



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 16 December 2020 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:34 P.M., 16 December 2020). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ Business: Loans

Anne Marie Morris:

[\[128677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent discussions he has had with representatives from the banking sector on extending the business loan repayment holiday for the duration of the covid-19 outbreak.

Paul Scully:

We recognise that some borrowers will benefit from flexibility for their repayments of Government-guaranteed loans. That is why, on 24 September, my Rt. Hon. Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the Pay As You Grow measures following discussion with lenders.

Pay As You Grow will give all Bounce Back Loan borrowers the option to repay their loan over a period of up to ten years. UK businesses will also have the option to move temporarily to interest-only payments for periods of up to six months (an option which they can use up to three times), or to pause their repayments entirely for up to six months (an option they can use once and only after having made six payments).

These changes will provide greater flexibility to repay these loans over a longer period and in a way that better suits businesses' individual circumstances.

We have also given Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme lenders the ability to extend the length of borrowers' loans from a maximum of six years to ten years if it will help the borrower to repay the loan.

■ Cooperatives

Jim McMahon:

[\[128709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what plans he has to extend the provisions made under the Corporate Insolvency and Governance Act 2020 to cover (a) the holding of AGMs and (b) other aspects co-operative society governance.

Paul Scully:

The Corporate Insolvency and Governance Act 2020 introduced temporary measures to provide companies and other qualifying bodies - including co-operative societies - with flexibilities in the manner in which they conducted general meetings (including annual general meetings) in the light of coronavirus restrictions. Originally due to expire on 30 September 2020, these flexibilities were extended first to 30 December and then again, by regulations laid before Parliament on 25 November, to 30 March 2021.

■ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Public Consultation**Sam Tarry:** [\[127015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what consultation documents his Department has issued in the last five years for which a response by his Department is outstanding .

Amanda Solloway:

All BEIS consultations and Departmental responses can be found on GOV.UK here: https://www.gov.uk/search/policy-papers-and-consultations?parent=department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy&content_store_document_type%5B%5D=closed_consultations&organisations%5B%5D=department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy&order=updated-newest.

■ Employment: Coronavirus**Caroline Lucas:** [\[126814\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will take steps to help ensure workers receive paid time off for covid-19 vaccination appointments; and if he will make a statement.

Paul Scully:

The roll-out of Covid-19 vaccinations is very positive news for the country.

We would strongly encourage employers to ensure their staff are able to take time away from work to receive a vaccination. Employers and employees already manage the need to accommodate work and medical and other appointments pragmatically between themselves, and we would expect that to continue to be the case for people seeking time away from work to receive Covid-19 vaccinations.

■ Horizon 2020**Chi Onwurah:** [\[128674\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, in the event that the UK's participates in the EU Horizon programme after the transition period, how that participation will be funded.

Amanda Solloway:

We have made clear in the R&D Roadmap that we aim to maintain a close and friendly relationship with our European partners, seeking to agree a fair and balanced deal for participation in EU R&D schemes. Negotiations remain ongoing and we will make a final decision once it is clear whether such terms can be reached.

The Government committed in the R&D Roadmap to reaching 2.4% of GDP being spent on R&D across the UK economy by 2027. Investment in R&D will include funding for any continued participation in EU research and innovation Programmes or replacement schemes. The outcome of the Spending Review does not presuppose the outcome of negotiations with the EU.

■ Hydrogen: Finance**Alan Brown:** [\[128697\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has made a decision on funding a Clean Fuels Metrology Centre, and if he will make a statement.

Amanda Solloway:

A decision on whether to fund a Clean Fuels Metrology Centre has not yet been made and will be made next year.

■ Renewable Energy**Taiwo Owatemi:** [\[127005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will take steps to ensure customers who choose green electricity tariffs can (a) locate and (b) verify the renewable power plant from which the electricity company purchase its power.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

The current legislation and licence conditions which underpin green electricity tariffs are based on the regulator (Ofgem) administering the Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin (REGO) certificate accounting scheme to verify the proportion of renewable energy sourced by supplier.

Consumers are able to consult the publicly available Ofgem REGO register to interrogate which certificates their supplier holds and from which renewable power plants they were sourced.

Taiwo Owatemi: [\[127006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether his Department has made an estimate of the number and proportion of energy suppliers selling green tariffs that buy 100 per cent renewable power from renewable generators, rather than purchasing second-hand certificates certifying a renewable energy purchase.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

Supplier procurement strategies for energy and related certificates are a commercial matter and the Government does not have visibility over which companies are utilising the secondary trading of Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin (REGO) certificates to support their green electricity tariff offerings.

■ Research: Capital Investment**Liz Saville Roberts:** [\[126939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much capital spending took place on research and development in 2019 by population share in (a) Wales, (b) Scotland, (c) Northern Ireland and (d) England.

Amanda Solloway:

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is planning to release in spring 2021 estimates of gross domestic expenditure on research and development in 2019 including estimates of R&D performed in different parts of the United Kingdom.

The latest available figures are for 2018: the ONS has estimated R&D performed was £786m in Wales, £2,706m in Scotland, £715m in Northern Ireland, and £32,862m in England. Dividing by the ONS mid-year population estimates would give figures of about £250 for Wales, £498 for Scotland, £380 for Northern Ireland, and £587 for England.

■ Winter Sports: EU Countries**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[126792\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he has taken to ensure UK snowsport instructors can continue to teach in the EU after the transition period.

Andrew Rosindell:[\[126793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent discussions he has had with the UK snowsports industry on the rights of UK instructors to teach in the EU after the transition period.

Paul Scully:

Under the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement, British snow sports instructors who have had their qualifications recognised and who are resident or a frontier worker in the EU Member State that recognised them at the end of the Transition Period, will have that recognition protected and will be able to continue to work there. The recognition of UK professional qualifications across all industries (including snow sports instructors) in the EU after the end of the Transition Period is subject to ongoing negotiations with the EU, and the local laws and regulations in Member States.

The Government is in regular contact with a range of stakeholders to ensure regulatory and professional bodies, and those working in regulated professions, make the necessary preparations ahead of the end of the Transition Period. This includes engagement with the British Association of Snowsport Instructors.

CABINET OFFICE**■ Veterans: Coronavirus****Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**[\[126797\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's news story, New study to understand effect of COVID-19 on veterans, published on 13 June 2020, when he will publish the report into the effect of covid-19 on veterans.

Johnny Mercer:

Results from the study conducted by the Kings' Centre for Military Health Research into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on veterans will be published independently by Kings' College London. The report will be submitted for academic peer review by the end of 2020, with full publication expected in early 2021 after the review process has taken place.

The key themes examined in the report will cover veterans' health, wellbeing and employment. The cohort surveyed has been followed by Kings' College London since 2003, allowing for insightful comparison to previous data concerning the health and wellbeing of veterans.

DEFENCE■ **Armed Forces: Recruitment**

Imran Ahmad Khan: [\[129153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent estimate his Department has made of the cost to the public purse of recruitment per recruit to the armed forces.

James Heapey:

The most recent single Service estimates for the cost of recruitment per successful recruit can be found in the table below. These figures represent the costs incurred from application to commencement of basic training

SERVICE	COST PER RECRUIT	FINANCIAL YEAR
Royal Navy	£13,407	2018-19
Army	£12,228	2018-19
Royal Air Force	£14,642	2019-20

■ **AWACS: Procurement**

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[128095\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, from which countries the two secondhand airframes for the E-7 Wedgetail will be purchased.

Jeremy Quin:

The first two Boeing 737 Next Generation airframes to be modified into Royal Air Force Wedgetail AEW Mark 1 aircraft have been sourced by Boeing from the commercial market through a broker. Further details remain commercially sensitive at this time.

■ Military Aid: Coronavirus**Jonathan Gullis:**[\[129141\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department has taken to ensure that UK operational readiness is unaffected by military assistance to the covid-19 response in (a) Stoke-on-Trent and (b) Staffordshire.

James Heapey:

Defence has taken prudent steps to assure the continued delivery of all its critical outputs. Measures have been put in place to protect critical Force Elements, ensuring that UK operational readiness remains unaffected by military assistance to COVID-19. This includes in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, where Defence has provided three military planners to support the Staffordshire Local Resilience Forum.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**■ Angling: Coronavirus****Dan Jarvis:**[\[122706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether fishing clubs located on private land can continue to operate under Tier 3 of the public health restrictions which come into effect on 2 December 2020.

Nigel Huddleston:

Sports and physical activity are incredibly important for our physical and mental health, and are a vital weapon against coronavirus. That's why we made sure that people could exercise at least once a day even during the height of the first period of enhanced national restrictions and why we opened up grassroots sport and leisure facilities as soon as it was safe to do so.

Organised outdoor sport is exempt from legal gathering limits across all levels. This means that organised outdoor team sport and outdoor exercise classes, as well as outdoor licensed physical activity, can happen with any number of participants, as long as undertaken in line with published COVID-secure guidance. This includes fishing clubs located on private land.

■ Culture Recovery Fund: Greater London**Sir David Evennett:**[\[122575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, how much funding from the Culture Recovery Fund has been allocated to the culture and heritage sector in (a) Greater London, (b) Bexley Borough and (c) Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency since that fund was established.

Nigel Huddleston:

As of 11 December, £1bn from the Culture Recovery Fund has been distributed to over 3000 organisations across England.

Across the arts and heritage recovery grants, repayable finance, and capital awards so far, support for London (including Greater London) was approximately £300m

Across the arts and heritage recovery grants, support for Bexley Borough was approximately £340,000.

Across the arts and heritage recovery grants, support for Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency was approximately £310,000.

This included funding for councils and local government owned assets including museums, theatres and music venues. This also included funding for organisations and sites including museums; archives; historical areas; designed landscapes; buildings; monuments and industrial transport.

■ Data Protection

Chi Onwurah:

[\[127557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps the new Digital Markets Unit will take to ensure a level playing field for small retailers and large corporations with respect to access to data.

Caroline Dinenage:

On 27th November, the Government announced it is establishing a new, pro-competition regime for digital markets. A new Digital Markets Unit (DMU), housed in the Competition and Markets Authority, will be set up to begin to operationalise the regime.

At the heart of the new regime will be a mandatory code of conduct to govern the relationships between dominant firms and different groups of users which rely on their services, to promote fair trading, open choices and trust and transparency. We have also agreed in principle to give the DMU powers to introduce pro-competition interventions, which may include remedies to widen access to data, and are considering the advice of the Digital Markets Taskforce.

We will consult on proposals for the new regime in early 2021 and will legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows

Stephen Farry:

[\[129162\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps the Government is taking to secure Data Adequacy recognition from the EU before the end of the transition period.

Mr John Whittingdale:

Continuing the free flow of personal data is an important objective for both the UK and the EU.

We have been in formal talks with the Commission since March 2020 to secure data adequacy decisions under both the General Data Protection Regulation and the Law Enforcement Directive.

Adequacy decisions would allow personal data to continue to flow freely from the EU/EEA to the UK. We have already legislated to enable, on a transitional basis, the free flow of UK personal data to Europe.

The EU's adequacy assessments ascertain whether UK data protection standards are 'essentially equivalent' to the EU's. Given we have an existing data protection framework that is equivalent to the EU's, we see no reason why the UK should not be awarded adequacy.

Throughout the adequacy assessment we have engaged proactively and constructively, doing all we can to expedite our assessment. This included preparation of a technical pack of explanatory materials, which was shared formally with the Commission at the start of the adequacy assessment in March 2020 and published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

■ **Football: Qatar**

Tommy Sheppard:

[\[128696\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what representations he has made to FIFA on the reported deaths of workers during the building of infrastructure for the Qatar 2022 world cup.

Nigel Huddleston:

Hosting the 2022 World Cup has seen an increased focus on human rights in Qatar, particularly the welfare of migrant workers. We welcome the concrete steps Qatar has taken on this matter, including the significant legislative reforms earlier this year. The UK continues to press for the swift implementation of these measures. We stand ready to further assist and support Qatar's continued efforts to implement change.

We continue to engage regularly with the International Labour Organisation and explore areas of their work where the UK can add particular value.

■ **Gambling: Cryptocurrencies**

Carolyn Harris:

[\[126918\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether gambling using cryptocurrency is legal; and whether UK bookmakers are permitted to offer this service.

Nigel Huddleston:

Cryptoassets are not illegal, but licensed gambling operators are only permitted to accept them as a payment method where they are able to ensure they are compliant with all Gambling Commission licence conditions and requirements, including anti-money laundering and safer gambling measures.

Operators are required to declare any changes to the arrangements through which they accept payment from customers to the Commission. This includes changes to the payment methods (including cryptoassets) or payment processors made available to customers to pay for gambling services. To date, no licensed operators have

notified the Gambling Commission that they are accepting digital currencies or cryptoassets directly as payments but several have reported indirectly accepting funds derived from cryptoassets via a third party payment provider. In these cases, funds accepted by the licensee for gambling have been converted to fiat currency (£).

■ ICT: Recruitment

Sir Mark Hendrick:

[\[127477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what plans he has to encourage (a) private companies and (b) the public sector to train and hire staff in (i) robotics (ii) data science and (iii) cybersecurity.

Caroline Dinenege:

The National Data Strategy has a number of proposals to encourage and support the training of data scientists in both the public and private sector. In June 2020, DCMS and the Office for AI announced provision of £13m to the Office for Students to support degree conversion courses in data science and AI. At least 2,500 graduate places will be created through the programme with over 600 students starting courses this Autumn with more starting in early 2021. Industry partners and universities provided an additional £11m to support the programme.

In relation to cyber skills we are keen to make careers in cyber security easily accessible for all individuals, across the UK, with an interest in this area. As a result, we have funded the creation of the new UK Cyber Security Council to help carry out this ambition. The Council will look to make it easier for individuals to enter and develop a career in cyber security through creating a comprehensive career pathways framework, as well as supporting employers to identify and recruit the appropriate talent to ensure their organisational resilience.

In 2019, the Government convened a new robotics leadership group, the Robotics Growth Partnership, working with sector leaders across academia and industry to help realise the significant potential of smart robotics for our economy and society. This includes giving consideration to the role of Government as well as the private sector in areas such as skills measures.

My department is currently delivering The Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund, a £3 million programme within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Lancashire LEP areas to boost digital skills training. The Fund will encourage employers and training providers to form partnerships to co-design and co-deliver short, bespoke skills courses that match employers needs, and is supporting skills such as cyber security, data science, software development and digital marketing.

My Department has also established the Digital Skills Partnership to bring together organisations from the public, private and third sector to improve digital skills across the skills spectrum. In addition, Local Digital Skills Partnerships have been established in seven regions across England.

■ Local Press: Coronavirus

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[128721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effect of the Government's fiscal policy on the continued operation of local newspapers.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[128722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the financial support available to local newspapers during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The government is committed to supporting local and regional newspapers as vital pillars of communities and local democracy, ensuring the provision of reliable, high-quality information. Local newspapers have benefited from a number of recent fiscal interventions, including the extension of business rates relief for local newspapers in England for an additional five years; the investment of £2 million in the Future News Fund, which sought to explore new ways of sustaining the industry in a changing landscape; and the zero-rating of VAT on e-newspapers, which was brought forward to May 2020 in response to the effects of the pandemic. In addition, many newspapers have benefitted from a unique and unprecedented government advertising partnership, designed to deliver important messages to UK citizens. Newspapers received up to £35 million additional government advertising revenue as part of the first phase of our coronavirus communications campaign. The campaign has since been extended to also cover business readiness for the end of the transition period and the value of the Union, with at least 60% funding going to smaller regional and local titles.

Some news publishers have made use of wider government measures as well, such as the job-retention scheme which we have extended until the end of March 2021.

Longer term, we will continue to consider all possible options in the interests of promoting and sustaining high-quality news journalism.

■ Music: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Taiwo Owatemi:

[\[128287\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, how many and what proportion of (a) music festivals have accessed and (b) the number of roles in music festivals have been supported by the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to date.

Caroline Dinenge:

The Government has worked closely with music and cultural sector representative bodies to maximise the survival of businesses and employee retention in the sector, through the extensive range of support the Government has provided to businesses and the self-employed.

The Government has not made an assessment of the extent to which music festivals have accessed the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

As at 30 September, the sector with the highest proportion of its workforce eligible and receiving the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme support was arts, entertainment and recreation at 23%. In all, 45% of employers in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector were using the furlough scheme at the end of September.

■ Music: Coronavirus

Taiwo Owatemi:

[\[128288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether his Department has made an assessment of the economic effect on (a) festivals, (b) music venues and (c) the live events sector of his Department (i) announcing an indicative date and (ii) delaying an announcement of an indicative date in 2021 for Stage 5 re-opening during the covid-19 outbreak.

Caroline Dinenge:

The Government acknowledges the importance of the live events sector to the UK economy and that it has been significantly affected by the impacts of Covid-19.

We recognise the importance of giving the live events sector clarity for when Stage 5 activity can resume and acknowledge the lead in time required for productions to go ahead. However we have always been clear that the activity permitted would be in line with the latest public health context. No assessment is currently available regarding the potential effects of announcing an indicative date for stage 5 reopening.

We are committed to continue working with the live events sector to understand the challenges they face and to work towards reopening events with fuller audiences.

■ Newcastle United Football Club: Saudi Arabia

Chi Onwurah:

[\[127554\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to his oral evidence to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport select committee in April 2020 on the proposed Saudi takeover of Newcastle United Football Club, for what reasons he has assessed the Saudi public investment fund and the Crown Prince to be separate entities.

Nigel Huddleston:

As the Secretary of State said during his evidence at the select committee, it is for the Premier League alone to make assessments of potential acquisitions of football clubs under its Owners' and Directors' Test.

■ Press

Alex Sobel:

[\[127631\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking to ensure the public are protected from being the subject of abusive press content.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The government is committed to a free and independent press and does not intervene in what the press can and cannot publish. We are clear, however, that with this freedom, comes responsibility, which media organisations must take seriously. It is important that there exists an independent self regulatory regime to ensure that the press adheres to a wide set of clear and appropriate standards, and to offer individuals a means of redress where these are not met.

The majority of traditional publishers—including 95% of national newspapers by circulation—are members of The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). A small number of publishers have joined The Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS). These regulators issue codes of conduct which provide guidelines on a range of areas and set out the rules that members have agreed to follow.

■ Youth Investment Fund

Thangam Debonnaire:

[\[128203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, when he plans to make available funding from the Youth Investment Fund; and how the £30 million allocated to capital investment for 2021-22 will be distributed across the UK.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Youth Investment Fund remains a manifesto commitment for transformative levelling up across England over the course of the parliament. In the recent announced Spending Review £30m of this was committed as capital investment for 2021-22. This will provide investment in new and refurbished safe spaces for young people, so they can access support youth workers, and positive activities out of school, including sport and culture. Further details of the timetable for allocation and how the funding will be distributed will be announced in due course.

Government recognises the significant impact of Covid-19 on young people, particularly the most vulnerable, and on the youth services that support them. A £16.5m Youth Covid-19 Support Fund has been announced which will protect the immediate future of grassroots and national youth organisations across the country.

EDUCATION

■ Apprentices: Young People

Harriett Baldwin:

[126861]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate he has made of the number of young people aged 16 to 24 years who are pursuing an apprenticeship in (a) West Worcestershire and (b) England.

Gillian Keegan:

The table below shows the number of learners aged 16 to 24, participating on apprenticeships in the West Worcestershire Parliamentary Constituency, and England, from the 2017/18 to 2019/20 academic years:

AREA	AGE	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	West Worcestershire	Under 19	270	240 220
19-24	400	360	360	
Total	670	600	580	
	England	Under 19	176,550	160,960 135,570
19-24	273,600	256,310	250,870	
Total	450,150	417,270	386,440	

To note:

1. Data source is the Individualised Learner Record (ILR).
2. Volumes are rounded to the nearest 10.
3. The 2019/20 data covers the period affected by COVID-19 and the nationwide lockdown (i.e. from March 2020 onwards), which will have impacted on apprenticeship and traineeship learning and also provider reporting behaviour via the ILR.
4. The above West Worcestershire PCON figures - and further breakdowns - are available in this link: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/8f8ab92a-20f0-44f5-b973-3b0ffe72d1a1>.
5. The above England figures - and further breakdowns - are available in this link: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/105ced16-d615-4f77-80ad-ba362d2ca443>.
6. Participation is the count of learners that participated at any point during the year. Learners undertaking more than 1 course will appear only once in the grand total.

7. Age for apprenticeship participation is based on age as of 31 August of the academic year.
8. Age is based upon self-declaration by the learner.
9. Geography is based upon the home postcode of the learner. Where the postcode is outside of England or not known it is included in the 'Other' category.
10. Geographies are taken from the National Statistics Postcode Lookup based on boundaries as of April 2019.

■ Assessments: Coronavirus

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[126840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether it is his Department's policy that examinations should take place at the end of academic year 2020-21 in schools.

Nick Gibb:

The Department is clear that exams will take place in summer 2021. Exams are the best way of judging students' performance. By sitting exams, students have a fair chance to show their knowledge and understanding of a subject.

We recognise that there will be challenges for students being assessed in summer 2021 and we are preparing for all eventualities. We have announced a wide range of contingency measures for pupils who are ill or have to self-isolate, including spacing out exam papers and introducing contingency papers.

There is broad consensus backing the decision to hold exams because they are a critical part of the education system, giving students the foundations that they need to move on to the next stage of their life.

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[126841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether it is his Department's policy that additional consideration should be given for pupils taking examinations at the end of academic year 2020-21.

Nick Gibb:

Students sitting exams and other assessments in 2021 will benefit from a package of exceptional measures to make them as fair as possible and manage the disruption caused by COVID-19. In recognition of the challenges this cohort faced, and is facing, grades will replicate as far as possible the overall profile of grades from 2020, making them more generous for students than in a normal year. Students will also be given advance notice of some topic areas or exam support materials, such as formula sheets, and steps will be taken to ensure every student has the chance to receive a grade, even if they miss a paper due to self-isolation or illness.

These measures recognise that, whilst teachers have gone above and beyond to support their pupils during a difficult period, some young people have had their teaching disrupted more than others and will need extra support to catch up on the curriculum and achieve their potential in exams.

■ Education: West Worcestershire**Harriett Baldwin:**[\[126859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of educational provision for young people aged 16 to 24 years in West Worcestershire.

Gillian Keegan:

Local authorities have a critical role to play in ensuring adequacy of provision and support for young people to access and participate in education and training. The offer available for 16-24 year olds in West Worcestershire includes:

- Full-time education: there is a range of full-time education options funded for 16-19 year olds, including T levels, A levels, and Technical qualifications.
- Traineeships: for young people qualified up to level 3 and with little work experience, but who are motivated and looking for an apprenticeship or work.
- Apprenticeships: for those age 16+.
- Kickstart programme: aimed at those aged 16-24 on Universal Credit and deemed to be at risk of long-term unemployment.
- Core Youth Offer for 18-24: for young people claiming Universal Credit in intensive work search.

In addition to the schools providing 16-18 delivery in West Worcestershire, a number of further education and sixth-form college academies, including Heart of Worcestershire College, Warwickshire College Group, and Worcester Sixth Form College offer provision in a reasonable travel to learn area.

■ Educational Institutions: Coronavirus**Dr Matthew Offord:**[\[126837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what safety measures are in place within schools and other educational settings to reduce the risk of covid-19 transmission and keep teachers, parents and children safe.

Dr Matthew Offord:[\[126839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what advice his Department has received on the risks to teachers of covid-19.

Nick Gibb:

It continues to be our aim that all pupils, in all year groups, remain in school full-time. Returning to school full time has been vital for children's education and for their wellbeing. The risk to children themselves of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 is low and there are negative health impacts from being out of school. Senior clinicians, including the Chief Medical Officers of all four nations, still advise that school is the very best place for children to be.

Headteachers, teachers, and staff of schools and other education settings have been doing an extraordinary job to remain open, keep settings safe, and provide education. The Department published guidance to support schools to welcome back all children from the start of the autumn term. The full guidance can be viewed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>.

Schools have implemented a range of protective measures to minimise the risk of transmission. The measures set out in the Department's guidance have been endorsed by Public Health England. These measures include regular handwashing, promoting good respiratory hygiene, keeping groups separate, maintaining distance, and minimising contact between individuals. This can be achieved through keeping groups separate (in 'bubbles') and through maintaining the distance between individuals. Schools must comply with health and safety law, and should continue to undertake risk assessments and implement the system of controls set out in this guidance.

The Department has received data, analysis, and advice from a number of different sources including the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), Public Health England, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and the Joint Biosecurity Centre to ensure our policies are guided by the most up to date scientific evidence.

Recently, the ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey published results between 2 September (the start of the school year) and 16 October 2020 that showed no evidence of differences in the positivity rate between primary and secondary school teachers, other key workers, and members of other professions. This evidence was endorsed by SAGE. More information is available here:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronaviruscovid19infectionsurveysurvey/6november2020#age-analysis-of-the-number-of-people-in-england-who-had-covid-19>.

On 26 November, the ONS published additional analysis on the number of school workers, key workers, and members of other professions in England who had COVID-19. This analysis also shows no clear evidence as to whether there is a difference in the level of individuals who would test positive for COVID-19 between teachers and other key workers. More information is available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/news/statementsandletters/onsstatementaddressingquestionaroundtheanalysisofthenumberofschoolworkerskeyworkersandotherprofessionsinenglandwhohadcovid19>.

■ Schools: Coronavirus

Dr Matthew Offord:

[126835]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what scientific advice his Department has received from SAGE on the comparative level of risk and benefit to children of being in school during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

The UK's Chief Medical Officers have been clear that school attendance is very important for children and young people. Children and young people are at low risk from COVID-19, but being out of school causes significant long-term harm to learning, life chances and mental and physical health.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the Department has made decisions informed by data, analysis and advice from a number of different sources, including the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), Public Health England, the Office for National Statistics and the Joint Biosecurity Centre, to ensure our policies are guided by the most up to date scientific evidence.

More recently, SAGE endorsed a paper co-authored by the Children's Task and Finish Working Group and the Department on the benefits of remaining in education. This paper outlined key evidence and considerations associated with the closure of schools.

The scientific evidence papers from SAGE meetings are published in tranches and are available by following the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/scientific-evidence-supporting-the-government-response-to-coronavirus-covid-19>.

Alex Cunningham:**[126866]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate his Department has made of the increase in expenditure by schools on public health measures during the covid-19 outbreak, by region.

Nick Gibb:

The Department appreciates the continued and significant efforts by schools and their staff to keep schools open this term. Returning to school full time has been vital for children's education and wellbeing and has rightly been a national priority. The latest published figures show that, on average, 99% of schools are open on a daily basis. The Department published guidance to support schools to welcome back all children full-time. The guidance can be viewed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>.

Schools have implemented a range of protective measures to minimise risk of transmission. The measures set out in the Department's guidance has been endorsed by Public Health England.

Schools have also continued to receive their core funding allocations throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. Following last year's Spending Round, school budgets are rising by £2.6 billion in the 2020/21 financial year compared to 2019-20. As stated in our guidance, schools should use their existing resources, including these funding increases, when making arrangements to support children this term, including on public health measures associated with COVID-19 where appropriate.

To further support schools with some of these costs, the Department has been providing additional funding to schools, on top of existing budgets, to cover unavoidable costs incurred between March and July due to the COVID-19 outbreak. As part of this, schools were able to claim for additional cleaning costs, over and above existing arrangements, for confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19. The first window for schools to claim funding back for exceptional costs due to the COVID-19 outbreak incurred between March and July closed on 21 July. Payments against claims made within the published scope of the fund were made to schools and academies in September. Schools received £16 million for additional cleaning required due to confirmed or suspected coronavirus cases. Schools now have a second opportunity to claim for any costs in the approved categories, for which they did not claim during the first window. This second claims window launched on 4 December, along with details on how to make a claim, and will remain open until 22 December.

Ministers and officials continue to engage regularly with school leaders and their representatives on a wide range of issues around COVID-19, including discussions in relation to costs faced by schools at this time. The Department will continue to review the pressures schools are facing into next term.

■ **Students: Coronavirus**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[126953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of covid-19 restrictions on the ability of university students to access their course content.

Michelle Donelan:

As I set out in a letter to MPs on 9 October and in a letter to Vice-Chancellors on 2 November, the government's clear and stated expectation is that, whether providers are delivering face-to-face, online or blended provision, the quality and quantity of tuition, and accessibility for all students, is maintained. The OfS has made it clear that all higher education providers must continue to comply with registration conditions relating to quality and standards, which set out requirements to ensure that courses are high-quality, that students are supported and achieve good outcomes and that standards are protected. They have also set out that providers must continue to provide sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Higher education providers must continue to comply with their legal obligations under the Equality Act (2010), ensuring that education and learning is accessible to all students. When making changes to the delivery of their courses, higher education providers need to consider how to support all students, particularly the most vulnerable, to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.

The OfS is taking very seriously the potential impacts of COVID-19 on teaching and learning and is regularly engaging with all registered providers. It is actively

monitoring those providers which have moved provision predominantly online due to COVID-19 restrictions to ensure: that they maintain the quality of their provision, that it is accessible for all and that they have been clear in their communications with students about how arrangements for teaching and learning may change throughout the year. The OfS is also following up directly with providers where they receive notifications from students, parents or others raising concerns about the quality of teaching on offer and requiring providers to report to them when they are not able to deliver a course or award a qualification. If the OfS has concerns, it will investigate further.

The government is aware of the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 is having on some students. That is why the government has already worked closely with the OfS to help clarify that providers can draw upon existing funding to increase hardship funds and support disadvantaged students impacted by COVID-19. Providers can use the funding, worth around £256 million for the academic year 2020/21, starting from August, towards student hardship funds, including the purchase of IT equipment or connectivity services where students would not otherwise be able to secure these. On 2 December, we announced that the government will also be making available up to £20 million of hardship funding on a one-off basis to support those that need it most, particularly disadvantaged students.

Students have rights under consumer law that they may be able to rely on if they are dissatisfied with their provider's response to COVID-19. In the first instance, students should speak to their provider to see if they can resolve their issue. We expect student complaints and appeals processes to be operated flexibly, accessibly, and sympathetically by providers to resolve any concerns. If a student at a provider in England or Wales is not satisfied with their provider's final response, they can make a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, which has published guidance on this issue, available at:

<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/>.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[126954]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to prevent the spread of covid-19 in university accommodation when students return after the Christmas break.

Michelle Donelan:

The safety and wellbeing of staff and students in higher education is always our priority. The government is doing all it can to minimise the risks to those working and studying in our higher education institutions during this unprecedented situation, whilst mitigating the impact on education.

The government is committed to prioritising education and wants to enable all students, including those who have travelled home for the winter break, to return to university as safely as possible. On 2 December 2020 we published guidance on students returning to higher education for spring term, which sets out our plans for staggering the return of students over a 5-week period. This guidance is available

here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/students-returning-to-higher-education-from-spring-term>.

Universities have responded well to COVID-19 outbreaks and continue to learn lessons on how to minimise the risks and support students. Improved access to asymptomatic testing for the initial return of students in the spring term provides further support to universities to manage the risk of transmission and take swift action to respond to any cases.

I have also written to universities asking them to ensure that self-isolating students have a range of choices available for access to food and other essential supplies. This includes providing food to those that need it and facilitating deliveries that will not require students to leave the accommodation where they are self-isolating, thereby preventing the spread of COVID-19.

We strongly encourage students to take a test when they return to university, to help mitigate the transmission of COVID-19, and keep themselves and others safe.

■ **T-levels: West Worcestershire**

Harriett Baldwin:

[\[126860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of planning for T-level provision for students in West Worcestershire.

Gillian Keegan:

The first T levels were introduced in September 2020 and these are part of a managed roll-out that continues over the next 3 years. We have selected a relatively small number of high performing providers for the initial roll-out to ensure high quality from the very start. We are working closely with these providers on their implementation planning to ensure readiness for delivery. Heart of Worcestershire College is one of 64 providers planning to deliver T levels from 2021 and will offer T levels in Digital and Education & Childcare to students in Worcestershire. As the roll-out continues and coverage widens, we will work to ensure that T levels are more widely available in all areas, including West Worcestershire.

■ **Undocumented Migrants: Children**

Afzal Khan:

[\[126975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he has authorised Kent County Council not to provide accommodation to children in its area who arrived by boat.

Vicky Ford:

Legislation is clear about the statutory duties placed on local authorities in caring for unaccompanied children and no dispensation has been given to Kent County Council regarding these duties.

Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 imposes a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in their area and to accommodate them if

they meet the relevant criteria for requiring accommodation under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

The government recognises the challenges local authorities face in caring for high numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. That is why we have been working with Kent County Council, to support them to meet their duties to looked after children in their care. The government has also worked with local authorities across the country to secure alternative placements for those arriving on the south coast.

■ Vocational Education: West Worcestershire

Harriett Baldwin:

[126858]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the provision of vocational training in West Worcestershire.

Gillian Keegan:

Local authorities have a critical role to play in ensuring adequacy of provision and support for young people to access and participate in education and training. Their responsibilities and duties relating to participation are set out in the published statutory guidance for local authorities, which is available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561546/Participation-of-young-people-in-education-employment-or-training.pdf. Specifically, the guidance states:

“To secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people in their area who are over compulsory school age but under 19 or aged 19 to 25 and for whom an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan is maintained. This is a duty under the Education Act 1996. To fulfil this, local authorities need to have a strategic overview of the provision available in their area and to identify and resolve gaps in provision.”

Where local authorities feel that there is a specific gap in provision that cannot be addressed by existing providers, there is a process by which this can be brought to the attention of the Education and Skills Funding Agency for consideration and action as appropriate.

The population of West Worcestershire aged 16-24 is approximately 4300 (NOMIS population data June 2020). Around 445 learners completed an apprenticeship programme in 2019 to 2020. Many of these students study locally, including at the Heart of Worcestershire College campus in Malvern which specialises in vocational provision such as brickwork, carpentry and painting and decorating.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ Antisocial Behaviour: Paint****Luke Pollard:**[\[126984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent steps the Government has taken to reduce levels of antisocial behaviour involving the use of spray paint.

Luke Pollard:[\[126985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment her Department has made of the potential correlation between the pricing of spray paint and the level of antisocial behaviour involving the use of spray paint.

Rebecca Pow:

Addressing visible signs of crime and anti-social behaviour such as graffiti helps to improve public perceptions of local environmental quality.

In 2018 we almost doubled the maximum fixed penalty that local authorities can issue for offences related to graffiti to £150 and increased the default to £100. Councils retain the income from these fixed penalty notices, which can be spent on their functions relating to keeping land and highways clear of litter and refuse, and enforcement against graffiti offences.

For more serious offences, such as racist or otherwise abusive graffiti, prosecution is more suitable. In our recently published guidance on enforcement against littering and related offences, we made clear that any enforcement action must be proportionate and in the public interest.

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 introduced a range of flexible tools and powers that the police, local authorities and other local agencies can use to respond quickly and effectively to anti-social behaviour, including Community Protection Notices (CPNs). It is a criminal offence if a person does not comply with a CPN, for which they can receive a fine upon conviction. Instead of prosecuting, a fixed penalty notice of up to £100 can be issued.

These powers are deliberately local in nature, and it is for local agencies to determine whether their use is appropriate in the specific circumstances as those who work within, and for, local communities will be best placed to understand what is driving the behaviour in question, the impact that it is having, and to determine the most appropriate response.

Defra has not made any assessment of the potential correlation between the pricing of spray paint and the level of antisocial behaviour involving its use.

■ Cats: Imports**Elliot Colburn:**[\[126999\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to his answer to Q40 in the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's oral evidence session on The work of DEFRA, HC 261, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of strengthening requirements for cats entering the UK.

Victoria Prentis:

The end of the transition period will present new opportunities for managing our own Pet Travel rules and welfare arrangements for all pets, including cats. We are listening to the concerns of stakeholders around future requirements and the Government is developing a range of options to ensure there are robust controls on disease and animal welfare whilst allowing pet owners to continue to be able to travel to and from the EU with the minimum of disruption.

■ Cats: Tagging**Elliot Colburn:**[\[126998\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to encourage local authorities to collect and scan cats injured or killed in road traffic accidents for a microchip and inform their owners.

Victoria Prentis:

It is established good practice for local authorities to scan any cat or dog found on the streets so that the owner can be informed. Cats Protection reports that 80% of councils in England routinely scan cats involved in accidents.

Additionally, Highways England has clear guidelines for contractors to follow when they find a deceased cat or dog. This process is designed with owners in mind, giving them the best chance of being informed of the incident to allow closure. The process is laid out in the Network Management Manual and in 2015 the necessary arrangements were made in all Highways England's contracts to collect and identify cats and dogs killed on the strategic road network and to contact their owners.

■ Chemicals: Imports**Ruth Jones:**[\[126989\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the devolved Administrations on ensuring that UK chemicals regulations after the transition period do not enable chemicals which do not meet EU regulations to be exported to the UK for sale and processing.

Ruth Jones:[\[126991\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with representatives of British business on ensuring that UK chemicals regulations do not enable chemicals which do not meet EU regulations to be exported to the UK for sale and processing.

Rebecca Pow:

After the end of the transition period, the UK will establish its own independent chemicals regulatory framework for Great Britain, UK REACH. UK REACH will retain both the fundamental approach and key principles of EU REACH, with its aims of ensuring a high level of protection of human health and the environment. All restrictions (and other measures) that are in force in EU REACH at the end of the transition period will be automatically carried over into UK law. UK REACH will retain the “no data, no market” principle, which underpins effective chemicals management by industry and regulator. This means that under UK REACH, every manufacturer or importer will be responsible for ensuring that the chemicals they produce and use do not adversely affect human health of the environment and will need to supply the Health and Safety Executive, the regulator, with the necessary information on a chemical’s properties and hazards, and how it can be used safely

The provisions for UK REACH were drawn up in close co-operation with the Devolved Administrations and the Administrations have given their formal consent to a single GB-wide set of regulations.

We have also engaged closely with representatives from British businesses on this issue and other issues through our extensive stakeholder network of trade associations, representative organisations and individual companies.

■ Chemicals: Northern Ireland**Ruth Jones:**[\[126990\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the European Union on the implications for UK chemicals policy of Northern Ireland remaining part of the EU REACH regime after 31 December 2020.

Rebecca Pow:

For the duration of the Northern Ireland Protocol, Northern Ireland will remain part of the EU regulatory systems for chemicals to ensure frictionless movement of goods within the island of Ireland, whilst remaining within the UK customs territory. The Government is committed to providing unfettered access for Northern Ireland businesses, as set out in the July Command Paper, and subsequent business guidance. The provisions we have made through the REACH etc. (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 concerning chemicals moving from Northern Ireland to Great Britain reflect this.

Chemicals that are, or are in, qualifying Northern Ireland goods being placed on the GB market will not be required to have a full REACH registration. Instead, there will be a light touch notification process to ensure the Health and Safety Executive knows what chemicals are being placed on the GB market. Information necessary to ensure safe use must also still be passed down the supply chain.

Substances of very high concern entering Great Britain from Northern Ireland will still need a UK REACH authorisation. This is needed to manage the risk from these

hazardous chemicals to GB consumers, workers and the environment. This simply replicates the current approach to placing these substances on the EU market where the authorisation process makes sure account is taken of local environmental and other factors. We will ensure that this happens where these chemicals are being placed on the market and used within Great Britain.

■ Climate Change

Nadia Whittome:

[\[127038\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much money from the public purse has been spent on nature based solutions to climate change in each of the last five years.

Rebecca Pow:

Nature-based solutions can play a key role in tackling climate change and managing its impacts. Over the last 5 years government has introduced new funding that specifically invests in nature-based solutions in England where climate change mitigation and adaptation is the primary purpose. Details of these specific funding streams are given below.

- £10 million Peatland Capital grants scheme 2018-21 to restore peatland.
- £19.5 million Woodland Carbon Fund announced in 2018 to support large scale woodland creation.
- £50 million Woodland Carbon Guarantee announced in 2018 to accelerate woodland planting rates and develop the domestic market for woodland carbon, to be spent over 35 years.
- £640 million Nature for Climate Fund will provide significant funding for the creation, restoration and management of woodland and peatland habitats in England 2020-2025.
- £15 million Natural Flood Management programme 2017-21, which supports 25 large catchment scale projects and 33 smaller community projects to further develop the evidence base on working with natural processes to reduce flood risk.

The UK Government also has a range of existing and funding streams such as Countryside Stewardship and the Green Recovery Challenge Fund that support the restoration of nature in England, and provide multiple benefits for wildlife, climate and people: we have not specifically assessed what proportion of these funding streams has provided nature-based solutions to climate change.

■ Climate Change Convention

Nadia Whittome:

[\[127036\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many meetings his Department has had with Natural England on preparations for COP26.

Nadia Whittome:

[\[127037\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans he has for the role of Natural England in preparations for the UK hosting COP26.

Rebecca Pow:

Preparations for the UK Presidency of COP26 are coordinated across Government by the Cabinet Office COP26 Unit, with departments including Defra, BEIS and FCDO and the devolved administrations leading on their areas of policy responsibility. The departments work closely together at ministerial and official levels, to ensure delivery of the best possible outcomes at COP26.

As a Defra Arm's Length Body, Defra holds the relationship with Natural England. Defra also leads on key aspects of the Government's COP26 preparations, including on the Nature Campaign. Defra has therefore led discussions with Natural England on COP26.

BEIS has not met Natural England on preparations for COP26.

Defra has regular meetings with Natural England on COP26, including holding Senior Board level meetings on these issues to ensure Natural England's input into preparations. These discussions, including Natural England's role in COP26 preparations, will continue in the lead up to COP26.

■ Coal: Heating

Taiwo Owatemi:

[\[127004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment the Government has made of the effect of the ban on burning coal in domestic settings on the (a) availability and (b) price of sized and washed lump coal for use in steam locomotives.

Rebecca Pow:

The measures included in the Air Quality (Domestic Solid Fuels Standards) (England) Regulations 2020 will not apply directly to steam locomotives. Although the domestic coal market represents less than 5% of national coal demand, we acknowledge that our plans may impact on the supply of fuels to some organisations. We have listened to the concerns raised by heritage bodies during our consultation on these measures, and we have engaged with the All Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail's enquiry. This did not quantify the direct costs to this sector from a ban on the sale of domestic coal but did recommend that a longer transition period be included in Government plans. We have taken this into account in our proposals, with a longer transition period being given to the phasing out of direct deliveries of loose coal via approved coal merchants, allowing organisations time to adjust to the change in legislation.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Geographical Information Systems

Caroline Lucas: [\[126818\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the (a) adequacy and (b) comprehensiveness of the priority habitat inventory on the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside website.

Rebecca Pow:

The Priority Habitats Inventory, published on the MAGIC website, describes the distribution of 24 habitats of nature conservation importance identified in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006). The data underpinning the mapping have been compiled over a 40-year period from multiple sources including:

- Targeted field surveys;
- Habitat data captured to support the designation and management of protected Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- Farm Environmental Audits completed to support delivery of Environmental Land Management Schemes and associated Scheme monitoring work;
- Data supplied by environmental stakeholder and partner organisations, where made available under appropriate license.

The Priority Habitats Inventory provides the best representation we have on an England-wide scale of the location and extent of the priority habitats, produced using openly available data. As a compilation of data, gathered from many sources over a lengthy timescale, it is not comprehensive.

To support Defra's objectives set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan and address these issues, Defra has set up the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment pilot. This is working across the Defra group to develop and improve our natural capital, habitat and ecosystem mapping and evidence. It includes work to produce Living England, a new comprehensive map of England's habitats, produced from interpretation of satellite data, which we will be able to be updated on a regular basis. It also includes work to enhance the existing Priority Habitats Inventory by improving the update process, collecting new priority habitat data, sourcing and adding additional habitat datasets held by partner organisations, and updating the Ancient Woodland Inventory.

■ Dogs: Electronic Training Aids

Dr Matthew Offord: [\[126843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will bring forward legislative proposals on banning the purchase and use of electronic dog collars.

Victoria Prentis:

The Government remains committed to banning the use of remote controlled hand-held electronic training collars (e-collars) for dogs and cats in England. We will introduce the necessary legislation to implement the ban as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Domestic Seafood Supply Scheme**Luke Pollard:**[\[126982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he has taken to ensure eligible businesses are aware of the Domestic Seafood Supply Scheme.

Victoria Prentis:

Applications for the Domestic Seafood Supply Scheme ran from Wednesday 29 April to Monday 11 May 2020. The Scheme has now closed to bids with 20 successful applications for funding.

European Chemicals Agency: Membership**Ruth Jones:**[\[126988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of the UK seeking associate membership of the European Chemicals Agency after the end of the transition period.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government's position is that we will not remain within the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, so we are not seeking to remain part of EU REACH or to participate in the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA).

In May the Government published its proposal for a chemicals annex, with inclusion of data sharing mechanisms with the EU and the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Health and Safety Executive and ECHA to facilitate regulator to regulator co-operation.

Flood Control: Cheshire**Mike Amesbury:**[\[126971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Environment Agency's work with other bodies to reduce flood risk in Helsby, Cheshire.

Rebecca Pow:

To reduce flood risk in Helsby, Cheshire, the Environment Agency (EA) is working closely with local landowners, Wildfowlers, Councillors, industrial interests and the Manchester Ship Canal Company (MSC Co.)

A key aspect of this work is to find a long-term sustainable option for draining the Ince Marshes, where water exits from the land around Helsby. This has recently included working with the MSC Co to improve the functionality of their assets.

Helsby also has two properties and three commercial premises that benefit from EA flood defence assets on the Weaver embankment and the MSC embankment assets that keep the tidal Mersey from flooding. The EA regularly speaks to the MSC Co. about these assets.

■ Forestry Commission: Geographical Information Systems

Caroline Lucas:

[\[126817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of Forestry Commission's Forester GIS online mapping system to identify areas of non-designated but high wildlife, habitat or environmental value when assessing applications for tree planting.

Rebecca Pow:

The Forestry Commission (FC) is working with Natural England to ensure that those proposing forestry projects such as woodland creation do have access to the appropriate environmental data to help inform their proposals. The FC's online map browser and Land Information Search (LIS) focusses on data more relevant to forestry activity, whereas the Defra Multi Agency Geographic Information [for the] Countryside (MAGIC) is a more general rural environment Geographic Information System portal. The FC's map browser and LIS is currently being reviewed to ensure that it is able to access as many of the relevant publicly available datasets as possible, particularly those related to soils, valuable habitats and important wildlife populations.

The FC is also working with other bodies across Defra to provide new data on issues that regularly affect forestry projects and woodland activity, such as on water catchments.

Geographical Information datasets can only ever be indicative. There is no substitute for field visits and assessments of extant biodiversity interests by qualified ecologists. To that end, the FC has published a new priority habitat identification booklet and is appointing additional ecologists.

Natural England are currently working with key data holders, including the Botanical Society of the British Isles, on methods to ensure important natural habitats are better identified and protected. They are also working with the FC to ensure all future woodland creation applications are subject to the necessary scrutiny.

■ Forests: Environment Protection

Caroline Lucas:

[\[126816\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for what reasons Natural England has the power under the Environmental Impact Assessment regulations to require a site to be restored if environmental damage has been caused by agricultural

expansion but the Forestry Commission does not have that power if environmental damage is caused by forestry expansion.

Rebecca Pow:

The Forestry Commission does have powers under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Forestry Regulations to require site restoration in cases where activities that required consent have been undertaken without the required consent.

■ **Members: Correspondence**

Rosie Cooper:

[\[126798\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the two letters from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 26 October 2020 on watercourse maintenance in West Lancashire constituency.

Rosie Cooper:

[\[126799\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 20 October 2020 on watercourse maintenance in West Lancashire constituency and Environment Agency funding.

Rosie Cooper:

[\[126800\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 27 October 2020 on behalf of the National Farmers Union on watercourse maintenance in West Lancashire constituency.

Rebecca Pow:

I apologise for the delay in responding. Replies to the hon. Member's letters have been prepared and will be issued very shortly.

■ **Odour Pollution: Lancashire**

Aaron Bell:

[\[128309\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the (a) mental and (b) physical health effects on communities residing near a landfill site of (i) the Environment Agency's report on Ambient Air Quality at Silverdale reference AAM/TR/2019/12 and (ii) other breaches of World Health Organization's odour guidelines.

Aaron Bell:

[\[128310\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the (a) social and (b) economic effects of (i) the Environment Agency's report on Ambient Air Quality at Silverdale reference AAM/TR/2019/12 and (ii) other breaches of World Health Organization's odour guidelines on communities residing near a landfill site.

Rebecca Pow:

We have not made an assessment of the Environment Agency's report (AAM/TR/2019/12) on Ambient Air Quality at Silverdale. However, the results of the monitoring that informed this report were shared with Public Health England who confirmed that the levels recorded were low and that no long-term health consequences were expected. Public Health England has no evidence of an increase in general practice (GP) consultations or calls to NHS 111 by the neighbouring population for symptoms of breathing difficulties or eye problems, and similarly for GP in-hours consultations for asthma and wheeze. If residents have health concerns, they are advised to consult their local GP. Public Health England continues to support the Environment Agency and local stakeholders with community engagement. Public Health England maintain that living close to a well-managed landfill site does not pose a significant risk to human health.

The Environment Agency regulates waste disposal sites and monitors compliance with environmental permits, and we have made legislative changes to improve Environment Agency powers to tackle problem waste sites. As of November 2018, waste management facilities must have a written management system, designed to reduce impacts on local communities and the environment, and our Resources and Waste strategy committed to further strengthening technical competence requirements for site operators.

The environmental permitting system for waste sites ensures that the Environment Agency is able to regulate against conditions in permits which aim to protect the environment and human health. The Environment Agency will continue to work with the operator and other local partners to continue to monitor the situation and take action wherever necessary.

Where issues, including odour, could be a statutory nuisance under Section 79(1)(d) the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local councils are responsible for investigating these complaints.

■ Peat Bogs: Fires**Nadia Whittome:**[\[127039\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress his Department has made on banning the burning of peatland habitats.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government has always been clear of the need to phase out rotational burning of protected blanket bog to conserve these vulnerable habitats, and we are looking at how legislation could achieve this. Real progress is being made in promoting sustainable alternatives. We have urged landowners to adopt these and continue to work with them constructively.

■ Per- and Polyfluorinated Alkyl Substances: Packaging

Sarah Olney:

[\[128710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what restrictions his Department will place on the use of PFAS chemicals to ensure the protection of the UK's health and environment after the transition period.

Rebecca Pow:

A number of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are already banned or highly restricted. The UK is a Party to the Stockholm Convention, which has already agreed restrictions on the use of certain PFAS. There are also restrictions in place under the REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals) regulation.

At the end of the transition period the UK will put in place its own domestic chemicals regulatory framework. Existing restrictions under REACH will be brought into UK law. Our commitments under the Stockholm Convention will continue to apply. Future UK decisions to control the environmental and human health impacts of substances will be taken under our independent regime and will be based on rigorous assessment of the scientific evidence, including looking at approaches taken by chemical regimes across the world. Ensuring the continued effective safe management of chemicals to protect human health and the environment and respond to emerging risks remains our priority.

We are working to improve our understanding of the emissions and risks of PFAS in the UK, and how we manage these chemicals will be considered in our forthcoming Chemicals Strategy. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) also regularly reviews new PFAS and will be considering the upcoming review by the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) of the European Food Safety Authority's (EFSA) latest scientific opinion on PFAS in food.

■ Pet Travel Scheme

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[126844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the timeframe for a response from the EU regarding its application to become a Part 1 listed third country for Pet Passports resubmitted in February 2020.

Victoria Prentis:

The EU Commission has now responded to clarify their decision on listing the UK as a third country under Annex II of the EU Pet Travel Regulations.

On 3 December 2020 the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (PAFF) of the EU voted in favour of giving the United Kingdom Part 2 listed status for the purposes of non-commercial pet travel after the transition period. This listed status will be formally adopted by the EU in due course.

Part 2 listed status means similar health requirements to travel to the EU as now, but new documentation will be required for pets and assistance dogs.

We are disappointed not to become a Part 1 listed third country. We are clear we meet all the requirements for this and have one of the most rigorous pet checking regimes in Europe to protect our biosecurity. Our disease risk will also not change after the transition period and so we will continue to press the EU Commission on securing Part 1 listed status.

There will be no changes to the current pet travel health requirements for entry into Great Britain and we will continue to accept EU pet passports. We intend to publish further guidance shortly on what this development means for travellers, on GOV.UK.

■ **Pet Travel Scheme: Assistance Animals**

Vicky Foxcroft:

[\[126919\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect on the ability of individuals accompanied by an assistance animal to travel to the EU from 1 January 2021 of the UK being listed in Part 1 of Annex II to EU Regulation (EU) No 577/2013.

Victoria Prentis:

Defra is proactively and positively engaging with the assistance dog community and relevant stakeholders on the impacts on dog movements to the EU after the end of the transition period. We will continue to closely work with assistance dog organisations to share the latest advice and guidance (in accessible formats) with their members on pet travel requirements.

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■ Pet Travel Scheme: Cats**Kenny MacAskill:**[\[128739\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many Intra Trade Animal Health Certificates were issued for cats entering the UK in each month from January 2019 to November 2020.

Victoria Prentis:

The number of Intra Trade Animal Health Certificates (ITAHCs) issued for cats entering the UK in each month from January 2019 to November 2020 can be found below.

MONTH	ITAHCs
Jan-19	177
Feb-19	178
Mar-19	170
Apr-19	136
May-19	115
Jun-19	112
Jul-19	124
Aug-19	137
Sep-19	201
Oct-19	282
Nov-19	178
Dec-19	143
Jan-20	203
Feb-20	144
Mar-20	70
Apr-20	43
May-20	101
Jun-20	142
Jul-20	214
Aug-20	301

MONTH	ITAHCs
Sep-20	356
Oct-20	486
Nov-20	506

The data for ITAHCs for cat imports was extracted from TRACES through the data warehouse facility by searching for imports of *Felis catus*. These figures cover all commercially imported cats including commercial kittens, rescue cats and unaccompanied pets.

The information that we have provided is a true reflection of the information that we have access to. We cannot guarantee the accuracy of this data, as we can only rely on the information that has been input into TRACES by a third party.

■ Property Flood Resilience Scheme

Luke Pollard: [\[128726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many grants have been distributed under the Property Flood Resilience Scheme since November 2019.

Luke Pollard: [\[128727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many applications for grants under the Property Flood Resilience Scheme remain outstanding.

Luke Pollard: [\[128728\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much funding has been allocated to the Property Flood Resilience Scheme.

Rebecca Pow:

Following the unprecedented flooding in November 2019 and the storms which followed in winter 2019/2020, government announced Property Flood Resilience (PFR) repair grants of up to £5,000 in affected areas to help eligible homes, charities and businesses become more flood resilient.

The repair grants apply to those affected in district or unitary authorities that have 25 or more severely flooded properties.

The Property Flood Resilience (PFR) repair grants are administered by eligible local authorities, with Defra reimbursing local authorities for grants paid for eligible properties. The most recent figures (held by Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government) show that over 47 district or unitary councils with over 7000 properties are eligible in England for the November 2019 and February 2020 PFR repair schemes.

In recognition of the challenges created by the coronavirus pandemic, both the 2019 and 2020 schemes have been extended by 9 months to give homeowners and businesses more time to carry out repairs and local authorities a greater period to process the grants.

Local authorities on the November scheme now have until 31 December 2021 to recover their costs whilst local authorities on the February scheme have until 1 July 2022.

■ Sewage: River Tyne

Chi Onwurah:

[\[128676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to reduce the level of sewage spills into the River Tyne.

Rebecca Pow:

Specific to the Tyne and its tributaries, there are 35 ongoing investigations to identify the frequency of spills from Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) and to deliver a cost beneficial solution to reduce this. Work is scheduled to complete by the end of 2030.

Howdon Sewage Treatment Works, which handles all of Newcastle's sewage, is being upgraded at a cost of £90 million to handle more sewage and accommodate growth in the area. These upgrades will increase the current storm tank sizes and reduce the amount of spills to the Tyne estuary.

Northumbrian Water Group are also working with the Environment Agency (EA) and local authorities to produce a Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan due to be published by June 2023. This plan will manage the impact of growth and climate change on the wastewater infrastructure to prevent any future environmental impacts.

Across England, the Government has established a new Storm Overflows Taskforce comprising Defra, the EA, Ofwat, CCW, Water UK and Blueprint for Water which is meeting regularly, with the aim of setting out clear proposals to reduce the frequency and volumes of sewage discharged into rivers and other waterways in extreme weather. The Taskforce is also exploring further short-term actions water companies can take to accelerate progress on storm overflows.

We recognise more needs to be done which is why we continue to work closely with Ofwat and water companies to find ways to reduce the need for storm overflow discharges. In 2019, Ofwat introduced a package of allowances and incentives for the next five years, setting water companies the challenge of reducing pollution incidents by a third, also requiring them to invest £4.8 billion in environmental improvements.

■ Tree Planting: Environment Protection

Caroline Lucas:

[\[126815\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what role (a) his Department (b) the Forestry Commission (c) Natural England (d) any other relevant

bodies play in ensuring (a) deep peat and (b) other valuable wildlife habitats are not damaged by tree planting.

Rebecca Pow:

The Forestry Commission is the lead department for the approval of woodland creation projects. It assesses forestry projects under the Environmental Impact Assessment Forestry Regulations to determine if they require consent under these regulations. Forestry Commission's approval of forestry schemes is underpinned by the UK Forestry Standard. This states that there will be no new afforestation on peat that is deeper than 50cm and that the minimum amount of soil disturbance should be made during cultivation and site preparation for tree planting, particularly on organic rich soils. There is also a presumption against woodland creation on priority non-woodland habitat because of the value of those non-woodland habitats in their own right.

Woodland creation schemes above a certain threshold assessed by the Forestry Commission also require applicants to gather evidence as part of scheme development from relevant environmental bodies, such as Natural England and Wildlife Trusts. These organisations can consider proposals against their own knowledge and data sets. As the statutory nature conservation adviser, Natural England provides expert ecological advice to Forestry Commission on the likely significance of impacts associated with woodland creation affecting Protected Sites and on priority habitats and species, including those dependent on peatlands. The Forestry Commission also places all woodland creation schemes on their 'Public Register' which offers interested parties an opportunity to identify special features such as important habitats that may not have been identified at any previous point in the approval process.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ British Overseas Territories: Companies

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

[\[128635\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he will publish the Order in Council in relation to public registers of beneficial ownership of companies registered in British Overseas Territories.

Nigel Adams:

On 14 December the Government published a draft Order in Council which has been prepared under Section 51 of the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-territories-adopting-publicly-accessible-registers-of-beneficial-ownership>

The draft Order sets minimum requirements for what the UK Government expects of publicly accessible registers of company beneficial ownership in the Overseas Territories. This includes the form that the register must take and that the information

that must be made available such that it would be broadly equivalent to that available in accordance with the provisions of Part 21 A of the UK Companies Act 2006.

All of the inhabited Overseas Territories have now committed to adopt public accessible registers, and as such are showing that they are responsible jurisdictions and a collaborative partner to the UK. This is also evident from the cooperation the UK gets from the Overseas Territories via the Exchange of Notes Arrangements, where confidential information on company beneficial ownership and tax information is shared with UK law enforcement bodies in real time.

The draft Order has been published on Gov.uk with an accompanying note, and a Written Ministerial Statement was laid on 14 December. The Government is now helping the Overseas Territories to implement the policy; on the technical aspects we already held workshops and have secured the support of Open Ownership, and we are helping others with the procurement of their registers.

■ **Department for International Development: Redundancy**

Dr Lisa Cameron:

[\[126900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many voluntary redundancies have been sought involving staff previously employed on permanent Department for International Development (DfID) contracts in (a) London (b) East Kilbride and (c) overseas offices following the merger of his Department with DfID.

Nigel Adams:

There have been no voluntary redundancy offers made to staff who were previously employed by the Department for International Development following the merger.

■ **Department for International Development: Temporary Employment**

Dr Lisa Cameron:

[\[126901\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many temporary contracts involving staff previously employed by the Department for International Development (DfID) in (a) London, (b) East Kilbride and (c) overseas offices have not been renewed following the merger of DfID and his Department.

Nigel Adams:

Temporary contracts, in the form of agency workers and contractors, are used to fill short-term and immediate vacancies when all other routes to fill have been explored in line with departmental and civil service resourcing policies and processes.

By their very nature, they are set up for an agreed period of time and would not routinely be renewed.

■ Developing Countries: Trade Agreements

Gareth Thomas: [\[127459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps to build the capacity of trade unions and civil society groups in developing countries to engage in trade negotiations; and if he will make a statement.

Nigel Adams:

The UK Government provides technical advice and skills training to governments in developing countries to build capacity to negotiate and benefit from trade and investment agreements through the Trade and Investment Advocacy Fund (TAF2+). We also deliver technical assistance for the African Continental Free Trade Area negotiations through the African Union Support Programme.

We support a range of organisations, including civil society groups, small-scale farmers and small manufacturing units to build technical skills to sustainably grow their businesses and benefit from wider trade opportunities, through, for example, the Trade, Enterprise and Employment programme in sub Saharan Africa, which we co-fund with Comic Relief.

■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Consultants

Lisa Nandy: [\[126852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much his Department spent on consultancy costs in financial year 2019-20.

Nigel Adams:

[Holding answer 14 December 2020]: In financial year 2019-20, the former FCO spent £2,936,902 on consultancy staffing costs. The former DFID spent £24,609 in the same year.

■ Gaza: Coronavirus

Dr Philippa Whitford: [\[127574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 8 December 2020 to Question 124769 and with reference to the cessation of polymerase chain reaction covid-19 testing in Gaza on 6 December 2020, what steps his Department is taking to help support (a) testing and (b) control of covid-19 in the Gaza Strip.

James Cleverly:

We remain concerned about the capacity of the Palestinian health system to cope with the increasing number of COVID-19 cases. We are aware of the temporary cessation of COVID-19 testing in Gaza on 6th December and welcome reports from the World Health Organisation that further testing kits arrived in Gaza on 7th December and testing resumed.

We have already delivered vital support to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak in the Occupied Palestinian Territories through £1.25 million in funding (World Health

Organisation with £630,000 and United Nations Children's Fund with £620,000). This funding helped to provide over 20,000 testing kits, mainly in Gaza.

Tommy Sheppard:

[\[128693\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the capacity of hospitals in Gaza to provide adequate oxygen for patients with covid-19 during the recent rise in cases.

James Cleverly:

We remain concerned about the capacity of the Palestinian health system to cope with the increasing number of COVID-19 cases, especially in Gaza. We welcome the recent 30% increase in hospital beds for patients suffering critical and severe cases and the recent procurement by World Health Organisation of two additional oxygen generators. The UK continues to monitor the situation closely.

■ **Gaza: Humanitarian Situation**

Tommy Sheppard:

[\[128694\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the effect of the increasing rates of covid-19 infection on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

James Cleverly:

The UK remains concerned about the ongoing humanitarian situation in Gaza and the impact of COVID-19 on an already fragile healthcare system. Recognising the severity of the situation, we were one of the first donors to provide funding to support the health and humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). We have provided £1.25 million funding (WHO with £630,000 and UNICEF with £620,000) to purchase and co-ordinate delivery of medical equipment, treat critical care patients, train frontline health workers and scale up laboratory testing capacity - mainly in Gaza.

In addition, we are providing £2.5 million to the World Food Programme to provide food and cash assistance for the most vulnerable Palestinians to help alleviate the humanitarian situation.

■ **Gulf States: Overseas Aid**

Andy Slaughter:

[\[128100\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many projects were delivered under the Integrated Activity Fund in the financial years (a) 2016-17 and (b) 2017-18; and what the (a) budget and (b) spend was for each of those projects.

James Cleverly:

I refer the Honourable Member to my response of 10 November 2020 to question 112065. 30 projects were delivered in 2017/18. The budget for each financial year

was £20 million. Total spend was £10.5 million in 2016/17 and £13.9 million in 2017/18.

Andy Slaughter: [\[128102\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many of the projects delivered through the Integrated Activity Fund in (a) 2016-7 and (b) 2017-18 were delivered solely within one country; and what those countries were in each of those financial years.

James Cleverly:

I refer the Honourable Member to my responses to questions 112065 on 10 November and 113155 on 12 November.

■ Israeli Settlements

Dr Rupa Huq: [\[126936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to UN Resolution 2334 of 2016, reconfirmed in 2019 and 2020, whether it remains his Department's policy that Israeli settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is a flagrant violation of international law.

James Cleverly:

We have long supported resolutions consistent with our policy, including United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334. The UK's position on settlements is clear: they are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace, and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. We urge Israel to halt settlement expansion immediately.

■ Middle East: Overseas Trade

Dr Rupa Huq: [\[126933\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of whether the UK missions in (a) Israel and (b) Palestine purchase goods sourced in illegal settlements.

James Cleverly:

Neither our Embassy in Tel Aviv nor our Consulate-General in Jerusalem purchase goods from Israeli settlements. The UK's position on settlements is clear: they are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace, and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution.

■ Nigeria: Politics and Government

Chi Onwurah: [\[126873\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support the (a) independence of the electoral commission in Nigeria and (b) strengthening of civil society in that country.

James Duddridge:

The UK has provided technical expertise to Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission. More broadly, between 2014 and 2022, the UK has committed to provide £57.4m of funding through the "Deepening Democracy in Nigeria" programme to improve voter participation, participatory governance and management of the electoral process. During the 2019 elections, we also deployed 60 staff from the British High Commission to 15 states to observe the presidential elections, and 37 staff observed the gubernatorial elections in 11 states.

Our High Commission works closely with civil society organisations in Nigeria on a range of priorities. On elections, for example, we have contributed to building civil society networks through the 'Civil Society Situation Room', a coalition of over 70 civil society organisation which monitors state and federal elections, and advocates for free, fair and transparent electoral processes. We have successfully worked with the Situation Room to promote the use of technology for voter education and strengthen domestic observation and oversight of elections.

■ Occupied Territories**Dr Rupa Huq:**[\[126932\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the UK-Israel Agreement will continue to regard settlements as part of Palestine.

James Cleverly:

We do not recognise the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including the settlements, as part of Israel, and indeed the settlements are not covered by the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement, which will enter into force at the end of the Transition Period. Products from Israeli settlements are not eligible to receive preferential tariff treatment.

■ Occupied Territories: Public Sector**Christian Wakeford:**[\[127042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the Palestinian Authority's ability to deliver public services within the Palestinian Territories.

James Cleverly:

Under International Humanitarian Law, Israel, as the Occupying Power, has the duty of ensuring and maintaining public health and hygiene in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) to the fullest extent of the means available and with the cooperation of the local authorities. The UK's long standing position is that we support the Oslo Accords that set out a process for the gradual and incremental transfer of a range of responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority. We therefore welcome the restoration of cooperation between the Government of Israel and Palestinian Authority, which shows both sides are willing to put the needs and security of Israelis and Palestinians first. UK support in the OPTs also helps to build

Palestinian institutions, deliver essential services and support economic development. Our financial assistance supports a stable Palestinian Authority which can act as an effective partner for peace with Israel and can deliver essential services to Palestinians.

■ Palestinians

Dr Rupa Huq: [\[126935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in European countries on a co-ordinated approach to the recognition of the state of Palestine after the transition period.

James Cleverly:

We are clear that we want to see the creation of a sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian state - living in peace and security, side by side with Israel. We have a regular dialogue with international partners on this issue. The UK will recognise a Palestinian state at a time when it best serves the objective of peace.

■ Palestinians: Children

Tommy Sheppard: [\[128695\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to the Israeli Authorities on the death of Ali Abu Alia, a 15 year old boy, in the West Bank; and what steps his Department is taking to help protect children living in the occupied Palestinian territories.

James Cleverly:

I [Minister Cleverly] expressed my sadness to hear of the death of Palestinian child Ali Ayman Abu Alaya, following clashes between the Israeli Defence Forces and Palestinian civilians. I [Minister Cleverly] urge Israel to ensure that its investigation is swift and comprehensive. We continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, in particular the need to protect children, and urge restraint in the use of live fire. In instances where there have been accusations of excessive use of force, we advocate transparent investigations.

■ Sahel: Human Rights

Chi Onwurah: [\[126872\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) support transparent and independent investigations into reports of extrajudicial killings and human rights violations by armed groups and security forces in the Sahel region and (b) develop a strategic response to resolve that situation.

James Duddridge:

The UK is deeply concerned about the increasing allegations of human rights abuses and violations committed by a range of actors across the Sahel. We have been using

our seat at the UN Security Council and our diplomatic presence in the region to push for greater accountability and increased compliance of human rights and international humanitarian law by national and regional security forces. I have urged relevant governments across the Sahel to carry out full investigations into allegations and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice. With our recent deployment to the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali, MINUSMA, and as one of the largest humanitarian donors to the region, the protection of civilians is at the heart of the UK response.

We are also committed to strengthened civil-military coordination. On 15 October, in the lead up to the Ministerial Roundtable on the Central Sahel, I opened a UK co-hosted side event with the Norwegian Refugee Council and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), that focused on the need for more effective civil-military dialogue. We are taking forward the outcomes of this event. The UK has also provided bilateral funding to support the implementation of the G5 Sahel Joint Force's human rights compliance framework.

■ Science: Research

Chi Onwurah:

[\[126869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what effect the reduction to the Official Development Assistance budget will have on the level of funding allocated to scientific research from that budget.

James Cleverly:

Scientific advances have helped drive significant reductions in extreme poverty, increases in agricultural productivity, declines in childhood mortality and increases in life expectancy across the developing world.

The Covid pandemic's economic impact has forced the government to take the difficult decision to temporarily reduce ODA to 0.5% of GNI. The Foreign Secretary has set out a strategic approach to ensure maximum impact for our aid spend. This includes the use of ODA to support research to identify what development interventions are most effective, and develop and test new technologies and innovations, that can provide new solutions to critical challenges in development, such as climate change and infectious diseases.

Difficult decisions will be necessary, and we are currently running a prioritisation exercise on allocations, to ensure that every pound we spend on ODA goes as far as possible and has greatest impact.

■ Self-determination of States

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[\[128714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what his policy is on the principle of self-determination to determine the status of territories subject to the process of decolonisation.

Nigel Adams:

The UK's relationship with its inhabited Overseas Territories is a modern one based on partnership, shared values and the right of the people of each Territory to choose to remain British.

Where the people of an inhabited Territory choose to remain British, we will maintain and deepen our special relationship with them. The UK and the Territories recognise that our relationship brings mutual benefits and responsibilities. The UK Government's responsibility is to ensure the security and good governance of the Territories and their peoples. The UK Government expect Overseas Territory governments to meet high standards in maintaining the rule of law, respect for human rights and integrity in public life, delivering efficient public services and building strong and successful communities. The UK and inhabited Overseas Territory governments remain in agreement that the Territories are internally self-governing and that the UK Government should retain responsibility for the powers necessary to uphold its constitutional obligations in the Territories.

The UK and its Overseas Territory governments hold an annual Joint Ministerial Council to monitor and drive forward collective priorities for action in the spirit of partnership.

■ Sri Lanka: Water Supply**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[126955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his counterpart in Sri Lanka on the effect of the Chunnakam power plant complex on Northern Sri Lanka's water supply.

Nigel Adams:

We are aware of the challenges Sri Lanka faces around water management and quality and the unique challenges faced by communities in Northern Sri Lanka. Staff at the British High Commission in Colombo raised the issue of water quality during a visit to the North in July. A number of public bodies in Sri Lanka, including the national water supply and drainage board, have conducted tests and compensation was offered to those affected by water pollution caused by the Chunnakam Power plant. We will continue to engage with local government in the North to ensure these concerns around water management and quality are understood, and that measures are taken to ensure clean water.

■ Travel: EU Countries**Alex Davies-Jones:**[\[128323\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of the end of the transition period on UK citizens' ability to travel to the EU from 1 January 2021; and if he will make a statement.

Wendy Morton:

[Holding answer 15 December 2020]: The Government has discussed arrangements with the EU for UK nationals travelling to the Schengen Area. Regrettably, the EU has consistently maintained that UK nationals will be treated as Third Country Nationals under the Schengen Borders Code from 1 January 2021. UK nationals will be able to travel visa-free for short stays for up to 90 days in a rolling 180-day period. UK nationals planning to stay longer will need permission from the relevant Member State. This may require applying for a visa and/or permit.

At border control in the EU, UK nationals will be subject to third country national rules.

Information about travel to Europe after the transition period is available on gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/visit-europe-1-january-2021>

■ West Bank: Demolition**Patrick Grady:**[\[126911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will publish a response to EDM 1140 on the Demolition of Palestinian homes.

James Cleverly:

As the EDM is a motion for a debate the FCDO has no plans to reply in writing. We consistently call for an immediate end to all actions that undermine the viability of the two-state solution, including the demolition of Palestinian property in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The practice causes unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and is harmful to the peace process. I [Cleverly] raised demolitions of Palestinian structures with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 6 November. Officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv have repeatedly raised our concern about demolitions with Israeli Ministers and senior officials, and urged them to cease the counter-productive policy of demolitions, and provide a clear, transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C.

■ West Bank: Imports**Dr Rupa Huq:**[\[126934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for International Trade on the potential merits of a requirement for imports from Israeli settlements on the West Bank to have a movement certificate stating their country and location of origin.

James Cleverly:

According to the arrangement between Israel and the UK for the implementation of the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement, all movement certificates for imports from Israel and the illegal settlements must include the postal code and the name of the city, village or industrial zone conferring originating status. Products produced in

Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are not entitled to benefit from preferential tariff treatment.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Ambulance Services

Mr Barry Sheerman: [\[127470\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of emergency service vehicles used by the NHS are (a) electric vehicles and (b) other alternatively fuelled vehicles.

Edward Argar:

The information requested is not held centrally. However, a small number of electric or alternative fuel vehicles are currently in use across the ambulance fleet. Pilots are taking place to examine the effectiveness of electric or alternative fuel vehicles in major urban centres, with a view to bringing more into operation.

Mr Barry Sheerman: [\[127471\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to encourage the NHS to transition to more environmentally sustainable ambulance vehicles.

Edward Argar:

In October 2020, NHS England published the report titled 'Delivering a Net Zero NHS'. The report states that the National Health Service is working towards road-testing the world's first hydrogen-electric hybrid zero-emission double-crewed ambulance by 2022. This will be done through the London Ambulance Service as part of project ZERRO - Zero Emission Rapid Response Operations Ambulance - funded by Innovate UK, with the aim of being able to field zero emission vehicles for the rest of the fleet by 2032.

In line with the NHS operating planning and contracting guidance for 2020/21, the NHS is also ensuring that all new vehicle purchases and leases are low and ultra-low emission vehicles.

■ Autism: Suicide

Stephen Morgan: [\[126968\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to help reduce the rate of suicide among people with autism.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The fourth progress report of the cross-Government suicide prevention strategy recognises addressing highest risk groups, including autistic people, as a priority area.

From 2019/20, we are investing £57 million in suicide prevention through the NHS Long Term Plan. This will see investment in all areas of the country by 2023/24 to support local suicide prevention plans and establish suicide bereavement support services.

■ Back Pain

Jim Shannon:

[\[126878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people had back pain in the UK, by (a) age and (b) gender, in each of the last three years.

Edward Argar:

This information is not held centrally.

■ Blood Tests: Coronavirus

Abena Oppong-Asare:

[\[124339\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that blood tests are accessible within an acceptable timeframe during the covid-19 outbreak.

Edward Argar:

Throughout the pandemic all services remained available to meet the clinical need of patients using the National Health Service. Pathology networks deployed staff and services accordingly to ensure that testing for COVID-19 was maximised and that other services were also available within the usual timeframe expected by clinicians to manage their patients.

Abena Oppong-Asare:

[\[124340\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the accessibility of blood tests during the covid-19 outbreak.

Edward Argar:

Blood tests have remained available to all patients throughout the pandemic. As with all blood tests these are undertaken at the request of a clinician based upon clinical need.

Abena Oppong-Asare:

[\[124341\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what targets his Department has set for the waiting time for a blood test (a) during the covid-19 outbreak; and whether that target has changed since the start of the outbreak.

Edward Argar:

Targets for blood tests are set by local hospitals and pathology networks following guidance set out by NHS England and NHS Improvement in the Pathology Quality Assurance Dashboard and from organisations such as the Royal College of Pathologists. These targets were set prior to the pandemic and no changes to these

were made during the pandemic. All targets are driven by clinical need and requirements to ensure appropriate patient management.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control

Caroline Lucas:

[125983]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2020 to Question 121227 on Coronavirus: Disease Control and with reference to paragraph 7.41 of the Explanatory Memorandum to The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020, what the evidential basis was for the Government's assessment that there was likely to be widespread non-compliance with stringent covid-19 restrictions over Christmas 2020; whether he holds modelled data on the estimated number of additional deaths from covid-19 infection arising as a result of (a) potential non-compliance with stringent covid-19 restrictions over Christmas 2020 and (b) the loosening of covid-19 restrictions as set out under those regulations over Christmas 2020; and if he will make a statement.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 10 December 2020]: Advice from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies is clear that because major celebrations represent special or unique occasions for participants, COVID-19 related behavioural norms might be relaxed or suspended as a result. Their advice is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spi-b-key-evidence-and-advice-on-celebrations-and-observances-during-covid-19-5-november-2020>

The absence of, or non-compliance with, restrictions over the Christmas period could allow COVID-19 to grow exponentially. A Christmas 'bubble' is a sensible and proportionate way to enable people to spend time with others over the festive period, while limiting the risk of spreading infection.

Justin Madders:

[126062]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2020 to Question 121858 on Coronavirus: Disease Control, if he will publish in full the advice referred to in that Answer in advance of the 23 December 2020.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 10 December 2020]:

In assessing the approach to take over Christmas, the Government considered advice from the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor, alongside other scientific advice from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling, Operational sub-group (SPI-M-O) on both behaviours and transmission. These are available at the following links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sage-66-minutes-coronavirus-covid-19-response-5-november-2020>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spi-b-key-evidence-and-advice-on-celebrations-and-observances-during-covid-19-5-november-2020>

SAGE and SPI-M advice has been published and is available at the following links:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/939078/S0904_SAGE69_201118_SPI-M-O_Consensus_Statement.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/938977/S0909_Sixty-ninth_SAGE_meeting_on_Covid-19.pdf

■ **Coronavirus: Hospitality Industry**

Theresa Villiers: **[125960]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will allow three households to mix indoors in pubs and restaurants during the Christmas 2020 relaxation of covid-19 restrictions.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 10 December 2020]: From 2 December, the rules on who people can meet with in bars, pubs and restaurants will depend on the tier in their area. The rules might be different for indoor and outdoor hospitality settings. Between 23 and 27 December, the rules on who people can meet in bars, pubs and restaurants will not change.

Although there are exemptions to gatherings for work purposes, individuals must not have a work Christmas lunch or party, where that is a primarily social activity and is not otherwise permitted by the rules in the local tier.

■ **Department of Health and Social Care: Electric Vehicles**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: **[124840]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of the vehicles used by his Department on Government business are electric vehicles.

Edward Argar:

The Department operates 14 fleet vehicles, none of which are electric.

■ **Department of Health and Social Care: Written Questions**

Sir Christopher Chope: **[124654]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 2 December to Question 119972, if he will place the Parliamentary Question Performance Recovery Plan as it existed on (a) 19 November and (b) 2 December in the Library and if he will explain any changes between the two documents.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 8 December 2020]: We are unable to provide the information the hon. Member has requested as the document is an iterative one which forms the development of policy/advice to Ministers on performance. However, a summary of the plan has been published by the Procedure Committee at the following link:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/3858/documents/38778/default/>

■ Endoscopy**Sir Mark Hendrick:****[127485]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle the national backlog in endoscopy procedures.

Edward Argar:

In October 2020, the National Health Service issued £150 million in capital funding to regions to invest in diagnostic equipment. The recent spending review included an additional £325 million for the NHS to invest in new diagnostic machines to improve clinical outcomes, replacing over two thirds of imaging equipment that is over 10 years old.

■ Health Services: Reciprocal Arrangements**Julie Elliott:****[126033]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the ability of health insurance providers to reimburse the cost of dialysis for people with kidney disease who need to travel to the European Union after 31 December 2020 in the event that reciprocal healthcare arrangements are not agreed with (a) the EU and (b) individual member states.

Edward Argar:

The Department is aware of the concerns of people with kidney disease and is carefully looking into the impact of any loss of necessary healthcare provisions. The Government will assess its options for reciprocal healthcare if we do not achieve a European Union-wide arrangement.

■ Hospital Beds: Greater London**Dr Matthew Offord:****[126846]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the (a) general and (b) acute London bed occupancy rate was in (i) December 2019 and (ii) November 2020.

Edward Argar:

This information is not available in the format requested.

Information on critical care bed numbers has been suspended during the response to COVID-19. The latest data available on this collection is for February 2020, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/critical-care-capacity/>

■ Marie Curie Cancer Care**Esther McVey:****[126857]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will (a) support Marie Curie's National Day of Reflection campaign and (b) meet representatives of Marie Curie to discuss their plans for that campaign.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Government is committed to supporting initiatives that provide people the opportunity to come together, to reflect upon their grief and loss and to remember those that are no longer with us. We welcome this campaign and we will continue to work with charities and other organisations to ensure that support and time for reflection are available to those in need.

Members: Correspondence**Matthew Pennycook:**[\[126089\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich of 25 September 2020 on cancer diagnosis and treatment during the covid-19 outbreak, ref PO1259847.

Edward Argar:

We are working to provide all Members and external correspondents with accurate answers to their correspondence, as well as supporting the Government's response to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The hon. Member's letter will be answered as soon as possible.

Mr John Baron:[\[128086\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to respond to the correspondence from the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay of 14 September, 22 October and 19 November 2020 on his constituent Ms Harman.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 15 December 2020]: We are working rapidly to provide all Members and external correspondents with accurate answers to their correspondence, as well as supporting the Government's response to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The hon. Member's letter will be answered as soon as possible.

Musculoskeletal Disorders: Physiotherapy**Rosie Duffield:**[\[124283\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that patients with musculoskeletal health conditions can continue to access (a) NHS, (b) private and (c) voluntary sector physiotherapy during the covid-19 outbreak.

Edward Argar:

Private or voluntary sector care decisions on access to care are a matter for the individual provider as these services are independent of the Government.

For NHS services guidance has been issued by NHS England and NHS Improvement on what services should be available. The NHS England and NHS Improvement guidance on COVID-19 prioritisation within community health services, updated

August 2020, sets out advice for local commissioners in prioritising the return to near normal for most of their NHS services. This includes physiotherapy. The guidance sets out that commissioners should take into account where care is urgent and where care can take place remotely or may be patient-initiated. The guidance is available at the following link:

www.england.nhs.uk/publication/implementing-phase-3-of-the-nhs-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/

■ Paramedical Staff: Air Pollution

Mr Barry Sheerman: [127469]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the ambient air pollution that paramedics are exposed to in the cabs of emergency vehicles.

Edward Argar:

To reduce the ambient air pollution that paramedics are exposed to, emergency vehicles are fitted with air filters provided by vehicle manufacturers as part of their standard specifications.

■ Pharmacy: Finance

Alexander Stafford: [126185]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that community pharmacies are financially viable businesses.

Alexander Stafford: [127034]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure his Department's funding for community pharmacies in Rother Valley is used to support the community's healthcare needs.

Jo Churchill:

Community pharmacies in Rother Valley and across the country, provide a vital service to the patients in the areas they serve. The Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework five-year deal, agreed in 2019 with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, commits £2.592 billion annually to the sector, with nearly £13 billion committed over five years.

Further, during the COVID-19 pandemic, £370 million has been made in advance payments to support pharmacies in maintaining medicine supplies and providing health advice. For June to September we have increased reimbursement prices of the most commonly prescribed generic medicines by £15 million. Additional payments have been made to support opening hours on Bank Holidays and for a medicine delivery service to shielded patients.

■ Surgery: Warwickshire

Taiwo Owatemi: [\[126151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of potential options for alleviating demands on NHS services to help maintain the provision of elective services in (a) Coventry and (b) Warwickshire in Winter 2020-21.

Edward Argar:

Extensive, system-wide measures have been put in place across Coventry and Warwickshire, to support patient flow through the acute hospitals and maintain elective services through winter, with a particular focus on:

- Extra care home capacity to support discharge from hospital;
- Additional acute capacity;
- Additional investment in primary care and mental health;
- Concentrating on enhanced discharge practises to maintain patient flow;
- 111 first pathway to divert patients from accident and emergency departments where appropriate and encourage use of services to seek help early to avoid need for admission; and
- Enhanced care home services.

■ Surgical Mesh Implants

Mrs Sharon Hodgson: [\[125963\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2020 to Question 121200, what discussions he (a) has had and (b) plans to have with stakeholders on lifting the suspension on surgical mesh.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 14 December 2020]: The Secretary of State has met with such stakeholders.

■ Tinnitus

Jim Shannon: [\[126877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of people who have tinnitus in the UK.

Edward Argar:

The Department has not made an estimate.

■ Tourette's Syndrome: Children

Navendu Mishra: [\[127683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what pathways exist for children in the North West for the diagnosis of Tourettes syndrome.

Edward Argar:

Commissioning of local services, including for Tourette's services, is a local matter, over which individual National Health Service commissioners have responsibility. Local commissioners are best placed to understand the needs of local populations and commission services accordingly. NHS England and NHS Improvement have advised that early discussions are taking place in both St Helens and Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Groups towards expanding pathways for the diagnosis of Tourette's syndrome for children in the North West.

Urinary Tract Infections: Diagnosis**Chris Green:**[\[126895\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans Public Health England has to update its guidance on the diagnosis of urinary tract infections to reflect changes in remote diagnostic techniques.

Edward Argar:

The current Public Health England (PHE) diagnostic urinary tract infection guidance features a diagnostic flowchart for over 65 year olds, which can be followed during remote consultation such as telephone or video consultations and does not recommend urine dipsticks.

The flowchart for under 65 year olds encourages diagnosis based on three symptoms that can be assessed remotely. Current guidance advises that patients with only one of these are tested using a urine dipstick, this could be facilitated by patients providing a urine sample from home for testing.

The guidance advises that clinicians should consider in patients with milder symptoms a back-up antibiotic prescription with appropriate pain relief. This would reduce the need for patients to attend the surgery. This guidance was last updated in October 2020 and will be reviewed again in November 2021. The recently updated guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/urinary-tract-infection-diagnosis>

PHE is collaborating with the Royal College of General Practitioners to develop training materials on antibiotic prescribing in remote consultations.

Ventilators**Justin Madders:**[\[127586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many mechanical ventilators (a) were purchased and (b) have been used since the start of the covid-19 outbreak.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 14 December 2020]: As of 9 December, there are over 30,000 mechanical ventilators available to patients across the United Kingdom. This compares to around 9,000 at the start of the pandemic in March.

Of the additional stock that has arrived and is available to the National Health Service, 15,150 have been bought via the Prime Minister's ventilator challenge and 7,150 from established suppliers.

Of the 22,300 mechanical ventilators bought and delivered since March, 3,300 have been distributed to hospitals across the UK and 19,000 remain in storage ready to be distributed if needed.

Figures on the numbers of patients on ventilators are reported daily at the following link:

<https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/healthcare>

HOME OFFICE

■ Asylum: Housing

Neil Coyle:

[110143]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to suspend evictions from asylum accommodation during the November 2020 covid-19 lockdown.

Chris Philp:

In March 2020, at the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Home Office paused ending support for people who had been granted asylum, or whose claim had been refused. This was done in respect of the full lockdown in place at that time, including a stop on house moves and a stop on people being moved out of rental property.

We said from the outset that this was a temporary measure which would be brought to an end as soon as it was safe to do so.

In August the Home Office restarted cessations of support in a phased way. This is necessary to reduce demand on the asylum system while prioritising the safety of those within the asylum system. We are not currently issuing discontinuation notices for those on Section 4 support. The process of issuing discontinuation notices is kept under regular review, taking consideration of public health guidance and reviewing each case on its individual merits.

We have been working closely with National and Local health Colleagues throughout the pandemic to inform our approach and will continue to do so. We remain committed to working closely with the accommodation providers and communicating with local authorities to relieve pressure and capacity as much as possible.

■ Asylum: Military Bases

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[128703\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many incidents of self-harm have occurred at (a) Penally training camp and (b) Napier barracks since September 2020.

Chris Philp:

Those accommodated at Penally training camp and Napier barracks have access to medical professionals and mental health support.

Our providers are trained to identify vulnerabilities and where safeguarding issues are identified the first responder will make an assessment to the level of risk and the next appropriate response to provide support.

Regular welfare checks are conducted on all service users, including behavioural monitoring of those who show signs of vulnerability and are not engaging with fellow service users and staff.

We work closely with our accommodation providers to ensure that all service users are aware of, and have access to, Migrant Help's helpline. This is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, if they need help, advice or guidance, including signposting to wider mental and medical health services.

The Home Office do not publish a breakdown of self-harm incidents relating to service users.

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[128704\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish the scoping exercises which were used to assess the suitability of the Penally training camp in Pembrokeshire as a temporary accommodation site for asylum seekers in (a) 2015-2016 and (b) 2020.

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[128705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with Secretary of State for Defence on the suitability of the Penally training camp as a site for temporary accommodation for asylum seekers in (a) 2015-2016 and (b) 2020.

Chris Philp:

Work to explore further options to accommodate asylum seekers in line with the Government's statutory obligations included examining the potential to utilise MOD sites at short notice after engagement with officials from MOD. This scoping process identified Penally Training Camp and Napier Barracks.

The basic requirements for the Home Office were that the sites were capable of housing, safely and securely, on a temporary basis, large numbers of single adult male asylum seekers, that the sites were either available or could be vacated by the MOD at short notice, and that the accommodation provider, Clearsprings Ready Homes, could operate the sites safely and securely, providing for asylum seeker needs.

There are no records available regarding potential use of the site in 2015 – 2016.
There are no plans to publish the scoping exercise.

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[128706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether asylum seekers (a) have been or (b) will be transferred to the temporary Penally accommodation site from areas in England under tiers 2 or 3 covid-19 restrictions at the time of their transfer.

Chris Philp:

Asylum seekers have been transferred to Penally from tier 2 regions. Transfers have not been made in areas where tier 3 restrictions are in place.

All movements of asylum seekers are undertaken with due regard to regulations in place in both England and Wales.

■ **Asylum: Penally**

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[120094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish details of the scoping exercise which identified the Penally training camp in Pembrokeshire as a suitable site for temporary accommodation for asylum seekers.

Chris Philp:

Work to explore further options to accommodate asylum seekers in line with the Government's statutory obligations included examining the potential to utilise MOD sites at short notice. This scoping process identified Penally Training Camp and Napier Barracks.

The basic requirements for the Home Office were that the sites were capable of housing, safely and securely, on a temporary basis, large numbers of single adult male asylum seekers, that the sites were either available or could be vacated by the MOD at short notice, and that the accommodation provider, Clearsprings Ready Homes, could operate the sites safely and securely, providing for asylum seeker needs.

There are no plans to publish the scoping exercise.

■ **Biometric Residence Permits**

Hywel Williams:

[\[128636\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many Biometric Residence Permit Cards enquiry forms were (a) received and (b) answered within the five day working day target in November 2020.

Hywel Williams:

[\[128637\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department has taken to improve the (a) production and (b) delivery times of Biometric Residence Permit Cards since the 1 of November 2020.

Kevin Foster:

Quality assured data on the number of unique enquiries received is not available.

The Home Office is not meeting its five working day response time for deliveries, collections and errors. At the end of November, it was taking 35 working days. Additional staff are being recruited and trained to undertake this work to improve this position.

An Application Planning Interface (API) is due to be introduced at the end of January 2021 to improve the National Insurance Number verification process between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and UKVI. This will reduce data transfer delays and speed up the verification process.

Work is underway to improve address quality and prevent mis-delivery of BRPs, as well as reducing errors in production. We are meeting weekly with our delivery partner (FEDEX) to improve delivery processes.

■ Burglary**Imran Ahmad Khan:**[\[127022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to reduce burglaries in (a) West Yorkshire and (b) England.

Kit Malthouse:

On 1 October 2019, my Rt Hon Friend, the Home Secretary announced the £25m Safer Streets Fund. The fund supports communities in England and Wales that are disproportionately affected by acquisitive crimes, including burglary, to implement well evidenced crime prevention initiatives, such as street lighting and home security.

West Yorkshire PCC was successful in receiving £709,311 across two projects in Bradford (£549,375) and Leeds (£159,936). The funding will go towards improving the physical security of homes, improved street lighting, installation of CCTV cameras and crime prevention advice for residents.

The Government is clear that these crimes, when they take place, should be reported to the police so that they can be investigated appropriately. To help ensure the police have the resources they need to carry out these investigations, we are recruiting 20,000 officers by March 2023. Specifically, within West Yorkshire, they have been allocated an additional 256 officers in the first year of uplift. At 30 September 2020 the force is 308 officers into uplift against its baseline and has therefore already exceeded its year one allocation.

■ Crimes of Violence**Imran Ahmad Khan:**[\[127021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to reduce violent crime in (a) West Yorkshire and (b) England.

Kit Malthouse:

The Government is committed to delivering on the people's priorities by tackling violent crime. This means giving the police the resources and powers they need to make a difference. In January this year we announced the biggest funding increase in a decade for the police system and we are recruiting an additional 20,000 police officers over next three years including 6,000 additional officers by the end of financial year 2020/21. In the 18 Police Force areas worst affected by serious violence, we have invested a total of £176.5 million over two years (2019-21) to deliver a whole-systems response, including police surge funding and Violence Reduction Units.

£104.9 million has been invested in Police Surge funding to pay for a surge in police operational activity. West Yorkshire Police have been allocated £6,655,315. This has paid for additional capacity through overtime, allowing for increased patrols in greater numbers for longer periods of times, new equipment and technology, improved intelligence and targeting, and an enhanced investigative response.

The Government has invested £70m over two years (19/20 – 20/21) in establishing multi-agency Violence Reduction Units (VRUs). £6,740,000 of this was invested into the West Yorkshire PCC to develop the West Yorkshire VRU. VRUs bring together police, local government, health and education professionals, community leaders and other key partners to identify the drivers of serious violence and agree a multi-agency response. This funding has supported the development of strategic needs assessments to identify the local risks and drivers of serious violence, as well as a range of activity to respond to these drivers, such as improved data quality and sharing, and a range of interventions such as teachable moments (e.g. A&E hospital and custody navigators), an independent domestic violence advocacy service and mentoring in schools and alternative provision sites.

VRUs have distributed a further £2.9 million to hundreds of frontline charities working on violence prevention projects which support vulnerable children and young people. More than 300 charities will share in the financial assistance. The West Yorkshire VRU received £285,168 of this funding and is supporting 40 charities and have already reached 2865 children.

Since October 2018 we have also been continuing to deliver the ten-year £200m Youth Endowment Fund, to tackle the drivers behind serious youth violence. On 6 May 2020, the YEF launched a new £6.5 million COVID-19 grant round to support vulnerable young people, aged 10 to 14, at risk of youth violence. In total 16 grantees in Yorkshire & Humber are in receipt of funding from all grant rounds.

We have also announced new legislation which will aim to prevent and reduce serious violence by creating a new duty (and extending an existing duty) on public sector bodies to collaborate and plan with each other to prevent and reduce serious violence.

■ Deportation: Jamaica

Kim Johnson:

[121931]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will suspend the charter flights departing up to 50 citizens to Jamaica planned for 2nd December until the Equality and Human Rights Commission report, Public Sector Equality Duty assessment of hostile environment policies, published 25 November, has been (a) considered and (b) addressed.

Chris Philp:

I refer my honourable member to the statement I gave in the House, on 30th November 2020 available from this link <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-11-30/debates/D3928F57-B16F-4BB0-9A50-642E1C47E6C7/ScheduledMassDeportationJamaica>

■ Home Office: Correspondence

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[96174]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what target (a) her Department and (b) UK Visas and Immigration has relating to the proportion of Ministerial correspondence that has to be responded to within 20-days; and what the performance was of (i) her Department and (ii) UK Visas and Immigration in meeting that target for each month in 2020.

James Brokenshire:

The (a) department and (b) UK Visas and Immigration work to a target of responding to 95% of Ministerial correspondence within 20 days.

Performance on policy correspondence in meeting the target in each month in 2020 is below.

Performance has been impacted by a very significant increase in the volume of correspondence received, alongside the need for Ministers and officials to instigate a remote process for drafting and signing correspondence during the period of COVID-19 restrictions. An action plan is currently in place to clear backlogs and drive up performance with September's increase in performance reflecting progress.

MONTH	PERFORMANCE
Jan-20	20%
Feb-20	39%
Mar-20	41%
Apr-20	39%
May-20	27%
June-20	29%

MONTH	PERFORMANCE
July-20	30%
Aug -20	33%
Sep-20	63%

The information contained in the table is based on management information subject to revision.

The latest published data on UKVI performance against the service standard is held at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/customer-service-operations-data-november-2020>

■ Home Office: Written Questions

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[126959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to answer Question 96174, tabled on the 28th September 2020 by the hon. member for Slough.

James Brokenshire:

The response for UIN 96174 was given on 16th December 2020.

■ Immigrants: Finance

Drew Hendry: [\[117293\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the effect of No Recourse to Public Funds conditions on the number of people sleeping rough since the start of the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office does not hold data on the number of people rough sleeping in the UK who are subject to no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

The Government remains committed to protecting vulnerable people and has acted decisively to ensure that we support everyone through this pandemic. Many of the wide-ranging COVID-19 measures the Government has put in place, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme have been made available to migrants with NRPF. We have published guidance and support for migrants affected by COVID-19 at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-get-support-if-youre-a-migrant-living-in-the-uk>.

A discretionary fund akin to the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme, in the form of a £500 discretionary payment, paid by local authorities is available to those with

NRPF, provided they meet the criteria set by the local authority for discretionary payments in their area.

Local authorities may also provide basic safety net support, regardless of immigration status, if it is established that there is a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution, for example, where there are community care needs, migrants with serious health problems or family cases where the wellbeing of a child is in question.

The Government has provided councils with £6.4 billion to support their communities through this pandemic, which includes their work to support rough sleepers. This includes £4.6 billion in un-ringfenced funding, £1.1 billion from the Infection Control Fund, £300 million to support Test and Trace as well as funding allocated to councils from the new Local Alert Level system and a number of grants to support communities and vulnerable people.

We are spending over £700m on tackling homelessness and rough sleeping this year. This is on top of the unprecedented resources already committed to help councils support their communities through the pandemic, which includes their work to support children. This funding includes over £4.6 billion in un-ringfenced grants, £485m Contain Outbreak Management Fund and additional funding for authorities to support care homes, high streets and the most vulnerable in their communities.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government has worked closely with local authorities and the sector to offer vulnerable people safe accommodation and support. That work is ongoing and by September over 29,000 people had been successfully supported, with over 10,000 still in emergency accommodation and nearly 19,000 provided with settled accommodation or move on support.

NRPF is applied to migrants who are expected to maintain and accommodate themselves in the UK, without recourse to public funds. However, individuals whose basis of stay in the UK is based on their family life or human rights can apply to have the NRPF condition lifted by making a 'change of conditions' application if there are exceptional circumstances related to financial circumstances, to avoid destitution and rough sleeping.

To avoid destitution and sleeping rough, those without immigration status should regularise their stay or leave the UK. There is support available to do this through the Voluntary Returns Service.

The Rough Sleeping Support Service (RSSS) offers an enhanced service for Local Authorities and registered charities to establish whether a rough sleeper has access to public funds. Part of this service includes the RSSS contacting casework teams (where there is an open application) to request that the case is prioritised. The Home Office remains committed to working with Local Authorities in their work with non-UK national rough sleepers.

■ Immigrants: Sleeping Rough

Mr Virendra Sharma:

[\[128656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2020 to Question 125980, what estimate her Department has made of the number of people who will be affected by the new Immigration Rules which make rough sleeping grounds for refusing or cancelling a person's permission to be in the UK.

Chris Philp:

I refer to my answer of 10 December. No estimate has been made of volumes affected by the new immigration rule on rough sleeping as it will be used sparingly and only where a person repeatedly engages in anti-social behaviour and refuses offers of support. Statistics on the number of rough sleepers are available on Gov.uk.

■ Immigration: EU Nationals

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[\[128713\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2020 to Question 125288, what steps she plans to take to determine whether the durable partnership was formed before 31 December 2020.

Kevin Foster:

The evidence required under the EU Settlement Scheme that the durable partnership was formed and was durable by 31 December 2020 will depend on the circumstances of the case.

The applicant may be required to provide a relevant document as a durable partner which was issued under the Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2016, or the applicant may be able to provide other evidence of cohabitation, such as bank statements or utility bills in joint names at the same address, residential tenancy or rental agreements or mortgage statements.

Further information for applicants is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/eu-settlement-scheme-evidence-of-relationship-to-an-eu-citizen>.

■ Members: Correspondence

Rosie Cooper:

[\[109237\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to respond to the letter on covid-19 from the hon. Member for West Lancashire dated 7 April 2020.

Chris Philp:

I apologise for the delay in responding to the Hon. Member's correspondence. The Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts responded on 12 November.

Mr John Baron: [\[111995\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to respond to the correspondence from the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay of 14 August, 14 September and 9 October 2020 on his constituent Mr Perfect.

Chris Philp:

The response was sent to the hon. Member on the 13 November 2020.

■ **Police: Motor Vehicles**

Mr Barry Sheerman: [\[127476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proportion of vehicles used by police forces in England are (a) electric and (b) other alternatively fuelled vehicles.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office does not hold this information.

Each Police Force has responsibility for how they manage and deploy their operational fleet.

■ **Police: Stun Guns**

Taiwo Owatemi: [\[128289\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will conduct an assessment of police use of tasers on (a) Black, Asian and minority ethnic children and (b) other children.

Kit Malthouse:

The Government is clear that all use of force must be reasonable, proportionate and necessary and that no one should be subject to use of force based on their race or ethnicity.

All Officers receive comprehensive training in assessing the potential vulnerabilities of a person, including their size age and size.

When police officers take the difficult decision to use force, they are accountable through the law for their actions.

The Home Office publishes annual statistics on the use of force to allow for scrutiny of police use of force including taser and other less lethal weapons.

■ **Slavery**

Sarah Champion: [\[128678\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to include survivors' voices when designing and delivering its response to modern slavery.

Victoria Atkins:

We are committed to embedding the survivors' voice in future policy. We have recently undertaken a piece of work to engage with survivors directly, to better

understand their recovery needs and their experiences of the National Referral Mechanism, placing survivors at the core of policy development.

We have worked with the Care Quality Commission to deliver an independent inspection regime across the new Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract. As part of this work, survivors will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of the support services they receive whilst living in safehouse accommodation and/or in receipt of outreach support.

Through the NRM Transformation Programme we will continue to examine how best we can engage survivors to inform our response to modern slavery.

■ Travellers: Caravan Sites

Martin Docherty-Hughes:

[\[128181\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the Friends, Families and Travellers 2020 report, Police renew calls for more Gypsy and Traveller sites in opposition to the criminalisation of unauthorised encampments, published 9 September 2020, that concluded (a) 21.7 per cent of police respondents agreed with the Home Office proposals to criminalise unauthorised encampments and (b) 93.7 per cent of police bodies called for site provision as the solution to unauthorised encampments.

Kit Malthouse:

- The Home Office has conducted a public consultation on strengthening the powers available to the police to deal with unauthorised encampments. The Government will consider all views and representations made when reaching our decision on the next steps.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Children

Afzal Khan:

[\[126978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she plans to take to ensure that children arriving in Kent via migrant crossings are protected and cared for.

Afzal Khan:

[\[126979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department has taken to ensure that children who have passed through the Kent Intake Unit are appropriately supported and cared for.

Chris Philp:

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) arriving in Dover are cared for in the Kent Intake Unit (KIU) before being placed in appropriate social services care. Those claiming asylum are only in the KIU whilst their claims are registered.

Children are always prioritised and supported there for as short a period as possible. Once a child is in the care of a local authority, they are provided support and care on the same basis as all other looked-after children.

Where a local authority, such as Kent, is supporting UASC at more than 0.07% of their total child population, they may refer an unaccompanied child to the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The NTS is the mechanism that allows legal responsibility of a UASC to be transferred from one local authority to another, where it is in the child's best interests to do so. We have recently undertaken a consultation with local authorities on an improved model for the NTS. This consultation closed on 30 September and we are carefully considering the responses.

In addition to the money paid to local authorities through the local government finance settlement, the Home Office provides funding to local authorities looking after UASC and former UASC care leavers. Increases to these contributions for 2020-21 were announced on 8 June.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Environment Protection: Planning

Liz Twist:

[\[126947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to ensure that local communities are consulted on the environmental impact of the proposed developments for (a) growth and (b) renewal zones outlined in the Planning for the Future White Paper.

Christopher Pincher:

Our proposals are designed to put effective community engagement at the heart of planning. The current planning system has a poor record in this area, with information that is hard to find, and difficult to understand.

By taking a digital-first approach to modernise the planning process, we can use new tools and platforms to make it easier for people to understand what is being proposed, and to feed their views into the system at the right time. This will help ensure local people can have real influence over both the location and design of development, and have a meaningful say over its environmental implications.

They will be able to do this both at the plan-making stage – when the important decisions are being made about the scale and location of growth – and as the details of proposed developments come forward. We have proposed a quicker, simpler framework for assessing environmental effects to support this: one which will be easier for communities to engage with, while protecting what matters and leaving an inheritance of environmental improvement.

We are grateful for the many responses received to these proposals. They are being analysed at present, and we will take them into account as we consider how to move forward.

■ Flats: Insulation

Andrew Gwynne:

[\[128640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that mortgage lenders do not request EWS1 forms for flats in blocks of three storeys or less.

Christopher Pincher:

The EWS1 process is not a Government or regulatory requirement. Whether an EWS1 is needed is determined by lenders and the professionals valuing a building - not all lenders ask for an EWS1. The Department has come to an agreement with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) that flats in blocks without cladding do not need an EWS1 form. Buildings under 18m should not fall into the EWS1 process, unless in justifiable circumstances – usually relating to the proportion of cladding on the building. RICS is working with wider industry, including lenders, on new guidance for surveyors which will make clearer the circumstances when EWS1 valuation forms are, and are not, to be requested.

■ High Rise Flats: Greater London

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[126845\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many residential properties in London over 18 metres his Department has identified as being constructed with ACM cladding; and how many of those properties remain to be cleared of that cladding.

Christopher Pincher:

The Department publishes data on the identification and remediation progress of high-rise residential and publicly owned buildings in England with ACM cladding systems unlikely to meet building regulations. The latest data is available [here](#) .

■ Nature Conservation: Planning

Liz Twist:

[\[126946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what additional protections for nature will result from the reforms to the planning system set out in the Planning for the Future White Paper.

Christopher Pincher:

In *Planning for the Future* we proposed a quicker and simpler framework for assessing environmental effects: one which does not compromise on environmental standards, and indeed encourages opportunities for environmental enhancements to be identified and pursued early in the development process. Proposals will leave an inheritance of environmental improvements with environmental assets protected, more green spaces provided, more sustainable development supported and new homes that are more energy efficient. Though we are still considering the responses to the White Paper consultation, I can assure you that legal protection for landscape, habitat and wildlife will remain in force, and reforms will support the implementation of

the proposals in the Environment Bill, including the commitment to a 10 per cent biodiversity net gain requirement. Consultation on the White Paper closed on 29 October 2020. The Government will publish its response following consideration of all the feedback received.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Arms Trade: Saudi Arabia

Sarah Olney: [\[128711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what assessment she has made for the implications of her policy of her policies of the report from the UN Group of Experts on Yemen on its decision to resume the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

HM Government is always concerned to learn of allegations such as those contained in the Group of Eminent Experts' latest report. The United Kingdom urges the parties to the conflict to investigate these allegations, to take action to uphold rights and responsibilities, and to co-operate with the Group in future.

We take our export responsibilities seriously and will continue to assess all export licences in accordance with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (the 'Consolidated Criteria'). We will not issue any export licences where to do so would be inconsistent with the Consolidated Criteria.

■ Human Rights: Turkey

Gareth Thomas: [\[127461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that Turkey upholds international labour and human rights standards as a condition of any trade deal with the UK; and if she will make a statement.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

The United Kingdom's priority this year is to seek to replicate the effects of existing EU trading arrangements with Turkey, as far as possible, into a bilateral arrangement between the United Kingdom and Turkey by the end of the Transition Period.

HM Government has a strong history of promoting our values globally. We are clear trade does not come at the expense of our record in upholding rights and responsibilities, which are a key part of our foreign policy, and HM Government will continue to engage the Turkish Government on these issues.

■ Medical Records: Trade Agreements

Gareth Thomas: [\[127464\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps she will take to protect public funded health data from data control from outside the UK during trade negotiations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

In Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, HM Government is seeking provisions that provide the right balance between removing barriers to the free flow of data, and not lowering the standard of protection afforded to the personal data of the British people – which includes health data.

Our data protection laws, enshrined in the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), remain unchanged. HM Government is clear that health and care data should only ever be shared if it is to be used lawfully, treated with respect and held securely, and only where the right safeguards are in place.

JUSTICE**■ Conveyancing: Standards****Marco Longhi:**[\[127011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether his Department has plans to bring forward proposals to set a minimum set of standards for conveyancing solicitors.

Marco Longhi:[\[127012\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment he has made of the level of complaints made about (a) conveyancing solutions and (b) other parties undertaking property conveyancing activities.

Alex Chalk:

Under the framework established by the Legal Services Act 2007, the legal profession is regulated independently of government. Solicitors are regulated by the independent Solicitors Regulation Authority, and it is a matter for them to set standards for their practitioners.

Service complaints relating to authorised persons under the Legal Services Act 2007 (including solicitors and licenced conveyancers) are within the remit of the Legal Ombudsman which operates independently of government. Conduct matters regarding solicitors and licensed conveyancers are addressed by the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Council of Licensed Conveyancers respectively.

■ HM Courts and Tribunals Service: Contracts**Rachel Hopkins:**[\[127044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether any companies stated during the recent bidding process for the HM Courts & Tribunals Service's security guarding service contract that they would pay employees the Living Wage as certified by the Living Wage Foundation; and if he will make a statement.

Chris Philp:

The recent tender for security services for HMCTS had two bidders who stated they would pay the guards over the National Living Wage and towards a level approaching

the UK Real Living Wage. The offers were a mix of base pay, based on the National Living Wage, and attendance bonuses and therefore not completely aligned to the Real Living Wage.

■ **Jury Service: Coronavirus**

Rachael Maskell:

[128700]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what estimate he has made of the number of NHS staff who have been called for jury service during the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will exempt NHS staff from jury service during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Philp:

In line with the Juries Act 1974, jurors are summoned randomly by the Jury Central Summoning Bureau (JCSB) using the Electoral Voting Registers. The registers are a list of everyone who has registered themselves as eligible to vote which are supplied to HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) by every Local Authority each year. At the point of being called for jury service a person's occupation is not known. It is therefore not possible to estimate how many NHS staff have been called for jury service since the COVID-19 outbreak.

At this time, the Government does not expect frontline emergency services staff, including those in the NHS, to be serving on juries.

Anyone in these groups, or any Key Worker working in education, the food supply chain or in any other frontline role who is summoned for jury service should contact the JCSB. While by law we cannot automatically defer jurors, HMCTS has issued guidance to help staff deal sympathetically with all requests from the public who wish to be released or deferred from jury service as a result of COVID-19. This also includes jurors who are in self-isolation, household isolation or those who are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Each application for deferral/excusal is considered on its own merit, that is both fair to the individual and consistent with the needs of the court in providing a representative jury.

We have published further details here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-courts-and-tribunals-planning-and-preparation#jury-trials-and-jury-service>

■ **Sexual Offences: Females**

Peter Kyle:

[128702]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of rolling out the Sexual Violence Complainants' Advocate Scheme, piloted in Northumbria under the Home Office Violence Against Women & Girls Service Transformation Fund.

Alex Chalk:

The Government wants to ensure that victims of sexual offences are treated with dignity and respect throughout the criminal justice process.

We are aware of the Sexual Violence Complainants' Advocate Scheme in Northumbria and are considering the evaluation of this pilot as part of the Criminal Justice Board's end-to-end review of the criminal justice response to rape and serious sexual offences.

The Government will publish its initial findings and recommendations for action in due course. We are committed to continuing work with partners from across the criminal justice system after that to improve the system in the longer term.

The recently revised Victims' Code, which comes into force on 1 April 2021, will also ensure that victims benefit from a clearer set of rights and that these rights are recognised at every stage of the justice system. The revised Victims' Code provides a solid foundation on which we can progress the Victims' Law. We aim to consult on the detail of the Victims' Law next year.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

■ Liberal Democrats: Criminal Investigation

Peter Gibson:

[\[129113\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for City of Chester, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, pursuant to the Ministerial Correction of 9 December 2020 to the Answer to Question 124870, what the status is of the Metropolitan police investigation into the former chief executive of the Liberal Democrats following a request by the Electoral Commission for a prosecution.

Christian Matheson:

The Commission is responsible for regulating political finance in the UK. In performing this role it may ask other law enforcement bodies, like the police, to consider investigating matters that sit outside the Commission's remit or enforcement powers. Whether the law enforcement body investigates, and what it concludes, are not matters for the Commission.

The Commission was notified in March 2019 by the Metropolitan Police that it had concluded its investigation in respect of a former campaigns officer of the Liberal Democrats, and that no further action would be taken.

TRANSPORT

■ High Speed Trains: West Midlands

Louise Haigh:

[\[126917\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to bring forward legislative proposals for the construction of high-speed railway from the West Midlands to Sheffield and Leeds.

Andrew Stephenson:

Plans for legislation covering the Eastern Leg of HS2 Phase 2b will be confirmed following the publication of the Integrated Rail Plan. The Government is committed to ensuring the Midlands, Yorkshire and the North East realise the benefits of high-speed services. The Integrated Rail Plan will set out the best way of doing so, looking at how best to deliver and design HS2 alongside other major schemes, such as Northern Powerhouse Rail and those within Midlands Engine Rail.

Members: Correspondence**Daisy Cooper:**[\[128733\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he plans to respond to the letters from the RSPB sent on 3 March 2020 and 11 May 2020 requesting assurances on six measures to protect nature.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department has no record of any correspondence dated 3 March or 11 May from the RSPB. If a copy can be provided the department will ensure a reply is sent.

Railways: Bicycles**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[128720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he plans to increase the capacity of bike storage facilities on trains in the context of increased uptake of cycling during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Government has set out in the Prime Minister's Cycling and Walking Plan that it believes that existing trains should include more spaces for cycles where practically possible, and that all future rolling stock should include more bike spaces relevant to the markets served. Train operators are best placed to determine the configuration of the interior layouts of trains to accommodate more cycles on routes where this is necessary.

Railways: Freight**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[128723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment he has made of the operational effect on rail freight of ending the transition period without a deal with the EU.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

I set out the potential impacts of the end of the Transition Period on the rail industry, including rail freight, in my reply to PQ UIN 120112 on 30 November 2020. The Department has engaged extensively with the rail freight industry on a number of cross-cutting policy areas to help businesses prepare for a non-negotiated outcome with the EU at the end of the transition period.

We have published guidance on running domestic and cross-border rail operations from 1 January 2021, and this applies irrespective of the UK and EU agreeing a formal trading relationship. The guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rail-transport-from-1-january-2021>.

The Department also engages on a very regular basis specifically with cross-border freight operators to ensure they have the necessary arrangements in place and are well prepared for all scenarios from 1 January 2021. Cross-border rail freight operations are not contingent upon an agreement being reached with the EU. The Government is confident that the necessary contingency arrangements will be in place to secure the continued smooth operation of cross-border services from 1 January 2021.

■ Railways: Social Distancing

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[126950]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress has his Department made on deploying and promoting mobile and app technology to help rail passengers socially distance whilst travelling.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Rail operators are working hard to facilitate social distancing between passengers wherever possible, in line with Public Health England advice. Operators are providing information about train loadings on their website, allowing passengers to make informed choices, and are monitoring the number of passengers who board services. A free personalised messaging service, 'Alert Me by Messenger', is also available via the National Rail Enquiries (NRE) website. It provides real-time alerts on journey disruption and crowding. This helps passengers make safer travel choices, such as travelling off-peak where possible, and improves safety and efficiency on the rail network. Since June, the NRE service has sent around 3 million alerts.

People should seek to book tickets online wherever possible and to plan ahead, and operators are highlighting on their websites the services that are quieter or busier to enable travellers to make informed decisions.

■ Rolling Stock

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[128719]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the number of trains on the UK network with built-in ramps which extend to platforms.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

There are 378 carriages forming 58 trains currently in, or being introduced into, service with Greater Anglia that have in-built ramps.

On order are a further 133 carriages forming 35 trains for Transport for Wales and 208 carriages forming 54 trains for Merseyrail, all of which will have in-built ramps.

■ Transport: Capital Investment**Liz Saville Roberts:** [\[126938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much capital spending on transport took place in 2019 by population share in (a) Wales, (b) Scotland, (c) Northern Ireland and (d) England.

Rachel Maclean:

HM Treasury publish an annual 'Country and Regional Analysis', which presents statistical estimates for the allocation of identifiable expenditure between the UK's countries and regions. For 2018-2019 the analysis shows that transport spend per capita in 2018-2019 was £474 in England, £642 in Scotland, £395 in Wales and £354 in Northern Ireland.

■ Travel: Wolverhampton**Stuart Anderson:** [\[126992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much funding Wolverhampton has been allocated for active travel options; and what projects the funds are being spent on.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Under the Active Travel Fund, the Department has made available around £17 million to Transport for the West Midlands (TfWM) this financial year for schemes to boost cycling and walking.

It is up to TfWM to determine in discussion with its seven constituent authorities where this funding is spent. The Spending Review last month confirmed that a further £257 million would be made available for cycling and walking schemes in England next financial year. The Department will make a further announcement in due course about how that funding will be split between different schemes and different regions of the country.

TREASURY**■ Credit: Regulation****Paul Maynard:** [\[126813\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will take steps to authorise the Financial Conduct Authority to regulate businesses in the buy now, pay later sector.

John Glen:

Buy-now-pay-later products that apply interest are regulated credit agreements, and therefore firms offering them must be authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and must comply with the relevant sections of the FCA's Consumer Credit sourcebook and provisions contained within the Consumer Credit Act 1974. However, buy-now-pay-later products that are interest-free, repayable by no more than 12 instalments within no more than 12 months, and are used to finance specific goods or services, are unregulated.

Former interim CEO of the FCA, Chris Woolard, is currently undertaking a review into change and innovation in the unsecured credit market, which includes unregulated buy-now-pay-later products.

When the review reports in early 2021, the Government will assess the findings and will take quick, proportionate action if substantive evidence of consumer harm is found to be occurring.

■ Customs Intermediaries: Recruitment

Stephen Morgan:

[\[126966\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of Government financial support to recruit new customs agents (a) nationally and (b) at the Portsmouth International Port for after the end of the transition period.

Jesse Norman:

The Government is supporting the intermediary sector to expand to meet predicted demand at the end of the transition period making available over £80 million of support for IT, training and recruitment, through the Customs Grant Scheme. This supports businesses established anywhere in the UK, including those that serve Portsmouth International Port.

The sector is scaling up and recently commissioned Ipsos MORI research shows that the sector expects to be able to complete 76-119 million additional declarations by the end of the transition period.

The Government continues to monitor progress carefully, keeping all support mechanisms under review.

■ Customs: ICT

Alan Brown:

[\[128698\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 8 December 2020 to Question 124786 on Customs: ICT, for what reason the C1800 CHIEF badge application forms are not accessible on the Gov.uk website; when they will be available on that website; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

The C1800 file is accessible through the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/import-and-export-request-for-chief-access-c1800>.

In order to open the form using this link the customer must download Adobe Reader, which is a free application. It is not possible to open the C1800 form in an internet browser.

■ Food: Advertising**John Stevenson:****[126830]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what input his Department had in the policy-making process for the public consultation on an online advertising ban on foods high in fat, salt or sugar.

Steve Barclay:

The Government's commitment to consult on an online advertising ban on foods high in fat, salt and sugar as part of the July obesity package, and the launch of the consultation on 10 November, were both subject to HM Treasury approval.

The Government is undertaking a full Regulatory Impact Assessment on the online ban to ensure the costs to business are captured and the benefits and the costs of all options are compared as per HM Treasury guidance. These assessments are independently assessed by the Regulatory Policy Committee to ensure they are robust.

John Stevenson:**[126831]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department was asked by (a) the Department for Health and Social Care and (b) Public Health England to undertake an (i) economic impact assessment and (ii) cost-benefit analysis of each proposal in the consultation on an online advertising ban for foods high in fat, salt or sugar.

Steve Barclay:

The Government is undertaking a full Regulatory Impact Assessment on the proposal to introduce a total restriction of online advertising of foods high in fat, sugar and salt to ensure the costs to business are captured and the benefits and the costs of all options are compared as per HM Treasury guidance. This assessments is undertaken jointly by the Department for Health and Social Care and the Department of Culture Media and Sport, and is independently assessed by the Regulatory Policy Committee to ensure it is robust.

The Department for Health and Social Care and the Department of Culture Media and Sport jointly published an evidence note alongside the consultation on this proposal. The evidence note is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/total-restriction-of-online-advertising-for-products-high-in-fat-sugar-and-salt-hfss/evidence-note>.

■ Self-employment Income Support Scheme: Construction**Rachael Maskell:****[128699]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will (a) instruct HMRC to use the Construction Insurance Scheme records they hold to verify the employment status of people in the construction industry who became self-employed in the 2019-20 financial year and (b) permit those people to make a claim under the Coronavirus Self-Employment Income Support Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

Construction Industry Scheme (CIS) monthly returns would not be an appropriate basis for claims under the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). CIS monthly returns do not show a subcontractor's profits for the year. The subcontractor needs to complete an annual Income Tax Self-Assessment return to report their expenses and claim capital allowances.

The practical issues that prevented the Government from being able to include the newly self-employed in 2019-20 in the original SEISS, namely that HMRC did not have access to their self-assessment returns in order to verify their eligibility, still remain.

The Government has provided a substantial economic response to the pandemic that is one of the most generous in the world, supporting families, businesses and the most vulnerable through a package worth over £280 billion.

Those ineligible for the SEISS may still be eligible for other elements of the package, including tax deferrals, rental support, self-isolation support payments and other business support grants.

Stamp Duty Land Tax: Coronavirus**Christian Wakeford:**[\[127040\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to extend the stamp duty waiver to allow people who have started but may not complete the house buying process within the existing deadline to benefit from that policy.

Jesse Norman:

The Stamp Duty Land Tax temporary rates apply to transactions completed or substantially performed between 8 July 2020 and 31 March 2021. A transaction is substantially performed where the buyer has paid 90% of the purchase price, or where they have possession of the whole or substantially the whole of the property.

Changing the point at which a transaction is eligible to receive the relief to include anyone who has started the process of buying a house before 31 March could lead to uncertainty and confusion among home buyers. This lack of certainty would also mean that such a trigger point would be open to abuse.

As with all tax policy, the Government continues to monitor the impact of the SDLT temporary rates. However, the Government is not minded to extend the relief further than 31 March.

WALES**Coronavirus: Wales****Stephen Morgan:**[\[910258\]](#)

What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on financial support for people in Wales affected by the covid-19 outbreak.

Simon Hart:

I have regular discussions with my Rt hon Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on our economic response to Covid-19. The Government has directly provided over 500 million pounds to the self-employed in Wales, on top of the 5 billion pounds additional funding guarantee we have given to Welsh Government to tackle the virus.

■ **Floods: Wales****Rosie Cooper:**[\[910263\]](#)

What steps the Government is taking to support people affected by flooding in Wales.

Simon Hart:

The Government is working closely with the Welsh Government to support people in Wales affected by flooding. We have approved the bid Welsh Government made to the UK Reserve for £31m of additional funding in 2020/21 for local authority flood recovery and repair of vulnerable coal tips.

■ **Public Expenditure: Wales****Ben Lake:**[\[910253\]](#)

What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the application of the Barnett formula to Wales.

David T C Davies:

The Barnett formula delivers for Wales. It guarantees that funding per head remains at least fifteen percent higher than corresponding funding in England. The Government has provided the Welsh Government with a five billion pounds additional funding guarantee this year and an additional 1.3 billion pounds next year.

■ **Welsh Government: Borrowing****Ben Lake:**[\[128233\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what recent discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on that Government's borrowing limit.

Simon Hart:

We have provided the Welsh Government with the tools to manage its budget, including £500m of resource borrowing powers and a £350m Wales Reserve. The Welsh Government can also borrow up to £1 billion for capital investments, up to £150m each year, so far the Welsh Government has only borrowed £65m. Within the agreed limits, there are no restrictions about how the Welsh Government can use its capital borrowing powers to deliver its devolved responsibilities.

We have provided the Welsh Government with a record £5 billion funding guarantee to help tackle coronavirus. However, it has been reported that the Welsh Government are yet to allocate £1.8 billion of this.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

■ Employment: Sexual Harassment

Fiona Bruce:

[\[127523\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of extending to six months the three month limit for tribunal applications for employees claiming to be the subject of sexual harassment.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government consultation on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace asked whether the time limit for taking a harassment, discrimination or victimisation claim to an Employment Tribunal should be extended, including in cases of sexual harassment.

We are considering the responses we received and will publish our response to this consultation in due course.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Occupational Pensions: Females

Sir Mark Hendrick:

[\[127480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans she has to encourage women to resume workplace pension contributions following a period of (a) part-time work or (b) time out of working.

Guy Opperman:

Automatic enrolment has hugely increased women's pension participation, participation across all ethnic groups, and among lower earners. Among eligible women in the private sector, participation has increased from 40% in 2012 to 86% in 2019, equal to men.

Automatic enrolment requires an employer to enrol eligible workers into a qualifying pension scheme when they start work or at the point they become eligible to be automatically enrolled due to a change in their circumstances, for example, by moving from part-time to full-time work. This ensures that workplace pension contributions would resume, in respect of women who increase their hours or re-join the labour market, if they meet the relevant earnings and other eligibility rules.

The level of earnings at which workers are automatically enrolled into workplace pensions (the earnings trigger) is subject to an annual statutory review. An analysis of the equalities impact always forms part of the review, as does an assessment of reducing the trigger to the NI threshold. This review has concluded that the earnings trigger be frozen at £10,000 for every year since 2014-15; this has proportionately benefited women. Analysis for the 2020/21 thresholds showed that 75% of those made eligible by freezing the trigger were women, compared to 37% of the eligible group under the baseline proposals.

■ Pensions: Gender**Sir Mark Hendrick:****[127478]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to reduce the gender pay gap in pensions savings.

Guy Opperman:

Automatic enrolment was developed and implemented by successive Governments to help groups who historically were poorly served or excluded from workplace pension saving, such as women and lower earners. These reforms have helped millions more women save into a workplace pension, many for the first time. Workplace pension participation among eligible women working in the private sector has risen from 40% in 2012 to 86% in 2019 – which is equal to men.

In terms of private pensions, the most important factors driving the gap in retirement outcomes are related to the labour market with inequalities in pay and working patterns. Women are more likely to take career breaks than men and to work part-time in lower-paid jobs because of caring responsibilities. We have put in place practical support to help people with caring responsibilities return to work, and to support families to share caring responsibilities more evenly. This includes doubling the free childcare available in England for eligible working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds to 30 hours per week, and consulting on increasing the transparency of employers' flexible working and parental leave policies, and on high-level options for reforming parental leave and pay, to allow both parents to play a greater role in childcare.

■ Personal Independence Payment**Apsana Begum:****[128294]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what factors Decision Makers take into account when determining the length of personal independence payment (a) awards and (b) review periods in circumstances where that award is initially made for a short period with the result that the recipient has to reapply.

Justin Tomlinson:

Once someone has been awarded Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which can be paid at one of eight rates, that award will be usually be reviewed. Regular reviews are a key feature of the benefit and ensure that payments accurately match the current needs of claimants. Shorter term awards without a review can also be made where there is an expectation that a claimant's condition will not give rise to a further award. Claimants given a fixed term award with no review are free to apply for PIP before their existing award ends and will be treated as a new claim.

Advice is available to Case Managers on the appropriate award length and was deposited in the House Library on 10 October 2018 [

[http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2018-1113/UIN_174062 -](http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2018-1113/UIN_174062_-_Award_period_guidance_10.10.18.pdf)

[Award_period_guidance_10.10.18.pdf](http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2018-1113/UIN_174062_-_Award_period_guidance_10.10.18.pdf)]. The guidance has since been updated to

include guidance about awarding ongoing awards for PIP recipients of State Pension age.

■ **State Retirement Pensions: Females**

Mr Kevan Jones:

[\[126787\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent discussions her Department has had with representatives of the Women Against State Pension Inequality group on the effectiveness of her Department's communication of changes to women's state pension age.

Guy Opperman:

There have been no recent discussions with representatives of the Women Against State Pension Inequality group.

■ **Universal Credit: Newcastle upon Tyne**

Chi Onwurah:

[\[126876\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many universal credit claims have been assessed to be ineligible in Newcastle upon Tyne since March 2020; and for what reasons those claims were found to be ineligible.

Will Quince:

There are a number of reasons a Universal Credit (UC) claim may be unsuccessful. These can include ineligibility, nil entitlement, insufficient evidence, claim withdrawal and non-compliance with the UC process.

Between March 2020 and November 2020, in Newcastle upon Tyne constituency, 2,210 UC claims were unsuccessful before reaching payment.

Notes:

1. Figures are for households on UC, either couple or single claims, and does not represent the number of individuals within the household.

2. Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

■ **Universal Credit: Work Capability Assessment**

Jim Shannon:

[\[128977\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent assessment her Department has made of waiting times for work capability assessment referral.

Jim Shannon:

[\[128978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to reduce waiting times for working capability referrals for universal credit.

Jim Shannon:

[128979]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of publishing condition specific processing times for work capability assessments referrals from universal credit.

Justin Tomlinson:

Statistics on Work Capability Assessments for Universal Credit are currently under development for future publication and have not previously been published as official statistics. We will issue them in due course as an official statistics release in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Whilst the initial statistics will not have median clearance times, these will be developed for publication in due course. There are no plans to provide these statistics by medical condition.

Statistics on Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Work Capability Assessment (WCA) outcomes are published quarterly. The latest figures covering the median end-to-end clearance time, which includes 'claim registration to WCA referral' by month of clearance up to March 2020, can be found at: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>

Guidance for users is available at:

<https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/online-help/Getting-Started.html>

UC claimants are generally referred for a work capability assessment at day 29 of their health-related claim. If the claimant has certain conditions (e.g. pregnant and risk to self or child) or are undergoing certain treatments (e.g. chemotherapy) they will be referred for a WCA earlier.

Once referred claimants are issued a capability for work questionnaire (UC50). Claimants have 4 weeks to complete and return this along with any supporting evidence to the Health Assessment Advisory Service (HAAS).

Once received at HAAS, the information is reviewed by a Healthcare Professional (HCP). The HCP will determine if there is enough information to enable the case to be cleared on scrutiny. This may include contacting other professionals who support the claimant, such as their GP or Consultant, for supporting evidence. If the HCP is unable to clear by paper scrutiny a face-to-face assessment is scheduled.

Due to Coronavirus restrictions claimants may experience a longer wait for their assessment, and may be asked to attend a telephone assessment while face-to-face assessments remain suspended. If, following an assessment, we decide that the claimant is entitled to extra benefit, we will pay any arrears owed.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Data Protection: World Trade Organisation

Bill Esterson:

[\[128150\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps she is taking to ensure that existing safeguards on people's (a) privacy and (b) data protection will be replicated as part of a future WTO agreement on cross-border data flows; and if she will make a statement.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 15 December 2020. The correct answer should have been:

Greg Hands:

The UK government is seeking provisions in trade agreements that remove barriers to the free flow of data, while not lowering the standard of protection afforded to the personal data of UK individuals. The UK is, and will remain, committed to maintaining high standards of protection for personal data, including when it is transferred across borders. The UK recognises the importance of data protection to enable trading partners to build trust through transparent treatment of personal data and to ensure that data is able to flow in an uninterrupted manner.

Currently cross-border data flows as well as privacy and personal information protection are being discussed at the e-commerce negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO). The UK will not sign up to any agreement at the WTO which will put at risk the UK's high standards of data protection, or the personal data protection or privacy currently afforded to UK individuals.

TREASURY

■ State Retirement Pensions: Females

Jack Dromey:

[\[65108\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the tax liability is for women who receive back payments of underpaid state pension in a single financial year; and if he will make a statement.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 1 July 2020. The correct answer should have been:

John Glen:

Income tax is calculated on arrears of state pension for the tax year in which the pensioner was entitled to receive it, and not in the year in which a lump sum is paid.

Where arrears of state pension are paid, income tax will only be due on any income that exceeds the personal allowance for the respective tax year.

In addition, HM Revenue and Customs ~~can~~ **will** only collect income tax for the current tax year and the four preceding tax years **for arrears payments made due to DWP error**. Any arrears of state pension relating to earlier years will not be subject to income tax.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CABINET OFFICE

■ **Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee**

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office
(Michael Gove):**

[\[HCWS659\]](#)

The next meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee will take place on 17 December 2020, by video conference, hosted by the EU.

The meeting will be co-chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, and Vice President of the European Commission Maroš Šefčovič.

The agenda will include four items:

1. Introduction and opening remarks from co-chairs

1.1 Stocktake of Specialised Committee activity

1.2 Future Specialised Committee meetings

2. Update on Withdrawal Agreement Implementation

2.1 Citizens' rights

2.1.1 Second Joint Report on Residency

2.1.2 Joint Committee Decision on triangulation

2.2 Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland

2.2.1 Joint Committee Decisions foreseen by the Protocol

2.2.2 Joint Committee Decision on correction of errors and omissions

2.2.3 Unilateral Declarations

2.3 Dispute settlement - Joint Committee Decision on the establishment of a list of arbitrators

3. AOB

4. Concluding remarks

The UK delegation will include:

- Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
- The Paymaster General, Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP

Representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive have been invited to form part of the UK delegation.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's Review of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact**

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Dominic Raab): [\[HCWS658\]](#)

On 29 August, shortly before the inauguration of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), I announced that I wanted to reinforce the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's (ICAI) role in helping Government deliver maximum impact for UK aid spending. I commissioned a review to ensure ICAI's remit, methodology and operating model focus on maximising the impact of UK overseas development assistance (ODA), support lesson-learning, and are in line with the aims of the FCDO and our broader strategic framework for UK ODA, which I set out to the House on 26 November. Today I am publishing that review. The review did not assess ICAI's status as a Non-Departmental Public Body.

The review concludes that ICAI provides strong external scrutiny of UK ODA and offers excellent support to Parliament in its role in holding the government to account. This must continue. ICAI has an important role in driving learning and focused action as well as providing assurance to UK taxpayers and Parliament. Its formal remit should therefore include lesson learning as well as scrutiny and evaluation to enable its recommendations to lead to real change.

The review makes a number of recommendations to increase ICAI's impact on ODA spending and to ensure that it deliver practical recommendations. These include focusing its remit to support Government learning as well as independent evaluation and scrutiny, and ensuring reviews contribute to a wider body of best practice.

There are also several recommendations for the FCDO to improve its own role in the scrutiny process, including supporting and responding to ICAI's reviews and helping ICAI in its work with other ODA-spending departments. The FCDO should also be willing to discuss ICAI's forward workplan, mindful that decisions on review topics will remain with ICAI Commissioners.

The review consulted a broad range of parliamentary, civil society and Government stakeholders, including ICAI itself, through a series of interviews and roundtables. The review also took into account written contributions, including from members of the public. I am grateful for all of their valuable contributions.

The Government will now discuss the content of this review with ICAI's Commissioners and work with them to implement the recommendations.

A copy of the review will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Housing Update

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): [\[HCWS660\]](#)

Today the Government is publishing the response to the consultation on the standard method for assessing Local Housing Need and setting out further steps in our plan to increase housing delivery as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our manifesto set out that we would deliver a million homes over the course of this Parliament and that we would seek to increase housebuilding towards 300,000 new homes a year. We have made strong progress towards this goal – with more homes built in the last year than at any time since 1987, taking the total delivered since 2010 to over 1.8 million. We want to build more homes as a matter of social justice, of inter-generational fairness and as one of the best proven ways of creating jobs and economic growth.

The government's Planning for the Future White Paper published on 6 August outlined a set of reforms that are intended to lay the foundations for future housebuilding and economic development, whilst meeting our commitments to the environment and climate. These reforms will create a planning system that is simpler and more certain that supports more homes to be built and drives a more diverse and competitive housing sector. As more homes are delivered under the new system, they will be built to higher standards, putting an emphasis on design, beauty, heritage and sustainability at the heart of the planning system. And that system will be a digital one that is more accessible and understandable for citizens and developers alike. We are currently analysing the 40,000 consultation responses and will publish a response in the Spring which will setting out our decisions on the proposed way forward, including to prepare for legislation, should we so decide, in the Autumn.

In August, we also set out a proposal for a new standard method for assessing Local Housing Need to ensure that all local authorities were planning to build enough new homes.

There were many consultation responses which did not fully recognise that the standard method does not present a 'target' in plan-making, but instead provides a starting point for determining the level of need for housing in an area. It is only after consideration of this, alongside what constraints areas face, such as the Green Belt, and the land that is actually available for development, that the decision on how many homes should be planned for is made. It is crucial that planning is more certain and more transparent, so we will explore how we can make this clearer through our longer-term planning reforms, including considering the right name for this approach.

There is widespread support for ensuring enough homes are built across England to ensure the needs of our communities are met. We heard clearly through the consultation that the building of these homes should not come at expense of harming our precious

green spaces. We also heard views that this need can be better met in existing urban areas.

There are good reasons for this. First, our urban centres are the best-served by existing infrastructure – with schools, shops and medical facilities.

Second, building more homes in our cities and urban centres will mean making the best use of brownfield land, of which many cities and urban centres continue to have large quantities, and protecting our countryside as much as possible.

Third, building homes around our transport hubs will help us to deliver our ambition to tackle climate change by offering greater access to more sustainable forms of transport and reducing unnecessary journeys.

In the months since we consulted, the profound impact of COVID-19 on our towns and cities has become even clearer. It has magnified and accelerated patterns that already existed and while it is too soon to know for certain the scale of the long-term impact, it is very likely to present a generational challenge and opportunity to repurpose more commercial centres, offices and retail spaces into housing and mixed uses.

We recognised these changes in the summer when we brought forward reforms to the Use Classes Order and new permitted development rights to regenerate vacant buildings, to provide the greatest flexibility possible to meet this moment and to repurpose and recycle buildings for public good. These significant changes were enacted at pace and are now available for use by individuals and businesses.

This government was elected on a pledge to level up all parts of the country. It was clear from the responses that people supported this ambition and wanted to see housing delivery play a significant part in achieving this goal. We want to see more public and, in particular, private sector investment in housing in our nation's great cities, regenerating these areas, improving the quality of housing stock and driving up living standards. This is vital for ensuring a better quality of life for existing residents and for attracting and retaining aspirational families.

We want to play our part in realising these goals by building more homes in cities and urban centres, encouraging interest by developers and institutional investors in these places, setting them on a path to greater prosperity and more economically balanced country and providing the certainty that is needed to support areas to recover after COVID-19.

For this reason, we plan to leave the standard method as it was created in 2017 for the majority of the country. We have seen that these levels are beginning to create ambitious plans in many parts of the country, which we expect to drive housing delivery beyond its current near record levels. It is also clear that the standard method does not act as a ceiling for the ambitions of some local authorities, with some planning to exceed their local figures to meet the needs of their residents, create jobs and drive economic growth in their areas. We strongly welcome this ambition and will support these local authorities to achieve their goals, including through specifically directing public investment to them through the £7.1 billion National Homebuilding Fund we are establishing.

We recognise that we need to go further than the previous standard method to achieve the ambition to build more in urban areas. So we will be increasing Local Housing Need above current levels by 35 per cent for authorities which contain the largest proportion of the 20 most populated cities and urban centres in England.

Many of these places are already delivering or have a plan to deliver at or around this level. For example, Nottingham, Hull, Liverpool, Newcastle and Stoke have all delivered more homes on average across the last three years than the revised standard method assesses their annual need to be. But others will need to go further than they do today.

They will not be alone in this task. To help support our cities and urban centres we are announcing several measures. First, we are establishing an Urban Centres Recovery Taskforce, which will bring together the leading experts in the field, like Sir Howard Bernstein, Sir George Iacobescu and Dame Alison Nimmo, to consider what actions the government could take to support urban centres as they recover from COVID-19.

Second, we intend to revise the current “80:20” rule which guides how much government housing infrastructure funding is available in all parts of the country, so that it is at the service of the most ambitious local authorities and those who want to tackle unaffordability. This will establish a new principle that helps to better support our levelling up and home building objectives.

Third, we will invest public funds to support areas to regenerate brownfield land. We are establishing a £7.1 billion National Homebuilding Fund – brownfield remediation, urban regeneration and infrastructure for housing will be the significant components of its mission. Today, we are announcing £67 million of funding from this to help the West Midlands and Greater Manchester Mayoral Combined Authorities to deliver new homes on brownfield land, helping to breathe new life into sites such as Longbridge in Birmingham. And we have launched a new £100 million Brownfield Land Release fund for local authorities to encourage similar ambitions.

We recognise that to meet the housing needs of the country, London needs to build more homes. Delivery in the capital remains far too low, creating acute affordability changes for its residents, as well as putting severe pressure on the wider South East.

In the short-term we expect to agree the London Plan with the Mayor early in the new year which will set his plan for, amongst other things, meeting London’s housing need. This will support greater ambition in London, but alone won’t go nearly far enough to meet need in London. We now need to focus on the medium and long term and create a plan to better address London’s housing needs, whilst protecting the character of London’s communities, particularly in outer London, and London as a place for families.

We will consider how Homes England can play an active role in London, working with the GLA and directly with ambitious London Boroughs for the first time. There are clear areas for development in London, including Nine Elms, Old Oak Common and more broadly in inner East London where there is significant brownfield land for development. A new role for Homes England will ensure robust bids are prepared for the National Homebuilding Fund and the right types of homes are built in the right places.

We hope that this approach will find broad support. We want to make sure that all areas of the country take seriously the need to build more homes and we will focus public funding on supporting our aspirations for home-building, whilst also supporting a renewed national effort to regenerate and level up by increasing housing delivery and private sector investment in our cities. There is now an opportunity for a new trajectory for our great cities. We hope that these changes will mark the first step along the path to forging a new country beyond COVID-19, which is healthier, more beautiful, more sustainable and more neighbourly – and one in which more of our fellow citizens, regardless of age or wealth enjoy the dignity and security of a home of their own.

TREASURY

■ Follower Notices and Penalties

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman): [\[HCWS661\]](#)

The Government introduced the Follower Notice regime in Finance Act 2014, following a consultation titled 'Raising the Stakes on Tax Avoidance'. The Government considers that the Follower Notice regime is an important element in the legal framework available to HMRC to tackle tax avoidance.

In December 2018 the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee published its report 'The Powers of HMRC: Treating Taxpayers Fairly'. In that report, the Committee recommended that the penalties associated with Follower Notices be abolished. The Government rejected the recommendation to abolish Follower Notice penalties as this would render the regime ineffective. However, I said in testimony to the Committee that HMRC would examine the possibility of providing greater judicial oversight of the Follower Notice safeguards.

The Government understands the concerns that have been raised about Follower Notices, but it has not been possible to identify any effective means of providing greater judicial oversight of the Follower Notice regime which would not re-introduce, or even worsen, the delays in settlement and payment of disputed tax, which the regime was designed to address. However, the Government has also taken the opportunity to look closely at other options to ensure the Follower Notice regime can best achieve its objectives. It accepts that a better balance can be found between encouraging taxpayers who have used tax avoidance schemes which have been defeated in the courts, to reach agreement with HMRC; and allowing those who genuinely believe their case is different from that heard by the courts, to continue their dispute. This can best be achieved with a stronger focus on those whose continuation of their dispute, even once they have received a Follower Notice, is without merit.

Therefore, I am announcing publication today of a consultation document 'Follower Notices and Penalties'. This consultation proposes to reduce the level of penalty for a taxpayer not acting in response to a Follower Notice, from fifty per cent of the disputed tax to thirty per cent. A further penalty of twenty per cent would be chargeable only in

cases where those receiving Follower Notices continue their disputes to litigation, and the tax tribunal rules that it was not reasonable for them to have done so.

The Government is committed to tackling all aspects of the avoidance market, including those who promote tax avoidance schemes. The Government announced measures in July and November aimed at strengthening HMRC's ability to tackle those who sell avoidance schemes.

The consultation has been published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/follower-notices-and-penalties>. It will run to Wednesday 27 January

■ **National Insurance contributions re-rating 2021-22**

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman):

[[HCWS657](#)]

In line with the approach set out in the Spending Review document on 25 November (CP 330), the Government will use the September Consumer Price Index (CPI) figure (0.5%) as the basis for setting all National Insurance limits and thresholds, and the rates of Class 2 and Class 3 National Insurance contributions, for 2021-22. A table of these 2021-22 National Insurance rates and thresholds will be placed in the Libraries of the House.