety Regulation in Northern Ireland. Since the guidance for businesses was published, officials have hosted numerous drop-in sessions for businesses, both before and after the Regulation took effect in Northern Ireland. The Department for Business and Trade will be publishing updates to the guidance to provide additional clarity to businesses, reflecting the queries and feedback we have received.

■ **Electric Bicycles: Sales**

Nick Timothy: [\[41535\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking with the Secretary of State for the Home Department to prevent the online sale of illegal e-bikes.

Justin Madders:

Product safety law requires that all consumer products placed on the UK market must be safe. The Office for Product Safety and Standards, in my Department, has a programme of work focused on tackling the sale of illegal e-bikes, making sure online platforms are aware of their responsibilities and working closely with Border Force on the issue at the UK Border. My officials work closely with counterparts across Government, including the Home Office on e-bike safety.

The Product Safety and Metrology Bill will provide powers that can be used to place new duties on online marketplaces with regards to unsafe products.

■ **Employment Tribunals Service: Enforcement**

Richard Foord: [\[41534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the level of financial penalty for employers who do not pay their ex-employee promptly after losing a tribunal.

Justin Madders:

The Government is committed to considering further improvements to the way that people can enforce their employment rights, including the role that Acas, Employment

Tribunals and the Fair Work Agency play in ensuring workers' have access to an effective justice system.

The Civil Justice Council (CJC) is currently considering how to improve enforcement methods and recently held a call for evidence on court users' experiences of enforcement. The government will consider any recommendations that the CJC makes.

■ **Employment Tribunals Service: Small Businesses**

Andrew Griffith: [\[42848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent discussions he has had with (a) business groups and (b) employer organisations on the potential impact of the level of efficiency of employment tribunals on SMEs.

Andrew Griffith: [\[42851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent estimate his Department has made of the financial impact of Employment Tribunal delays on UK businesses.

Justin Madders:

We are committed to ensuring that Employment Tribunals operate effectively, ensuring workers have access to justice while minimising burdens on the majority of businesses which play by the rules.

As part of the development of the Employment Rights Bill, the Government has consulted with businesses extensively and further engagements (including on this topic) are planned.

■ **Environment Protection: Training**

Adam Jogee: [\[42078\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) the industrial strategy and (b) skills policies provide green skills across sectors.

Sarah Jones:

The government is working hard to ensure that the current and future skills system supports the low carbon economy. We will support workers in high-carbon industry by creating good green jobs in our country's industrial heartlands – enabling people to move into low-carbon roles by drawing upon their wealth of skills and experience. Skills England will work closely with the Industrial Strategy Advisory Council to understand the skills needs of high-growth sectors, including Clean Energy Industries, and will bring together key partners to better meet these needs.

■ Foreign Investment in UK: Northern Ireland

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[42419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many employees from the Trade and Investment Hub in Northern Ireland are working with Invest NI to promote investment before the Open Golf Championship at Royal Portrush in July 2025.

Sarah Jones:

At end February 2025 DBT had 76 FTE from across the organisation based in our Belfast Hub. There are 10 people working in the trade and investment team, who all work collaboratively with Invest Northern Ireland on a range of events and initiatives throughout the year.

■ Import Duties: USA

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[41928\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the White House's factsheet entitled President Donald J. Trump adjusts imports of automobiles and automobile parts into the United States, published on 26 March 2025, what steps the Government plans to take to respond to the proposed tariffs on UK car and car parts exported to the United States.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The UK automotive sector is an integral part of driving our economic growth and, like industry, the Government is concerned about the potential impact of automotive tariffs.

We are disappointed by this decision by the United States to impose global tariffs on the automotive industry and know this will be extremely concerning for businesses and consumers. We are keeping all options on the table and will always respond in the national interest. We continue to have productive discussions on securing a wider economic deal.

■ Industrial Strategy Advisory Council

Emma Foody:

[\[42780\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, for what reason the Industrial Strategy Advisory Council does not include representatives from the (a) life sciences and (b) advanced manufacturing sectors.

Sarah Jones:

The Industrial Strategy Advisory Council is made up of sixteen of the UK's business leaders, policy experts and trade union leaders who have been appointed based on their expertise and wide-ranging experience. Diversity of background has been a key focus in the decisions on membership to ensure we reflect the broadest range of perspectives this country has to offer, including in the Industrial Strategy's growth-driving sectors such as advanced manufacturing and life sciences.

■ Personal Care Services: Employers' Contributions and Minimum Wage**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[41601\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the impact of (a) employers national insurance contributions and (b) national minimum wage increases on the hair salon industry.

Justin Madders:

For national insurance contributions, increasing the employment Allowance to £10,500 will mean that 865,000 employers will pay no NICs at all and more than half of employers see no change or gain overall from this package, including many businesses in the hair and beauty industries.

On minimum wage, approximately 40,000 workers in the hair and beauty sector, representing around half of the sector's workforce, are expected to benefit from a direct pay rise due to the increases in the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage in April 2025.

The Government is also creating a fairer business rates system, which will further benefit the hair salon industry.

■ Products: Recycling**Ellie Chowns:**[\[41666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what progress the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has made on their investigation into misleading environmental claims made in relation to fast moving consumer goods announced in January 2023; and when he expects the CMA to report publicly on any findings.

Justin Madders:

Following its compliance review into environmental claims, in December 2023 the Competition and Markets Authority ("CMA") opened an investigation into certain claims made by Unilever in relation to some of its fast-moving consumer goods, which include everyday items such as toiletries and cleaning products.

In November 2024 the CMA announced its decision to close the investigation. In making this decision, the CMA took into account a range of factors, including changes Unilever had made to claims on some of its products and the wider impact of the CMA's programme of work tackling misleading green claims.

Ellie Chowns:[\[41667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many products have been investigated in detail by the Competition and Markets Authority as part of its fast-moving consumer goods investigation announced in January 2023.

Justin Madders:

In January 2023 the Competition and Markets Authority ("CMA") announced a compliance review into the Fast Moving Consumer Goods sector – these include essential everyday items such as toiletries and cleaning products. Over the period

following that announcement, the CMA carried out an initial review of hundreds of products.

■ Temporary Employment: Conditions of Employment

Danny Beales: [\[41745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Employment Rights Bill on (a) drivers employed by app companies, (b) couriers employed by app companies and (c) gig economy workers.

Justin Madders:

The impact of the Employment Rights Bill on those individuals will depend largely on their employment status. Individuals in the platform economy can be any status: employee, limb (b) worker, or self-employed, depending on the reality of the relationship between them and their employer.

The Employment Rights Bill, once implemented, will represent the biggest upgrade of workers' rights in a generation. It will raise the minimum floor of employment rights, raise living standards across the country and level the playing field for those businesses who are engaged in good practices.

■ USA: Trade Agreements

Wendy Morton: [\[41837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer 18 March 2025 to Question 36660 on USA: Trade Agreements, if he will set out his the expected timeline for an economic deal.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

On Tuesday 18 March, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade met with US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and the Special Envoy to the UK Mark Burnett in Washington DC. The meeting followed last month's agreement between the Prime Minister and President Trump that teams would start working together on an Economic Prosperity Deal, building on our shared strengths and commitment to economic security. Ministers and officials will be continuing discussions moving forward.

■ VAT: USA

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[42264\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has had recent discussions with his US counterpart on reducing VAT on US firms exporting to the UK.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

DBT Secretary of State and officials continue to hold regular and productive conversations with the Trump administration to press the case for UK business interests. We're prioritising engagement with the US to stand up for our national interests.

CABINET OFFICE■ **10 Downing Street: Cleaning Services**

Mr Richard Holden: [\[39114\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when 10 Downing Street cleaners are due to strike; and whether temporary cover will be organised for the Prime Minister's (a) offices and (b) residence during the strike action.

Georgia Gould:

The PCS trade union is in dispute with ISS and G4S. As is longstanding practice, the Government does not provide an ongoing commentary on industrial disputes.

■ **10 Downing Street: Libraries**

Charlie Dewhirst: [\[40915\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister plans to donate a copy of Three Pillars to Liberty to the Prime Minister's Library.

Charlie Dewhirst: [\[41251\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, which Minister most recently donated a book to the Prime Minister's Library.

Charlie Dewhirst: [\[41252\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether any Cabinet Ministers have donated a book to the Prime Minister's Library since 5 July 2024.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

No donations have been made to the Prime Minister's Library since 5 July 2024.

■ **Arms Length Bodies**

Mike Wood: [\[41430\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's guidance entitled The Approvals Process for the Creation of New Arm's-Length Bodies, whether the Cabinet Office Public Bodies Team assessed Skills England against the requirement that the creation of a new ALB should only be considered as a last resort; whether the department provided evidence that alternative delivery models such as enhancing an existing body, executive agency, or departmental function were considered; and which of the three tests outlined in chapter 2 of that guidance it overcame.

Georgia Gould:

The Department for Education is currently working through the approval process to establish Skills England as an Arm's Length Body. The completion of business cases as part of this process considers viable delivery mechanisms and the three tests.

Mike Wood: [\[41435\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 8 January 2025 to Question 19414 on Non-departmental public bodies, how many arm's length bodies other

than non-departmental public bodies the Government has (a) announced it will open, (b) opened, (c) announced it will close, and (d) closed since 4 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

As said in my previous answer of 8 January 2025, the Cabinet Office maintains records and oversight of formally established Arm's Length Bodies. No ALBs have been formally established since 4 July 2024. Individual departments are responsible for any proposals to open or close ALBs.

■ **Cabinet Office: Consultants**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[41512\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he plans to use recruitment consultants for staffing test-and-learn teams.

Georgia Gould:

The Test, Learn and Grow Programme will use existing government recruitment channels to staff the programme for the three years of the initiative. This includes the use of loans for existing Civil Servants, and fixed term appointments for external candidates. The programme will also leverage an inward secondment programme for public service delivery experts working near the frontline to help drive public service reform in their field. This scheme will be flexible in terms of duration and location, and specifically for those with experience relevant to the public service reform project. We do not plan to use recruitment consultants for these staffing needs.

■ **Cabinet Office: Contracts**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[42604\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many pricing reviews of contracts managed by his Department the Crown Commercial Service has undertaken due to changes to employer's National Insurance contributions in April 2025; and if he will make an estimate of the number of pricing reviews that will be required for this reason.

Georgia Gould:

Most Crown Commercial Service (CCS) commercial agreements use the public sector contract which does not permit increases in the framework rates for employer national insurance contributions as these are classed as General Change in Law. Where the framework contract allows for framework rates to be reviewed, any request by a supplier to do so would be considered by CCS on a case-by-case basis.

■ **Cabinet Office: Freedom of Information**

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[41653\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 22 January 2025 to Question 23884 on 10 Downing Street: Repairs and Maintenance, if he will publish the Freedom of Information Act response with reference FOI2025/01530.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

A copy of the response to FOI2025/01530 will be deposited in the House Library. The media suite is in a listed part of 9 Downing Street.

■ **Cabinet Office: Procurement****Joe Robertson:**[\[38882\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many public contracts awarded by his Department have been subject to investigations for (a) fraud and (b) corruption since 5 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

The Government takes any allegations of fraud and corruption very seriously. 5 contracts have been referred to the Cabinet Office Assurance, Compliance and Counter Fraud Team for consideration of allegations of fraud or corruption.

■ **Cabinet Office: Secondment****Mike Wood:**[\[36676\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 24 February 2025 to Question 27921 on Cabinet Office: Secondment, whether (a) any staff in his Department are seconded from other local authorities and (b) the secondee from Camden council works on policy.

Georgia Gould:

Secondments are part of a range of ways of bringing talent and experience into the civil service for short periods of time and have been used by successive governments. Secondments are arranged at a business unit level and must follow the processes as set out in the Civil Service Recruitment Principles.

As the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster set out in his [speech](#) in December 2024, we will be bringing in secondees - both frontline workers and digital and data experts - to help deliver public service reform.

This includes the secondee referenced from Camden Council, who works as the Director of Public Service Reform in the Public Sector Reform and Efficiency team. More details will be published in the quarterly Organogram of Staff Roles & Salaries on data.gov.uk.

■ **Civil Servants: Dismissal****Charlie Dewhirst:**[\[41641\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 14 March 2025 to Question 36677 on Senior Civil Servants: Performance Appraisal, whether he plans to make changes to facilitate the dismissal of under-performing civil servants.

Georgia Gould:

In line with the newly announced changes to Senior Civil Service Performance management, this Government will require that Permanent Secretaries identify the lowest performing members of their senior workforce and take action to address this within 6 months. In addition to expanding the tools available to ensure that those with the right skills can deliver to the highest standard and drive a productive and efficient Civil Service, we will hold Heads of Departments accountable for the management of underperformance.

■ Civil Servants: Equality**Charlie Dewhirst:**[\[41646\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what guidance has been issued to civil servants on how Diversity and Inclusion considerations should be embedded in all decision-making and delivery.

Georgia Gould:

[The Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#) provides a framework for departments about how Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) should be embedded in the Civil Service.

The [EDI Expenditure Guidance](#) and the [Guidance on Diversity and Inclusion and Impartiality for Civil Servants](#) also provide guidance on specific aspects of EDI. None of this guidance has changed since the General Election.

Departmental EDI guidance for individual civil servants will be held in departments.

■ Foreign Investment in UK: National Security**Mike Wood:**[\[42578\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 8 January 2025 to Question 22202 on Foreign Investment in the UK: National Security, how many transactions have related to China since 5 July 2024.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Government publishes an annual report on the National Security and Investment (NSI) Act 2021, with information about the transactions that it has been notified about and those it subsequently called in for a full national security assessment.

The reports include, amongst other things, the percentage of accepted notifications, call-in notices issued, final notifications issued and the number of withdrawals from a called in acquisition and final orders issued by origin of investment.

The NSI Annual Report 2023-24 was published on 10 September 2024. In this period 3% of accepted notifications involved acquirers associated with China. The period

from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 will be covered in the next annual report, which will be published later this year.

■ Government Departments: Assets

Charlie Dewhirst: [\[41647\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 17 March 2025 to Question HL5388 on Government Departments: Assets, if he will place in the Library a copy of each department's most recent Strategic Asset Management Plan.

Georgia Gould:

The government has previously published summaries of departments' yearly Strategic Asset Management Plans (SAMPs). These are available on the UK government's website (GOV.UK) at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/departmental-strategic-asset-management-plan-executive-summaries>

■ Government Departments: Communication

Mike Wood: [\[41436\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what information the Government Communications Service holds on spending on (a) external marketing, (b) external public relations and (c) other forms of external communications by (i) his and (ii) other Departments.

Georgia Gould:

All departments and ALBs are responsible for their own business planning process. During this process, they will decide their allocation of advertising, marketing, and communications (AMC) spending.

If their spend breaches the advertising, marketing and communications spending control threshold (£100,000), they then engage with our AMC team within the Government Communications Service (GCS).

■ Government Departments: Directors

Mike Wood: [\[41427\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 10 February 2025 to Question 28582 on Government Departments: Directors, whether non-executive directors who are consultant lobbyists are required to recuse themselves on all matters relating to their lobbying clients.

Georgia Gould:

Non-Executive Directors who are consultant lobbyists are required to recuse themselves on all matters relating to their lobbying clients. Non-Executives are

required to recuse themselves from any and all matters relating to any conflict of interest.

■ Government Departments: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

Charlie Dewhirst:

[41640]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's press release entitled Mass cancellation of government credit cards in crackdown on wasteful spend, published on 18 March 2025, if he will require Departments to publish Government Procurement Card spending above £0.

Georgia Gould:

All central Government departments are required to publish Government Procurement Card transactions of £500 and over in line with the guidance available to all government departments on gov.uk at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e8b402686650c18ce2cb541/Procurement_Cards_-_Pan_Government_Policy_V4_06042020.pdf.

Departments can elect to publish transactions under £500 if they so wish.

■ Honours

Mike Wood:

[41437]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 21 February 2025, to Question 30682, on Honours, for what reasons the three Honours campaigns were closed and then later re-opened; and how many of the subsequently-successful candidates were individuals who only applied after the campaigns were re-opened.

Georgia Gould:

In reference to my response to [question 14712](#), the three campaigns were closed and reopened to allow for the widest range of applications. All three campaigns are still in progress, so there are at present no successful candidates.

■ House of Lords Appointments Commission

Charlie Dewhirst:

[41648]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 17 March 2025 to Question 37807 on Advisory Committee on Business Appointments and House of Lords Appointments Commission, what the existing Memorandum of Understanding or equivalent document is between Cabinet Office and HOLAC.

Georgia Gould:

There is no existing Memorandum of Understanding between HOLAC and the Cabinet Office. As with all independent advisory bodies, the Government keeps its arrangements with HOLAC under review. HOLAC has published on its website its Code of Practice and other information detailing the way in which it carries out its advisory role.

■ Public Sector: Procurement**Charlie Dewhirst:** [\[41649\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Procurement Policy Note 002: Social Value Model, published in February 2025, what estimate he has made of the regulatory cost to the public sector of such contract compliance requirements of the new measures on trade unions and fair work.

Georgia Gould:

Central government uses the same tool for assessing social value that has been used since 2021, where central government buyers select evaluation criteria from the options available in the social value model.

We have made updates to the social value model, to streamline it, align it with the government's missions and ensure suppliers' commitments are targeted to need. Any new criteria in the social value model must only be used where they are proportionate and relevant to the contract to prevent creating burdens.

■ Senior Civil Servants: Recruitment**Mike Wood:** [\[42576\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 26 July 2024 to Question 1260 on External by Default Recruitment, how many urgent exemptions to external by default recruitment were granted during the pre-election period.

Georgia Gould:

Details of exemptions to External by Default recruitment are not held centrally.

It is the responsibility of all Ministerial departments, Non-Ministerial departments, Executive Agencies and Crown Non-Departmental Public Bodies to hold their own recruitment records including those relating to exemptions to External by Default.

Mike Wood: [\[42577\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 26 July 2024 to Question 1260 on External by Default Recruitment, what criteria were applied to determine whether a role was urgent or critical during the pre-election period.

Georgia Gould:

The guidance regarding recruitment of Senior Civil Servants during the pre-election period was published on the gov.uk website [here](#).

■ Special Advisers: Industrial Disputes**Mike Wood:** [\[41432\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 13 February 2025 to Question 29023 on Special Advisers: Industrial Disputes, whether he has issued

guidance to special advisers on whether they may undertake industrial action with special advisers from other Departments.

Georgia Gould:

The Cabinet Office has not issued any such guidance.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

Josh Dean:

[903608]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent progress her Department has made on developing the National Youth Strategy.

Melanie Onn:

[903611]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to involve young people in Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes constituency in the development of the National Youth Strategy.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Secretary of State was pleased to announce the new National Youth Strategy, stating the Department's commitment to delivering a strategy by and for young people through the most ambitious listening exercise in a generation. We have launched our nation-wide survey, with over 10,000 responses to date, and are holding events across all regions with young people and the youth sector. Our Youth and Expert Advisory Groups are now established and guiding us in our development. We will publish the strategy in the summer, with an interim report in the coming months.

■ Ahmadiyya: Culture

Luke Taylor:

[33168]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to take steps to support the celebration of Ahmadiyya culture in the UK.

Chris Bryant:

DCMS has no specific plans to do so.

■ Arts: Finance

Lisa Smart:

[40834]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 18 November 2024 to Question 13614 on Arts: Finance, what progress her Department has made on ensuring that artists and creators are appropriately remunerated for the use of their works.

Chris Bryant:

This government is committed to ensuring that all creators receive the recognition, respect, and fair compensation they rightfully deserve for their work, while also fostering an environment that enables the creative industries to flourish, innovate, and sustain long-term success.

We also recognise the principle that rights holders should have control over and seek payment for their work, including when thinking about the role of AI. The current UK Copyright Framework enables creative right holders to prevent the use of protected works, but we are aware that this can be difficult to implement in the context of AI, especially for individual firms and creators.

Our consultation on the impact of AI on the copyright regime, which closed on 25 February, received over 11,500 responses. We will now consider the full range of responses and will continue to develop our policy approach in partnership with creative industries, media and AI stakeholders. Addressing this is an urgent priority for the government, but no decisions will be taken until we are confident we have a practical plan that delivers for the creative industries.

On music streaming, we are continuing to engage with stakeholders across the music industry. This includes through the Creator Remuneration Working Group, which is dedicated to pursuing industry initiatives in this area. The group has convened four times so far, most recently in February, and is set to meet again in the coming weeks.

■ BBC Radio: Scots Gaelic Language and Welsh Language**Ann Davies:**[\[40824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of the cessation of BBC Sounds coverage outside of the UK on the (a) Welsh, and (b) Scottish Gaelic speaking diaspora.

Stephanie Peacock:

The BBC is operationally and editorially independent of the Government, and decisions on how it discharges its obligations, such as its changes to its BBC Sounds service, are a matter for the BBC. The Government has therefore not assessed the potential impact of the BBC's changes to its BBC Sounds service.

■ Casinos: Betting**Max Wilkinson:**[\[41778\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department has made an impact assessment of the decision to allow sports betting in all casinos.

Max Wilkinson:[\[41779\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department has made an impact assessment of the decision to allow up to 80 gaming machines in certain casinos.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Department has considered the available evidence and a full impact assessment will be published for the measure which allows casinos to site up to 80 gaming machines. The Government's Better Regulation Framework classifies the sports betting measure as a de minimis measure, and therefore a de minimis assessment will be completed for this measure, although this won't be published.

■ **Charities: Finance****Stuart Andrew:**[\[42231\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the Spring Statement of 26 March 2025, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to her Department's planned budget for the 2025-26 financial year on support for charities.

Stephanie Peacock:

At the recent Spring Statement, we reiterated the fiscal rules that would guide this Government. The government has taken a number of difficult but necessary decisions on tax, welfare, and spending to fix the foundations of the public finances, fund public services, and restore economic stability.

However, we recognise the vital role that charities play up and down the country, by providing crucial support to different groups and communities.

DCMS continues to support charities in several ways. This includes delivery of a number of grant schemes, such as the £25.5 million Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Energy Efficiency Scheme, which is supporting frontline organisations across England to improve their energy efficiency and sustainability.

Support for charities is also available through social investment which provides access to grants, repayable finance and a blend of the two. This government is continuing to look at how dormant assets can be used to support the availability of finance to facilitate VCSEs becoming more entrepreneurial and financially resilient. An estimated £350 million will flow into the Dormant Assets Scheme between 2024-28, with details on how this money will be distributed to be provided in due course.

Within the tax system, we provide support to charities through a range of reliefs and exemptions, including reliefs for charitable giving. The tax reliefs available to charities are a vital element in supporting charitable causes across the UK, with more than £6 billion in charitable reliefs provided to charities. The biggest individual reliefs provided are Gift Aid at £1.6 billion and business rates relief at nearly £2.4 billion.

■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Equality**Lee Anderson:** [\[40628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what diversity, equality and inclusion targets her Department has for staff recruitment.

Stephanie Peacock:

In line with the wider Civil Service, DCMS does not have recruitment targets for EDI, but is committed to represent the diversity of the UK population.

■ Gambling: Advertising**Martin Wrigley:** [\[41951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if he will take steps to (a) strengthen and (b) enforce regulations on gambling advertising.

Stephanie Peacock:

There are a range of robust rules in place through the Advertising Codes enforced by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to ensure that gambling advertising and marketing, wherever it appears, is socially responsible and does not exacerbate harm. The ASA continually reviews the best available evidence to ensure rules are effective and updates protections as required.

As the statutory regulator for gambling in Great Britain, the Gambling Commission is further strengthening protections to improve customer control over the marketing they receive and the tightening rules on the design of incentives such as free bets.

However, we recognise that more can be done to improve protections. We have set the gambling industry a clear task to raise standards and this work will be monitored closely.

■ Holiday Accommodation: Licensing**Mrs Sureena Brackenridge:** [\[42101\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7047 on Holiday Accommodation: Licensing, what progress she has made on developing a short-term rental registration scheme.

Chris Bryant:

We hope to be able to make further announcements soon.

■ Leisure Centres: South Shropshire**Stuart Anderson:** [\[41476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support access to leisure facilities in South Shropshire constituency.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government recognises that leisure facilities are important to communities up and down the country.

The ongoing responsibility for public leisure facilities lies at Local Authority level. Local Authorities work in partnership with operators who manage leisure services. The Government and Sport England continue to work closely with Local Authorities to monitor pressures in the sector and provide advice and guidance.

■ Listed Buildings

Pippa Heylings: [\[40775\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to provide additional support for owners of listed buildings.

Chris Bryant:

In terms of financial support, the National Lottery Heritage Fund's current 10 year strategy, Heritage 2033, increased the maximum funding available to owners from £100,000 to £250,000 to support designated assets, such as listed buildings. Owners must demonstrate that the public benefit of their project outweighs any private gain.

Historic England also offers repair grants to owners of listed buildings, which in total amounts to between £8.5 - £9 million per year. Historic England also offers various guidance and resources which may be useful to owners and occupiers of listed buildings, as well as the heritage sector more broadly, such as the guidance on Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency, published July 2024.

■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

James Wild: [\[40655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, when she plans to publish updated guidance for the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

Chris Bryant:

Updated guidance was published on the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme website on 19 March 2025.

Martin Wrigley: [\[41559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will ensure that the Listed Places of Worship Grant scheme continues beyond 2026.

Chris Bryant:

I refer the Hon Member to my answer to PQ 29531.

Martin Wrigley: [\[41561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of not funding the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme beyond 2026 on those places of worship.

Chris Bryant:

Future Government spending is a matter for the 2026 Spending Review.

Martin Wrigley: [\[41562\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions she has had with religious leaders on the Listed Places of Worship Grant scheme.

Chris Bryant:

The Government holds a range of meetings with representatives of religious organisations.

DCMS officials have discussed the changes with the Church of England and Catholic Bishops' Conference. Ministers have also exchanged correspondence and met with representatives from most religious organisations.

Zöe Franklin: [\[42134\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a one-off relief package within the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme to support (a) churches and (b) cathedrals in areas with lower economic activity.

Chris Bryant:

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport funds listed places of worship through the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme. This is as generous as we are able to be within existing resources. We have no plans to set up a new grant scheme or package of support.

Zöe Franklin: [\[42136\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme on (a) businesses and (b) suppliers in the (i) building and (ii) crafts sector.

Chris Bryant:

DCMS Ministers received advice on changes to the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, including careful consideration of the potential impacts of various options to scale the scheme.

We believe that the changes announced were necessary and adequate given the tight fiscal challenges we inherited from the previous government and considering competing financial demands in other parts of the heritage and cultural sector, and will continue the widest distribution of the scheme's benefits within the available means. Based on previous scheme data, we expect 94% of claims to be unaffected by this change.

■ Media Act 2024

Stuart Andrew: [\[41803\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions her Department has had with Ofcom on the implementation of the Media Act 2024.

Stuart Andrew:

[41804]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she is taking steps with Ofcom on implementing fair terms of carriage for public service broadcasters on streaming platforms under the Media Act 2024.

Stephanie Peacock:

My Department is working closely with Ofcom to progress implementation of the Media Act 2024. The Act delegates certain powers to the Secretary of State and to Ofcom in terms of designating ‘in-scope’ services and developing relevant guidance.

The new online prominence regime, under the Act, seeks to support effective negotiations between public service broadcasters and TV platforms for the carriage of designated PSB services (referred to in the Act as “internet programme services”). It does so via a set of “agreement objectives” which both parties must act consistently with, as well as Ofcom guidance, which they are required to consult on.

Further information on Media Act implementation can be found on Ofcom’s website: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/Media-Act-Implementation/>.

■ **Members: Correspondence**

Graham Leadbitter:

[41675]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, when she plans to reply to correspondence from the hon. Member for Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey on the closure of local area radio broadcasters of (a) 3 December 2024, (b) 20 January 2025, (c) 20 February 2025 and (d) 12 March 2025.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Hon Member was issued with a response on 26th March.

■ **Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme**

Max Wilkinson:

[41976]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme projects (a) were completed between 5 July 2024 and 27 March 2025 and (b) were incomplete on 27 March 2025; how much and what proportion of the funding allocated for the provision of multi-sport grassroots facilities in this financial year has (i) been and (ii) not been committed.

Stephanie Peacock:

Since 5 July, a total of 728 Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities projects were completed in England (as of 13 March), 14 projects were completed in Scotland, 17 projects were completed in Wales and 11 projects were completed in Northern Ireland (all as of 27 March).

A total of 513 Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities projects remained incomplete in England, 16 remained incomplete in Scotland, 37 remained incomplete in Wales and 4 remained incomplete in Northern Ireland.

For the financial year 2024/25, other than a £1.2k underspend, the full £125m proposed investment into the Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities programme has been committed, with delivery of projects funded ongoing. The Programme has sought to maximise value for money to ensure this funding directly impacts communities across the UK by providing high-quality sports facilities and offering places for people of all backgrounds to get active.

■ Music Venues: Greater Manchester

Lisa Smart: [\[40833\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support grassroots music venues in Greater Manchester.

Chris Bryant:

The government is urging the live music industry to introduce a voluntary levy on tickets for stadium and arena shows, to help safeguard the future of the grassroots music sector. We welcome steps taken by industry to set up a charitable trust to distribute funds from the ticket levy, and commitments made by artists to support grassroots music.

The government has announced £2.5m of continued funding for the Arts Council England's (ACE) Supporting Grassroots Music Fund (SGMF) for 2025-26. This enables grassroots music venues, recording studios, promoters and festivals to apply for grants of up to £40k to develop new revenue streams, make repairs and improvements, and enhance the live music experience for fans.

Through the SGMF, ACE has provided funding to support various music venues in Manchester, such as Matt and Phreds, who have received funding to upgrade equipment and develop a new website for streaming. The Snug in Atherton received £40k to launch The Early Doors Club, bringing high-quality events to local audiences, and in Stockport, The Strines Nightingale secured £26k to expand live programming and enhance accessibility.

■ Musicians: Women

Dr Simon Opher: [\[41132\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to support women wanting to become professional musicians.

Chris Bryant:

This government is committed to providing the essential foundations and support for everyone, including women, to pursue successful careers in music. We are developing a 10 Point Plan to drive growth, foster innovation, and create a thriving environment for those who work in the sector.

The ongoing, independent Curriculum and Assessment review seeks to deliver a broader curriculum so children and young people do not miss out on subjects such as music, the arts and drama. The Government is collaborating with Young Sounds UK on a music opportunity pilot to support music progression, including through

opportunities to learn an instrument. The Department for Education (DfE) is also developing a National Centre for Arts and Music Education to promote opportunities for all children and young people to pursue artistic and creative interests - including through Music Hubs.

■ Sports: Disability

Liam Conlon:

[\[41628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to improve access to sports facilities for disabled people in (a) Beckenham and Penge and (b) the UK.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government is dedicated to making sport in this country accessible and inclusive for everyone. The Government has announced a further £100 million in funding to deliver new and improved multi-sport grassroots facilities and pitches across the whole of the UK. The Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme's aims include regular, weekly use by under-represented groups, including disabled people, so that everyone has the opportunity to participate.

Sport England, the Government's Arm's Length Body for grassroots sport, is committed to increasing participation in sport and physical activity for disabled people and improving their access to sport facilities. Sport England runs specific initiatives like the 'We are Undefeatable' campaign, impacting directly on disabled people, and those with a long-term health condition. Sport England also has partnerships with organisations such as Disability Rights UK, Activity Alliance, Aspire, and Sense, to help more disabled people get active.

■ Sports: Facilities

Liam Conlon:

[\[41629\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that sports facilities funding will encourage broader participation in sports by under-represented communities in (a) Beckenham and Penge constituency and (b) the UK.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government recognises that sports facilities are important to communities up and down the country. High-quality, inclusive facilities help people get active. Everyone, no matter who they are or where they live, should have access to high quality facilities and opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity.

The Government has committed to continued funding for grassroots facilities. On 21 March, we announced £100 million funding to be delivered through the Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme, supporting high-quality, inclusive facilities across the UK.

Projects are required to demonstrate how they increase access and participation levels among under-represented groups, which includes women and girls, ethnic minority groups and disabled players. From 2025/26, the Football Foundation will use learnings from the Lionesses Futures Fund to inform the minimum 'Women and Girls' criteria for all major capital projects, which includes reserved peak-time slots, women and girls only evenings and priority booking for women and girl's teams.

Grassroots sport is also funded through the Government's Arm's Length Body, Sport England, who invest over £250 million in Exchequer and Lottery funding each year.

■ Sports: Sexual Harassment

Jim Shannon:

[\[41422\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to help tackle sexual harassment in sports settings.

Stephanie Peacock:

The safety, wellbeing and welfare of everyone taking part in sport is absolutely paramount. Everyone should be able to participate in sport in safe and secure environments, and where allegations about inappropriate or harmful behaviour are made, these should be taken seriously. National Governing Bodies are responsible for the regulation of their sports and for ensuring that appropriate measures are in place to protect participants from harm. Any matter meeting the criminal threshold should be taken forward through the criminal justice system. Where there is evidence that a crime may have been committed, this should be reported directly to the police.

DCMS's Arm's-Length Body for grassroots sport, Sport England, provides support to the sport and physical activity sector around preventing harm, including sexual harassment, through funding the Ann Craft Trust and the NSPCC's Child Protection in Sport Unit. This totalled £330,917 and £527,525 respectively in 2024/25.

The Government will continue to discuss athlete safety with relevant stakeholders and the sports sector to ensure that everyone can take part in sport as safely as possible.

■ Streaming: Subscriptions

Stuart Andrew:

[\[41831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade on the potential impact of the subscriptions regime in the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 on the level of investment in the video on-demand sector.

Stuart Andrew:

[\[42221\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade on the effectiveness of proposed exemptions to cooling-off rights within the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 subscription regime for preventing consumers from accessing digital content for free.

Stephanie Peacock:

My Department regularly engages with the Department for Business and Trade on a range of issues relating to the implementation of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Act 2024.

The Department for Business and Trade's consultation on the implementation of these measures closed on 10 February 2025, and they are currently analysing responses.

■ **Tourism: Local Government**

Blake Stephenson:

[R] [\[40347\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 7 February 2025 to Question 27307 on Tourism: Local Government, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of increased local authority spending to promote UK tourism on (a) economic growth and (b) tax revenue.

Chris Bryant:

Increased investment to promote UK tourism can, if well targeted, lead to an increase in economic growth, tax revenue and local prosperity.

■ **Tourism: South Shropshire**

Stuart Anderson:

[\[41141\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to support the tourism sector in South Shropshire.

Stephanie Peacock:

With coastal and countryside destinations making up 25% of domestic day trips and 31% of domestic overnight stays in 2023, tourism is recognised as a key sector with the potential to contribute strongly to economic growth and pride in place of an area.

The Government is implementing a range of measures to support the sector and maximise its benefits for local economies, including working with VisitBritain to champion visits to the British countryside to a worldwide audience, and promoting rural areas

DCMS, through VisitEngland, has accredited 38 Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) so far, which aim to drive investment and spend across the regions - including in rural and coastal areas. In November 2024, Telford and Shropshire became an accredited LVEP and continues to provide strong local leadership and governance.

■ Tourism: West Midlands

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

[\[41794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent steps her Department has taken to increase tourism in the West Midlands.

Chris Bryant:

The Government is delivering the largest reform of destination management in a generation. We now have a network of 41 Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) across England and two Regional Destination pilots in the North East and West Midlands. The programmes have been looking at how we make it easier for people to visit those regions and enjoy a range of things to do when they are there, including great places to eat, shop and stay.

In March 2025, during English Tourism Week, we announced that the government is now providing an extra £1.35 million of support so the pilots can operate for another year. The extension will provide an opportunity to keep testing how a regional approach to managing the visitor economy can help drive visitor numbers, increase spending and create jobs, and secure the West Midlands' reputation as a world-class destination to visitors.

■ Young People

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[41168\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to formulate the National Youth Strategy.

Stephanie Peacock:

We are co-producing the National Youth Strategy with young people and cross-sector experts.

We have already conducted Ministerial roundtables with young people as well as in-person and online focus groups. We have also launched a national survey to ask young people about their worries and hopes for the future, and created an engagement toolkit so organisations or MPs can run their own workshops and discussions with young people.

In addition, we have set up a Youth Advisory Group and an Expert Advisory Group to work alongside us throughout the development of the Strategy. We are also working closely with other Government Departments to ensure the Strategy is cross-cutting and better coordinates youth policy.

We will be publishing an interim report this spring and the Strategy will be published this summer.

■ Youth Services: Finance**Martin Wrigley:**[\[41538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to ensure long-term sustainable funding for youth services.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government will publish the National Youth Strategy this summer. The detail and scale of the funding commitments included in the strategy will be shaped by engagement with young people and the youth sector and will be dependent on Spending Review decisions.

In 2025/6, DCMS youth funding will include over £85 million of capital funding to create fit-for-purpose spaces in places where it is most needed. This includes the £26 million Better Youth Spaces Fund for youth clubs to buy new equipment and do renovations, and the completion of Youth Investment Fund projects underway. The new Local Youth Transformation pilot will improve capability to improve local youth offers. Further funding allocations for specific youth programmes will be communicated in due course.

Martin Wrigley:[\[41541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of reductions in youth service funding on young people.

Stephanie Peacock:

Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient youth services for young people in their area. This is funded through the Local Government Funding Settlement.

We acknowledge the challenges facing the sector and the disparities across the country. That is why this Government has launched the co-production of an ambitious new National Youth Strategy, which will be developed together with young people and the youth sector.

We will also launch the Local Youth Transformation pilot in 2025/26, which will support local authorities to build back capability to improve local youth offers. We also have allocated over £85m of capital funding to create fit-for-purpose spaces in places where it is most needed. Further funding allocations for specific youth programmes will be communicated in due course.

Stuart Andrew:[\[41832\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the Spring Statement of 26 March 2025, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to her Department's planned budget for the 2025-26 financial year on the provision of youth services.

Stephanie Peacock:

This Government fully recognises the importance of youth services to help young people live safe and healthy lives, and we remain committed to giving all young people the chance to reach their full potential. That is why we are developing a National Youth Strategy to set out a new vision for young people and an action plan for delivering this.

In 2025/26, has committed to funding over £85 million of capital funding to create fit-for-purpose spaces in places where it is most needed, which includes £26 million for youth clubs to buy new equipment and do renovations under the Better Youth Spaces Fund. Further funding allocations for specific youth programmes will be set out in due course.

■ Youth Services: Local Government**Martin Wrigley:**[\[41545\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will take steps to ensure that local authorities are carrying out their statutory duty to deliver youth services.

Stephanie Peacock:

Local authorities hold the statutory duty to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient provision of educational and recreational leisure-time activities for young people. Local Authorities fund youth services from their Local Government Settlement in line with local need, and this was increased to more than £69 billion in 2025/26 - a 6.8% increase in cash terms compared to 2024/25.

Although there is no legal requirement for local authorities to publish their plans, the guidance encourages local authorities to publish their assessment of local needs for youth services as well as the rationale for their actions and decisions. We will be launching the Local Youth Transformation pilot this year, which will support local authorities to build back capability to improve local youth offers.

DEFENCE**■ Armed Forces: Housing****James Cartlidge:**[\[41887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether there are any benefits that are provided to a service person living in Substitute Service Single Accommodation that would not be provided to a service person living in private accommodation.

Al Carns:

Substitute Service Single Accommodation (SSSA) exists to accommodate Service personnel who are entitled to Single Living Accommodation (SLA) at their primary duty unit where none is available. SSSA is intended to mirror the conditions of SLA in so far as possible and cannot be compared like-for-like with private accommodation.

There are a wide range of allowances available to Service personnel to meet the costs incurred in carrying out their duties, and eligibility will depend on a number of permutations, not just the type of accommodation in which they are resident.

James Cartlidge: [\[41888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many service personnel live in Substitute Service Family Accommodation.

James Cartlidge: [\[41890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many service personnel were living in Substitute Service Family Accommodation by rank as of 27 March 2025.

James Cartlidge: [\[41894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many dual serving service personnel are living in Substitute Service Family Accommodation.

Al Carns:

As of 28 March 2025, there were 174 Service personnel and their families, living in Substitute Service Family Accommodation (SSFA).

Information on the number of Service personnel living in SSFA by rank or by the number of dual Serving Service personnel is not held.

James Cartlidge: [\[41889\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Substitute Service Family Accommodation properties are in use in the United Kingdom.

James Cartlidge: [\[41892\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the annual cost is of Substitute Service Family Accommodation.

James Cartlidge: [\[41893\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the annual cost is of Substitute Service Family Accommodation by region.

Al Carns:

As of 28 March 2025, 174 Substitute Service Family Accommodation (SSFA) properties are in use in the United Kingdom.

The cost of SSFA for financial year 2024-25 is £1.28 million.

Information regarding the annual cost of SSFA by region is not held.

■ Armed Forces: Training

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[42020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the new Ofsted grading scale on in scope military training establishments.

AI Carns:

Ofsted undertake two separate and distinct inspection regimes of Armed Forces' training provision. The first is of the Armed Forces Apprenticeship Programmes which are inspected under the Education Inspection Framework. Any changes to Ofsted's grading scale will have no significant impact in this area. The second is of the Care and Welfare of Armed Forces Initial Training which is inspected under the Ministry of Defence (MOD) Inspection Framework that is unique to the MOD. As such, the MOD and colleagues from Ofsted are working together during a period of consultation to determine whether all, or elements of, the new grading scale will apply to these inspections.

■ Army Foundation College: Inspections

Mike Martin: [43009]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, for what reason AFC Harrogate is exempt from Ofsted inspections; and which independent body is responsible for inspections of AFC Harrogate.

AI Carns:

Ofsted does inspect Army Foundation College (Harrogate). Up to date reports are published online and can be found here, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/welfare-and-duty-of-care-in-armed-forces-initial-training>

■ Army: Recruitment

James Cartlidge: [41495]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the Army still offers a Gap Year Commission.

James Cartlidge: [41496]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the Army Officer Internship has replaced the Gap Year Commission.

James Cartlidge: [41497]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many service personnel are enrolled on the Army Officer Internship programme.

James Cartlidge: [41498]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the maximum capacity is of the Army Officer Internship programme.

James Cartlidge: [41499]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what remuneration package comes with the Army Officer Internship programme.

James Cartlidge:

[\[41500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many people have completed a (a) Gap Year Commission and (b) Army Officer Internship since 2015.

James Cartlidge:

[\[41869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has had discussions with (a) the Chief of Defence People, (b) the Deputy Chief of the General Staff and (c) other military representatives on changing elements of the Army Officer Internship scheme.

Luke Pollard:

Since 2021, the Gap Year Commission has been integrated into the Army Internship Programme, which has provided individuals with the opportunity to experience a challenging and rewarding year with the Army in the role of an Army Officer for 12 months before, during or after University.

The Army offers up to 30 places per year on the Internship programme. 52 different opportunities are provided to allow applicants their choice of role.

Whilst we do not hold data for the entire period requested, below are the number of completions for each academic year since 2017-18. Courses start in September and conclude the following year.

YEAR	INTERNSHIP COMPLETIONS
2017-2018	11
2018-2019	14
2019-2020	14
2020-2021	16
2021-2022	10
2022-2023	10
2023-2024	11

There are currently fewer than 10 active Service personnel enrolled on an internship for the 2024-25 scheme.

Those awarded an internship are paid a spot rate at Pre-Career officer rates and are non-pensionable. These rates are reviewed annually on the recommendations of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body. Internship officers are also provided with an accommodation solution in accordance with Joint Service Policy. Furthermore, any internship officers who become ill or are injured are eligible to receive benefits from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.

There have been no recent discussions or proposed changes to the Internship scheme.

James Cartlidge: [\[41501\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many people have applied for an (a) Gap Year Commission and (b) Army Officer Internship since 2015.

Luke Pollard:

Since 2021, the Gap Year Commission has been integrated into the Army Internship Programme, providing individuals with the opportunity to experience a challenging and rewarding year with the Army in the role of an Army Officer for 12 months before, during or after university.

The department does not hold data related to applications for the entire period requested. Applications for the Army Officer Internship Programme commencing from September 2022 onwards are as follows:

YEAR	APPLICATIONS
2022	196
2023	156
2024	102
2025	120

James Cartlidge: [\[41502\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many people have subsequently joined the Regular Army after completing the (a) Gap Year Commission and (b) Army Officer Internship since 2015.

Luke Pollard:

This information is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as practical and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

James Cartlidge: [\[41504\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many people have subsequently joined the Army Reserve after completing the (a) Gap Year Commission or (b) Army Officer Internship since 2015.

Luke Pollard:

This information is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as practical and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

■ Defence: Finance

James Cartlidge: [\[41494\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the Spring Statement on 26 March 2025, how the £2.2bn for financial year 2025-26 will be spent by his Department.

Luke Pollard:

The £2.2 billion will support the Government in building a modern and resilient Armed Forces, including by enhancing the UK's programme of joint exercises with NATO allies, allowing investment in advanced technology such as Directed Energy Weapons, and refurbishing the defence estate to provide our military families with the homes they deserve. We will also establish the UK Defence Innovation, to help secure competitive advantage whilst driving wider growth.

■ **Defence: Procurement****James Cartlidge:**[\[41484\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many procurement orders have been submitted by his Department for approval by (a) HM Treasury and (b) Cabinet Office since 5th July 2024 for a value of (i) over £1 million, (ii) £500,000-1 million, (iii) under £500,000.

Maria Eagle:

From 5 July 2024 to date, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has submitted 39 business cases to His Majesty's Treasury (HMT) and 68 to the Cabinet Office, all of which were for expenditure over £1 million.

As regards approvals by HMT, it is important to note that only those business cases relating to programmes with whole life costs above MOD's Delegated Authorisation Levels (DAL) require HMT approval. These levels are as follows:

£1 billion CDEL or £800 million RDEL for Equipment or Service Provision programmes, £250 million (either DEL) for Information & Communications Technology programmes, and £100 million (either DEL) for Infrastructure programmes. All programmes within the Defence Nuclear Enterprise have a DAL of £1 billion.

Therefore, all business cases below these thresholds are approved internally within MOD.

■ **Guided Weapons: Procurement****Alex Burghart:**[\[40320\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to his Department's press release on the award of a £1.6 billion contract to Thales in Belfast for the manufacture of lightweight-multirole missiles, published on 2 March 2025, whether his Department considered procuring the contract through a competitive tendering process under the Defence and Security Public Contracts Regulations 2011.

Maria Eagle:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him to Question 40323 on 28 March 2025.

Attachments:

1. [Guided Weapons: Procurement](#) [40323 - Guided Weapons Procurement.docx]

■ Land Mines**Sir Julian Lewis:** [\[42389\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential effectiveness of landmines in enabling the defence of land borders against conventional armed attack.

Luke Pollard:

I hope the right hon. Gentleman will understand that the Ministry of Defence can't comment publicly on operational matters. All anti-personnel landmines present an enduring risk to civilians in the wake of conflict. It is for this reason the UK remains a committed State Party to the Ottawa Treaty. The UK has successfully operated without anti-personnel landmines for fifteen years.

■ Ministry of Defence: Equality**Lee Anderson:** [\[41943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what diversity, equality and inclusion targets his Department has for staff recruitment.

Al Carns:

Whilst there are no Civil Service-level Diversity, Equality and Inclusion targets for staff recruitment, the Civil Service is committed to representing the diversity of the UK population. At a Departmental level, the Ministry of Defence has set a number of Levels of Ambition which, amongst other factors, aim to improve the diversity of our workforce by delivering the policy, process, cultural and behavioural changes required to maximise the talent of our people. We also have a target for civilian disability representation of 15.3 per cent by 2030.

■ Navy: Recruitment**James Cartlidge:** [\[41506\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether a programme similar to the Army Officer Internship scheme exists in the Royal Navy.

James Cartlidge: [\[41507\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether a programme similar to the Army Officer Internship scheme exists in the Royal Marines.

Luke Pollard:

Neither the Royal Navy (RN) nor Royal Marines (RM) currently offer an Officer Internship scheme similar to the Army.

However, the RN does offer several different schemes such as A-Level Scholarships, Accelerated Apprenticeship Schemes, Defence Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Undergraduate Schemes and Cadetship Entry. All of these give generous annual bursary payments and the opportunity to complete Naval Service training every year alongside their studies.

■ Strategic Defence Review: Contracts

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[36052\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether any of the contracts for the three external reviewers conducting the Strategic Defence Review have been extended.

Luke Pollard:

The external review team continue to support the delivery of this crucial piece of work. The Strategic Defence Review - which will be published in the Spring - will ensure the United Kingdom is both secure at home and strong abroad, now and for the years to come.

■ Ukraine: Ammunition

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[41592\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what artillery ammunition has been supplied to Ukraine.

Luke Pollard:

Since the beginning of the conflict, we have delivered over 500,000 rounds of artillery ammunition worth over £1.5 billion to Ukraine. With European partners, we are also members of the artillery capability coalition which delivers immediate support to Ukraine and also has a long-term plan to support Ukraine's ambitions for a NATO-interoperable future force.

Due to operational security reasons, I am unable to give a breakdown of types.

This Government is steadfast in our commitment to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. We are committed to giving Ukraine more military support than ever before this year, with a £4.5 billion boost for Ukraine in 2025.

■ Ukraine: Armoured Fighting Vehicles

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[41609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has a long-term (a) maintenance and (b) repair plan for armoured vehicles gifted to Ukraine beyond the training package by Babcock.

Luke Pollard:

For reasons of security, I hope the hon. Gentleman will understand that I cannot go into specific details. Maintaining, repairing and overhauling (MRO) both systems granted in kind and Ukrainian indigenous systems is critical to Ukraine's ability to repel the illegal Russian invasion and deter any future aggression. In recognition of this, through Task Force Hirst we have created a framework to scale this support in line with Ukrainian priorities, both nationally and internationally, as seen with the recent announcement of in-country MRO of the Archer system with Swedish partners.

We are working closely with a number of companies such as BAE Systems, Babcock and others, together with local Ukrainian companies, to scale this support nationally and with wider partners.

Conducting this work in-country, ensures that critical military equipment is returned to the frontline for use by the Ukrainian Armed Forces quicker and more efficiently, so that Ukraine can continue the fight against this unprovoked Russian aggression.

EDUCATION

■ Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[42661\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to extend the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund beyond the end of the 2024-25 financial year for those recipients not eligible for split funding.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[42662\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of recipients will lose entitlement to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund on 31 March 2025.

Janet Daby:

On 1 April, it was announced that the adoption and special guardianship support fund would continue into 2025/26, with a budget of £50 million. A further announcement about arrangements for applications will be made as soon as possible. All applications will continue to be assessed on an individual basis in line with published criteria.

■ Children: Carers

Ellie Chowns: [\[41668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help ensure the adequacy of support for children in kinship care.

Janet Daby:

The department is taking a number of steps to ensure that children in kinship care get the support that they need to thrive. This includes promoting their educational and mental health needs and supporting the people who care for them.

From September 2024, the department expanded the role of virtual school heads on a non-statutory basis to include championing the education, attendance and attainment of children in kinship care, ensuring that more children in kinship care receive the help they need to thrive at school. The department is now mandating this through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

In addition, the department is providing over £3 billion of pupil premium funding to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils in England, including

looked after and previously looked after children. Schools can direct pupil premium spending where the need is greatest, including to pupils with other identified needs, such as children in kinship care. Schools can also use pupil premium on whole class approaches that will benefit all pupils, such as on high quality teaching.

Some children in kinship care will be able to access the adoption and special guardianship support fund, which helps adoptive and special guardianship order children and their families access therapeutic interventions related to trauma and attachment.

Children in kinship care will also benefit from this government's commitment to improving mental health support for all children and young people. The government will deliver on this commitment through providing access to specialist mental health professionals in every school, so every young person has access to early support to address problems before they escalate. We will also recruit an additional 8,500 new mental health staff to treat children and adults, and open new Young Futures hubs with access to mental health support workers.

The steps the government is taking to improve support for kinship carers will also improve the support children living in kinship care receive. In October, the department announced £40 million to trial a new kinship allowance in up to ten local authorities. This pilot will test whether paying an allowance will help support more children to live and thrive with a kinship carer.

In addition, the government has provided over 140 peer support groups and a package of training and support for all kinship carers to access across England. The increased financial support, emotional support and training kinship carers receive should help them in their role as carers and enhance the support they give the children in their care.

■ **Dyslexia: Screening**

Mr Angus MacDonald:

[\[41713\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to introduce universal dyslexia screening within the first two years of primary school to help ensure (a) early identification and (b) support for dyslexic children.

Mr Angus MacDonald:

[\[41714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to make dyslexia training mandatory for (a) classroom educators and (b) on-going continued professional development.

Catherine McKinnell:

I refer the hon. Member for Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire to the answer of 31 March 2025 to Question [40829](#).

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

■ Music: Education

Laura Kyrke-Smith: [\[42326\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the level of funding available for Music Hubs.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government has committed £79 million per year for the Music Hubs programme, inclusive of the 2024/25 academic year. The 43 Music Hubs partnerships across England offer a range of services, including musical instrument tuition, instrument loaning and whole-class ensemble teaching. To widen access to musical instruments, the government is investing £25 million in capital funding for musical instruments, equipment and technology from the 2024/25 academic year. This funding enables Music Hubs partnerships to better cater to the needs of the children and young people they work with.

The government believes creative subjects like music, art and drama are important elements of the rounded and enriching education every child deserves. Future programme budgets will be considered as part of the spending review and subsequent business planning process.

■ Reading: Teaching Methods

Ms Julie Minns: [\[41623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the validation process for new phonics programmes is.

Ms Julie Minns: [\[41624\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of the University of Florida's UFLI phonics programme.

Catherine McKinnell:

I refer my hon. Friend, the Member for Carlisle to the answer of 29 March 2025 to Question [36216](#).

■ Schools: Carbon Emissions

Nick Timothy: [\[41554\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what contracts have been agreed by her Department for (a) designing and (b) constructing new school buildings that are net zero in operation; and what the value was of each contract.

Stephen Morgan:

The department's building projects are currently delivered through our £7 billion construction framework 2021 (CF21) which was published under the previous government. The specification for that framework requires buildings to be net zero carbon in operation. Signed contract values are published on GOV.UK, normally

within 30 days of the contract being signed, and are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/contracts-finder>.

■ Schools: Solar Power

Connor Naismith:

[41655]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what criteria her Department is using to allocate funding for school solar panel installation; and what steps she is taking to ensure that the most energy-inefficient school buildings are prioritised.

Stephen Morgan:

This £80 million partnership programme between the department and Great British Energy is targeting 200 schools and colleges in the 2025/26 academic year.

There will be a cluster of around 45 schools in each of the North West, North East and West Midlands, selected based on deprivation levels and other factors such as roof capacity. Each cluster will also include a further education college which will work with the contractors appointed to promote careers in renewables to support growth in the construction and renewables workforce. There will also be a minimum of ten schools in each of the government office regions to ensure some regional spread.

This is just one element of the department's strategy to ensure that the school estate is sustainable. We are providing support for all schools and colleges to get started on their journey towards net zero via our new online 'Sustainability Support for Education' platform and our climate ambassador programme.

■ Schools: Staffordshire

Adam Jogee:

[41581]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many schools in (a) Newcastle-under-Lyme and (b) Staffordshire have received notices of finance from Staffordshire County Council.

Catherine McKinnell:

Staffordshire County Council reported that 13 maintained schools were subject to a notice of financial concern during the 2023/24 financial year.

The department does not hold details of which schools these were, nor does it hold details at a level lower than County Council.

■ Social Workers: Registration

Zoe Franklin:

[41636]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has plans to increase registration fees for social workers.

Janet Daby:

As set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017, Social Work England (SWE) is responsible for setting the level of the registration fee for social workers. Before

determining the level of any fee, including any change, SWE must both consult publicly and gain the approval of my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education. Further information is available at:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/part/2/enacted#section-36-4>.

SWE's public consultation runs until 13 May 2025 and is available at:

<https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/news/public-consultation-on-changes-to-our-fees-is-now-open/>.

■ Special Educational Needs

Caroline Voaden:

[41707]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she plans to take to ensure all staff working with children and young people have the appropriate training to identify and support children with speech, language and communication challenges.

Catherine McKinnell:

All teachers are teachers of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). High quality teaching is central to ensuring that pupils with SEND are given the best possible opportunity to achieve in their education, and early language skills are vital to enable children to thrive in the early years and later in life, including for all aspects of later attainment in school.

This is why the department's new combined Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) contains significantly more content related to adaptive teaching and supporting pupils with SEND, including content on supporting pupils' oral language skills, and our Universal SEND Services training programme helps school and further education workforces to identify and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND earlier and more effectively.

The department is also co-funding the Early Language Support for Every Child and Partnerships programme with NHS England, which utilises pre-qualification speech and language therapy Support Assistants in early years and primary settings, and the Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools builds teacher and staff capacity to identify and meet the needs of neurodivergent children, including those with speech and language needs.

The department are continuing funding support for the 11,100 schools registered for the Nuffield Early Language Intervention programme. As of January 2024, we estimate that the programme has screened 650,000 children in the last four years and supported over 211,000 four and five year-olds since the pandemic.

To continue to build workforce capability, the department has recently commissioned Newcastle University and University College London to review the most effective tools, strategies and approaches for teachers and other relevant staff in mainstream settings to identify and support children and young people, including around speech, language and communication needs.

■ Special Educational Needs: Newton Abbot**Martin Wrigley:** [\[41782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make it her policy that the existing level of funding for Education and Health Care Plans will be provided in Newton Abbot constituency in 2025-26.

Catherine McKinnell:

I refer the hon. Member for Newton Abbot to the answer of 17 March 2025 to Question [35870](#).

■ Special Educational Needs: North Staffordshire**Adam Jogee:** [\[41529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many individual representations her Department has received from Staffordshire County Council on the (a) funding and (b) quality of SEND provision in North Staffordshire in each of the last five years.

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 department is committed to taking a community-wide approach in collaboration with local area partnerships, improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs.

To support this, high needs funding will increase by £1 billion in the 2025/26 financial year, compared to the 2024/25 financial year. This will bring total high needs funding to over £12 billion.

Of that total, Staffordshire County Council is being allocated over £143 million through the high needs funding block of the dedicated schools grant (DSG), an increase of £10.4 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 financial year NFF allocation.

In addition to the DSG, local authorities will also receive a separate core schools budget grant (CSBG) in the 2025/26 financial year. This CSBG continues the separate grants payable in the 2024/25 financial year, which are to help special schools and alternative provision with the costs of teachers' pay and pension increases and other staff pay increases, as well as the additional funding in respect of the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions. The department plans to publish individual local authorities' allocations of this funding for the 2025/26 financial year in May 2025.

Following the last Ofsted/Care Quality Commission visit, departmental officials have been working with Staffordshire County Council to closely monitor progress against

the areas for improvement identified by inspectors. An Accelerated Progress Plan is in place and progress is monitored regularly.

The areas for improvement were:

- Area 1: Co-production was weak. Parents felt that the local area did not listen to them or their child. The 'tell it once' approach was not embedded. The area's relationships with schools and families were fragile.
- Area 2: The quality of education, health and care (EHC) plans was poor. Health and care workers did not contribute to the process effectively. The targets and outcomes in plans were not aspirational enough. The annual reviews of EHC plans were often not completed on time or did not contribute effectively to the review of the children and young people's needs or the support and help they received.

The department has appointed a SEND Advisor, along with a bespoke package of support from the Research and Improvement for SEND Excellence Consortium, to support and work alongside the Local Area Partnership.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Training**

Mr Angus MacDonald:

[\[41715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to help ensure that Ofsted assessments include a requirement for schools to provide SEND training for all teachers.

Catherine McKinnell:

This is a matter for His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member for Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire directly and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Transport**

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[42731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to support SEND transport providers.

Catherine McKinnell:

I refer my hon. Friend, the Member for Stroud to the answer of 7 February 2025 to Question [27291](#).

■ **Teaching Assistants: Temporary Employment**

Jim Shannon:

[\[41418\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of teaching assistants who are on temporary contracts.

Catherine McKinnell:

Education is a devolved matter, and as such the response below outlines the information for schools in England only.

As of November 2023, the latest date for which data is available, there was a headcount of 395,585 teaching assistants (282,925 full-time equivalent) employed by state-funded schools with a contract of 28 days or longer. Of these, 22,224, equivalent to 5.6%, (14,277, 5.0%, full-time equivalent) were reported to be employed on a temporary contract.

In addition, support staff who are not directly employed by the school or local authority and who are in school on census day (early November each year) with a contract or service agreement lasting fewer than 28 days are recorded as 'third-party support staff'. As of November 2023, the latest date for which data is available, schools reported there was a headcount of 14,908 third-party support staff with a post of teaching assistant (full-time equivalent is not collected).

Information on the school workforce, including the number of teaching assistants, is published in the 'School workforce in England' statistical publication which is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Batteries: Storage

Nick Timothy:

[\[41547\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what fire prevention policies battery energy storage systems sites are required to follow.

Michael Shanks:

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) regulates battery energy storage systems (BESS) under a framework which requires responsible parties to take measures to ensure health and safety throughout all stages of a BESS's deployment. Of particular relevance to fire prevention, the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002 (DSEAR) sets minimum requirements for the protection of workers and others from fire and explosion risks.

■ Electricity and Natural Gas: Prices

John Whitby:

[\[41709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of decoupling the electricity wholesale price from gas.

Michael Shanks:

As part of the Review of Electricity Market Arrangements, the Government assessed the merits of decoupling the electricity wholesale price from gas, considering proposals such as a Split Market, Green Power Pool and future-proofed Contracts for Difference scheme. The Contracts for Difference scheme was identified as the best tool to decouple gas and electricity prices. Increasing participation of renewables in

the wholesale market means that over time, cheaper renewable electricity will set the price more often, lowering costs for consumers.

■ **Electricity Generation and Renewable Energy: Buckinghamshire**

Callum Anderson: [\[41728\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent assessment his Department has made of the capacity to support increased renewable energy generation of the electricity grid in (i) Buckinghamshire and (ii) Milton Keynes.

Michael Shanks:

Electricity network capacity information is available at the website of each Distribution Network Operator that serves Buckinghamshire. For National Grid Electricity Distribution (which covers Milton Keynes) this can be found at:

<https://www.nationalgrid.co.uk/our-network/network-capacity-map/>. For UK Power Networks <https://ukpowernetworks.opendatasoft.com/pages/network-infrastructure-usage-map/?grid=true>. For Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks <https://network-maps.ssen.co.uk/>. The National Energy System Operator also has information on transmission network capacity at: <https://www.neso.energy/industry-information/connections/connections-360>.

■ **Electricity: Concessions**

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[41521\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of extending the £250 reduction in electricity bills for who live within 500m of a pylon to those living near to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project level solar farms.

Michael Shanks:

My Rt hon Friend the Secretary of State has regular discussions with Ministerial Colleagues on a number of issues.

■ **Electricity: Meters**

Graham Leadbitter: [\[42378\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the potential implications for his policies of practice of classifying communal electricity meters in residential buildings as business rather than domestic; what steps he has taken to ensure fair and consistent application of tariffs; whether energy suppliers are permitted to override a meter's designation as Domestic in the National Database when setting tariffs; and what steps his Department is taking to prevent incorrect classification.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Communal areas in apartment blocks are charged on a non-domestic energy contract as the organisation who is responsible for them is a business. As such, domestic consumers living in the apartment block are usually charged a non-domestic energy

rate for these areas. Ofgem's Maximum Resale Direction protects tenants from being charged inflated electricity costs from their landlord. It sets a maximum price that can be charged for electricity and gas which has already been bought from a licenced supplier.

Suppliers are ultimately responsible for correctly classifying the customers they contract with as domestic or non-domestic, in line with Ofgem criteria. Suppliers are also responsible for the correct classification of electricity meters, in accordance with 'meter profile classes' managed by Elexon in the Balancing and Settlement Code (BSC).

Ofgem has made clear in guidance on this subject that 'meter profile class' should not be the deciding factor in whether a customer is domestic or non-domestic, this should be based on the intended purpose of consumption at the premises (i.e. domestic or non-domestic) Bespoke contracts should be offered where needed

Graham Leadbitter: [\[42379\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether the status of a managing factor as a limited company affects the classification of a communal electricity supply as domestic or business; and what guidance his Department provides to Ofgem and energy suppliers on this matter.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The classification of whether a communal electricity supply is considered domestic or business depends on whether the organisation or individual who manages the building has a domestic or commercial energy contract. Businesses are required to have a commercial energy contract, even if they provide electricity to domestic properties.

Ofgem provides guidance to consumers on whether they need a business energy contact on its website - <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/information-consumers/energy-advice-businesses/get-energy-your-business>.

Graham Leadbitter: [\[42380\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he has taken to protect residential consumers from being charged Business Rate electricity tariffs for communal areas; and what mechanisms exist to challenge such classifications.

Graham Leadbitter: [\[42381\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department plans to review the practice of applying business energy tariffs to communal electricity supplies in residential buildings.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Communal areas in apartment blocks are charged on a non-domestic energy contract as the organisation who is responsible for them is a business.

A Call for Evidence regarding domestic customers with a non-domestic energy supply was published in July 2023 and explored the advantages and disadvantages of these

arrangements. The responses highlighted the complexity of energy supply and contract arrangements, and due to the physical set-up of these residences, the majority of these consumers will continue to receive their energy via a non-domestic contract. The Call for Evidence is now closed, and a summary of responses was published in April 2024.

Ofgem is taking action to ensure these consumers are protected by raising awareness of the Maximum Resale Price direction, and planning work with network companies to produce a clear route for vulnerable consumers to be added to the Priority Services Register.

■ Energy: Meters

Alex Sobel: [\[41508\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to ensure energy suppliers are resolving noncommunicating smart meters.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Over 90% of smart meters are sending automatic readings to energy suppliers. To drive this percentage up further we are working at pace alongside industry partners to share best practice and improve smart meter connectivity across Great Britain.

Ofgem is currently conducting compliance engagement into six energy suppliers in relation to their obligations to keep smart meters operating in smart mode. Ofgem is also currently consulting on new Guaranteed Standards of Performance (GSOPs) that will further strengthen consumer protections in cases where a smart meter is not sending automatic readings.

■ Energy: Misrepresentation

Connor Naismith: [\[41634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to prevent companies fraudulently mis-selling (a) solar panels and (b) other energy generating equipment.

Michael Shanks:

The sale of energy generation equipment is governed by consumer protection law.

There are opt-in consumer codes such as the Renewable Energy Consumer Code and standards such as the Microgeneration Certification Scheme. These are adopted by many companies selling generation equipment.

The Government is also undertaking a review of Ofgem's role, to ensure that it has the appropriate powers to protect consumers. A recent call for evidence sought views on Ofgem's remit in enforcing consumer protection law in respect of low carbon technologies.

■ Energy: Schools

James McMurdock: [\[42174\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department has had recent discussions with head teachers on the rising cost of energy for schools.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

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

■ Environment Protection: Job Creation

Adam Jogee: [\[42076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will publish the report of the Green Jobs Delivery Group on skills for the green energy sector.

Sarah Jones:

We are building on the progress that the Green Jobs Delivery Group previously made by setting up the Office for Clean Energy Jobs (OCEJ). The OCEJ has been created to ensure that clean energy jobs are abundant, high quality, paid fairly, and have favourable terms and good working conditions. We published our analysis on the future of the clean energy workforce as part of the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan in December 2024, including the accompanying 'Assessment of the Clean Energy Skills Challenge' annex.

■ Heating

Seamus Logan: [\[42927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what survey data his Department (a) has commissioned and (b) holds since July 2024 on regional averages for when different areas turn on their heating systems in Great Britain.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Department does not hold data on when different areas turn on their heating systems. Statistics on regional gas demand are published annually in [Subnational gas consumption data](#). UK level monthly domestic gas demand is also published in [Energy Trends table 4.2](#).

■ Mayoral Renewables Fund

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41453\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, for what reason the Mayoral Renewables Fund is operating on a bidding scheme basis; and whether the fund is ringfenced.

Michael Shanks:

Great British Energy (GBE) will partner with Local Authorities, Mayoral Strategic Authorities, Devolved Governments and the community energy sector to help increase the rollout of renewable energy projects.

The 2025/26 financial year is a transitional period as GBE is being established, during which the Department is supporting GBE to deliver a one-off scheme what will kick-start its relationship with the Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs). The £10 million fund will be for projects that focus on renewable power generation; all MSAs will receive funding as long as eligibility criteria are met. Beyond the transitional period, GBE will work with individual MSAs to determine the most effective investment partnerships in their areas.

■ **Solar Power: Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects**

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[41524\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, on which date the increased threshold for Nationally Significant Infrastructure projects for solar will take effect.

Michael Shanks:

Subject to parliamentary approval, the higher threshold of 100MW for solar projects will come into force on 31 December 2025.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ **Agriculture and Environment Protection: Regulation**

Joe Robertson:

[\[41761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how his Department quantifies compliance costs for new regulations.

Emma Hardy:

“Compliance costs” are the costs of complying with government regulation. These will typically include familiarisation costs, costs relating to monitoring or data reporting, and costs related to inspections where relevant. When analysing impacts on businesses of any new or amended policy, Defra complies with the Better Regulation Framework alongside HMT’s Green Book and Magenta Book principles.

Joe Robertson:

[\[41762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department includes indirect business losses when estimating compliance costs.

Emma Hardy:

“Compliance costs” are the costs of complying with government regulation. When analysing impacts on businesses of any new or amended policy, Defra complies with the Better Regulation Framework alongside HMT’s Green Book and Magenta Book principles. We do not routinely consider indirect costs to business as this is not a requirement of the Framework.

■ Animal Welfare: Labelling

Sarah Champion:

[\[41444\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to include an exemption in the veterinary agreement that is being negotiated with the European Union that would protect the United Kingdom's ability to implement animal welfare method-of-production labelling, including on imports.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government is committed to resetting our EU relationship, including by seeking to negotiate an SPS agreement. We have been clear that an SPS agreement could boost trade and deliver significant benefits on both sides. It's too early to discuss any specific areas in detail and we will not be providing a running commentary on discussions with the EU.

A public consultation on proposals to improve and extend current mandatory method of production labelling was undertaken last year by the previous Government. We are now carefully considering all responses before deciding on next steps and will respond to this consultation in due course.

■ Bees: Conservation

Robin Swann:

[\[42062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many inspectors his Department has trained to (a) inspect and (b) assess the health of (i) bees and (ii) their hives.

Mary Creagh:

The Animal and Plant Health Agency's National Bee Unit has 50 trained inspectors which includes the National Bee Inspector and 8 Regional Bee Inspectors. All of these inspectors are trained to inspect and assess the health of bees and the hives in England and Wales.

■ Chemicals: Pollution Control

Mr James Frith:

[\[41971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) protect the health of (i) women and (ii) the public generally from chemical pollution and (b) promote (A) research, (B) regulation and (C) public awareness in this area.

Emma Hardy:

This Government is committed to protecting human health and the environment from the risks posed by chemicals. We do this by monitoring, assessing chemical risk and banning or highly restricting certain chemicals. The UK Regulation concerning the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (UK REACH) requires companies to identify and manage the risks presented by the chemicals they manufacture or market in GB. Action to assess and manage the risks posed by

specific chemicals is also set out annually in the UK REACH Work Programme. Under UK REACH, there is a restriction mechanism to limit or ban chemical substances if they pose an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment.

We also restrict the most harmful chemicals through regulations that implement legally binding international conventions on chemicals and hazardous waste: Stockholm (Persistent Organic Pollutants), Basel (cross border hazardous wastes and disposal), Minamata (mercury) and Rotterdam (hazardous chemicals). These regimes have led to a reduction in chemical pollution. Monitoring demonstrates that emissions of Persistent Organic Pollutants to air, land and water have fallen between 2001 and 2021.

We work across Government and with relevant agencies, such as the UK Health Security Agency and with the Health and Safety Executive to identify gaps in our evidence and commission new research, which is published in the interests of transparency. Through the Environment Agency, Defra has published research into key chemicals of concern, such as Per- and Polyfluorinated Alkyl Substances (PFAS), with a view to understanding the policy options to protect human health and the environment. The UKHSA provides public health advice to Local Authorities, Government Departments and Agencies where chemicals are found in the environment including drinking water, air and soil, to protect the health of the public including women. UKHSA also undertakes research in Environmental Exposures and Chemical Threats and Hazards in partnership with universities, including research funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) funded Health Protection Research Units (HPRU) and, and publishes the Chemical hazards compendium which provides information on chemicals to the public.

This Government is committed to protecting human health and the environment from the risks posed by chemicals. We are bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty which requires us to consider how the exercise of our functions may impact people with different protected characteristics, including sex.

■ **Climate and Nature Bill**

Martin Wrigley:

[\[34414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to meet with campaigners involved with the Climate and Nature Bill.

Mary Creagh:

We regularly meet with campaigners on a wide range of issues, including those who support the Climate and Nature Bill.

■ **Climate Change and Environment Protection**

Martin Wrigley:

[\[34409\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to meet the hon. Member for South Cotswolds to discuss legislative proposals on climate and nature.

Mary Creagh:

I met with the honourable member for South Cotswolds in January this year.

■ Consumer Goods: Carbon Emissions**Ellie Chowns:**[\[40769\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question 16660 on Consumer Goods: Carbon Emissions, what discussions he has had with the (a) Circular Economy Taskforce and (b) Committees of Advertising Practice and Advertising Standards Authority on measures to limit climate emissions from advertising of high carbon products.

Emma Hardy:

The Government recognises the importance of reducing emissions from high carbon products and will continue to bring forward proposals to do so. As the Circular Economy Taskforce develops recommendations for the strategy, it will consider the evidence for action right across the economy and evaluate what interventions may be needed. The Committee of Advertising Practice and Advertising Standards Authority operate independently of the Government.

■ Countryside: Access**Satvir Kaur:**[\[41671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress his Department has made on improving responsible access to nature.

Mary Creagh:

The Government recognises the importance of providing access to the outdoors for people's health and wellbeing and is working to ensure that this access is safe and appropriate. We are committed to increasing access to nature, and have already set out several ambitious manifesto commitments to expand opportunities for the public to enjoy the outdoors, including the creation of nine new national river walks and three new national forests in England.

We are currently developing policy to improve access to nature, working closely with other Government departments and key stakeholders. In addition, we are already delivering key initiatives aimed at increasing access to green spaces and the countryside, including:

- Completing the King Charles III England Coast Path, which will become the longest waymarked and maintained coastal walking route in the world. With over 2,400 miles of the route now approved and 1,430 miles already open, this will also create 250,000 hectares of new open access land within the coastal margin.
- Designating Wainwright's Coast to Coast route as a National Trail across the north of England.

- Delivering the £16 million 'Access for All' programme, which is designed to make our protected landscapes, national trails, forests, and the wider countryside more inclusive and accessible to all.

In addition, the Government has made the decision to repeal the cut-off date for the registration of historic rights of way, preventing the loss of hundreds of miles of unregistered paths. This will ensure that these paths remain available to the public for future generations. This change will be formally enacted when parliamentary time allows.

Ellie Chowns:

[\[42122\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will bring forward legislative proposals in this Session to create a right of responsible access to the English countryside.

Mary Creagh:

The Government recognises the importance of providing access to the outdoors for people's health and wellbeing and is working to ensure this is safe and appropriate. That is why we have set out ambitious manifesto commitments to create nine new national river walks and three new national forests in England, expanding access to the great outdoors.

We have also announced plans to remove the 2031 cut-off date for the recording of historic rights of way to enhance public access to nature. This will ensure that the public can continue to use these routes for years to come, with the change being formally enacted when parliamentary time allows.

Dr Roz Savage:

[\[42964\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the policy paper entitled Technical annex: The combined environmental land management offer, published on 19 March 2024, whether it is his policy to financially incentivise permissive access.

Daniel Zeichner:

Actions for permissive access are included in the Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier offer where they will benefit from input from Natural England advisers to ensure improvements represent value for money and link into the existing PROW network. Details of the new Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier offer were announced in December 2024.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Secondment

Jon Trickett:

[\[36591\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 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.

Daniel Zeichner:

Since July 2024 no staff have been seconded into Defra from the Institute for Economic Affairs, the Policy Exchange, the Adam Smith Institute or Labour Together. The response to the request is Nil staff.

■ Electronic Equipment: Waste**James McMurdock:**[\[37856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to reduce electronic waste.

Mary Creagh:

This Government is committed to transitioning to a circular economy. The UK is exposed to significant supply risks: 80% of the UK's raw material footprint is extracted abroad, including almost all of the metal ores we use. A transition to a circular economy could improve UK resource security by protecting the UK from future global resource depletion.

We have convened a Circular Economy Taskforce to help us develop a Circular Economy Strategy for England. The Strategy will be supported by a series of roadmaps detailing the interventions that the government will make on a sector-by-sector basis, supporting government's Missions to kickstart economic growth and make Britain a clean energy superpower. We are considering the evidence for sector-specific interventions right across the economy, including in electronic waste, as we develop our Strategy.

Funds generated under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Regulations 2013 include a postcode locator guiding householders to their nearest location to safely recycle, donate or repair unwanted equipment. The Recycle Your Electricals campaign also provides advice on how to remove personal data from gadgets

We have also introduced a ban on the sale and supply of Single-Use Vapes from 1 June 2025 meaning that from this date wasteful single-use vape products will no longer be available. Later this year we will introduce legislation to ensure online marketplaces and vape producers are paying their fair share towards recycling costs.

■ Environmental Protection: Regulation**Joe Robertson:**[\[41742\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department plans to conduct a review of environmental compliance obligations.

Emma Hardy:

Defra complies with the Better Regulation Framework alongside HMT's Green Book and Magenta Book principles. Where required, Defra will conduct post implementation reviews (PIRs) of legislation.

The Chancellor's Action Plan, published 17 March 2025, is supported by Defra. In that plan we have already committed to take actions relating to environmental and

planning regulation, amongst other things. We want to ensure our regulatory system becomes more flexible, coherent and innovation-friendly to support new infrastructure and development, whilst upholding our protections for the environment and local communities.

■ Farms: Pollution Control

Julia Buckley:

[\[33250\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to improve cross-border cooperation on farming pollution regulations between England and Wales.

Emma Hardy:

This Government is committed to building stronger ties and working collaboratively with the Welsh Government on shared priorities that deliver for all our citizens including tackling pollution, restoring nature and supporting our farmers. Effective regulations play an important part of in reducing diffuse agricultural pollution and cleaning up our waters, as well as supporting improvements to farm businesses. Both Governments are working closely with regulators, local farmers and other key partners in England and Wales on these issues, for example by working with local farmers and environmental NGOs, alongside the Wye Nutrient Management Board and the Wye Catchment Partnership who are leading efforts to tackle pollution in the Wye.

Please also see the announcement below for more detail regarding what is being done to tackle pollution in the Wye: UK and Welsh Government unite in £1m fund to transform River Wye - GOV.UK.

In a joint initiative worth up to £1 million, Defra and Welsh Government will fund comprehensive cross-border research on the River Wye, to understand pollution and other pressures (such as wildlife decline, flood risk, high and low flows), and develop plans to tackle these issues in the catchment.

This funding, supported by UK and Welsh Governments, will ensure farmers, environmental campaigners, citizen scientists and other local experts, can help us gather essential evidence about what is causing this iconic river to be so polluted, and chart a course towards improving water quality and restoring nature.

■ Fly-tipping: Buckinghamshire

Callum Anderson:

[\[41732\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many cases of illegal waste dumping have been recorded in Buckinghamshire in each of the last five years.

Mary Creagh:

Local authorities are required to report fly-tipping incidents and enforcement actions to Defra, which the department has published annually since 2012 at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/env24-fly-tipping-incidents-and-actions-taken-in-england>. This data excludes the majority of private-land incidents.

This data shows that Buckinghamshire Council has reported the following fly-tipping incidents since it was established in 2020/21. Prior to this, incidents were reported by the relevant district councils.

2023/24 - 4272

2022/23 - 3293

2021/22 - 3140

2020/21 - 3954

■ Food Supply

Stuart Anderson:

[\[42309\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department plans to consult on a statutory target for food production self-sufficiency.

Daniel Zeichner:

Our ambitious food strategy will set and deliver clear long-term outcomes that create a healthier, fairer, and more resilient food system. The food strategy will consider the critical role that domestic production plays in our food security. We are developing a programme of stakeholder engagement to inform the strategy, that will include industry, civil society and consumer group representatives. We will consider the need for statutory targets as we develop the strategy.

■ Hare Coursing

Fabian Hamilton:

[\[41785\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he is taking steps to introduce a closed season for hare shooting.

Mary Creagh:

This is a devolved matter and the information provided therefore relates to England only, with the potential for relevant policy to extend and apply to Wales.

While the Government has no immediate plan to introduce a close season for hares in England, the policy remains under consideration as part of the Government's plans to introduce the most ambitious programme for animal welfare in a generation.

■ Marine Environment: Conservation

Barry Gardiner:

[\[42390\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to publish an implementation plan for the Marine Wildlife Bycatch Mitigation Initiative.

Emma Hardy:

Since the publication of the Marine Wildlife Bycatch Mitigation Initiative, we have continued our work to minimise and, where possible, eliminate the bycatch of

sensitive marine species. That has included renewing Clean Catch for a further 3-year period. This flagship programme will be focused on collaborative trials with the fishing industry to establish practical ways to minimise bycatch, delivery of research on potential bycatch hotspots and of best practice guides tailored to fishermen's needs, and critical knowledge exchange both within and beyond the UK.

In addition to that, in 2025, we are considering further measures to reduce bycatch of seabirds. We have not published an implementation plan but will consider the need for this when working with stakeholders to identify and implement these measures. This builds on wider work done under the English Seabird Conservation and Recovery Pathway. For more information see: [English Seabird Conservation and Recovery Pathway \(ESCaRP\) - ME6044](#).

■ Microplastics: West Dorset

Edward Morello: [\[42913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to (a) monitor and (b) help reduce microplastic pollution in West Dorset constituency.

Emma Hardy:

The Environment Agency is collaborating with the water industry on a suite of investigations into microplastics. This began in 2020 as part of the Chemical Investigations Programme and is continuing into the next phase of the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP). These investigations will enable a greater understanding of how microplastics enter the environment and what can be done to minimise this. The Environment Agency also recognises that tyre and road wear particles are a significant source of microplastics for the environment and are collaborating with National Highways on research into these sources.

■ Packaging: Recycling

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[41151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish a comparative analysis of Extended Producer Responsibility schemes in other advanced economies, including any measures taken to prevent disproportionate cost burdens on the beer and pub sector.

Mary Creagh:

International comparisons of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes are challenging due to differences in waste infrastructure across countries. The UK's pEPR scheme covers more costs than those in other countries. For example, many European countries rely on 'bring sites' for glass recycling, which lowers collection costs. Furthermore, UK glass fees are likely to be higher due to the full inclusion of the costs associated with managing residual waste—waste not disposed of by consumers in recycling bins—something not included in the pEPR schemes of other countries. While the costs for different materials are apportioned accordingly, the UK

aims to balance environmental objectives with the interests of all sectors, including the beer and pub industry.

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[41152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has considered adopting a phased introduction of EPR fees.

Mary Creagh:

PackUK calculates the pEPR fees based on the full net cost of efficient and effective collection systems. Therefore, fees must be collected from producers in Year 1 of the scheme, it should be noted that the fees can be paid in quarterly to spread the cost. The UK's pEPR policy has been under development since 2019, with extensive engagement and consultation providing businesses with a clear indication of the scheme's design and implementation. This policy underwent consultations in 2019, 2021, and a final consultation on reforms to the Packaging Recovery Note (PRN) system in 2022. Additionally, in 2023, the four nations of the UK consulted on the operability of the draft Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging and Packaging Waste) Regulations 2024, and further amendments were made to address stakeholder concerns prior to final regulations being introduced.

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[41153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to (a) review and (b) adjust extended producer responsibility fees to ensure they do not (i) adversely impact particular sectors and (ii) lead to unintended consequences in the supply chain.

Mary Creagh:

Base fees for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) are designed to reflect the net waste management costs incurred by local authorities, with future fee modulation intended to encourage the recyclability of materials. This policy approach, established in March 2022, has been informed by two public consultations under the previous administration. Producer fees for packaging are calculated per tonne of household packaging placed on the market. This ensures a fair distribution of costs in line with the regulations. From Year 2 of the EPR scheme (2026-2027), fees will be modulated to reflect the recyclability of packaging materials, with less recyclable packaging incurring higher fees. The types of packaging subject to higher or lower fees will be determined by assessments based on the Recyclability Assessment Methodology (RAM).

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[41154\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if his Department will publish the allocation of monies received through extended producer responsibility fees.

Mary Creagh:

PackUK will publish annual reports and financial statements, which will provide transparency on the allocation of funds received through the Extended Producer

Responsibility (EPR) fees. These reports will clarify how the collected fees are distributed and used to support the scheme's objectives.

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[41156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate his Department has made of the proportion of extended producer responsibility costs that will be passed on to consumers; and what assessment he has made of the potential impact of those costs on the affordability of food and drink.

Mary Creagh:

The Department has assessed the impact of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) on both producers and consumers, including the potential effect on the affordability of food and drink. This assessment is included in Section 8 of the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging and Packaging Waste) Regulations 2024: [The Producer Responsibility Obligations \(Packaging and Packaging Waste\) Regulations 2024](#).

We are closely monitoring the potential impact of these costs on consumer prices and remain committed to balancing environmental goals with economic considerations.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how Extended Producer Responsibility fees collected will be allocated to local authorities.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41871\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with each local authority in England on how collected Extended Producer Responsibility fees will be allocated.

Mary Creagh:

Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging (pEPR) payments are allocated fairly to Local Authorities through the calculation of local authority waste management costs, which accurately reflect the costs of efficient management of different packaging materials in the household waste streams.

Defra have written to every Local Authority in the UK detailing estimated pEPR payments 2025/26, allowing authorities to check accuracy and to engage with PackUK as needed. PackUK have recently issued a survey, open to all authorities, to invite views on the estimated payments, this feedback has helped to shape our plans.

Wendy Morton: [\[42597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the relative potential impact of the implementation of the extended producer responsibility scheme on the (a) glass and (b) plastic industries.

Mary Creagh:

In October 2024, the Government published an updated [assessment](#) of the impact of introducing the pEPR scheme on packaging producers as a whole. This impact assessment did not split the assessment by sector.

■ Planning: Regulation

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[41856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the policy paper entitled A new approach to ensure regulators and regulation support growth, published on 17 March 2025, which public body will be designated as the lead regulator for major projects.

Emma Hardy:

As the Government announced on 17 March a lead environmental regulator will be appointed for all major projects in which multiple environmental regulators have an interest, to make decisions on their behalf. This will reduce layers of regulation and create a single front door for major projects.

This model will be tested through a series of projects this year, which could start with the Lower Thames Crossing subject to the planning process, as well as a new town-related housing project and future schemes like Heathrow expansion. We will assign a lead environmental regulator as part of this pilot phase. We are also asking industry to come forward with suggestions of additional projects which meet the steering criteria where they want to trial this new approach.

■ Public Footpaths: River Thames

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[42186\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to mark the 30th anniversary of the Thames Path National Trail; and what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the closure of the trail at Marsh Lock Horsebridge on the (i) anniversary and (ii) tourism to the Henley and Thame constituency.

Mary Creagh:

There will be a programme of events in the summer of 2026 celebrating the history and importance of the Thames Path National Trail.

The Environment Agency recognises the importance of Marsh Horse Bridge to the community within the Henley & Thame constituency and the role it plays supporting tourism along the Thames Path National Trail.

The Health, Safety, and Wellbeing of river users is the Environment Agency's foremost consideration. The current condition of the bridge is such that closure was the only option to keep people safe.

The Environment Agency is in regular contact with National Trails, to ensure it has the latest information on the bridge closure. It has published details of a diversion route on their website to ensure progress along the trail is not significantly hampered by the bridge closure.

■ Public Houses: Recycling

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[42580\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme on the financial sustainability of (a) pubs and (b) breweries in Wales.

Mary Creagh:

In October 2024, the Government published an updated assessment of the impact of introducing the pEPR scheme on packaging producers as a whole. This impact assessment did not split the assessment by sector.

The Government has worked closely with industry, including the brewing sector, throughout development of Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (pEPR). Feedback from stakeholders was factored into finalising the regulations, including formally consulting stakeholders on a draft of the pEPR regulations in 2023.

pEPR obligates brands and packaging producers to pay the costs of managing household packaging waste. In most cases, this will not be individual pubs but the business supplying the pub with packaged goods.

My officials have recently attended a number of events organised by the brewing industry, to discuss pEPR and to listen and respond to concerns raised by their members. We have provided extensive guidance to all sectors on how to comply with their obligations under pEPR and continue to work with the brewing sector and others to further refine both the guidance and the wider scheme.

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[42582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the number of pubs and breweries which pay costs associated with the management of packaging waste under the Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme who also manage their packaging waste through private waste contracts.

Mary Creagh:

Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility (pEPR) obligates brands and packaging producers to pay the costs of managing household packaging waste. In most cases, this will not be individual pubs but the business supplying the pub with packaged goods where they have an annual turnover of £2 million or more and are responsible for supplying or importing more than 50 Tonnes of packaging. It is up to individual producers whether to pass these costs on to their customers.

In October 2024, the Government published an updated [assessment](#) of the impact of introducing the pEPR scheme on packaging producers as a whole. This impact assessment did not split the assessment by sector.

■ Recycling

Anna Sabine:

[\[42119\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussion he has had with the Circular Economy Taskforce on promoting repair and reuse.

Mary Creagh:

This Government is committed to transitioning to a circular economy. We have convened a Circular Economy Taskforce, comprising experts from industry, academia, and civil society, to help develop a Circular Economy Strategy for England. The strategy will map our transition to a circular economy, supported by a series of roadmaps detailing the interventions that the government and others will make on a sector-by-sector basis.

Defra recognises that repair and reuse are fundamental tenets of any circular economy, and a successful transition aims to eliminate waste and promote sustainability through reuse and resource efficiency. We will consider the evidence for appropriate action right across the economy as we develop the strategy.

■ Recycling: Public Houses

James Wild:

[\[41144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of Extended Producer Responsibility fees on trends in the levels of pub closures; and what steps his Department is taking to support pubs in adhering to Extended Producer Responsibility regulations.

Mary Creagh:

In October 2024, the Government published an updated assessment of the impact of introducing the pEPR scheme on packaging producers as a whole. This impact assessment did not split the assessment by sector.

The Government has worked closely with industry, including the brewing sector, throughout development of Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (pEPR). Feedback from stakeholders was factored into finalising the regulations, including formally consulting stakeholders on a draft of the pEPR regulations in 2023.

pEPR obligates brands and packaging producers to pay the costs of managing household packaging waste. In most cases, this will not be individual pubs but the business supplying the pub with packaged goods.

My officials have recently attended a number of events organised by the brewing industry, to discuss pEPR and to listen and respond to concerns raised by their members. We have provided extensive guidance to all sectors on how to comply with their obligations under pEPR and continue to work with the brewing sector and others to further refine both the guidance and the wider scheme.

■ Recycling: Skilled Workers

Adam Jogee:

[\[42075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had the Secretary of State for Education on the provision of green skills for a circular economy.

Mary Creagh:

This Government is committed to transitioning to a circular economy. We have convened a Circular Economy Taskforce, comprising experts from industry, academia, and civil society, to help develop a Circular Economy Strategy for England. The strategy will map our transition to a circular economy, supported by a series of roadmaps detailing the interventions that the government and others will make on a sector-by-sector basis.

The importance of green jobs is evidenced by the UK's existing circular industries delivering £67 billion to the economy, growing from £44 billion in 2008. This is an annual real growth rate of around 2.9%, more than double the 1.2% growth rate of the wider UK economy over this period. Existing UK circular industries provide 827,300 jobs, as of 2022.

Defra recognises that fostering green skills is a fundamental tenet of any circular economy, and a successful transition aims to deliver on strengthening our current green workforce as well as developing the new green skills we will need for the future. We will consider the evidence for appropriate action right across the economy as we develop the strategy.

■ River Thames: Sewage

Helen Maguire:

[\[42990\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will hold discussions with Thames Water on the adequacy of the time it takes to stop sewage overflows.

Emma Hardy:

My officials and I have regular conversations with Thames Water and other water companies to discuss a range of activities, including the reduction of sewage discharges. I am also meeting with the boards of all water companies, including Thames Water, to set out the government's expectation of improved performance across all metrics.

Cleaning up England's rivers, lakes and seas is a priority for the government. The government has taken immediate and substantial action to address the performance of water companies who are not delivering for the environment or their customers.

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

Furthermore, as part of Ofwat's Price Review 2024 settlement, Thames Water will undertake a significant investment programme to improve the environment over the 2025-30 period. These investments include: £784 million to reduce the use of storm overflows and £1.2 billion to prevent nutrient pollution. Ofwat expects the reduction of the use of storm overflows by at least 29% by 2029-30, down to an average of 14.2 spills per overflow.

■ Solar Power: Reservoirs

Lincoln Jopp: [\[37519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 11 March 2025 to Question 36002 on Solar Power: Reservoirs, which legislation could impact what can and cannot be done regarding installing solar panels on a reservoir.

Emma Hardy:

While Defra is responsible for policy on water, including on reservoirs, it is not responsible for the legislation that is likely to apply concerning the installation of solar panels on a reservoir.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty

Priti Patel: [\[41823\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the proposed treaty with Mauritius on the future sovereignty of the British Indian Ocean Territory contains guarantees to support British Chagossians in visiting the Chagos archipelago.

Stephen Doughty:

As we have previously said, we will work with Mauritius to start a new programme of visits for Chagossians to the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia.

Priti Patel: [\[41824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2025 to Question 39405 on British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty, whether the (a) legislation and (b) treaty will contain details of the (i) lease length and extension provisions, (ii) costs and payment schedule, (iii) provisions on sovereignty, (iv) provisions on buffer zones, (v) provisions on the marine protected area and (vi) provisions on enabling returns and visits by Chagossians.

Priti Patel: [\[41828\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, If he will publish the most recent latest draft of the proposed Treaty with Mauritius on the future sovereignty of the British Indian Ocean Territory pbefore he signs that Treaty.

Stephen Doughty:

I refer the Rt Hon Member to the response given to her previous Questions 39402 and 39403 on the details of the treaty.

Priti Patel:[\[41825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2025 to Question 39405 on British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty, on what date he plans to (a) sign the proposed treaty with Mauritius and (b) present that treaty to Parliament.

Priti Patel:[\[41830\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he will lay before Parliament the proposed treaty on the future sovereignty of the British Indian Ocean Territory.

Stephen Doughty:

Both sides remain committed to concluding a deal on the future of the Chagos Archipelago which protects the long-term effective operation of the joint UK-US base on Diego Garcia. We continue to engage with Mauritius and are not going to provide a running commentary on the details.

■ Council of Europe**Leigh Ingham:**[\[41350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Council of Europe.

Stephen Doughty:

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary had discussions with the former Council of Europe Secretary General at the European Political Community (EPC) Summit last July. The Prime Minister met with the current Secretary General at the Budapest EPC Summit in November 2024. The Lord Chancellor and the Attorney General have both attended recent Council of Europe events in Vilnius and Strasbourg respectively.

I have regularly engaged with our Ambassador to the Council of Europe on a range of matters, and recently met with members of the UK delegation.

■ Development Aid: Religious Freedom**Carla Lockhart:**[\[39593\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much and what proportion of Government funding for the promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief was allocated to supporting persecuted religious communities globally in the each of the last three financial years.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK champions and 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 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) John Bunyan Fund (JBF), the designated programme for FoRB-focused overseas projects has a budget allocation of £460,720 in the financial year 2024/25. In the financial year 2023/24 the JBF spent £170,000 and in financial year 2022/23, £70,000. The FCDO works to ensure that Official Development Assistance (ODA) is allocated to those who are most vulnerable and most in need of this assistance irrespective of race, religion, or ethnicity. This includes minority religious or belief communities who are assessed by our partners when determining those most in need of protection and assistance.

■ **Diego Garcia: Military Bases**

Priti Patel:

[\[41826\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 26 March 2025 to Question 38978 on Diego Garcia: Military Bases, if he will publish a map of the proposed buffer zone around Diego Garcia when the UK-Mauritius Treaty is laid before Parliament.

Stephen Doughty:

I refer the Rt Hon. Member to the response given to her previous Question 38978, which remains the same.

■ **European Political Community**

Wendy Morton:

[\[41879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what plans he has for participation by (a) Ministers and (b) officials at the European Political Community Summit in Albania on 16 May 2025.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK values the European Political Community (EPC) as a format that brings together leaders from across Europe for frank discussions about shared challenges such as European security and irregular migration. The UK has played a central role in the EPC since its inception, particularly through hosting at Blenheim Palace in July 2024. We welcome Albania's hosting of the EPC on 16 May. Attendance at the EPC is at leader-level only and cannot be delegated. We will set out the Prime Minister's travel plans in the usual way.

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

Lee Anderson:

[\[41942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diversity, equality and inclusion targets his Department has for staff recruitment.

Catherine West:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) follows the Civil Service Commission's Recruitment Principles guiding fair and open appointments based on merit. We aspire to reflect the population we serve but there are no specific

diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) targets for recruitment. As a Disability Confident Level 3 Leader the FCDO implements the Disability Confident Scheme across our recruitment campaigns meaning candidates in the scheme are guaranteed an interview if they meet the minimum criteria for the role. DEI in the Civil Service is an important lever to support the delivery of the Government's Plan for Change and wider Civil Service reform.

■ **Mauritius: Marine Protected Areas**

Priti Patel: [\[41827\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 26 March 2025 to Question 38979 on Mauritius: Marine Protected Areas, what will happen to the existing marine protected area when sovereignty is transferred; whether he has a planned timetable for the time it will take Mauritius to establish a marine protected area; whether the Treaty with Mauritius will contain provisions that secure from the Government of Mauritius the establishment of a marine protected area.

Stephen Doughty:

I refer the Rt Hon Member to the response given to her previous Question 38979, which remains the same.

■ **Turkey: Press Freedom**

Kate Osamor: [\[903556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Turkish counterpart on media freedom in that country.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK is a resolute supporter of democracy, the rule of law and media freedom. This Government has discussed recent events in Turkey with our counterparts at a number of levels. Most recently, on 29 March, the Foreign Secretary spoke to his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan. Among other issues he raised our expectation that as a key friend and ally, Turkey upholds its international commitments, the rule of law and protects the fundamental rights to free speech, peaceful assembly, and media freedom, including the treatment of British and other journalists reporting there.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ **Asthma: Health Services**

Peter Prinsley: [\[41300\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of patients suffering from asthma received a review in the last 12 months.

Peter Prinsley:

[41301]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make a comparative estimate of the number of people hospitalised due to asthma compared to other European nations in 2024.

Karin Smyth:

Across 2023/24, the latest data available, 2.5 million, or 64.6% of, patients on the asthma register received a review. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/respiratory-disease/data#page/4/qid/8000009/pat/159/par/K02000001/ati/15/are/E92000001/iid/93790/age/314/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

In addition, the most recent asthma hospital admissions data for England is available at the following link:

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/asthma>

Furthermore, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development holds international comparison data for asthma hospital admissions, up to 2022, which is available at the following link:

[https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?fs\[0\]=Topic%2C1%7CHealth%23HEA%23%7CHealthcare%20quality%20and%20outcomes%23HEA_HCQ%23&pg=0&fc=Topic&snb=11&df\[ds\]=dsDisseminateFinalDMZ&df\[id\]=DSD_HCQO%40DF_HCQO&df\[ag\]=OECD.ELS.HD&df\[vs\]=1.0&dq=.A.ADMRASH...T.OBS%2BVALUEW&pd=2014%2C&to\[TIME_PERI OD\]=false&vw=tb](https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?fs[0]=Topic%2C1%7CHealth%23HEA%23%7CHealthcare%20quality%20and%20outcomes%23HEA_HCQ%23&pg=0&fc=Topic&snb=11&df[ds]=dsDisseminateFinalDMZ&df[id]=DSD_HCQO%40DF_HCQO&df[ag]=OECD.ELS.HD&df[vs]=1.0&dq=.A.ADMRASH...T.OBS%2BVALUEW&pd=2014%2C&to[TIME_PERI OD]=false&vw=tb)

There is no published international comparison data for asthma hospital admissions available for the past 12 months, and the Department currently has no plans to make an assessment of this.

■ **Bipolar Disorder: Waiting Lists**

Alex Sobel:

[41486]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) reduce the delay for a bipolar diagnosis and (b) bring it in line with early intervention targets for other conditions.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is unacceptable that too many people are not receiving the mental health care they need, and we know that waits for mental health services are far too long, including for people with bipolar disorder. We are determined to change that.

As part of our mission to build a National Health Service that is fit for the future, we will provide access to a specialist mental health professional in every school in England, create a network of open access community Young Futures hubs, recruit an

additional 8,500 mental health workers to cut wait times and provide faster treatment, and modernise the Mental Health Act.

We are also committed to new models of care for mental health, including reforming care for people experiencing a mental health crisis. We are testing neighbourhood mental health centres for people aged 18 years old and over with serious mental illness. These six pilot schemes are based in Tower Hamlets, Lewisham, Sheffield, York, Birmingham, and Whitehaven.

These models will offer 24/7 open access care closer to home, with an integrated service which includes healthcare providers, local authorities, and the voluntary sector. These pilots build on international evidence that shows that similar models have led to a reduction in hospitalisation and waiting times, and support our efforts to move more care into the community.

Since 2021, all areas of the country have been transforming and increasing access to community mental health services for all people with severe mental illness, including people with bipolar disorder. The vision for the transformation programme was set out in the Community Mental Health Framework, which included ensuring that services were needs led, rather than requiring people to have a specific diagnosis to access care.

■ Continuing Care

Lisa Smart:

[\[40313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the future of NHS continuing healthcare will form part of the scope of the (a) NHS 10-year Health Plan for England and (b) Casey Commission.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have committed to developing a 10-Year Health Plan to deliver a National Health Service fit for the future. It will set the vision for what good joined-up care looks like for people with a combination of health and care needs.

The independent commission into adult social care, to be chaired by Baroness Casey, is part of our critical first steps towards delivering a National Care Service. The commission will start a national conversation about what people expect from adult social care. The commission will be split over two phases. The first phase, reporting in 2026, will focus on how we can make the most of existing resources to improve people's lives over the medium term. Phase two, reporting by 2028, will then consider the long-term transformation of adult social care, setting us on the road to fundamental reform that will build a social care system fit for the future.

■ Dental Services

Jayne Kirkham:

[\[42944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending the NHS Find a dentist website in relation

to information on accepting new NHS patients to remove the selectable option of When availability allows and instead replace it with options of either Yes or No.

Stephen Kinnock:

National Health Service dentists are required to update their NHS website profiles at least every 90 days to ensure patients have up-to-date information on where they can access care. This includes information on whether they are accepting new patients. The NHS.UK website was updated in April 2024 to include the 'when availability allows' option to reflect that the availability of appointments may change over time, which is more reflective of the way NHS dentists work.

Integrated care boards can review which practices in their area have not updated their profile in a 90-day period, and work with practices to ensure that their websites are up to date.

Patients in England are not registered with an NHS dental practice, although many NHS dental practices do tend to see patients regularly. There is no geographical restriction on which practice a patient may attend.

■ **Dental Services: Disadvantaged**

Ian Roome:

[\[41556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve access to NHS dentistry in deprived communities.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access National Health Service dental care, and work is underway to ensure that patients can access the 700,000 additional urgent dental appointments, with integrated care boards (ICBs) asked to make these available from 1 April 2025.

The most common reason children aged five to nine years old are admitted to hospital is for tooth decay. We have confirmed an investment of £11 million to rollout a national supervised toothbrushing programme for three to five year olds. This will reach up to 600,000 children in the most deprived areas of England.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to the ICBs across England. For the North Devon constituency, this is the NHS One Devon ICB.

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

■ **Dental Services: Waiting Lists**

Rachael Maskell:

[\[41849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average waiting time for an NHS dental appointment was in (a) York Central constituency, (b) Yorkshire and (c) England in each of the last ten years.

Stephen Kinnock:

Patients in England are not registered with a National Health Service dental practice, although many NHS dental practices do tend to see patients regularly. There is no geographical restriction on which practice a patient may attend. Dental practices may operate local waiting list arrangements. Patients unable to access an urgent dental appointment directly through an NHS dental practice are advised to contact NHS 111 for assistance.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care, including dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to all integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. For the York Central constituency, this is the NHS Humber and North Yorkshire ICB.

Domestic Waste and Fly-tipping: Health Hazards**Wendy Morton:****[41085]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of (a) fly-tipping and (b) uncollected rubbish on public health.

Ashley Dalton:

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has not made an assessment of the potential impact of fly-tipping and uncollected rubbish on public health.

During specific incidents, for instance with the Birmingham City Council, the UKHSA has provided standard guidance to the local authority on the public health risk associated with household waste. The UKHSA is also part of a multi-agency response Strategic Commissioning Group (SCG), and has contributed to a risk assessment concerning the potential health impacts of uncollected waste. The UKHSA will continue to provide advice and support to Birmingham City Council, as part of this SCG.

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency produce the Statutory guidance for Waste duty of care: code of practice, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/waste-duty-of-care-code-of-practice/waste-duty-of-care-code-of-practice>

Guidance for waste planning policy is published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/waste>

Down's Syndrome**Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:****[40740]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to section 1 of the Down Syndrome Act 2022, when his Department plans to publish the guidance.

Stephen Kinnock:

Officials have been working to develop the Down Syndrome Act 2022 statutory guidance, including engaging with sector partners and the relevant departments.

We expect to issue the draft guidance of the public consultation by the summer of 2025. The guidance will be published at the earliest opportunity following the consultation.

Eating Disorders: Community Health Services**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[41513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to expand intensive (a) community and (b) day treatments for eating disorders across NHS Integrated Care Systems.

Mr Richard Holden:[\[41514\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to tackle regional disparities in access to community-based eating disorder treatments in (a) rural areas and (b) general.

Stephen Kinnock:

NHS England is working with the integrated care boards with the aim of increasing the capacity of eating disorder services, to provide community and day treatment services. By improving care in the community, the National Health Service aims to improve outcomes and recovery, reduce rates of relapse, prevent children's eating disorders continuing into adulthood and, if admission is required as a very last resort, reduce the length of time that people have to stay in hospital.

NHS England has commissioned the Royal College of Psychiatrists to deliver a national, all-age eating disorders audit. This aims to drive improvement in the identification and appropriate management of eating disorders, and the quality and consistency of services for all ages in England. This will help ensure that services across the country, including in rural areas, are safe, effective, patient centred, timely, efficient, and equitable.

In addition, NHS England is currently refreshing the guidance on children and young people's eating disorders to highlight the importance of awareness and the early recognition of eating disorders within schools, colleges, primary care, and broader children and young peoples' mental health services.

General Practitioners: Employers' Contributions**Mr Andrew Snowden:**[\[42350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 27 March 2025 to Question 39625 on General Practitioners: Employers' Contributions, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of the proposed increase to employers' National Insurance contributions on the number of general practices.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have made necessary decisions to fix the foundations of the public finances in the Autumn Budget. Resource spending for the Department will be £22.6 billion more in 2025/26 than in 2023/24, as part of the Spending Review settlement. The employers' National Insurance rise was implemented in April 2025.

General practices (GPs) are valued independent contractors who provide over £13 billion worth of National Health Services. Every year we consult with the profession about what services GPs provide, and the money providers are entitled to in return under their contract, taking account of the cost of delivering services.

We are investing an additional £889 million through the GP Contract to reinforce the front door of the NHS, bringing total spend on the GP Contract to £13.2 billion in 2025/26. This is the biggest increase in over a decade, and we are pleased that the General Practitioners Committee England is supportive of the contract changes.

■ General Practitioners: Finance**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[42330\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 27 March 2025 to Qquestion 38429 on General Practitioners: Finance, from what year is the (a) GP expenses data, (b) patient data used to calculate the distance from the patients' homes to the GP surgery and (c) the population density used in the rurality adjustment of the Carr-Hill formula.

Stephen Kinnock:

Global sum payments to general practices (GPs) are based on the Carr-Hill formula. The staff market forces factor is based on earnings data from 1999 to 2001. For the rurality component, the GP expenses data is from 2000 to 2001. The patient data used to calculate the distance from patients' homes to the GP surgery uses patients' current addresses. The population density data used in the rurality adjustment is from 2001.

■ General Practitioners: Workplace Pensions**Pippa Heylings:**[\[41932\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that GPs are able to access their pension information.

Stephen Kinnock:

NHS Pension Scheme members, including general practitioners (GPs), can access information about their pension via My NHS Pension, an online portal from the NHS Pension Service, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/member-hub/my-nhs-pension>

To provide accurate pension information for practitioners, the NHS Business Services Authority needs a fully up to date record in respect of their NHS Pension Scheme membership. This means practitioners must submit their Annual Certificate(s) of

Pensionable Profits to Primary Care Support England (PCSE), so that PCSE can keep their record updated.

PCSE launched the PCSE Online GP Pensions system in 2021 to provide GPs and practices with greater convenience, and more transparency and security when it comes to their pension contributions data. Supporting GPs to accurately submit current and historic Type 1 or Type 2 annual certificates remains a priority for NHS England and PCSE. Since the PCSE Online solution for submitting Type 1 and Type 2 certificates electronically went live in 2021, PCSE have developed user guides and held webinars to educate GPs on how to complete forms accurately.

■ Hospices: Children

Harpreet Uppal:

[\[39759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has for the funding of children's hospices once NHS England is dissolved.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department has provided the biggest investment in a generation for hospices, with £100 million to help hospices this year and next, to provide the best end of life care to patients and their families in a supportive and dignified physical environment. Hospices for children and young people will also receive a further £26 million of revenue funding for 2025/26 through what until recently was known as the Children's Hospice Grant.

The decision to bring NHS England and Department together into one team will have no impact on this, or future funding decisions around hospices.

Ministers are working with the new transformation team at the top of NHS England, led by Sir Jim Mackey, to lead this transformation. Hospices will continue to have a clear point of contact within the centre.

■ Hospitals: Children

Chris Hinchliff:

[\[42343\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many children were admitted into NHS care for more than seven days in the latest period for which data is available.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England collects data on patient discharge episodes, including for children. Discharge data does not represent the number of individual children with a hospital stay, as a child may have more than one discharge from hospital within the reporting period.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, 67,421 discharge episodes were recorded where the patient was in hospital for more than seven days and was aged between zero and 17 years old when admitted into National Health Service care.

The following table shows a count of finished discharge episodes where the patient was aged between zero and 17 years old, including both total discharges and episodes where the patient was in hospital for more than seven days, each discharge month for 2023/24, for activity in English NHS hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector:

DISCHARGE YEAR	DISCHARGE MONTH	TOTAL DISCHARGES	DISCHARGES OVER SEVEN DAYS
2023	April	150,925	5,203
2023	May	167,886	5,731
2023	June	164,206	5,489
2023	July	160,981	5,393
2023	August	153,118	5,163
2023	September	162,577	5,203
2023	October	178,583	5,686
2023	November	186,682	6,144
2023	December	169,807	5,997
2024	January	174,492	5,698
2024	February	170,258	5,667
2024	March	180,789	6,047

Source: Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), NHS England.

Notes:

1. a discharge episode is the last episode during a hospital stay, or spell, where the patient is discharged from the hospital or transferred to another hospital. Discharges do not represent the number of patients, as a person may have more than one discharge from hospital within the period;
2. the patient age is recorded at the point of admission, and this is used to determine the most appropriate setting for the patient. For the purposes of this data, we have only included discharges where the patient was aged zero to 17 years old at the point of admission;
3. total discharges are a count of the total number of finished discharge episodes;
4. discharge month episodes have been counted against the month in which the discharge occurred. It is possible that a patient may have been admitted in a month prior to their discharge; and

5. for the financial year 2023/24, the data in the HES is held by the financial year in which the episode ends. This is to ensure that all clinical and administrative data relevant to the episode is available at the time of collection.

■ **Maternity Services: Devon**

Richard Foord:

[\[41533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department taking to ensure that maternity hospitals are adequately staffed to ensure high quality care for pregnant women in Devon.

Karin Smyth:

The Government is committed to tackling the retention and recruitment challenges that face the National Health Service. Bringing in the staff we need will take time, but this is an absolute priority for the Government.

NHS England is leading a range of initiatives to boost retention of existing staff and ensure that the NHS remains an attractive career choice for new recruits. This includes building a compassionate and inclusive culture, supporting staff wellbeing, and promoting flexible working opportunities.

Targeted retention work for midwives is being undertaken by NHS England, led by the Chief Nursing Officer. This work contains a range of measures, including creation of a midwifery and nursing retention self-assessment tool, mentoring schemes, strengthened advice and support on pensions, and embedding flexible retirement options. NHS England has also invested in unit-based retention leads which, alongside investment in workforce capacity, has seen a reduction in vacancy, leaver, and turnover rates.

Decisions around local recruitment remain the responsibility of individual NHS trusts, who are responsible for ensuring they have the right number of staff in place, with the right skill mix, to deliver safe and effective care.

■ **Maternity Services: Ethnic Groups**

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[40657\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data his Department collects on the (a) racial and (b) ethnic backgrounds of women experiencing adverse maternity outcomes; and how that data is used to inform policy on maternity care services.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[40664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) monitor and (b) reduce racial disparities in the (i) experiences, (ii) levels of satisfaction and (iii) care outcomes of women during (A) antenatal, (B) labour and (C) postnatal care.

Karin Smyth:

Monitoring and utilising data and evidence is crucial to making evidence-based improvements to our maternity services. Data collected on the ethnic backgrounds of women experiencing adverse maternity outcomes can help identify areas that require targeted interventions and improvements in maternal and neonatal care. Monitoring the incidence and rate of adverse outcomes is a crucial step in implementing evidence-based strategies to preventing and mitigating such incidents.

Data on a woman's ethnic background is collected by services at various points on her maternity journey. National Health Service trusts are incentivised to collect this information, and levels of completeness are high, with 95% of women who gave birth in 2023/24 having had their ethnic group recorded. This information is used to identify differences in care pathways and outcomes experienced by women from different ethnic backgrounds.

For example, Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK (MBRRACE-UK) reports the shocking disparity in maternal mortality rates for black and Asian women compared with white women. MBRRACE-UK has also performed a confidential enquiry into the care of black and Asian women who have experienced a stillbirth or neonatal death. These reviews include recommendations for improvements in clinical processes and policy that may reduce ethnic inequalities in adverse maternity outcomes.

Monitoring the experiences women have of different aspects of maternity care is also crucial. The Care Quality Commission conducts an annual survey that asks pregnant women and new mothers about their experience of NHS maternity services. The 2024 survey found that women who reported their ethnicity as 'Indian', 'Pakistani' and 'any other White background' reported poorer experiences of maternity care, specifically around not feeling listened to and not receiving help during their antenatal and postnatal care. These insights inform local and national interventions.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[40658\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that maternity healthcare professionals receive training on (a) unconscious bias and (b) culturally competent care.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[40661\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve access to culturally appropriate maternity care for women from diverse ethnic backgrounds in (a) urban and (b) rural areas.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[40662\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that maternity services (a) are free from racial discrimination and (b) effectively meet the needs of women from all ethnic backgrounds.

Karin Smyth:

Taking action to tackle racism experienced by both staff and patients is essential to providing safe services for everyone. It is right that the National Health Service takes proactive steps to address prejudice and discrimination where it exists across the NHS workforce.

NHS England is ensuring maternity healthcare professionals receive training on unconscious bias and culturally competent care through the Core Competency Framework and the provision of the Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety in Maternity Services e-learning course. Equity-focused leadership development is being embedded through the national Perinatal Culture and Leadership Programme.

In June 2023, NHS England published an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Improvement Plan, which sets out targeted actions to address prejudice and discrimination in the NHS workforce. The plan seeks to increase accountability for all leaders in delivering improvements, and to create an environment that eliminates the conditions in which bullying, discrimination, harassment, and physical violence at work occur.

For maternity services specifically, all local areas, including those in urban and rural areas, are required to equip staff to provide culturally competent care through their local Equity and Equality Actions plans, such as by providing appropriate training to staff for their local population. NHS England is also developing a respectful and inclusive maternity care toolkit which aims to improve access, experiences, and outcomes for service users and to support staff to provide culturally sensitive care.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:[\[41183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) ensure that data collection on maternity care outcomes is disaggregated by ethnicity and (b) reduce gaps in this data.

Karin Smyth:

Data on a woman's ethnic background is routinely collected by services at multiple points throughout maternity care. This data is used to disaggregate reporting of adverse outcomes, like maternal mortality, by ethnicity. Differences by ethnicity are also reported as part of the Care Quality Commission's annual survey, which asks a sample of pregnant women and new mothers about their experience of National Health Service maternity services.

NHS trusts are incentivised to collect this information through the Maternity Incentive Scheme, which is a financial incentive program designed to enhance maternity safety within NHS trusts. Safety Action 2 of the Maternity Incentive Scheme incentivises trusts to submit digital information, including ethnicity data, to the Maternity Services Data Set.

The levels of completeness are high, and gaps are rare. 95% of women who gave birth in 2023/24 had their ethnic background recorded.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[41184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic women receive equitable access to high-quality maternity care in (a) areas with significant health inequalities and (b) other areas.

Karin Smyth:

It is unacceptable that there are such inequalities for women and babies. It is a priority for the Government to make sure that all women and babies receive the high-quality care they deserve, regardless of their background, location, or ethnicity.

The National Health Service's Three-Year Delivery Plan for Maternity and Neonatal Services sets national measures to improve maternity and neonatal services by making care more personalised and equitable. A key objective within the plan is to reduce inequalities for all in maternity access, experience, and outcomes, to improve equity for mothers and babies. As part of the plan, all local areas have published Equity and Equality Action Plans, which set out tailored interventions that will tackle inequalities for women and babies from ethnic backgrounds and for those living in the most deprived areas. Trusts are also implementing Version 3 of the Saving Babies Lives Care Bundle, which provides maternity units with guidance and interventions to reduce stillbirths, neonatal brain injury, neonatal death, and preterm birth.

The Department continues to work closely with the NHS as it delivers these initiatives.

The Department is also considering what longer term action can be taken to tackle disparities in outcomes and experiences for black, Asian, and minority ethnic women. This includes working closely with NHS England, and the wider sector, to identify the right actions and interventions that will deliver the required change.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[41185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help support local maternity services to tackle racial disparities; and whether his Department monitors the compliance of these services with guidelines on (a) equality and (b) anti-discrimination.

Karin Smyth:

The National Health Service's Three-Year Delivery Plan for Maternity and Neonatal Services sets national measures to improve maternity and neonatal services by making care more personalised and equitable. A key objective within the plan is to reduce inequalities for all in maternity access, experience, and outcomes, seeking to improve equity for mothers and babies. As part of the plan, all local areas have published Equity and Equality Action Plans, which set out tailored interventions that will tackle inequalities for women and babies from ethnic backgrounds and those living in the most deprived areas. Equity and Equality Action Plans are published online to ensure public accountability.

NHS England has published technical guidance to monitor compliance and to determine the success measures that are used to monitor the outcomes and progress in achieving the key objectives of the plan. The guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/three-year-delivery-plan-for-maternity-and-neonatal-care-technical-guidance/>

The Department is also considering what longer term action can be taken to tackle disparities in outcomes and experiences for black, Asian, and minority ethnic women. This includes working closely with NHS England, and the wider sector, to identify the right actions and interventions that will deliver the required change.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[41186]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help reduce the impact of (a) housing, (b) income, (c) access to education and (d) other social determinants of health on maternal health outcomes for ethnic minority women.

Karin Smyth:

The Government is committed to addressing the stark inequalities for women and babies, so that everyone can receive the high-quality care they deserve regardless of their background, circumstance, or ethnicity.

The Department is working with NHS England, other Government departments, and the wider sector to identify and embed the right actions and interventions that will help deliver improvements. For example, we are working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to develop non-statutory guidance to support the implementation of Awaab's Law from October 2025. This law introduces additional hazards, such as excess cold, which increase health risks for pregnant women, as well as for unborn and born children.

To find new ways to tackle maternity disparities, the National Institute for Health and Care Research, funded by the Department, launched the first challenge on maternity inequalities in March 2024. Over the subsequent five years, funding of up to £50 million will be made available to develop research and evidence that will drive action to reduce maternity inequalities and improve outcomes for women.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[41914]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the quality of maternity care for women from Black and Asian backgrounds.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 2 April 2025]: It is unacceptable that there are inequalities for women and babies. It is a priority for the Government to make sure that all women and babies receive the high-quality care they deserve, regardless of their background, location, or ethnicity.

NHS England's three-year delivery plan for maternity and neonatal services sets out how the National Health Service will make maternity and neonatal care safer, more personalised, and more equitable for women, babies, and families. A central component of this is action to tackle and reduce inequalities, to deliver consistency in access, experiences, and outcomes. Through this plan, all local areas now have Equity and Equality Action Plans in place, which set out tailored interventions that tackle inequalities for women and babies from ethnic backgrounds and those living in the most deprived areas. All trusts are also now implementing Version 3 of the Saving Babies Lives Care Bundle, which provides maternity units with guidance and interventions to reduce stillbirths, neonatal brain injury, neonatal death, and preterm birth. It also includes initiatives to tackle factors that also drive worst outcomes, for example reducing smoking in pregnancy.

However, further action is needed, and ministers in the Department are working closely with NHS England, and the wider sector, to identify the right actions and interventions that will deliver the required change. Part of this will be setting an explicit target to close the black and Asian maternal mortality gap and drive the change we need to see.

■ **Mental Health Bill (HL)**

Neil Coyle: [\[41074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which stakeholders (a) he and (b) his officials have met with while (i) preparing, (ii) publishing and (iii) bringing forward the Mental Health Bill.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 1 April 2025]: The reforms delivered by the Mental Health Bill reflect the recommendations made by the Independent Review into the Mental Health Act, which engaged widely with stakeholders, including people with lived experience. There was extensive consultation following this to develop the draft bill, most notably in the Government's White Paper, Reforming the Mental Health Act. Since the initial draft bill, we have taken on board several recommendations from the pre-legislative scrutiny committee, which heard from a wide range of stakeholders and organisations representing service users, patients, and professionals.

Soon after the Mental Health Bill's introduction to the House of Lords on 6 November 2024, the Department held a ministerial roundtable to discuss the content of the bill's reforms with stakeholder groups, and a wider virtual meeting to update a broader range of stakeholders. Engagement has continued throughout the bill's passage.

Neil Coyle: [\[41075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether (a) Ministers and (b) officials in his Department have met with the Bring People Home from Psychiatric Hospital campaign to discuss the Mental Health Bill.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 1 April 2025]: Engagement with stakeholders and people with lived experience is central to the progression of these reforms, and we will consult and engage as we move to implementation planning, including on revisions to the Mental Health Act Code of Practice. The Department recognises the important work of the Bring People Home from Psychiatric Hospital network. A meeting to discuss the Mental Health Bill has not taken place with this network to date.

■ Mental Health Services: Children and Young People**Sarah Champion:****[41833]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 27 March 2025 to Question 38992 on Mental Health Services: Children, what metrics his Department uses to provide a comparative assessment of the impact on long-term outcomes of children and young people's well-being practitioners with (a) accredited school-based counsellors and (b) other relevant professionals; and if he will take steps to commission an independent review on the impact of different mental health practitioners on children and young people's well-being.

Stephen Kinnock:

All interventions delivered by mental health practitioners, including those in mental health support teams, are evidence-based and use a range of clinical evidence.

An early evaluation of the children and young people's mental health trailblazer programme examined the development, implementation, and early progress of the 25 'trailblazer' mental health support teams created as the first step of the programme. The interim report was published in January 2023, and highlights the impacts of the mental health support teams on improving pupil mental health and improving teacher mental health. The report is available at the following link:

<https://www.rand.org/randeurope/research/projects/2023/children-and-young-people-s-mental-health-trailblazer-programme.html>

There are currently no plans to commission an independent review on the impact of different mental health practitioners on children and young people's well-being.

■ Midwives and Obstetrics: Training**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:****[41182]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that culturally competent (a) midwifery and (b) obstetric training is available in the NHS; and how his Department assesses the effectiveness of these steps.

Karin Smyth:

It is a priority for the Government to make sure that all women and babies receive the high-quality care they deserve, regardless of their background, location, or ethnicity. To deliver this, it is important that those working in maternity and neonatal services receive the required training needed to deliver culturally competent care.

While it is the responsibility of employers in the health system to ensure that their staff are trained to the required standards to deliver safe and effective treatment for patients, NHS England is taking steps to ensure that maternity healthcare professionals receive training on unconscious bias and culturally competent care through the Core Competency Framework and through provision of the Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety in Maternity Services e-learning course. Over 15,400 maternity staff have completed the e-learning module, which supports staff to better understand and meet the needs of diverse communities.

NHS England has also embedded equity-focused leadership development through the Perinatal Culture and Leadership Programme. All 150 maternity and neonatal units in England have participated in the programme. No assessment has been made on the effectiveness of these steps.

■ Miscarriage: Health Services

Liam Conlon:

[\[41577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve miscarriage care (a) in general and (b) for miscarriages occurring before 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Karin Smyth:

The Government recognises that experiencing a miscarriage can be an extremely difficult time, and we are determined to make sure all women and babies receive safe, personalised, and compassionate care, particularly when things go wrong. It is vital that women seeking support, including in early pregnancy, get the care they need.

We have launched the Baby Loss Certificate Service, which enables those who have experienced any pregnancy loss to record and receive a certificate to provide recognition of a baby loss, if they wish to do so. The Human Tissue Authority has also updated the guidance on the sensitive handling of pregnancy remains. We are continuing to work with NHS England to improve the Early Pregnancy Assessment Units' services, by improving their availability and level of support. NHS England has also published a policy to support National Health Service employees and provide managers with advice on how to support people affected by baby loss, including paid leave.

■ Neurodiversity: Diagnosis

Rachael Maskell:

[\[41846\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the level of capacity with the NHS for (a) ADHD and (b) autism assessments.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is the responsibility of the integrated care boards (ICBs) in England to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including assessments for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

and autism, in line with relevant National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines.

Lord Darzi's independent review of the National Health Service, published September 2024, highlighted that demand for assessments for ADHD and autism have grown significantly in recent years, and highlighted the severe delays for accessing such assessments.

The report noted that nationally the growth in demand for ADHD assessments over recent years has been so significant that it risks completely overwhelming the available resources. NHS England has established an ADHD taskforce which is working to bring together those with lived experience with experts from the NHS, education, charity, and justice sectors. The taskforce is working to get a better understanding of the challenges affecting those with ADHD, including timely and equitable access to services and support, with the final report expected in the summer.

In respect of autism, the latest Autism Waiting Times Statistics published by NHS England show that, in December 2024, there were 212,964 patients with an open referral for suspected autism. Of these, 191,656 had a referral that had been open at least 13 weeks. On 5 April 2023, NHS England published a national framework and operational guidance to deliver improved outcomes in all-age autism assessment pathways. This guidance aims to help ICBs and the NHS to deliver improved outcomes for children, young people, and adults referred to an autism assessment service. Since publication, NHS England has been supporting systems and services to identify where there are challenges for implementation and how they might overcome these.

■ NHS: Buildings

Nick Timothy:

[41162]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the (a) sources and (b) levels were of carbon emissions for NHS buildings in England in each year since 2015.

Karin Smyth:

National Health Service organisations are not expected to individually submit carbon emissions data. Estimates are made at a national level, based on energy consumption data submitted by trusts through the annual Estates Return Information Collection. Further information on the annual Estates Return Information Collection is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/estates-returns-information-collection>

Total NHS carbon emissions estimates are published in NHS England's Annual Report. A copy of a table showing total secondary care emissions by energy source and rounded to nearest 10 ktCO₂e, from 2018/19 to 2023/24, the most recent data available, is attached.

Attachments:

1. [PQ41162 Additional document](#) [FORMATTED FOR MINISTERIAL CLEARANCE Table of total secondary care emissions by source and rounded to nearest 10 ktCO2e.docx]

Nick Timothy:**[41163]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average cost of energy bills were for NHS buildings in each year since 2015.

Karin Smyth:

The annual Estates Return Information Collection (ERIC) collects data on the energy costs of National Health Service organisations. This data has been consistently reported since 2018/19. The following table shows the cost of energy bills for NHS trusts as reported in ERIC, from 2018/19 to 2023/24:

YEAR	TOTAL	MEAN AVERAGE PER REPORTING TRUST
2018/19	£667,000,000	£2,900,000
2019/20	£672,000,000	£3,000,000
2020/21	£653,000,000	£3,000,000
2021/22	£779,000,000	£3,700,000
2022/23	£1,195,000,000	£5,700,000
2023/24	£1,380,000,000	£6,600,000

■ NHS: Databases

Freddie van Mierlo:**[42948]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will consider the final costs and benefits statement for programmes delivered under the National Programme of Technology, published on 6 June 2013, in his plans for (a) an NHS Federated Data Platform and (b) a single patient record.

Karin Smyth:

We are keen to draw on the lessons from the National Programme for IT in delivering the Federated Data Platform and the single patient record.

NHS England publishes information each quarter on the benefits being realised by the Federated Data Platform, with further information available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/digitaltechnology/nhs-federated-data-platform/solution-exchange/fdp-uptake-and-benefits/>

■ Ophthalmic Services: Children

Daniel Francis:

[\[42037\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the difference between the (a) fee that will be paid to deliver the NHS Special Schools Eye Care Service and (b) cost of delivering the same clinical care in outpatient paediatric ophthalmology clinics.

Stephen Kinnock:

The fee that has been put in place to underpin the service is aligned to other fees paid for domiciliary sight testing services. NHS England has committed to investing up to £12.7 million annually on the provision of sight tests and the associated optical vouchers in special educational settings. This provides the potential for these services to reach approximately 165,000 children and young people in over 2,000 educational settings, ensuring sight tests are provided in a familiar environment whilst minimising disruption to the school day.

NHS England has engaged with key stakeholders throughout the life of the programme and continues to work closely with local integrated care board commissioners, and the ophthalmic and voluntary sector, to scale up and roll out sight tests for patients in a special educational setting.

■ Palliative Care: Children

Sir Julian Lewis:

[\[42385\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what (a) mechanisms exist and (b) steps he is taking to ensure that integrated care boards are accountable for their commissioning of children's palliative care.

Stephen Kinnock:

Integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for the commissioning of palliative and end of life care services, including for children and young people, to meet the needs of their local populations. To support ICBs in this duty, NHS England has published statutory guidance and service specifications.

NHS England has a legal duty to annually assess the performance of each ICB in respect of each financial year, and to publish a summary of its findings. This assessment must include how well the ICB has discharged its functions.

■ Pharmacy: Finance

Mark Swards:

[\[41603\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help ensure that independent community pharmacies have adequate funding to sustain their (a) businesses and (b) services.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government recognises that pharmacies are an integral part of the fabric of our communities. They provide an easily accessible 'front door' to the National Health Service, staffed by highly trained and skilled healthcare professionals.

We have now concluded the consultation on funding for 2024/25 and 2025/26, and have agreed with Community Pharmacy England (CPE) to increase the community pharmacy contractual framework to £3.073 billion. CPE represents all pharmacy contractors in England, including independent community pharmacies. This deal represents the largest uplift in funding of any part of the NHS, at over 19% across 2024/25 and 2025/26. This shows a first step in delivering stability for the future and a commitment to rebuilding the sector.

■ Postnatal Care: Mental Illness and Rural Areas**Maya Ellis:**[\[41366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve postnatal care services for mothers (a) with mental health challenges and (b) in rural areas.

Karin Smyth:

We are committed to ensuring that women, including those living in rural areas, receive safe and equitable care, regardless of where they live or give birth.

NHS England's guidance sets out that all women who have given birth should be offered a postnatal check-up with their general practitioner (GP) after six to eight weeks. This check-up provides an important opportunity for women to be listened to by their GP in a discreet, supportive environment, and for women to be assessed and supported not just in their physical recovery post-birth, but also in their mental health.

For women with, or at risk of, mental health problems, who are planning a pregnancy, are pregnant, or who have a baby up to two years old, specialist perinatal mental health services provide care in all 42 integrated care system (ICS) areas of England. For women experiencing mental health difficulties directly arising from, or related to, their maternity or neonatal experience, Maternal Mental Health Services provide care in 41 of the 42 ICS areas in England, with the last being supported by NHS England to ensure it is up and running as soon as possible.

■ Postnatal Care: Standards**Mr Will Forster:**[\[41633\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps with NHS England to improve the provision of respite homes for mums and babies post traumatic birth.

Karin Smyth:

The Department recognises the significant physical and psychological consequences of birth trauma and the devastating impact this can have on some women. We are fully committed to improving the quality and consistency of care for women

throughout pregnancy, birth, and the critical months that follow, and to ensuring that when a woman experiences a traumatic birth, there is a broad range of support available

In relation to the psychological impact, bespoke mental health pathways support women who experience mental health difficulties as a result of labour. These services are provided through specialist perinatal mental health services, maternal mental health services, and mother and baby units. Mother and baby units are specialist, in-patient units for some women with mental health problems, designed to keep mothers and their babies together. Specialist staff nurture and support the mother infant relationship on the ward, while at the same time the mother receives treatment and care. 165 mother and baby unit beds have now been commissioned, and maternal mental health services have been set up in 41 out of the 42 local areas across England to provide care for women with moderate to severe or complex mental health difficulties, arising from birth trauma or loss in the maternity/neonatal context.

With regards to physical health, NHS England's national service specification for perinatal pelvic health services sets out the expected standards of care to improve the prevention and identification of pelvic health issues, and to increase access to physiotherapy for pelvic health issues during pregnancy and for at least one year after birth. These services work with maternity services across England to implement the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injuries care bundle, to reduce rates of anal sphincter, or perineal, injuries resulting from labour and vaginal birth.

All women are now offered a general practitioner (GP) check six to eight weeks after birth that should focus on the mothers physical and mental health needs. This is an opportunity for GPs to listen to women in a discrete, supportive environment, in order to provide personalised postnatal care for their physical and mental health, and includes an explicit reference to birth trauma for the first time.

■ Respiratory Diseases: Health Services

Juliet Campbell:

[\[41586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to (a) help ensure equitable access to care for people diagnosed with interstitial lung diseases and (b) support local health services to improve (i) immediate and (ii) long-term care.

Ashley Dalton:

The commissioning responsibility for interstitial lung disease (ILD) services has been delegated to the integrated care boards (ICBs), to facilitate joined up care and the configuration of services that will meet local needs.

Early and accurate diagnosis is a priority for NHS England, and the work to improve this area of clinical care is underway, which should have an impact on reducing delayed diagnosis of ILD. The Specialised Respiratory Clinical Reference Group is looking to update the national service specification during 2025/26, and this refresh will include an Equality Health Impact Assessment to support local implementation.

The specification will cover diagnosis, management, and ongoing care for patients with ILD.

NHS England also funds the cost of anti-fibrotic treatments for ILD. Access to these treatments has recently been expanded to patients with non-idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis following the publication of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's technology appraisal, Nintedanib for treating progressive fibrosing interstitial lung diseases, in November 2021.

Furthermore, pulmonary rehabilitation plays an important role in the management of patients with ILD and should be made available to all patients who would benefit from this intervention, not just those with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

To better understand the uptake of this intervention, NHS England is aiming to modify the current National Asthma and COPD Audit Programmes so that conditions other than COPD are included, and service availability can be tracked.

■ **Smoking: Hospitality Industry**

Helen Morgan: [\[42738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will ensure that the Tobacco and Vapes Bill does not lead to (a) restrictions and (b) bans on smoking in outside areas of hospitality businesses.

Helen Morgan: [\[42740\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will ensure that outdoor hospitality areas remain outside the scope of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill.

Ashley Dalton:

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which will put us on track towards a smoke-free UK, was introduced to Parliament on 5 November 2024. On 26 March 2025, MPs voted overwhelmingly in favour of advancing the Bill to the next Parliamentary stage and it has now entered the House of Lords.

The Bill allows us to expand current indoor smoking restrictions to outdoor public places and workplaces. However, we have been very clear that in England, we intend to consult on extending smoke-free places to outside schools, children's playgrounds and hospitals but not outdoor hospitality settings or wider open spaces like beaches. Private outdoor spaces are out of scope of the powers in the Bill.

We do not intend to extend these powers further than this at this time and recognise that now would not be the right time to consult on making outdoor hospitality settings smoke-free in England.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Huddersfield**

Harpreet Uppal: [\[41773\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of access to CAMHS services for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) children in Huddersfield.

Stephen Kinnock:

We know that too many children and young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, are not receiving the mental health care they need, and that waits for mental health services are too long across England, including in Huddersfield. We are determined to change that.

As part of our mission to build a National Health Service that is fit for the future, we will provide access to a specialist mental health professional in every school in England, introduce open access Young Futures hubs in communities, and recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers to cut wait times and provide faster treatment.

Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill: Impact Assessments**Rachael Maskell:**[\[41876\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when the impact assessment for the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill will be published.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 2 April 2025]: The Government expects to publish the impact assessment before Members consider the bill on Report.

HOME OFFICE**Anti-social Behaviour: Children****Mr Luke Charters:**[\[41738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help prevent people under 18 years old from committing anti-social behaviour.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB) is a top priority for this Government and a key part of our Safer Streets Mission.

The Government has committed to the creation of a new Young Futures Programme, which will establish a network of Young Futures Hubs and Young Futures Prevention Partnerships, to intervene early and ensure this cohort is identified and offered support in a more systematic way, as well as creating more opportunities for young people in their communities.

Prevention Partnerships will identify children and young people who are vulnerable to being drawn into crime and violence such as knife crime and ASB and divert them by offering them suitable support in a more systematic way.

The Government's Plan for Change, announced by the Prime Minister on 5 December, sets out our plan to reduce ASB. This will include a dedicated lead officer in every police force across England and Wales working with communities to develop a local ASB action plan. We are also delivering on our commitment to bring back and strengthen neighbourhood policing, ensuring thousands of additional officers are visibly out patrolling in our town centres and communities to make our streets safer.

■ Anti-social Behaviour: Rural Areas**Stuart Anderson:**[\[41948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to tackle anti-social behaviour in rural towns and villages.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB) is a top priority for this Government, and a key part of our Safer Streets Mission.

The Government's Plan for Change, announced by the Prime Minister on 5 December, sets out how we will reduce ASB. Every police force across England and Wales will have a dedicated lead officer for ASB, working with communities, including rural towns and villages, to develop a local ASB action plan.

We are delivering on our commitment to restore and strengthen neighbourhood policing, putting 13,000 neighbourhood police and community support officers into local communities – including rural communities - so residents have a named officer they can turn to when things go wrong.

Through the Crime and Policing Bill, we have introduced tougher powers to tackle repeat offending, including the new Respect Order to tackle the most persistent ASB offenders. Breach of a Respect Order will be a criminal offence and courts will have a wide range of sentencing options, including community orders, unlimited fines and, for the most severe cases, up to two years' imprisonment.

■ Asylum: Employment and Training**Mary Glendon:**[\[39416\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help (a) people seeking asylum and (b) refugees to (i) develop their skills and (ii) increase their employability.

Seema Malhotra:

The UK has a long history of providing protection to those that need it and supporting refugee integration and employment. This includes work across government to ensure that mainstream services meet the needs of refugees.

Refugees granted refugee status or humanitarian protection (as well as those arriving under one of the UK's resettlement schemes) have immediate access to the labour market, including employment support from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) work coaches in the same way as other jobseekers. Unemployed refugees are eligible for full funding for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learning.

In addition, through the Skilled Worker visa, the UK has labour mobility initiatives for refugees and displaced people to take up employment in the UK. We are currently reviewing labour mobility initiatives for refugees and displaced people to ensure we are learning from what works to increase employability and outcomes.

We continue to provide local authorities with a core tariff to support the integration of those who arrive through the UK's Resettlement Scheme, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme and the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy. We work across Government to ensure these services meet the needs of refugees and continue to keep our policies under review.

■ Asylum: Hotels

Mr James Cleverly:

[\[41442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent estimate she has made of the total cost of providing accommodation for asylum seekers in hotels in each of the next five years; and what these costs were in each of the past five years.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office publishes information on asylum expenditure in the Home Office Annual Report and Accounts at [HO annual reports and accounts - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118422/2023-24-annual-report-and-accounts).

Jack Rankin:

[\[43008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 31 March 2025 to Question 41380 on Asylum: Hotels, how many hotels used for the housing of asylum seekers have closed between 21 January 2025 and 31 March 2025.

Jack Rankin:

[\[43010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 31 March 2025 to Question 41380, how many asylum hotels have closed between 4 July 2024 and 31 March 2025.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Honourable Member to the Answer he received on the 31 March 2025 to UIN 41380.

■ Asylum: Housing

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[42643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to publish information on profits made by Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts providers (a) Serco, (b) Mears and (c) Clearsprings through those contracts.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The providers of the Home Office's Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts are held to account on their performance against an agreed set of key performance indicators throughout the course of each contract to ensure that the taxpayer receives value for money, and that the standards of service required by the department are met.

■ Crime Prevention: Buckinghamshire**Callum Anderson:**[\[41733\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what funding has been allocated to community safety initiatives in (a) Buckinghamshire and (b) Milton Keynes.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Funding of £627.4 million has been allocated to Thames Valley Police in 2025-25, an increase of up to £40.8 million when compared to the 2024-25 funding settlement.

It is for locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners, or Mayoral equivalents, to make decisions on how they use their funding and deploy their resources using their knowledge of local need.

■ Crime: Buckinghamshire**Callum Anderson:**[\[41731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of recent trends in levels of rural crime rates in Buckinghamshire in the last five years.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes estimates, from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), on the proportion of adults who had been a victim of crime. This is broken down by whether the household was located in a rural or urban location. The latest data can be found here:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalesannualtrendanddemographictables/current>

Data is not available for county areas such as Buckinghamshire.

This Government is determined to tackle rural crime and is committed to safeguarding rural communities, with tougher measures to clamp down on anti-social behaviour, strengthened neighbourhood policing, and stronger laws to prevent farm theft.

We are taking a new approach by working closely with the National Police Chief's Council to develop the next iteration of the Rural and Wildlife Crime Strategy, to ensure the government's Safer Streets Mission benefits every community no matter where they live, including rural communities.

This new financial year the Home Office will be providing the first funding since 2023 for the National Rural Crime Unit (£365,000) as well as continuing funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit (£450,000). This will allow these specialist units to continue their work in tackling rural and wildlife crime which can pose unique challenges for policing given the scale and isolation of rural areas.

■ Drugs: Misuse**Charlotte Nichols:** [\[42028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will consider transferring responsibility for the misuse of drugs to the Department of Health and Social Care.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Responsibility for drug policy is shared across a number of departments and both the Home Office and the Department for Health and Social Care have important roles to play in setting policy to tackle drug use and to reduce drug-related crime and drug health harms. The Home Office is the lead department for the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and associated drug legislation, working with other departments as appropriate where changes in the law are required.

Illicit drug use affects the whole of society, and this Government is taking a collective response which will help our key missions to deliver safer streets, improve health outcomes and contribute to opportunities and growth through reducing crime and saving lives.

■ Emergency Services Network: Ceredigion Preseli**Ben Lake:** [\[41478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans that access to each of the Extended Area Services masts located in Ceredigion Preseli constituency will be shared with mobile network operators.

Dame Diana Johnson:

We can confirm that four EAS masts have already been activated for the Shared Rural Network (SRN) and are delivering new 4G mobile coverage from all four mobile network operators across Ceredigion Preseli.

We continue to work with Building Digital UK (BDUK) and the operators to activate the remaining five masts for the SRN. BDUK officials have informed me that the Hon. Member has signed up for the next BDUK MP drop-in session and they would be happy to update him further on SRN EAS progress in Ceredigion Preseli then.

■ Home Office: Equality**Lee Anderson:** [\[41937\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what diversity, equality and inclusion targets her Department has for staff recruitment.

Dame Diana Johnson:

I refer the Hon Member to my response to his previous PQ 40631.

■ Immigration: Ukraine**Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:**[\[42064\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to allow time spent under the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme to count towards the five-year qualifying period for settled status.

Seema Malhotra:

We recognise the Ukrainian government's desire for the future return of its citizens to Ukraine. 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. Similarly, time spent in the UK with permission granted under the Ukraine Schemes cannot be relied upon towards the continuous qualifying period for the purposes of a Long Residence application.

There are other routes available for those who wish to settle in the UK permanently, if they meet the requirements.

The Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) scheme, which opened to applications on 4 February 2025, will provide up to an additional 18 months' permission to stay in the UK for those with existing Ukraine Scheme permission.

UPE is a new grant of permission; it is not an extension of a person's existing permission. An automatic extension of existing permission would mean providing further unnecessary permission, even to a person who has now left the UK and is no longer in need of temporary sanctuary in the UK.

■ Licensing Laws**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[42254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of changes to (a) pavement licences and (b) take-away pints on regulatory costs for businesses.

Dame Diana Johnson:

I refer the Hon Member to the Written Ministerial Statement I made to the House on 27 Feb on the lapse of the easement on takeaway pints.

A new impact assessment relating to the lapse of the easement was not required as no new policy or legislation has been introduced.

The pavement licensing regime, owned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, is separate to the regime regulating the sale and supply of alcohol. The pavement licensing regime has not been impacted by the lapse of the aforementioned easement.

■ Motor Vehicles: Theft**Danny Beales:** [\[41753\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to prevent the export of stolen vehicles by organised criminal groups.

Dame Diana Johnson:

This Government is determined to drive down vehicle crime and we are working with the automotive industry and police – taking a national approach – to ensure our response is as strong as it can be, including working closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for vehicle crime.

This Government is committed to working domestically, applying the full range of disruption tactics, and with partners internationally to disrupt organised crime groups upstream.

We provided £250,000 funding in the financial year 2024-25 to help support enforcement at the ports to prevent stolen vehicles and vehicle parts being shipped abroad. This included additional staff and specialist equipment.

Through our Crime and Policing Bill, we have introduced measures to ban electronic devices used to steal vehicles, empowering the police and courts to target the criminals using, manufacturing and supplying them.

Via the recently established National Vehicle Crime Reduction Partnership and the police-led National Vehicle Crime Working Group, we are focusing on prevention and deterrence of theft of and from vehicles; this includes training police officers on the methods used to steal vehicles, encouraging vehicle owners to secure their vehicles, and working with industry to address vulnerabilities in vehicles.

■ Police: West Midlands**Wendy Morton:** [\[42589\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 27 March 2025 to Question 40502 on Police: West Midlands, how many of those officers she expects the West Midlands force to recruit in each of the four years of that plan.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government has committed to restoring neighbourhood policing through the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. This includes putting thousands more police personnel on the beat in neighbourhood policing roles up and down the country. Every part of the country will benefit from this pledge, including the West Midlands.

Further details of the delivery of this programme, including areas the impact on individual areas, will be published in due course.

■ Refugees: Ukraine**Martin Wrigley:** [\[42007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how long visa terms for the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme are.

Martin Wrigley: [\[42018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to grant an automatic extension of 18 months to all Ukraine Scheme visas.

Martin Wrigley: [\[42019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to grant Ukraine Scheme visa holders the right to settled status after five years.

Seema Malhotra:

We recognise the Ukrainian government's desire for the future return of its citizens to Ukraine. 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. Similarly, time spent in the UK with permission granted under the Ukraine Schemes cannot be relied upon towards the continuous qualifying period for the purposes of a Long Residence application.

There are other routes available for those who wish to settle in the UK permanently, if they meet the requirements.

The Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) scheme, which opened to applications on 4 February 2025, will provide up to an additional 18 months' permission to stay in the UK for those with existing Ukraine Scheme permission.

UPE is a new grant of permission; it is not an extension of a person's existing permission. An automatic extension of existing permission would mean providing further unnecessary permission, even to a person who has now left the UK and is no longer in need of temporary sanctuary in the UK.

■ Retail Trade: Crimes of Violence**Amanda Hack:** [\[41617\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of extending the offence of assaulting a retail worker to wholesale workers operating in business-to-business premises.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Shop theft continues to increase at an unacceptable level with ever greater numbers of offenders using violence and abuse against shopworkers as part of their crime. We will not stand for this. Everybody has a right to feel safe at their place of work.

Through our Crime and Policing Bill, we have therefore introduced a standalone offence of assaulting a retail worker to protect the hardworking and dedicated staff that work in stores, sending a strong message to offenders and would-be offenders

that violence against retail workers will not be tolerated. The Bill is making its way through Parliament and committee stage started on 27 March.

As introduced, the definition of a 'retail worker' does not include wholesale workers operating in business-to-business premises, but it does include wholesale workers operating in premises that provide retail sales to the public. Keeping a tight definition provides legal clarity and ensures there is less ambiguity for courts in identifying whether an individual is a retail worker and impacted during their job. Workers whose roles are not included are already covered under other legislation such as the Offences against the Person Act 1861, which also covers more serious violence, such as actual bodily harm (ABH) and grievous bodily harm (GBH).

That said, the purpose of the parliamentary process is to scrutinise the provisions in the Bill and we will, of course, consider carefully any proposed amendments and supporting evidence.

■ Spiking

Shaun Davies: [\[42004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle spiking.

Shaun Davies: [\[42005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the tools available to (a) bars and (b) venues to (i) help prevent and (ii) spiking incidents.

Shaun Davies: [\[42006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help (a) identify and (b) promote new ways for (i) bars and (ii) venues to prevent spiking.

Jess Phillips:

Spiking is an appalling crime that undermines the people's right to feel safe when they are simply enjoying a night out.

The Government is currently delivering a range of measures to tackle this vile practice, specifically targeted at raising awareness, identifying perpetrators, and gathering evidence. They include:

- Introducing a new criminal offence for spiking to help police better respond to this crime. This is being delivered through the Crime and Policing Bill which is currently at Committee Stage in the House of Commons.
- Funding the development and delivery of increased training on spiking to staff in the Night Time Economy at no cost to venues.
- Working with the regulator of the UK private security industry, the Security Industry Authority to deliver mandatory spiking training for their 352,000+ door supervisor licence holders by April 2028. This has already been delivered to more than 135,000 new licence applicants since Spring 2024.

- The funding of police spiking "intensification weeks" which have seen an enhanced focus on spiking and led to increased arrests, detections, and prevention activity taking place.
- Investing in research into the accuracy and efficacy of commercially available spiking testing kits, to help the police detect if someone has been spiked in real-time.

The Home Office works closely with the hospitality and third sectors, as well as law enforcement to ensure that we are delivering measures on spiking which make it more difficult to carry out in the first place, that venues and the emergency services are proving the best possible response, and that victims are listened to and feel supported.

A wide range of spiking training, resources, support and advice options are available across a number of organisations, many of whom are referenced on the Government's spiking web pages or within our training package.

■ **Thames Valley Police**

Callum Anderson:

[41730]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many additional police officers have been recruited under the Police Uplift Programme in Thames Valley Police.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Table U2 of the data tables accompanying the final 'Police Officer Uplift' release, covering the position as at 31 March 2023, provides a breakdown of additional officers recruited through the Police Uplift Programme by month since October 2019. These data can be accessed here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64b6d5d30ea2cb000d15e560/police-officer-uplift-final-position-as-at-march-2023-tables-260723.ods>. Data are provided on a headcount basis and broken down by Police Force Area.

During the Police Uplift Programme, Thames Valley recruited 784 additional police officers attributable to the Police Uplift Programme. This was against an allocation to recruit 609 additional police officers for the three-year programme.

Reporting on the size and composition of the police workforce continues on a bi-annual basis in the 'Police Workforce, England and Wales' statistical bulletin which can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-workforce-england-and-wales>.

■ **Undocumented Migrants: Albania**

Andrew Rosindell:

[41016]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 19 March 2025 to Question 34801 on Asylum: Albania, what steps her Department has taken to ensure the continued reduction in the number of Albanian nationals arriving in the UK by small boat.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Small boat crossings by Albanian nationals have reduced each year since their peak in 2022. This government is committed to working with the Albanian government to further reduce these numbers, including through communications campaigns that demonstrate the dangers of these crossings, and ensuring that Albanian nationals with no right to be in the UK are returned efficiently to Albania.

We also continue to work with other international partners to target the people smugglers who exploit migrants for profit. The Home Secretary has convened an international summit focussed on Organised Immigration Crime, bringing together Interior Ministers and law enforcement experts, including from Albania, to develop our combined response to the gangs who facilitate this vile trade in human lives.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Hotels**Lee Anderson:**[\[41985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to use Eastwood Hall Hotel to accommodate irregular migrants.

Dame Angela Eagle:

As a matter of longstanding policy, the Home Office does not comment publicly on sites which may or may not be utilised to accommodate asylum seekers.

However, if a hotel has been identified for use as contingency accommodation, Home Office officials will write to the local authority Chief Executive and the constituency MP to inform them of any such plans.

It remains our absolute commitment to end the use of hotels over time, as part of our plans to reduce the overall cost of asylum accommodation.

■ Visas**Rupert Lowe:**[\[42061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many visas expired before the recipient left the country in each of the last ten years.

Dame Angela Eagle:

As set out in legislation, an individual is liable to removal from the UK if "the person requires leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom but does not have it". The Home Office has not historically recorded the means by which individual becomes liable to removal, and we could only collate and verify the requested information on visa overstayers for the purposes of answering this question at disproportionate cost.

The Government has already begun to deliver a major surge in the removal of people with no right to be in the UK, with over 24,000 returns recorded between 5 July 2024 and 22 March 2025.

Further data on returns activity is published quarterly and can be found on gov.uk at [Immigration system statistics quarterly release - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)\(opens in a new tab\)](#).

■ Windrush Commissioner

Lisa Smart: [\[41564\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the Windrush Commissioner will have (a) statutory powers of investigation and (b) access to Home Office data to fulfil their role independently.

Lisa Smart: [\[41565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what metrics will be used to assess the effectiveness of the Windrush Commissioner in assuring delivery of the Windrush Compensation Scheme.

Lisa Smart: [\[41566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the Windrush Commissioner will have the authority to compel responses from government departments or agencies in the course of their work.

Lisa Smart: [\[41567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to ensure the the independence of the Windrush Commissioner in terms of (a) appointment, (b) resourcing and (c) reporting mechanisms.

Lisa Smart: [\[41568\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she considered the potential merits of consulting the Windrush scandal's (a) victims and (b) victims' representatives in determining the role specification of the Windrush Commissioner.

Seema Malhotra:

The Windrush Commissioner will be a public appointee, operating independently of the Home Office to serve as an advocate and trusted voice for victims, families and impacted communities affected by the Home Office Windrush Scandal. They will provide independent scrutiny, challenge and advice to the Home Secretary and Ministers ensuring the lessons from Windrush are applied across the Home Office and are acted on throughout government.

We have actively engaged and listened to stakeholders' views on the key responsibilities of this position, ensuring their reflections informed the role specification. On appointment, it is anticipated that the Commissioner will also engage with impacted groups to understand their viewpoint and identify how they can deliver meaningful change through this new role.

The recruitment process is being conducted in line with Cabinet Office principles and guidelines, with two independent panel members included on the Advisory Assessment Panel to ensure transparency and fairness.

Like other Home Office Commissioners, the Windrush Commissioner also will have dedicated funding to recruit and build their team, while also receiving civil service support from the re-established Windrush Unit in the Home Office. A Memorandum of

Understanding will be drawn up between the Windrush Commissioner and the Home Office on the governance arrangements between both parties in line with the approach taken for all independent public officer holders.

To maintain momentum, drive early progress, and refine the role based on stakeholder engagement, the Commissioner will initially operate on a non-statutory basis. It may be put on a statutory footing at a later date subject to Parliamentary approval.

The Windrush Commissioner will also assure delivery of the Windrush Compensation Scheme to provide advice to Ministers on the scheme's effectiveness in achieving its objectives and provide assurance that the needs of Windrush communities are met.

Lisa Smart:

[41917]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what mechanisms her Department will put in place to ensure the Windrush Commissioner's (a) advice and (b) recommendations to the Government are promptly acted upon.

Lisa Smart:

[41918]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to mandate the Windrush Commissioner to report regularly to (a) Parliament (b) the Home Affairs Committee.

Seema Malhotra:

The Windrush Commissioner will provide independent scrutiny, challenge and advice to the Home Secretary and Ministers, ensuring the lessons from Windrush are applied across the Home Office and are acted on throughout government.

As the Windrush Commissioner is an independent role any decision on how the Commissioner engages with parliamentarians as part of their work is a matter to be raised with the Commissioner themselves. However, like other Home Office commissioners it is expected that they may be invited to give evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on relevant issues.

The immediate priority is to appoint the right person into the role and ensure they engage swiftly with impacted communities to truly understand their views and concerns, and identify how the Commissioner can deliver meaningful change through their new role.

To maintain momentum, drive early progress, and refine the role based on stakeholder engagement, the Commissioner will initially operate on a non-statutory basis. It may be put on a statutory footing at a later date subject to Parliamentary approval.

A Memorandum of Understanding will be drawn up between the Windrush Commissioner and the Home Office on the governance arrangements between both parties in line with the approach taken for all independent public officer holders. Like other Home Office Commissioners, the Windrush Commissioner will have their own dedicated team, maintaining their independence while receiving civil service support.

Further support will be provided from the re-established Windrush Unit in the Home Office.

■ Workplace Pensions: Fire and Rescue Services

Anna Sabine:

[\[42111\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to implement the public service pensions remedy for retired firefighters.

Dame Diana Johnson:

While the Home Office has responsibility for overarching policy and legislative changes to the firefighters' pension scheme regulations, the firefighters' pension scheme is locally administered by each individual Fire and Rescue Authority. The regulations governing the McCloud remedy for the firefighters' pension schemes were made in July 2023.

The Home Office continues to work with the fire sector to support the effective implementation of the McCloud remedy for all affected individuals.

As the designated scheme manager, it is for each Fire and Rescue Authority to determine their administrative timetable, in accordance with the Public Service Pensions and Judicial Offices Act 2022, including when remedy payments will be distributed.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Admiralty House

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[41458\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 19 March 2025 to Question 37220 on Admiralty House, what logistical support was provided.

Alex Norris:

Professional removal and cleaning services were hired and paid for personally by the Deputy Prime Minister and at no cost to the Department.

As the Deputy Prime Minister was moving to an official residence, some logistical support was provided. The residence is managed and run by civil servants who were involved in arranging the move in the usual way.

■ Affordable Housing

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[41449\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's press release notice entitled £2 billion new investment to support biggest boost in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation, published on 25 March 2025, on what evidential basis that press notice states that the Government's investment in social and affordable housing is the biggest in a generation.

Matthew Pennycook:

At Spring statement, the government announced an immediate injection of £2 billion to support delivery of the biggest boost in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation and contribute to our ambitious Plan for Change milestone of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes in this Parliament. Further detail can be found in the Written Ministerial Statement made on 25 March 2025 ([HCWS549](#)).

Affordable Housing: Buckinghamshire**Callum Anderson:**[\[41721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to increase the level of affordable housing in (a) Buckinghamshire and (b) Milton Keynes.

Matthew Pennycook:

At Spring statement, the government announced an immediate injection of £2 billion to support delivery of the biggest boost in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation and contribute to our ambitious Plan for Change milestone of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes in this Parliament. Further detail can be found in the Written Ministerial Statement made on 25 March 2025 ([HCWS549](#)).

The investment made at Spring statement follows the £800 million in new in-year funding which has been made available for the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme and that will support the delivery of up to 7,800 new homes, with more than half of them being Social Rent homes.

We will set out set details of new investment to succeed the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme at the Spending Review. This new investment will deliver a mix of homes for sub-market rent and homeownership, with a particular focus on delivering homes for social rent.

The government has also announced the £450 million third round of the Local Authority Housing Fund, followed by an uplift of £50 million, enabling councils to grow their housing stock.

We also confirmed a range of new flexibilities for councils and housing associations, both within the Affordable Homes Programme and in relation to how councils can use their Right to Buy receipts. Having reduced Right to Buy discounts to their pre-2012 regional levels, we have allowed councils to retain 100% of the receipts generated by Right to Buy sales.

The government recognise that Registered Providers need support to build their capacity and make a greater contribution to affordable housing supply. Between 30 October 2024 and 23 December 2024, the government consulted on a new 5-year social housing rent settlement, to give Registered Providers the certainty they need to invest in new social and affordable housing.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December 2024 includes a number of changes that make the planning system more supportive of

affordable housing, in particular Social Rent homes. These include new Golden Rules for development on the Green Belt. Prior to development plan policies for affordable housing being updated in accordance with the revised NPPF, the affordable housing contribution required to satisfy the 'Golden Rules' is 15 percentage points above the highest existing affordable housing requirement that would otherwise apply to the development, subject to a cap of 50%. We estimate that under this model, the median Green Belt local planning authority affordable housing requirement will be 50%.

■ **Bedford Borough Council: Finance**

Richard Fuller: [\[42429\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what consideration she has given to providing financial support to Bedford Borough Council for extraordinary expenses arising from the Cleat Hill gas explosion.

Jim McMahon:

Bedford Borough Council submitted a formal request on 27th March 2025 for Bellwin Scheme financial support for their immediate response costs arising from the Cleat Hill gas explosion that occurred in October 2024. We will now review the information provided by the Council and then decide what if any financial assistance may be provided through the Bellwin Scheme for the Council's eligible costs in respect of this tragic incident.

■ **Buildings: Carbon Emissions**

Jamie Stone: [\[39930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to paragraph 167 of the National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December 2024, whether she has plans for local planning authorities to take a proactive approach to facilitating domestic decarbonisation.

Matthew Pennycook:

Paragraph 167 of the revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December 2024 sets out that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings, both domestic and non-domestic.

The Framework also makes clear that plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change and that the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change should be considered in preparing and assessing planning applications.

■ Buildings: Safety

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference her Department's consultation response entitled, Building Safety Levy: Technical consultation response, published on 25 March 2025, at what rate the Building Safety Levy will be set..

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41866\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference her Department's consultation response entitled, Building Safety Levy: Technical consultation response, published on 25 March 2025, when the Building Safety Levy will come into force.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference her Department's consultation response entitled, Building Safety Levy: Technical consultation response, published on 25 March 2025, if the Building Safety Levy will apply to (a) live sites at the time of implementation and (b) new sites after the implementation of the levy.

Alex Norris:

The Building Safety Levy (levy) is one of a package of measures to make sure that the burden of paying for fixing historical building safety defects does not fall on leaseholders or further burden taxpayers.

Developers will pay the levy on new residential development, subject to certain exemptions. It will come into effect in Autumn 2026. Anyone submitting an application for building control approval with full plans, a building control approval application (made to the Building Safety Regulator), or an initial notice for construction of, or works to, one or more dwellings or purpose built student accommodation (PBSA), after the levy has come into effect, will be liable to pay the levy, except where an exemption applies. The levy will not apply to applications for new dwellings that were submitted before the coming-into-force date.

The design of the levy maintains viability of new developments as far as possible through variable levy rates at local authority level and a 50% discount on developments on previously developed land, reflecting the additional costs of building on these sites. Affordable housing and community facilities are exempt from the levy.

The rates for each local authority can be found at [Annex A: Levy Rates](#) of the Building Safety Levy: Technical consultation response.

■ Climate Change and Nature Conservation: Planning Permission

Martin Wrigley:

[\[41339\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to ensure all planning decisions do not impact the UK's climate and nature targets.

Matthew Pennycook:

As set out in Paragraph 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of homes, commercial development and supporting infrastructure in a sustainable manner.

The Framework makes clear that the planning system should support the transition to net zero by 2050 and take full account of all climate impacts including overheating, water scarcity, storm and flood risks and coastal change. The need to mitigate and adapt to climate change should also be considered in preparing and assessing planning applications, taking into account the full range of potential climate change impacts.

The Framework also makes clear that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. The revised NPPF published on 12 December 2024 included changes designed to enhance and protect the environment. For example, it expects developments to provide net gains for biodiversity, including through incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats, and hedgehogs.

Biodiversity Net Gain requires development to deliver improvements for nature, while the Nature Restoration Fund proposed in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill would allow development to fund nature recovery in a simpler and more strategic manner, creating a win-win outcome for both the economy and nature.

■ Economic Growth: Northern Ireland

Sorcha Eastwood:

[\[42073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what funding her Department plans to allocate for (a) upskilling, (b) re-skilling and (c) local economic development for women in Northern Ireland beyond financial year 2025-26.

Alex Norris:

The government will set out its future vision for local growth at the multi-year spending review. In the meantime, we will continue to engage with Northern Ireland partners, including Northern Ireland Executive, to inform plans beyond 2025-26.

■ Elections: Pilot Schemes

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[41055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to conduct electoral pilots under the Representation of the People Act 2000.

Rushanara Ali:

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has no plans at present to conduct electoral pilots under the powers in the Representation of the People Act 2000 in England.

■ Electoral Commission: Companies House**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[41450\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 17 March 2025 to Question 37580 on Electoral Commission: Companies House, what discussions the Electoral Commission has had with Government departments on the (a) commencement and (b) implementation of data-sharing powers in relation to Companies House since the passage of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023; and whether the implementation of such powers for the Electoral Commission is dependent on (i) further commencement and (ii) secondary legislation.

Rushanara Ali:

The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 introduced changes which enable Companies House to disclose information with any person for the purpose of exercising its functions. Companies House can also share information with any public authority for the purpose of exercising the functions of that public authority. Information can be shared with the Electoral Commission for such purposes. No further secondary legislation is required to commence these data-sharing powers.

■ Housing: Buckinghamshire**Callum Anderson:**[\[41716\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the demand for housing in (a) Buckinghamshire and (b) Milton Keynes in each of the next ten years.

Callum Anderson:[\[41720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent discussions her Department has had with (a) Buckinghamshire Council and (b) Milton Keynes City Council on (i) housing targets and (ii) local plan development.

Matthew Pennycook:

As the hon. Member will know, the government published a revised National Planning Policy Framework on 12 December 2024 which included a revised standard method designed to direct residential development to where it is most needed and least affordable.

The government expects each local planning authority to use the revised standard method to assess local housing needs as a starting point to inform plan-making. Once an assessment has been made, local authorities should take into account land availability, environmental constraints, such as National Landscapes, and other relevant matters, to determine how much of the assessed housing need can be met.

The government is clear all local planning authorities should continue work on their local plans and get them in place as soon as possible.

Callum Anderson: [\[41717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many new homes have been built in (a) Buckinghamshire and (b) Milton Keynes in each of the last five years.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Department publishes an annual release entitled 'Housing supply: net additional dwellings, England', which is the primary and most comprehensive measure of housing supply. This includes estimates of new homes built in each local authority, including Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, in each financial year. Statistics to 2023-24 can be found in Live Table 123 on gov.uk [here](#).

The Department also publishes a quarterly release entitled 'Housing supply: Indicators of New Supply, England', which includes estimates of new build starts and completions in England and in each local authority district. Statistics to the quarter ending December 2024 can be found in Table 253a on gov.uk [here](#). This dataset covers new build dwellings only and should be regarded as a leading indicator of overall housing supply.

Callum Anderson: [\[41719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what proportion of new housing in (a) Buckinghamshire and (b) Milton Keynes has been built on brownfield land in each of the last five years.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Department publishes a release entitled 'Land use change: new residential addresses', which includes information on new residential addresses and the previous land use - including previously developed - on which the addresses were created. This is available at England level, as well as each local authority district, including Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. Statistics covering 2019-20 to 2021-2022 can be found in Table P302 on gov.uk [here](#). Figures for more recent years are due to be published in due course.

■ Housing: Construction

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[42788\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 25 March 2024 to Question 39650 on Housing: Construction, whether quarterly data on planning applications and housing starts and completions classifies the approval of a retrospective planning application of the conversion of a house into an HMO as a new dwelling.

Matthew Pennycook:

Within the Department's quarterly official statistics on planning applications, an application for the conversion of a house into a house in multiple occupation (HMO)

would not be classified as an application for a new dwelling. Applications within Use Class C3 are classified as new dwellings, whereas applications for conversion to an HMO are within Use Class C4 (three to six residents) or as *sui generis* (more than six residents), both of which are classified as being within All Other Developments. The relevant official guidance is published and available on gov.uk [here](#).

Whether or not a planning application is retrospective does not affect how it is classified.

Within the Department's quarterly official statistics on housing starts and completions, the conversion of an existing house into an HMO would not count as a newly built dwelling.

The official guidance for the data return is that new build dwelling figures should exclude dwellings created through conversion of existing dwellings and by change of use such as commercial buildings to residential. Extensions and alterations to existing dwellings should be excluded. The relevant official guidance is published and available on gov.uk [here](#).

■ Housing: Infrastructure

Callum Anderson: [\[41718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to support local authorities in (a) Buckinghamshire and (b) Milton Keynes to deliver infrastructure alongside new housing developments.

Callum Anderson: [\[41723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what funding her Department has provided for local infrastructure improvements related to housing development in (a) Buckinghamshire and (b) Milton Keynes in each of the last five years.

Matthew Pennycook:

The table below lists infrastructure projects in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes that have received capital funding through the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF), the Land Release Fund (LRF), or the Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF) to unlock housing developments in the last five years, up to 31 December 2024.

FUND	SCHEME	LOCATION	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	TOTAL
HIF	Aylesbury Garden Town	Buckinghamshire	£8.6m	£30.0m	£23.0m	£0.1m	£10.0m	£71.7m
HIF	Princes Risborough Expansion Area	Buckinghamshire	-	£5.1m	£0.2m	-	-	£5.3m

FUND	SCHEME	LOCATION	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	TOTAL
HIF	Realignment of Abbey Barn Lane (project since withdrawn)	Buckinghamshire	£0.8m	£0.4m	-	-£0.2m		£1.0m
HIF	Milton Keynes East Sustainable Urban Expansion	Milton Keynes	£2.0m	£9.1m	£2.2m	£53.8m	£27.4m	£94.6m
LRF 2	Wing LRF	Buckinghamshire	£0.2m					£0.2m
BLRF 2.2	Old Country Offices	Buckinghamshire				£0.7m		£0.7m

■ Housing: Solar Power

Ben Coleman:

[\[41737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has plans to encourage the freeholders of multiple occupancy leasehold buildings to install solar panels when the lease does not permit the Right To Manage Company or individual leaseholders to install panels on the common roof area.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to Question UIN [38264](#) on 21 March 2025. The government remains committed to meeting its net zero emissions target by 2050 and recognises the important contribution that making buildings more energy efficient will play in doing so.

■ Leasehold: Reform

Wendy Morton:

[\[41414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in what month this year she will publish the draft Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon. Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)).

Local Government: Elections

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41457\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has issued guidance on including local Electoral Returning Officers within the definition of local authorities for the Re-use of Public Sector Information.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[42242\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of including Electoral Returning Officers on the list of public authorities subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Rushanara Ali:

The Government has not issued guidance on including Returning Officers or Electoral Registration Officers within the definition of local authorities for the Re-use of Public Sector Information.

The Government has not made an assessment of the potential merits of including Returning Officers or Electoral Registration Officers on the list of public authorities subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The Electoral Commission provides guidance to Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers, and recommends that they disclose requested information where possible, provided the information is either already in the public domain or does not include personal data.

Martin Wrigley: [\[41569\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of using the Single Transferrable Vote system in English local elections.

Rushanara Ali:

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [23541](#) on 22 January 2025.

Local Government: Reorganisation

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 13 March 2025 to Question 36414 on Local Government: Reorganisation, whether she plans to include London Boroughs in a future round of restructuring.

Jim McMahon:

As outlined in our answer to Question UIN [36414](#) on 13 March 2025, on 5 February the government formally invited unitary proposals from only those councils in two-tier local government areas and their neighbouring small unitaries, no London Boroughs were included in this invitation.

The English Devolution White Paper set out that the government is taking a phased approach to delivery and will also facilitate reorganisation for those unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or where their size or boundaries are impacting on their responsibilities.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Consultants**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[38373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 7 March 2025 to Question 34282 MHCLG: Cost Effectiveness, what estimate she has made of the cost to the public purse of her Department's use of consultants in the 2024-25 financial year.

Alex Norris:

I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to Question UIN [22042](#) on 14 January 2025 and Question UIN [25703](#) on 14 February 2025.

In line with the government's overall ambition, we are targeting a 50% reduction in consulting spend by the end of financial year 2025-26, and expect to demonstrate material progress towards achieving this following financial year 2024-25. MHCLG publishes spend on consultancy as part of its annual report and accounts, and the figures for FY2024-25 included in the accounts will therefore be assembled immediately following the end of the financial year.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Equality**

Lee Anderson: [\[41939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what diversity, equality and inclusion targets her Department has for staff recruitment.

Alex Norris:

MHCLG do not have diversity, equality and inclusion recruitment targets. Our recruitment processes aim to attract a diverse range of applications, with a focus on parity with the economically active population in the places we work. The Economically Active Population (EAP) is published by the Office for National Statistics for the regions in the UK.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Secondment**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41464\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, which non-civil service organisations second staff to her Department.

Alex Norris:

The organisations of current secondees in the department are:

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

The Future of London Emerging Talent programme

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Trade Union Officials**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 14 March 2025 to Question 36096 on MHCLG: Trade Union Officials, whether she plans to continue publishing this data following the passage of the Employment Rights Bill.

Alex Norris:

As with any changes to employment legislation, the department will review the position on reporting requirements as appropriate in line with the Employment Rights Bill 2024 and any applicable Cabinet Office guidance.

■ **Permitted Development Rights**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41465\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 18 March 2025 to Question 36421 on Permitted Development Rights, if she will publish the Article 4 directions in force in each local authority.

Matthew Pennycook:

In keeping with the practice of previous administrations, Article 4 Directions which are implemented without changes are not published. In cases where the Secretary of State determines that an Article 4 Direction should be modified, decisions are published on gov.uk [here](#).

■ **Planning Permission: Air Pollution**

Brian Mathew: [\[41766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if her Department will include the potential impact of new developments on air pollution in planning decisions in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Matthew Pennycook:

The National Planning Policy Framework already makes clear that planning policies and decisions should prevent new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of air pollution.

Planning policies and decisions should also sustain and contribute towards compliance with relevant limit values or national objectives for pollutants, taking into

account the presence of Air Quality Management Areas and Clean Air Zones, and the cumulative impacts from individual sites in local areas.

■ Private Education: Business Rates

Blake Stephenson: [\[41519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Impact Note on removal of eligibility of private schools for business rates charitable relief, published on 30 October 2024, for what reasons the Government did not model the impact on economic growth.

Jim McMahon:

Policies and legislation concerning tax and tax administration fall outside the meaning of regulatory provisions and, therefore, are not required to be accompanied by an Impact Assessment.

Nevertheless, the government has conducted detailed analysis of the effects of business rates changes using the available Department for Education and Valuation Office Agency data.

The impact note published on 13 November 2024, alongside the introduction of the Non-Domestic Rating (Multipliers and Private Schools) Bill, provides detailed analysis of the average business rates change per pupil for private schools; distributional analysis by region, religious ethos, and pupil population; as well as anticipated pupil movements, associated costs, and equalities impacts.

The methodology for calculating the cost of this change has been certified by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility. The estimation of impacts, such as pupil movements, follows from that methodology.

The OBR's economic forecast in October modelled the macroeconomic impacts of the Budget package, including the measures relating to private schools.

■ Private Rented Housing

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41455\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of private rented sector reforms on the number of landlords requesting guarantors for new tenancies.

Matthew Pennycook:

According to the latest English Private Landlord Survey, 21% of landlords required a guarantor for their most recent letting.

The government recognises that blanket requirements for a guarantor could act as a barrier to renting for some tenants and expects landlords and agents to consider tenants' individual circumstances when negotiating rental conditions.

We are committed to monitoring the use of guarantors as part of our wider evaluation of the impact of our reforms on the private rented sector.

■ Private Rented Housing: Databases

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[40558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of recording actual rents on the new Private Rented Sector Database.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Private Rented Sector Database will support local authority enforcement action, help landlords understand their legal obligations and give tenants the information they need to make informed choices before entering into a tenancy agreement.

We intend for the Database to collect information about landlords and whether their rental property complies with key health and safety information.

In addition to data about the ownership and standard of PRS properties, we are considering the feasibility and merits of recording a wider range of data, including rent levels.

We will stipulate the specific requirements in regulations.

■ Social Rented Housing: Buckinghamshire

Callum Anderson: [\[41722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent estimate her Department has made of the number of households on local authority housing waiting lists in (a) Buckinghamshire and (b) Milton Keynes.

Matthew Pennycook:

The number of households on social housing registers (waiting lists) in England and for each local authority in England is available each year since 1987 in live table 600 on gov.uk [here](#).

The number of households on the housing register (waiting list) is not the same as the number of households waiting.

Local authorities periodically review their registers to remove households who no longer require housing, so the total number of households on housing registers may overstate the number of households who still require social housing at any one time. Housing register size may also be affected by other factors. For example, there is the potential for some households to be on the housing register of more than one local authority.

The frequency of reviews varies between local authorities.

■ Social Rented Housing: Furniture

Chris Bloore: [\[41520\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will hold discussions with local authorities on increasing the provision of furniture for (a)

vulnerable people, (b) families with young children and (c) people who have escaped domestic violence living in social rented accommodation.

Matthew Pennycook:

My Department holds discussions with local authorities on a wide range of issues, including how to improve housing quality in the social rented sector. We will be consulting later this year on a reformed Decent Homes Standard.

In relation to furniture provision, local authorities may be able to provide support through the 'Household Support Fund' and other services available locally. The Deputy Prime Minister is also part of the ministerial Child Poverty Taskforce, which is considering the impacts of living in poor quality housing on children.

In relation to those who are victims of domestic abuse and need to flee their homes, local authorities also have a statutory duty to assess the need for and provide appropriate support in safe accommodation. Such emergency domestic abuse safe accommodation is furnished, and workers would provide support for victims, including help with finding appropriate and safe longer-term housing, and sources of financial support to furnish that home if needed.

■ **Social Rented Housing: Transport for London**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[41454\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has received representations from the RMT trade union on prioritising Transport for London staff members for social housing.

Matthew Pennycook:

My Department has not received representations from the RMT trade union on prioritising Transport for London staff members for social housing.

■ **UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Northern Ireland**

Sorcha Eastwood:

[\[42069\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will publish a breakdown of how the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has been allocated in Northern Ireland for financial year 2025-26 including spending by (a) sector, (b) region and (c) projects.

Sorcha Eastwood:

[\[42072\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what engagement she has had with (a) community groups, (b) local authorities and (c) the Northern Ireland Executive on the reallocation of (a) UK Shared Prosperity Fund and (b) skills funding in Northern Ireland.

Sorcha Eastwood: [\[42074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reasons the 2025-26 allocation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund wasn't an open competition.

Alex Norris:

My officials meet regularly with representatives of the voluntary and community sector and local authorities through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Northern Ireland Partnership Group, as well as officials from the Northern Ireland Executive Departments of Finance, Economy and Communities, to seek views and insight on funding allocation, local priorities and alignment with other provision and policies in Northern Ireland.

I met with Northern Ireland Executive ministers to discuss the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and with the Northern Ireland Partnership Group and project deliverers to hear first-hand the impact that the fund is having on people and communities across Northern Ireland.

Taking account of partner feedback and to avoid a hiatus in delivery of support for people and businesses, my department determined the most appropriate approach to funding for 2025-26 was to invite continuation applications. This has avoided a significant delay in delivery that new funding competitions would have created.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund project information for Northern Ireland [is published on gov.uk](#). This will be updated for 2025-26 funding allocations following the conclusion of the selection process.

■ UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Training

Sorcha Eastwood: [\[42071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an estimate of the potential cost to the public purse of UK Shared Prosperity Fund spending on (a) upskilling and (b) reskilling programmes; and what oversight and accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure these funds are effectively deployed.

Alex Norris:

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) provides a total of £3.5 billion of funding, with all places in the UK receiving an allocation via a funding formula. Through the People and Skills investment priority, places can choose to fund projects that help reduce the barriers some people face to employment, and support them to move towards employment and education. Places can also target funding on skills to support employment and local growth, including upskilling and reskilling programmes. As of September 2024 £1.1 billion of UKSPF funding had been spent across the investment priorities, of that, over £268 million of funding had been used for People and Skills projects.

The UKSPF has a light-touch and flexible delivery model. In England, Scotland and Wales, lead local authorities determine how to allocate their UKSPF allocation in line

with local circumstances and priorities. In Northern Ireland, MHCLG works with a Partnership Group of local partners to implement the fund. MHCLG receives progress reports from places on a six-monthly basis. Places are also required to publish information on UKSPF delivery and activities being funded in their area. MHCLG is also undertaking a [programme evaluation](#) to measure overall fund impact.

■ Unitary Councils

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to instruct the Local Government Boundary Commission to conduct a formal assessment of the new wards and boundaries of the new unitary authorities.

Jim McMahon:

My department is working closely with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to ensure that they are involved at the appropriate time to ensure fair electoral arrangements across the area of any new unitary local authorities.

■ Voting Rights: British Nationals Abroad

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[41056\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to help increase (a) registration and (b) participation in elections by overseas British electors.

Rushanara Ali:

The Government is committed to improving electoral registration. We are exploring a wide range of options to deliver on this manifesto commitment.

As set out in our response to the Electoral Commission's evaluation of the 2024 general election, published last month ([Electoral Commission's reports on the 2024 elections: government response - GOV.UK](#)), the Government recognises the Commission's findings with regards to the difficulties faced by British citizens living overseas when trying to participate in UK elections.

As part of our review of electoral registration and conduct, the Government, in partnership with electoral practitioners and the Electoral Commission, is examining several aspects of the system for overseas electors, with a view to identifying practical solutions to some of the challenges faced.

JUSTICE

■ Child Arrangements Orders: Offences against Children

Sarah Champion: [\[42456\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many private law cases where child sexual abuse was alleged to have been perpetrated by a parent was that parent granted residence in (a) 2022-23 and (b) 2023-24.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The requested information is not recorded centrally. The relevant data could only be obtained by an analysis of individual case files at disproportionate cost.

■ **Courts**

Munira Wilson: [\[41447\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an estimate of the number of court hearing records that were (a) lost and (b) not recorded in the last (i) 12 months and (ii) 5 years.

Sarah Sackman:

Data on information on audio recording failures is not collated or held centrally. Hearings across the Crown Court, Family Court, County Court, High Court, and Court of Appeal, as a matter of routine, are digitally audio recorded, among other things so as to facilitate the provision of written transcripts where, requested or required. Operational courtroom checks are undertaken daily to assure the technology used is working correctly.

■ **Domestic Abuse: Family Courts**

Kim Johnson: [\[41598\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to the reduce the time taken for domestic abuse cases to reach family courts in (a) the North West and (b) Liverpool.

Kim Johnson: [\[41599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to ensure the adequacy of the number of specialist domestic abuse services available to assist victims during the court process in Liverpool.

Kim Johnson: [\[41777\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will hold discussions with HM Courts and Tribunals Service on the potential merits of ensuring that domestic abuse victims attending Liverpool Family Court can use a different entrance to the building to that of their alleged perpetrator.

Alex Davies-Jones:

It is important that the Family Court works for children and families. That is why the Government is committed to ensuring there are adequate protections in place for users and that we improve the timeliness of cases.

I am aware that, due to the building's architecture, layout and shared use there are issues in arranging separate entrances at Liverpool Family Court. To mitigate this, it is possible to arrange staggered arrival times, secure waiting rooms and separate exits. Special measures can be requested by contacting the court as soon as possible, ideally 5 days before the hearing. Liverpool Family Court's contact details

can be found at: [Liverpool Civil and Family Court - Find a Court or Tribunal - GOV.UK](#).

We recognise the significant impact that delay can have on children and families. We are committed to tackling backlog of cases we inherited from the previous Government and the latest published data shows progress is being made. When comparing October to December 2024 to the same period in 2023, under the previous Government, the average duration of private law cases has fallen from 45 to 42 weeks and care proceedings over the same period have fallen from 42 weeks to 36. We know that there is more to do and the Family Justice Board has agreed system-wide targets for 2025/26 and these are focused on increasing the proportion of public law cases concluded within the statutory 26-week timeframe and closing the longest running cases in both private and public law. To support this, Cheshire and Merseyside is a designated Trailblazer area, developing and testing targeted solutions to address the biggest local drivers of delays.

Our new Pathfinder courts are improving the experience and outcomes for children and parents involved in private law proceedings, and particularly those who may need additional support such as domestic abuse survivors. The pilot courts work closely with local domestic abuse agencies, including Independent Domestic Violence Advisers. The Pathfinder pilot started in February 2022 in Dorset and North Wales. It was expanded to Southeast Wales and Birmingham in 2024 and Mid and West Wales on 3 March 2025. Pathfinder will be rolled out to West Yorkshire on 3 June. Areas delivering the Pathfinder model for private family law are making significant progress in addressing delay, with the initial two pilot sites showing an 11-week reduction in average case duration and a 50% reduction in outstanding caseloads between February 2022 and November 2024.

Alongside improving how cases move through the system we need to properly support those involved. Victims of domestic abuse must receive emotional and practical support to recover and rebuild their lives. The Ministry of Justice provide Police and Crime Commissioners with annual grant funding to commission local support services. This includes ring-fenced funding for sexual violence and domestic abuse community-based services and Independent Sexual Violence and Domestic Abuse Advisors. Alongside this the Home Office runs the Flexible Fund, administered by Women's Aid, which offers financial support to victims in specific circumstances.

■ Employment Tribunals Service

Dame Harriett Baldwin:

[\[42441\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many Employment Tribunal claims were submitted in each of the last five years; and what proportion of those were resolved within six months.

Sarah Sackman:

The number of Employment Tribunal claims submitted in each of the last 5 years can be found on www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service does not hold information on the number of cases submitted in the last 5 years that were resolved within 6 months, but we do hold data on the number of disposals and the number of sitting days used. Sitting day data has been published in the quarterly Tribunal statistics up to the period 2023/24. The disposal rate can be acquired by dividing the number of disposed cases by the number of sitting days. For the Employment Tribunal, the disposal rate for 2023/24 is therefore 0.99 disposals per sitting day; and for EAT for the same period, is 0.89 disposals per sitting day.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[42442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what estimate she has made of the average cost to the public purse of administering an Employment Tribunal claim.

Sarah Sackman:

The estimated operational cost of disposing of a case within the Employment Tribunal was estimated at £2,522 per case in 23-24, the last full financial year for which figures are available.

■ Employment Tribunals Service: Standards

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[42439\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many Employment Tribunal cases had been outstanding for more than 12 months in the latest period for which data is available.

Sarah Sackman:

A case may be outstanding for many reasons, often driven by the behaviour and choices of the parties. HM Courts & Tribunals Service does not hold information on the number of outstanding cases for more than 12 months.

Andrew Griffith: [\[42850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of trends in the level of employment tribunal delays on access to justice for (a) claimants and (b) respondents.

Sarah Sackman:

We recognise that there remain significant challenges for the performance of the Employment Tribunals following the inheritance from the previous Government. We are determined to cut delays and ensure timely access to justice for all.

The Lord Chancellor announced on 05 March a sitting day allocation for the Employment Tribunals of 33,900 in 2025/26, the maximum allocation the tribunal is able to sit.

Following a recruitment drive, in 2024 we recruited 21 more salaried judges in the Employment Tribunals than in 2023. Further recruitment for up to 36 salaried Employment Judges commenced in March 2025. 50 fee paid employment judges were appointed in 2024 and recruitment will commence for another 50 in early 2026.

HMCTS continues to invest in improving tribunal productivity through the recruitment of additional judges, deployment of Legal Officers to actively manage cases, the development of modern case management systems, and the use of remote hearing technology. A 'Virtual Region' of judges has delivered over 1,500 extra sitting days.

We are continuing to monitor demand in the Employment Tribunals and are working with the judiciary, HMCTS and the Department for Business and Trade on any further actions needed to alleviate pressures on the Employment Tribunals, improve efficiency and reduce waiting times.

Andrew Griffith: [\[42852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of Employment Tribunal cases are withdrawn or settled before hearing due to delays in the listing process; and what assessment he has made of the potential impact on business productivity.

Sarah Sackman:

Settlements and withdrawals from legal proceedings may take place for a variety of reasons which are unconnected to delays in the court process. HM Courts & Tribunals Service does not hold separate data on reasons for settlements or withdrawals. Moreover, listing is exclusively a judicial function.

■ **Employment Tribunals Service: Vacancies**

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[42440\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many judicial vacancies there were in the Employment Tribunal system on 31 March 2025; and what steps she is taking to fill those vacancies.

Sarah Sackman:

We are maintaining investment in the annual recruitment of around 1,000 judges and tribunal members across all jurisdictions. Annual recruitment requirements are determined by business need and judicial departures.

Recruitment for up to 36 salaried Employment Tribunal judges commenced in March 2025. 50 new fee paid employment judges were appointed in 2024, and recruitment will commence for a further 50 in early 2026. Additionally, recruitment is planned in 2025 for two regional leadership judges and 150 non-legal tribunal members.

Andrew Griffith: [\[42849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many sitting days were lost in employment tribunals due to (a) judicial and (b) administrative staff shortages in the last 12 months.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

HM Courts & Tribunals Service does not hold information on sitting days lost in employment tribunals due to (a) judicial and (b) administrative shortages in the past 12 months.

■ Fines: Surcharges

Mr Andrew Mitchell: [\[41796\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much funding from the Victims Surcharge has been allocated to charities in the West Midlands in the last three years.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The Ministry of Justice Victim and Witness budget funds a variety of support services, both at a national and local level, which offer practical, emotional and therapeutic support to help victims cope and move forward in the aftermath of crime. This includes funding to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), including West Midlands OPCC, and the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Fund (RASASF), which funds local sexual violence support organisations.

The Victim Surcharge is not a standalone funding stream and instead provides a contribution to the overall Ministry of Justice Victim and Witness budget described above. Therefore, we are unable to say how much funding to the West Midlands area was specifically allocated from the Surcharge.

■ Human Trafficking: Children

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[42033\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 27 March 2025 to Question 40749 Human Trafficking: Children, what steps she is taking to enable victim age to be recorded in the Court Proceedings Database.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[42034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 24 March 2025 to Question 40749 on Human Trafficking: Children, what steps she is taking to improve the accuracy of recording the number of child victims of human trafficking.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Ministry of Justice publishes criminal court outcomes against offences as defined in legislation, including offences where the age of victims is recorded only if that is part of the specific offence wording.

The Department does not capture or hold the information on victim age within court record management system more generally, because there is no operational business need to do so.

Information on victim age may be held and recorded earlier in the criminal justice process by partners such as the police and the Crown Prosecution Service.

■ Legal Aid Scheme: Asylum

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[42735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to increase access to legal aid for people entering the asylum process.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[42736\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to increase awareness of legal aid services for people entering the asylum process.

Sarah Sackman:

The Ministry of Justice has undertaken a comprehensive review of civil legal aid and recently concluded a consultation on uplifts to housing & debt and immigration & asylum legal aid fees, which when implemented, would inject an additional £20 million into the sector each year. We are currently reviewing consultation responses and will publish the Government's response in due course.

Migrant Help will signpost users to the Legal Aid Agency. Legal aid applicants can use the 'Find a legal aid adviser' search tool on GOV.UK to access a list of legal aid solicitors near them: [Find a legal aid adviser or family mediator \(justice.gov.uk\)](https://www.justice.gov.uk/finding-a-legal-aid-adviser). They can also contact the Civil Legal Advice Helpline, who will provide contact details for legal aid providers.

■ Marriage: Humanism**Max Wilkinson:** [\[42776\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of legally recognising humanist wedding ceremonies.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The Government is aware that humanists have long been campaigning to conduct legally binding weddings. We are grateful for the contributions that humanists make to our society.

The Law Commission's 2022 report on weddings raises a number of issues around weddings law. Given marriage will always be one of our most important institutions, it is right that as a new Government we take the time to carefully consider this report before we set out our position in the coming months.

■ Prison Officers: HMP/YOI Drake Hall**Leigh Ingham:** [\[41352\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to support prison officers working in HMP Drake Hall in Stafford.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

HMP Drake Hall provides early days support for new Officers to ensure they are well informed pre-start date. The New Colleague Mentor supports staff in their first year along with an assigned mentor in addition to their Line Manager.

Line Managers support staff through the Staff Wellbeing Offer, with referrals to Occupational Health and workplace adjustments passports if required. Staff Support networks are promoted to all staff. Onsite Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) practitioners and Care Team members are available. Staff are also able to access the Mental Health Allies service and Employee Assistance Programme.

Furthermore, Officers are allocated to training to support working with women and have touchpoint meetings with their Line Managers to aid their development and wellbeing. They have the opportunity to take part in various development schemes to help their career progression.

I recognise that prison officers work in difficult environments every day and I want to thank all prison officers for the important job they do in keeping the public safe.

The previous Government left our hardworking staff to face the brunt of prison overcrowding, which has damaged morale and put the safety and security of staff at risk. I know that a well-staffed and skilled HM Prison Service is fundamental to delivering safe, secure, and rehabilitative prison regimes and we are determined to improve their safety at work and ensure they get a fair pay reward.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Detention and Training Orders**

Munira Wilson:

[\[41973\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 6 February 2025 to Question 27891 on Detention and Training Orders: Children, how many and what proportion of the children identified as having SEND (a) had and (b) did not have (i) an EHC plan and (ii) other special needs support.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Children's special educational needs are assessed when entering custody, and are regularly reviewed.

To obtain the information requested, it would be necessary to undertake a detailed review of individual records, which could not be done without incurring disproportionate cost.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

■ **Government Departments: Parliamentary Proceedings**

Mr Toby Perkins:

[\[42432\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, how many (a) oral statements, (b) urgent questions, (c) end of day adjournment debates and (d) Westminster Hall debates each Department has responded to since 5 July 2024.

Lucy Powell:

Urgent questions, adjournment debates and Westminster Hall debates are a matter for the House. Information relating to each of these is available on the Parliament website.

The Government is responsible for the arrangement of oral statements. As of 3rd April 2025, there have been 129 oral statements from the following departments:

DEPARTMENT	NUMBER OF ORAL STATEMENTS
DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS AND TRADE	8
Cabinet Office	9
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	4
Ministry of Defence	7
Department for Education	8
Department for Energy Security and Net Zero	8
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	4
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	20
Department of Health and Social Care	8
Home Office	15
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	8
Ministry of Justice	6
Northern Ireland Office	2
Prime Minister	6
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology	2
Department for Transport	5
Treasury	6
Department for Work and Pensions	3

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ Government Departments: Cost Effectiveness

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[40906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the speech entitled PM remarks on the fundamental reform of the British state, published on 13 March 2025, on what methodological basis the Prime Minister said that the

Government would make £45 billion savings in efficiency; and over what time period this would be.

Feryal Clark:

The Government's £45 billion estimate is based on a detailed analysis employing three levers: automating routine tasks (£36 billion), migrating services online (£4 billion) and reducing fraud via digital compliance (£5 billion). This work scaled bespoke analysis conducted on the Civil Service to the wider public sector, with overlaying case studies. A more detailed methodology will be published online in due course.

The £45 billion therefore represents the steady-state annual savings / productivity gains achievable once these efficiency measures are fully embedded across the public sector.

■ **Mobile Phones and Social Media: Children**

James McMurdock:

[\[41746\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what recent discussions her Department has had with parents on (a) smart phones in schools and (b) young people on social media.

Feryal Clark:

Ministers and officials regularly meet stakeholders to discuss online child protection. Ofcom, the independent regulator for online safety, also has statutory duties under the Online Safety Act to consult with users. Ofcom engaged with over 7,000 parents to understand online experiences and exposure to harms, informing the child safety codes of practice due for publication in April.

The Department for Education's 'Mobile Phones in Schools' guidance is clear that schools should prohibit the use of devices throughout the school day. Discussions with parents were held by officials during the development of the guidance. Details on Ministerial meetings are published on the GOV.UK website.

■ **Panattoni: Swindon North**

Will Stone:

[\[41596\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will consider Panettoni Park in Swindon North constituency for Government funding for jobs in science and technology.

Feryal Clark:

The Government is supporting local leaders to unlock their regions' innovation potential. This includes Innovation Accelerator pilots, with innovation clusters sharing £100 million; the Launchpad programme, with 11 sites each receiving up to £7.5 million for innovation projects; and the Strength in Places Fund, which is investing £316 million in 12 projects to develop research and development capacity.

I understand Panettoni Park may host data centre space. The Government is reviewing and improving grid connections and exploring other ways to enable data centre capacity, with over £40 billion in private investment in new UK data centres announced since July 2024.

■ **Telemedicine: Voice over Internet Protocol**

Ben Lake: [\[42884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to support the effective delivery of the National Telecare Campaign in Ceredigion Preseli constituency.

Chris Bryant:

The Government is working with industry to support the industry-led and industry-funded National Telecare Campaign. The objective of this campaign is for telecare users to be identified so that they can be provided with additional support when their landlines are upgraded from analogue to digital.

It is important that the campaign reaches vulnerable customers across the UK. In Wales, a TV advert will be broadcast on ITV Wales, in English with Welsh subtitles. A mix of English and Welsh, and Welsh only will be used for printed adverts, video on demand, and social media.

TRANSPORT

■ **Department for Transport: Equality**

Lee Anderson: [\[41936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what diversity, equality and inclusion targets her Department has for staff recruitment.

Mike Kane:

All recruitment at the Department for Transport (DfT) is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. As such there are no diversity, equality and inclusion targets for recruitment in the Department.

■ **Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency: Payment Methods**

Steff Aquarone: [\[42801\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will widen the payment methods which can be used when making a payment to the DVLA.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) offers a range of payment options, including direct debits, cheques and debit and credit cards.

The DVLA keeps its range of payment options under review, taking into account the associated costs and benefits of potential new options.

■ Great British Railways**Jerome Mayhew:** [\[41991\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of conclusion one of the Public Account Committee's report entitled HS2: Update following the Northern leg cancellation, HC 357, published 28 February 2025, on the governance of Great British Railways.

Simon Lightwood:

Work is underway on the design of Great British Railways, including its governance. We will take learnings from elsewhere, including the Public Account Committee's recent report on High Speed Two (HS2), to ensure GBR is set up to deliver better services for passengers and freight customers, and better value for money for taxpayers.

■ Great Western Railway**Martin Wrigley:** [\[41975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of changes proposed by Great Western Railway on (a) ticket offices and (b) station staffing.

Simon Lightwood:

Any changes to ticket office opening hours, in relation to regulated stations covered by Schedule 17 of the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement, must be made following the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement conditions and Secretary of State guidance. The Secretary of State has not had any recent discussions with Great Western Railway on changes related to ticket offices at any of its stations.

■ LeShuttle: Disability**Daniel Francis:** [\[42105\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has had recent discussions with the Office of Rail and Road on improving access for disabled people on LeShuttle services.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government engages regularly with the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to discuss a range of matters and officials meet routinely to discuss the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority (CTSA) and ORR's regulatory activities concerning Eurotunnel. The Government fully supports efforts to continually improve accessibility on Le Shuttle services.

■ Railway Stations: Access**Mr Paul Kohler:** [\[42986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact Appendix B of the PRM NTSN on the availability of step-free Access at Railway Stations.

Mr Paul Kohler: [\[42989\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department plans to remove Appendix B of the PRM NTSN.

Simon Lightwood:

The Secretary of State for Transport has no plans to remove Appendix B from the Persons of Reduced Mobility (PRM) NTSN.

The PRM NTSN is one of several measures that help make the railway more accessible and should be considered in conjunction with relevant National Technical Rules, Rail Industry Standards and operators' Accessible Travel Policies amongst other measures. My Department has not made a specific assessment of the impact of Appendix B on the availability of step free access at stations, but we keep all NTSNs under regular review.

Mr Paul Kohler: [\[42988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many railway stations underwent development where (a) full step-free access and (b) only passive provision was provided between 2019 and 2024.

Simon Lightwood:

During the period 2019 – 2024, 66 major accessibility interventions were delivered at 63 different stations under the Access for All Programme, 4 of which were fixed funding contributions through the Access for All mid-tier programme.

■ Railways: Disability**Navendu Mishra:** [\[41630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department plans to improve Passenger Assist service for rail users in England.

Simon Lightwood:

We have recently invested over £10 million to enable the Rail Delivery Group to deliver the next phase of the Passenger Assist Improvement Programme. This 25-month programme will deliver a series of improvements including the capability to book a ticket, request assistance and reserve a seat in a single transaction. Importantly, it will give customers the ability to communicate directly with staff and provide a dedicated help function on the Passenger Assist App.

■ Railways: Equality**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[41909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has completed an equality impact assessment on its consultation proposals entitled A railway fit for Britain's future, published on 18 February 2025.

Simon Lightwood:

Equality impacts are being considered throughout the policy development process and as we prepare the required legislation. Feedback from the consultation will also inform our assessments.

An Equality Impact Assessment will be published alongside the broader Impact Assessment when the legislation is introduced, in line with standard practice and requirements.

■ Railways: Newton Abbot**Martin Wrigley:** [\[41573\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of re-opening the railway line between Heathfield and Newton Abbot.

Simon Lightwood:

There are no current plans to make an assessment of reopening the railway line between Heathfield and Newton Abbot. The Government believes that local authorities are best placed to promote and take forward transport schemes that will most benefit their local areas.

Martin Wrigley: [\[41591\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions she has had with CrossCountry trains on increasing capacity on rail routes in Newton Abbot constituency.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department has funded 12 additional Voyager trains (60 carriages) for the CrossCountry network. Three trains are already in service with the next one due to be brought into service in April. The remaining eight trains are due to enter service with CrossCountry in May. This will increase the Voyager train fleet and enable CrossCountry to provide many more seats on its network including the Edinburgh to Plymouth route.

■ Railways: Public Interest**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[41910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will add public interest duties to her Department's open consultation entitled A railway fit for Britain's future, published on 18 February 2025.

Simon Lightwood:

The consultation is clear that Great British Railways (GBR) will run our rail infrastructure and passenger services in the public interest. The consultation has not specified GBR's exact duties and functions, and we welcome views on these. All responses to the consultation will be considered ahead of introduction of the forthcoming Railways Bill.

■ Railways: Tickets**Jerome Mayhew:**[\[41990\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an estimate of the amount of funding spent on reforming the train ticketing system in the (a) 2021-22, (b) 2022-23 and (c) 2023-24 financial years.

Simon Lightwood:

The Fares Ticketing and Retail (FTR) Programme to modernise ticketing and retail systems started at Spending Review 2021. The first year of the programme was 22/23. The Department spend £55.7 million in 22/23 and £66 million in 23/24 on the FTR programme.

■ Road Traffic Control: Kent**Sojan Joseph:**[\[42967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum on avoiding the routine deployment of Operation Brock during school holidays.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Kent and Medway Resilience Forum (KMRF) is operationally independent from His Majesty's Government (HMG). The KMRF's decision to deploy Operation Brock ahead of the Easter getaway was taken after extensive discussions, taking into account previous disruption during peak periods, expected traffic levels and safety of road users.

The deployment of Operation Brock and other traffic management measures are continually kept under review by the KMRF to ensure they are designed and implemented in the most effective way possible.

The Department continues to work on new approaches to long term traffic management in Kent, considering a combination of off-road sites and technology to manage the flow of traffic to the portals during periods of high traffic volumes, keeping the strategic road network clear. We are also working on improvements in traffic forecasting using better data, AI and learning from recent experience which could mean that the use of Operation Brock on a precautionary basis could be reduced in the future.

■ Roads: Repairs and Maintenance

Michael Wheeler:

[\[40048\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much funding has been allocated to (a) Salford City Council and (b) Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council for road maintenance in (i) 2024-25 and (ii) 2025-26.

Lilian Greenwood:

Both Salford City Council and Wigan Metropolitan Borough are constituent members of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). During 2024/25, the Government allocated funds to GMCA through its City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS), which includes consolidated funding for highway maintenance funding for all its constituent authorities. In addition to this funding, during 2024/25 GMCA received a £4.4 million funding uplift as part of the previous Government's Network North plan.

For 2025/26, GMCA will receive an Integrated Settlement from the Government, into which CRSTS will be consolidated. In addition to this funding, GMCA will receive an additional £14.8 million from the highway maintenance funding uplift announced in this Government's 2024 Budget.

Funding allocations for CRSTS and highway maintenance are published on gov.uk.

■ Roads: Staffordshire

Adam Jogee:

[\[42659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many individual representations her Department has received from Staffordshire County Council in relation to potholes in (a) Newcastle-under-Lyme and (b) North Staffordshire in each of the last five years.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department receives regular correspondence from many local highway authorities on the topic of local highway maintenance, including potholes. Over the last five years, the Department's records suggest that Staffordshire County Council has made formal representations to the Department four times on highway maintenance and other funding issues. The Department's officials are in regular informal contact with officers from Staffordshire County Council on local highway maintenance issues.

■ Welsh Government: Public Expenditure

Ann Davies:

[\[42637\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions has she had with the Welsh Government regarding the Spending Review.

Simon Lightwood:

The Secretary of State and the wider ministerial team are in regular contact with Welsh Government counterparts and have ongoing, constructive discussions on our

respective strategic priorities. There is also regular collaboration at senior official level through a number of fora, notably the Wales Rail Board.

TREASURY

■ British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies: Ownership

Steff Aquarone:

[\[42748\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the amount of tax income which could be generated by new registers of beneficial ownership in overseas territories and crown dependencies.

James Murray:

We are clear on the benefits of beneficial ownership registers, which not only include tackling illicit finance and corruption, but also fighting tax and sanctions evasion.

At the Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) in November 2024, the Falkland Islands and Saint Helena committed to join Montserrat and Gibraltar in implementing fully public registers by April 2025. The British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Bermuda, Anguilla and Turks and Caicos Islands agreed to implement registers of beneficial ownership, accessible to those with a legitimate interest, by June 2025. It remains our expectation that the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies will ultimately implement fully public registers.

The Crown Dependencies have committed to increasing the transparency of their beneficial ownership registers and are working towards implementing access to those with legitimate interest, in line with the EU's 6th Anti-Money Laundering Directive.

HMRC draws on a variety of data sources to tackle offshore non-compliance, including exchange of information under double taxation agreements and Tax Information Exchange Agreements.

■ Central Bank Digital Currencies

Ben Lake:

[\[42708\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what her policy is on the development of the digital pound.

Emma Reynolds:

HM Treasury and the Bank of England are continuing to explore the case for the digital pound.

No decision has been taken on whether to introduce the digital pound. The work currently being undertaken will provide the evidence base for a decision in due course. Any decision will also take account of international developments and wider trends in money and payments.

If a decision was taken to proceed with the digital pound, primary legislation would be introduced prior to its launch. Legislation would be preceded by a further public consultation and would guarantee users' privacy and control of their money.

■ Civil Service: Redundancy

Ben Obese-Jecty: [41608]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much she has budgeted for the Civil Service Voluntary Exit Scheme announced in the Spring Statement 2025.

Darren Jones:

As announced at Spring Statement the government has allocated £150 million for government employee exit schemes. Information can be found in the Spring Statement supporting documentation here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67e3ec2df356a2dc0e39b488/E03274109_HMT_Spring_Statement_Mar_25_Web_Accessible_.pdf. This will be match-funded by a further £150 million from Departments.

■ Defence Growth Board

Mr Mark Francois: [41392]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who the membership of the Defence Growth Board will be.

Mr Mark Francois: [41393]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what her planned timetable is for the Defence Growth Board to create growth.

Mr Mark Francois: [41394]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will the Defence Growth Board report to (a) the Chancellor of the Exchequer, (b) the Secretary of State for Defence or (c) Parliament; and how will its performance be measured.

Mr Mark Francois: [41395]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how the Defence Growth Board fits into the upcoming Strategic Defence Review.

Darren Jones:

The Defence Growth Board has been created to maximise Defence's contribution to the Government's first priority, the Growth Mission. It will be co-chaired by both the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Defence. Membership also includes the Secretary of State for Business and Trade with support from Departmental officials.

The aim of the Defence Growth Board is to oversee the integration of economic growth considerations into Defence. The Board will also oversee the delivery of the relevant recommendations that emerge from the Strategic Defence Review where they relate to growth and industrial strategy. Progress of the specific issues which

come to the Board will be measures under milestones agreed between the Ministry of Defence and HM Treasury.

James Cartlidge: [\[42297\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the National Armaments Director will sit on the defence growth board.

James Cartlidge: [\[42298\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Chief of the Defence Staff will sit on the defence growth board.

James Cartlidge: [\[42299\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how regularly the defence growth board will meet.

James Cartlidge: [\[42300\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff will sit on the defence growth board.

James Cartlidge: [\[42301\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Permanent Secretary will sit on the defence growth board.

James Cartlidge: [\[42302\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Second Permanent Secretary will sit on the defence growth board.

Darren Jones:

The membership of the Defence Growth Board consists of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Business and Trade. They will be supported by Departmental officials, including the National Armaments Director and MOD Permanent Secretary. Meetings of the Defence Growth Board will be scheduled as required.

■ Dual Jobholding and Overtime: Taxation

Laurence Turner: [\[41700\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of reports of NHS staff being taxed as a second job for working overtime.

James Murray:

All income earned through employment is taxable, including income from further employment, such as from overtime or through additional employment. Tax is paid on individual's overall income, regardless of the source of that income. Not all individuals who receive an income are formally employed, as many earn through self-employment or receive other sources of income.

By paying tax on overall income, rather than solely through income from a single source of employment, the income tax system is highly progressive, with different rates of tax sitting above an internationally high Personal Allowance. When an individual moves from one tax band to another because of an increase in their income, they will only pay additional tax on the portion of their income that falls within the new tax band.

■ **Employers' Contributions: Welsh Government**

Ben Lake: [\[42628\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the funding allocated to public services in Wales to compensate for costs arising from the increase in employers national insurance contributions will be allocated to the Welsh Government through the Barnett Formula.

Ben Lake: [\[42629\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the total amount provided to the Welsh Government for the financial year 2025-2026 to compensate Welsh public services for costs arising from the increase in employers national insurance contributions will be.

Ben Lake: [\[42630\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions she has had with the Welsh Government on the potential impact of providing compensation for public services in Wales for costs arising from the increase in employers national insurance contributions through the Barnett Formula.

Darren Jones:

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Chancellor agreed to provide funding to the public sector to support them with the additional cost associated with changes to employer National Insurance Contributions policy.

The Welsh Government will receive funding through the Barnett formula in the usual way in 2025-26, including on this support. This is the normal operation of the funding arrangements as set out in the Statement of Funding Policy.

The Welsh Government settlement is growing in real terms in 2025-26 and is the largest settlements in real terms of any since devolution. Overall, the Welsh Government receives at least 20% more funding per person than equivalent UK Government spending in the rest of the UK. That translates into over £4 billion more in 2025-26.

■ **Financial Services**

James Wild: [\[42323\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department is taking to reduce the level of compliance costs for financial services.

James Wild:

[\[42324\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has commissioned any independent assessments of the compliance costs of financial regulations since 4 July 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

The government has committed to cutting the administrative costs of regulation for business by 25% by the end of the Parliament. This will take a whole-of-government approach to establish a baseline for the administrative costs of regulation and deliver an ambitious regulation reform programme, targeting reforms that remove or streamline administrative processes. No independent assessment has been commissioned for this work.

The financial services regulators are required by the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 to undertake and publish a Cost-Benefit Analysis when consulting on any proposal to make or amend rules, to analyse the likely expected costs and benefits arising from the changes.

The Treasury is working with the financial services regulators to reduce regulatory burdens on financial services firms while maintaining high regulatory standards.

As part of the Regulation Action Plan, the government announced that it will consolidate the Payments Systems Regulator into the Financial Conduct Authority, to provide a more streamlined approach to regulation for businesses.

The Regulation Action Plan also confirmed that the Financial Conduct Authority and Prudential Regulation Authority are taking steps to review and streamline reporting requirements for firms.

The government is committed to ensuring our regulation is fit for purpose, ensuring it meets our commitments to maintaining the UK's high standards and protections whilst ensuring we do not hold back growth with unnecessary red tape.

■ Independent Football Regulator

Mr Louie French:

[\[41518\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 24 March 2025 to Question 39136 on the Independent Football Regulator, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of the Independent Football Regulator on the growth of the economy.

Darren Jones:

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport are leading on setting up the Independent Football Regulator where they are looking to put in place a flexible and proportionate regime focused on ensuring the financial sustainability of the game, which will create the certain and stable regulatory environment required to drive the right kind of investment in, and growth of, English football.

The Regulator also has duties to avoid having any adverse effects on the competitiveness of any regulated club and on the financial growth of, or financial investment in, English football.

■ Inflation

Jim Shannon: [\[41417\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of recent trends in the level of inflation.

Emma Reynolds:

The independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) are the Government's official economic forecaster. They published their Economic and Fiscal Outlook (EFO) on 26th March, including an assessment on recent trends in inflation. The EFO can be found at the link below.

<https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-march-2025/>.

■ Macquarie Bank: Infrastructure

Freddie van Mierlo: [\[42950\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of Macquarie Bank's involvement in UK infrastructure development; and what steps she plans to take to ensure the stability and sustainability of essential services.

Darren Jones:

The government is committed to delivering a cross-cutting 10 Year Strategy for the UK's social, economic and housing infrastructure to support a flourishing modern economy, drive growth, deliver net zero and support improved public services.

The government has been engaging openly with industry as it develops this Strategy to ensure that it is credible and deliverable.

■ Motor Vehicles: Taxation

Dan Aldridge: [\[42081\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps with Cabinet colleagues to increase taxation on (a) higher-polluting vehicles and (b) tax pickup trucks used for personal purposes as private vehicles.

James Murray:

The Government uses the tax system to support a variety of objectives including our legally binding climate targets, including the transition to electric vehicles (EVs).

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government announced changes to the Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) first year rates from 1 April 2025, to introduce higher rates for hybrid and petrol/diesel vehicles for 2025-26, and freeze the rate for zero emission vehicles until 2029-30.

The Budget also announced new company car tax rates for 2028-29 and 2029-30, which gradually increase the rates for both petrol/diesel and electric vehicles whilst restricting incentives for hybrid vehicles, which research has shown are over three times more polluting than previously thought.

Cars are treated according to their emissions under the capital allowances system; and company cars made available for private use are also taxed according to their CO2 emissions under the benefit in kind regime.

From April 2025 this includes some pick-up trucks such as double cab pick-ups and extended cab pick-ups. These vehicles will be charged a higher rate for the benefit in kind, and be eligible for lower capital allowances reflecting their generally higher emissions.

■ National Insurance Contributions (Secondary Class 1 Contributions) Bill

Dame Caroline Dinéage:

[\[41807\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the National Insurance Contributions (Secondary Class 1 Contributions) Bill on the night-time economy.

James Murray:

A Tax Information and Impact Note (TIIN) was published alongside the introduction of the Bill containing the changes to employer NICs. The TIIN sets out the impact of the policy on the exchequer, the economic impacts of the policy, and the impacts on individuals, businesses, and civil society organisations, as well as an overview of the equality impacts.

■ National Wealth Fund: Public Appointments

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[42047\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether appointments to the National Wealth Fund will be included in the Public Bodies Order in Council; and whether the chair will be classified as a significant appointment.

Darren Jones:

All ministerial public appointments will follow the principles of the Governance Code on public appointments. There are no current plans to recruit a new Chair of the National Wealth Fund. The current recruitment round for a new CEO is exempt from the Office for the Commissioner for Public Appointments regulation as it is an executive position.

■ Parental Pay

Munira Wilson:

[\[42642\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 17 February 2025 to Question 29915 on Parental Pay, how many people were in receipt of (a) Statutory

Maternity Pay, (b) Statutory Paternity Pay, (c) Statutory Adoption Pay and (d) Statutory Shared Parental Pay in 2023-24.

James Murray:

Counts of employees receiving Statutory Maternity Pay, Statutory Paternity Pay, Statutory Adoption Pay, and Statutory Shared Parental Pay in 2023-24 have been published in response to an earlier Parliamentary Question. They can be found at the following location:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-12-18/21027>

■ **Public Expenditure**

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[42331\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the projected percentage of Government spending as a proportion of GDP at the end of this Parliament.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[42332\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the percentage of Government spending was as a proportion of GDP on 5 July 2024.

Darren Jones:

The Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) last forecast for Total Managed Expenditure (TME) as a % of GDP ahead of 5 July 2024 is available in Table 2.3 (p29) of the [Spring Budget 2024 document](#).

However, the OBR subsequently published a [review of the March 2024 forecast for departmental expenditure limits](#), in which it set out that information about large spending pressures was not shared with them ahead of this forecast, and that "had this information been made available, a materially different judgement about RDEL spending in 2024-25 would have been reached".

As of today, the OBR's latest forecast for TME as a % of GDP is available in Table A.1 (p41) of the [Spring Statement 2025 document](#).

■ **Railways: Public Expenditure**

Laurence Turner: [\[42342\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to table 10.10 of her Department's publication entitled Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2024, published on 30 July 2024, if she will publish a version of the regional breakdown of per capita railway expenditure that excludes HS2's contribution.

Darren Jones:

The country and region tables shown in chapters 9 and 10 of PESA including table 10.10, were originally published the previous December as part of the Country and

Regional Analysis (CRA) dataset. It is possible to reproduce railway expenditure excluding HS2 using the data published alongside each CRA release.

Provided below is a link to collected editions of the Country and Regional Analysis publications on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/country-and-regional-analysis>

■ Safe Hands Plans: Insolvency

Claire Hanna:

[41597]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the final report by the Complaints Commissioner entitled The FCA's handling of Safe Hands Plans Limited, published on 11 March 2025, if she will make recommendations to the Financial Conduct Authority based on that report.

Emma Reynolds:

I am sympathetic to all the Safe Hands customers who have lost money, following the collapse of the firm in 2022.

Once concerns were raised about the funeral plan market, the Government legislated to bring all pre-paid funeral plan providers and intermediaries within the regulatory remit of the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). This made it illegal to sell pre-paid funeral plans without authorisation from the Financial Conduct Authority, protecting 1.6 million customers and their families.

The FCA has published its response to the Financial Regulator Complaints Commissioner. The FCA has been clear that it is not possible to immediately act on every piece of anonymous intelligence they receive.

We support the FCA's handling of Safe Hands, and it is clear that they acted reasonably in this case, as they had a clear plan to properly scrutinise Safe Hands' business during the authorisations process. As the Commissioner acknowledges, there is also no evidence that alternative action from the FCA would have led to different outcomes for Safe Hands customers.

■ Stamp Duty Land Tax

Richard Tice:

[41622]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she will consider introducing a (a) transitional period and (b) grace window for homebuyers who began the property purchase process before recent changes to Stamp Duty rates to help prevent transactions from falling through.

James Murray:

I refer the hon member to the answer given to [UIN 38297](#).

■ Ukraine: Overseas Loans

Wendy Morton: [\[41839\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the press release entitled Joint statement of the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Charlevoix, published on 14 March 2025, whether the Government has plans to increase its loan to Ukraine from the profits of sanctioned assets.

Darren Jones:

The Government has provided £2.26bn as part of the G7 Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration Loans for Ukraine (ERA) scheme. This will be repaid using profits from immobilised Russian sovereign assets in the EU.

The G7 has agreed that the ERA can support \$50bn in funding to Ukraine – the entirety of which has been pledged.

The UK's total military, humanitarian and economic support pledged since the start of the conflict now amounts to around £12.8bn.

WALES

■ Social Security Benefits: Reform

David Chadwick: [\[42080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how many people in Wales will be impacted by welfare reform.

Jo Stevens:

Information on the impacts of the Pathways to Work Green Paper will be published in due course, with some information already published alongside the Spring Statement. These publications can be found here [Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper - GOV.UK](#).

There are currently 347,100 Universal Credit claimants in Wales, with 267,100 claimants of Personal Independence Payments. 89,000 claimants in Wales are receiving both Personal Independence Payments and Universal Credit. Overall, 15% of working age people in Wales receive a disability or incapacity benefit and around a quarter are neither in work nor looking for work.

To raise living standards in every corner of our country, we need to unleash the talents of people across the UK wherever they live. However, the system we inherited has left millions of people trapped on benefits, without the support they need to build a better life.

We know many sick and disabled people want to work, with the right help and support. They deserve the same rights, chances and choices to get good jobs as anybody else. That is why the government is fixing the social security system so that

it gives those who could work the help they need, and those who can't work the dignity and security they deserve.

The Department for Work and Pensions will continue to work with the Welsh government and other devolved governments, which will include looking at Welsh specific impacts to help support people back into work if they are able to, but also protect those who rely on our social security system.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Access to Work Programme: Applications

Patricia Ferguson:

[\[41749\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the time taken for Access to Work applications to be allocated to a case manager; and what steps she is taking to help reduce this waiting time.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We are committed to reducing waiting times for Access to Work and are considering the best way to deliver that for customers. We have increased the number of staff processing Access to Work claims and applications from customers who are about to start a job or who are renewing are prioritised.

The *Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to get Britain Working* Green Paper was published on 18 March. Alongside the Access to Work reform proposals introduced in the Green Paper, we are considering further options to reduce the waiting time for customers

■ Child Maintenance Service

Jayne Kirkham:

[\[42939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of using the Child Maintenance Service on the (a) mental health and wellbeing of its users and (b) relationships between separated parents when inaccurate awards are made and not amended.

Andrew Western:

The Child Maintenance Service (CMS) is committed to ensuring it delivers a safe service which is sensitive to the needs of all customers that use it.

We recognise that some customers may face difficult circumstances particularly at a time of separation and the need to handle customer cases sensitively and accurately, particularly around calculations.

We introduced a Customer Experience Strategy and an Implementation Plan which aims to fully equip caseworkers with the tools, skills and support required to deliver service excellence. We are well prepared to respond quickly and effectively if we

become aware that the mental health and wellbeing of any customer is at risk. Caseworkers have received extensive training and follow a well-managed process with clear steps, support tools and procedures to support vulnerable parents experiencing financial or emotional crisis. This includes the National District Provision Toolkit and Affordability Hub which provides invaluable information to allow caseworkers to signpost to national and local support organisations for debt help and mental health assistance across the UK.

To ensure calculations are accurate the department continues to build on its already proportionate and cost-effective controls, such as:

- use of verified income from HMRC and benefit systems as outlined in legislation and a principal part of service design.
- use of child benefit systems to verify qualifying child(ren).
- procedures and policy to request additional verification.
- a dedicated Financial Investigation Unit which addresses allegations of misrepresentation and fraud.
- a robust mandatory reconsideration and appeals process.

Where a single accidental error relating to the maintenance calculation is made, a challenge can be raised by a parent or their representative within time, and corrections can be applied by a caseworker without the need for a mandatory reconsideration (MR).

We have introduced a robust 3 Tier Quality Framework to rigorously monitor accuracy as part of our service ambition to further reduce error and increase our accuracy levels. The National Audit Office set a target of monetary value errors under 1%. CMS accuracy consistently meets this, remaining above 99% accuracy.

The government has also committed to reviewing the calculation to make sure it is fit for purpose and reflects today's trends. Any changes will be subject to extensive consultation and legislation brought forward where necessary for approval.

■ Children: Maintenance

Chi Onwurah:

[\[42261\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking with (a) charities and (b) other organisations with expertise in domestic abuse to embed trauma-informed principles into the operation of the Child Maintenance Service.

Andrew Western:

I refer the Hon. member to the answer I gave on 6 March to PQ [33879](#).

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Contracts**Noah Law:**[\[42182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the cost effectiveness of the outsourcing the (a) assessment and (b) administration of welfare.

Andrew Western:

[Holding answer 2 April 2025]: We do not outsource the assessment or administration of social security in any wholesale manner, although some elements of these services are outsourced to third parties.

Where these services have been outsourced, each arrangement is subject to individual scrutiny both at the planning and commissioning stages, where a number of steps are conducted:

- A Delivery Model Assessment (also known as a Make vs Buy assessment) to understand whether outsourcing is cost effective and able to offer value for money in the first instance;
- A Should Cost Model to enable us to understand what the potential costs of the services are, where this can be compared to an insourced model and used as a benchmark for any bids received, and;
- An assessment as part of the commercial process to ensure that bids are cost effective and offer value for money.

When we do decide to outsource, at the end of the commercial process a contract will be executed, which will capture the key requirements for provision of the service and the service levels expected of the provider to enable the anticipated value for money to be delivered. This will be managed closely by contract management practitioners accredited to, or studying towards accreditation, at Expert or Practitioner level (depending on the complexity of the contract) of the Contract Management Capability Programme managed by Cabinet Office. This enables and ensures that the department realises the best value for money possible from the third party services and the optimum cost effectiveness.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Recruitment**Euan Stainbank:**[\[41944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average non-salary recruitment cost is for a civil servant in her Department at Executive Officer grade.

Andrew Western:

The Average non salary recruitment cost for a civil servant at Executive Officer grade is £1,202.60.

■ Jobcentres: Scotland**Kirsty Blackman:** [\[42586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, which jobcentres in Scotland have seen work coach staffing numbers reduced (a) since 2018-19 and (b) in the year for which the most recent data is available.

Alison McGovern:

Work Coach staffing numbers for 2018-19 are unavailable. We have therefore compared Work Coach staffing numbers between March 2020 and the latest position (February 2025).

The following Jobcentres in Scotland have seen reductions in Work Coach levels between the two periods of March 2020 and February 2025:

Airdrie Stirling Street
Forfar Service Road
Forres Tytler Street
Fraserburgh South Harbour Road
Glasgow Radnor House
Greenock Dalrymple Street
Leven Waggon Road
Paisley High Street

The following Jobcentres in Scotland have seen reductions in Work Coach levels between the two periods of March 2024 and February 2025:

Annan Murray Street
Ayr Wallacetoun House
Dumfries Irish Street
Forfar Service Road
Fraserburgh South Harbour Road
Glasgow Radnor House
Leven Waggon Road
Paisley High Street

- Data is correct as at the end of February 2025.
- Work Coach staffing levels include staff working on Universal Credit and Legacy Benefits.
- Work Coach staffing levels do not include Work Coach Team Leaders and Disability Employment Advisers.

- The number of Work Coaches employed in these Jobcentres is unpublished management information, collected and intended for internal departmental use and has not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard. As the Department holds the information, we have released it.
- It is important to note that, during the Covid-19 Pandemic (20/21), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) rapidly expanded Jobcentre capacity by opening temporary Jobcentres. This was part of the Rapid Estate Expansion Programme (REEP). The vast majority of REEP sites are no longer in use.

■ Pension Credit: Applications

Wendy Chamberlain:

[\[43173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what progress she has made on simplifying the Pension Credit application form (a) in paper and (b) online.

Torsten Bell:

As the Department continues to modernise the Pension Credit service, we review the user experience, balancing simplification of application with capturing the right information to ensure accuracy of award. A key objective of DWP's Service Modernisation Programme is to utilise end user research to understand how the application process should operate in the future and consider the opportunities on how services can be more user friendly and easily accessible for citizens. To that end we are streamlining all Pension Credit application routes by using information held internally to reduce the number of questions the citizen must answer.

Claims for Pension Credit can be made online, by telephone or by post. By far, the most popular way to claim is online where a claim can be made 24/7 with the help of a family member, a friend or a third party. Via the online service, the maximum number of questions a person needs to answer is 48; for some customers it can be as few as 35 questions. As a result, the online claim form now takes just 16 minutes on average to complete, with 90 per cent of new customers applying using the simple online form, or over the phone.

With the telephone service, the caller will be guided through the claim process. We will keep the Pension Credit application process under review.

■ Pensioners: Local Housing Allowance

Caroline Voaden:

[\[41702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to support pensioners in receipt of Local Housing Allowance who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) determines the maximum housing support for tenants (including pensioners) in the private rented sector. LHA rates are not intended to cover all rents in all areas.

The increase to LHA rates in April 2024 cost an additional £1.2bn in 2024/25, and approximately £7bn over 5 years.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are available from local authorities to those entitled to Housing Benefit who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs.

As a downpayment on poverty we are investing £1bn in funding for both the Household Support Fund (HSF) and DHPs (including Barnett impacts) for 2025/26 and will be ensuring DHP funding is maintained at current levels.

■ Personal Independence Payment

Seamus Logan:

[\[41663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of proposed reforms to the personal independence payment on children living in families in receipt of that benefit.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The publication '[Spring Statement 2025 health and disability benefit reforms – Impacts](#)' provides some information on the numbers affected by the proposed changes to the disability benefits system.

In particular, table B2 on page 12 shows the estimated impact of the benefit change alone on the proportion of children living in poverty.

More information on the impacts of the Pathways to Work Green Paper will be published shortly. A further programme of analysis to support development of the proposals in the Green Paper will be developed and undertaken in the coming months.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Bolsover

Natalie Fleet:

[\[42633\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people who are claiming PIP and who reside in the Bolsover constituency are (a) in work and (b) not in work.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The information requested is not readily available.

Information on the impacts of the Pathways to Work Green Paper will be published in due course, and some information was published alongside the Spring Statement.

These publications can be found in '[Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper](#)'.

A further programme of analysis to support development of the proposals in the Green Paper will be developed and undertaken in the coming months.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Carers**Steve Darling:** [\[41963\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of proposed changes to the Personal Independence Payment qualifying criteria on unpaid family carers.

Steve Darling: [\[41965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of allowing carers to keep Carer's Allowance if they are providing over 35 hours of care to someone who has eligible health needs but who no longer qualifies for the Personal Independence Payment.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We have committed to introduce a new requirement that, in addition to the existing eligibility criteria, claimants must score a minimum of four points in at least one daily living activity to be eligible for the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment. Our intention is that – subject to parliamentary approval – the changes will apply to new claims and award reviews from November 2026.

This government is committed to supporting carers, who do one of the most valuable jobs in society, unpaid. As the Green Paper sets out, we will consider the impacts on benefits for unpaid carers as part of our wider considerations of responses to the consultation as we develop our detailed proposals for change. We are also consulting on how best to support those who lose entitlement to Personal Independence Payment due to the reforms, including how to make sure health and eligible care needs are met.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Eligibility**Richard Tice:** [\[41602\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has made an estimate of the proportion of Personal Independence Payment recipients who would remain eligible for support under the proposed changes to the disability benefits system.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The publication '[Spring Statement 2025 health and disability benefit reforms – Impacts](#)' provides some information on the numbers affected by the proposed changes to the disability benefits system.

In particular, table A3 on page 8 shows the estimated impacts of the proposed changes on the working age Personal Independence Payment and Daily Living Allowance caseload, and table A4 on page 9 shows the volume of people in receipt of PIP estimated to be affected by the change, divided into the pre-implementation caseload, and people claiming from November 2026 onwards.

More information on the impacts of the Pathways to Work Green Paper will be published in due course. A further programme of analysis to support development of

the proposals in the Green Paper will be developed and undertaken in the coming months.

■ **Personal Independence Payment: Reform**

Seamus Logan:

[\[41662\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of proposed reforms to the personal independence payment on the NHS.

Sir Stephen Timms:

As part of the mission led government, regular cross government collaboration takes place at both Ministerial and official level. DWP will work across Government, including with the Department for Health and Social Care, to address any impacts caused by reforms made to the Social Security system.

■ **Personal Independence Payment: Stroud**

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[42640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to her Department's Green Paper entitled Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working, published on 18 March 2025, how many people in Stroud will no longer be eligible for Personal Independence Payment.

Sir Stephen Timms:

No estimate has yet been made.

Information on the impacts of the Pathways to Work Green Paper will be published in due course, and some information was published alongside the Spring Statement. These publications can be found in '[Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper](#)'.

A further programme of analysis to support development of the proposals in the Green Paper will be developed and undertaken in the coming months.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Reform**

Fabian Hamilton:

[\[41386\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of her Department's proposed welfare reforms on levels of economic inactivity.

Sir Stephen Timms:

No estimate has yet been made.

As announced in the Green Paper, we will build towards a guarantee of personalised employment, health and skills support for anyone on out of work benefits with a work-limiting health condition or disability who wants it. Catalysed by an additional £1 billion a year by 2029/2030, this will improve returns to work and prevent economic inactivity, as part of rebalancing spending towards work over welfare.

A further programme of analysis to support development of the proposals in the Green Paper will be developed and undertaken in the coming months.

As stated in the Office for Budget Responsibility's *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, OBR plan to work with the Treasury and DWP to further scrutinise both the direct and indirect effects of these welfare and employment support policies ahead of their next forecast, alongside the effects of any further measures from the Green Paper that have been sufficiently developed.

Fabian Hamilton: [\[41387\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure that people that are unable to work due to (a) long-term illness, (b) disability and (c) other circumstances are adequately supported following her planned reforms to the welfare system.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The social security system will always be there for those who can't work. As part of making changes to the payment rates in Universal Credit, we will ensure that those with the most severe, lifelong conditions who will never be able to work have their incomes protected.

Twinned with this, as we set out in the Pathways to Work, our ambition is to guarantee personalised employment support to anyone claiming out of work benefits (UC and contributory) with a health condition or disability who wants to work but is currently outside the labour market. We propose that this guarantee will have a particular focus on early support, by offering everyone who claims out of work benefits and has a work-limiting health condition or disability, or who has recently been in receipt of PIP, with a support conversation. The support conversation will help identify the best next steps, including a range of personalised and more intensive support for anyone who wants it. We want our offer to be flexible, personalised and built on the evidence.

Seamus Logan: [\[41664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of proposed reductions in the welfare budget on local government services.

Sir Stephen Timms:

No assessment has been made.

A further programme of analysis to support development of the proposals in the Green Paper will be developed and undertaken in the coming months.

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[42581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the correspondence from the First Minister of Wales to her on the impact of welfare reforms in Wales, dated 11 March 2025, if she will publish her Department's reply to that letter.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Secretary of State responded to the First Minister of Wales on March 28. Her published response can be found here: [Secretary of State letter to the First Minister of Wales - GOV.UK](#)

Ann Davies:**[42683]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to her Department's Green Paper entitled Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working, published on 18 March 2025, and report entitled Spring Statement 2025 health and disability benefit reforms - Impacts, published on 26 March 2025, when she plans to publish an impact assessment of the effect of welfare reforms in Wales.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Information on the impacts of the "[Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper](#)" will be published in due course, with some information already published alongside the Spring Statement.

Future publications will include some information on people in Wales affected. A further programme of analysis to support development of the proposals in the Green Paper will be developed and undertaken in the coming months.

■ **Universal Credit: Bolsover****Natalie Fleet:****[42634]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people who reside in Bolsover and claim the health element of Universal Credit are (a) in work and (b) not in work.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The table below shows the number of claimants in the Bolsover Parliamentary Constituency with a live Universal Credit Limited Capability for Work and Work-related Activity (LCWRA) award and the percentage of these claimants who are recorded as in work.

CLAIMANT IN WORK	NUMBER OF CLAIMANTS	PERCENTAGE
Yes	260	8%
No	3,060	92%
Total	3,320	100%

Source: DWP UC Computer System

The table below shows the number of claimants in the Bolsover Local Authority area with a live Universal Credit Limited Capability for Work and Work-related Activity (LCWRA) award and the percentage of these claimants who are recorded as in work.

CLAIMANT IN WORK	NUMBER OF CLAIMANTS	PERCENTAGE
Yes	200	8%
No	2,450	92%
Total	2,650	100%

Source: DWP UC Computer System

Notes:

- The Bolsover Parliamentary Constituency covers a wider area compared to the Bolsover Local Area.
- The UC health element is paid at the household level.
- A small proportion of claimants with a Limited Capability for Work (LCW) may be in receipt of a health element, if they've had a continuous LCW award (or received the Work-Related Activity Component of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)) that began before April 2017
- Numbers are rounded to the nearest 10 and based on internal UC systems, so are not quality assured to published official statistics standards and are subject to retrospective change.

■ **Universal Credit: Disability**

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[42352\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to her Department's Green Paper entitled *Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working*, published on 18 March 2025, whether disabled people aged between 19 and 22 years in receipt of Universal Credit whose condition is (a) severe and (b) terminal will be required to seek employment.

Sir Stephen Timms:

In *Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper* we are consulting on raising the age someone can access the UC Health Element to 22, which would remove any potential disincentive to work during this time. It would also be on the basis that resources may be better spent on improving the quality and range of opportunities available to young people through the guarantee, so they can move towards a life of learning, training or work rather than a life on benefits. However, we do understand that there may be some exceptions where this may not be possible due to a disability or health condition.

No final decision has been made on access to the UC health element and we welcome responses to the consultation.

■ Veterans: Social Security Benefits

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[41594\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the recently proposed welfare reforms on veterans.

Sir Stephen Timms:

In our recent Pathways to Work Green Paper, published on the 18 March 2025, we announced a broad package of reforms to the health and disability benefit and support system. No changes are proposed to Armed Forces Independence Payments which provide support to some of the most severely disabled veterans.

For those who receive PIP and are affected by the eligibility changes, we are consulting on how best to support this group, including how to make sure health and eligible care needs are met. We also intend to launch a wider review of the PIP assessment, and we will bring together a range of experts, stakeholders and people with lived experience to consider how best to do this. We will provide further details as plans progress.

As we develop proposals further, we will consider the impacts of changes as part of our wider consideration of responses to the Green Paper consultation. We would encourage organisations supporting and representing veterans, such as the Royal British Legion, SSAFA, and many others, to respond to the consultation setting out their thoughts and views on how wounded, injured and sick veterans can best be supported.

■ Winter Fuel Payment: Pensioners

Wendy Morton:

[\[42599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to winter fuel payment eligibility on pensioners who are (a) disabled, (b) renting and (c) on low to modest incomes.

Torsten Bell:

The Secretary of State considered the impact of the Winter Fuel Payment changes on pensioners with protected characteristics as part of her duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty. This included the impact on those with disabilities.

Details of the Equality Analysis can be found at: [Responses to Freedom of Information requests on Equality Impact Assessments produced for targeting Winter Fuel Payment - GOV.UK](#)

Disability benefits provide a tax free, non-income-related contribution towards the extra costs people with a long-term health condition or disability can face, such as additional heating costs. They are paid in addition to any other benefits received.

The Government also offers direct financial help to low-income pensioners through Pension Credit, the Warm Home Discount, and (in England & Wales) Cold Weather Payments.

Pension Credit provides a safety net for low-income pensioners by guaranteeing a minimum level of income and also passports them to receive other benefits (including Winter Fuel Payments, help with rent, council tax, fuel bills and a free TV licence for those over 75).

The Government is taking significant steps to raise awareness and maximise the take-up of Pension Credit. DWP has received 235,000 Pension Credit applications in the 30 weeks since the Winter Fuel Payment announcement and made 117,800 new Pension Credit awards over the same period.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme: Wells and Mendip Hills

Tessa Munt:

[\[25995\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, which of the 106 Listed Places of Worship in Wells and Mendip Hills constituency have received Grants under the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme since its inception.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 28 January 2025. The correct answer should have been:

Chris Bryant:

Since 2022, the Department has given 4 grants, totalling £5,264.67, to Listed Places of Worship in the constituency of Wells and Mendip Hills. The recipients of these were St Mary's Church Wedmore, St Mary Magdalene, All Saints Church, and Holy Trinity.

Since 2022, the Department has awarded 50 grants, totaling £173,587.94, to Listed Places of Worship in the constituency of Wells and Mendip Hills. This includes grant funding to Wells Cathedral, Holy Trinity Church and St Mary's Church East Brent.

■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Schemes: Paisley and Renfrewshire North

Alison Taylor:

[\[24128\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme on Paisley and Renfrewshire North constituency; and if she will make it her policy to review that Scheme beyond March 2025.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 21 January 2025. The correct answer should have been:

Chris Bryant:

Since 2022, grants have been awarded to 17 listed places of worship in the Paisley and Renfrewshire North constituency, totalling £83,957.

We will shortly announce the outcomes of the Business Planning process, including for the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

Since 2022, the Department has awarded 9 grants, totalling £67,674.80 to Listed Places of Worship in the constituency of Paisley and Renfrewshire.

As announced in January, the Scheme has been extended for one year with a budget of £23 million, until 31 March 2026, the end of this Spending Review period. This will enable religious organisations to continue to claim grants in respect of eligible VAT costs paid towards repairs and renovations. The

scheme has an overall budget of £23 million with a cap of £25,000 per place of worship.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ UK-US Trade

Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): [\[HCWS575\]](#)

The planned statement will be delivered orally today by the Secretary of State for Business and Trade.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Local Government Best Value

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon):
[\[HCWS576\]](#)

Taxpayers expect and deserve well-functioning local and combined authorities which provide essential statutory services for local residents. This government's manifesto committed to rebuilding local government and handing control back to local leaders. To achieve this, we must get the basics right and ensure local and regional government is fit, legal and decent. Government will continue to work directly with a small number of authorities in difficulty as a responsible steward for the sector, and this should be done in a way that is based on genuine partnership to secure improvements.

Today, I would like to update the House on the steps we are taking in relation to the Tees Valley Combined Authority. The people of Tees Valley must have confidence that every penny of their money is being spent appropriately and today's announcement is about ensuring that is the case.

In May 2023, the previous government commissioned an independent review to consider the specific allegations made and Tees Valley Combined Authority's oversight of the South Tees Development Corporation and Teesworks Joint Venture. This review was published in January 2024.

In February 2024, the Tees Valley Combined Authority mayor, Lord Houchen responded to this review. His response was published on GOV.UK. Then Secretary of State, the Rt Hon Michael Gove, requested a further update on progress in six months' time and my department received this update in September 2024. The Authority's auditors then published reports covering financial year 2023/24, which identified significant weaknesses in value for money arrangements, meaning auditors declined to sign off accounts.

After having carefully considered the relevant evidence, my department has today issued the Authority with a best value notice.

This notice is not a statutory intervention. It is a formal notification that the department has concerns regarding the Authority and requests that the Authority engages with the

department to provide assurance of improvement. The department expects authorities that have been issued with a best value notice to continue leading their own improvement. I note that the Tees Valley Combined Authority is already supported by an independent assurance panel established with the Local Government Association. I encourage the Authority to make full use of the panel's expertise and guidance and strengthen its role in day-to-day operations, and will be looking to the panel for updates on the Authority's progress.

We are committed to removing barriers to growth in the region, as well as supporting the development of new industries and creating new jobs in the region. That is why this government has confirmed the allocation of up to £21.7 billion of funding over 25 years for Net Zero Clusters in Teesside and Merseyside, and why we are finalising development of the Tees Valley Investment Zone. This notice today is about rebuilding trust in the Combined Authority after a long period of uncertainty, so that it can continue its journey towards deeper devolution.

Today's announcement offers the opportunity to provide the foundations for future investment into the area oriented towards the public good, underpinned by good governance and careful management of taxpayers' money. I recognise that today's decision will have implications for the Authority's progress towards Enhanced Mayoral Strategic Authority status, and the granting of an Integrated Settlement. We are committed to working closely with the Authority to enable swift progression once improvements have been made.

The independent review also made recommendations for government. I am today publishing non-statutory guidance to address a key recommendation. This guidance clarifies the governance, oversight and legislation of Mayoral Development Corporations. It is relevant to all Mayoral Combined Authorities and Mayoral Combined County Authorities in England. In due course, I will publish an updated version of this guidance to address the relationship between stranded liabilities and Mayoral Development Corporations.

The government remains of the view that, while the independent Tees Valley review was thorough within its terms of reference, it was by nature not designed to answer all the questions raised, instead to focus on the governance and finance elements of the Best Value regime. The residents of Tees Valley cannot afford to live under a shadow of uncertainty for any longer, and investment in the region demands full confidence from both the public and the private sector. I hope that this process will offer the opportunity for a reset, providing the foundations for future investment into the area oriented towards the public good, underpinned by good governance, transparency, and accountability. Authorities must demonstrate robust financial management, effective decision-making, and meaningful engagement with communities to uphold Best Value principles.

The focus now must be to ensure that the improvements needed are not only secured but also sustained, embedding a culture of continuous improvement and responsible stewardship in line with statutory Best Value obligations.

I will deposit in the House library copies of the documents I have referred to, which are also being published on GOV.UK today.

I will keep the House updated if any further steps are taken.