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Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

Richard Graham:

[\[901650\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on support for renewable sources of energy.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

Ministers regularly discuss issues including renewable energy, including as part of the Government's commitment to meeting net zero by 2050.

In 2019, the Government set a legally binding target to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions from across the UK economy by 2050. We agree with the Committee on Climate Change's view on the importance of a diverse mix of power generation sources to achieve that with renewables providing the majority of our electricity by 2050 alongside firm low carbon power from sources such as nuclear, and gas or biomass generation with carbon capture and storage. The Government has introduced many initiatives to increase the supply of renewable energy production in the UK.

We have committed up to £557m of annual support for future Contracts for Difference, providing developers with the confidence they need to invest in bringing forward new projects and we are supporting our world-leading offshore wind industry through the 2019 sector deal.

In order to support smaller scale renewable electricity generation, the Government introduced the Smart Export Guarantee on 1 January, which gives small scale low-carbon electricity generators, such as homes with solar panels, the right to be paid for the renewable electricity they export to the grid.

The Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) supports the transition to low-carbon heating in the UK, helping generate renewable heat for schools, hospitals and more than 12,000 social housing properties. The scheme is designed to bridge the gap between the cost of fossil fuel heat sources and renewable heat alternatives through financial support for owners of participating installations. The RHI helps to sustain and build the supply-chains needed to deliver our aspirations for renewable heat in 2020 and beyond

Meeting our net zero target will require virtually all heat in buildings to be decarbonised, and heat in industry to be reduced to close to zero carbon emissions. This will involve large-scale transformation, including disruption to consumers and wide-ranging change to energy systems and markets: the way heating is supplied to over 28 million homes, businesses and industrial users will need to change.

We are working to develop a new policy framework for the long-term decarbonisation of heat. This will set out the programme of work required to enable key strategic decisions on how we achieve mass transition to low carbon heating.

■ **British Petroleum: Carbon Emissions**

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[\[27480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will make an assessment of the feasibility of BP's plans to become net zero by 2050; and if he will make it his policy to encourage other oil companies to set net zero targets.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

The Government welcomes BP's new 2050 Net Zero goals for its worldwide business. These should allow the company to make a significant contribution to climate action. It would not, however, be appropriate for the Government to assess the feasibility of BP's plans given the international and commercial context in which they will be delivered.

More generally, while welcoming the action already being taken to reduce emissions, the Government would encourage the oil and gas sector to build ambitiously on what they are doing. Major and rapid cuts in unabated emissions are essential to meeting global climate goals.

The Government has put the UK at the forefront of global action on climate change and we are determined to build on the leadership we have shown to date, notably through our world-leading net zero target set in UK legislation in June last year. We are determined to use our Presidency of this year's crucial COP26 climate negotiations to promote ambitious action to deliver the transformational change required by the Paris Agreement.

■ **Business: Coronavirus**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[27530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to mitigate the effect of covid-19 on business supply chains.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Government is well prepared for this type of outbreak. We will continue to take all necessary precautions, such as engaging with key industry partners and employer organisations to understand the potential effect of Covid-19 on workers and to discuss their preparedness planning.

On 17 March, the Government announced a major new package of loans and guarantees, which means any good business in financial difficulty that needs access to cash to pay their rent, the salaries of their employees, pay suppliers, or purchase stock, will be able to access a Government-backed loan on attractive terms, with no cap on lending capacity. The Government will make an initial £330 billion of guarantees available – equivalent to 15% of UK GDP.

On 17 March, the Government also announced £20 billion of business rates support and grant funding to help the most affected firms manage their cashflow through this period by:

- giving all retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses in England a 100% business rates holiday for the next 12 months;
- increasing grants to small businesses eligible for Small Business Rate Relief from £3,000 to £10,000;
- providing further £25,000 grants to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses operating from smaller premises, with a rateable value over £15,000 and below £51,000.

■ Employment

Mr David Davis:

[\[27492\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent steps he has taken to increase employment in (a) Haltemprice and Howden constituency, (b) Yorkshire and the Humber and (c) the UK.

Nadhim Zahawi:

As of 12th March, employment rates in the UK are at a record high at 76.5% and unemployment is at a near record low at 3.9%. 33 million people are now in work, which is 271,000 more than last year. The growth in employment has largely been driven by an increase in female full-time employment.

The Government is investing over £1.3 billion through Yorkshire and Humber Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Growth Deals. This includes over £141 million through the Humber LEP that is providing financial assistance to local businesses, as well as improving infrastructure and skills. We have also established Enterprise Zones across the UK including in the Humber, which is the largest Enterprise Zone award in the country. The Zone has attracted business investment and new jobs to the area, such as at the Humber Enterprise Park in Brough in the Hon Gentleman's constituency.

The Government-backed British Business Bank's Start-Up Loans programme provides loans to entrepreneurs seeking to start and grow their own businesses. Since 2012, 5,930 loans have been issued in the Yorkshire and the Humber region, totalling over £50 million. In the Haltemprice and Howden constituency, 110 loans have been issued, totalling over £1 million (as at end-December 2019).

■ Employment: Coronavirus

Apsana Begum:

[\[28101\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what plans his Department has to hold meetings with (a) employer organisations and (b) trade unions on a strategy to manage the potential effect on workers of further covid-19 infection.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Government is closely monitoring the impacts on the UK economy, including on individuals, businesses, supply chains, and for consumers. We are working with key industry partners, employer organisations, and trade unions to understand the effect of Covid-19 on employees, employers, and businesses, and to share the latest guidance and information.

On 17 March, the Government announced an unprecedented package of Government-backed and guaranteed loans to support businesses, making available an initial £330 billion of guarantees – equivalent to 15% of GDP.

■ Heating: Carbon Emissions**Alex Sobel:**[\[27619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what comparative assessment his Department has made of the progress of each sector of the economy on the decarbonisation of heat supply; and whether that assessment will be used to inform the forthcoming heat policy roadmap.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

In 2018 the Department published *Clean Growth-Transforming Heating*, a comprehensive review of the evidence available on the transition towards low carbon heat on each sector of the economy.

The Heat and Building Strategy, which is planned to be published later this year, will build on this evidence and set out the immediate actions we will take for reducing emissions from buildings. These actions include the deployment of energy efficiency measures and low carbon heating technologies as part of a wider programme of work on how we will make progress towards decarbonising all homes and buildings. We are developing policies to deliver low carbon heating in the 2020s and meet our climate targets, which will we consult on.

Alex Sobel:[\[27620\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether the Government plans to publish a cross-departmental strategy on the decarbonisation of heat supply before COP 26.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

The Government is planning to publish a cross-departmental Heat and Building Strategy later this year, which will set out the immediate actions we will take for reducing emissions from buildings. These actions include the deployment of energy efficiency measures and low carbon heating technologies as part of a wider programme of work on how we will make progress towards decarbonising all homes and buildings.

■ Housing: Energy**Rebecca Long Bailey:**[\[28670\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many homes the Government plans to upgrade to EPC Band C by 2030; and whether the Government has targets for such upgrades.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

In the Clean Growth Strategy, Government set an aspiration for as many homes as possible to be EPC Band C by 2035 where practical, cost-effective and affordable, with an earlier target of 2030 for homes in fuel poverty. Good progress has already been made, with 34% of homes in England at Band C or above. This is an increase from 7% in 2007.

■ Insurance Companies: Compensation**Fleur Anderson:**[\[30084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what discussions he has had with the insurance sector on extending compensation for individuals affected by covid-19-related cancellations not covered by their insurance policy.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Government is well prepared for this type of outbreak. We will continue to take all necessary precautions, such as engaging with key industry partners and employer organisations, to understand the potential effect of Covid-19 on workers and to discuss their preparedness planning. The Secretary of State is frequently communicating with Business Representative Organisations and businesses, including the Association of British Insurers, to gain intelligence on Covid-19's impacts and share the latest guidance and information with them.

On 17 March, the Government announced unprecedented support for businesses and workers to protect against the economic emergency caused by Covid-19. This includes unlimited loans and guarantees to support firms and help them manage their cashflows through this period. The Government will also make an initial £330 billion of guarantees available – equivalent to 15% of UK GDP.

■ Low Carbon Hydrogen Production Fund**Liz Saville Roberts:**[\[30151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 13 March 2020 to Question 27583, what his Department's timescale is for launching of the Low Carbon Hydrogen Production Fund.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

The Low Carbon Hydrogen Production Fund (LCHF) was announced in August 2019. The fund is intended to support the development of technology to produce hydrogen at scale, as a decarbonised energy carrier alongside other decarbonised gases.

Formal engagement has yet to begin, but we will be discussing the design of the fund with stakeholders throughout 2020, with a view to making a call for bids in 2021.

■ **Low Carbon Hydrogen Production Fund: Scottish Government**

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[30155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 13 March 2020 to Question 27583 on Low Carbon Hydrogen Production Fund: Wales, whether his Department has consulted the Scottish Government on that fund.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

The Low Carbon Hydrogen Production Fund (LCHF) was announced in August 2019. The fund is intended to support the development of technology to produce hydrogen at scale, as a decarbonised energy carrier alongside other decarbonised gases. Formal engagement has yet to begin, but we will be discussing the design of the fund with stakeholders throughout 2020, with a view to making a call for bids in 2021. This will involve engagement with the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.

■ **Low Carbon Hydrogen Production Fund: Wales**

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[30153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 13 March 2020 to Question 27583, on Low Carbon Hydrogen Production Fund: Wales, what discussions officials in his Department have had with Welsh Government officials on the Low Carbon Hydrogen Production Fund.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

The Low Carbon Hydrogen Production Fund (LCHF) was announced in August 2019. The fund is intended to support the development of technology to produce hydrogen at scale, as a decarbonised energy carrier alongside other decarbonised gases. Formal engagement has yet to begin, but we will be discussing the design of the fund with stakeholders throughout 2020, with a view to making a call for bids in 2021. This will involve engagement with the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.

■ **Post Offices: ICT**

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[29841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much has been paid from the public purse to individual sub-postmasters since the group litigation settlement on the Horizon IT system on 12 December 2019.

Paul Scully:

On 11 December 2019, Post Office Ltd reached a settlement of £57.75m to conclude the Horizon litigation claim. No government money was used to fund the settlement or the related litigation. These were fully funded by Post Office Ltd from its commercial revenues.

■ Science: Finance**Chi Onwurah:**[\[29217\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to paragraph 1.220 of the Budget 2020 Red Book, how much and what proportion of the funding for science has already been allocated to institutions (a) in London, the south and South East of England and (b) other parts of England.

Amanda Solloway:

[Holding answer 18 March 2020]: The Government will be working on the allocation of the announced investment over the coming weeks and will announce further details at the Spending Review later this year.

We will publish a new ambitious place strategy for R&D this summer. This will set out how we can build on existing initiatives, such as the Strength in Places in Places Fund, to build R&D excellence across the whole country.

■ Small Businesses: Compensation**Mr Laurence Robertson:**[\[29819\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what compensation he plans to make available to small businesses for loss of revenue as a result of covid-19; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Laurence Robertson:[\[29820\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what compensation he plans to make available to small businesses for loss of revenue as a result of government-imposed restrictions in relation to covid-19; and if he will make a statement.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Government is closely monitoring developments in relation to potential economic impacts on the UK economy, including on individuals, businesses, supply chains, and for consumers.

On 17 March, the Government announced a major new package of loans and guarantees. Any good business in financial difficulty that needs access to cash to pay their rent, the salaries of their employees, pay suppliers, or purchase stock, will be able to access a Government-backed loan on attractive terms, with no cap on lending capacity. The Government will make an initial £330 billion of guarantees available – equivalent to 15% of UK GDP.

The Government also announced £20 billion of business rates support and grant funding to help the most-affected firms to manage their cashflow through this period by:

- giving all retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in England a 100% business rates holiday for the next 12 months

- increasing grants to small businesses eligible for Small Business Rate Relief from £3,000 to £10,000
- providing further £25,000 grants to retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses operating from smaller premises, with a rateable value over £15,000 and below £51,000

At last week's Budget, the Government also provided £30 billion of support to the economy to deal with the crisis by investing in public services, increasing support for vulnerable people and providing business with tax reliefs and loans.

CABINET OFFICE

■ Blood: Contamination

Christian Matheson:

[\[30214\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the payment of compensation to people in Northern Ireland affected by the contaminated blood scandal before the conclusion of the Infected Blood Inquiry.

Chloe Smith:

The Government believes that we should wait until the Inquiry reports before considering compensation. The Inquiry cannot make a finding of legal liability, but it could make a recommendation that the Government fundamentally increases what it pays to the infected and affected, and that it does so on a different basis.

Government will act on the Inquiry's recommendations with the utmost urgency, when it reports.

In the meantime, we are working with our partners in the devolved nations, including Northern Ireland, and other relevant Government departments to improve the parity of financial support for those infected by the infected blood scandal, across the United Kingdom.

The Department of Health NI was allocated £1.03 million in January 2020 monitoring, ringfenced for the specific purpose of providing financial support to the infected and affected.

Of this £610,780 was committed in the interim payments announced on 27 January and has been paid out. Therefore £419,220 remains, which the NI Health Minister committed to allocating before the end of this financial year.

■ Females: Coronavirus

Dawn Butler:

[\[29914\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the effect of covid-19 on women's (a) financial security, (b) ability to work and (c) mental health has been discussed at recent COBRA meetings.

Penny Mordaunt:

It is a long established precedent that detailed information about internal discussions are not shared publicly.

DEFENCE**■ Armed Forces: Driving****Alex Sobel:**[\[30045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make and estimate of the number of qualified Armed Forces drivers based (a) in the UK and (b) overseas his Department could make available to support logistics during the covid-19 outbreak.

James Heappey:

Defence has drivers qualified to drive a range of vehicles including cars, tracked vehicles, minibuses and fuel tankers. Defence drivers with appropriate skillsets who may be able to provide additional support to ensure continuity of logistical operations across the UK have been identified. We continue to work with colleagues cross Government and with industry to better understand how Defence assets might be best able to assist in the COVID-19 response, if required.

■ Defence: Contracts**Jessica Morden:**[\[29953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what arrangements his Department has put in place for auditing the cyber security capability of defence contractors; and if he will make a statement.

Jeremy Quin:

Defence takes the cyber security of its suppliers extremely seriously, which is why we work with a wide range of Defence contractors in the Defence Cyber Protection Partnership (DCPP). The DCPP is a collaboration between government and industry and it has developed a cyber security framework which is applied in all Defence procurements. The model requires the supplier to have in place cyber security controls which are proportionate to the cyber risk to the information they handle. These controls address security governance, culture, personnel and asset security as well as technical requirements and incident management, and our suppliers are accountable for flowing the requirements down through their supply chains. In addition, for activities where the routine handling of material classified as secret or above takes place, the granting and maintenance of List X status confirms that contractors conform to a defined set of controls provides assurance of their security.

■ Hyde Park Barracks

Mr Kevan Jones:

[\[30691\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 4 March to Question 21165, whether his Department has plans to sell land within Hyde Park Barracks in the next five years.

Jeremy Quin:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is currently conducting detailed assessment studies to determine how best to deliver State Ceremonial and Public Duties in London.

No decisions have yet been taken on future arrangements.

■ Iraq: Military Operations

Rosie Duffield:

[\[30076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, for what reason 1st Battalion Irish Guards have a continued presence at Fort Tagi in Iraq.

James Heapey:

UK troops are in Iraq, as part of the Coalition, in order to ensure the enduring defeat of Daesh. This includes mitigating chances of a Daesh resurgence and developing the capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces at the Taji Military Complex. At the invitation of the Government of Iraq, the UK has helped train over 110,000 Iraqi Security Forces personnel, including Kurdish Peshmerga.

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, there has been a reduced requirement for training from the Iraqi Security Forces and a subsequent pause in the Coalition and NATO training missions in Iraq. We have therefore decided to redeploy some UK personnel back to the United Kingdom. We will retain key military personnel throughout the country to ensure the Iraqi Government, Global Coalition and UK national interests are appropriately supported. For the time being a contingent of essential UK personnel will remain in Taji Military Complex.

■ Military Aid: Coronavirus

Mr Stephen Morgan:

[\[30172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, in what circumstances would the armed forces be deployed to assist public services in dealing with the covid-19 outbreak.

James Heapey:

Defence routinely conducts contingency planning for a wide range of scenarios and we continue to engage with colleagues cross-Government to help identify where we can best provide support. There are long-standing principles that underpin decision making with regards to the provision of military assistance. These principles are laid out in Joint Doctrine Publication 02 UK Operations: The Defence Contribution to resilience and Security, which is available on the Gov.uk website at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/operations-in-the-uk-a-joint-doctrine-publication>

Mr Stephen Morgan: [\[30173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of deploying the armed forces to assist with the effective running of public services during the covid-19 outbreak.

James Heapey:

Defence routinely conducts contingency planning for a wide range of scenarios and we continue to engage with colleagues cross-government to help identify where we can best provide support to the UK's COVID-19 pandemic response. At present, there are no immediate plans for any large-scale deployments of the military. Defence is prepared to support other Government Departments, if required.

Mr Stephen Morgan: [\[30175\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he has had with (a) Ministers and (b) civil servants at the Ministry of Defence on the deployment of armed forces during the covid-19 outbreak.

James Heapey:

The Ministry of Defence has provided regular advice to the Prime Minister since the COVID-19 outbreak and we routinely conduct contingency planning for a wide range of scenarios. In response to the Covid outbreak, we have stood up an additional support force of 10,000 military personnel at higher readiness. At present, however, there are no immediate plans for any large-scale deployments of the military. Defence is prepared to support other Government Departments, if required.

■ Military Decorations

Jerome Mayhew: [\[30067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will introduce a National Defence Medal.

James Heapey:

It is understood that many of those who have served in the Armed Forces feel that their service has not been properly recognised, and that they ought to receive a medal. However, medals in the UK Honours system are awarded in recognition of risk and rigour faced while on active service, and are not given for Service alone. There are, therefore, no plans to introduce a National Defence Medal.

■ Ministry of Defence: Contracts

Grahame Morris: [\[29926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent assessment he has made of the quality of services provided under contracts outsourced by his Department.

Jeremy Quin:

The Ministry of Defence routinely monitors the quality of service provided under all of its contracts, taking appropriate action when standards are not met.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[30184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much money from the public purse his Department has spent on contracted companies charging management fees to sub-contracted companies where both companies are owned by the same parent company in the last year.

Jeremy Quin:

Each year the Ministry of Defence (MOD) awards thousands of contracts. The MOD would need to analyse where sub-contractors and prime contractors share the same parent company, before investigating if such fees are contained within any relevant contracts. As such, this information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

■ Ministry of Defence: Infrastructure and Projects Authority**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[30092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 12 March 2020 to Question 26984, for what reason none of his Department's major projects has been categorised as green by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority; and what recent assessment he made of his Department's ability to deliver major projects (a) on time, (b) within their initial scope and (c) on budget.

Jeremy Quin:

A green programme is defined as 'successful delivery to time, cost and performance appears highly likely, there are no major outstanding issues at this stage that appear to threaten delivery'. All defence programmes that sit on the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP) and Defence Major Projects Portfolio are large and complex and therefore have sizable risks that threaten delivery. These risks are continuously monitored along with mitigation plans, by the Senior Responsible Owner with the support of the approval authority in the centre of the Department to ensure successful delivery. Once the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) are satisfied a programme is mature enough and delivering with confidence, the IPA graduate them from the GMPP, typically before it reaches green status. DMPP programmes are subject to assurance and approvals activity to support and de-risk delivery to performance, cost and time.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[30093\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 12 March 2020 to Question 26984, what steps he is taking to (a) improve the status of each major project not categorised as green and (b) move more projects into the green category.

Jeremy Quin:

Programmes are subject to regular assurance reviews with senior officials to support and de-risk the complex issues that programmes may face. Lessons are shared across the programmes Senior Responsible Owners (SRO) community, Head Office and Commands via forums and workshops. The recently set up Project Delivery function is working to further develop the skills and capability of the people who deliver projects. Along with assurance activity carried out by the Ministry of Defence, the Infrastructure and Project Authority conduct independently lead Reviews of each programme that provide recommendations to the SRO as to what actions may help improve the programmes delivery confidence.

Ministry of Defence: Staff

Jessica Morden: [\[29952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many civilian posts in his Department have been vacant in each month of each year from January 2018 to December 2019; and if he will make a statement.

Johnny Mercer:

I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Nuclear Weapons: Testing

Sir John Hayes: [\[29824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans he has to commemorate the armed services personnel who supported the UK's nuclear weapons testing programme.

James Heapey:

New medallic awards are considered by the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals (HD Committee). The HD Committee has re-established its Advisory Military Sub-Committee (AMSC) to examine historic military medals claims; the AMSC is considering the case for a medal for Nuclear Test Veterans and will make a recommendation to the HD Committee in due course.

The Government continues to recognise and be grateful to all Servicemen and women who participated in the British nuclear testing programme. They contributed to keeping our nation secure during the Cold War and since, by ensuring that the UK was equipped with an appropriate nuclear capability.

Reserve Forces and Cadets Association

Dr Julian Lewis: [\[28558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make it his policy to retain (a) regional committees and (b) a national council of volunteers in overall control of the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations; and if he will make a statement.

James Heappey:

The regional structure of the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations (RFCAs) is a key enabler of the support they provide for the Reserve Forces and the Cadet organisations at a local level, and of community engagement. The Reserve Forces Act 1996 sets out how the RFCAs can be established, along with their roles and responsibilities. The legislation also outlines the flow of executive authority and allows the Associations to convene a joint committee - in this case, the Council of RFCAs - for any purpose in respect of which they are jointly interested.

I remain committed to enabling the RFCAs to continue in carrying out their vital role, supported by appropriate governance and stronger national corporate functions such as finance, legal and human resources.

Dr Julian Lewis:[\[28559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what (a) advantages and (b) disadvantages his Department has identified in the application of the principle of voluntarism to Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations.

James Heappey:

Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations (RFCAs) are a key partner to Defence in maintaining and developing links with the communities in which they are based and with society at large. This is thanks in no small part to the sterling commitment of their voluntary membership and executive staff, the regional networks, and the close links that they have forged within their communities.

However, the RFCAs also need to be representative of the communities they serve and accountable for their use of public money. These responsibilities cannot be placed upon volunteers and must lie with executive staff who conduct the day-to-day professional operations of the Associations.

Dr Julian Lewis:[\[29193\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the value of (a) independence from Government and (b) interaction with communities to the operation of Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations.

James Heappey:

The Reserve Forces and Cadet Associations (RFCAs) are trusted partners of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and have been instrumental in delivering several Defence priorities, not least the External Scrutiny Team and the Cadet Expansion Program. The RFCAs have a clear and significant role in making the Reserve and Cadet experience an increasingly rewarding way to learn key skills for younger people and our dedicated Reservists.

They significantly contribute to the security of the United Kingdom and our citizens, both at home and across the globe. We appreciate and recognise the ongoing value the RFCAs add in achieving Defence objectives, whilst concurrently building and maintaining vital links between the Defence community and the general public.

Dr Julian Lewis:

[\[29194\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the role of Lord Lieutenants as presidents of regional Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations in raising their (a) prominence and (b) popularity in their respective communities.

James Heappey:

I welcome the enduring, active, and valuable support that Lord Lieutenants give in their role as Presidents of the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations. As regional representatives of Her Majesty the Queen, they provide an important link between the Crown and local communities, which facilitates civic engagement on Defence issues. This is of great importance to the Armed Forces, including the Reserves, and to the Cadet organisations, as it serves to raise the profile of these commendable institutions, whilst demonstrating endorsement at the highest levels.

■ **VE Day: Anniversaries**

Alexander Stafford:

[\[30191\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what support his Department plans to provide for veterans with mobility issues to help them attend VE day celebrations in 2020.

James Heappey:

Veterans have always been at the centre of our plans to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day and our key priority must be their health and wellbeing. Given the age of participants, we are reviewing what we can safely proceed with in line with the latest scientific advice from Public Health England.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ **BBC: Coronavirus**

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[29917\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, whether he plans to provide emergency funding to the BBC to ensure that it can continue to operate at full capacity in the next 12 months.

Mr John Whittingdale:

As the national broadcaster, the BBC has a vital role to play in supplying information to the public in the weeks and months ahead. The BBC has stated that its priority over the coming period is to do everything it can to serve the nation at this uniquely challenging time.

The BBC and the government have been discussing the national coronavirus situation, and these discussions will continue.

In 2018/19 the BBC received nearly £3.7bn in licence fee income.

■ **Broadband: Remote Working**

Chi Onwurah: [\[29216\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he plans to take to reserve broadband capacity for essential (a) workers and (b) services in the event that networks are overloaded as a result of increased home-working.

Matt Warman:

DCMS is liaising closely with the main broadband providers to ensure network capacity is able to cope with the potential peak of home workers as a consequence of Covid-19. The telecoms sector has undertaken a significant amount of work over recent years to prepare for a pandemic, DCMS is reassured that those plans are extensive and that there is sufficient network capacity. However, we will remain in regular touch with companies and will continue to keep the situation under review.

■ **Charities: Coronavirus**

Vicky Foxcroft: [\[26890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps the Government is taking to help ensure the financial resilience of service delivery charities in the (a) delay and (b) mitigate phases of the response to covid-19.

Oliver Dowden:

Ministers and officials are in constant dialogue with partners in these sectors to build and maintain a complete and up to date understanding of the challenges. We are working urgently with colleagues across government to shape support available to mitigate risks in the coming weeks and months.

■ **Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport: Ministerial Responsibility**

Tracy Brabin: [\[30074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will publish his Department's Ministerial responsibilities.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Department's Ministerial responsibilities were published on February 17th.

Details can be found on GOV.UK.

■ **Digital Technology: Proof of Identity**

Neil Coyle: [\[28062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, when his Department plans to publish its response to the consultation on digital identity that closed on 15 September 2019.

Matt Warman:

The Department intends to publish its response to the Digital Identity Call for Evidence in Spring 2020.

■ Internet: Regulation

Louise Haigh: [\[29983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking to tackle websites which host images of rape or victims of trafficking.

Caroline Dineneage:

The government is developing legislation to tackle illegal and harmful content online. The legislation will establish a new statutory duty of care on online companies which host user-generated content or enable user interactions. The new duty will require these companies to put in place systems and processes to tackle illegal content, including illegal images. The expectation is that companies will remove illegal content expeditiously and minimise the risk of it appearing.

■ National Citizen Service Trust: Redundancy Pay

Tim Loughton: [\[25611\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he has taken to reduce the leaving package of the departing Chief Executive of the NCS Trust; and what provisions he has instituted for limits on remuneration of remaining employees.

Matt Warman:

Earlier this month we were made aware of an unacceptable exit package proposed for the outgoing NCS Chief Executive.

We have taken swift action on this issue, and are investigating wider issues around governance. We have made clear that every element of the outgoing Chief Executive's departure must comply with HM Treasury guidance on Managing Public Money.

A new CEO has joined the NCS Trust this week and we are clear that we expect the organisation going forward to be completely focussed on helping level up the country with strong opportunities for young people from all backgrounds.

■ National Lottery

Andrew Rosindell: [\[27965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, how much funding was not allocated (a) to and (b) from the National Lottery distribution funds in each of the last 20 years.

Nigel Huddleston:

National Lottery good cause funding is held in the National Lottery Distribution Fund (NLDF). This money is distributed by 12 distributing bodies at arm's length from the Government. Each distributor receives a fixed percentage of the NLDF income as set out in [legislation](#).

Distributors draw down from the NLDF on a weekly or monthly basis as their grant commitments fall due, and tend to hold a balance in the NLDF to cover future grant commitments. Information on historic NLDF balances can be found in the [NLDF Annual Report and Accounts](#).

Information on National Lottery funding awards up to January 2018 can be found on the [publicly available National Lottery grant database](#). We expect to update this database with grant information from January 2018 to March 2020 later this Spring.

■ Television: Licensing

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[28627]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 20 January 2020 to Question 3870, for what reasons that answer did not include an assessment of the effect of the policy to no longer fund free TV licences for people aged over 75 on loneliness among older people.

Mr John Whittingdale:

Following the licence fee settlement agreement in 2015, the future of the over 75 licence fee concession is the responsibility of the BBC, not of the government. Therefore, the BBC is responsible for conducting an assessment of the effect of the policy to no longer fund free TV licences for all people aged over 75 on loneliness among older people from 1 June 2020.

The BBC acknowledged the impact of loneliness when, following public consultation, it set out its decision on the future of the concession. This can be viewed online: <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/consultation/age/decision-document.pdf>

You will also be aware that, recognising the exceptional circumstances of the national Coronavirus situation, the BBC Board has decided to change the start date of the new policy. The current plan is to now bring it into place on 1 August and the BBC will keep the issue under review.

■ Third Sector: Coronavirus

Wes Streeting:

[30109]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions he has had with civil society organisations on the effect of covid-19 on their (a) financial stability and (b) ability to deliver effectively for communities as part of the Government's civil contingency planning.

Oliver Dowden:

Organisations across civil society are already working tirelessly to support their communities in response to covid-19. I have had several conversations with civil society organisations about responding to covid-19 and its potential impact on charities and social enterprises. Last week the Minister for Civil Society, Baroness Barran, held a roundtable with over 45 charities to listen to their concerns. We are

working with colleagues across government to shape support available to mitigate risks in the coming weeks and months and deliver effectively for communities.

■ Youth Services: Lancashire

Paul Maynard:

[\[27579\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what projects in (a) Blackpool and (b) Lancashire have been allocated funding from (i) the Youth Accelerator Fund and (ii) the Youth Investment Fund.

Matt Warman:

Government is funding up to £7 million this financial year (2019/20) through the Youth Accelerator Fund, expanding existing successful projects delivering positive activities for young people, and to address urgent needs in the youth sector. This fund is being delivered through DCMS ALB's alongside UK Youth

UK Youth is distributing over £1 million in small grants to support grassroots organisations to deliver extra sessions in youth clubs and increase positive activities for young people across the country. 5 grants have been awarded to organisations in Blackpool and Lancashire totalling over £35,000.

DCMS ALBs are expanding their existing positive activities programmes, and Sport England as part of their Youth Accelerator Funding, have awarded funding to the Lancashire Boys and Girls Clubs who work across the whole of Lancashire.

We are investing £500 million over five years through the new Youth Investment Fund, which will be launching in 2020/21.

EDUCATION

■ Apprentices

Antony Higginbotham:

[\[28112\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to encourage more young people to take up apprenticeships.

Gillian Keegan:

We have introduced a wide range of reforms to improve the quality of apprenticeships and to encourage employers across England to create more high-quality apprenticeship opportunities.

From August 2020, all starts will be on the new apprenticeship standards which are replacing frameworks. Over 530 standards, designed and driven by industry, have already been approved for delivery. These high-quality standards are directly benefitting young apprentices as they allow them to gain transferable skills, knowledge and behaviours which are recognised by industry and to become fully competent in their chosen occupations.

We are working hard to encourage take-up of apprenticeships among young people. The first 2 phases of the Fire it Up campaign have targeted young people, parents and schools to improve the perception and take-up of apprenticeships by young people. The third phase of the Fire it Up campaign, which launched in January, will continue this work as well as targeting audience groups that contribute to widening participation in apprenticeships.

Our 13th annual National Apprenticeship Week took place in February. Nearly 900 events were held across the country, aiming to change perceptions of apprenticeships.

In January 2018, we introduced a legal requirement for schools to give training providers the chance to talk to pupils about technical qualifications and apprenticeships so that young people hear about the alternatives to academic routes.

We also offer a free service to schools through the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge for Schools and Colleges (ASK) programme to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and support to enable them to promote apprenticeships to their students. In the last academic year, ASK reached over 300,000 students throughout England. We have recently extended the programme to include younger pupils in key stage 3 (years 7 to 9).

■ Children: Exploitation

Neil Coyle:

[\[28055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the establishment of a support programme for families with children at risk of exploitation, following the introduction of the Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme in 2019.

Vicky Ford:

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, meets regularly with other ministers to discuss the Department of Education's agenda.

We are committed to protecting children at risk of exploitation and this is why the government has commissioned a consortium, led by Research in Practice, and the International Centre at the University of Bedfordshire and The Children's Society, to deliver the Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Support Programme.

The TCE Support Programme will help safeguarding partners in local areas develop an effective multi-agency response to a range of threats to children from outside the family, including sexual and child criminal exploitation, county lines, all forms of modern slavery of children and child trafficking. It will operate from 2019 up until 2022 with funding of up to £2 million.

■ Educational Visits: Coronavirus

Louise Haigh:

[29992]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps the Government is taking to ensure (a) schools and (b) families are reimbursed for school trips cancelled as a result of covid-19.

Nick Gibb:

On 12 March 2020, the Government advised all schools and other education settings in England against undertaking any overseas trips for children under 18. More recently, on 16 March, the Government advised against anyone making non-essential domestic trips. All travel guidance is available on GOV.UK and all educational settings in England have been alerted to the existence of, and directed to, this advice via the daily Covid-19 education sector update they receive directly from the Department for Education.

With regard to insurance matters, all schools should check with their travel providers and credit card companies regarding securing refunds in the first instance. If unable to recoup their full costs, those academies signed up to the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) for schools should then submit their claims as per the RPA membership pack and other affected schools should contact their individual insurance providers.

Government Covid-19 travel guidance for the education sector can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19/covid-19-travel-guidance-for-the-education-sector>.

FCO Covid-19 travel guidance is available at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>.

■ Food Technology: Schools

Sir George Howarth:

[27952]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to increase the provision of cooking classes in schools to ensure that all pupils are taught cookery until the end of key stage 3.

Nick Gibb:

Cooking and nutrition are compulsory in state-maintained schools for Key Stages 1 to 3, from ages 5 to 14. It is a discrete strand of the design and technology programme of study within the national curriculum, which can be used as an exemplar for free schools and academies.

The programme of study for cooking and nutrition aims to teach children how to cook and apply the principles of healthy eating and good nutrition. It recognises that cooking is an important life skill that will help children to feed themselves and others healthy and affordable food, now and in the future. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils should be able to cook a repertoire of predominantly savoury dishes and be competent in a range of cooking techniques.

A food preparation and nutrition GCSE is also available for pupils who are interested in continuing to study cookery. It requires pupils to understand and apply the principles of food science, nutrition and healthy eating when preparing and cooking food. This was introduced in 2016, with the first exams in this qualification taken in summer 2018.

■ Foreign Students: Coronavirus

Wes Streeting:

[30107]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his department is taking to support international students with (a) accommodation, (b) visas, (c) financial hardship and (c) access to healthcare during the covid-19 outbreak.

Michelle Donelan:

Urgent work is underway in the Department for Education and the Office for Students to ensure that we have the appropriate policy response in place to respond to the impact of Covid-19 on the higher education sector and its students, including international students.

Our priority is preventing the spread of Covid-19 while doing everything possible to mitigate the impact on learning and attainment and to protect the sustainability and capacity of the provider base and colleges for the future.

We recognise that this is an unprecedented situation and that it will require an unprecedented response. I have been working closely with representatives of the sector in developing this, including joining representatives from a sector coordination group on 16 March, convened by Universities UK, where we discussed a number of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Ilford North.

With respect to visas specifically, the Home Office published Covid-19 visa guidance for overseas nationals in February, and international students are invited to contact the Home Office's Coronavirus Immigration Helpline if they have any specific concerns regarding their own visa status. Details are easily accessible on the Home Office's website, available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-immigration-guidance-if-youre-unable-to-return-to-china-from-the-uk>.

■ School Meals

Sir George Howarth:

[27953]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans his Department has to (a) increase the take-up of school meals and (b) improve compliance with school food standards.

Vicky Ford:

The government encourages all schools to promote healthy eating and provide healthy, tasty and nutritious food and drink. Compliance with the School Food Standards is mandatory for all maintained schools. We also expect all academies and free schools to comply with the standards, and since 2014 we have made this an explicit requirement in their funding agreements.

School governors have a responsibility to ensure compliance and should appropriately challenge the headteacher and the senior leadership team to ensure that the school is meeting its obligations. Should parents feel that school food standards are not being met at their child's school, they may choose to make a complaint using the school's own complaints procedure.

In particular, we want to ensure that as many eligible pupils as possible are claiming their free school meals (FSM) and we also want to make it as simple as possible for schools and local authorities to determine eligibility. To support this, we provide an Eligibility Checking System to make the checking process as quick and straightforward as possible for schools and local authorities. We have also developed a model registration form to help schools encourage parents to sign up for FSM. Additionally, we provide guidance to Jobcentre Plus advisers so that they can make Universal Credit recipients aware that they may also be entitled to wider benefits, including FSM.

■ Schools: Coronavirus

Darren Jones:

[\[28068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will take steps to ensure that vulnerable people, in the event that they are advised to self-isolate are not penalised if they have to remove their dependents from school in order to do so.

Nick Gibb:

Parents will not be penalised for absence that results from following government guidance on self-isolation.

Where a pupil is in self-isolation, in accordance with the latest advice from Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England, schools have been advised to record the pupil as being unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances in the attendance register.

Schools have also been advised that where a pupil does not attend school and is not self-isolating, the pupil will be recorded as absent but we expect headteachers will authorise absence where a pupil is not able to attend because of an underlying health condition that means they, or a family member in their household, are particularly vulnerable to the virus.

Recording a pupil as unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances and authorising absence will not lead to enforcement action being taken.

■ Sex and Relationship Education

Louise Haigh:

[\[29980\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to review sex and relationships education in schools and academies to ensure it includes age-appropriate guidance on online pornography.

Nick Gibb:

From September 2020, relationships education will become compulsory for all primary-aged pupils, relationships and sex education (RSE) compulsory for all secondary-aged pupils, and health education compulsory for all pupils in state-funded schools. These subjects are designed to ensure pupils are taught the knowledge and life skills they will need to stay safe, build confidence and resilience, and develop healthy and supportive relationships.

In relationships education and RSE, teachers need to address online safety and appropriate behaviour in a way that is relevant to pupils' lives. Teachers should include content on how information and data is shared and used in all contexts, including online. This should include, for example, how specifically sexually explicit material such as pornography presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours, can damage the way people see themselves in relation to others and negatively affect how they behave towards sexual partners. Teaching should also cover relevant aspects of the law so that pupils understand that sharing and viewing indecent images of children (including those created by children) is a criminal offence which carries severe penalties, including custodial sentences.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ Agricultural Products: Coronavirus****Hywel Williams:**[\[29837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with (a) agricultural trades unions and (b) his counterparts in the Welsh Government on the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on agricultural exports.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government fully supports Welsh farmers and recognises the importance of Welsh agricultural businesses to the UK economy.

We are actively monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 and related control measures with significant input from industry stakeholders.

The Chancellor has announced an initial £330 billion will be made available to support UK businesses. He also set out a package of temporary, timely and targeted measures to support public services, people and businesses through this period of disruption caused by COVID-19.

We acknowledge concerns about the effect of the COVID-19 outbreak and its effect on agricultural exports and are working closely with key stakeholders from across the agri-food sector to help mitigate its impact. The National Farmers' Union and the Devolved Administrations form part of Defra's Food Chain Emergency Liaison Group (FCELG). This forum has and will continue to meet regularly to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the food and farming sectors across the UK, and what actions are needed to support the sector.

■ Agricultural Products: Dumping

Gareth Thomas: [\[27947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential for dumping of agricultural products onto the UK market following the transition period; and if he will make a statement.

Gareth Thomas: [\[27948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps the Government is planning to take to prevent the dumping of agricultural products onto the UK market after the transition period; and if he will make a statement.

Rebecca Pow:

In November 2017 the Government issued a call for evidence to UK producers and product users, including on agriculture. The call for evidence sought to identify which of the EU's existing trade remedy measures including anti-dumping should be maintained under the UK's independent trade remedies framework. All maintained measures will be reviewed by the Trade Remedies Investigations Directorate, and adjusted if necessary, to ensure they are suitable for the UK market.

The Government has also established an independent UK trade remedies framework to protect the UK's agriculture industry from dumping of agriculture products onto the UK market. This framework establishes an approach, consistent with WTO obligations, for the investigation of complaints of dumping and the imposition of additional duties where dumping is found to have taken place.

■ Agriculture: Migrant Workers

Daniel Kawczynski: [\[29966\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to issue guidance on minimum qualifying annual pay for EU nationals seeking permits to work in the agricultural industry.

Rebecca Pow:

This Government is fully committed to protecting the rights of migrant workers and ensuring that they are treated fairly in the workforce, including seasonal workers in agriculture.

In recent years, there has been tremendous change to wider employment legislation, which protects and benefits workers in all sectors of the economy. The national minimum wage has been raised and the new national living wage introduced.

A key objective of the Seasonal Workers Pilot, a scheme for non-EEA migrant workers, is to ensure that they are adequately protected against modern slavery and other labour abuses. The operators of the scheme are licensed by the Gangmasters Labour and Abuse Authority (GLAA). The GLAA ensure that all workers are placed with farms who adhere to all relevant legislation, including paying the National Minimum Wage.

Daniel Kawczynski:

[\[29967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that an adequate number of work permits is issued to cover the demand for workers in the egg industry and associated sectors.

Rebecca Pow:

We are actively monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 and related control measures with significant input from industry stakeholders.

We are urgently considering which measures could be put in place to help mitigate the impact of the current situation on access to labour in the agri-food chain.

The Chancellor has announced an initial £330 billion will be made available to support UK businesses. He also set out a package of temporary, timely and targeted measures to support public services, people and businesses through this period of disruption caused by COVID-19.

After the transition to a new immigration system in 2021, businesses will continue to be able to rely on EU nationals living in the UK with settled or pre-settled status and there will continue to be other flexibility in the system and the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) has already pointed to the estimated 170,000 recently arrived non-EU citizens currently in low-skilled occupations.

The EU Settlement Scheme, which opened in March 2019, has already received more than 3.3 million applications from EU citizens who are able to stay and work in the UK – and people have until June 2021 to apply.

The government will introduce a new points based system from January 2021 which will include an employer-led route for skilled workers to enter the UK, both EU and non-EU citizens. The skilled worker route will not be capped, there will be no requirement to conduct a Resident Labour Market Test and the salary and skills thresholds have been lowered.

These changes will ensure that a wide pool of skilled workers will be able to come to the UK from anywhere in the world.

■ Agriculture: Subsidies

Beth Winter:

[\[30190\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of halting future farm payments to farms which operate caged systems.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government will build upon our world-leading animal welfare standards now that we have left the EU. We will do this in part by developing publicly funded schemes for English farmers to provide animal welfare enhancements beyond the regulatory baseline – ones that are valued by the public and not sufficiently provided by the market.

We are currently considering different forms of scheme design. This could include a capital grants scheme for investments that are known to raise welfare and would help farmers move beyond our already world-class baseline standards. It could also include a payment-by-results scheme that makes ongoing payments for demonstrable and evidence-based welfare increases. These could relate to improving animal welfare in relation to confinement (e.g. the use of cages and crates), to the provision of enrichments, to mutilations (e.g. beak trimming and tail docking), and to animals' ability to exhibit natural behaviours (including behaviours in their right settings).

Animal welfare enhancements will be evidence based, clearly defined, measurable, have positive impacts on animal health and welfare. We will work with industry, retailers and welfare groups and the Animal Welfare Committee as we continue to develop these proposals.

■ Animal Welfare

Andrew Rosindell: [\[29850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to bring forward legislative proposals on animal sentience.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[29851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent representations he has received on a comprehensive and rigorous means of legislating for animal sentience.

Margaret Ferrier: [\[30183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to bring forward legislative proposals to create a new statutory definition of animal sentience.

Beth Winter: [\[30189\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of mandating Departments to undertake animal welfare impact assessments on policy that potentially affects sentient species.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government has committed to bringing in new laws on animal sentience. Any necessary changes required to domestic legislation will be made in a rigorous and comprehensive way after the transition period and will be brought forward when Parliamentary time allows. Defra is currently assessing how best to support Government departments in considering the welfare needs of sentient animals when they are developing and implementing Government policy.

Defra engages with a wide range of stakeholders on a number of animal welfare issues, including animal sentience.

■ Bovine Tuberculosis: Disease Control

Luke Pollard:

[28046]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many holdings in 2019 in each county in England were subject to interferon gamma testing for bovine tuberculosis after their officially TB free status had been withdrawn.

Rebecca Pow:

The numbers of herds with Officially TB-Free Withdrawn (OTFW) status that underwent interferon gamma (IFN γ) testing in 2019 in each county of England are given in the table below. Two sets of numbers are given covering IFN γ tests conducted in 2019 in herds with new TB breakdowns starting in the same year and those in herds with breakdowns that began before 2019.

<i>COUNTY</i>	<i>RESTRICTIONS PRIOR TO 2019 BUT THE IFNγ TEST CONDUCTED IN 2019</i>	<i>RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED IN 2019 AND THE IFNγ TEST CONDUCTED IN 2019</i>
AVON	6	4
BERKSHIRE	20	8
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	15	11
CAMBRIDGESHIRE	4	2
CHESHIRE	124	72
CORNWALL	49	19
CUMBRIA	12	9
DERBYSHIRE	96	55
DEVON	152	92
DORSET	55	33
EAST SUSSEX	8	2
ESSEX	1	1
GLOUCESTERSHIRE	38	24
GREATER MANCHESTER	2	2
GREATER LONDON	1	1
HAMPSHIRE	17	11
HEREFORD & WORCESTER	28	6

<i>COUNTY</i>	<i>RESTRICTIONS PRIOR TO 2019 BUT THE IFNY TEST CONDUCTED IN 2019</i>	<i>RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED IN 2019 AND THE IFNY TEST CONDUCTED IN 2019</i>
HERTFORDSHIRE	2	2
ISLE OF WIGHT	2	1
KENT	1	1
LANCASHIRE	2	1
LEICESTERSHIRE	27	15
LINCOLNSHIRE	6	4
NORFOLK	1	1
NORTH YORKSHIRE	4	3
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE	18	12
NORTHUMBERLAND	3	3
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	4	1
OXFORDSHIRE	70	31
SHROPSHIRE	12	1
SOMERSET	33	26
SOUTH YORKSHIRE	4	2
STAFFORDSHIRE	5	1
SUFFOLK	1	1
WARWICKSHIRE	55	26
WEST SUSSEX	1	1
WEST YORKSHIRE	1	1
WILTSHIRE	52	35

■ **Businesses: Sales**

Alberto Costa:

[28040]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what support the Government will provide to businesses that sell wet wood and coal following the announcement of a ban on the sale of those items.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government intends to introduce a mandatory certification scheme demonstrating that wood sold in volumes under 2m³ is dry (less than 20% moisture). This will apply from one year from publication of the Government Response to allow existing stocks to be used up. Small suppliers will have an extra year to comply. This is to give them time to season their wood down to the required level or consider changes to their business model. A proportionate approach to enforcement will be taken, with enforcement agencies working with and educating small foresters to support them in meeting the new requirements.

We intend to introduce a ban on the sale of all bagged traditional house coal one year from publication of the Government Response. For a transitional period of two years, approved coal merchants will be able to sell loose traditional house coal directly to customers. A phased transition gives additional time for the market for smokeless fuel to develop in response to the legislation and for small businesses to adjust.

■ Flood Control: Reading**Matt Rodda:**[\[30023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the timetable is for carrying out flood prevention work at the River Thames in Reading.

Rebecca Pow:

More than 700 properties, roads and other infrastructure are at risk of flooding from the Thames in north Reading and Lower Caversham. The Environment Agency (EA) has engaged widely with the community to raise awareness of flood risk and to get feedback on plans for a flood risk management scheme which would include flood walls, embankments and a channel to bypass Reading Bridge. The EA is reviewing feedback from the community and if there is support for the scheme it will progress work to secure the necessary permissions and funding.

■ Flood Control: River Severn**Daniel Kawczynski:**[\[29968\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress he has made with (a) Shropshire council and (b) the River Severn Partnership in discussions on funding research into solutions to flooding on the River Severn.

Rebecca Pow:

The River Severn Partnership is seeking to deliver a holistic whole water management approach to address both flood risk and water security as a means of underpinning local resilience and supporting economic prosperity across the whole catchment.

The Environment Agency (EA) is working with partners to develop a River Severn Strategy, building on established frameworks for the River Thames and Humber Estuary strategies. This will include modelling and options appraisals to identify a long-term programme of capital investment in water infrastructure across the whole

catchment, including the tributaries of the River Teme, Warwickshire Avon and River Wye. The strategy will explore new and innovative fiscal models for funding infrastructure delivery as well as the ongoing operation of such measures. The comprehensive and holistic nature of the River Severn Strategy means that there are multiple potential partners and funding sources, and the EA is exploring many options and funding streams. Local partners have already contributed £300,000 to begin work on the strategy and this will be used as leverage in wider funding bids.

■ **Horse Racing: Animal Welfare**

Chris Evans:

[\[28039\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the British Horseracing Authority on that organisation's consultation on the rules and penalties for misuse of a whip in racing; and whether that consultation will follow Government principles for consultations.

Rebecca Pow:

Defra officials have regular discussions with the British Horseracing Authority (BHA), including recently on its Horse Welfare Board's five-year Horse Welfare Strategy "A life well-lived". The Strategy recommends that the BHA should consult as soon as possible and ideally by October 2020 on increased penalties for whip offences. The Strategy also recommends that this consultation should gather views on future restrictions on whip use and on a possible ban. As part of ongoing regular discussions, Defra officials will be advising the BHA about how to follow Government principles for conducting consultations, and Defra will be taking a close interest in how this progresses.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

■ **Armed Conflict: Sexual Offences**

Emily Thornberry:

[\[25043\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what progress his Department has made on the development of a three-year strategy on preventing sexual violence in conflict.

Nigel Adams:

The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) is part of the UK's Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (NAP), which includes our strategy for tackling and preventing conflict-related sexual violence. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is currently developing an additional three-year strategy on PSVI, which remains a top priority for the UK Government.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development (DFID) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) will all contribute to this strategy, not only in London but across the network of Embassies in countries where conflict-related sexual violence issues are acute. This work will be overseen by the joint FCO-DFID

Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth and Prime Minister's Special Representative for Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon.

Our PSVI objectives will remain to strengthen justice and support for survivors and hold the perpetrators to account; tackle the stigma faced by survivors, including children born of sexual violence in conflict; and prevent sexual violence in conflict. The Government will ensure the three-year strategy is survivor-centred, working closely with PSVI Survivor Champions throughout its development.

Emily Thornberry:

[\[25045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to improve the (a) monitoring, (b) analysis, (c) storing and (d) sharing of information in relation to the Government's preventing sexual violence initiative.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office follows UK Government monitoring and evaluation good practice, tailored to what is most appropriate for the size of funding we deliver and the partners we work with. All programmes and projects must contribute to, and help realise, a Theory of Change and be appropriately monitored throughout delivery. Our Grant Agreements, Memoranda of Understandings or Contracts set out the reporting requirements for implementers. A review or evaluation of every completed project and programme must be carried out, tailored to what is appropriate for the size of funding we deliver. We are looking carefully at these processes in light of the findings by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI).

The FCO works closely with academics and civil society organisations, including through our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) working groups, to share information and help develop effective policy approaches towards the Government's policy objectives. It is standard practice for PSVI experts returning from overseas to provide detailed reporting post-deployment, which offers vital information that informs the Government's overall approach. . We recognise there are further improvements that can be made on sharing PSVI information. Building on lessons learned is central to improving access to information on preventing sexual violence in conflict.

Emily Thornberry:

[\[25046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make it his policy to publish a report with accompanying evidence on the (a) work and (b) outcomes of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office published a response to the recommendations of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI)'s review of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) on 20 February. The recommendations will support the development of a PSVI strategy, and influence our

policy and programming.. Progress in delivering the PSVI is set out in the 2019 Annual Human Rights Report and the Women, Peace and Security Annual report, both of which will be available later this year.

Emily Thornberry:

[\[25047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, when the Government plans to reschedule the postponed conference on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign Secretary intends to host the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) International Conference, Time for Justice: Putting Survivors First, in 2020, alongside the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon. We are currently reassessing potential dates in light of the developments on Coronavirus.

■ **China: Journalism:**

Mr Steve Baker:

[\[27534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the accuracy of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China 2019 survey findings on intimidation and harassment of journalists in China.

Nigel Adams:

We are deeply concerned by the credible findings of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China's Annual Report. On 2 March, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad publicly set out his concerns that more foreign journalists in China are facing visa restrictions, and more are being harassed, intimidated and monitored by the authorities.

■ **China: Muslims**

Apsana Begum:

[\[28733\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, with reference to Amnesty International's report entitled China: Uyghurs living abroad tell of campaign of intimidation, published 21 February 2020, what recent assessment he has made of the accuracy of reports of harassment by the Chinese Government of Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic groups after they have left the China.

Nigel Adams:

These reports are concerning and we continue to monitor allegations of harassment of Uyghurs outside of China. We regularly raise our concerns about the treatment of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang directly with the Chinese Government and at the UN.

■ China: Uighurs

Apsana Begum:

[\[28734\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Chinese counterpart on the treatment of Uyghur Muslims; and what assessment he has made of the humanitarian situation in Xinjiang.

Nigel Adams:

On 9 March, the Foreign Secretary directly raised his serious concerns about the human rights situation in Xinjiang and the treatment of Uyghur Muslims with his Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi.

Our concerns include the extra-judicial detention of over a million Uyghur Muslims and other minorities in "political re-education camps", systematic restrictions on Uyghur culture and the practice of Islam, and extensive and invasive surveillance targeting minorities.

■ Commonwealth: Coronavirus

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[27593\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to co-ordinate with Commonwealth Governments a response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Nigel Adams:

We are working closely with the international community, including the Commonwealth, to ensure that we respond appropriately to COVID-19. The UK's global priority is to support the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other multilateral actors to contain COVID-19 and mitigate secondary health and socio-economic impacts. Our approach is guided by the Chief Medical Officer, working on the basis of the best possible scientific evidence.

■ Commonwealth: Foreign Relations

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[27522\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to develop and strengthen relations between the UK and its Commonwealth allies.

Nigel Adams:

The UK marked Commonwealth Day on 9 March and in his statement our Prime Minister outlined the enduring bond between the Commonwealth network of 54 countries, who are united in its promotion of peace, democracy and human rights. At Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018 (CHOGM18) in London, the UK announced £500m of projects and programmes to support delivery of the Commonwealth leaders commitments under the headings of security, prosperity, democracy and sustainability. After hosting CHOGM18, the UK took up the role of Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, a position held by the Commonwealth country which has hosted the most recent CHOGM.

The UK has been an active Chair-in-Office, committed to strengthening and renewing the Commonwealth, through its three pillars - the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Member States and Commonwealth organisations and networks. We have driven delivery of Commonwealth leaders commitments, supported the Commonwealth to have a stronger voice as an advocate for multilateral cooperation in the rules-based international system and increased solidarity between members. The UK has also championed reform of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Initiatives have been undertaken in a diverse range of policy areas, from climate change and marine protection, to cyber security, mediation of conflict and promotion of intra-Commonwealth trade. 31 Commonwealth countries are together now tackling marine plastic pollution, whilst over 3,000 women entrepreneurs across the Commonwealth have been supported to internationalise their businesses, and barriers to trade have been reduced.

■ El Salvador: Politics and Government

Paul Blomfield:

[\[29913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations has he made to the government of El Salvador on the occupation of that country's parliament building by armed forces and national civil police troops on 10 February 2020.

Wendy Morton:

Our Ambassador to El Salvador issued public calls for dialogue on 9 and 11 February. On 12 February, he urged the Government and legislators to work together to reduce tensions and resolve the situation through dialogue, and welcomed the government's commitment to abide by the ruling of the Supreme Court. The Head of Latin America Department at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office discussed the incident on 11 February with the Salvadoran Ambassador, and on 24 February with a visiting Government of El Salvador delegation. We welcome actions taken since by all parties since 9 February to reduce tensions. The UK and El Salvador have a close dialogue on a number of bilateral and global issues of mutual interest, and our Embassy in San Salvador remains in close contact with the Salvadoran authorities.

■ Integrated Security, Defence and Foreign Policy Review

Wendy Chamberlain:

[\[29976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that there is appropriate transparency, scrutiny and accountability of the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy.

James Cleverly:

The Integrated Review will report to the Prime Minister, who will be supported by a cross-Whitehall team in the Cabinet Office and a small team in No10. The Cabinet Office will coordinate and drive input from departments across Whitehall, including

the Foreign Office, Ministry of Defence, Department for International Development, the Treasury and the Home Office. We will also consult experts inside and outside of the Government, ensuring the UK's best minds are feeding into its conclusions and challenging traditional Whitehall assumptions and thinking as needed. We will keep Parliament fully informed during the process as we deliver a review that is in the best interests of the British people across the United Kingdom.

■ Israel: Palestinians

Christian Matheson:

[\[28067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, with reference to the testimonies of Israeli army snipers reported in the Ha'aretz newspaper on 6 March 2020, what assessment he has made of the accuracy of reports of the Israeli army's use of live fire on Palestinians.

James Cleverly:

We have repeatedly made clear to Israel our longstanding concerns about the manner in which the Israel Defense Forces police non-violent protests and the border areas, including the use of live ammunition. We encourage Israel to carry out transparent investigations into whether the use of live fire had been appropriate. While Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence, it is vital that all its actions are proportionate, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and are calibrated to avoid civilian casualties.

■ Malaysia: Corruption

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[27520\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Malaysian counterpart on the continuation of anti-corruption measures in that country.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign Secretary discussed anti-corruption reforms with the then Prime Minister Mahathir and Foreign Minister Saiffudin in Kuala Lumpur on 11 February.

We are working to support a variety of anti-corruption initiatives in Malaysia, including contributing to the development of a National Anti-Corruption Plan and supporting the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.

The UK is committed to the continuation of anti-corruption measures in Malaysia, and we look forward to working with Prime Minister Muhyiddin and his new government in his stated aim to tackle corruption and promote institutional reform.

■ Religious Freedom: Females

Carla Lockhart: [\[27000\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to enable NGOs to improve the (a) identification, (b) recording and (c) monitoring of hidden incidents of persecution against women from minority religious communities.

Nigel Adams:

We remain deeply concerned at the scale of Freedom of Religion of Belief (FoRB) violations in many parts of the world. We recognise that people's religion and gender can increase their vulnerabilities, particularly those from minority groups.

The Department for International Development's programme on FoRB is supporting NGOs to work with minority religious communities. The programme will build the capacity of international development actors to mainstream FoRB into their programmes and develop ways to give voice to religiously marginalised groups. In addition to this, the programme will investigate existing evidence gathering tools on FoRB. The lessons will be openly shared through both reports and guidance.

Carla Lockhart: [\[27001\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to support overseas security forces in improving their protection of women from religious minority communities in societies where the persecution of those women is prevalent.

Nigel Adams:

We remain deeply concerned at the severity and scale of violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in many parts of the world. We recognise that people's religion and gender can increase their vulnerabilities, particularly those from minority groups.

The government is committed to improving the protection of women in volatile situations. In the context of UN Peacekeeping, the UK provides British Peace Support Team training (for Troop Contributing Countries), which includes training on prevention of sexual and gender based violence. The training also includes gender awareness and training.

Carla Lockhart: [\[27002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will take steps to (a) strengthen existing and (b) develop new training programmes to help women from religious minority communities understand their rights in countries that do not recognise and uphold those rights.

Nigel Adams:

We remain deeply concerned at the scale of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) violations in many parts of the world. We recognise that people's religion and gender can increase their vulnerabilities, particularly those from minority groups.

The Department for International Development's programme on FoRB is supporting NGOs to work with minority religious communities. The programme will build the capacity of international development actors to mainstream FoRB into their programmes and develop ways to give voice to religiously marginalised groups. In addition to this, the programme will investigate existing evidence gathering tools on FoRB. The lessons will be openly shared through both reports and guidance.

■ **Taliban: Peace Negotiations**

Jonathan Edwards: [\[28707\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 9 March 2020 to Question 25069, what involvement he had in the peace negotiations with the Taliban.

Nigel Adams:

The UK continues to work closely with the Afghan government, the US and our NATO allies in support of peace efforts and for a better future for Afghan people. The US-Taliban agreement of 29 February was a positive milestone in efforts to make progress towards peace in Afghanistan.

■ **Travel Information: Sports**

Ronnie Cowan: [\[28665\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what (a) travel advice and (b) recourse to funds his Department is providing to people who've booked travel and accommodation abroad to attend sporting events which become cancelled or played behind closed doors.

Nigel Adams:

The global response to coronavirus is developing rapidly, with many countries imposing travel restrictions and closing borders and we have now taken the step to advise against all but essential travel globally. We urge all British nationals in country to speak to their travel provider if they wish to return to UK and follow the guidance of local authorities while they remain overseas. Travellers should speak to their tour operator, airline, transport/accommodation provider and insurance company (as applicable) to discuss the options available to them.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ **5G: Health Hazards**

Adam Holloway: [\[27979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the implication for his policies of the petition presented to the Prime Minister in January 2020 by the International Appeal to stop 5G on Earth and in Space.

Jo Churchill:

The Department of Health and Social Care through Public Health England (PHE), provides advice on 5G safety. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport leads on 5G policies. The overall exposure to radio waves from the introduction of 5G is expected to remain low relative to international guidelines and there should be no consequences for public health. PHE continues to review the evidence to support their advice; which is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mobile-phone-base-stations-radio-waves-and-health>

Recent Ofcom measured emission levels from 5G-enabled mobile phone base stations remain at small fractions of the guideline level. Ofcom are consulting on a proposed legal requirement for compliance with the international guidelines for public exposure.

■ Babies: Carbon Monoxide

Liz Twist: [\[28651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to protect (a) unborn children and (b) infants from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Liz Twist: [\[28652\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of carbon monoxide poisoning during pregnancy on the unborn child; and if he will make a statement.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Long-term exposure to carbon monoxide gas can damage an unborn baby. Babies exposed to carbon monoxide during pregnancy are at risk of a low birth weight; stillbirth; death that occurs within the first four weeks of birth; and behavioural problems.

Women are tested for the presence of carbon monoxide at the antenatal booking appointment and as appropriate throughout pregnancy to identify smokers, or those exposed to tobacco smoke, and offer them a referral for support from a trained stop smoking advisor. Carbon monoxide testing may also highlight a household problem and the need to take measures to prevent further exposure.

■ Coronavirus: Carers

Yvette Cooper: [\[27951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the oral statement on Coronavirus, 3 March 2020, Official Report, column 771, what steps he is taking to support people that are dependent on informal social care from family members in the event that covid-19 results in those family members (a) unable to and (b) advised not to provide that care.

Helen Whately:

Public Health England (PHE) has published guidance for vulnerable groups which is available to view at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>

COVID-19 guidance for residential care, supported living and home care is published at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-residential-care-supported-living-and-home-care-guidance>

The Stay at Home guidance on self-isolation can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-people-with-confirmed-or-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

The Department is working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and local authorities to make sure there will be care for vulnerable individuals who normally rely on informal care in the event that family members are unable to or are advised not to provide that care.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control**Apsana Begum:****[28100]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what additional resources have been allocated to minimising the risk of further infection from covid-19 in (a) Tower Hamlets and (b) the UK.

Jo Churchill:

The Government has announced that the United Kingdom are moving out of the contain phase and into delay, in response to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. As the response is at national level there are currently no localised plans.

A series of new measures have been introduced to reduce and delay transmission and delay the peak. This includes a 'staying at home' measure for seven days if any symptoms of coronavirus infection, however mild are experienced. The most common symptoms of coronavirus are recent onset of a new continuous cough and/or a high temperature. During isolation councils are activating Local Resilience Forums in order to co-ordinate action in local areas to assist effective isolation. The full announcements of these plans are available at the following link:

www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-government-announces-moving-out-of-contain-phase-and-into-delay

■ Coronavirus: Hearing Impairment

Liz Twist: [28034]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will ensure that informative videos on covid-19 are provided with (a) British Sign Language interpretation and (b) subtitles.

Liz Twist: [28036]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the NHS 111 British Sign Language service has sufficient capacity to handle calls in the event of a covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

All guidance, statements and public information released by the Government are readily available to read online information on COVID-19 from Public Health England and the Department is translated into British Sign Language videos can be found at the following link:

<https://www.signhealth.org.uk/>

In addition to this, the Chancellor has advised that, the National Health Service will get whatever resources it needs to cope with a coronavirus epidemic.

Liz Twist: [28037]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will ensure that public health information provided by (a) Ministers and (b) the Chief Medical Officer is delivered with a British Sign Language interpreter present.

Jo Churchill:

All guidance, statements and public information released by the Government are readily available to read online.

Information on COVID-19 from Public Health England and the Department is translated into British Sign Language. Videos can be found at the following link:

<https://www.signhealth.org.uk/>

NHS England operates an accessible information standard which sets out a specific, consistent approach to identifying, recording, flagging, sharing and meeting the information and communication support needs of patients, service users, carers and parents with a disability, impairment or sensory loss. More information can be found at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/accessibleinfo/>

■ Coronavirus: Homelessness

Helen Hayes: [28073]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that people who are (a) homeless, (b) sleeping rough and (c) sofa-

surfing are provided with access to (i) testing for covid-19, (ii) suitable accommodation for self-isolation and (iii) treatment for covid-19.

Helen Hayes:

[28074]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the risks that covid-19 poses for homeless people and rough sleepers.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 16 March 2020]: Public Health England (PHE) has published guidance for hostel or day centres for people rough sleeping, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-services-for-people-experiencing-rough-sleeping>

As part of local emergency planning, local councils would have plans in place to provide support to these groups of people, including providing suitable accommodation for self-isolation.

General PHE advice on COVID-19 is updated regularly and is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

The Stay at Home guidance on self-isolation and access to testing is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-people-with-confirmed-or-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

■ Coronavirus: Intensive Care

Ms Lyn Brown:

[28583]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to co-ordinate the conversion of hospital facilities into specialist areas to treat large numbers of patients needing intensive care as a result of covid-19, in advance of the infection rate peak.

Ms Lyn Brown:

[28584]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has plans to construct temporary intensive care facilities prior to the peak of the covid-19 infection to treat people as a result of that infection.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 17 March 2020]: NHS England has an operating Framework for Managing the Response to Pandemic Influenza. It sets out the roles, responsibilities and functions of NHS England in preparing for and responding to an influenza pandemic. It is intended to complement and support existing plans, policies and arrangements. More information can be found at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/nhs-england-pandmic-influenza-operating-framework-v2.pdf>

Extensive advice and guidance on COVID-19 has already been produced by Public Health England (PHE), the National Health Service and others, some of which will be of direct relevance to people who misuse drugs and alcohol, and those in specialist treatment for drug or alcohol misuse and dependence. Additional targeted information is being provided in specific settings, including prisons and approved premises. These populations may have particular vulnerabilities and needs that are considered within this guidance, alongside other populations. PHE cascaded this information directly to local authority commissioners on 14 February 2020. The Government will continue to carefully monitor whether further resources need to be made available to protect this vulnerable cohort.

■ **Coronavirus: Italy**

Carla Lockhart: [\[26997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, for what reason flights are being allowed to continue between airports in northern Italy and the UK.

Jo Churchill:

Flights are currently allowed to continue between the United Kingdom and Italy as there are many UK citizens in that area who may want to come home. Also, crucially, the evidence shows that banning flights from affected areas does very little to protect us.

Currently British Airways and Ryanair have made the decision to cancel all flights to and from Italy; these decisions were made by the companies themselves. The UK Government has not currently taken steps to restrict flights between the UK and Italy, but this remains under constant review.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office advise against all but essential travel to Italy, due to the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19 and in line with various controls and restrictions imposed by the Italian authorities on 9 March. The Foreign Office advice is available at the following link:

www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/italy

■ **Coronavirus: Screening**

Vicky Foxcroft: [\[28066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps the Government is taking to help ensure that people with symptoms of covid-19 are tested quickly.

Jo Churchill:

Public Health England (PHE) has developed a highly sensitive test to detect the virus, one of the first countries in the world to do so, which has been rapidly rolled out to their regional labs across the country and to National Health Service labs. PHE and

NHS England have a combined capacity to process approximately 3,500 tests per day. PHE has processed over 25,000 tests as of 10 March and has not exceeded capacity during this time. The NHS is planning to bring new capacity online in the coming weeks which will help those who are hospitalized or most at risk from COVID-19.

We do not intend to test those self-isolating with mild symptoms. The advice at the following link is designed to help people prevent the spread:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-people-with-confirmed-or-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

■ Encephalitis

Jim Shannon: [29220]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many cases of encephalitis there has been in the UK in the last five years.

Jim Shannon: [29221]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce waiting times for the provision of after-care for people who have been treated for encephalitis.

Helen Whately:

Data on the total number of cases of encephalitis in the United Kingdom in the last five years is not held. As health is a devolved matter, it would be for the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to make decisions about collecting data in their respective countries.

The provision of after-care for people who have been treated for encephalitis is a local matter. Waiting times for patients with encephalitis will vary depending on their level of need and the judgement of clinicians, who are best placed to make such decisions.

■ Flour: Folic Acid

Dr Caroline Johnson: [28043]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential effect on listed traditional heritage windmills of proposals for the mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid.

Dr Caroline Johnson: [28044]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the consultation on mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid which closed in September 2019, what estimate his Department has made of the number windmills using traditional milling processes which prevent accurate dosing of flour with additives.

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[28045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will consider the potential merits of exempting traditional heritage windmills from proposed mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid.

Jo Churchill:

The recent consultation on the proposed mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid to help reduce neural tube defects in foetuses did specifically ask people to highlight any potential impact of this policy on small and medium businesses. People who responded to the consultation did not have to identify themselves or any sector they may be representing. However, of those who did, 50 identified themselves as working in the heritage/artisan milling sector. Officials from the Department have met with representatives from the The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) Mills Section and the Traditional Cornmillers Guild and visited wind and watermills to understand at first hand the practicalities around fortification in those premises. We have only the publicly available data on the number of traditional mills; noting that not all buildings manufacture flour as some are museums. Ministers are currently considering the consultation response analysis and further information will be provided in due course.

■ **Hospital Beds: Intensive Care**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[28614\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many hospital intensive care beds there were as at 11 March 2020; what estimate he has made of how many additional hospital intensive care beds could be created and normally staffed within one month of 11 March 2020; and what estimate he has made of the number of patients diagnosed with covid-19 who will require intensive care at the peak of the outbreak under (a) best case, (b) anticipated case and (c) worst case scenarios modelled by the Government.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 17 March 2020]: Information based on current number of intensive care beds and estimated additional requirements due to the COVID-19 outbreak is not held centrally. The National Health Service has an Operating Framework for Managing the Response to Pandemic Influenza in place which sets out the roles, responsibilities and functions of NHS England in preparing for and responding to an influenza pandemic. It is intended to complement and support existing plans, policies and arrangements.

Among those who become infected, we believe some will exhibit no symptoms. Early data suggest that of those who develop an illness, the great majority will have a mild-to-moderate, but self-limiting illness – similar to seasonal flu. It is, however, also clear that a minority of people who get COVID-19 will develop complications severe enough to require hospital care, most often pneumonia, in some instances sadly leading to death.

The United Kingdom Government and devolved administrations, including the health and social care system, have planned extensively over the years for an event like this. The UK is therefore well prepared to respond in a way that offers substantial protection to the public.

■ Hospitals: Sutton Coldfield

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

[\[28568\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps his Department has taken to reduce waiting times for hospital appointments for mental health patients in Sutton Coldfield constituency.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

We have committed at least a further £2.3 billion a year to mental health services by 2023/24, and, through the NHS Long Term Plan, the National Health Service commits to testing and rolling out waiting time standards for adults in selected areas.

In line with the aims of the Plan, Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group is:

- Putting in place specialist perinatal mental health teams;
- Increasing access to psychological therapies for depression and anxiety;
- Placing mental health professionals in general practitioner (GP) practices; and
- Opening crisis cafes to support people in a mental health crisis.

■ NHS: Migrant Workers

Matt Western:

[\[28677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has had discussions with the Home Secretary on removing immigration restrictions on non-resident health and care workers to fill NHS vacancies; and if he will make a statement.

Helen Whately:

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has regular discussions with the Secretary of State for the Home Department about the design of the future immigration system and its impact on the National Health Service.

The Government fully recognises the contribution that international health and care professionals make to the NHS, and we remain committed to ensuring that this country still attracts these skills to benefit the whole healthcare system. We have set out plans to introduce a new NHS visa, which will offer an attractive package for NHS staff. The details of this scheme will be announced by the Secretary of State for the Home Department in due course.

■ Pneumococcal Diseases: Vaccination

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[28075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that pharmacies have adequate supplies of the PPV23 vaccine.

Jo Churchill:

The Department is aware that there is currently limited availability of the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV23). There have been intermittent supply issues over the last 2-3 years due to manufacturing capacity constraints and an increase in global demand for the vaccine.

Public Health England has issued comprehensive guidance to the National Health Service clinicians on the management of potentially affected patients during this time of limited availability. General Practices have been advised to prioritise PPV23 vaccinations based on clinical risk and to plan vaccinations to ensure demand is more consistent across the year.

On 6 November 2019, PPV23 was added to the list of medicines that cannot be parallel exported, further protecting United Kingdom supplies and vaccine availability.

HOME OFFICE

■ Asylum

Anneliese Dodds:

[\[28757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the effect of removing service standards from asylum claims on the time taken to conclude those claims for (a) adult claimants and (b) minors.

Chris Philp:

Until October 2018, there was a published Service Standard in place to decide 98% of straight-forward cases within six months from date of claim. Whilst the operation consistently achieved this for three years, the number of non-straight forward cases awaiting a decision grew rapidly and it became clear that the former service standard no longer best served those that used our services. For these reasons, former Ministers agreed that we should move away from the service standard to reprioritise cases in the short term, whilst we come to longer term arrangement for service standards that meet the needs of all parties.

As a result, we moved away from the 6-month service standard to concentrate on older claims, cases with acute vulnerability and those in receipt of the greatest level of support, including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). That has meant some claims that would have been categorised as straightforward and received a decision within 6 months have waited longer.

However, it would be difficult to attribute this to changes to the service standard, as asylum intake has been significantly higher than expected levels since October

2018.. Published statistics show that there were 35,566 asylum applications in the UK (main applicants only) in the year ending December 2019, an increase of 21% from the previous year.

This means that despite a number of interventions, the number of claims awaiting a decision has grown.

■ Asylum: Appeals

Anneliese Dodds:

[\[28752\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have been wrongly removed to their country of origin after having their asylum claims refused while Appeal Rights Exhausted and have then been returned back to the UK, in each of the last five years.

Chris Philp:

The UK has a proud record of providing protection for asylum seekers fleeing persecution. Each case is considered sensitively, appropriately and on its individual merits. All available evidence is carefully and sensitively considered against a background of relevant case law and in light of published country information, which covers country specific issues.

The UK only ever returns those who both the Home Office and the courts are satisfied do not need our protection and have no legal basis to remain in the UK.

Providing the information requested in relation to number of people returned to the UK following removal would require a manual check of individual records and I am therefore not able to provide this to you. In a small number of cases each year individuals are brought back to the UK either by the Home Office or a Court for further consideration of their case. When this occurs, we review all circumstances with the Courts as appropriate.

■ Asylum: Applications

Anneliese Dodds:

[\[28748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average time spent is to process (a) s95, (b) s4 and (c) s96 asylum support applications from application to receipt of support.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office monitors closely the performance of asylum support application decision making and has a range of targets for processing support applications depending on the nature of the application being made.

Information on processing times is not recorded in a format suitable for publication and there are no plans to publish such statistics at this time.

■ Asylum: Finance**Anneliese Dodds:** [\[28746\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what her Department's target is for issuing ASPEN cards; and what recent assessment her Department has made of performance against those targets.

Chris Philp:

The HO does not routinely collect data on the time taken to issue ASPEN cards but we are continuing to work with all accommodation providers to ensure that applicants are able to access financial support upon dispersal. There is an Emergency Support Payment (ECP) provision available from Providers to ensure that Service Users are supported until receipt of their ASPEN Card.

■ British Nationality**Anneliese Dodds:** [\[29277\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many investigations into deprivation of citizenship are currently being undertaken by her Department.

Anneliese Dodds: [\[29278\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many referrals her Department's team investigating deprivation of citizenship received in the last 12 months.

Anneliese Dodds: [\[29279\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average time was for an investigation into the deprivation of citizenship in each of the last five years.

Chris Philp:

We do not comment on referrals or ongoing investigations but do publish information in respect of cases where a deprivation order has been served.

Figures for conducive deprivation orders, which are made under Section 40(2) of the 1981 British Nationality Act, have been published as part of the transparency report on disruptive and investigatory powers. Three reports have been published to date in 2015, 2017 and 2018:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/473603/51973_Cm_9151_Transparency_Accessible.pdf

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/593668/58597_Cm_9420_Transparency_report_web.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disruptive-and-investigatory-powers-transparency-report-2018>

Section 40(3) of the 1981 British Nationality Act, allows for deprivation of citizenship where fraud, false representation or concealment of material facts have been used to obtain British citizenship. Since February 2020 these figures have been published via the Transparency report on asylum data, which can be found using the links below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-transparency-data-february-2020>

■ Domestic Abuse: Children

Liz Twist:

[28661]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps the Government is taking to ensure that (a) frontline practitioners and (b) public bodies adopting the definition of domestic abuse in the Domestic Abuse Bill take account of the needs of children affected by domestic abuse.

Victoria Atkins:

While the definition of “domestic abuse” in clause 1 of the Domestic Abuse Bill applies for the purposes of the Bill, we expect the definition to be adopted more generally, for example by public authorities and frontline practitioners.

As provided for in clause 66(2)(b), the statutory guidance which will accompany the Bill will recognise the effect of domestic abuse on children. The guidance will outline the range of impacts domestic abuse can have on children, as well as appropriate support and referral mechanisms. We will ensure that the guidance is widely publicised.

■ Entry Clearances: Coronavirus

Alberto Costa:

[28065]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that people with a multiple entry visa are not penalised for overstaying in the UK in the event that their home country is affected by covid-19.

Kevin Foster:

Due to travel restrictions because of coronavirus, some individuals may be facing uncertainty in relation to the expiry date of their current visa or leave to remain in the United Kingdom.

We are taking steps to ensure foreign nationals will not be regarded as breaking their continuity of residence as a result of coronavirus and related travel restrictions.

Visas for Chinese nationals which were due to expire between 24 January and 30th March 2020 have already been automatically extended until March 2020. We continue to monitor the situation in all countries and we are keeping this under constant review.

A coronavirus immigration helpline <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-immigration-guidance-if-youre-unable-to-return-to-china-from-the-uk#helpline> has been set up for those who wish to discuss their circumstances. The freephone number is 0800 678 1767 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

■ Immigration: EU Nationals**Anneliese Dodds:**[\[29275\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to continue to allocate funding to organisations that support vulnerable EU nationals to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme from the end of March 2020 until that scheme closes.

Kevin Foster:

On 6 March 2020, the Home Office announced a further £8 million of funding to help vulnerable EU citizens apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. There have already been more than 3.2 million applications to the EU Settlement Scheme and nearly 2.9 million granted status, with over a year left to go.

Last year, the Home Office awarded £9 million funding to 57 charities across the UK who have helped hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people already. The further £8 million of funding for the 2020-2021 financial year will ensure important information continues to get through to those hardest to reach.

The 57 charities currently funded by the Home Office will have their funding extended until the end of June 2020, to allow their work to continue during the bidding process for new funding. Successful organisations will be fully supported by the Home Office and will be able to speak to caseworkers directly to discuss individual cases.

As with all government funding, there will be a competitive bidding process to ensure the right support is provided to all parts of the UK and makes best use of public money.

The bid process will begin shortly and more details will be announced in due course. The EU Settlement Scheme was launched in March 2019 and gives EU citizens and their family members the status they need to live and work in the UK after 30 June 2021.

There is a wide range of support available online, over the phone and in person to help them apply. This includes a helpline open 7 days a week where 250 staff based in Liverpool answer questions and help people apply. There are 1,500 Home Office staff working on the scheme in total.

Home visits and telephone support are available from a tutor for those lacking in digital skills or without internet access.

Anneliese Dodds:[\[29276\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans her Department has to publish data on numbers of people that convert from pre-settled status to settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme.

Kevin Foster:

The latest published figures show that the total number of applications received up to 31 January 2020 was more than 3.1 million, with over 2.7 million granted status (58% granted settled status and 41% granted pre-settled status).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/eu-settlement-scheme-statistics-january-2020>

Figures reported in the statistical publications account for applications to the system, including individuals making applications on more than one occasion. For example, an individual who has been granted pre-settled status can make a new application at a later stage to apply for settled status. As these are separate applications with separate outcomes, they are counted as separate applications and outcomes in the statistics.

This is consistent with how applications are reported across wider Home Office statistics.

Our initial analysis of applications suggest that repeat applications currently represent less than two per cent of all applications. This is a small percentage of the over 3 million applications we have received. To continue to meet user needs, the Home Office is exploring options for identifying and reporting follow-on applications (i.e. those moving from pre-settled to settled status) as part of our regular statistical publications.

Anneliese Dodds: [\[29281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress his Department has made on ensuring that staff on the MP Enquiry line have access to the EU Settlement Scheme database.

Kevin Foster:

All MP Enquiry Line staff and the majority of supporting MPAM staff, have access to the EU Settlement Scheme database.

■ **Migrant Help: Contracts**

Anneliese Dodds: [\[28749\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average time taken is from receipt of correspondence by Migrant Help to replying to the sender since the introduction of the new Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility contract.

Chris Philp:

There are various types of correspondence received by Migrant Help via a range of routes. It is therefore not possible to give average times, however all correspondence received through Royal Mail is dealt with within 48 hours of receipt.

■ **Migrant Help: Telephone Services**

Anneliese Dodds: [\[28747\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average time spent is (a) waiting to get through to and (b) on hold on a telephone call to Migrant Help.

Chris Philp:

Migrant Help have sustained an average call waiting time of less than a minute since 8th January.

Anneliese Dodds:[\[28750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department has taken to increase staffing levels for the Migrant Help phone line.

Anneliese Dodds:[\[28751\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the staff turnover has been on the Migrant Help phonenumber since the introduction of the new Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility contract.

Chris Philp:

Migrant Help have been recruiting and training staff to ensure they are resourced sufficiently to meet demand and they are working closely with accommodation providers and the Home Office to ensure that appropriate escalation mechanisms are in place so that service users can access support.

Staffing levels for both AIRE (Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility) and EAGL (Eligibility, Advice & Guidance) are more than double what they were when the lines first opened in September 2019.

Public Houses and Service Industries: Recruitment**Dr Luke Evans:**[\[28103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the ability of (a) pubs and (b) the hospitality industry to recruit adequate numbers of workers after the introduction of the proposed points-based immigration system.

Kevin Foster:

Now we have left the EU, Free movement is ending and we will not simply replicate it in a future system.

Skilled hospitality workers who meet the relevant criteria will be able to come to the UK through the points-based immigration system.

We need to shift the focus of our economy away from a reliance on cheap labour from Europe and consider immigration alongside investment in technology, innovation, automation and development of the UK's domestic labour force.

Employers need to adjust and adapt and make jobs more attractive for resident workers.

Business can continue to rely on those EU/EEA nationals, and their family members, living in the UK with settled or pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme, and on those who come to the UK through other routes such as our youth mobility schemes.

■ Seasonal Workers

Caroline Lucas: [\[27992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the ability of local workers to fill vacancies for seasonal employment in the (a) tourism and hospitality and (b) agricultural sectors.

Caroline Lucas: [\[27993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential effect of implementing the new points-based immigration system in January 2021 on the capacity of the (a) tourism and hospitality and (b) agricultural sectors to fill temporary vacancies ahead of peak seasons.

Kevin Foster:

Free movement is ending and we will not simply replicate it in a future system. The UK's new points based system will focus on the brightest and best and ensure we bring in those this country needs. We need to shift the focus of our economy away from a reliance on cheap labour from Europe and consider immigration alongside investment in technology, innovation, automation and development of the UK's domestic labour force.

Business can continue to rely on those EU/EEA nationals, and their family members, living in the UK with settled or pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme, and those who come to the UK through youth mobility schemes. We will also extend the pilot scheme for seasonal workers to 10,000 places.

In delivering on our manifesto commitment, the Government has considered relevant views, evidence and analysis. We will also continue to keep labour market data under careful scrutiny.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Government Assistance: Coronavirus

Mr Stephen Morgan: [\[30163\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the timetable is for funding to be allocated from the Hardship Fund announced in Budget 2020 in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Stephen Morgan: [\[30164\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when his Department plans to introduce council tax relief via the Hardship Fund announced in Budget 2020 to people financially affected by covid-19.

Mr Stephen Morgan: [\[30165\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that local authorities understand the processes

by which to apply for the Hardship fund announced in the Budget 2020 in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Stephen Morgan: [\[30166\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many and which local authorities have applied for funding from the Hardship Fund announced in Budget 2020 in response to covid-19.

Mr Stephen Morgan: [\[30167\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that funding from the covid-19 Hardship Fund is allocated on the basis of need.

Christopher Pincher:

[Holding answer 19 March 2020]: The Government will provide English councils with £500 million of new grant funding to support financially vulnerable residents, and expects that most of the funding will be used to provide additional council tax relief. The Government will set out further details and allocations for individual authorities in the coming days.

■ Help to Buy Scheme

John Healey: [\[29825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what policy decisions were set out in Budget 2020 in relation to Help to Buy.

Christopher Pincher:

[Holding answer 19 March 2020]: In February, the Government confirmed details of the new Help to Buy Scheme from April 2021, which included a policy decision to define a first-time buyer as someone who has never previously owned a property. This definition is consistent with other government policies such as Stamp Duty Land Tax exemption. Budget 2020 set out the revised forecast expenditure arising from this decision.

■ Homelessness: Coronavirus

Caroline Lucas: [\[29905\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate he has made of the resources required by local authorities to (a) identify street homeless people at high risk from covid-19 and (b) provide suitable accommodation for isolation of those people; and if he will make a statement.

Caroline Lucas: [\[29925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will publish urgent guidance on steps people should take if they are (a) street homeless, (b) sofa-surfing and (c) otherwise in homeless accommodation without a space to self-isolate, if they develop covid-19 symptoms; and if he will take steps to ensure that

guidance is communicated effectively to people who need to receive it; and if he will make a statement.

Luke Hall:

The Government recognises the challenges faced by those who are homeless or sleeping rough during the Covid-19 outbreak. We are working closely with local authorities and the sector to minimise the risk for vulnerable people and those currently unable to self-isolate.

As an initial first step we have announced £3.2 million in emergency funding for local authorities to help rough sleepers and those at risk of sleeping rough to self-isolate. This funding will assist local authorities with providing accommodation and support to vulnerable people who are at risk of, or who have been diagnosed with, Coronavirus.

Public Health England have also published guidance for those working in hostel and day centre environments.

These actions represent the first steps to help local authorities and frontline services put emergency measures in place. We recognise that more support will be required and are working to develop this as a matter of urgency.

■ **Local Government: Coronavirus**

Daniel Kawczynski:

[\[29920\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if the Government will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending the Local Government Act 1972 to allow both (a) council meetings and (b) annual parish council meetings to use modern technology as an alternative to face to face meetings to tackle the spread of covid-19.

Mr Simon Clarke:

It is vital that local authorities can continue to function effectively as the country responds to covid-19. Following last week's announcement that local authority elections will be postponed until May 2021, we are considering bringing forward legislation to remove the requirement for annual council and parish council meetings.

Councils already have powers to delegate functions, but we are considering whether – for a limited period - to enable use of video or tele-conferencing to facilitate decision making on those limited matters which currently require committee or full council decisions. We would of course also consider appropriate safeguards to ensure transparency and democratic accountability.

■ **Private Rented Housing: Older People**

Louise Haigh:

[\[29993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to Age UK's publication entitled Home Truths, published January 2020, what plans he has to support older people in the private rented sector in the upcoming renters' reform Bill.

Christopher Pincher:

[Holding answer 19 March 2020]: As announced in the Queen's Speech, the Government plans to introduce a package of reforms to deliver a better deal for renters and a fairer and more effective rental market. The Renters' Reform Bill will enhance renters' security and improve protections for short-term tenants by abolishing 'no-fault' evictions. This will include repealing Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 and represents a generational change in the law that governs private renting. Our recent consultation, 'A New Deal for Renting: Resetting the balance of rights and responsibilities between landlords and tenants' sought views from across the private and social rented sectors on how the new system should operate, in order to ensure that we get the details right and create a new framework which works for everyone. We welcome the consultation response submitted by Age UK, which highlights the experience of a range of tenants who rent their homes in the private rented sector, including older people. Almost 20,000 responses to the consultation were received and these are being carefully considered to help inform the Renters' Reform Bill.

■ Temporary Accommodation: Coronavirus**Andrew Gwynne:**[\[29886\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance his Department has issued to local authorities on the responsibility to provide temporary accommodation to visitors visiting that local authority area who need to self-isolate immediately as a result of the risk of passing on a covid-19 infection.

Christopher Pincher:

[Holding answer 19 March 2020]: The Government is clear that if an individual is experiencing the symptoms of coronavirus – a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, the current guidance is to self-isolate for 7 days from when their symptoms started. A visitor from outside a local authority area should endeavour to do so in the accommodation they had arranged for themselves upon arrival.

If the individual is not living alone, the whole household must also self-isolate for 14 days.

This guidance is being constantly reviewed as the situation changes. Please see here for the updated guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

■ UK Shared Prosperity Fund**Stephen Kinnock:**[\[30061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether it remains the Government's policy to undertake a public consultation on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Mr Simon Clarke:

The Government has committed to create the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as the successor to EU structural funds. The fund will bind together the whole of the United Kingdom, tackling inequality and deprivation in each of our four nations.

The Government recognises the importance of reassuring local areas on the future of local growth funding and of providing clarity on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Government officials have been working closely with interested parties and will continue to do so as we develop the fund. Officials have held 26 engagement events in total, including 25 across the UK and one in Gibraltar. These were attended by over five hundred representatives from a breadth of sectors and designed to aid the development of the fund.

We will publish a Devolution White Paper setting out our strategy to unleash the potential of our regions, which will include plans for spending and local growth funding.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**■ Developing Countries: Health Services****Wendy Chamberlain:**[\[29299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, in which month her Department plans to publish its health systems strengthening position paper.

Wendy Morton:

Our support for low-income countries to scale up quality health services and achieve universal health coverage is central to the UK government's manifesto commitment to build on existing efforts to end preventable deaths of mothers, new-born babies and children by 2030. Publication of the health systems strengthening position paper must therefore be coordinated with other information on how the UK government will deliver this manifesto commitment. We are committed to publishing the health systems strengthening position paper but the exact month cannot be determined until this other information is available.

■ Maldives: Overseas Aid**Dan Jarvis:**[\[28006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether she plans to allocate aid to the Maldives to support policy in relation to (a) rising sea levels and (b) human displacement.

Nigel Adams:

The UK does not have a bilateral aid programme related to climate change in the Maldives. Most of our support to the Maldives is provided through multilateral institutions and key climate change funds.

The UK is acutely aware of the unique vulnerabilities that climate change poses to small island developing states, such as the Maldives, and we are actively using our influence in the UN and multilateral development banks to raise their concerns on issues such as natural disasters and climate change.

We are the largest contributor to the Green Climate Fund and the World Bank's International Development Association, the largest European donor to the Asian Development Fund, and a significant contributor to the Green Environment Facility, which are all helping the most vulnerable countries like the Maldives adapt to climate change, including human displacement and risks related to rising sea levels.

■ Overseas Aid: Teachers

Stephen Crabb: [\[28577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what processes her Department uses to monitor the content of teacher training programmes funded by Official Development Assistance.

Wendy Morton:

The Department for International Development is committed to promoting evidence-based approaches to teacher training. This is also part of our Manifesto pledge to ensure that all girls around the world receive 12 years of quality education.

In all cases we conduct risk assessments and spot checks of teacher training content and assess the risk of contentious materials. Further monitoring is determined on a programme basis depending on the country context, the extent of UKAid funding and the training provider. This can include visits to teacher training sessions and independent reviews of training materials conducted by third parties.

JUSTICE

■ Courts: Coronavirus

Helen Hayes: [\[30089\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the likelihood of court closures in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Philp:

HMCTS is operating a robust contingency plan which aims to deliver as much business as possible throughout this outbreak. Any necessary temporary closures will be managed in accordance with the plan and with essential court and tribunal services prioritised.

■ Debt Collection: Regulation

Dan Jarvis: [\[30068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans his Department has to introduce a body to oversee the regulation of the bailiff industry.

Dan Jarvis: [\[30069\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of establishing an independent body to regulate the bailiff industry.

Dan Jarvis: [\[30070\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of regulations governing the work of enforcement officers.

Alex Chalk:

The Ministry of Justice is currently reviewing the implementation of reforms, contained in the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 and introduced in 2014, which govern how enforcement agents (bailiffs) enforce debt.

We held a call for evidence to inform our review, which ran from November 2018 to February 2019. This sought views on the effectiveness of the current regulations and whether further regulation was required.

In a Written Ministerial Statement made on 22 July 2019, the Department set out its initial response to the call for evidence. This included a commitment to taking forward work to make it mandatory for private enforcement agents to use body-worn cameras and to provide guidance about their use. The Department also said that we would consider further how regulation of the sector might be strengthened but we are clear that any further regulation must be effective, proportionate and sustainable.

We will respond in full to the call for evidence in due course.

■ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Compensation

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[29840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much money has been disbursed from the public purse in compensation by his Department's Complex Cases Review Team in the last 12 months.

Alex Chalk:

Claims for compensation for a miscarriage of justice under section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 are dealt with by the Ministry of Justice Application Service. In the last 12 months, the department paid out £10,000 in compensation.

■ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Staff

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[29839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, which officials of his Department sit on his Department's Complex Cases Review Team.

Alex Chalk:

The Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), is an independent body, established by the Criminal Appeals Act 1995, to investigate possible miscarriages of justice in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

No officials from the Ministry of Justice are members of the CCRC.

All CCRC Commissioners are independent from Government and the Civil Service.

Commissioners are appointed by Her Majesty the Queen on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. Appointments to the CCRC are made in line with the principles of the Cabinet Office's Governance Code on Public Appointments and are regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

■ **Evictions: Coronavirus**

Helen Hayes: [\[30090\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what support he plans to provide to people who are served with eviction notices to ensure that due process is followed and they have access to justice in the event of court closures as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Chris Philp:

Emergency legislation is due to be laid to suspend new evictions from social or private rented accommodation while this national emergency is taking place.

Furthermore, no new possession proceedings will start during this time.

■ **Prisoners' Release: Coronavirus**

Mary Glendon: [\[29947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the viability of releasing low-risk prisoners to ease overcrowding during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mary Glendon: [\[29948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the viability of using prison ships to ease overcrowding during the covid-19 outbreak.

Lucy Frazer:

We have no plans to release prisoners or to use prison ships in response to the Covid-19 outbreak.

HMPPS is doing everything it can to prevent the spread of COVID-19, based on the very latest scientific and medical advice. We are working closely with Public Health England, the NHS and the Department of Health and Social Care to manage the challenges we face.

In line with broader clinical advice, HMPPS has introduced a procedure for the protective isolation of individuals in prison custody when it is considered that they may be potentially infected with the virus.

Our capacity to isolate prisoners varies across the estate depending on the type of establishment, its configuration and the category of prisoner held. Each establishment has in place local contingency plans setting out how it will manage should isolation of prisoners be necessary.

People in prison custody who become unwell have the benefit of on-site NHS healthcare services which provide the first line assessment and treatment response.

HMPPS has worked closely with our partners in the NHS to make arrangements for transfer to hospital should an individual be sufficiently unwell to require hospital admission, building on our business as usual procedures for access to healthcare.

■ Prisons: Coronavirus

Richard Burgon: [\[30086\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans he has to redeploy prison staff to cover front-line prison services during the covid-19 outbreak.

Richard Burgon: [\[30087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of releasing low-risk prisoners to ease overcrowding during the course of the covid-19 outbreak.

Lucy Frazer:

HMPPS is doing everything it can to prevent the spread of COVID-19, based on the very latest scientific and medical advice. We are working closely with Public Health England, the NHS and the Department of Health and Social Care to manage the challenges we face.

The safety and wellbeing of staff, prisoners and visitors is paramount and at the heart of our approach.

We have robust contingency plans in place, which are informed by advice from Public Health authorities. Part of our contingency planning involves the ability to deploy staff flexibly. We are taking steps to boost staff availability so that we can look after prisoners properly and minimise the impacts on regimes of staff absences.

We are not planning to release prisoners in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

■ Prisons: Pepper Spray

Mary Glendon: [\[28643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many times has PAVA been deployed in each prison in each of the last 12 months.

Lucy Frazer:

PAVA spray is being provided to all band 3-5 staff in the adult male estate and it is currently being rolled out across the estate. Staff need appropriate training to use PAVA and only prisons who have the key worker scheme – which is vital in building relationships between offenders and staff – will receive it.

The following uses of PAVA have been recorded in the last 12 months;

4 PILOT SITES WERE LIVE: MARCH 2019***PAVA Drawn OR Used***

Hull	2
Wealstun	1
Risley	2
Preston	0

Live: April 2019 - Feb 2020

Drawn (not used)	Used	
Hull	0	10
Wealstun	1	6
Risley	7	20
Preston	6	13

Live: October 2019 - Feb 2020

Brinsford	0	1
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Live: December 2019 - Feb 2020

Hindley	1	2**
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*pre-April 2019 the collection system did not ask staff to distinguish between PAVA being drawn and/or being used.

**accidental uses by staff with no prisoners present.

■ Prisons: Restraint Techniques

Mary Glendon: [\[28644\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many times have rigid handcuffs been used in each prison in each of the last 12 months.

Lucy Frazer:

Rigid bar handcuffs are being rolled out to all band 3-5 staff in the adult male estate.

Data on the number of times that rigid bar handcuffs have been used is recorded locally. As we do not currently hold this information centrally, we are unable to provide the number of times that these have been used in prisons. However, we are piloting the use of a Digital Tool for establishments to record this and other Use of Force data, which will improve our ability to interrogate and extract any relevant data, such as this.

Rigid bar handcuffs are only one of the tools we are giving prison officers to help them do their job more safely. This also includes body worn cameras and PAVA spray.

■ Reading Prison

Matt Rodda:

[\[30022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, when he plans to announce the preferred bidder in relation to the sale of Reading Prison.

Lucy Frazer:

There are no plans to formally announce the preferred bidder or details of the bid until the sale has completed. We expect to make an announcement about the sale in the summer.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

■ Divisions: Coronavirus

Dr Dan Poulter:

[\[29887\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of using alternative voting methods in the House of Commons during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg:

I refer my Hon. Friend to the answer I gave him yesterday in response to question 29207.

PRIME MINISTER

■ Sign Language: Television

Drew Hendry:

[\[30049\]](#)

To ask the Prime Minister, what assessment he has made of the merits of providing British Sign Language during live televised statements.

Wes Streeting:

[\[30105\]](#)

To ask the Prime Minister, if he will make British Sign Language interpretation available at televised briefings on covid-19 at the earliest opportunity.

Boris Johnson:

Following discussions with the BBC, they have confirmed they will provide a sign language service during official statements for the foreseeable future.

SCOTLAND■ **Sovereignty: Scotland**

Owen Thompson: [\[28634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, whether he plans to publish a response to the report entitled, Scotland's Right to Choose: Putting Scotland's Future in Scotland's Hands, published by the Scottish Government on 19 December 2019.

Owen Thompson: [\[28635\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, whether the exercise of Scottish self-determination expressed in the Claim of Right 1989 is contingent on the consent of the UK Government.

Owen Thompson: [\[28636\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what criteria the Government uses to inform decision-making on whether to enable a second independence referendum in Scotland.

Mr Alister Jack:

The Prime Minister wrote to the First Minister of Scotland on 14 January 2020 to confirm he cannot agree to any request for a transfer of power from the UK Parliament to the Scottish Parliament that would lead to further independence referendums. The letter, which is published on gov.uk, sets out that the Prime Minister carefully considered and noted the arguments for such a transfer of power and makes clear that the UK Government will continue to uphold the democratic decision of the Scottish people who voted decisively in 2014 to remain part of the United Kingdom. The UK Parliament has demonstrated its endorsement of the principles of the Claim of Right 1989 by legislating for the existence of the new Scottish Parliament and with significant deepening of devolution since then.

TRANSPORT■ **A47: Accidents**

James Wild: [\[30053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many (a) fatalities, (b) serious injuries and (c) minor injuries there were as a result of road traffic accidents on (i) dualled and (ii) non-dualled sections of the A47 in each year since 2010.

Rachel Maclean:

The number of fatalities, seriously injured casualties and slightly injured casualties in reported road accidents on the A47 by road type since 2010 can be found in the table below.

CASUALTIES IN REPORTED ROAD ACCIDENTS ON THE A47, BY ROAD TYPE AND SEVERITY¹, 2010 - 2018

Road type	Severity	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Dual carriageway	Fatal	3	5	1	1	3	2	4	4	1
	Serious	23	9	12	6	23	12	17	16	20
	Slight	116	118	113	112	105	104	125	120	139
Single carriageway	Fatal	9	14	10	10	6	6	4	3	6
	Serious	29	41	22	35	42	40	37	27	50
	Slight	240	247	257	229	208	222	294	265	277
Other ²	Fatal	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Serious	7	4	7	9	6	4	9	4	8
	Slight	77	82	68	90	78	93	59	55	59

Source: DfT, STATS19

1. as reported by the police

2. includes one way streets, roundabouts, slip roads and unknown road type

Since 2016, changes in severity reporting systems for a large number of police forces mean that serious injury figures, and to a lesser extent slight injuries, as reported by the police are not comparable with earlier years.

■ Belfast City Airport: Air Routes

Stephen Farry:

[\[28114\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the collapse of Flybe, what steps he is taking to ensure that available slots between London area airports and Belfast are not replaced by flights to other routes.

Kelly Tolhurst:

Her Majesty's Government recognises that airports are vital for local economies, providing domestic and global connectivity, employment opportunities, and a hub for

local transport. We have been working closely with airports and airlines to encourage them to act quickly to fill routes which are vital for local communities and businesses, including those in Belfast.

A review of Regional Air Connectivity was recently announced to ensure all nations and regions of the UK have the domestic transport connections local communities rely on. Her Majesty's Government plays no part in, and through regulations is legally prevented from intervening in, the airport slot allocation process. Whilst there is no role for Government to play in this matter, it is in the interest of UK consumers that all airport slots are used efficiently.

■ Bus Services

Lilian Greenwood:

[\[29895\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 27 February 2020 to Question 19852 on bus services, what external persons and bodies he (a) has met with and (b) plans to meet with to develop his plans for the National Bus Strategy.

Rachel Maclean:

Our National Bus Strategy, which was announced alongside the 'Better Deal for Bus Users' package, aims to transform bus services across the country. We intend to publish the strategy later this year; I am keen to engage widely on our plans. We are currently finalising our approach to this.

■ Bus Services: Concessions

Steve McCabe:

[\[27950\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to ensure equal access to concessionary bus passes throughout the country.

Kelly Tolhurst:

There are no current plans to change the concessionary bus travel arrangements in England.

Concessionary travel is a devolved policy area. This means that there are separate schemes in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the administrative arrangements are entirely separate.

Eligibility for the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) is linked to the state pension age. The ENCTS costs around £1 billion annually, so any changes, such as extending free bus travel to those who are not yet eligible for the ENCTS, need to be carefully considered for their impact on the scheme's financial sustainability.

■ Dore and Topley Station

Olivia Blake: [\[30209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what his department's expected timescale is for work to (a) start and (b) be completed on restoration of the second platform at Dore & Topley station through National Rail's Hope Valley Capacity Scheme.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Network Rail are part way through a procurement process to appoint a supplier to carry out detailed designs and deliver the scheme. They are working with the train operators to assess the best way to deliver the works during Control Period 6 (2019-2024) with the least disruption to customers. I am expecting Network Rail's Final Business Case for the scheme over the course of the summer after which I will be able to say more about specific delivery dates of the scheme's components in the Autumn.

■ High Speed 2 Railway Line

Jeremy Wright: [\[29896\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what effect the Court of Appeal judgment of 27 February 2020 on Heathrow expansion and the need to take into account climate change goals has on the progress of High Speed Two.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Government is still considering the full implications of the recent Heathrow judgement and what impacts, if any, it might have on other projects such as HS2. It is a complex and important judgment which the Government will need time to consider carefully.

HS2 is due to play a key part in the transition to a net-zero carbon UK economy by 2050. HS2 will offer some of the lowest carbon emissions per passenger km – seven times less than passenger cars and 17 times less than domestic air travel in 2030. By providing a cleaner, greener way to travel, HS2 will help cut the number of cars and lorries on our roads, cut demand for domestic flights, and help the country's fight against climate change.

■ High Speed 2 Railway Line: Oxenholme

Tim Farron: [\[28601\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to introduce a stop for High Speed Two at Oxenholme station.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Department has awarded the West Coast Partnership franchise to First Trenitalia. As well as operating existing conventional services, they are also acting as the Shadow Operator for HS2 services. In this role they will provide advice to the Department regarding the optimum train service that should operate on the West Coast Main Line once HS2 opens, to best serve towns and cities on the route, based

on their knowledge and analysis of passenger demand. A final decision on train services will not be made until the appropriate timetable development process begins.

■ Lakes Railway Line: Electrification

Tim Farron: [\[28600\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to electrify the Lakes Line between Oxenholme and Windermere.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

A decision on whether to proceed with developing the next phase of a potential battery electric traction scheme is currently under consideration.

It should also be noted that the local stakeholder priority is for a passing loop to enable a two-trains per hour service using the current new build rolling stock rather than either battery trains or electrification with the current service pattern.

■ Midland Main Railway Line: Electrification

Alberto Costa: [\[29270\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans his Department has to electrify the Midland Mainline from London to Leicester.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

We are currently investing in the biggest upgrade of the Midland Main Line since it was completed in 1870. From December 2020, there will be faster journeys in the peak and more seats, with a fleet of brand new bi-mode trains starting service in 2022.

As part of the upgrade, electrification is currently planned to extend from London to Kettering in 2020, and subsequently Market Harborough, subject to design. Network Rail's Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy, currently being developed, will identify the other areas of the network likely to need electrification to decarbonise the railway.

■ Ports: Coronavirus

Hywel Williams: [\[29836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps the Government is taking to help reduce disruption to British ports as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Kelly Tolhurst:

The Government has a programme of ongoing engagement with ports associations and individual ports, to ensure that there is as little interruption as possible to the flow of goods in and out of the UK. The security and safety of seafarers and port workers continues to be protected.

■ Rail Review

Lilian Greenwood:

[\[29894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 27 February 2020 to Question 19851 on the Rail Review, on what date the Williams Rail Review was delivered to his Department; and for what reason the Government has not made a statement on that Review.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Williams Rail Review's recommendations are currently being finalised by their independent chair, Keith Williams, working with the Department. We intend to publish these recommendations before the summer recess as a government white paper to allow us to implement the reforms as soon as possible.

■ Railway Stations: Access

Neil Coyle:

[\[28688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many train stations will (a) become step-free and (b) acquire an accessible toilet changing place through Access for All funding.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

So far, more than 200 stations have been made step free through the programme, with a further 1500 receiving smaller scale access improvements. By 2024 more than 100 additional stations will receive a step free route, and 11 will acquire an accessible toilet, 2 of which will be changing places toilets.

■ Railways: Harassment

Lee Anderson:

[\[28764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to protect train conductors from abuse and harassment in their work environment.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The question of workplace safety and wellbeing is a matter for rail employers to address with their staff. However, the Department works with the British Transport Police (BTP), including on joint initiatives such as the secure stations scheme, to tackle crime on the railways in Great Britain.

As part of its work to tackle violent crime, BTP also undertakes activity to address violence against staff specifically and holds a work place violence group with industry representative to identify and share best practice on a national basis. This includes supporting the use of Body-Worn Video (BWV) by front line staff and establishing consistent conflict awareness training for staff.

■ Roads: Don Valley**Nick Fletcher:** [\[28765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to paragraph 1.132 of the Budget 2020 Red Book, how much funding will local authorities in Don Valley receive to repair potholes.

Rachel Maclean:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget 2020 that £500 million is being made available in 2020/21 to local highway authorities in England, outside London, to repair potholes. Yorkshire and the Humber's share is £53.3 million. The Department will shortly publish details of the individual funding allocations we are making available.

■ Roads: Shrewsbury**Daniel Kawczynski:** [\[29971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he plans to allocate funding to Shropshire council to begin the planning phase and construction of the north west relief road.

Rachel Maclean:

The Department has provided £3.5m development funding to Shropshire Council in 2019/20 from the £54.4m contribution Ministers approved in March 2019 for the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road. Officials will continue to work with the Council as they develop their final business case which is due to be submitted to the Department in December 2021.

■ Shipping: Apprentices**Karl Turner:** [\[29211\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 11 March 2020 to Question 25091, on Shipping: Apprentices, how many (a) deck, (b) engine and (c) catering rating apprentice starts there were in 2018-19; and, with reference to the UK Seafarer Projections 2016 commissioned by his Department, what comparative assessment he has made of the (i) current supply of newly trained ratings and (ii) projected demand from industry in each of the next four years.

Kelly Tolhurst:

Apprenticeship policy is a matter for the Department for Education. The statistics for apprenticeship numbers are published online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships#apprenticeship-starts-and-achievements>

The number of apprenticeship starts for ratings in 2018-19 were (a) 45

Deck (Able Seafarer) and (b) 125 Engine Room Rating. Maritime caterer was not approved in time to appear in the 2018-19 data. No comparative assessment has

been made of the current supply or projected demand for ratings. However, there has been encouraging uptake in apprenticeships in the Maritime sector. Government data shows the number of starts on maritime apprenticeships more than doubled between 2014-15 and 2017-18.

My Department continues to work with industry to support maritime apprenticeships for both seafaring and shore-based roles.

Karl Turner:

[29212]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 11 March 2020 to Question 25091, on Shipping: Apprentices, what the number of maritime apprentice starts was in 2018-19; and what assessment his Department has made of the annual demand for seafarers in the offshore energy sector in each of the next 10 years.

Kelly Tolhurst:

Apprenticeship policy is a matter for the Department for Education. The statistics for apprenticeship numbers are published online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships#apprenticeship-starts-and-achievements>

There were 344 maritime apprenticeship starts in 2018-19. No assessment has been made of the annual demand for seafarers in the offshore energy sector.

TREASURY

■ Alternative Fuels: Wales

Ben Lake:

[30149]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether there will be a Barnett consequential to the Welsh Government from the Green Gas Levy.

Steve Barclay:

We are working towards the future Green Gas Levy scheme being GB-wide, subject to further engagement with the devolved administrations. This engagement will cover how the Welsh Government receives a share of the funding.

The government will be publishing a consultation on the new scheme in due course.

■ Business: Coronavirus

Tommy Sheppard:

[R] [30146]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he plans to take to ensure that insurance companies accept covid-19 as a legitimate claim for businesses when as a result of the recent emergence of that virus it is not named on their policy.

John Glen:

The Chancellor has made clear that, for those businesses which have an appropriate policy that covers pandemics and unspecified notifiable diseases, as well as government-ordered closure, the government's medical advice of 16 March is

sufficient to allow businesses to make a claim against their insurance, provided the other terms and conditions in their policy are met.

In addition, the FCA's rules require insurers to handle claims fairly and promptly; provide reasonable guidance to help a policyholder make a claim, and appropriate information on its progress; not reject a claim unreasonably; and settle claims promptly once settlement terms are agreed.

However, most businesses have not purchased insurance that covers pandemic related losses. As such, any affected businesses should note the government's full package of support.

The government is in continual dialogue with the insurance sector about its contribution to handling this unprecedented situation.

■ Carbon Capture and Storage: Finance

Alan Brown:

[\[28090\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 1.240 on page 62 of the 2020 Budget Red Book, what the timescales are for the allocation of funds from the CCS Infrastructure Fund to selected carbon capture and storage clusters.

Steve Barclay:

At Budget, the Government announced it will create a Carbon Capture and Storage Infrastructure Fund to establish CCS in at least two sites, one by the mid 2020s and another by 2030. The Government will work collaboratively with all potential projects, guided by value for money criteria, before taking decisions on how the Fund will be allocated. Further detail on the Fund and its delivery will be announced by the Comprehensive Spending Review, informed by engagement with all potential projects.

Alan Brown:

[\[28091\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference paragraph 1.240 on page 62 of the 2020 Budget Red Book, what criteria will be used to select a carbon capture and storage cluster for funding from the proposed CCS Infrastructure Fund.

Steve Barclay:

At Budget, the Government announced it will create a Carbon Capture and Storage Infrastructure Fund to establish CCS in at least two sites, one by the mid 2020s and another by 2030. The Government will work collaboratively with all potential projects, guided by value for money criteria, before taking decisions on how the Fund will be allocated. Further detail on the Fund and its delivery will be announced by the Comprehensive Spending Review, informed by engagement with all potential projects.

Alan Brown:

[\[28092\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 1.240 of the Budget 2020 Red Book, HC 121, for what reason only one carbon capture and storage cluster is planned to be operational by the mid-2020s.

Steve Barclay:

The government recognises the important role that CCS could play in securing a low carbon future for UK industry. It is why we have created a CCS Infrastructure Fund of at least £800 million to support the establishment of CCS in two or more industrial clusters. It is important that our path to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 is achieved cost-effectively and in a way that is value for money for consumers and taxpayers. Further detail on the Fund and the delivery of it will be announced by the Comprehensive Spending Review, informed by engagement with all potential projects.

Alan Brown:[\[28093\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 1.240 of the Budget 2020 Red Book, what the timescale is for determining the revenue stream funding model from consumer subsidies.

Steve Barclay:

The Budget said that the UK's first power for carbon capture usage and storage (CCS) plant will be running by the mid-2020s and funded by consumer subsidies. The government consulted in September 2019 on potential business models for carbon capture usage and storage (CCS). BEIS will respond to this consultation in due course.

Climate Change Levy: Wales**Ben Lake:**[\[30150\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment his department has made of the potential merits of devolving the Climate Change Levy to the Welsh Government.

Jesse Norman:

The Treasury keeps all taxes under review. As part of this process, it considers the advice and recommendations of experts. In 2012, the Silk Commission recommended that the Climate Change Levy should not be devolved.

Debts: Dudley**Marco Longhi:**[\[30044\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to help people in Dudley with problem debt.

John Glen:

The government is committed to supporting people in problem debt. We have established the Money and Pensions Service to provide free-to-use support on all aspects of people's financial lives and have increased public funding for free professional debt advice to almost £56m this year, providing support to 560,000 people in England.

But there is more to do to support people who fall into problem debt. We are delivering a 60-day breathing space period that will see enforcement action from

creditors halted and interest frozen for people with problem debt. We expect over 700,000 people to benefit from breathing space in its first year alone.

And to help prevent debt problems, the government is bringing together the UK's world-leading fintech sector with community and social lenders through the Affordable Credit Challenge Fund to develop technological solutions that raise awareness of and access to affordable credit as an alternative to high-cost lenders.

■ Emergency Services: Vehicles

Dr Luke Evans: [\[28010\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of provisions of the Finance Act 2017 due to be implemented in 2020 on potential additional costs for emergency service personnel using their own vehicles to attend emergencies.

Jesse Norman:

New rules for valuing the taxable benefit of the use of assets were introduced in April 2017. As these might have adversely affected a small number of individuals using emergency vehicles for private use, the Government introduced transitional arrangements in 2018 so that the previous basis for valuing any benefit for users of emergency vehicles would apply until April 2020.

In addition, the Government extended the existing tax exemption for users of emergency vehicles to include ordinary commuting. Where the only private use of the vehicle is for ordinary commuting or for journeys made while on call, there is no income tax liability.

Employers and employees have had time to review any contractual arrangements for the provision of an emergency vehicle for private use and have had the option to limit private use of the vehicle so that it is compatible with the extended tax exemption.

This legislation applies where an individual is using an emergency vehicle provided by their employer and not to individuals using their own vehicles.

■ Employee Ownership

Jessica Morden: [\[29950\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to protect participants in employee share ownership schemes from losing the tax relief they would otherwise be entitled to where a trustee acts in breach of trust; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

A breach of trust can occur if a trustee does any act which he ought not to do, or fails to do any act which he ought to do, with regard to the administration of the trust or the beneficial interests arising under the trust.

Beneficiaries that suffer a loss as a result of a breach of trust should consider action against the trustees.

■ Leave: Coronavirus**Stuart C McDonald:**[\[30106\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what support he plans to make available for employees who are requested or required to take unpaid leave as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has announced a wide-ranging package of measures to support employees affected by Covid-19.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) will now be available for individuals diagnosed with Covid-19 or those who are unable to work because they are self-isolating in line with government guidance. This is in addition to the change announced by the Prime Minister that SSP will be payable from day one instead of day four for affected individuals.

Those who are not eligible for SSP can now more easily make a claim for Universal Credit or Contributory Employment and Support Allowance:

- For the duration of the outbreak, the requirements of the Universal Credit Minimum Income Floor will be temporarily relaxed for those who have Covid-19 or are self-isolating, ensuring self-employed claimants will receive support. -
- People will be able to claim Universal Credit and access advance payments upfront without the current requirement to attend a jobcentre if they are advised to self-isolate.
- Contributory Employment and Support Allowance will be payable, at a rate of £73.10 a week for those over 25, for eligible people affected by COVID-19 or self-isolating in line with advice from day one of sickness, rather than day eight.

From Friday 20 March onwards, those who are advised to self-isolate will be able to obtain an "isolation note" by contacting NHS 111, rather than by visiting a doctor.

The Budget also announced a £500 million Hardship Fund to help Local Authorities to support economically vulnerable people and households.

Banks and building societies are also ready and able to support consumers affected by Covid-19. On 17 March, the Chancellor announced on behalf of the sector that banks and building societies will offer a 3-month 'mortgage holiday' for borrowers that are financially struggling with their repayments. This forbearance measure will enable affected borrowers to defer their mortgage payments for up to three months while they get back on their feet. Customers who are concerned about the current financial situation should get in touch with their lender at the earliest possible opportunity.

■ Mortgages: Coronavirus**Julian Sturdy:** [\[29215\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to ensure banks offer flexibility in meeting monthly mortgage repayments to households whose finances may be disrupted by the economic effect of covid-19.

John Glen:

Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) rules set out requirements that mortgage lenders are expected to treat borrowers fairly and show forbearance when customers are in financial difficulty. The Government has made sure that repossession is always a last resort after other reasonable attempts to resolve the position have failed.

Banks and building societies are ready and able to support consumers impacted by COVID-19. On the 17 March, the Chancellor announced on behalf of the sector that banks and building societies will offer a 3-month 'mortgage holiday' for borrowers that are financially struggling with their repayments. This forbearance measure will enable affected borrowers to defer their mortgage payments for up to 3 months while they get back on their feet. Customers who are concerned about the current financial situation should get in touch with their lender at the earliest possible opportunity.

■ Off-payroll Working**Mr Stephen Morgan:** [\[28020\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of changes to IR35 legislation on contractors' ability to secure work.

Mr Stephen Morgan: [\[28021\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of IR35 changes on the contractor workforce on the ability of the Government to complete major infrastructure projects.

Jesse Norman:

The Tax Information and Impact Note (TIIN) published in July 2019 sets out HMRC's assessment that the reform to the off-payroll working rules is expected to affect 170,000 individuals. The TIIN can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rules-for-off-payroll-working-from-april-2020/rules-for-off-payroll-working-from-april-2020>.

On 17 March 2020, the Government announced that the reform to the off-payroll working rules that would have applied for people contracting their services to large or medium-sized organisations outside the public sector will be delayed for one year from 6 April 2020 until 6 April 2021.

This is part of additional support for businesses and individuals to deal with the economic impacts of Covid-19. This means that the different rules that exist for inside and outside the public sector will continue to apply until 6 April 2021.

This announcement is a deferral of the introduction of the reforms, not a cancellation. The Government remains committed to introducing this policy to ensure that people working like employees, but through their own limited company, pay broadly the same tax as individuals who are employed directly.

■ Prisons: Wales

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[29981\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much additional funding has been allocated to the (a) Welsh Government and (b) other public bodies in Wales in response to the covid-19 outbreak to ensure additional health provisions in prisons in Wales, since 31 January 2020.

Steve Barclay:

The Welsh Government have been provided with over £1.6bn to support people, businesses and public services through COVID-19.

HMPPS is working closely with Public Health Wales, Welsh Government, Public Health England, the NHS and the Department for Health and Social Care to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Alongside existing procedures to manage outbreaks of infectious diseases, HMPPS are ensuring that staff have access to personal protective equipment where necessary and have introduced a procedure for the protective isolation of individuals in custody when it is considered that they may be infected with the virus. HMPPS are also working with prison health teams in Wales to ensure that there is a joint approach to any incidents.

■ Public Expenditure: Scotland

Alan Brown:

[\[28089\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 1.161 on page 50 of the 2020 Budget Red Book, if he will publish details of the derivation of the extra £640 million to the Scottish budget for (a) capital and (b) revenue; and in which financial years that money will be allocated to the Scottish Government.

Steve Barclay:

HM Treasury's Block Grant Transparency publication sets out the breakdown of changes in the devolved administration block grants, including all Barnett consequentials. The next edition of the Block Grant Transparency is due to be published later in the Spring on the gov.uk website and will include details of the Barnett consequentials announced at Budget 2020.

All £640 million of Barnett consequentials for the Scottish Government announced at Budget 2020 relate to financial year 2020-21 and are on top of the £1.3 billion of Barnett consequentials for 2020-21 provided at Spending Round 2019.

Public Expenditure: Wales**Jonathan Edwards:** [\[29928\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how the £360 million Barnett allocation for Wales arising from Budget 2020 was calculated.

Steve Barclay:

As set out in the Statement of Funding Policy, the Barnett formula was applied where Budget measures changed UK government Departmental Expenditure Limits. Barnett consequentialia were generated for the Welsh Government where measures related to programmes that are devolved in Wales.

Jonathan Edwards: [\[29929\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the Barnett consequential payment will be to Wales arising from the £3,000 grant to be made available to English businesses as part of the Government's response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Steve Barclay:

From the measures announced to support to people, businesses and public services affected by COVID-19 the devolved administrations will receive over £5.2 billion. In total the UK Government has provided the Welsh Government with £1.6 billion to date.

The funding provided is in addition to the UK-wide support to tackle the impact of COVID-19, such as extending Statutory Sick Pay, making it easier and quicker to access benefits, and providing a Business Interruption Loan Scheme.

Regional Planning and Development: South West**Luke Pollard:** [\[28094\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what representations he received on providing £2 million of seed funding for the Great South West initiative.

Steve Barclay:

We received a wide range of representations at Spring Budget, including from the Great South West. The Chancellor set out our plan at Budget to level up every region and nation of the UK. For the South West, this ranges from major investment in infrastructure, including the A303 Stonehenge, an intra-city transport settlement for West of England from a £4.2bn envelope and the rollout of gigabit broadband, to a cut to National Insurance for over 2.5 million people in the South West.

Small Businesses: Coronavirus**Jess Phillips:** [\[29982\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to offer small business a payment holiday or longer term repayment scheme for VAT contributions during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC already offer help to businesses struggling to meet their VAT payments with arrangements such as Time to Pay. HMRC also have a dedicated helpline for those who cannot pay because of the coronavirus.

In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Chancellor has pledged a range of measures to help business through the crisis, including grants, loans and relief from business rates worth more than £300 billion. The Chancellor will continue to review and make further announcements as events unfold.

■ Tax Avoidance**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[27967\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he plans to take to provide financial assistance to people still affected by the 2019 Loan Charge.

Jesse Norman:

The Government estimates that 50,000 individuals were affected by the Loan Charge and that following the implementation of the Loan Charge Review's recommendations, about 11,000 will be taken out of its scope altogether, and more than 30,000 will benefit from the changes.

In addition to this, HMRC offers Time to Pay arrangements which ensure that taxpayers only pay what they can, when they can, by providing manageable payment terms. In addition to existing arrangements, HMRC will not require payment of more than 50% of disposable income, aside from where taxpayers have very high disposable incomes; and where a taxpayer has no disposable assets and earns less than £50,000, they are automatically entitled to a minimum of a five-year payment plan, and where they earn less than £30,000, a minimum of seven years. HMRC have also announced previously that no taxpayer will be forced to sell their main home to fund a disguised remuneration or Loan Charge tax bill.

■ Tax Avoidance: Suicide**Mr David Davis:**[\[27494\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate his Department has made of the number of people that have died by suicide as a result of the 2019 Loan Charge.

Jesse Norman:

The Government takes concerns over the physical and mental wellbeing of taxpayers very seriously. These cases are complex and typically involve many different factors.

There are no cases in which suicide is known to have been the result of the Loan Charge. HMRC have referred five cases to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) where HMRC have been notified that an individual has taken their life and had used a disguised remuneration scheme.

The IOPC has advised in two of these cases that they felt it was appropriate for HMRC to review the case internally. In the other three, it returned the matter to HMRC to proceed as appropriate.

■ Third Sector: Coronavirus

Wes Streeting: [\[30108\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what financial support he plans to provide to charities and civil society organisations to ensure their (a) effectiveness and (b) solvency during the covid-19 outbreak.

Steve Barclay:

On Tuesday evening, the Chancellor announced £330 billion of guarantees for businesses across the UK and emphasised his commitment to do whatever it takes to see industries through the Covid 19 outbreak.

Many charities and social enterprises will be eligible for the new Business Interruption Loan Scheme for loans of up to £5m, with no interest due for the first six months. While many charities are already eligible for 80% charitable rate relief, they will benefit from the new enhanced retail rate relief at 100%.

Furthermore, a new power in the Covid 19 bill will ensure the Chancellor and HMG as a whole can take whatever further financial actions necessary to support sectors across the economy. The Chancellor has asked cabinet colleagues to urgently convene meetings over the coming days with business leaders and representatives in these affected sectors, in order to identify specific opportunities to support them and their industries.

■ UK trade with EU: Carbon Emissions

Jonathan Gullis: [\[28098\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to ensure that a potential EU carbon border tax is taken into account in negotiations on a free trade agreement between the UK and the EU.

Jonathan Gullis: [\[30839\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to ensure that a potential future EU Carbon Border Tax is taken into account in the UK-EU FTA negotiations.

Jesse Norman:

The UK has set out a clear position on what it is seeking in the negotiations with the EU through the UK Approach to Negotiations publication. The Government wants a relationship based on friendly cooperation with both parties respecting one another's legal autonomy. The Government also wants this relationship to be a long lasting one. Therefore, where relevant, the UK is of course considering any implications of future EU policy proposals on the future relationship agreement.

As a global leader on decarbonisation, the UK recognises the issues that the EU's carbon border adjustment proposal could look to address, and the Government is monitoring the debate on possible designs with interest.

■ Wines

Neil Coyle:

[28054]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with UK-based winemakers on (a) importing and (b) making wines from non-UK grapes after the transition period.

Jesse Norman:

The Government is committed to reviewing the alcohol duty regime. As part of this review, ministers and Treasury officials will continue to meet regularly with representatives of the UK alcohol industry, including winemakers.

Details of ministerial meetings can be found on the GOV.UK website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmt-ministers-meetings-hospitality-gifts-and-overseas-travel>

WALES

■ Local Growth Deals: Wales

Ruth Jones:

[30828]

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on funding for the proposed growth deals for Wales.

Simon Hart:

I have held recent meetings with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and with the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government to discuss a range of issues, including the City and Regional Growth Deals in Wales. The Government is committed to ensuring that these deals deliver economic growth and jobs across the whole of Wales and I will continue to work closely with my colleagues to enable that to happen.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

■ Discrimination

Sir Jeffrey M Donaldson:

[27954]

To ask the Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, what assessment he has made for the implications of her policies of Paragraph 9(1) of Resolution 2318 (2020) of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly on the establishment of appropriate monitoring mechanisms to assess the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation.

Elizabeth Truss:

Resolution 2318 concerns the protection of freedom of religion or belief in the workplace. Domestic anti-discrimination provisions covering religion or belief are contained in the Equality Act 2010. Anyone who feels that they have suffered discrimination because of religion or belief can contact either ACAS, for issues related to the workplace, or the Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS) for non-employment matters. Both services provide free advice to members of the public.

ACAS and the EASS refer appropriate cases to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which is the country's national equality and enforcement body.

Both the EHRC and ACAS have published guidance for employers and employees about religion or belief and the workplace.

■ Employment: Training**Sir Jeffrey M Donaldson:****[27955]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of paragraph 9(4) of resolution 2318 (2020) of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly on the provision of training and advice to public and private employers.

Elizabeth Truss:

Resolution 2318 concerns the protection of freedom of religion or belief in the workplace. Both the Equality and Human Rights Commission and ACAS have published guidance for employers and employees about this matter.

Additionally, ACAS offers online training for employers on religion or belief in the workplace.

The guidance and the online training are available at:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/religion-or-belief-workplace> ; and

<https://elearning.acas.org.uk/login/index.php>

WORK AND PENSIONS**■ Children: Day Care****Tulip Siddiq:****[28682]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of people who claimed support for childcare through universal credit in the last 12 months also applied for (a) advance payment of that benefit or (b) the flexible support fund.

Will Quince:

[Holding answer 17 March 2020]: The Government is committed to helping parents into work and childcare costs should not be a barrier to this.

Universal Credit pays up to 85% of childcare costs, compared to 70% in legacy benefits and can be claimed up to a month before starting a job. In cases where

people need to pay for childcare upfront, prior to starting work, Work Coaches can use the Flexible Support Fund to meet these costs until their first wage is received.

For the 110,000 Universal Credit households with at least one childcare element in payment from December 2018 to November 2019 inclusive, 52,000 (47%) have received an advance payment.

The reasons for advances are not recorded, therefore these could have been utilised for many reasons.

The Department does not hold a breakdown of its Flexible Support Fund expenditure for childcare for the last 12 months.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 1,000.
2. Figures include all types of advances, including advances paid after the first assessment period.
3. Figures provided to November 2019 are in line with published statistics relating to households on Universal Credit.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Disability

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhési: [\[29978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 13 March 2020 to Questions 27006, 27012, and 27014, on Department for Work and Pensions: Disability, whether the review her Department is undertaking will assess (a) the reasons why her Department has lost more employment tribunals for disability discrimination than any other employer since 2016, (b) the potential effect of those losses on the reputation of her Department and (c) the potential effect of trends in the level of cases lost by her Department at employment tribunals for disability discrimination on objective 2 of her Department's single departmental plan.

Mims Davies:

It is possible that these are elements a review would cover, however we would not want to be restrictive and the full scope would need to be agreed as part of the Terms of Reference for a review.

■ Government Departments: Sign Language

Dawn Butler: [\[27968\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment the Government has made of the potential merits of all Government announcements of public importance being accompanied by a BSL interpreter.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Government is committed to ensuring deaf people can fully participate and play a full role in society. We support initiatives aimed at improving understanding of the

needs of deaf people and how the barriers they face can be removed, as well as giving deaf people more say in how they access services.

We are currently in discussions on the best way to ensure that any pertinent announcements are delivered in BSL to ensure that deaf people receive information at the same time as others.

■ **Private Rented Housing: Social Security Benefits**

Afzal Khan: [\[29998\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she has taken to tackle housing advertisements which specify No DSS tenants.

Will Quince:

Everyone should have the same opportunity when looking for a home, regardless of whether they are in receipt of benefits. Blanket bans that do not take account of the individual and their circumstances are unhelpful and should be discouraged.

Last year, I met industry representatives including property advertising platforms, to determine what action can be taken to end this practice. We have since seen positive changes with platforms committing to removing adverts with 'No DSS' wording.

Officials also met the Competition and Marketing Authority to discuss their guidance for lettings professionals which, in October 2019 was updated to state that landlords should not exclude people on the grounds that they are receiving benefits.

We will monitor this situation and continue to engage with stakeholders where necessary.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Coronavirus**

Steve McCabe: [\[29197\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what (a) advice and (b) guidance her Department is providing to claimants of social security benefits on the administration of those (i) claims and (ii) benefits during the covid-19 outbreak; and what such (A) advice and (B) guidance her Department is providing to those claimants at high-risk of developing a severe illness as a result of a covid-19 infection.

Justin Tomlinson:

On 12 March 2020 regulations (The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020) were laid to give effect to the measures outlined in the Budget, designed to help delay the spread of COVID-19 and ensure people are not penalised for doing the right thing. This will represent a boost of almost £500 million to the welfare system and ensure work search and work availability requirements within Universal Credit (UC) are switched off. Affected self-employed claimants will also not have a Minimum Income Floor (as assumed level of income) applied for a period of time within UC.

To avoid increasing the burden on health care professionals and the risk of further infection, we are removing the requirement for fit notes in relation to both

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and UC claims relating to COVID-19 only. In line with current NHS guidance; anyone required to self-isolate or having COVID-19 will be treated as having Limited Capability for Work in ESA and UC without the requirement for medical evidence or undergoing a Work Capability Assessment.

In addition, to better support the needs of people (particularly the self-employed and those not eligible for SSP) and/or not entitled to UC, we are removing the seven waiting days that currently apply to ESA. This means that everyone who makes a new claim for ESA; is entitled to the benefit and is infected with Covid-19 or required to self-isolate will be paid from day one of their claim.

Government officials continue to work closely together to understand the potential impacts of COVID-19 on employment and benefits. The Department has introduced new guidance about claiming benefits which can be found at:

<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

■ Social Security Benefits: Medical Examinations

Steve McCabe:

[29822]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to postpone (a) employment support allowance and (b) personal independence payment assessments during the covid-19 outbreak.

Justin Tomlinson:

We announced on Monday 16 March that, as of Tuesday 17 March, face-to-face assessments for all sickness and disability benefits will be suspended for the next three months, including those for Employment and Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payment. Anyone who has a face-to-face assessment appointment scheduled from Tuesday 17 March onwards does not need to attend and will be contacted to discuss next steps and alternative arrangements, which could involve either telephone or paper-based assessments.

Chris Stephens:

[30000]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to protect sick, elderly or disabled people in receipt of (a) employment support allowance, (b) personal independence payment and (c) universal credit from having to attend mandatory assessments or appointments in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Justin Tomlinson:

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

Chris Stephens:

[30002]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans his Department has to mitigate the risk of delays in processing new applications for (a) personal independence

payment and (b) employment support allowance due to (i) self-isolation or (ii) reduced face to face assessments following the covid-19 outbreak.

Neil Coyle: [\[30056\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that disabled people do not face delays in the absence of face to face assessments as a result of covid-19.

Neil Coyle: [\[30058\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an estimate of the expected average waiting time for (a) personal independence payment (b) employment and support allowance and (c) universal credit (i) phone and (ii) desk-based assessments during the outbreak of covid-19.

Justin Tomlinson:

As announced on Monday 16 March we are stopping all face-to-face assessments for sickness and disability benefits and introducing alternative measures to assess from Tuesday 17 March. We are working at pace with our Assessment Providers to minimize any inconvenience and delays as much as possible.

No estimate has yet been made on the average waiting times for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Universal Credit (UC) while these alternative arrangements are in place. Claims to ESA and UC will be payable prior to a Work Capability Assessment having been carried out and payments for Personal Independence Payment will be backdated from the date of decision in line with normal rules following an assessment.

Neil Coyle: [\[30060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what criteria her Department uses to monitor the accuracy of desk-based benefit assessments.

Justin Tomlinson:

I have interpreted 'desk based' to relate to paper-based assessments whereby the Health Professional has deemed there is enough existing evidence without the need to see the claimant face to face.

Audit, in relation to completed desk based and face to face benefit assessments, refers to a comprehensive check of the elements of the assessment, including the evidence collection, further evidence provided and the assessment report completed by the Health Professional. The check is completed against a set of guidelines to ensure a consistent approach is taken. This ensures that assessment reports are fit for purpose, clinically justified and sound, and provide sufficient information for the department to make a reasonable decision on entitlement to benefit.

■ Statutory Sick Pay

Wes Streeting: [\[30110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason Budget 2020 did not implement the recommendation of the Taylor Review to extend statutory sick pay to include those earning below the lower earnings limit; and if she will make a statement.

Justin Tomlinson:

Our immediate focus is on ensuring that there is an effective financial safety net for individuals. Many of those earning below £118 per week are already in receipt of benefits. If they are on Universal Credit, their award will rise when their income falls. More generally Universal Credit and New Style Employment and Support Allowance exist to support people when they are unable to work because they are ill or isolating.

We consulted last year on the idea of extending Statutory Sick Pay eligibility to those earning below the Lower Earnings Limit, as part of a wider package of measures intended to support people to remain in work and reduce ill-health related job loss. The rationale was about retaining a link between employer and employee. We received a good response from a range of stakeholders. A response to the consultation will be published later this year.

■ Universal Credit

Carla Lockhart: [\[27034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many times her Department has used its discretionary waiver in respect of universal credit overpayments as a result of Departmental error in each of the last three years.

Carla Lockhart: [\[27036\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many times her Department has used its discretionary waiver on health grounds in relation to universal credit overpayments as a result of Departmental error.

Will Quince:

Waivers can only be granted by the Secretary of State where the recovery of an overpayment is causing substantial medical and/or financial hardship, and clear evidence of this can be provided. The discretion to waive benefit overpayments can only be exercised in line with Her Majesty's Treasury's guidance on 'Managing Public Money'.

Prior to the start of 2019/20, the reason that the overpayment occurred (fraud, claimant error or Departmental error) was not recorded on waiver requests. Therefore, for the years 2017/18 and 2018/19, I have instead provided the total number of successful waivers. It is important to note that these may not all have been for overpayments arising as a result of Departmental errors.

In 2017/18, there were no waivers granted for Universal Credit overpayments. In 2018/19, there were 5 waivers granted for Universal Credit overpayments, of these, 4 were granted on medical grounds. In 2019/20 year to date, there were 3 waivers

granted for Universal Credit overpayments, these were all granted on medical grounds.

**The data in this response has been sourced from internal management information and was not intended for public release. It should therefore not be compared to any other, similar data subsequently released by the Department.*

Olivia Blake:

[30210]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what methods his Department will use to contact people receiving legacy benefits as part of the managed migration to universal credit.

Will Quince:

The initial approach is based on using existing relationships that the Department or our partners have with legacy benefit claimants. We are initially identifying claimants for the pilot from those that currently attend the Jobcentre for meetings, in order for Work Coaches to build on existing relationships to prepare claimants to move and to support them through the process. We will establish whether someone is ready to move and explore how we can move them effectively across to Universal Credit (UC).

Since the introduction of UC, claimants have been supported by a more flexible approach regarding contact, with much greater use of digital and telephone channels. This enables claimants to continue to engage with the Department, receive appropriate support and satisfy the conditions of their personalised Claimant Commitment without having to always attend an appointment in person. This approach provides the ability to change or adapt our plans to make sure it is working, and to support vulnerable claimants and those in unusual circumstances.

Olivia Blake:

[30211]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate her Department has made of the additional staff time required for administering managed migration from legacy benefits to universal credit.

Will Quince:

The impact and pressure that moving existing legacy benefit claimants to Universal Credit (UC) will put on the Department is often overstated. Our Move to UC pilot will help to understand any additional support and resources required to migrate claimants to UC, so that we can tailor support for those who need it.

Olivia Blake:

[30212]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps he is taking to ensure that universal credit claims received as part of managed migration are processed within the month-long assessment period.

Will Quince:

Our current Move to Universal Credit (UC) pilot allows work coaches to support claimants and ensures they have the correct evidence to verify their claim in order to ensure they are paid in full and on time.

■ **Women against State Pension Inequality**

Philip Davies:

[\[27980\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will meet with the WASPI campaign group once the Court of Appeal proceedings are over.

Guy Opperman:

The government won on all grounds in the High Court action of this matter - defending the actions of the Coalition government 2010-2015, the labour government 1997-2010 and the Conservative government 1992-1997; the department does not comment on live litigation.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CABINET OFFICE

■ Postponement of electoral events

Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): [\[HCWS174\]](#)

On Friday 13th March, the Prime Minister announced that the scheduled elections in May this year would be postponed by 12 months. The decision to postpone was taken following advice from the Government's medical experts in relation to the response to the Covid-19 virus. Additional risks include to polling station safety, the possible demands on local authority electoral staff to support other key services, and the impracticality or potential impossibility of campaigning activity.

We will shortly be bringing forward measures within the Coronavirus Bill to postpone the scheduled local and mayoral elections due to take place in England and the scheduled Police and Crime Commissioner elections due to take place in England and Wales on 7th May this year until the next ordinary day of election on 6th May 2021. Provisions will also be made to enable the postponement of other electoral events over the course of the year (such as by-elections) and to make necessary consequential amendments associated with the postponement of polls which may, for example, include measures relating to incumbent office holders, the nomination of candidates and election expenses. This includes the particular circumstances of new unitary councils in Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire to ensure the new Buckinghamshire council goes live on 1st April 2020 and that the shadow unitary councils in Northamptonshire are established in May 2020. We understand the Warwick council tax referendum (and the proposed above-threshold tax increase) is not now taking place.

Where the May 2020 scheduled elections have been postponed, the term of current elected representatives will be extended to May 2021. For those elected in 2021 as a result of the postponement their term of office will be three years ending in 2024 rather than four years.

For recall petitions, the timing of a recall poll is prescribed in legislation and any alteration to enable postponement will require the measures being brought forward. The timing of Parliamentary by-elections are within the discretion of the political parties and Speaker and do not require a legislative remedy for postponement.

The Bill will be introduced in Parliament today, however we recognise that there will be a small number of polls between now and the date of Royal Assent which will not be covered by these provisions. We appreciate that this presents difficult and challenging circumstances for Returning Officers and others running polls, who are rightly statutorily independent and responsible for delivering polls. Running a poll in present times is likely to come with significant concerns about the wellbeing of those involved, which may be unfair to both staff and the public. As such it would be both reasonable and consistent with the national position to suspend any poll scheduled within this period, including those due to take place today, Thursday 19th March.

The Government will give its full support to Returning Officers and others running polls who make the decision to suspend their polls. We have consulted with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), who have assured me that prosecution in these circumstances is highly unlikely.

Ensuring the health and safety of the public is our number one priority and I am grateful for the support of the electoral community in helping this effort. We appreciate all of the hard work of Returning Officers and others during these difficult and challenging circumstances.

■ **The European (Withdrawal) Act and Common Frameworks**

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Michael Gove):

[\[HCWS171\]](#)

I am today laying before Parliament a report, 'The European Union (Withdrawal) Act and Common Frameworks: 26 September 2019 to 25 December 2019'. I am laying this report because it is a legal requirement under the EU (Withdrawal) Act 2018 for quarterly reports to be made to Parliament on the progress of the work to develop common frameworks. The report is available on Gov.uk and details the progress made between the UK Government and devolved administrations regarding the development of common frameworks. This report details progress made during the sixth 3-month reporting period, and sets out that no 'freezing' regulations have been brought forward under section 12 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act. A copy of the 'The European Union (Withdrawal) Act and Common Frameworks: 26 September 2019 to 25 December 2019' report has been placed in the library of both Houses. The publication of the report reflects the Government's continued commitment to transparency.

DEFENCE

■ **Armed Forces Update**

Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heapey):

[\[HCWS170\]](#)

A new order has been made under section 56(1B) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to enable Reservists to be called into permanent service to support HM Forces in connection to the UK's response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 coronavirus.

Defence is committed to assisting HMG by ensuring that there are effective and proportionate contingency plans in place to mitigate the potential impacts that the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak might have on the welfare, health and security of UK citizens and economic stability of the UK. Defence is taking prudent steps to ensure that we can provide support to other Government Departments when requested.

As part of this support, Reserve Forces will be on standby to deliver a range of Defence outputs such as (but not limited to): the reinforcement of Regular sub-units, liaison officer roles and the provision of specialist skills. A particularly important role may be the planned reinforcement of Regional Points of Command, to enable their 24/7 operation and resilience. We would also expect Reserves to be drawn upon to support the implementation of contingency plans developed by Other Government Departments.

The order shall take effect from the day on which it is made and shall cease to have effect 12 months from the date on which it is made.

HOME OFFICE

■ **HM Government Transparency Report: Disruptive Powers 2018/19**

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): [\[HCWS172\]](#)

I have today laid before the House the fourth iteration of the Government Transparency Report on the use of disruptive powers (CP 212). Copies of the Report will be made available in the Vote Office and online on gov.uk.

This Government remains committed to increasing the transparency of the work of our security and intelligence and law enforcement agencies, and this next iteration of the Transparency Report is a key part of that commitment.

Publishing this Report ensures that the public are able to access, in one place, a guide to the range of powers used to combat threats to the security of the United Kingdom, the extent of their use and the safeguards and oversight in place to ensure they are used properly.

■ **Report of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation on the operation in 2018 of the Terrorism Acts**

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): [\[HCWS173\]](#)

Jonathan Hall QC, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, has prepared a report on the operation in 2018 of the Terrorism Acts.

In accordance with section 36(5) of the Terrorism Act 2006, I am today laying this report before the House and copies will be available in the Vote Office. It will also be published on GOV.UK.

I am grateful to Mr Hall for his report. I will carefully consider its contents and the recommendations he makes and will respond formally in due course.