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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS

WRITTEN STATEMENTS AND WRITTEN ANSWERS

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Ministers and others who make Statements or answer Questions are referred to only by name, not their ministerial or other title. The current list of ministerial and other responsibilities is as follows.

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Lord Collins of Highbury	Deputy Leader of the House of Lords and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Whip
Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on Trent	Spokesperson for NI Office, Scotland Office and Wales Office, Whip
Baroness Blake of Leeds	Whip
Baroness Chapman of Darlington	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Lord Coaker	Minister of State, Ministry of Defence
Lord Collins of Highbury	Whip
Lord Cryer	Whip
Baroness Gustafsson	Minister of State, Department for Business and Trade and HM Treasury
Lord Hanson of Flint	Minister of State, Home Office
Baroness Hayman of Ullock	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill	Minister of State, Department for Transport
Lord Hermer	Attorney-General
Lord Hunt of Kings Heath	Minister of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
Baroness Jones of Whitchurch	Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Business and Trade and Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, and Whip
Lord Kennedy of Southwark	Chief Whip
Lord Khan of Burnley	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Lord Leong	Whip
Lord Livermore	Financial Secretary, HM Treasury
Baroness Merron	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care
Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice, Whip
Baroness Sherlock	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions
Baroness Smith of Cluny	Advocate-General for Scotland
Baroness Smith of Malvern	Minister of State, Department for Education
Baroness Taylor of Stevenage	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Whip
Lord Timpson	Minister of State, Ministry of Justice
Baroness Twycross	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture Media and Sport, Spokesperson, Cabinet Office, Whip
Lord Vallance of Balham	Minister of State, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
Baroness Wheeler	Deputy Chief Whip

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Written Statements

Tuesday, 11 February 2025

Crown Prosecution Service: Contingencies Fund Advance

[HLWS428]

Lord Hermer: My Hon. Friend the Solicitor General (Lucy Rigby) has made the following Written Statement:

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) requires a Contingencies Fund Advance of £60 million to cover urgent payments of RDEL expenditures, such as February payroll and to pay suppliers invoices. Due to the uplift in funding sought at the Supplementary Estimate, this has led to CPS requiring a Contingencies Fund Advance to ensure it has the cash required ahead of the Parliamentary approval of the Supplementary Estimate.

Parliamentary approval for additional resource of £60 million will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for the Crown Prosecution Service. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £60 million will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

Designated Vendor Directions: Enforcement

[HLWS429]

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: I am repeating the following Written Ministerial Statement made today in the other place by my Honourable Friend, the Minister of State for Data Protection and Telecoms, Chris Bryant MP:

Today the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology has published guidelines on how the Secretary of State will approach compliance and enforcement of Designated Vendor Directions (“DVD”) issued under the Communications Act 2003 (the “Act”) as amended by the Telecommunications (Security) Act 2021.

The Act introduced powers for the Secretary of State to issue Designation Notices to vendors whose presence in UK networks poses national security risks and DVDs to public communications providers (“PCP”), placing controls on their use of goods and services provided by a designated vendor. The Secretary of State can issue a DVD to a PCP if they consider that it is necessary in the interests of national security and the requirements imposed by the DVD are proportionate to what is sought to be achieved by the DVD.

The Act also provides the Secretary of State with powers to ascertain whether PCPs are complying with the requirements imposed by a DVD and enforce against a PCP where they are found to be non-compliant with the requirements in a DVD.

This guidelines cover:

- the background to DVDs and the powers available;
- the approach to enforcement action;

- how to establish whether there has been a contravention of a DVD requirement;
- how to determine whether to enforce against a contravention;
- the process for coming to a proposed penalty;
- issuing formal enforcement action;
- issuing a confirmation decision; and
- the governance for how decisions on enforcement are made and communicated.

This document acts as a guiding framework for His Majesty’s Government when considering enforcement and imposing penalties in relation to non-compliance with requirements in a DVD.

Growth Guarantee Scheme

[HLWS431]

Baroness Gustafsson: My Hon Friend the Minister for Services, Small Businesses and Exports (Gareth Thomas MP) has today made the following statement:

I wish to make members aware of the details of a proposed variant of the existing Growth Guarantee Scheme (GGS), which is designed to increase uptake by businesses of green assets that facilitate the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The GGS was launched on 1 July 2024 and is facilitated by the Government-owned British Business Bank (BBB) and delivered through its delivery partners. Under the scheme, lenders offer facilities of up to £2 million to support businesses that would otherwise be unable to access the finance they need, or would only be able to do so on worse terms.

Green GGS uses the infrastructure of the existing GGS programme to help increase the supply of affordable finance for businesses investing in green technologies. Lenders face uncertainty over the future value of these green assets in the instance of borrower default, due to the pace of technological advances and a lack of observable track record or data in the relevant second-hand markets. As a result, lenders raise the upfront cost of financing green assets to mitigate this uncertainty, or simply choose not to finance the green asset. This in turn dampens business demand for green investment.

The BBB’s GGS variant is designed to address this uncertainty by setting a floor on losses that a lender would take if a borrower defaulted on the loan. This would give lenders the confidence to support finance for green assets or lower the upfront cost of that finance, increasing the supply of finance available to SMEs to invest in green assets. The terms of the programme ensure that the benefit of the guarantee is passed to the business.

Initially, the British Business Bank will reallocate funding from the existing GGS to pilot this scheme with a single lender, facilitating an initial portfolio of £30 million of investment in green assets. There will be no change to the maximum lending facilitated across both GGS variants, which will remain at £2.2 billion, as

notified to Parliament by means of a Written Ministerial Statement made on 24 May 2024. Any future proposed increase in the capacity of Green GGS will be notified as applicable.

I will be laying a Departmental Minute today containing a description of the liability undertaken.

Ministry of Defence: 2025-26 Estimate

[HLWS434]

Lord Coaker: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

The Ministry of Defence Votes A Estimate 2025-26, has been laid before the House of Commons on 11 February 2025 as HC638. This outlines the maximum numbers of personnel to be maintained for each Service in the Armed Forces during Financial Year 2025-26.

These numbers do not constitute the Strength of the Armed Forces, which is published separately in the UK Armed Forces Quarterly Service Personnel Statistics.

National Apprenticeships Week

[HLWS432]

Baroness Smith of Malvern: My Right Honourable Friend, Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities (Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson) has made the following statement:

This week is National Apprenticeship Week, where we celebrate the life-changing opportunities that apprenticeships offer people up and down this country. I want to update the House on a range of steps this government is taking to introduce the greater flexibility in our apprenticeships system that learn to break down to barriers opportunity and boost economic growth.

First, we have confirmed today that we will be changing the rules relating to achievement of English and maths qualifications as part of an apprenticeship for over 19s. Upskilling in English and maths will continue to remain a key feature of all apprenticeships, and from today we have listened to employers and will be offering more flexibility over when a standalone qualification is required in addition to this.

All apprentices will be required to secure and will be assessed on the job-specific skills English and maths they need, but moving forward employers will have more flexibility over whether adult (19+) apprentices are required to achieve standalone English and maths qualifications. In future, adult apprentices will be able to complete their apprenticeship if they have demonstrated they have the skills – including relevant English and maths skills – to be effective in the role without undertaking a standalone English and maths qualification. All 16-18 apprentices will continue to be required and funded to secure up to a Level 2 qualification in English and maths if they do not hold one, consistent with our expectation that all young people should have a

meaningful further opportunity to secure a Level 2 qualification in English and maths post-16. This delivers the flexibility that employers have long called for and we expect it to lead to thousands more qualified apprentices in a range of key sectors, including in social care and construction.

Second, we will reduce the minimum duration of apprenticeships to 8 months from August 2025. This new flexibility will mean that employers can make greater use of apprenticeships and learners can be fully trained more quickly. We expect this new flexibility to particularly benefit learners with high levels of prior learning, where the current 12-month requirement means they are not eligible for an apprenticeship; and particular occupations that do not typically work in fixed 12-month training cycles. We will be working closely with Skills England to identify where this new flexibility will have the greatest impact. Today we are announcing that the first shorter apprenticeships to be available to all apprentices will be in priority occupations including Healthcare Support Workers, Dual Fuel Smart Meter Installers, and Production Assistants in the creative industries. We will be setting out more details in due course.

Finally, in our next step towards establishing Skills England as the key driving-force behind this government's growth plans, I am confirming that the new Chair of Skills England will be Phil Smith CBE, with Sir David Bell serving as Vice Chair.

This team will bring together extensive industry experience in digital, tech and innovation, with decades of experience in the education and skills sector. They will work with employers, national, regional and local government, providers, and unions to identify skills shortages and provide strong strategic direction for the skills system ensuring we have the highly skilled workforce needed to deliver our industrial strategy and the government's Plan for Change. I look forward to working with them to deliver the dynamic skills system and economic growth that this country needs to thrive.

Public Service Pensions: Indexation and Revaluation 2025

[HLWS433]

Lord Livermore: My right honourable friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Darren Jones) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

Legislation governing public service pensions in payment requires them to be increased annually by the same percentage as additional pensions (State Earnings Related Pension and State Second Pension). Public service pensions will therefore be increased from 07 April 2025 by 1.7 per cent, in line with the annual increase in the Consumer Prices Index up to September 2024, except for those public service pensions which have been in payment for less than a year, which will receive a pro-rata increase. This will ensure that public service pensions take account of increases in the cost of living and their purchasing power is maintained.

Separately, in the career average revalued earnings public service pension schemes introduced in 2014 and 2015, pensions in accrual are revalued annually in relation to either prices or earnings depending on the terms specified in their scheme regulations. The Public Service Pensions Act 2013 requires the Treasury to specify a measure of prices and of earnings to be used for revaluation by these schemes.

The prices measure is the Consumer Prices Index up to September 2024. Public service schemes which rely on a measure of prices, therefore, will use the figure of 1.7 per cent for the prices element of revaluation.

The earnings measure is the Whole Economy year on year change in Average Weekly Earnings (non-seasonally adjusted and including bonuses and arrears) up to

September 2024. Public service schemes which rely on a measure of earnings, therefore, will use the figure of 4.5 per cent for the earnings element of revaluation.

The effective date of revaluation listed in the order is 1 April 2025, but some schemes have chosen to move their effective revaluation date to 6 April 2025 in order to manage interactions with the annual tax allowance.

Revaluation is one part of the amount of pension that members earn in a year and needs to be considered in conjunction with the amount of in-year accrual. Typically, schemes with lower revaluation will have faster accrual and therefore members will earn more pension per year. The following list shows how the main public service schemes will be affected by revaluation:

<i>Scheme</i>	<i>Police</i>	<i>Firefighters</i>	<i>Civil Service</i>	<i>NHS</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>LGPS</i>	<i>Armed Forces</i>	<i>Judicial</i>
Revaluation for active member	2.95%	4.50%	1.70%	3.20%	3.30%	1.70%	4.50%	1.70%

Telecare National Action Plan

[HLWS430]

Baroness Merron: My Honourable Friend the Minister of State for Care (Stephen Kinnock MP) has made the following statement:

The digital phone switchover is a necessary upgrade to our underlying national digital infrastructure as the old analogue landline network is becoming increasingly unreliable. The safety of telecare users throughout the switchover is government’s utmost priority. That is why I am pleased to publish a joint Telecare National Action Plan with the Minister of State for Data and Digital Infrastructure (Chris Bryant MP) setting out the steps that stakeholders need to take to safeguard telecare users during the digital phone switchover.

The digital phone switchover means traditional analogue devices, such as telephone handsets and telecare units that are currently connected to the analogue landline network, will need to be reconnected to the digital network. There is a risk that the process of migrating telecare users to digital landlines will disrupt their telecare services. Telecare users must be protected during the digital phone switchover and every effort must be taken to avoid these risks.

Our action plan is predominantly aimed at communication providers, local authorities, housing providers, third sector organisations and commercial providers. It demonstrates the Government’s commitment to working with the telecare and telecommunications industries and ensuring that telecare users’ safety is put first during the switchover. Officials have worked closely with stakeholders to develop and agree the actions set out in this plan.

This Telecare National Action Plan sets out the actions that the government expects to see delivered. The actions are set out against the following outcomes:

- No telecare user will be migrated to digital landline services without the communication provider, the user, or the telecare service provider confirming that the user has a compatible and functioning telecare solution in place.
- Use of analogue telecare devices is phased out to ensure that only digital devices are being used. DHSC will be working with stakeholders over the coming months to set a deadline for this.
- Telecare users, their support networks and their service providers understand what actions they need to take to ensure a safe migration to digital phone lines.
- Stakeholders identified within the plan collaborate to safeguard telecare users through the digital phone switchover.

The government is committed to improving adult social care for those who draw on it, helping people to stay independent in their own homes, joining up services and improving the quality of care. The government recently announced an independent commission into adult social care led by Baroness Louise Casey as part of its critical first step towards a national care service. Whilst the Casey Commission carries out its work, the government is getting on with the job of reforming the system and has announced immediate actions to improve adult social care services. This includes the development of new national standards and trusted guidance for technology in social care. The new standards and guidance will make it easier for providers, commissioners and people who draw on care and support to identify the technologies that will work best for them.

The transition to digital telephone networks will lay the foundations for a next generation of telecare services that will support more personalised and early preventive interventions and support the government’s reforms to adult social care. The plan includes examples of where local areas have utilised the opportunities presented by the

digital phone switchover to advance the use of technology within their social care provision.

Given the complexity of the issue, it is possible that additional necessary actions might be identified. We will review progress against the Telecare Nation Action Plan

every six months and identify new actions as needed. A copy of the Telecare National Action Plan will be deposited in the Library of both Houses and will also be published on GOV.UK.

Written Answers

Tuesday, 11 February 2025

Abortion: Demonstrations

Asked by *Lord Jackson of Peterborough*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the implications for freedom of religion and belief of banning silent prayer in abortion service protection zones designated under the Public Order Act 2023. [HL4498]

Lord Hanson of Flint: Section 9 makes it a criminal offence for a person who is within a safe access zone to do any act with the intent of, or reckless as to whether it has the effect of, influencing any person's decision to access, provide or facilitate the provision of abortion services, obstructing or impeding any person accessing, providing, or facilitating the provision of abortion services, or causing harassment, alarm or distress to any person in connection with a decision to access, provide, or facilitate the provision of abortion services.

Section 9 of the Public Order Act 2023 does not make any reference to silent prayer.

The Equality Impact Assessment for the Public Order Act 2023 assesses the impact of the Act, including section 9, on people with religious beliefs. This document is published on the GOV.UK website here: Public Order Bill: equality impact assessment - GOV.UK.

Decisions around the enforcement of safe access zones are for the police, who are operationally independent from Government. The College of Policing are responsible for providing operational guidance to the police. They have released their own supplementary content on this topic, available here: Section 9 - Public Order Act 2023: Supplementary content.

Armed Forces: Housing

Asked by *Lord Spellar*

To ask His Majesty's Government what was the cost per unit of the new single living accommodation block at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst; and where were the units manufactured. [HL4604]

Lord Coaker: The new Single Living Accommodation (SLA) block at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS) provides 53 en-suite single bedspaces for Senior Ranks, with utilities, drying rooms, a kitchen and furnished communal space.

While this information is not held in the format requested, the overall contract value for the new SLA block at RMAS was £10.91 million; project cost capture does not split the cost into a single bedspace. The SLA block was manufactured in the UK.

Artificial Intelligence

Asked by *Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the effectiveness of transparency obligations on AI firms introduced by the EU. [HL4491]

Lord Vallance of Balham: The EU is developing its requirements for AI firms under the EU AI Act.

We recognise the importance of international collaboration on AI in order to drive safe, responsible innovation and continue to work closely with the EU and other international partners on AI to understand their approaches. This includes through bilateral relationships as well as through multilateral and multi-stakeholder initiatives, including the upcoming AI Action Summit in Paris.

Artificial Intelligence: Copyright

Asked by *Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury*

To ask His Majesty's Government, with reference to their consultation on copyright and artificial intelligence (CP1205), what analysis they have conducted which shows that the current copyright framework has held back AI adoption. [HL4488]

Lord Vallance of Balham: The Government has engaged stakeholders at Ministerial and official level about these issues.

We have heard that the current copyright framework makes it difficult for creators to control whether their works can be used in AI training, and to seek payment. And that it also creates uncertainty and risk for firms seeking to develop or deploy AI in the UK.

A consultation on Copyright and AI was published in December 2024 seeking views on how to create clarity in this area, to promote growth and investment in both the creative industries and AI sector.

The consultation closes on 25 February.

Asked by *Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury*

To ask His Majesty's Government, with reference to their consultation on copyright and artificial intelligence (CP1205), what evidence or research they have that the proposed copyright exemptions for AI training will lead to investment in the UK. [HL4489]

Lord Vallance of Balham: The Government published a consultation on Copyright and AI in December 2024.

The consultation seeks views on a package of measures which seek to promote growth and investment in both the creative industries and AI sector. We aim to balance the interests of AI developers and rights holders and provide the legal certainty to boost growth and investment across both sectors.

The evidence we receive will inform our impact assessment of the measures, including in relation to investment.

The consultation closes on 25 February.

*Asked by **Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury***

To ask His Majesty's Government, with reference to their consultation on copyright and artificial intelligence (CP1205), whether a market impact assessment will be published relating to any proposed changes to copyright law for text and data mining for AI models. [HL4490]

Lord Vallance of Balham: The Government published the consultation on Copyright and AI in December 2024.

Prior to its publication, the Government considered a range of approaches to clarify copyright law and meet its objectives for AI innovators and the creative industries. Further detail of the Government's assessment of options can be found in the [summary assessment](#) (external link) published alongside the consultation.

Further information and evidence on economic impact is welcomed as part of the consultation, to help shape the Government's thinking.

The consultation closes on 25 February.

The Answer includes the following attached material:

Summary Assessment [Summary-assessment-of-options (2).docx]

The material can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2025-01-28/HL4490>

*Asked by **Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury***

To ask His Majesty's Government, with reference to their consultation on copyright and artificial intelligence (CP1205), what assessment they have made of the effectiveness of rights reservation mechanisms introduced by the EU. [HL4492]

Lord Vallance of Balham: The Government published a consultation on Copyright and AI in December 2024.

This consultation is seeking views on a similar approach to the EU's, which many AI firms and right holders are already familiar with. However, we recognise that there is more work to do on technical standards and transparency before a rights reservation model can be considered workable for right holders and AI developers alike. We will use responses to the consultation to inform work on this detail and bring forward firm proposals.

The consultation closes on 25 February.

*Asked by **Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury***

To ask Her Majesty's Government, with reference to their consultation on copyright and artificial intelligence (CP1205), what evidence they used to assess the function of the licensing market as it pertains to copyright data and the training of AI models. [HL4493]

Lord Vallance of Balham: The Government published a consultation on Copyright and AI in December 2024.

This consultation seeks views on proposals which seek to better facilitate licensing agreements between rights holders and AI developers, and whether more should be done to support good licensing practice.

The Government recognises that this is a complex area and welcomes all views and evidence on the function of the licensing market, to help shape its thinking.

The consultation closes on 25 February.

Banks: Internet

*Asked by **Lord Taylor of Warwick***

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the potential for online technical issues to affect customers as banks move to online platforms. [HL4666]

Lord Livermore: Strengthening the financial sector's operational resilience is a key priority for HM Treasury and the financial regulators.

The financial regulators issued a Policy Statement on Operational Resilience in March 2022, entering into effect this Spring. It clarifies and sets new expectations for finance firms to improve their operational resilience, including services such as online banking, and requires firms to identify important business services and set impact tolerances.

These rules ensure firms are better equipped to prevent, adapt, respond to, recover, and learn from operational disruption.

Beavers

*Asked by **The Lord Bishop of St Albans***

To ask His Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to the potential role of beavers in restoring England's chalk streams. [HL4270]

Baroness Hayman of Ullock: This Government is committed to the restoration of our cherished chalk streams. With 85% of the world's chalk streams found in the UK, these unique water bodies are not just vital ecosystems but a symbol of our national heritage.

Beavers are part of the natural chalk stream fauna, and we view that these ecosystem engineers can contribute to the Government's aspiration to deliver a healthy, sustainable water environment for people, businesses, and nature at a catchment scale. Defra and the Environment Agency are working with Natural England, stakeholders, and Beaver Management Groups, and other partners to inform and support these aims.

Business: Productivity

*Asked by **The Lord Bishop of St Albans***

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the productivity of businesses where employees work a permanent four-day working week. [HL4509]

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: While the government routinely monitors the impact of flexible working, it has made no specific assessment of the four-day week. Additionally, the government has no plans to mandate a four-day week for five-days' pay. However, we are, through the Employment Rights Bill, giving employees better access to flexible working arrangements, where feasible. Not all businesses will be able to accommodate all forms of flexible working. We want to create a framework that will encourage employers and employees to explore suitable options for flexible working arrangements that suit both parties.

Civil Servants

Asked by Lord Agnew of Oulton

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Civil Service People Plan 2024–2027, published on 10 January 2024, whether the Central Employee Identifier has been fully implemented across government. [HL4476]

Baroness Twycross: No, the Central Employee Identifier has not been fully implemented across government. The capability to issue IDs is available but changing the legacy ERPs across government departments to hold this has been deemed inefficient with the new cluster ERPs about to commence rollout. These will be following the data standards laid out in the Nova model which includes holding the Central Employee Identifier.

Clean Energy

Asked by Baroness McIntosh of Pickering

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to achieve their ambitions for clean energy while meeting the environmental targets set out on the Environment Act 2021. [HL4503]

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath: Our Government's Clean Energy Superpower Mission is to accelerate to net zero and deliver Clean Power by 2030 alongside our commitment to restoring nature. This includes through delivering the Environment Act targets in England and honouring our international commitments under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD). In making Britain a clean energy superpower, we will ensure that a reformed planning system works for nature through measures such as the new Nature Restoration Fund and the Marine Recovery Fund (MRF) for Offshore Wind.

Climate Change: Finance

Asked by Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of an international charge on fossil fuel extraction as a means of raising revenue under the New Collective Quantified Goal agreed at COP29. [HL4481]

Lord Livermore: We are committed to helping deliver global climate finance, including the New Collective Quantified Goal agreed at COP29 of at least \$300bn per year to developing countries by 2035, and responding to the wider call on all actors to increase climate finance to developing countries to £1.3trn per year.

As part of that effort, we are pressing for faster and more ambitious reforms to the global financial system to deliver much more and higher quality climate and development finance. Alongside this, we are supportive of exploring revenue raising mechanisms for climate action, but we will need to consider specific proposals on a case-by-case basis.

Companies: Company Accounts

Asked by Lord Sikka

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they plan to investigate the affairs of Avis Capital Limited (Company number 10465466), given that it has reported that it is a dormant company which filed accounts with Company House indicating it had net assets of £58,155,255,471. [HL4513]

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: His Majesty's Government takes allegations of suspicious company filings and any concerns raised seriously. As such, the Minister for Employment Rights, Competition and Markets has asked Companies House to investigate the allegations surrounding Avis Capital Limited.

Companies House are aware of concerns that have been raised about the highlighted company. Where such concerns are raised, Companies House will look into these matters further and, where necessary, take appropriate action.

Construction and Demolition: Waste Management

Asked by Lord Freyberg

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to transition to a circular economy for construction; and what assessment they have made of (1) current construction and demolition waste levels; (2) targets and timelines for waste reduction; (3) methods to increase materials reuse and recycling; (4) economic opportunities in waste minimisation; and (5) any regulatory frameworks which may need to be implemented. [HL4694]

Baroness Hayman of Ullock: The Secretary of State has asked Defra to convene a Circular Economy Taskforce of experts from industry, academia, civil society, and the civil service to develop a Circular Economy Strategy for England and a series of roadmaps detailing the interventions that the Government will make on a sector-by-sector basis.

Additionally, the Secretary of State has convened a Small Ministerial Group on Circular Economy that will govern, join up and drive Circular Economy work across

government departments to support the government's Missions to kickstart economic growth and make Britain a clean energy superpower.

We will consider the evidence for action right across the economy and evaluate what further interventions may be needed in the construction and waste sectors as we develop the Circular Economy Strategy.

Crown Estate: Wales

Asked by Lord Wigley

To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have received from the Welsh Government concerning the maximisation of financial and economic benefit for Wales from the activities of the Crown Estate in Wales. [HL4573]

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: The UK Government has regular discussions with the Welsh Government on a range of issues, including our shared ambition for floating offshore wind development in the Celtic Sea, and the role of the Crown Estate therein.

The Crown Estate has played a significant role in attracting international investment into Wales to support the UK's net zero target and will continue to do so, particularly through leasing rounds for floating offshore wind in the Celtic Sea. The Crown Estate is key to the £1.4 billion investment and over 5,000 jobs that this government wants to enable from floating offshore wind projects in the Celtic Sea.

The Crown Estate works closely with the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales in support of shared priorities, ensuring that these resources are sustainably managed for the long term.

The UK Government's focus is on taking maximum advantage of this opportunity for Wales. I was therefore pleased that the Secretary of State for Wales worked with Lords Livermore and Hain to agree an amendment to The Crown Estate Bill in the House of Lords that will appoint a commissioner with special responsibility for Wales. This will ensure the interests of Wales are fully reflected in The Crown Estate's work.

Euston Station: Taxis

Asked by Lord Blencathra

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they plan to cover the route to the new taxi rank point from Euston railway station. [HL4486]

Lord Henty of Richmond Hill: Network Rail manages Euston Station and work to improve the passenger experience at Euston is continuing.

As part of this, a range of ideas has been proposed, including potential enhancements to the route between the station and the taxi rank. Network Rail, under a 'single guiding mind' approach, is working with industry partners to assess the feasibility of these proposals and the overall benefits to passengers.

Financial Services: Software

Asked by Baroness Altmann

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of whether the Financial Conduct Authority and other regulators have sufficient powers to intervene when retail investment platforms fail to inform their customers clearly, fully and in a timely manner (1) about the direct charges they pay for the investments they purchase on the platforms, (2) that they can exercise their rights to vote at the meetings of companies in which they hold shares, and (3) about the reasons for de-platforming listed, regulated investments that they may wish to purchase. [HL4526]

Lord Livermore: The Government wants to see more consumers benefit from the long-term financial security and returns that investing can provide and recognises that platforms will be crucial to achieving this objective.

Retail investment platforms are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), which has the necessary powers to intervene should they find retail investment platforms to be in breach of their regulatory obligations.

The Government legislated to enable the FCA to reform the UK's retail disclosure regime to ensure consumers have access to the most useful information – including on risks, costs and performance – to support their investment decisions. The FCA consultation is currently open for views.

The issue of shareholder rights, including where shares are held by an intermediary, is being considered by the Digitisation Taskforce. The government is fully committed to ensuring the UK's shareholding framework is fit for purpose and looks forward to receiving the taskforce's final report.

Gender

Asked by Lord Blencathra

To ask His Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to amending existing definitions relating to sex and gender with a view to adopting definitions similar to those set out in US Executive Order 14166, entitled "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government", issued on 20 January. [HL4487]

Lord Collins of Highbury: The contents and publication of executive orders is a domestic matter for the United States.

Independent Review of Forensic Pathology

Asked by Lord Wills

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to implement the findings of the Independent review of forensic pathology by Glenn Taylor,

published on 11 September 2024; and whether they will introduce a statutory code of conduct for forensic pathology to ensure the dignity of victims is preserved. [HL4471]

Lord Hanson of Flint: Family members rightly expect that the pathology taken in respect of their loved ones will be explained to them and their questions answered, and the report made clear that more needs to be done on engagement and support for families.

Following the publication of the report "The Patronising Disposition of Unaccountable Power: Independent Review of Forensic Pathology", my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department confirmed that the Government accepts the six recommended points of action as I reported in my statement of 11 September 2024.

Officials are now working at pace on an action plan to respond in detail to those recommended points of action including updating some existing detailed guidance for pathologists which is now out for stakeholder consultation. This work will be completed in the summer of this year and will include advice on any statutory measures which Ministers will consider carefully. The Government will report back in due course with our response to the recommendations.

Labour Together

Asked by Baroness Finn

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury on 5 December 2024 (HC16605), what ministerial declaration has been made to the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, or the Independent Adviser on Ministerial Standards, in relation to the Chancellor of the Exchequer receiving funding from Labour Together donors; and whether the Chancellor knows who funds Labour Together. [HL4630]

Lord Livermore: There is an established process in place for the declaration and management of private interests held by ministers, which has been followed.

Legal Aid Scheme: Contracts

Asked by Lord Agnew of Oulton

To ask His Majesty's Government how many legal aid providers held contracts but did not take on any cases in the most recent year for which figures are available. [HL4477]

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede: In the financial year 2023/24, of the 1320 legal aid providers holding a contract to deliver civil legal aid services, 81 (6%) did not take on any cases within that period. Of those 81 providers, only 18 have a current contract to deliver civil legal aid services.

Of the 1066 legal aid providers holding a contract to deliver criminal legal aid services, 22 (2%) did not take on any cases in that period. Of those 22 providers, only 6 have a current contract to deliver criminal legal aid services.

Local Government: Artificial Intelligence

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of how AI technologies could be used by local councils; and how this will directly benefit residents. [HL4515]

Lord Vallance of Balham: As set out in the blueprint for modern digital government we are launching new collaborations to accelerate work in priority areas, such as in local government. The government has just launched the AI Playbook in collaboration across government and industry for the benefit of the public sector, including local councils. The AI opportunities action plan also sets out the opportunities for use of AI technology all across the public sector.

The government has recently published 10 transparency records from local councils on the Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard (ATRS) repository. The ATRS enables local authorities to share examples of how AI is improving public services, learn from each other's approaches, model best practice, and promote the responsible and transparent adoption of AI technologies.

Local Government: Reorganisation

Asked by Baroness Eaton

To ask His Majesty's Government what process local authorities should follow when producing a spatial development strategy as set out in the their English Devolution White Paper published on the 16 December 2024 where the local authority does not sit within a strategic authority. [HL4406]

Baroness Taylor of Stevenage: Legislation regarding the production of spatial development strategies (SDS) will be included in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which has yet to be laid before Parliament.

For areas that are not covered by a strategic authority, the duty to produce an SDS will rest with upper tier county councils and unitary councils. These areas should form groupings in order to produce their SDS. These groupings should be in accordance with our "sensible geography" criteria as set out in the English Devolution White Paper. We propose to take a power in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill for the Secretary of State to direct such groupings where they are not forthcoming.

Migrant Workers: Artificial Intelligence

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to encourage AI experts to work in the UK, particularly in relation to reducing visa fees. [HL4516]

Lord Hanson of Flint: In meeting the AI skills commitments under the AI Opportunities Action Plan, the Government has pledged to strengthen and increase opportunities for technical AI expertise in the UK by creating new AI fellowships, scholarships, and Higher Education courses. Fees for immigration and nationality applications are routinely kept under review, taking into account a range of factors and objectives, including the Government's commitments to reduce levels of net migration.

Ministry of Defence: Ministry of Defence: Artificial Intelligence and Technology

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the case for the Ministry of Defence (1) to adopt artificial intelligence and (2) to embrace new and emerging technologies. [HL4564]

Lord Coaker: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) recognises the enormous potential that AI and other emerging technologies offer to transform all aspects of the Department and the Armed Forces. We maintain significant in-house Science and Technology (S&T) capabilities in Dstl to monitor technology trends, develop novel applications and mitigate strategic surprise.

Nuclear Power Stations: Wales

Asked by Lord Wigley

To ask His Majesty's Government what sites in Wales currently house or have in the past 20 years housed a nuclear reactor, including university and medical locations. [HL4571]

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath: There have been two nuclear reactors located in Wales; both are now being decommissioned. The nuclear power plant on the Trawsfynydd site came offline in 1991 and the plant on the Wylfa site in Anglesey stopped generating electricity in 2015. The Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) regulate nuclear sites in Great Britain and publish a map of licensed sites on their website at www.onr.org.uk/our-work/map-of-sites-and-facilities/. GE Healthcare operated a Nuclear Licensed site in Cardiff which was used for radiopharmaceutical manufacture and de-licensed in 2019. There was no reactor present on this site.

Penrith (North Lakes) Station: Parking

Asked by Lord Blencathra

To ask His Majesty's Government whether their franchise agreement with Avanti West Coast Trains contains conditions on the maintenance and repair of potholes in the car park at Penrith North Lakes railway station. [HL4485]

Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill: The current agreement with Avanti West Coast does not contain obligations regarding the maintenance and repair of potholes.

Avanti West Coast is responsible for the day-to-day management of Penrith North Lakes Station, including the car park. Responsibility for any repairs, including repairs to potholes, lies with the station's landlord, Network Rail. Avanti West Coast works with Network Rail to seek improvements on behalf of passengers where this is required.

The Department will ask AWC to pass on to NR the concerns about potholes in the car park.

Pets: Insecticides

Asked by Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of (1) regulation of topical flea and tick treatments for pets; and (2) of a recent University of Sussex study on the impact of these chemicals on songbird reproduction. [HL4483]

Baroness Hayman of Ullock: (1) Parasiticides play an important role in the protecting of animal health from fleas, ticks, and vector-borne diseases, and in protecting human health from zoonotic transfer of disease. Therefore, their regulation requires a careful balance between effective parasite control for animal health and welfare and human health whilst minimising potential risks to the environment.

To address environmental safety, every veterinary pharmaceutical undergoes an environmental exposure assessment, with products for companion animals usually ending in a Phase 1 assessment. If exposure is deemed high, a more detailed Phase II risk assessment is conducted, evaluating potential environmental impact based on expected exposure and toxicity. The findings from these assessments are considered as part of the final benefit/risk assessment during the approval process. There are also warnings that accompany products advising on use and to mitigate against dogs entering water courses directly after treatment. Environmental assessments are conducted in accordance with international guidelines and data standards.

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) is conducting a number of research activities to provide further evidence on environmental impacts and causes. Furthermore, the VMD supports a review of the international environmental risk assessment guidelines for companion animal parasiticides, which has been proposed and is currently under consideration by the body for International Cooperation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Veterinary Medicinal Products (VICH).

(2) The VMD is also aware of a University of Sussex study indicating the presence of insecticides, commonly used on companion animals and livestock, in the nests of songbirds. The study suggests a potential correlation between pesticide levels and reduced reproductive success. However, causality has not been confirmed, and further research is required to determine whether the observed effects are due to pesticide exposure or other factors.

Renewable Energy

Asked by *Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of a Cap and Share system for supporting energy transition for the UK, particularly with regard to its fairness and social and climate impacts. [HL4480]

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath: The UK Emissions Trading Scheme is a cap-and-trade scheme, setting a limit on emissions from power, industry and aviation. Participants must buy and surrender allowances annually to cover their emissions.

The scheme, launched in 2021, is a key part of the Government's approach to meeting our climate targets. Revenues from the UK ETS are used to support Government priorities including decarbonisation. The UK ETS Authority, made up of the UK Government and Devolved Governments, continues to develop the scheme to ensure it is achieving its aims, supported by thorough public consultation and assessment of its climate, economic and social impacts.

Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations

Asked by *Lord Elliott of Ballinamallard*

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to strengthen the current structures of the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations. [HL4497]

Lord Coaker: The 2019 Review of the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations (RFCAs) recommended that the Council of RFCAs (CRFCA) and the 13 RFCAs should be merged into a single Executive Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB). The Ministry of Defence is currently developing the requisite NDPB operating structure which will preserve the voice and influence of the membership, both at the national and regional level, and will also ensure that structures are consistent throughout the organisation.

Retail Trade: Insurance

Asked by *Lord Dholakia*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of businesses that have been refused insurance because of incidents of retail crime. [HL4688]

Lord Livermore: The Government has not made an assessment. Insurers make decisions about the terms on which they will offer cover following an assessment of the relevant risks. This is usually informed by the insurer's claims experience and other industry-wide statistics. Individual insurers may take a different view of the relevant factors in determining whether to offer insurance and at what price.

However, the Government recognises that shop theft continues to increase at an unacceptable level, with more

and more offenders using violence and abuse against shopworkers to do this.

The Government will introduce a new offence of assaulting a retail worker to protect hardworking and dedicated staff, and end the effective immunity that has been granted to shop theft of goods under £200. As set out in the Autumn Budget 2024, the Government also will provide over £7 million over the next three financial years to help police tackle retail crime and support local businesses.

Sudan: Politics and Government

Asked by *Lord Alton of Liverpool*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the security situation in Sudan, especially with regard to the risk of further atrocity crimes, including by reference to their Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability assessment. [HL4392]

Lord Collins of Highbury: The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office advises against all travel to Sudan because of the ongoing military conflict. The UK condemns in the strongest terms increasing reports of atrocities being committed across Sudan, and we continue to do so at every available opportunity. The UK has played a leading role in human rights scrutiny on Sudan. In October 2024, we led efforts at the UN Human Rights Council to renew the UN mandate for the international, independent Fact-Finding Mission to ensure credible evidence of human rights abuses and violations are investigated impartially. I also held a meeting with the African Union Special Envoy for the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide and Mass Atrocities on 5 February where we discussed the African Union advocacy on protection of civilians and addressing atrocities in Sudan. A draft Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS) assessment of the situation in Sudan was finalised in March 2023 but the internal review process was halted by the outbreak of violence on 15 April 2023. We continue to track the conflict through a variety of shorter, more regular analyses and have enhanced our atrocity risk monitoring, including monitoring of conflict-related sexual violence.

Trade Promotion: Public Appointments

Asked by *Viscount Waverley*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they plan to appoint trade envoys to (1) the United States of America, (2) India, and (3) China; and if not, why not. [HL4521]

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: We have not appointed a Trade Envoy to the United States of America, India or China. We recognise the importance of each of these markets to the government's growth mission, however, markets such as these already have significant diplomatic, trade and investment networks, as well as receiving regular high-level visits by Ministers.

UK Trade with EU: Carbon Emissions

Asked by *Lord Teverson*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact that the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism will have on surcharges on goods and energy passing (1) between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and (2) between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. [HL4669]

Lord Livermore: The Government plans to apply the UK CBAM across the whole UK, including in NI. The UK will continue to work with international partners, including the EU, to ensure our approach is implemented in a way that works for businesses. The EU CBAM could only apply in Northern Ireland with the agreement of the UK and in line with the democratic safeguards of the Windsor Framework.

For goods moving from Northern Ireland into the EU, guidance is a matter for the European Commission and EU Member States. The Commission website is the most up to date source of information and guidance.

The EU Commission have also published their own impact assessment of the EU CBAM which is available online.

Unexplained Wealth Orders

Asked by *Lord Sikka*

To ask His Majesty's Government how many unexplained wealth orders were issued in each year since 2018; what was the value of the wealth involved; what amount was recovered; and how many prosecutions and convictions took place. [HL4511]

Lord Hanson of Flint: The Unexplained Wealth Order (UWO) regime was introduced in the Criminal Finances Act 2017. The number of UWOs obtained, wealth involved (estimated value of assets secured and estimated value of assets recovered) and number of prosecutions and convictions is outlined below.

Year	Number of operations that obtained a UWO	Estimated Value of Assets secured	Estimated Value of Recovery Order obtained	Number of Prosecutions/Convictions
2018	1	£30,000,000	£12,000,000	NIL
2019	3	£113,200,000	£10,000,000	
2020	0			

2021	0		
2022	0		
2023	1	£1,800,000	
2024	1	£275,000	
2025	1	£1,500,000	
Total	7	£146,775,000	£22,000,000

It is important to note that a UWO is only an investigatory order into an asset. A number of the UWO investigations listed that have not resulted in civil recovery proceedings are ongoing investigations. Any property subject to a UWO can be frozen whilst under an investigation which disrupts criminal activity but the property itself cannot be recovered using a UWO, it must be recovered through subsequent civil recovery proceedings. Civil recovery proceedings apply to assets rather than individuals so require no prosecution or criminal conviction.

The Government publishes statistics annually on the number of UWOs applied for and obtained. The most recent report can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unexplained-wealth-orders-2023-to-2024-annual-report/unexplained-wealth-orders-2023-to-2024-annual-report>

Unitary Councils

Asked by *Baroness Thornhill*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether it will be possible to alter existing council boundaries when establishing a unitary council. [HL4518]

Baroness Taylor of Stevenage: Existing council boundaries should be considered the building blocks for new unitary councils, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered.

Waterloo Station

Asked by *Lord Swire*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have any plans to rename London Waterloo Station. [HL4514]

Lord Henty of Richmond Hill: Network Rail own and manage Waterloo station. There are no plans to rename the station.

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