



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 16 July 2021 and the information is correct at the time of publication (04:08 P.M., 16 July 2021). 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

■ Boilers: Hydrogen

Justin Madders:

[29820]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the recommendation from the Climate Change Committee's 2021 Report to Parliament to set requirements for all new gas boilers to be hydrogen-ready by 2025 at the latest, while ensuring that all new boilers outperform current and expected future air quality standards.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 9th July 2021 to Question [25020](#).

■ Carbon Emissions

Caroline Lucas:

[29770]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment his Department has made of the merits of Regionally and Locally Determined Contributions in order to (a) complement and (b) support the delivery of the UK's Nationally Determined Contributions to reduce at least 68 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

Under the Paris Agreement, parties should communicate nationally determined contributions that represent their highest possible ambition. In line with best practice approach for developed countries, the UK communicated a single economy wide absolute emission reduction commitment which covers all UK regions and local authorities. This is then reflected in our national Carbon Budgets.

The Government recognises that local and regional government can, and do, play an essential role in meeting national net zero ambitions and are delivering significant programmes to support national ambition.

Through our local Energy programme, we support Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Authorities, and communities to play a leading role in decarbonisation and clean growth. Further details of how we intend to work with local government to reach net zero will be set out in the Net Zero Strategy.

■ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Information

Dr Matthew Offord:

[29023]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what mechanisms are in place to audit information provided to his Department by (a) regulatory bodies and (b) non-departmental public bodies.

Paul Scully:

The relationship between an Arm's-Length Body (ALB) and the Department should be established through a Framework Document. Managing Public Money sets out that:

"3.8.2 The framework document (or equivalent) agreed between an ALB and its sponsor always provides for the sponsor department to exercise meaningful oversight of the ALB's strategy and performance, pay arrangements and/or major financial transactions, e.g. by monthly returns, standard delegations and exception reporting. The sponsor department's accounts consolidate those of its ALBs so its accounting officer must be satisfied that the consolidated accounts are accurate and not misleading."

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-public-money>.

A non-departmental public body is required to submit to their sponsoring department, on an annual basis, an annual report and audited accounts prepared in accordance with the relevant statutes and guidelines. The annual report and accounts provide the sponsoring department with the financial and non-financial performance of the non-departmental public body. In addition, they will state if the non-departmental public body has met key performance indicators as set out in their business and corporate plans. The report and accounts are laid in Parliament and, where commercially possible, made available on the non-departmental public body's website.

Energy: Housing**Feryal Clark:**[\[29154\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the energy efficiency of residential housing in the UK.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The Government remains committed to the aspiration set out in the Clean Growth Strategy, that as many homes as possible are improved to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C by 2035, where practical, affordable and cost effective. In addition, the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy continue to work closely together to deliver the Future Homes Standard which, when it is implemented in 2025, will ensure that new homes produce at least 75% lower CO2 emissions compared to those built to current standards, and require no further retrofit to become fully zero-carbon as the electricity grid continues to decarbonise.

Energy: Prices**Janet Daby:**[\[30413\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of (a) the ability of Ofgem to effectively regulate prices of

energy providers and (b) the potential merits of bringing all energy providers into public ownership.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The prices charged by energy providers are set by the market and are largely determined by the cost of internationally-traded electricity and gas. For default tariffs, where competition has less of an effect on price, Ofgem sets a price cap on suppliers, based on the efficient costs of supply. During its first year the default tariff price cap was estimated to have saved households £1 billion and continues to save consumers £75- £100 a year on average.

The Government sees competition as the best way of securing value and quality service for consumers. The number of domestic gas and electricity suppliers has increased from 10 in 2010 to around 50 now, and customers who switch can save up to £150 a year.

■ **Green Homes Grant Scheme**

Justin Madders:

[29822]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many Green Homes Grant applications were (a) received and (b) approved in each month since January 2021 for (i) England and (ii) Ellesmere Port and Neston constituency.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

[Official statistics](#) published on 24th June for the Green Homes Grant Voucher scheme describe the status of applications prior to 3rd June. This includes applications received and approved across England and the English Parliamentary Constituency, Ellesmere Port and Neston.

The next statistical release will be published on 22 July.

■ **Heating: Hydrogen**

Justin Madders:

[29821]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the recommendation from the Climate Change Committee's 2021 Report to Parliament that Ofgem undertake a programme of research with his Department to identify priority candidate areas for hydrogen for the decarbonisation of heat.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 9th July 2021 to Question [25021](#).

■ **Heating: Innovation**

Mark Menzies:

[29777]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to ensure sufficient provision of skilled alternative heat source technologies

engineers to help facilitate the move away from gas boilers to new technologies, such as ground or air source heat pumps.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The Government is working closely with industry and the education sector to ensure that high-quality training is available for heat pump installers. This includes training for new heating engineers, and for existing heating engineers who do not yet have heat pump training.

As part of the Green Homes Grant Skills Competition, the Government awarded more than £6 million to support training for tradespeople delivering green home energy improvements, including heat pump installations.

We are also supporting the industry-led development of new heat pump upskilling courses for existing heating engineers. By the end of 2021, we expect industry to have the capacity to upskill thousands of heating installers per year to work on heat pumps.

Furthermore, BEIS together with the Department for Education is also working with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) to ensure that apprenticeships and T-Levels contain high quality heat pump training. Additionally, we are working with the Association of Colleges to ensure that further education providers are aware of future needs for heat pump installer skills, and to understand barriers to providing relevant training so that they can be better addressed.

■ **Hinkley Point C Power Station**

Alan Brown:

[\[29075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 2 July 2021 to Question 21957 on Hinkley Point C Power Station, what the reason was for the delay reported by EDF in the project update statement.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The COVID-19 health crisis has had a significant impact on progress for Hinkley Point C, although construction work has continued on site. In January 2021, EDF carried out a detailed review of the schedule to estimate the impact due to the pandemic so far. The review concluded that the start of electricity generation from the first unit at Hinkley Point C is now expected in June 2026, compared to the end of 2025 as announced by EDF in 2016.

■ **Housing: Carbon Emissions**

Feryal Clark:

[\[29153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on strengthening policy on the decarbonisation of homes.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

My Rt. Hon. Friend the Secretary of State has regular discussions with ministerial colleagues on a number of issues.

We will be publishing a Heat and Buildings Strategy which will set out the Government's position on the decarbonisation of homes in due course.

Hydrogen**Mr Barry Sheerman:**[\[28948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to encourage the production of electrolytic hydrogen in the UK.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

My Rt. Hon. Friend the Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan and the Energy White Paper demonstrate a clear commitment to hydrogen, setting an ambition to deliver 5GW of low carbon hydrogen production capacity by 2030, working alongside partners in industry.

The UK has expertise and assets to support both electrolytic and Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) enabled hydrogen production. By enabling multiple low carbon production routes, we can drive cost effective supply volumes in the 2020s in line with our 2030 5GW ambition, whilst scaling up electrolytic hydrogen.

Support for multiple production routes has underpinned our innovation funding to date and is also part of our policy thinking. The forthcoming UK Hydrogen Strategy will set out what is required to build a hydrogen economy fit for 2030, Carbon Budget 6 and beyond, whilst maximising economic benefits. Alongside this, we will also consult on priority policies including a hydrogen business model, a low carbon hydrogen standard, and the £240m Net Zero Hydrogen Fund. These are designed to support multiple production technologies, including CCUS-enabled and electrolytic hydrogen, and will be targeted at projects that can deploy during the 2020s.

Wind Power**Alan Brown:**[\[30374\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will adopt the Committee on Climate Change's recommendation in their 2021 progress report and set a 2030 target for onshore wind.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The Government will respond formally to the Committee on Climate Change's recommendations by October.

Achieving our ambitious 2050 Net Zero target will require significant increases in renewable electricity generation, and we will need to increase deployment across a range of technologies, including onshore wind. Our recent Energy White Paper stated that we will need sustained growth in the capacity of onshore wind over the next decade alongside solar and offshore wind.

CABINET OFFICE**■ Cabinet Office: Directors**

Angela Rayner: [\[28212\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, which of his Department's non executive directors were appointed through open competition.

Chloe Smith:

All Cabinet Office Non-Executive Board Members were recruited through open competition according to the guidance set out in the Corporate governance code for central government departments. Lord Nash, the Government Lead Non-Executive, who also sits on the Cabinet Office Board, was appointed directly by the Prime Minister based on merit and works within the confines of the Code of Corporate governance for central Departments.

■ Civil Service: Remote Working

Mr Mark Harper: [\[R\] \[28128\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to paragraph 18 of Covid-19 response: summer 2021, what his policy is on guidance to the civil service on working from home or returning to the office.

Fleur Anderson: [\[30420\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what guidance he (a) has issued or (b) plans to issue to civil service permanent secretaries and chief executives of arms-length bodies on ensuring adequate ventilation in buildings where civil servants work to reduce the risks of transmission of covid-19 infection; to what standards they should (i) plan and (ii) measure such ventilation; whether his Department plans to undertake enforcement to ensure that the risk is reduced; and whether he proposes to make funds available to improve standards of ventilation in those building.

Julia Lopez:

The Prime Minister has set out the arrangements that will be in place in England once we move to Step Four of the Government roadmap. It will no longer be necessary for the government to instruct people to work from home and so employers, including the Civil Service, will be able to support the safe return to the workplace. The safe return of more civil servants to the workplace will be enacted by departments in line with updated Safer Working guidance from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and guidance from the Health and Safety Executive. This includes guidance for ventilation.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control

Rachael Maskell: [\[13135\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether, after 21 June 2021, social distancing and face coverings will still be advised.

Penny Mordaunt:

On 12 July, the Government announced we would proceed to step 4 after assessing the data against the four tests.

I refer the hon. Member to the guidance for [Moving to step 4 of the roadmap](#).

Mr Mark Harper: [\[R\] \[28993\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to paragraph 35 of Covid-19 Response: Summer 2021, published on 5 July 2021, if he will publish his contingency plans for reimposing economic and social restrictions at a (a) local, (b) regional and (c) national level.

Rachael Maskell: [\[29077\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what criteria he will use to determine whether covid-19 secure measures should be reintroduced in the future.

Rachael Maskell: [\[30397\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, under what circumstances he would introduce a local lockdown after the lifting of covid-19 restrictions in England on 19 July 2021.

Penny Mordaunt:

In September, the Government will undertake a review to assess the country's preparedness for autumn and winter, which will consider whether to continue or strengthen public and business guidance as we approach the winter, including on face coverings and test, trace and isolate, and will review the remaining regulations.

The Government will maintain contingency plans for reimposing economic and social restrictions at a local, regional or national level if evidence suggests they are necessary to suppress or manage a dangerous variant. Such measures would only be re-introduced as a last resort to prevent unsustainable pressure on the NHS.

Rachael Maskell: [\[29094\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will publish all the data on which the Government has based its decision to lift all covid-19 restrictions from 19 July 2021.

Penny Mordaunt:

On 12 July, the Government announced we would proceed to step 4 after assessing the data against the four tests. The decisions as to whether the four tests were passed was based on an analysis of a range of information and the conclusion drawn will be in line with advice from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE).

Data is regularly shared publicly via the COVID Dashboard, which can be accessed at the following [link](#).

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

Mr Mark Harper: [R] [28994]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to paragraph 36 of Covid-19 Response: Summer 2021, published on 5 July 2021, whether appropriate Parliamentary scrutiny will include a vote by the House before the implementation of the proposals set out in paragraph 36.

Mr Mark Harper: [R] [28996]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to paragraph 36 of his Department's guidance, Covid-19 Response: Summer 2021, published on 5 July 2021, whether his definition of appropriate parliamentary scrutiny of the matter of potential covid-status certification would include a vote by the House of Commons prior to any such certification being implemented.

Penny Mordaunt:

The COVID-status certification review has concluded that, although certification is not required at the present time, it could be a useful tool in the future as a means of keeping events going and businesses open if the country is facing a difficult situation in autumn or winter.

Any future implementation of certification would involve consultation and appropriate parliamentary scrutiny.

No policy decisions have been taken at this time.

■ Fixed-term Parliaments

Rachael Maskell: [29076]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of abolishing fixed terms for the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Executive alongside proposals to repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011.

Chloe Smith:

The use of fixed terms in elections to the Scottish Parliament and Senedd Cymru is a devolved matter and for the Devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales to consider. The fixed terms set for Northern Ireland Assembly elections are not a devolved matter and there are currently no plans to change the law.

The UK Government continues to engage with the Scottish and Welsh Administrations, as well as considering the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, with regards to any impact of the departure from fixed terms in the UK Parliament on the administration of elections in devolved areas.

■ Government Departments: Flags

Hywel Williams: [\[29732\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much each Department has spent on Union Flags in (a) Wales, (b) Scotland and (c) England in each year since 2018.

Chloe Smith:

The information requested is not held centrally.

■ Ministerial Policy Advisers and Senior Civil Servants: Meetings

John Penrose: [\[29755\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of reporting external meetings of (a) special advisers and (b) senior officials below Permanent Secretary level, on a similar basis to that which applies to Ministers and Permanent Secretaries.

Chloe Smith:

The Government publishes a comprehensive set of transparency publications and we keep this under review.

■ UK Relations with EU: Northern Ireland

Stephen Farry: [\[29948\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will publish the Government's response to the statement from the EU Commission dated 30 June 2021 entitled EU-UK relations: solutions found to help implementation of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Penny Mordaunt:

The Government has been clear that it welcomes Vice President Sefcovic's indications that the EU is looking at further solutions.

However, the issues raised are only a smaller subset of a much larger set of problems created by the way the Protocol is being implemented – we need engagement on these fundamental barriers that we have identified during discussions.

In addition, where solutions were flagged, discussions are generally not advanced enough to determine whether they sufficiently address even the narrow issues with which they are concerned. We would need to see the full details of the proposals and discuss further to ensure any of these will work in practice.

We are considering our next steps and discussing with all those with an interest. We will set out our approach to Parliament in a considered way before the summer recess.

■ UK-EU Civil Society Forum: Staff**Jonathan Edwards:** [\[27117\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he plans to establish the UK's delegation to the Civil Society Forum as set out in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement; and what discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on membership of the Civil Society Forum.

Penny Mordaunt:

At the first Partnership Council on 9 June, we noted the importance of the Civil Society Forum, and agreed with the EU on the necessary preparations ahead of its first meeting later this year.

We are engaging with the devolved administrations on membership of the Forum, as we do on all relevant matters of TCA implementation. We will seek public views and will issue a call for participants within the next few months to ensure a balanced representation of business and civil society groups across the UK.

DEFENCE**■ Afghanistan: Immigration****Daisy Cooper:** [\[29915\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many applications have been made to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme since 1 April 2021; and how many of those applicants have been resettled in the UK.

Leo Docherty:

Through the Ex-Gratia Scheme (EGS) 1,550 former staff members including their families have relocated to the UK. Under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) 96 former staff members including their families have relocated to the UK so far with several thousand more due to arrive over the summer.

Unfortunately for operational security reasons we cannot at this time comment on specific numbers of applications. However, we are significantly accelerating the pace of relocations in parallel with the military withdrawal. Our commitment to those who are eligible under the ARAP, and the process to deliver it, is not time-limited and will endure beyond the military presence in Afghanistan.

■ Ajax Vehicles: Testing**Mr Kevan Jones:** [\[29737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether Millbrook Proving Ground are on schedule to report the results of its independent trials into noise and vibration issues with Ajax armoured vehicles in late July 2021.

Jeremy Quin:

As per my answer of 21 June 2021 to Question 16028 to the right hon. Member, we expected to start to receive data in July and August this year with a final report expected to be delivered in September. Some data has already been received. However, we paused all Ajax mobility trials and training on 25 June as a precautionary measure due to noise and vibration concerns. This may impact the timing of the receipt of data and the final report.

Merlin Helicopters: Early Warning Systems**Mr Mark Francois:**[\[32322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he intends to exercise any contractual penalties against Lockheed Martin UK for the delays to the Crowsnest AEW helicopter programme.

Jeremy Quin:

The Ministry of Defence is currently withholding a portion of the contract price due to late delivery of the capability on the basis of the Schedule Performance not meeting the contracted milestones. This would become repayable on the achievement of full capability in line with the terms of the contract.

We continue to reserve our position with Lockheed Martin UK in respect of any further consideration relating to Contract performance.

Mr Mark Francois:[\[32326\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list the contractors involved in the Crowsnest AEW helicopter programme and their individual responsibilities within the overall prime contract.

Jeremy Quin:

The main contractors that are involved in the Crowsnest programme are: Lockheed Martin UK as the Prime Contractor; Thales UK Ltd as the Mission System Supplier; Leonardo Helicopters UK Ltd as the Aircraft Integrator; and QinetiQ Ltd as Independent Evaluator.

RFA Argus**Mr Mark Francois:**[\[32320\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans he has to replace RFA Argus when it leaves service.

Jeremy Quin:

Following the uplift in funding for Royal Navy shipbuilding announced in the Integrated Review in March 2021, a number of options are being considered as part of the Royal Naval Shipbuilding Pipeline regarding the future provision of afloat medical support once RFA ARGUS leaves service.

■ RFA Diligence**Mr Mark Francois:**[\[32314\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has plans to replace the repair ship RFA Diligence.

Jeremy Quin:

The Royal Navy has no current plans to procure a replacement for the former RFA DILIGENCE.

The capability previously delivered by DILIGENCE can be provided through a range of sources, including the deployment of a Royal Navy Forward Support Unit, or utilising well-established commercial arrangements and international agreements, such as the use of other countries' bases and facilities.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**■ Arts: EU Countries****Kirsten Oswald:**[\[31449\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 25 February 2021 to Question 156495 on Arts: EU Countries, what progress the Government has made on (a) negotiating a bespoke Visa Waiver Agreement with the EU for the creative sector, (b) reaching bilateral agreements with EU Member States regarding the introduction of cultural exemptions for work permits and (c) mitigating the impact of new road haulage and cross-trade rules on pan-European cultural tours.

Caroline Dinenge:

This government recognises the importance of our world leading creative and cultural industries. That is why the UK took an ambitious approach during negotiations that would have ensured that touring musicians, performers and their support staff did not need work-permits to perform in the EU. Regrettably, our proposals were rejected by the EU, but our door remains open if the EU wants to reconsider its position.

A bespoke visa waiver agreement with the EU would require the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) to be renegotiated. The TCA is the basis of our trading relations with the EU, and this is not going to be renegotiated.

The Commission would be likely to argue that any EU-wide visa waiver agreement can only be part of a wider package with a binding non-discrimination clause and a reciprocal visa waiver agreement covering all current and future Member States. This was what the Commission proposed in the negotiations and would be incompatible with our manifesto commitment to retain control of our borders.

We have spoken to every Member States about the importance of touring, and we have established that at least 18 out of 27 Member States, including France and Germany, allow some visa and permit free touring. Furthermore, we are now working closely with individual Member States to encourage them to adopt a more flexible

approach, in line with the UK's own rules which allow creative professionals to tour easily here.

We are aware that the new provisions in the TCA around haulage will require the sector to adapt to new requirements and ways of working with the EU now we are no longer a Member State. The Department for Transport published a call for evidence on 30 June to seek views and evidence on two possible options that could help support these sectors adapt to the new requirements.

■ **Broadband: Fylde**

Mark Menzies: [\[29012\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the need to reform the Electronic Communications Code to enable people in Fylde constituency to access full fibre broadband.

Mark Menzies: [\[29013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that reforms to the Electronic Communications Code enable tenants in properties in Fylde to access full fibre broadband.

Matt Warman:

My department published a consultation in January 2021 asking whether further reforms to the Electronic Communications Code are needed in order to ensure the Code provides the right legislative framework to promote fast, cost effective network provision across the UK. The consultation covered a range of issues, including matters relating to negotiations and dispute resolution, rights to upgrade and share apparatus and problems relating to the renewal of expired agreements.

This consultation closed on 24 March 2021. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the possible outcomes of the consultation at this stage, as responses are being considered. The consultation response will be published in due course and we will bring legislation forward as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Act gained Royal Assent in March 2021. This Act aims to address one stated policy barrier: making it easier for telecoms companies to access multi-dwelling buildings (such as blocks of flats) where a tenant has requested a new connection, but the landlord has not responded to requests for access rights.

The Act inserts a new Part 4A to the Electronic Communication Code, which provides a process that telecommunications operators could use to gain code rights to multi-dwelling premises for a defined period. This only applies where:

- a lessee in occupation in a multi-dwelling building has requested a telecommunications service from an operator
- to connect the property the telecoms operator requires an access agreement with another person such as the landlord

- the landlord has not responded to the telecoms operator's request for access

My department has also recently launched a consultation, which seeks views on the terms that will accompany the interim Code rights provided to operators who have successfully applied for an order made under Part 4A of the Electronic Communications Code. This consultation closes on Wednesday 4 August. Responses will be considered and the consultation response will be published in due course.

■ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport: Information

Dr Matthew Offord:

[29019]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what mechanisms are in place to audit information provided to his Department by (a) regulatory bodies and (b) non-departmental public bodies.

Caroline Dinenage:

All DCMS sponsored bodies are required to prepare their annual reports and accounts in accordance with their governing and other relevant legislation and the accounts directions given by this department and HMT PES papers as long as it does not supersede or affect compliance with their governing legislation. The ALB annual reports are audited and published on their own websites and on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). Similar to other government departments DCMS produces consolidated group accounts annually which includes all ALBs within its accounting boundary which are audited by the NAO. The most recent set of audited DCMS consolidated group accounts for 19-20 were published on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) in December 2020. The DCMS Group audit for 20-21 is currently in progress and we expect to lay the accounts in parliament later in the year.

■ Social Enterprises: Coronavirus

Ms Lyn Brown:

[30329]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to support social enterprises affected by the covid-19 outbreak.

Matt Warman:

The Government recognises the important social and economic contribution that social enterprises are making across the country.

Social enterprises continue to benefit from the unprecedented package of support made available by the government, including Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Many will also have benefited from government grants where they have been required to close non-essential retail.

In addition to cross economy measures the Government made available a £750 million package of funding, specifically for charities, social enterprises, along with unlocking an additional £150 million from dormant bank and building society accounts. This funding has helped over 13,000 organisations continue to deliver vital services for those most affected by the pandemic.

We continue to monitor sector health closely. The government is committed to working with social enterprise representatives to support a strong and resilient sector.

■ Social Media: Disinformation

Janet Daby:

[\[29899\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking with social media companies to tackle fake social media profiles that spread misinformation and are operated from hostile states.

Caroline Dinenge:

We take the issue of dis- and misinformation very seriously and DCMS leads work across Government to tackle it. We engage regularly with social media companies to encourage the introduction of systems and processes that promote authoritative sources of information, and to help them identify and take action to remove dis- and misinformation, in line with their terms and conditions.

It is a Government priority to protect the UK against foreign interference. We know that certain states routinely use disinformation as a foreign policy tool and have seen evidence of this happening in other countries. We monitor for disinformation campaigns so that we can be ready to respond to them quickly and effectively. We work closely with international partners to share information to better understand and then develop approaches to counter the threat from disinformation.

The Government is legislating on these issues. The Counter State Threats Bill will provide the Security Services and Law Enforcement Agencies with the tools they need to tackle the evolving threat from hostile activity by states and actors. The legislation will make the UK a harder environment for states to conduct hostile activity in, and increase the cost to them of doing so.

We have also published the draft Online Safety Bill, which will bring in a legal duty of care and give companies clear legal responsibilities to improve user safety. The new laws will have robust and proportionate measures to deal with disinformation that could cause significant physical or psychological harm to an individual, such as anti-vaccination content and falsehoods about COVID-19.

EDUCATION

■ Air Pollution: Higher Education

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[28949\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to encourage universities to introduce air health education into relevant degree programmes.

Michelle Donelan:

Education regarding air quality is a very important matter, and I expect our world leading higher education (HE) providers to respond to student interest and consider potential demand from employers for skills and knowledge, given the increasing

importance of this issue. HE providers are autonomous and independent bodies, and it is the decision of providers what they teach.

The English Higher Education regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), provides grant funding to support the teaching of high-cost subjects, which includes medical and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. Further details can be found here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/skills-and-employment/supporting-stem-subjects/>.

The Strategic Priorities Grant (formerly the HE Teaching Grant) will play an important role in supporting providers and students to develop the skills and knowledge needed locally, regionally, and nationally to support the economy. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, has asked the OfS to reform the grant for the 2021-22 financial year, to ensure more of taxpayers' money is spent on supporting higher education provision which aligns with national priorities, such as healthcare, STEM and other subjects meeting specific labour market needs.

■ Education: Coronavirus

Rachael Maskell:

[29078]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what criteria he will use to determine whether covid-19 secure measures should be reintroduced in the future in the education system.

Nick Gibb:

On 5 July, it was announced that when the Government moves to Step 4 of the roadmap the majority of COVID-19 restrictions will be relaxed. This includes the measures that the Department recommends for early years, schools, colleges, and universities.

The Department for Education has worked closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England (PHE) to revise guidance for schools and colleges. Our aim is to balance the risks associated with COVID-19 whilst moving to a 'steady state' that minimises both the burden of implementing a system of controls on staff and parents, and the impact those measures have on young people's educational experience. The Department will continue to keep these measures under review, in partnership with health experts and informed by the latest scientific evidence and advice.

Local authorities, Directors of Public Health and PHE Health Protection Teams play an important role in providing support and advice to early years, schools, colleges, and universities and are responsible for managing localised outbreaks.

The contingency framework describes the types of measures that may need to be reintroduced, outlining the types of measures that early years, schools, colleges, and universities should be prepared for, who can recommend them, when measures should be lifted and how decisions are made. If there is an outbreak, or if they are in an enhanced response area, the local director of public health might advise an early years setting, school, college, or university to temporarily reintroduce some control

measures. If that happens, the individual setting's outbreak management plan should help staff understand the actions they need to take. In all cases, any benefits in managing transmission should be weighed against any educational drawbacks. More information is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-local-restrictions-in-education-and-childcare-settings/contingency-framework-education-and-childcare-settings>.

The Department's priority is for all early years, schools, colleges, and universities to deliver face-to-face, high quality education to all pupils and students. The evidence is clear that being out of education causes significant harm to educational attainment, life chances, mental and physical health.

■ Remote Education

Rachael Maskell:

[29086]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what support will be provided for home teaching from September 2021 in the event that children and young people are required to self-isolate as a result of covid-19.

Nick Gibb:

From September 2021, the Department continues to expect schools to provide remote education for pupils whose attendance would be contrary to Government guidance or legislation around the COVID-19 outbreak. Schools should maintain their capabilities to deliver high quality remote education for the next academic year.

The remote education service continues to provide information and support that is available for teachers and head teachers, which is available to view here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>. This includes the 'review your remote education provision framework', which was produced to help support schools in England to identify the strengths and areas for improvement in their remote education provision, available to view here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-your-remote-education-provision>. A good practice guide for school head teachers with accompanying school-led webinars, annotated lesson plans for remote teaching, case studies and resources to support good practice is available to view here: <https://get-help-with-remote-education.education.gov.uk/good-teaching-practice>. The Department has provided funding to Oak National Academy to provide video lessons in a broad range of subjects for Reception up to Year 11.

To support access to remote education and online social care services, the Department has distributed over 1.3 million laptops and tablets to schools, academy trusts, local authorities and further education colleges for disadvantaged children and young people, as part of a £400 million investment. The Government is providing this significant injection of laptops and tablets on top of an estimated 2.9 million already owned by schools before the start of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Schools and colleges can access free peer-to-peer support on effective use of technology in education through the EdTech Demonstrator programme, which has been funded by the Department until the end of March 2022. Further information is available to view here: <https://edtechdemo.ucst.uk/events/regional-launch-events>.

The support offered is tailored to the needs of each school and college. The Department has also worked with Sandringham School to create 'Sustaining Digital and Remote Education, A Toolkit for School Leaders', a free resource to support schools in developing and implementing effective remote education strategies, available to view here: <http://www.digitallyempowered.co.uk>.

Support is also available for schools to set up either a Google or Microsoft platform. These platforms bring together the school community, pool resources and give pupils the opportunity to work with their peers remotely. To date, over 6,700 schools have been supported to enrol in a platform and over £7.4 million in grant funding has been paid out to set up the platforms for staff and student users.

■ Students: Fees and Charges

Helen Hayes:

[29105]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he is having with the higher education sector on reductions in tuition fees in response to reports that some universities are planning to continue remote learning into the 2022-23 academic year.

Michelle Donelan:

Universities and other higher education (HE) providers are autonomous and responsible for setting their own fees within maximum fee limits set by regulations, where applicable.

The government has already announced that maximum fees in the 2021/22 academic year will remain at £9,250 for a standard full-time course. We also intend to freeze the maximum tuition fee caps for the 2022/23 academic year (the fifth year in succession that maximum fees have been frozen) to deliver better value for students and to keep the cost of HE under control.

As autonomous institutions, it is for HE providers to determine their own provision, including their approach to teaching and learning, taking account of any government guidance. As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, some providers have accelerated their digital teaching and learning plans and some may choose to adopt elements for the autumn term. Blended learning is a valid approach, and digital teaching and learning throughout the COVID-19 outbreak has enabled new ways of working, highlighting that it can improve learning outcomes and enhance student engagement.

However, providers should not be planning to restrict teaching based on COVID-19 restrictions. Under Step 4 of the government's roadmap, there will no longer be restrictions on the approach to teaching and learning in HE settings as a result of COVID-19.

On 6 July, we published guidance for HE providers setting out plans from Step 4 of the government's roadmap. This includes that there will no longer be restrictions on

the approach to teaching and learning in HE providers as a result of COVID-19. There will be no requirement for social distancing or other measures within in-person teaching. Providers will therefore be able to shape their courses without restrictions to face-to-face provision. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, also wrote to education leaders on 8 July setting out plans as we move towards Step 4, including the government's expectation that HE providers offer students a full, enriching and enjoyable experience while staying as safe as possible. The letter and details of the relevant guidance are available here:

<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2021/07/08/a-letter-from-the-education-secretary-to-education-leaders/>.

The government's clear and stated expectation is that HE providers should maintain the quality and quantity of tuition. We expect universities to continue delivering a high-quality academic experience and help students to achieve qualifications that they and employers value.

The Office for Students (OfS), as the regulator for English HE providers, has made it clear that providers must continue to comply with registration conditions relating to quality and standards. This means ensuring that courses provide a high-quality academic experience, that students are supported and that they achieve good outcomes, and that standards are protected, regardless of whether a provider is delivering its courses through in-person teaching, remote online learning or a combination of both.

It is crucial that providers are transparent about how they will deliver their courses, and as a matter of principle, they should consult students about changes to their courses. As part of registration conditions, the OfS also outlines that providers must demonstrate that, in developing and implementing policies, procedures and terms and conditions, they have given due regard to relevant guidance about how to comply with consumer protection law. In September 2020, the OfS set out their expectations of providers relating to clarity. This is available here:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/clarity-needed-for-students-during-pandemic/>.

Whether or not an individual student is entitled to a refund of their tuition fees will depend on the specific contractual arrangements between the provider and student. Students do have consumer rights, and it is for them to decide whether to seek to exercise these.

If students are not satisfied, they should first raise this with their university through their internal complaints procedures. If they are unsatisfied with the outcome, students at providers in England or Wales can ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for Higher Education to consider their complaint.

The OfS does not get involved in individual student complaints - that is for the relevant HE provider and possibly the OIA. Students can, however, notify the OfS of issues that may be of regulatory interest to it. These are called 'notifications'. The OfS uses this information as part of its regulatory monitoring activity and to keep HE

providers under review to ensure that they comply with the ongoing conditions of registration. The OfS has produced a guide for students to support them in this process.

We recognise that, in these exceptional circumstances, some students may face financial hardship. The department has worked with the OfS to clarify that providers are able to use existing funds, worth around £256 million for the academic year 2020/21, towards hardship support. We have also made an additional £85 million of student hardship funding available to HE providers this academic year (2020/21).

■ Students: Quarantine

Rachael Maskell:

[29090]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what educational support will be made available to university students required to self-isolate due to the covid-19 outbreak in the 2021 autumn term; and how he plans to provide that additional support.

Michelle Donelan:

From 16 August and as part of Step 4 of the government's COVID-19 roadmap, double vaccinated people and under 18 year olds will no longer be legally required to self-isolate if they are identified as a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case.

It is vitally important that universities continue to make sure that students feel as supported as possible, should they have to self-isolate. Universities UK has produced a checklist for higher education (HE) providers to support students who are required to self-isolate: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2020/uuk-checklist-support-self-isolating-students.pdf>.

Universities UK has also created bespoke guidance for HE providers on how to prepare for and care for students who are required to self-isolate on arrival in the UK. We encourage providers to review this guidance when considering how best to support their international students and other students arriving from overseas.

The Office for Students has also published a statement on support for students in self-isolation during the COVID-19 outbreak, available at:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/ofs-student-panel-statement-on-support-for-students-in-self-isolation-during-covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic/>. Students will still have access to online resources and learning materials during periods of self-isolation. We encourage students to contact their provider to find out more about what resources are available to them online.

In addition, some students may be eligible for a one-off payment of £500 through the NHS Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme, if they are required to self-isolate: <https://www.gov.uk/test-and-trace-support-payment>.

■ Sustainable Development: Curriculum

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[28950\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a compulsory sustainability component to the national curriculum.

Nick Gibb:

Topics related to sustainability and the environment are covered in the National Curriculum. This National Curriculum is mandatory in all state maintained schools, whilst academies are required to follow a broad and balanced curriculum as exemplified by the National Curriculum. Teachers have the flexibility and freedom to determine how they deliver the content in the way that best meets the needs of their pupils and can choose to cover particular topics in greater depth if they wish.

Topics related to the climate, the environment and sustainability issues are covered in the science and geography curricula and GCSEs. In both subjects, at Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils are taught about seasons and habitats, as well as covering climate zones and how environments can change. Secondary geography includes study of the climate, how human and physical processes interact to influence and change landscapes, environments and the climate. In science at Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils study climate and ecosystems in biology and chemistry, including how human interaction with ecosystems impacts on biodiversity.

In 2017, the Department introduced a new environmental science A level. This will enable pupils to study topics that will support their understanding of climate change and how it can be tackled.

Pupils also cover content on the environment in citizenship education which has been a compulsory subject in maintained schools since 2002. Pupils are taught what improves and harms the environment, and how economic choices affect sustainability.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Agriculture: Carbon Emissions

Christian Wakeford:

[\[29171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of how the agricultural sector can transition to net zero.

Victoria Prentis:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich on 9 June 2021, PQ UIN [13266](#).

■ Air Pollution: Asthma

Mr Barry Sheerman: [\[28951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to minimise the impact of air pollution on children's development.

Mr Barry Sheerman: [\[28952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to mitigate the impact of air pollution on people who are suffering from long-term asthma.

Mr Barry Sheerman: [\[28959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that people with long-term asthma are not impacted by high levels of air pollution.

Rebecca Pow:

We know air pollution is a particular threat to vulnerable groups, including the elderly, the very young and those with existing health conditions such as asthma. Our Clean Air Strategy sets out an ambitious programme of action to reduce air pollution from a wide range of sources.

The Environment Bill will establish a duty to set two legally binding targets on PM_{2.5}: a minimum concentration limit and a new population exposure reduction target. We will consult on these targets in early 2022. These two targets will drive action at the local level, as well as nationally, to improve air quality for everyone.

In addition, we have committed to reviewing the National Air Quality Strategy (including the Local Air Quality Management Framework) with a key objective of promoting and supporting greater local action to identify and address air pollution inequalities, targeting action at vulnerable groups and communities.

The Government is also committed to improving public awareness of air pollution and to improve the provision of air quality data and information on the UK Air website. We have started a comprehensive review of the Daily Air Quality Index, to enhance the advice when pollution levels are elevated.

The Department of Health and Social Care continues to engage with organisations such as Health Education England and the Royal Colleges to ensure that healthcare professionals are equipped to provide information and advice to those vulnerable to the health impacts of air pollution. This will allow patients and their carers to take steps to reduce their exposure to air pollution and give them greater power to manage their condition. The Chief Medical Officer has also discussed this matter with the Royal Colleges. Furthermore, the NHS has a Long Term Plan to improve asthma outcomes for children and young people. The Children and Young People's Transformation Programme has asked local systems to prioritise local improvements in asthma care. This will include supporting clinicians to discuss the short- and long-

term adverse effects of air pollution on children with asthma and any mitigation strategies.

■ Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks: Reviews

Luke Pollard: [\[29892\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond in full to the 27 proposals of the Landscapes review published in September 2019.

Luke Pollard: [\[29893\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the proposals of the Landscapes review published in September 2019 on (a) the planning system, (b) a night under the stars in a national landscape for every child, (c) increasing the ethnic diversity of visitors to national landscapes, (d) landscapes that cater for and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, (e) expanding volunteering in national landscapes, (f) sustainable tourism, (g) joining up national trails with national landscapes, (h) expanding open access rights in national landscapes, (i) affordable homes in national landscapes, (j) public transport, (k) a city park competition, (l) a better designations process, (m) reformed governance and (n) more funding and a new financial model.

Luke Pollard: [\[29894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has held with Cabinet colleagues on each of the 27 proposals in the Landscapes review published in September 2019.

Luke Pollard: [\[29895\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has held with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the increase in funding for national landscapes proposed in the Landscapes review published in September 2019.

Luke Pollard: [\[29896\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has plans to merge and centralise the management of national parks and areas of outstanding national beauty.

Luke Pollard: [\[29897\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to issue a consultation on the future management structure for national landscapes.

Rebecca Pow:

My Rt Hon Friend the Environment Secretary regularly discusses a wide range of issues with Cabinet colleagues.

Julian Glover and his team set out a compelling vision for more beautiful, more biodiverse and more accessible National Parks and AONBs.

Our Written Ministerial Statement published on 24 June shows our support for some of the main themes of the review.

We are working with partner organisations to inform and develop our response to the review, and expect to consult on draft proposals later this year.

In regards to the reviews recommendation on a potential National Landscapes Service; we have not made any final decisions on whether and how this proposal should be implemented, and the review did not specify what structure a National Landscapes Service should take. This is just one of the recommendations and we will consult on various areas of the review and respond to the review as a whole in due course.

While we cannot pre-empt the spending review, we have recently launched [Farming in Protected Landscapes](#), a three-year programme announced in the Defra's Agricultural Transition Programme and as part of the Spending Review 2020 commitment to National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Our Protected Landscape organisations will receive approximately £20m in funding in the current financial year to provide to farmers and land managers in their areas, delivering projects focusing on the environment, people and place.

■ Chemicals: Regulation

Justin Madders: [\[29811\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with relevant stakeholders on the timeframe for the continuation of discounts to UK REACH applicable fees for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Rebecca Pow:

On 1 January 2021, legislation to bring REACH into UK law came into force. The regulation on REACH fees and charges was retained, along with the fee reductions for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Under UK REACH SMEs will continue to receive these discounts for all applicable fees, which will reduce fees by up to 90% in some cases.

■ Climate Change

Christian Wakeford: [\[29170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to progress implementation of nature-based climate solutions with the (a) speed and (b) ambition needed to deliver the UK's nationally determined contribution under the Paris Agreement.

Rebecca Pow:

The UK is committed to taking ambitious, far-reaching action to tackle climate change and meet our commitments under the Paris agreement. We have announced a series

of ambitious plans since committing to net zero emissions in law, including through our target to reduce emissions by at least 68% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels - the highest reduction target made by a major economy to date. Ahead of COP26, we will set out plans across key sectors of the economy through our Net Zero Strategy, to meet our carbon budgets and net zero commitment, and nature-based solutions will be a part of these plans.

We are exploring a range of potential Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) including; restoring degraded peatlands; appropriately establishing multi-purpose woodlands and protecting them; and restoring or recreating wetland and coastal habitats. We have already published our England Peat and Trees Action Plans this May which provide an ambitious framework to improve the management of peatlands, and our planting and management of woodlands and trees. This is underpinned by our £640 million Nature for Climate Fund over the course of this Parliament which will support a trebling of tree planting across England by the end of this Parliament and help to restore 35,000ha of peatland over the next 5 years.

We are also exploring options for incentivising private investment to further develop the nascent market in NbS. This includes enabling this market to scale up by developing robust, long term policy and regulatory frameworks to facilitate high quality investment.

By making nature, including NbS to climate change, a key focus of COP26, we hope to demonstrate that NbS can deliver multiple benefits for climate, biodiversity, and people, and can therefore play a critical role in tackling these interrelated crises in an integrated way.

■ Consumer Goods

Hilary Benn:

[\[28966\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to recent reports of unsold electrical goods being destroyed by Amazon, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to make it unlawful for retailers to destroy unsold stock.

Rebecca Pow:

There is already an obligation, set out in the Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011, for businesses that handle waste to take all measures reasonable to apply the waste hierarchy. Failure to meet the legal obligation can lead to enforcement action from the Environment Agency in England.

We also have a producer responsibility system in place under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Regulations to ensure all waste electrical and electronic products are collected and treated properly. This supports action in line with the waste hierarchy by those who treat electronics to ensure priority is given to preparing the products for reuse where possible, and then recycling so full use is made of components and materials.

■ Dartmoor National Park: Finance**Luke Pollard:** [\[29898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what funding allocation he plans to make to Dartmoor under the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme for (a) 2022-23 and (b) 2023-24.

Rebecca Pow:

The funding allocation for Dartmoor National Park Authority under the Farming in Protected Landscape programme for 2022-23 and 23-24 has not yet been confirmed. Future allocation figures will follow the next Spending Review announcement.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Information**Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[29014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what mechanisms are in place to audit the information provided to his Department by (a) regulatory bodies and (b) non-departmental public bodies.

Victoria Prentis:

The relationship between Defra and its arm's-length bodies (ALB) is established through a Framework Document which has been agreed between each ALB and Defra to exercise meaningful oversight of the ALB's strategy and performance, pay arrangements and/or major financial transactions, e.g. by monthly returns, standard delegations and exception reporting. Defra's accounts consolidate its ALBs, so Defra's accounting officer must be satisfied that the consolidated accounts are accurate and not misleading.

Defra's ALBs are required to submit to Defra, on an annual basis, an annual report and audited accounts prepared in accordance with the relevant statutes and guidelines. The annual report and accounts provide Defra with the financial and non-financial performance of the ALB. In addition, they will state if the ALB has met key performance indicators as set out in their business and corporate plans. The report and accounts of each ALB are independently audited and are laid in Parliament and, where commercially possible, made available on the ALB's website. The consolidated Defra group accounts are audited by the National Audit Office, laid in Parliament, and published on Defra's website.

■ Dogs: Animal Breeding**Helen Hayes:** [\[29106\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to tackle illegal puppy smuggling and inhumane breeding practices.

Victoria Prentis:

The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill was introduced in Parliament on 8 June. This will allow us to protect the welfare of pets by introducing restrictions to crack down on puppy smuggling and other low welfare movements of pets into Great Britain. The Bill

reduces the number of pet dogs, cats and ferrets that can be moved under the pet travel rules which apply to non-commercial movements from 5 per person to 5 per vehicle for ferries and rail routes and 3 per person if a foot passenger or via air travel.

The Bill also includes a power to make regulations about the importation of pet animals into Great Britain for the purpose of promoting animal welfare. This will enable us to go further in the future and explore measures to prohibit or restrict imports of puppies below a minimum age, heavily pregnant dams, or dogs which have been subjected to mutilations such as cropped ears or docked tails.

The Government is planning to launch a consultation later this year on the proposed restrictions to the commercial and non-commercial movement of pets into Great Britain. The consultation will allow us to refine the scope of the measures.

Significant steps have also been taken to improve and update the laws on dog breeding in England. Under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 anyone in the business of breeding and selling dogs and/or who breeds three or more litters in a twelve-month period needs to have a valid licence from their Local Authority. Licensees must meet strict statutory minimum welfare standards which are enforced by Local Authorities who have powers to issue, refuse or revoke licences.

■ Dogs: Animal Welfare

Helen Hayes:

[29107]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to tackle the promotion of cropping dogs ears on social media.

Victoria Prentis:

This Government is committed to eradicating the illegal cropping of dogs ears, not just addressing the practice's promotion on social media. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is already an offence in England and Wales to carry out a non-exempted mutilation e.g. where it is not carried out for medical purposes, including the cropping of a dog's ears. Now that The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 has come into force, anyone convicted of such an offence faces being sent to prison for up to 5 years, or receiving an unlimited fine, or both.

The Government published its Action Plan for Animal Welfare on 12th May, which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/action-plan-for-animal-welfare/action-plan-for-animal-welfare>. This is a wide-reaching and ambitious plan to set out our current and future work on animal welfare. The Government has a manifesto commitment to crack down on puppy smuggling and one of our key reforms in the plan is to end this abhorrent, cruel practice and low-welfare pet imports. As part of the Action Plan, we are now making some significant changes to domestic law through the recently introduced Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill. This Bill was introduced in Parliament on the 8 June and will progress through Parliament when parliamentary time allows. The Bill includes powers to introduce new restrictions on pet travel and on the commercial import of pets on welfare grounds,

via secondary legislation. These power will allow us to go further and prioritise the welfare of dogs by prohibiting the importation and non-commercial movement of dogs into GB that have been subject to low welfare practices, such as ear cropping or tail docking, in line with our domestic legislation on these practices.

Meanwhile my Department maintains a national communications campaign (Petfished) to raise awareness of issues associated with low-welfare and illegal supply of pets. This includes providing clear signposting on where responsible breeders and rehoming centres can be found and encouraging prospective buyers to research the seller thoroughly before they visit and decide to purchase. The campaign provides a list of red flags for buyers to look out for when searching for a pet online. More information can be found here:

<https://getyourpetsafely.campaign.gov.uk/>. We have also endorsed The Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG) which was created to combat growing concerns about the irresponsible advertising of pets for sale, rehoming and exchange and backed a set of Minimum Standards that PAAG developed which several of the UK's largest classified websites have agreed to meet.

■ Environmental Land Management Scheme

Christian Wakeford:

[29172]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of the Environmental Land Management schemes on greenhouse gas emissions from the agriculture sector; and what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the objectives of those schemes with the UK's net zero target.

Rebecca Pow:

Defra is taking action to tackle climate change, in line with our net zero target, by making consistent contributions towards reducing emissions from agriculture and agricultural land and increasing the amount of carbon that is sequestered and stored. All three of our Environmental Land Management schemes will pay farmers to provide agreed environmental outcomes, including actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The soil standards recently announced as part of the first year roll out of the Sustainable Farming Incentive will play a part in this.

Initial projections of the SFI arable/horticultural soil and improved grassland soil standards estimate average potential carbon savings of up to 0.8 megatons of CO₂ equivalent in England annually over the CB6 period (the sixth carbon budget period under the Climate Change Act, from 2033 to 2037). These savings are roughly equivalent to a total of up to 400,000 cars off the road per year over the CB6 period (based on annual emissions by an average car on the road in 2019). Improving soil health is an important potential mechanism to sequester more carbon, but we know that we must do more to deliver our Net Zero ambitions.

We are continuing to consider a wide range of measures for how to reduce emissions from agriculture and increase the amount of carbon captured by the land, as we roll out the Environmental Land Management schemes.

A more detailed overview of our departmental plans to help the UK meet its climate targets will be set out in the Net Zero Strategy, to be published ahead of COP26.

■ Fly-tipping: Fines

Stephen Hammond:

[\[29008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of increasing the minimum fine for unlawfully depositing waste.

Rebecca Pow:

There is currently no minimum fine set out in law for unlawfully depositing waste under Section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act.

Sentencing in individual cases is a matter for the independent courts. When deciding what sentence to impose for unlawfully depositing waste, the court will take into account the circumstances of the offence and any aggravating and mitigating factors in line with the Environmental Offences Definitive Guideline issued by the independent Sentencing Council for England and Wales. Where a court decides that a fine is the right sentence, the level of fine must reflect the seriousness of the offence and take into account the financial circumstances of the offender.

Instead of prosecuting, councils may choose to issue a fixed penalty notice (FPN). The value of an FPN needs to be high enough to act as a deterrent, but not too high so that offenders cannot, or choose not to, pay the penalty. Defra issued a call for evidence in 2015 prior to introducing a FPN for fly-tipping offences. The responses to the call for evidence, and further analysis, led to a default value of £200, a maximum value of £400, and a discounted minimum of £120. Similarly, in 2018 Defra consulted on introducing a FPN for householders who fail in their duty of care by passing their waste to an unlicensed waste carrier and which is then found fly-tipped. Almost three-quarters of respondents to the consultation felt that the proposed value of the FPN (discounted minimum value of £120, default value of £200 and maximum value of £400) was correct.

■ Forests: Conservation

Catherine West:

[\[29113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the Government's recent announcement on the COP26 initiative to protect the world's forests, what steps he has taken to strengthen measures to protect forests in the UK.

Rebecca Pow:

We are committed to increasing tree planting across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by the end of this parliament. We published our ambitious England Trees Action

Plan on 18 May which sets out our plans to at least treble tree planting rates in England in support of this, using more than £500m from the Nature for Climate Fund.

The irreplaceable nature of ancient and long-established woodlands is recognised in our 25 Year Environment Plan. We therefore strengthened the protection of ancient and veteran trees in 2018 through the National Planning Policy Framework and guidance to planners. These outline that developments should be refused if they would lead to the loss and deterioration of ancient and veteran trees unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and suitable compensation measures.

The Government will also introduce a new category of 'Long Established Woodland', which are woodlands that have been in situ since 1840, alongside ancient woodland. We will consult on the protections these woodlands are afforded in the planning system, recognising their high ecological and societal value.

We will also continue to lead efforts to build resilience to protect and enhance our trees, woods, and forests for the future, implementing the four environmental goals of the Tree Health Resilience Strategy: Extent, Connectivity, Diversity, and Condition. This includes launching a new Centre for Forest Protection which will help protect our trees, woodlands, and forests from the threats from pests and pathogens through the provision of better evidence.

■ **Pets: Tagging**

Jim Shannon:

[\[29047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that pets in the UK are microchipped; and if will he ensure that there is an adequate level of funding to microchip all pets.

Victoria Prentis:

All dogs in England must already be microchipped under the Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015, unless they are certified as exempt. We committed in our Manifesto, and reaffirmed this commitment in our Action Plan for Animal Welfare, to introduce compulsory cat microchipping and are currently considering the responses to our recent consultation on the issue.

Recent data suggests that the cost of microchipping an animal is £17 on average. We are aware that some organisations offer free microchipping of dogs.

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

■ **Plastics**

Helen Hayes:

[\[29109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to reduce the use of single use plastics; and what assessment his Department has made of the benefits of a target of 50 per cent reduction by 2025.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan sets out our ambition to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042, including from single-use plastics. We are making great strides to tackle plastic pollution across the country. In December 2018 we published the Resources and Waste Strategy, which sets out how we want to achieve this and move towards a circular economy and keep resources in the system for as long as possible.

We have made significant progress on reducing single-use plastic products. In October 2020, we introduced measures to restrict the supply of plastic straws, plastic drink stirrers, and plastic-stemmed cotton buds. The single-use carrier bag charge, which has led to a 95% reduction in the use of single-use carrier bags by the main supermarkets, has been increased to 10p and extended to all retailers to encourage customers to bring their own bags to carry shopping and reduce the volumes of single-use plastic being used. We will continue to review the latest evidence on problematic products and materials to take a systematic approach to reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastic products, including problematic packaging materials. However, we must think carefully about introducing bans and other policy solutions to avoid unintended consequences, such as a switch to another single-use material.

Our Environment Bill will enable us to significantly change the way we manage waste and take forward a number of proposals from the Resources and Waste Strategy. The Bill will include powers to create Extended Producer Responsibility schemes, introduce Deposit Return Schemes, and give us the power to set new charges for other single-use plastic items. Our consultations on an EPR scheme for packaging and a DRS for drinks containers closed on 4 June. From April 2022, we will introduce a new tax on plastic packaging, set at £200 per tonne for packaging that does not contain at least 30% recycled content. The tax is estimated to lead to around 40% more recycled plastic being used in packaging in 2022/23, saving nearly 200,000 tonnes of CO₂. In effect a tonne of recycled plastic will be over £600 more valuable. This will create a market for recycled content, which we expect to drive investment in further capacity in the UK.

The Government has put together a package of over £100 million for research and innovation to tackle the issues that arise from plastic waste. £38 million was set aside through the Plastics Research and Innovation Fund, the last funding competition of which opened in June 2020. The Resource Action Fund included £10 million specifically to pioneer innovative approaches to boosting recycling and reducing litter. The Government has also announced £60 million of funding through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, alongside a £150 million investment from industry, towards the development of smart, sustainable plastic packaging (SSPP), which will aim to make the UK a world leader in sustainable packaging for consumer products. Two SSPP funding opportunities have been open for bids in 2021: the SSPP Demonstrator Round 2 and the SSPP business-led research and development competition.

The Department has not made an assessment of the impact of a target to reduce single-use plastics by 50% by 2025. However, the Environment Bill includes a requirement for the Government to set at least one long-term target on resource efficiency and waste reduction. Work is already underway on developing these targets, in order to help guide the government the Resources and Waste Targets Expert Group has been formed. More information can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/resources-and-waste-targets-expert-group>.

Moreover, the Government is exploring packaging recycling targets under our proposals for extended producer responsibility for packaging. The consultation on our more detailed proposals closed on 4 June 2021.

■ **Plastics: Recycling**

Helen Hayes: [\[29108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the timescale to introduce a deposit return scheme on the amount of plastic waste the UK will export overseas by 2024.

Rebecca Pow:

In the Resources and Waste Strategy, we have committed to taking actions which will help to stimulate private investment in reprocessing and recycling infrastructure. The introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers, alongside the other Collection and Packaging Reforms (Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging (EPR) and consistency in household and business recycling in England), is expected to increase and incentivise appetite for commercial infrastructure investment, giving investors greater confidence in the growing UK reprocessing market and reducing the reliance on exporting material overseas. Alongside this, the HMT plastic packaging tax is expected to increase demand for secondary material plastic and increasing reprocessing infrastructure will help meet this demand.

■ **Polystyrene: Packaging**

Ms Harriet Harman: [\[29724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the use of polystyrene chips in packaging.

Rebecca Pow:

Our Resources and Waste Strategy sets out our plans to reduce plastic pollution and move towards a more circular economy. This builds on the commitment in the 25 Year Environment Plan to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste. For the most problematic plastics we are working faster, which is why we committed to work towards all plastic packaging placed on the market being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025.

Generally, we prefer to help people make more sustainable choices, only resorting to a charge or a ban where we think this is necessary. We have recently undertaken a second consultation on introducing extended producer responsibility for packaging.

This would see producers required to pay the costs of managing the packaging they place on the market including when it becomes waste. This will incentivise producers to question whether the packaging they use is necessary, could be reduced, or not used at all.

The consultation also proposed that producers' fees will be varied to help achieve intended outcomes of the scheme, such as increased recycling of packaging waste. Under this approach producers who use unrecyclable or difficult to recycle packaging such as polystyrene would be required to pay higher fees. This will further incentivise them to use recyclable or reusable packaging instead. We are now analysing the responses that were received and will publish our response in due course.

Industry is also taking action. The UK Plastics Pact, which accounts for over 85% of plastic packaging placed on the market, has committed to eliminating all polystyrene packaging by 2025.

■ **Public Footpaths: North West**

Justin Madders:

[\[29817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what his timetable is for announcing a final decision on Natural England's proposals for the English coastal path from Birkenhead to the Welsh border.

Rebecca Pow:

The Birkenhead to Welsh Border stretch of the England Coast Path has been split into three lengths. Length 1 (Seacombe Ferry Terminal, Birkenhead to Red Rocks Slipway, Hoylake) and length 3 ('The Boat House' Public House, Parkgate to the Welsh border) were approved by the Secretary of State on the 7th July and establishment works can now begin.

Length 2 (Red Rocks Slipway, Hoylake to 'The Boat House' Public House, Parkgate) has not yet been determined as a Planning Inspectorate investigation into objections received on the length is ongoing. On completion of this by the Appointed Person, a report will be submitted to the department for consideration in the Secretary of State's determination decision.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ **Afghanistan: Humanitarian Aid and Peace Negotiations**

Rachael Maskell:

[\[29851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he plans to take to advance (a) humanitarian aid and (b) a peace process in Afghanistan.

Nigel Adams:

The UK remains committed to supporting Afghanistan through our diplomatic and development work, and support to the security sector. Over recent years the UK has

been proud to be one of the leading contributors to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund and this will remain a high priority for the UK. This year UK funding will help provide vital assistance to people affected by drought, COVID-19 and internal displacement. Between 2016 and 2020, UK funding contributed to over 6.3 million people being supported with life-saving humanitarian assistance.

The UK is working closely with international and regional partners to support Afghan peace negotiations, including through diplomatic support and technical advice. The Prime Minister spoke to President Ghani on 17 June, and reiterated the UK's commitment to Afghanistan and that the UK would continue to support a negotiated political settlement as the best path to peace in Afghanistan.

■ Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations

Rachael Maskell:

[\[29850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, through which international mechanisms he plans to monitor the levels of risk in Afghanistan; and what mechanisms he plans to use to respond to risk with other actors or alone.

Nigel Adams:

The UN coordinates regular discussions on Afghanistan, in which the UK and international partners assess the situation, and review options for collective response. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) monitors the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, and provides regular updates to donors. OCHA also coordinate delivery of the multi-donor Humanitarian Response Plan, which the UK contributes to. Through NATO, the UK will continue to provide training and financial support to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. NATO will also retain a civilian office in Kabul to continue diplomatic engagement and enhance our partnership with Afghanistan. The UK will continue working closely with others in the international community as the situation develops in the months and years ahead.

■ Developing Countries: Equality

Sarah Champion:

[\[29053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many programmes reduced or discontinued as a result of a reduction in Official Development Assistance targeted those with protected characteristics.

Nigel Adams:

Allocation decisions have been taken by Ministers in line with the objectives set out in the Integrated Review. These took account of a full range of factors, including analysis of potential impacts on beneficiaries of UK aid. Ministers were appraised of qualitative analysis, sectoral analysis of thematic trends, and further quantitative analysis of draft business plans to assess the impacts of ODA reductions. Ministers have considered the impact on people with protected characteristics, including any

potential impact on equalities. Ministers have also considered the impact on supply partners, drawing on FCDO programme managers' advice on how best to manage reductions to specific programmes.

The UK will continue to act as a global development actor focused on supporting the world's poorest people. This is a key objective in the UK's diplomatic and development work. We remained committed to protecting human rights and contributing to a fairer and more prosperous world.

■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Information

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[29031\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what mechanisms are in place to audit information provided to his Department by (a) regulatory bodies and (b) non-departmental public bodies.

Nigel Adams:

The relationship between an arm's-length body and the department should be established through a Framework Document. Managing Public Money sets out that:

"3.8.2 The framework document (or equivalent) agreed between an ALB and its sponsor always provides for the sponsor department to exercise meaningful oversight of the ALB's strategy and performance, pay arrangements and/or major financial transactions, eg by monthly returns, standard delegations and exception reporting. The sponsor department's accounts consolidate those of its ALBs so its accounting officer must be satisfied that the consolidated accounts are accurate and not misleading".

www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-public-money

A non-departmental public body is required to submit to their sponsoring department, on an annual basis, an annual report and audited accounts prepared in accordance with the relevant statutes and guidelines. The annual report and accounts provide the sponsoring department with the financial and non-financial performance of the non-departmental public body. In addition, they will state if the non-departmental public body has met key performance indicators as set out in their business and corporate plans. The report and accounts are laid in Parliament and, where commercially possible, made available on the non-departmental public body's website.

■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Staff

Lisa Nandy:

[\[31389\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many staff from his Department have been posted overseas by country in each of the last five years.

Nigel Adams:

[Holding answer 15 July 2021]: Former FCO data for the last five years is available in the Annual Report & Accounts for each financial year and which is available on

Gov.uk. Former DFID data is not routinely published. FCDO headcount data as of 31 March 2021 will be published as part of the 2020-21 Annual Report and Accounts in due course.

■ **Gaza: Israel**

Margaret Ferrier: [\[30365\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps he has taken to ensure (a) an investigation into and (b) accountability for potential violations of international law in the context of Israel's May 2021 military offensive on Gaza.

James Cleverly:

Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence, and the right to defend its citizens from attack. In doing so, it is vital that Israel ensures its actions are proportionate, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and that it makes every effort to avoid civilian casualties. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation, including raising concern about Israel's actions when warranted.

■ **Israel: Palestinians**

Fleur Anderson: [\[29927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with (a) the Israeli Ambassador and (b) Palestinian Ambassador on (i) equitable access to covid-19 vaccines and (ii) protecting human and children's rights in that region.

James Cleverly:

The British Embassy Tel Aviv and the British Consulate-General Jerusalem are in regular contact with the relevant parties and continue to raise the issue of timely access to vaccines. The Foreign Secretary most recently raised this during his visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 26 May.

The UK continues to engage with the Israeli government on human rights issues in the context of the occupation, including the treatment of children. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation. We also 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.

■ **Members: Correspondence**

Robert Lorgan: [\[29162\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he plans to respond to the enquiry of 9 April 2021 from the hon. Member for High Peak, referenced RL21845.

Nigel Adams:

A reply was sent on 13 July.

Robert Largan:[\[29179\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he plans to respond to the enquiry of 12 May 2021 from the hon. Member for High Peak, referenced RL22521.

Nigel Adams:

We have no record of receiving this item of correspondence. My officials have contacted your office and have obtained a copy. We will work to expedite a response.

■ Nepal: Coronavirus**Jim Shannon:**[\[29795\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make it his policy to ship at least 1.4 million AstraZeneca covid-19 vaccine doses to Nepal in the next few weeks to allow vulnerable people who have had one dose, receive their second within the appropriate timeframe.

Jim Shannon:[\[29796\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is planning to take in response to the situation in Nepal where 1.4 million vulnerable people require AstraZeneca covid-19 vaccines in the next seven days before the timeframe elapses for a second dose.

Jim Shannon:[\[29797\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has of (a) the need for 1.4 million AstraZeneca vaccines in Nepal by mid-July and (b) the UK's ability to meet that need.

Jim Shannon:[\[29798\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if the UK will provide 40 million covid-19 vaccine doses to Nepal over the next few months to help the Government of Nepal meet its 72 per cent vaccination target.

Nigel Adams:

The UK is a leading donor to COVAX, the multilateral mechanism set up to support international co-operation on vaccines, having committed £548 million to the scheme. COVAX has delivered 348,000 doses to Nepal so far with further tranches on the way. As G7 chair this year the UK has also secured a commitment to donate 1 billion vaccine doses to the developing world by June 2022, including 100 million donated by the UK - the first 5 million in the coming weeks. The majority of these doses will be donated to COVAX. COVAX remains best-placed to allocate vaccines to where they will be most effective. It is helping to support countries to assess vaccine introduction readiness, develop detailed national deployment and vaccination plans, and strengthen delivery systems. As shareholders and contributors to both the World

Bank and the Asian Development Bank, the UK has also pushed hard for multilateral organisations to provide finance to countries for vaccine procurement, including Nepal. The World Bank has now made at least \$75 million available to the Government of Nepal for that purpose; a further \$165 million will soon be proposed to the board of the Asian Development Bank, which the UK will also support.

■ Nigeria: Human Rights and Religious Freedom

Feryal Clark: [\[30427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Nigerian counterpart on protecting the (a) religious freedoms, (b) freedom of belief, and (c) human rights of (i) the Igbo community, (ii) Christians, (iii) all minority religious groups and (iv) people with no religion in Nigeria; and if he will make a statement.

James Duddridge:

The UK is committed to promoting and protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief around the world. We condemn all violence against civilians in Nigeria, irrespective of their religion and ethnicity. In the North East, terrorist groups, including Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa, continue to cause immense suffering to both Muslim and Christian communities. These groups seek to undermine the right to freedom of religion or belief by indiscriminately attacking those of all faiths who do not subscribe to their extremist views.

We are also concerned by sharpening social divisions and intercommunal violence within Nigeria. We encourage reconciliation and constructive dialogue between the many ethnic groups, religious identities, and communities that make up and contribute to the strength and diversity of Nigeria. I [Minister Duddridge] discussed rising insecurity with the President's Chief of Staff, the Foreign Minister and the Governor of Lagos during my visit to Nigeria in April. Our High Commissioner regularly raises the importance of ensuring accountability for all human rights violations with senior interlocutors in the Nigerian government, including serious cases of discrimination on the basis of religion or belief.

■ Occupied Territories: Coronavirus

Fleur Anderson: [\[29926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with the (a) Israeli Ambassador and (b) Palestinian Consulate on the provision of covid-19 vaccines to people living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

James Cleverly:

The British Embassy Tel Aviv and the British Consulate-General Jerusalem are in regular contact with the relevant parties and continue to raise the issue of timely access to vaccines. The Foreign Secretary most recently raised this during his visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 26 May. The UK is committed to

global equitable access to effective vaccines as demonstrated by our £548 million contribution to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC) - the international initiative to support global equitable access to vaccines. We are pleased that the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) were among the first to benefit from the COVAX scheme with its first delivery on 17 March 2021. Since that initial shipment, we are pleased that several further deliveries have arrived in the OPTs, including most recently on 2 June 2021.

■ **Palestinians: Coronavirus**

Patrick Grady:

[\[29829\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if the Government will provide covid-19 vaccines to the Palestinian Authority from supplies surplus to UK needs.

James Cleverly:

The UK is committed to global equitable access to effective vaccines as demonstrated by our £548 million contribution to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC) - the international initiative to support global equitable access to vaccines. We are pleased that the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) were among the first to benefit from the COVAX scheme with its first delivery on 17 March 2021. Since that initial shipment, we are pleased that several further deliveries have arrived in the OPTs, including most recently on 2 June 2021.

■ **Tigray: Armed Conflict**

Ms Harriet Harman:

[\[28929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what evidence he has of rape being used as a weapon of war in Tigray, Ethiopia.

James Duddridge:

We are appalled at the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence in Tigray that includes widespread [and systematic] rape. We have raised this issue in a variety of multilateral fora, including the UNSC and G7. I raised this matter when I met with the Ethiopian Minister for Peace on 15 July. who reported that her Government had zero tolerance of such crimes and had convicted 60 soldiers of rape I urged her to actively work with our teams to do more.

We have deployed an expert from the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative UK Team of Experts. They are currently conducting an initial scoping mission. Their recommendations from this scoping mission will inform further options - including a wider deployment - for supporting the Government of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and other key stakeholders to safely collect and preserve evidence, and bring the perpetrators of sexual violence to justice. The UK fully supports the joint investigation involving the UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights. We continue to explore options for addressing the immediate

needs of survivors, preventing further sexual violence and delivering justice and accountability.

The UK has recently allocated a further £16.7m towards the crisis in Tigray. Part of this funding will be used to support survivors of sexual violence, through mobile health teams and by helping to re-start service delivery at health centres that were impacted by violence and looting.

Ms Harriet Harman:

[\[28930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help prevent rape being used as a weapon of war in Tigray, Ethiopia.

James Duddridge:

We are appalled at the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence in Tigray that includes widespread [and systematic] rape. We have raised this issue in a variety of multilateral fora, including the UNSC and G7. I raised this matter when I met with the Ethiopian Minister for Peace on 15 July, who reported that her Government had zero tolerance of such crimes and had convicted 60 soldiers of rape. I urged her to actively work with our teams to do more.

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HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

Peter Kyle:

[\[30401\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to assess the effectiveness of covid-19 vaccines for those with compromised immune systems.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 14 July 2021]: Public Health England is working with a range of partners to monitor the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccinations in clinical risk groups, including those with immunosuppression.

Public Health England recently published data on COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness for clinical risk groups. It showed that for those who are immunosuppressed, vaccine effectiveness after a second COVID-19 vaccine dose is 74%, with similar protection to those who are not in a risk group. This rises from 4% after a first dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Kate Osborne:[\[30419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to further reduce from eight weeks the length of time between the first and second dose of the covid-19 vaccine due to increasing rates of infection.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 14 July 2021]: Currently, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recommends an interval of eight weeks between doses of all the available COVID-19 vaccines.

It should be noted that current evidence shows that a longer dose interval produces a better immune response. As such, the JCVI has advised against reducing the dose interval further in order to maximise the effectiveness of the vaccination programme. The JCVI regularly reviews its advice in relation to COVID-19 vaccination programme, taking into account new data and evidence on the effectiveness of the programme and epidemiological situation.

■ Fibromyalgia: Medical Treatments**Jim Shannon:**[\[29794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the new research published on the treatment of fibromyalgia.

Edward Argar:

We currently have no plans to do so. However, the Department welcomes the publication of high-quality research into fibromyalgia.

■ Maternal Mortality: Ethnic Groups**Marsha De Cordova:**[\[29891\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of proposals to set a target to reduce the maternity mortality gaps experienced by Black and Asian women.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Health and Social Care Committee published its report on 6 July following its inquiry into the Safety of Maternity Services in England. The report recommended that the Government introduce a target to end the disparity between black, Asian and

minority ethnic groups and white women in maternal and neonatal outcomes with a clear timeframe for achieving that target. The Department is assessing the proposals and recommendations made by the Health and Social Care Committee and will publish its response in due course.

■ Maternity Services

Paul Howell:

[\[30429\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to ensure that the transition to the midwifery-led Continuity of Carer model is adequately resourced and supported; and whether woman who are pregnant following the death of a baby are given priority access to that service.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

NHS England and NHS Improvement have committed to midwifery-led continuity of carer, so that it becomes the default model of care for women using maternity services across England by March 2023. NHS England and NHS Improvement have provided local maternity systems with £90.05 million between 2018 to 2021 to fulfil transformational objectives, including implementing continuity of carer models. An additional £96 million was announced earlier this year, the majority of which will be invested in additional midwives and obstetric capacity.

Upcoming guidance on midwifery-led continuity of carer will include advice on the implementation of maternal medicine-focused continuity of carer teams, which could be used to accommodate women deemed higher risk due to previous loss, whilst still offering continuity of the midwife caring for them.

■ Maternity Services: Coronavirus

Mrs Sharon Hodgson:

[\[28997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data his Department is collecting to monitor the effectiveness of NHS England guidance, 'Supporting pregnant women using maternity services during the coronavirus pandemic', updated in April 2021; and what steps he is taking to ensure that parents have full access to their babies on neonatal units.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Department is not collecting data to monitor the effectiveness of NHS England's guidance. However, NHS England and NHS Improvement have worked closely with trusts to adopt the actions set out in their updated guidance on and to remove barriers which prevent trusts being able to facilitate full parental presence in neonatal units. NHS England and NHS Improvement are assured that 100% of trusts report that they are actively using the guidance to ensure they are able to facilitate full parental access to their babies on neonatal units.

■ Medical Records: Data Protection

Daisy Cooper: [\[29140\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the oral contribution by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care of 8 June 2021, Official Report, column 808, that the planned sharing of patient data by NHS Digital is to be delayed until 1 September, when he plans to publish the Data Protection Impact Assessment of those proposals.

Daisy Cooper: [\[29141\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will (a) publish and (b) consult key stakeholders on a Data Protection Impact Assessment before proceeding with the proposals to share patient data by NHS Digital, planned to commence on 1 September 2021.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

NHS Digital intends to publish the Data Protection Impact Assessment for the programme following its final assurance processes including legal and stakeholder reviews.

■ Mental Health Services: Out of Area Treatment

Jonathan Ashworth: [\[25825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many out-of-area mental health placements started in each NHS region in each month since March 2020.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

A table showing the information requested is attached.

Attachments:

1. Number of OAPs since March [PQ25825 TABLE .xlsx]

■ Travel: Coronavirus

Nick Fletcher: [\[29161\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the timescale is for the European Medicines Agency to approve Covishield vaccines produced at the Serum Institute of India for the EU's Green Pass.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Licensing applications made to the European Medicines Agency (EMA) is a matter for individual pharmaceutical companies. The timescale for a decision to approve such applications is a matter for the EMA.

Cat Smith: [\[29831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what representations he is making to his international counterparts on allowing people participating in the Novavax covid-19 vaccine trial to travel overseas.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Discussions are ongoing with other countries, including through groups such as the G7, the European Union and the World Health Organization to shape the approach taken around the world to sharing health status for travel, including vaccination status. The Chief Medical Officer for England has written to his counterparts in the EU on this matter.

■ **Young People: Coronavirus****Catherine West:**[\[28282\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the mental health of young people.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

We continue to assess the effect of the outbreak on the mental health of young people through Public Health England's 'COVID-19: mental health and wellbeing surveillance' report.

In October 2020, NHS Digital published 'Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2020: Wave 1 follow up to the 2017 survey' which explores the mental health of children and young people in July 2020, during the pandemic and compares changes since 2017.

HOME OFFICE■ **Antisocial Behaviour****Steve Reed:**[\[30358\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help local authorities work with local police forces to tackle antisocial behaviour.

Victoria Atkins:

The Government introduced a range of flexible tools and powers for local agencies, including local authorities and police forces, to tackle anti-social behaviour through the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

These powers are deliberately local in nature. Local authorities, Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners can decide how they use the powers within the Act and how best to work with each other in responding to anti-social behaviour priorities.

Home Office [statutory guidance](#), which was updated this year, supports all local agencies to take the multi-agency approach that is needed to tackle anti-social behaviour in a way that takes account of the needs of the victim and the wider community.

The Home Office and I are very proud to support Anti-social Behaviour Awareness Week which begins on 19th July.

I have also recently written to all local authorities this week to remind them of their duties around the Community Trigger process and the importance of taking a multi-agency approach to ensure that anti-social behaviour incidents are dealt with efficiently so local communities do not suffer through ASB and feel safe within their neighbourhood.

■ Asylum

David Simmonds:

[\[29173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many asylum seekers and their dependents are awaiting an initial decision on their application after six months; and how many of those applicants are over 18 years old.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office publishes data on asylum applications in the '[Immigration Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on the number of asylum applications that awaiting an initial decision are published in table Asy_D03 of the [asylum and resettlement detailed datasets](#). This can be broken down by applicant type and duration.

Information on how to use dataset Asy_D03 can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbook. The latest data relate to as at 31 March 2021.

Additionally, the Home Office publishes a high-level overview of the data in the 'summary tables'. The 'contents' sheet contains an overview of all available data on asylum and resettlement.

Information on future Home Office statistical release dates can be found in the 'Research and statistics calendar'.

■ Asylum: Housing

Helen Hayes:

[\[29103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to increase the volume of suitable accommodation in which people seeking asylum are housed.

Kevin Foster:

The current global pandemic has presented us with significant challenges when it comes to the provision of asylum accommodation, including sourcing sufficient suitable accommodation to meet demand. The use of hotels and wider government facilities is a short-term measure and we are working with our accommodation providers to move people to longer-term dispersal accommodation as soon as it becomes available.

The Home Office has been working with asylum accommodation providers, Local Authorities and Strategic Migration Partnerships to increase the amount of accommodation available for asylum seekers so we can eliminate the need for the use of contingency accommodation.

We are grateful to those local authorities who participate in the dispersal scheme and will continue to work in partnership with them to procure suitable accommodation.

Many local authorities do not currently participate in the dispersal scheme, making it harder to procure sufficient dispersal accommodation. I would encourage them to step up and play their part in the UK-wide effort to provide accommodation to those seeking asylum who would otherwise be destitute.

Justin Madders: [29823]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many complaints have been received relating to Serco's management of homes of multiple occupation for asylum seekers in each of the last three years.

Justin Madders: [29824]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of Serco's management of the housing contract for asylum seekers.

Kevin Foster:

We do not routinely publish data on complaints.

Data on the performance of key government contracts can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-performance-indicators-kpis-for-governments-most-important-contracts>

■ **British Nationality: Hong Kong**

Dr Matthew Offord: [29032]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to extend the provisions of the British Overseas Territories Act 2002 to include people from Hong Kong who hold British National (Overseas) status.

Kevin Foster:

The British Overseas Territories Act 2002 specifically related to territories which were British Dependent Territories in 2002. There are no plans to amend the Act to cover people from Hong Kong or other British nationals.

We have introduced a specific route to settlement for those who hold British National (Overseas) status and their dependent family members. This enables them to live, work and study, whilst also providing a pathway to British citizenship. This is in addition to the routes available under our wider immigration system which BN(O)s can apply to.

■ **High Rise Flats: Fire Prevention**

Shabana Mahmood: [29758]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what comparative assessment her Department has made of the relative safety of the use of (a) waking watch fire patrols

and (b) professionally installed fire alarm systems in buildings with unsafe building materials.

Shabana Mahmood: [29759]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what regulation is in place to oversee companies offering waking watch fire patrols in buildings with unsafe cladding materials.

Shabana Mahmood: [29760]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department holds information on businesses providing waking watch services in buildings with unsafe cladding materials.

Shabana Mahmood: [29761]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department plans to take to ensure that local authorities have access to a list of approved providers of waking watch fire patrol.

Kit Malthouse:

Under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the FSO), the Responsible Person for each building is required to ensure appropriate fire safety measures are in place within their building. If a responsible person uses a waking watch as part of a wider building fire safety strategy to mitigate the risks in a particular building, as informed by a fire risk assessment, it is for them to ensure its adequacy.

The Government and NFCC make available guidance to support those responsible in complying with the FSO and ensuring their premises remain safe for continued use but does not monitor service providers. The National Fire Chiefs Council has recently revised its Simultaneous Evacuation Guidance which reflects best practice and can be located at <https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/Simultaneous-evacuation-guidance>.

This guidance encourages greater use of more cost-effective measures such as alarm systems to replace or reduce dependency on waking watch wherever possible.

Local fire and rescue authorities and other enforcers of the FSO can take action where the fire safety measures fall short of compliance.

■ **HMC Protector**

Mr Kevan Jones: [31339]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what amount the Government paid for the purchase of HMC Protector.

Chris Philp:

[Holding answer 15 July 2021]: We can confirm we purchased HMC Protector from the Finnish Border Guard for £3.7m, in August 2013.

■ Home Office: Information**Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[29022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what mechanisms are in place to audit information provided to her Department by (a) regulatory bodies and (b) non-departmental public bodies.

Kevin Foster:

The information is not available in the format requested.

■ Identity Cards**Janet Daby:** [\[30414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing a photo identification card for every British citizen free of charge as a form of identification for general purposes.

Kevin Foster:

The Home Office has made no recent assessment on ID cards as we do not plan to introduce them.

■ Immigration: EU Nationals**Charlotte Nichols:** [\[29148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has plans to provide physical documentation incorporating secure QR code technology to EU nationals residing in the UK of their Settled or Pre-Settled immigration status.

Kevin Foster:

We are developing a border and immigration system which is “digital by default”, which over time means we will increasingly replace physical and paper-based products and services with accessible, easy to use online and digital services.

Individuals continue to receive written notice of their immigration status by email or letter, which they can keep for their personal records if they wish and can use when contacting the Home Office.

We continue to welcome feedback on how we can improve our services. Home Office officials have met with the 3million group to discuss the use of a QR code system and are now considering the feasibility of the suggested approach.

David Simmonds: [\[29174\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what long-term funding is in place to support (a) local authorities and (b) community organisations providing support to late applications for the EU Settlement Scheme over the next 12 months.

David Simmonds:

[\[29175\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much funding has been allocated to provide support to those with pre-settled status to secure settled status over the next (a) 12 months, (b) two years, and (c) five years.

Kevin Foster:

The Home Office remains committed to ensuring those who are eligible for the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) can apply, including those who are vulnerable or need extra support.

We have provided £4.5 million of grant funding for the period from 1 April to 30 September 2021 so the current network of 72 organisations across the UK can continue to provide a range of support to vulnerable groups in applying to the EUSS. These organisations have helped more than 310,000 vulnerable people to apply to the EUSS already. We are working closely with the grant-funded organisations and other stakeholders, collating feedback and data, to help establish the needs and scale of support required beyond September 2021.

The Home Office has a dedicated team of more than 1,500 people working on the EUSS, with support available to applicants seven days a week by telephone or email via the Settlement Resolution Centre. We are also continuing to engage extensively with a wide range of stakeholder organisations and other government departments, to provide the materials they need to communicate about the EUSS and encourage those who need to apply to do so.

David Simmonds:

[\[29176\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many full-time equivalent officials (a) worked 12 months ago, (b) currently work and (c) are expected to work in 12 months' time for the EU Settlement Scheme team and its service centre.

Kevin Foster:

Since the start of the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) we have maintained 1500 full-time equivalent officials within its casework operation, and a further 250 staff within the Settlement Resolution Centre in place to provide assistance to applicants with any questions about the scheme or who need help applying.

Over the next 12 months staffing numbers for the casework operation and the EU Settlement Scheme resolution centre will be aligned to future forecasting.

We remain committed to ensuring our operational teams have the resources they need to run an efficient and effective system, and we actively monitor workflows to ensure sufficient resources are in place to meet demand.

David Simmonds:

[\[29177\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, by what date EU citizens who have made an in-time EU Settlement Scheme application will be able to use the View and Prove service with a certificate of application to generate a shared code instead of requiring an employer or landlord to use the Checking Service.

David Simmonds: [\[29178\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when his Department plans to update the right to work and rent guidance to align that guidance with the EU Settlement Scheme Certificates of Applications which are not time limited to six months.

Kevin Foster:

Applicants who were resident by 31 December 2020 and who made an online application by the deadline now have a digital Certificate of Application. This can be used now to prove their protected rights in the UK pending the final determination of their application, which includes any appeal.

The durations of the statutory excuses provided to employers and landlords are six months and one year respectively. These are the standard durations of statutory excuses when right to work and rent checks are conducted on individuals who have an outstanding, in-time, immigration application.

These processes are not limited to applications under the EUSS and there are no plans to change them. In the event an application is not resolved within these timeframes, follow-up checks should be conducted.

Cat Smith: [\[29830\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the performance and reliability of the View and Prove service for the EU Settlement Scheme.

Kevin Foster:

We have designed our digital services to be highly resilient, with rigorous testing to build assurance, and deployed them across multiple data centres. This ensures customer data is backed up across those data centres, meaning if one fails another will take over, maintaining continuity of service.

Our digital services and their constituent parts are proactively monitored for failures, which will highlight any potential problems to allow support teams to triage and resolve as quickly as possible.

Our dedicated Resolution Centre is able to assist users who are experiencing technical issues with their online immigration status, and where necessary, enable individuals' status to be verified through alternative means.

Sanctions: Syria**Conor McGinn:** [\[28242\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking against people in the UK with links to criminal activity by the Syrian regime.

Kevin Foster:

Whilst it would not be appropriate to comment on individual cases, where there is evidence of criminal activity in support of the Syrian regime, the Home Office, Police,

Crown Prosecution Service and any relevant body will consider it and act on it as appropriate.

We are clear, the conflict in Syria poses serious risks to UK interests, including the stability of the wider region, migration, and counter-terrorism. We therefore remain vigilant to those seeking to perpetuate the conflict or profit from it.

The UK has imposed sanctions on the Assad regime to end the violent repression of civilians in Syria, and to increase pressure for a political solution. UK sanctions send a clear message to the regime and its supporters, we will not stand by whilst the regime continues to commit serious human rights abuses. Sanctions will be used to hold them to account, and to stop those targeted from entering the UK, channelling money through UK banks, and profiting from our economy.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

Jim Shannon:

[29041]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what financial support the Government has provided to churches during the covid-19 outbreak.

Eddie Hughes:

The Government recognises the impact the pandemic has had on the finances of our places of worship and religious groups.

As part of the response to the impact of Covid-19, the Government made available a package of support specifically for charities and businesses. Places of worship that are registered charities have been able to apply to a number of these schemes on the basis of being impacted organisations themselves, and for their work delivering community services in response to the pandemic. This included the Government's £750 million package of support specifically for charities, social enterprises and the voluntary sector.

The Government continues to engage regularly with a range of faith leaders and community groups - including through our Places of Worship Taskforce and regular roundtable meetings with major faith groups - to better understand how the Government can support them to respond to the pressures they face at this time.

I encourage places of worship and community groups to monitor the Government's web pages that offer information on the schemes currently available, and new schemes when they are launched, such as: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/financial-support-for-voluntary-community-and-social-enterprise-vcse-organisations-to-respond-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

Jim Shannon:

[\[29042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps the Government is taking to ensure that accessible housing for older and disabled people remains a priority during the covid-19 outbreak.

Eddie Hughes:

Our reforms on housing for older and disabled people progress despite the Covid-19 pandemic. The Government has consulted on options to raise accessible housing standards, including options to review and potentially tighten the regulatory framework to deliver accessible new homes. Since 2010 the Government has invested over £4 billion into the Disabled Facilities Grant, including £573 million paid to local authorities in May for 2021-22, funding adaptations to almost 450,000 homes. In our Social Housing White Paper we said that we will look at how we can improve access to suitable homes for disabled people. Our planning rules already mean councils must consider the needs of older and disabled people when planning new homes, and we are significantly reforming the planning system to put a much greater emphasis on design and quality, creating a system which gives local people more of a voice to make clear what new development their areas need and where.

■ **Building Safety Fund: Leeds**

Hilary Benn:

[\[28967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if his Department will write to the Member for Leeds Central to explain why the application to the Building Safety Fund for Crusader House and George Street Trading House in Leeds was not eligible to register for BSF funding.

Christopher Pincher:

The registrations to the Building Safety Fund for Crusader House and George Street Trading House confirmed they would not be able to meet the original start on site deadline which was required to be eligible for funding when the £1 billion Building Safety Fund was launched. The Government has since announced an additional £3.5 billion of funding which will fund the cost of replacing unsafe cladding for leaseholders in all residential buildings 18 metres and higher in England and should provide assurance to leaseholders that all eligible applications to the Building Safety Fund will be able to proceed. We will publish more details on how the additional funding will work alongside the existing funds soon.

■ **Carbon Emissions**

Caroline Lucas:

[\[29771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the Climate Change Committee's 2021 Progress Report to Parliament; and what steps he is taking to deliver that report's recommendation that his Department support local government to play a full role in the Net Zero transition including through increased funding and resources.

Eddie Hughes:

Government is committed to reducing emissions and has set an ambitious target of reducing our carbon emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels, higher than any other major economy.

My department is consulting on a revised National Planning Policy Framework that strengthens planning policies on the environment, climate change and flood risk resilience; and we are finalising our joint review of planning policy for flood risk with DEFRA.

We have also recently consulted on a new part of the Building Regulations to reduce the risk of overheating in new residential buildings. From 2025, the Future Homes Standard will ensure that new homes produce at least 75% lower CO2 emissions compared to those built to current standards. This represents a considerable improvement in energy efficiency standards for new homes.

A significant amount of funding has already been made available to local government, providing them with the opportunity to take a place-based response to climate change which reflects their local circumstances.

Funds such as those available under the Local Authority Delivery Scheme have already provided £500 million to local authorities for upgrades such as insulation and low-carbon heating systems to low-income households across England.

We will continue to support local government by investing a further £200 million over six years from April 2021 to pilot innovative actions that improve the long-term flood and coastal resilience of 25 local areas.

■ Community Centres: Shops**Stuart Anderson:**[\[28328\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of repurposing empty high street units as community advice centres.

Christopher Pincher:

We have reformed the Use Classes Order to provide greater flexibility to enable a wide range of uses which attract visiting members of the public, such as offices and shops for example, to change to other uses without the need for a planning application.

■ High Rise Flats: Fire Alarms**Shabana Mahmood:**[\[29762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what evidence his Department has relied upon when producing BS-5839 guidance on fire detection and alarm systems to instruct installers that communal areas in blocks of flats should not be fitted with fire alarm systems.

Shabana Mahmood: [\[29763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will review BS-5839 guidance on fire detection and alarm systems so that clear guidance is included on the installation of fire alarms in blocks of flats.

Shabana Mahmood: [\[29764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will review BS-5839 guidance on fire detection and alarm systems to insert guidance on Smart Alarm systems for high rise property.

Christopher Pincher:

British Standards such as BS 5839 are produced by the British Standards Institute (BSI). Questions regarding BS 5839 should be directed to BSI and the relevant committee.

■ High Rise Flats: Fire Prevention

Shabana Mahmood: [\[29765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what additional funding is being provided to local authorities to maintain waking watch fire patrol services in buildings with unsafe cladding.

Christopher Pincher:

Guidance published by the National Fire Chiefs Council recommends that a Waking Watch should only be in place for a short period of time in those buildings where the fire safety strategy has moved from 'stay put' to 'simultaneous evacuation'.

The guidance is clear that the Responsible Person should move quickly to install a common fire alarm system as they are a more cost effective and reliable option. On 17 December the Secretary of State announced a £30 million Waking Watch Relief fund to pay for the costs of installing a common fire alarm system in residential buildings in England taller than 18 meters with unsafe cladding, to remove costly Waking Watch measures.

Shabana Mahmood: [\[29766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the annual cost was of waking watch fire patrols to each local authority in each of the last three years.

Christopher Pincher:

The Department does not hold this information.

■ Local Plans: Green Belt

Sir Mike Penning: [\[29745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance his Department is providing to local planning authorities on local plans that are constrained as a result of pressures on the Green Belt.

Christopher Pincher:

We have published planning practice guidance which sets out how authorities should consider the constraints, such as Green Belt, when determining the suitability, availability and achievability of sites within their plan, and which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment>.

This Government is committed to protecting and enhancing the Green Belt, in line with our manifesto. The National Planning Policy Framework outlines strong protections for Green Belt land, and states that a Green Belt boundary may be altered only in exceptional circumstances, through the local plan process. A local authority should consider releasing land from Green Belt only if it can evidence that it has examined all other reasonable options for meeting its development needs. The local authority should demonstrate that it has used as much brownfield land as possible, optimised densities, and discussed with neighbouring authorities whether they could accommodate some of the development required.

The Framework strongly encourages the re-use of brownfield, especially for housing, to relieve some of the pressure to consider other land, including Green Belt. It says that local authorities should give substantial weight to the value of redeveloping suitable brownfield sites, including development above transport infrastructure. Communities are also expected to consider gentle densification within settlements to provide more developable land.

Members: Correspondence**Matthew Pennycook:**[\[29862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when he plans to respond to the letter of 27 May 2021 from the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich on ground rents on existing residential long leases.

Christopher Pincher:

A response to the letter was sent on 29 June.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Coronavirus**Grahame Morris:**[\[29775\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate has made of the number of positive covid-19 tests that have been recorded for staff in his Department who (a) would usually be based in 2 Marsham Street and (b) had been in 2 Marsham Street while carrying the virus since (i) the beginning of the pandemic and (ii) 15 May 2021.

Eddie Hughes:

We do not routinely disclose the Covid-19 test results of colleagues usually based in 2 Marsham Street.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Information

Dr Matthew Offord:

[29018]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what mechanisms are in place to audit information provided to his Department by (a) regulatory bodies and (b) non-departmental public bodies.

Eddie Hughes:

The relationship between an arm's-length body and the department should be established through a Framework Document. Managing Public Money sets out that:

"3.8.2 The framework document (or equivalent) agreed between an ALB and its sponsor always provides for the sponsor department to exercise meaningful oversight of the ALB's strategy and performance, pay arrangements and/or major financial transactions, eg by monthly returns, standard delegations and exception reporting. The sponsor department's accounts consolidate those of its ALBs so its accounting officer must be satisfied that the consolidated accounts are accurate and not misleading".

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-public-money>

A non-departmental public body is required to submit to their sponsoring department, on an annual basis, an annual report and audited accounts prepared in accordance with the relevant statutes and guidelines. The annual report and accounts provide the sponsoring department with the financial and non-financial performance of the non-departmental public body. In addition, they will state if the non-departmental public body has met key performance indicators as set out in their business and corporate plans. The report and accounts are laid in Parliament and, where commercially possible, made available on the non-departmental public body's website.

■ Tree Preservation Orders

Catherine West:

[29114]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Tree Preservation Orders; and whether the Government has plans to bring forward additional legislative proposals to improve the protection of trees and woods in urban areas.

Christopher Pincher:

Tree Preservation Orders are issued and enforced by local authorities, who have responsibility for ensuring trees of amenity value are protected for their community's enjoyment. The Government strongly believes in protecting our natural environment, which is why we increased protection for Ancient and Veteran trees in the National Planning Policy Framework in 2018 and are the first Government to commit to leaving the natural environment in a better state than we inherited it.

The England Tree Action Plan set out the Government's long-term vision for trees and acknowledged the role of strong regulation in protecting and sustainably managing our existing tree and woodland cover. We are committed to ensuring that

our future planning reforms will lead to more trees being planted and ensure strong protections for existing trees, which will benefit all areas of the country, including urban areas.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Trade Fairs: Shipping

Bob Blackman: [\[29778\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what support her Department is providing for UK maritime businesses to attend overseas trade shows.

Graham Stuart:

I refer my Hon. Friend for Harrow East to the answer I gave to the Rt Hon. Member for North Durham on 16 July 2021, UIN: 28979.

Mick Whitley: [R] [\[30017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what support her Department is providing to enable UK maritime businesses to attend overseas trade shows.

Graham Stuart:

I refer the Hon. Member for Birkenhead to the answer I gave to the Rt Hon. Member for North Durham on 16 July 2021, UIN: 28979.

Ben Lake: [\[32476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what support her Department is providing to UK maritime businesses to attend overseas trade shows.

Graham Stuart:

I refer the Hon. Member for Ceredigion to the answer I gave to the Rt Hon. Member for North Durham on 16 July 2021, UIN: 28979.

Damien Moore: [\[32507\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what support her Department is providing to UK maritime businesses to help them attend overseas trade shows.

Graham Stuart:

I refer my Hon. Friend for Southport to the answer I gave to the Rt Hon. Member for North Durham on 16 July 2021, UIN: 28979.

■ Trade Shows: Shipping

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[28979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps her Department is taking to support UK maritime businesses to attend overseas trade shows.

Graham Stuart:

The Department for International Trade (DIT) provides businesses with information on overseas trade shows and helps facilitate their attendance by organising DIT

stands, leading targeted trade missions and linking potential buyers, investors and decision-makers to UK companies who attend these events. DIT can also cover the associated costs of setting up activities such as workshops, presentations, and networking dinners.

DIT remains in contact with other government departments and key stakeholders, such as Maritime UK, to discuss future arrangements to help UK businesses continue to attend international trade shows.

■ **Tradeshow Access Programme: Wales**

Ben Lake: [\[32477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what discussions her Department has had with the Welsh Government on (a) the cancellation of and (b) a replacement scheme for the Tradeshow Access Programme.

Graham Stuart:

A range of stakeholders have been, and continue to be, engaged by Department for International Trade (DIT) officials on plans for a revised trade show support programme, and DIT will announce further details when discussions with HM Treasury are concluded.

DIT Ministers and officials engage regularly with the Devolved Administrations, including the Welsh Government, on a wide range of trade and investment support available across the UK.

JUSTICE

■ **Care Proceedings: Legal Aid Scheme**

Andrew Gwynne: [\[31348\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to applications for legal aid by prospective special guardians in private law proceedings, (a) how many and what proportion of those applications were granted and (b) what the average award was, in each year since 2016.

Andrew Gwynne: [\[31349\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to applications for legal aid from non-parent parties in care proceedings for the purposes of pursuing placement of the subject child with them, (a) how many and what proportion of those applications were granted and (b) what the average award was, in each year since 2016.

Andrew Gwynne: [\[31350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of prospective kinship carers joined as parties to care proceedings were granted legal aid, in each year since 2016.

Chris Philp:

Applications for legal aid by prospective special guardians in private law proceedings:

FINANCIAL YEAR	CERTIFICATES		AVERAGE COSTS (£)
	GRANTED	% GRANTED	
2016-17	131	71%	1,830
2017-18	145	77%	1,874
2018-19	125	70%	2,000
2019-20	183	79%	2,887
2020-21	165	73%	2,754

Please note that average costs are based on those cases which have billed in this period. Cases may conclude and bill in a different period from that which they were granted in.

Figures relate to applications for legal aid certificates submitted to the Legal Aid Agency. Equivalent figures for advice and assistance provided under the Legal Help scheme are not available, as the decision to grant funding at that tier rests with the solicitor providing the legal services.

Applications may not be granted for a variety of reasons, including being rejected for administrative reasons, with withdrawn or abandoned by the applicant, or not satisfying one or more of the requisite eligibility criteria.

Legal aid to obtain a special guardianship order is available, subject to means and merits tests, and evidence of either domestic violence or a risk of child abuse.

Information on applications for legal aid from non-parent parties in care proceedings for the purposes of pursuing placement of the subject child with them, or prospective kinship carers joined as parties to care proceedings, is only available at disproportionate cost.

■ Coroners: Finance

Anna McMorrin:

[\[31522\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment he has made of the potential need for his Department to provide additional funding to local authorities to help clear coroner inquest backlogs.

Chris Philp:

The Government has provided £6 billion in unringfenced grant funding to local authorities to support the costs of Covid-19 pressures, which can be used to help offset any extra costs incurred in the administration of coroner services, including coroner inquest backlogs, for example.

■ Divorce

Mark Jenkinson:

[R] [\[29911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans he has to reduce the number of separation and divorce proceedings that end up in the family court system; and what steps he is taking to increase the use of mediation services.

Alex Chalk:

Divorce and dissolution are a fundamental change of legal status that may have implications for people's rights and responsibilities, for matters such as property and inheritance, and for the families involved. Since the Matrimonial Causes Act 1857, divorce has always been a court process and only the court can legally end a marriage.

However, divorcing couples can use family mediation to reach agreement about the arrangements for any children and for dividing their financial assets, rather than asking the court to decide these matters.

This government is committed to supporting more families to resolve issues such as these through mediation, where appropriate. On 26 March 2021, a £1m Family Mediation Voucher Scheme was launched by the MoJ, to encourage and better support families to use mediation and resolve disputes outside of court.

The Family Mediation Voucher Scheme is currently available in private law children cases where there are no safeguarding concerns and the case is deemed suitable for mediation. The scheme will offer over 2,000 families a financial contribution of up to £500 towards their mediation costs, giving these families the opportunity to resolve their disputes with the assistance of a trained mediator. Mediation Vouchers are offered, at the Mediation Information Assessment Meeting (MIAM) to ensure families are provided with information regarding the support they can get, before they decide to pursue their matters in the family court.

We are closely monitoring the uptake and impact of the scheme and are actively considering what more could be done to encourage parties to consider mediation as an alternative to court, including better signposting of mediation as part of the implementation of the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020.

This government will continue to look at how the benefits of mediation can be better communicated, in order to encourage wider use of mediation where cases are suitable to do so.

■ Juries: Coronavirus

Matthew Pennycook:

[\[29860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of requiring jurors to have received (a) both doses of a covid-19 vaccine and (b) a negative covid-19 test before they are sworn in.

Matthew Pennycook:

[\[29861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of prohibiting those people selected for jury service from serving on juries if they have not received both doses of a covid-19 vaccine.

Chris Philp:

We have assessed the option of creating juries with only fully vaccinated people. We believe that selecting a jury in this way cannot currently be made consistent with the random jury selection process and would introduce bias to the makeup of juries. We have assessed, therefore, that the proposal would not be in the interests of justice.

The institution of trial by jury is a key component of our criminal justice system and the interests of justice are paramount in determining how juries are selected. The random selection process exists to ensure not only that there is no bias but also that juries are representative of the communities from which they are drawn. The principle of the random selection of jurors has long been an integral part of maintaining a fair justice system.

On testing, rapid (lateral flow device) COVID tests are being offered to all citizens and we encourage anyone attending court, including jurors, to get a test to support efforts to help stop the spread of the virus. Lateral flow home-test kits are also available to collect at every court and tribunal in England and Wales for all regular court and tribunal users including jurors.

■ **Ministry of Justice: Information**

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[29030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what mechanisms are in place to audit information provided to his Department by (a) regulatory bodies and (b) non-departmental public bodies.

Chris Philp:

Partnership and governance arrangements between the department and its Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) are set out in Framework Documents in line with HM Treasury guidance. These include the requirements for performance reporting, information sharing and the provision and publication of an annual report with its audited accounts after the end of each financial year.

The Ministry of Justice undertakes stewardship oversight of its regulatory bodies and non-departmental public bodies in line with the Cabinet Office Code of Good Practice. These oversight arrangements are proportionate to each body, and include formal performance meetings with ALB senior executives, which scrutinise and assess the performance data provided.

■ Personal Independence Payment: North West**Dame Angela Eagle:****[31315]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment he has made of trends in the waiting times for personal independence payment tribunals in (a) the North West, (b) Wirral and (c) Wallasey.

Chris Philp:

The most recent venue data is not currently available.

The latest period for which data about First-tier Tribunal Social Security and Child Support (SSCS) are available is January to March 2021. However, due to issues identified as the Tribunal was being migrated to a new operational system, SSCS data at venue level requires further quality assurance.

Throughout the pandemic, SSCS appeals have continued to be decided on the papers or heard using telephone and other remote technology. Additionally, HMCTS has introduced safety measures so that face to face hearings can be held for any cases which cannot be decided on the papers or heard remotely.

Information about appeals to tribunals is published quarterly on gov.uk at:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics

■ Youth Justice: Equality**Rosie Duffield:****[31521]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps the Government is taking to tackle race disparity in the youth justice system, particularly with regard to those held on remand.

Alex Chalk:

We want people to have confidence in a justice system that is fair and open—one where no person suffers discrimination of any sort.

The over-representation of ethnic minority children in the youth justice system is a real concern and we continue to prioritise understanding and tackling disparities.

The MoJ Youth Justice Policy Unit, the Youth Justice Board and the Youth Custody Service work closely together on this. Work includes providing the tools and data to help frontline youth justice services to understand the needs of ethnic minority children, work with the Magistrates' Association to build awareness of disproportionality among sentencers, and securing over £1m in funding to use physical activity to improve outcomes for 11,000 ethnic minority children at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

In relation to remand, we are also exploring race disparities in the context of a departmental review into the use of custodial remand for children. In addition, the steps we are taking through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill to tighten the tests courts must apply to remand children to custody also have the potential to help reduce disparity in remand decisions.

More broadly, work directly within the youth justice system can only partially address inequalities, as 'upstream' factors which increase the likelihood of a child appearing in the youth justice system are also disproportionate. Cross Government work on education, health and policing, all important areas upstream of MoJ's remit, recognises the importance of equalities.

TRANSPORT

■ High Speed 2 Railway Line: Construction

Esther McVey:

[\[29792\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent estimate his Department has made of the area of land required for the HS2 project including depots, facilities and stations.

Andrew Stephenson:

The latest estimate for the total permanent and temporary land requirement for the HS2 scheme, across Phases One, 2a and 2b (Western Leg), is 129.47 sqkm (this will include a degree of overlap between phases).

This is broken down between phases as follows, noting that the figures for the land required for Phase One and 2a are based on the design as at Royal Assent of the hybrid Bills for those phases, while the estimate for Phase 2b (Western Leg) is at a much lower level of design maturity as temporary and permanent land requirements for the scheme are being refined. The current estimates are as follows:

Phase 1 – 68.74 sqkm (excludes depots at Langley and Longsite)

Phase 2a – 29.20 sqkm

Phase 2b west – 31.53 sqkm

■ Large Goods Vehicles: Tax Allowances

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[28947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of introducing a scheme to financially incentivise fleet companies to transition to zero-emission heavy goods vehicles.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government is already providing £582 million to continue plug-in vehicle grants until 2022-23, including the plug-in truck grant. The plug-in truck grant reduces the purchase price of zero emission commercial vehicles. Grant rates for eligible trucks are set at 20% of the purchase price, with up to £25,000 of funding available for the largest HGVs. Decarbonisation of HGVs is at an earlier stage of development compared with cars and vans due to the different challenges of long-haul and heavy freight. To address this, we announced that we are investing £20 million this year in planning for zero emission road freight trials which will support UK industry to develop cost-effective, zero-emission HGVs and their refuelling infrastructure in the UK.

These will advance R&D in the technologies of hydrogen, catenary electric and battery electric HGVs allowing us to begin the commercial roll out of the new technology before the end of the decade. We keep all policies under review.

■ **Railway Stations: Ellesmere Port and Neston**

Justin Madders: [29813]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the decision making criteria are for applications to the Stations Fund for Ellesmere Port and Neston.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The aim of the New Stations Fund (NSF) is to open new and restored stations across England and Wales. Funding is distributed through a competition and the full eligibility criteria are available on the Network Rail website:

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/passengers/station-improvements/new-stations-fund/>

There are a number of other station improvement funds available that could potentially be drawn on by train operating companies through their franchise agreement, such as the Minor Works budget.

■ **Railways: Ledsham Garden Village**

Justin Madders: [29812]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to increase rail transport infrastructure in Ledsham Garden Village.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

I understand that the Hon Member has sponsored a bid to the Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund for the Ledsham Railway Renewal scheme to build a new station at Ledsham to serve the upcoming Ledsham Garden Village development. We expect to announce the outcomes in the summer.

■ **Railways: North of England**

Justin Madders: [29818]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he plans to publish the feedback analysis of the consultation on timetable options to improve rail performance in the North of England.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department continues to talk and work with transport leaders across the North to shape a timetable that delivers trains passengers can rely upon.

Once there is agreement, the Department will publish an analysis of the consultation responses

TREASURY**■ Females: Coronavirus****Feryal Clark:**[\[29934\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with the Minister for Women and Equalities to help ensure an equitable economic recovery for women from the Covid-19 outbreak.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Chancellor speaks to his Cabinet colleagues frequently.

Women have benefitted from an unprecedented package of support introduced since March 2020 to help businesses and individuals.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) continues through to the end of September, with employees receiving 80% of their salary for hours not worked, up to £2,500 per month. Across the UK, where it was possible to link the data, 1.72 million women were on furlough at 30 April 2021 compared with 1.67 million men.

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) also continues until September 2021. The fifth and final grant will include a turnover test in order to ensure that the most generous support - a grant worth 80% of three months' average trading profits, up to £7,500 - is targeted at those who need it the most. As of 6 June 2021, the scheme has received over 2.6 million claims from self-employed women across the four rounds of grant.

To continue to support people on low incomes during the pandemic, the Government has extended the temporary £20 per week uplift to the Universal Credit (UC) standard allowance to the end of September, with similar support for eligible Working Tax Credit (WTC) claimants. The majority of Universal Credit claimants are women: 53% in April 2021.

The increase to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit in cash terms in 2021-22 has also been maintained, an increase which was worth an extra £600 on average in 2020-21 for over 1.5 million households.

As there is a higher proportion of single women (52%) claiming housing support in the private rental sector with a shortfall than single men (18%) or couples (30%), increasing LHA rates to the 30th percentile of rates in the market, is more likely to benefit single women than single men.

While the long-term impacts of the pandemic on the labour market are still emerging, there has been a larger fall in employment among men compared to women so far. Since December-February quarter 2020, the female employment rate has fallen by 0.5 percentage points, while the male employment rate has fallen by 2.4 percentage points. This is in contrast to other G7 countries: between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020 Canada has seen a larger fall in the female employment rate, and France, Italy,

Japan and the US have seen relatively similar falls for both men and women (within 0.2 percentage points).

The gender pay gap is also at its lowest level since records began, falling to a record low of 15.5% in April 2020, from 17.4% last year. For full-time employees, the gap is also at a record low of 7.4% in April 2020, down from 9.0% in April 2019. The Office for National Statistics found that evidence from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) suggests that coronavirus factors did not have a notable impact on the gender pay gap in 2020.

■ Net Zero Review

Richard Thomson:

[\[31572\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he plans to publish the final report of the Net Zero Review; and whether that report will include an analysis on the potential merits of using hydrogen to decarbonise the UK steel industry.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Net Zero Review will be published in due course and in advance of COP26.

The final report will be a high-level analytical report that uses existing data to explore the key issues and trade-offs as the UK decarbonises. Against a backdrop of significant uncertainty on technology and costs, as well as changes to the economy over the next 30 years, it will focus on the potential exposure of households and sectors to the transition, and highlight factors to be taken into account in designing policy that will allocate costs over this time horizon.

The Net Zero Review will not include specific analysis of the merits of using hydrogen to decarbonise the UK steel industry. However, earlier this year the Government published the Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy, setting out its overall approach to reducing emissions from the industrial sector. This includes how we will support fuel switching to low carbon hydrogen in industries such as steel.

The Government is also committed to exploring the development of hydrogen as a strategic decarbonised energy carrier, alongside electricity and other decarbonised gases. Hydrogen could be an important part of the transition to Net Zero and has the potential to help the economy recover in a stronger, cleaner and more sustainable way.

Finally, the Government is investing directly in hydrogen, having announced a £240m Net Zero Hydrogen Fund at Spending Review (SR) 20 which aims to kick-start low carbon hydrogen production in the UK.

■ Treasury: Ethnic Groups

Ruth Jones:

[\[29900\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the number of Black and ethnic minority staff employed in his Department.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Treasury publishes information about the diversity of its workforce in its [2019-20 Annual Report and Accounts](#). Page 42 of this gives the latest published breakdown of diversity in the department.

■ Treasury: Information**Dr Matthew Offord:****[29029]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what mechanisms are in place to audit information provided to his Department by (a) regulatory bodies and (b) non-departmental public bodies.

Kemi Badenoch:

There is a statutory requirement for the annual reports and accounts of the financial services regulators (the Financial Conduct Authority, the Bank of England, and the Payment Systems Regulator) to be laid in Parliament by the Treasury. The regulators' accounts are examined and audited by an independent auditor before they are provided to the Treasury.

A non-departmental public body is required to submit to their sponsoring department, on an annual basis, an annual report and audited accounts prepared in accordance with the relevant statutes and guidelines. The annual report and accounts provide the sponsoring department with the financial and non-financial performance of the non-departmental public body. In addition, they will state if the non-departmental public body has met key performance indicators as set out in their business and corporate plans. The report and accounts are laid in Parliament and made available on the non-departmental public body's website.

The relationship between the department and its arm's-length bodies (including non-departmental public bodies) is established through a Framework Document, in accordance with Managing Public Money.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES**■ Gay Conversion Therapy****Wera Hobhouse:****[30406]**

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to ensure that transgender people are not subjected to gender identity conversion practices.

Kemi Badenoch:

As set out in the Queen's Speech in May, we will bring forward legislation to ban conversion therapy. The Minister for Women and Equalities has confirmed that the ban will protect people from harmful conversion therapy practices in relation to sexual orientation and/or gender identity. We will ensure the action we take to stop this practice is proportionate and effective, with no unintended consequences.

Members: Correspondence**Robert Largan:** [\[29181\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, when she plans to respond to the enquiry of 30 April 2021 from the hon. Member for High Peak, referenced RL21902.

Kemi Badenoch:

A response was provided to the hon. Member for High Peak on Monday 12 July.

WORK AND PENSIONS**Access to Work Programme: Visual Impairment****Damien Moore:** [\[32504\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps will her Department take to improve the accessibility of the Access to Work Scheme for visually impaired people.

Justin Tomlinson:

DWP is committed to ensuring that the Access to Work (AtW) scheme is accessible to visually impaired people. We work closely with stakeholders (including organisations who support blind and visually impaired people) to identify and deliver improvements to the scheme to broaden its accessibility and reach.

Recent accessibility improvements include:

- completing work to ensure our online application journey is compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidance (v 2.1); ensuring the service works with all major screen readers, screen magnifiers and other assistive software
- creating accessible versions of four Access to Work claim forms. These products are compatible with popular assistive software such as JAWS, Windows NVDA and Zoomtext. Customers can also request versions in a format of their choice if these do not meet their needs.

In addition, we are currently developing an online journey to enable citizens to claim the grant; this will be fully accessible and allow users to submit claims, check the status of claims and view their remaining grant. We have done extensive user research and prototype testing with users who have visual impairments to ensure the future service meets their needs. We are also discussing ways of reducing the amount of invoices and other evidence users might need to upload or supply; ensuring a more inclusive service across all channels.

To raise awareness of the scheme, Access to Work was supported with paid campaign activity that ran between 24 February and 31 March, and the Department continues to assess how the scheme can be promoted to support both those with visual impairment and people with other disabilities and health conditions. The campaign ran across a broad channel mix to reach a wide but targeted audience. To coincide with the Access to Work campaign launch, we also produced a new Access

to Work toolkit. This was shared with a wide range of stakeholders, including Business Disability Forum, Disability Benefits Consortium (DBC), Disability Rights UK and the RNIB.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Information

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[29024\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what mechanisms are in place to audit information provided to her Department by (a) regulatory bodies and (b) non-departmental public bodies.

Guy Opperman:

The Department oversees the governance, performance, strategy and financial arrangements of Arm's-Length Bodies (ALBs) via several mechanisms, which are applicable to both regulatory bodies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs).

The relationship between an ALB and the Department is established through a framework document, in line with the Managing Public Money guidance - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-public-money> : "3.8.2 The framework document (or equivalent) agreed between an ALB and its sponsor always provides for the sponsor department to exercise meaningful oversight of the ALB's strategy and performance, pay arrangements and/or major financial transactions, e.g. by monthly returns, standard delegations and exception reporting. The sponsor department's accounts consolidate those of its ALBs so its accounting officer must be satisfied that the consolidated accounts are accurate and not misleading".

A NDPB is required to submit to their sponsoring department, an annual report and audited accounts prepared in accordance with the relevant statutes and guidelines. The annual report and accounts provide the sponsoring department with information about the financial and non-financial performance of the NDPB. In addition, they will state if the NDPB has met key performance indicators as set out in their business and corporate plans. The report and accounts are laid in Parliament and, where commercially possible, made available on the NDPB's website.

In addition to these processes, the Department runs an Annual Assurance Assessment, holds Quarterly Accountability Reviews with the bodies and attends the bodies' Audit and Risk Committees.

■ Employment: Disability

Feryal Clark:

[\[29933\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent discussions she has had with the Minister for Women and Equalities on supporting the creation of employment opportunities for disabled people in (a) Enfield North constituency, (b) Greater London and (c) England.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has not had any recent discussions with the Minister for Women and Equalities on supporting the creation of employment

opportunities for disabled people in the specified areas. However, the Government is committed to improving the lives of disabled people, and a range of initiatives are supporting disabled people to stay in and enter work.

These include the Work and Health Programme, the Intensive Personalised Employment Support Programme, Access to Work, Disability Confident and support in partnership with the health system, including Employment Advice in NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapy services. The Government has also increased the number of specialist Disability Employment Advisors in Jobcentres.

In addition, the DWP will shortly publish a Green Paper on health and disability support which will consider how we can improve our current service, provide extra support to navigate the system and seek to better understand how we can improve the current employment support offer. The Government will also publish the National Disability Strategy later this year which will be informed by insights from the lived experience of disabled people, focusing on the issues that disabled people say affect them the most in all aspects and phases of life, including employment.

■ **Personal Independence Payment**

Mary Glendon:

[\[32393\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the amount of support a disabled person who first claimed personal independence payment in 2020 has foregone as a result of delays in processing those claims.

Justin Tomlinson:

We are committed to ensuring that people can access financial support through Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in a timely manner. We always aim to make an award decision as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to collect and review all available evidence. Once a decision has been made on a new claim to PIP, payment can be backdated to the date of claim in most instances.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Overpayments**

Mike Amesbury:

[\[29889\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many direct earnings attachments her Department has put in place in each year since the Welfare Reform Act 2012 enabled recovery of overpayments as a result of errors made by her Department rather than the claimant; and what estimate she has made of the amount that has been overpaid in error by her Department in each year since 2012.

Will Quince:

It is not possible to produce a historical time series for this specific data request regarding Direct Earnings Attachments (DEA). However, I can confirm that there are 15,000 DWP debtors with an official error debt who currently have a DEA in place.

This data is taken from operational data systems, and is not intended for publication. Therefore, the data itself is not quality assured to the standard of published Official Statistics and National Statistics.

It should be noted that, during a period when we have faced the unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19, fraud and error in the benefits system remains low, with 95% of benefits, worth more than £200bn paid correctly in 2020/21. Official Error overpayments remained at 0.4% of benefit expenditure last year, with UC Official Error Overpayments falling from 1.3% to 0.9%.

DWP's primary method of debt recovery is by deduction from any on-going benefit that might be in payment, with limits on the amount we can deduct from income related benefits being set out in legislation.

Where recovery from ongoing benefit entitlement is not possible, DWP will seek to agree a voluntary repayment plan with the debtor, taking into account their personal circumstances and the amount they can reasonably afford to repay each month.

Where a person fails to agree a voluntary repayment plan, we can apply a Direct Earnings Attachment (DEA) which allows deductions to be taken directly from a person's earnings, but this would only be after DWP had made all reasonable efforts to pursue recovery via a voluntary repayment plan.

Estimates of the amount that has been overpaid in error by DWP are published annually and can be found by following the links at [Fraud and error in the benefit system - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

■ Universal Credit

Rachael Maskell:

[29852]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the change in the level of the cost of living in the decision to remove the £20 uplift to universal credit.

Will Quince:

No such assessment has been made.

The government has always been clear that the £20 increase was a temporary measure to support households affected by the economic shock of Covid-19. It is our expectation that this additional financial support and other direct Covid support will end once the economy has reopened. Our focus now is on our multi-billion pound Plan for Jobs, which will support people in the long-term by helping them learn new skills and increase their hours or find new work.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Oral Cancer

Peter Dowd:

[\[12159\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has plans to increase patients' understanding of the merits of regular dental check-ups in helping to ensure the early diagnosis of oral cancer.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 18 June 2021. The correct answer should have been:

Jo Churchill:

No assessment has been made. Whilst dentists play a valuable role in detecting potential oral cancers through dental check-ups. Patients with concerns should seek advice from their dentist or general practitioner.

~~No assessment has been made. Whilst dentists can play an ad hoc role in detecting potential oral cancers as a by-product of dental check-ups, oral cancer is primarily detected through the medical system. The Department currently has no plans to promote dentist appointments for the specific purpose of oral cancer diagnosis. Patients with concerns should seek advice from their general practitioner and not wait for their next dental appointment.~~

Peter Dowd:

[\[12160\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to Cancer Research's projection that oral cancer will rise by 33% in the UK from 2014 to 2035, whether his Department has made an assessment of the (a) potential merits of increasing patients' awareness of the dental services available to support the diagnosis of oral cancer and (b) importance of those services.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 18 June 2021. The correct answer should have been:

Jo Churchill:

No assessment has been made. Whilst dentists play a valuable role in detecting potential oral cancers through dental check-ups. Patients with concerns should seek advice from their dentist or general practitioner.

~~No assessment has been made. Whilst dentists can play an ad hoc role in detecting potential oral cancers as a by-product of dental check-ups, oral cancer is primarily detected through the medical system. The Department currently has no plans to promote dentist appointments for the specific purpose of oral cancer diagnosis. Patients with concerns should seek advice from their general practitioner and not wait for their next dental appointment.~~

Peter Dowd:

[R] [\[12162\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to take steps to help improve patients' understanding of the merits of regular dental check-ups in helping to ensure the early diagnosis of oral cancer.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 18 June 2021. The correct answer should have been:

Jo Churchill:

No assessment has been made. Whilst dentists play a valuable role in detecting potential oral cancers through dental check-ups, patients with concerns should seek advice from their dentist or general practitioner.

~~No assessment has been made. Whilst dentists can play an ad hoc role in detecting potential oral cancers as a by-product of dental check-ups, oral cancer is primarily detected through the medical system. The Department currently has no plans to promote dentist appointments for the specific purpose of oral cancer diagnosis. Patients with concerns should seek advice from their general practitioner and not wait for their next dental appointment.~~ a