



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 16 March 2023 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:33 P.M., 16 March 2023). 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 AND TRADE

#### ■ Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** [\[162243\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether she has commissioned legal advice on the UK's exposure to Investor State Dispute Settlement claims under the provisions of Chapter 9 of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Nigel Huddleston:

Please see the answer given to UIN 155771 tabled on 19th April 2022 for a response to this question.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** [\[162245\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what her planned timetable is for concluding accession negotiations for the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Nigel Huddleston:

The UK is continuing to negotiate accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership. Recent discussions have seen the department make considerable progress towards concluding talks, aiming to finish them at the earliest opportunity. The Government is working to ensure that the UK joins on terms that work for British business and are in line with domestic priorities.

Joining CPTPP will offer significant benefits to exporters. It could give tariff free access to up to 99% of UK goods, to export to a market of 500 million people, while reducing barriers to our world leading service firms.

#### ■ Conditions of Employment: Regulation

**Angela Rayner:** [\[162188\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether she has (a) met or (b) corresponded with the Director of Labour Market Enforcement between 25 October 2022 and 25 January 2022 on the potential introduction of a Single Enforcement Body for Employment Rights.

Kevin Hollinrake:

This Government remains committed to workers' rights and enforcement. An important part of this is the ongoing sponsorship of and work with the Director of Labour Market Enforcement (DLME). The last meeting between myself and Margaret Beels, the DLME, was on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023. We have also corresponded by letter.

**■ Department for International Trade: Expenditure****Gareth Thomas:** [\[160152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to Government transparency data entitled DIT: spending over £25,000 for November 2022, for what purpose her Department spent £29,011 on marketing and media at Tradefairs UK on 2 November 2022.

Nigel Huddleston:

Tradefairs UK is the UK agent for the Gulfood Trade Show in Dubai. The payment to Tradefairs UK allowed for a 27 sq m exhibition stand in the shared UK Pavilion at Gulfood in February 2023 which enabled 30 food and drink suppliers from across Southern England to meet face-to-face with buyers from over 120 countries. This level of direct engagement with over 4,000 suppliers and potential buyers not only resulted in multiple orders being secured during the event but will generate further international sales for the participants, leveraging lucrative trade opportunities for UK businesses.

**■ Electric Vehicles: Batteries****Bill Esterson:** [\[162171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to make the UK an attractive place for automotive companies to invest and build gigafactories.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

The Government continues to work with investors through our Automotive Transformation Fund (ATF) to progress plans to build a globally competitive electric vehicle supply chain in the UK, with securing gigafactories a priority.

We continue to work closely with the sector including through the Automotive Council to bring together knowledge and understanding of automotive industry issues.

As part of our commitment to strengthening the UK's competitiveness, the Government recently announced further measures to reduce the long-term electricity price gap that exists between UK Energy Intensive Industries and competitor countries.

**■ Equal Pay: Ethnic Groups****Anneliese Dodds:** [\[161403\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what her Department's planned timetable is for the publication of the Government's ethnicity pay gap reporting guidance.

**Anneliese Dodds:** [\[161405\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the number of firms who have published ethnicity pay gap reporting.

Kevin Hollinrake:

This Government remains committed to tackling all areas of disparities in this country, including in employment. It is crucial that everyone is treated fairly in the workplace, so that they can thrive and reach their full potential and we want to ensure that everyone has access to the same employment opportunities.

Ethnicity pay gap reporting is just one type of tool to assist employers in doing this and it may not always be the most appropriate mechanism for some types of organisations. Therefore, as set out in the “Inclusive Britain” report, which was published in March 2022, the Government will not be legislating to make ethnicity pay reporting mandatory at this stage. Instead we are committed to producing guidance to support those who wish to report voluntarily. This will be published in due course.

## ■ Free Trade: Trade Agreements

**Ruth Cadbury:**

[\[162203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps her Department is taking to monitor compliance with modern slavery provisions within free trade agreements.

Nigel Huddleston:

The UK-Australia and UK-New Zealand Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) both include modern slavery provisions. These encourage good business practice and advance our mutual ambition to tackle modern slavery. All the UK's FTAs include institutional mechanisms for monitoring compliance with all labour provisions in the agreements.

## ■ Manufacturing Industries

**Bill Esterson:**

[\[162169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the Make UK report entitled No Weak links: Building Supply Chain Resilience, published on 7 March 2023, whether her Department is taking steps to support the UK manufacturing sector with the cost of (a) energy, (b) transportation and (c) raw materials in the next 12 months.

Nigel Huddleston:

*[Holding answer 15 March 2023]:* The manufacturing sector plays a vital role in the UK economy, by driving innovation, exports, job creation and productivity growth.

The Government announced a new energy support scheme for businesses in January ahead of the current scheme ending in March. All eligible UK businesses will continue to receive a discount on high energy bills until 31 March 2024.

Supply Chain constraints and cost escalation are not unique to the UK. The government will assist where it can, for example, with the action we have taken to respond to requests for Duty Suspensions and action to train more HGV drivers.

I would also refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023 to Question 161280.

**■ Manufacturing Industries: Supply Chains****Bill Esterson:** [\[162170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the report by Make UK entitled No Weak links: Building Supply Chain Resilience, published on 7 March 2023, what steps her Department is taking to implement the recommendations of that report on supply chain resilience for manufacturers.

Nigel Huddleston:

*[Holding answer 15 March 2023]:* The Government continually reviews the support it provides for our critically important sectors such as Manufacturing.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 14th March 2023 to Question 161280.

**■ Members: Correspondence****Bill Esterson:** [\[161277\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, when she plans to reply to the correspondence from the Assistant General Secretary of Unite The Union of 19 January 2023.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

Following the Machinery of Government on 6 February, the letter from the Assistant General Secretary of Unite The Union has been passed to the Department for Business and Trade. I apologise for the delay, and a response will be sent to Unite the Union shortly.

**■ Motor Vehicles: Manufacturing Industries****Bill Esterson:** [\[151274\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of BMW's decision to move Mini's electric car production to China on the (a) competitiveness, (b) supply chains working and (c) employment and jobs in the UK automotive industry.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

*[Holding answer 28 February 2023]:* Oxford remains the home of MINI and the Government continues to engage closely with BMW and other manufacturers on future UK production opportunities.

The Government has a longstanding and comprehensive programme of support for the UK automotive sector, which is an important part of the Government's plans for green growth, levelling up across our country and driving emissions to net zero by 2050.

The Government is committed to making the UK the best location to manufacture zero emission vehicles of all types.



**Bill Esterson:** [\[162172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent estimate he has made of the proportion of a UK vehicle that is manufactured in the UK; and what assessment he has made of the implications of that data for the future of the UK automotive industry.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

*[Holding answer 15 March 2023]:* Research carried out by the Automotive Council on growing the domestic supply chain reported that parts sourced by UK car manufacturers from UK first-tier suppliers was 44% by value in 2017. This is up from 36% when the first research was published in 2012.

The Government continues to work with industry to unlock private investment in our EV supply chain via the Automotive Transformation Fund, enabling a UK-made transition to Net Zero by positioning the UK as one of the best locations in the world to manufacture electric vehicles.

**■ SIMEC Group: Subsidies****Nick Smith:** [\[156109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether any companies owned by or subsidiaries of the SIMEC Group received any Government subsidies following the SIMEC Group's acquisition of the Uskmouth B Powerplant in Newport, South Wales in 2015.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

The information requested is not held centrally by the Department for Business and Trade. To provide this information would exceed the disproportionate cost threshold of £850 that is set by the Cabinet Office.

**■ Small Businesses: Loans****Bill Esterson:** [\[163848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will make it her policy to accept the recommendations on tackling late payments to small businesses in the Federation of Small Business report entitled Time Is Money: The Case for Late Payment Reform, published on 10 March 2023.

Kevin Hollinrake:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023, UIN 162500.

**■ Trade Agreements: Supply Chains****Ruth Cadbury:** [\[162200\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of free trade agreements in improving gender equality in global supply chains.

Nigel Huddleston:

The Government is committed to advancing women's economic empowerment in the UK and around the world. We are using our free trade agreements to break down barriers and create new opportunities for women as business owners, entrepreneurs, and workers. We have already secured dedicated Chapters to this effect with Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Through our market access work, the Department for Business and Trade is supporting British businesses to build more diverse and resilient supply chains which will be crucial in tackling challenges both today and in the future.

## CABINET OFFICE

### ■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

**Mrs Sheryll Murray:**

**[904100]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps his Department is taking to improve the transparency of public procurement rules for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Alex Burghart:

This Government knows that small and medium sized businesses are the backbone of the British economy.

The Procurement Bill we are introducing will bring four regimes into one and enable simpler, more flexible public procurement processes.

The single central digital platform, with open contracting data standards and efficient 'tell us once' register of suppliers, will deliver a step-change in transparency, including for SMEs bidding for public contracts.

**Mr Philip Hollobone:**

**[904101]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he is taking steps with Cabinet colleagues to ensure that Government departments and agencies answer telephones within an adequate period of time.

Alex Burghart:

I refer my Hon. friend to the answers given to PQ [113291-113292](#) on 13 January 2023.

Departmental helplines are not managed or run centrally. Therefore, each department is responsible for their own helpline, as well as response and waiting times.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### ■ **BBC Radio: Local Broadcasting**

**Julian Sturdy:**

[\[163839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she is taking steps to help mitigate the BBC's decision to make reductions to its local radio services.

Julia Lopez:

The Government recognises the important role that the BBC's local radio services play in terms of the provision of local news and information, and of community engagement in the local area. We are disappointed that the BBC is planning to reduce parts of its local radio output.

The BBC is operationally and editorially independent from the Government as set out in its Royal Charter, and decisions on service delivery are a matter for the BBC. However, in the Department's regular conversations with the BBC we have been clear that it must make sure it continues to provide distinctive and genuinely local radio services, with content that reflects and represents people and communities from all corners of the UK.

The Government also expects Ofcom, as regulator of the BBC, to ensure the BBC is robustly held to account in delivering its public service duties. The Government has already asked Ofcom about how they are considering this issue, and Ofcom has now set out its assessment of the market impact of the BBC's proposals. I understand that Ofcom is continuing discussions with the BBC on the impact of its proposals on audiences.

## DEFENCE

### ■ **A400M Aircraft: Parachuting**

**Mr Tobias Ellwood:**

[\[163729\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent progress he has made on the A400M parachute trials.

Alex Chalk:

On current planning, the first clearance for low-level parachuting is anticipated in April 2023. The aircraft is already cleared for high altitude parachuting.

### ■ **Armed Forces: Families**

**Andrew Selous:**

[\[904108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent progress his Department has made on implementing relevant recommendations of the report entitled Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families, published on 30 June 2020.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The Government responded to the 110 recommendations of the comprehensive *Living in Our Shoes* report in March 2021 and committed to taking this forward through the Armed Forces Families Strategy. Since the publication of the Strategy in January 2022, a great deal of work has taken place to formulate the priorities under the Action Plan, to understand what changes can be delivered in the short, medium and longer term. As the *Living in Our Shoes* report acknowledged, many of the recommendations are ambitious and will be delivered towards the middle or latter part of the 10-year programme. However, there is much we can do now and indeed many of the recommendations from *Living in Our Shoes* have in effect already been delivered. An update on progress with the implementation of the Strategy can be found in the 2022 Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report, published on 19 December 2022: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/armed-forces-covenant-and-veterans-annual-report-2022>

#### ■ **Armed Forces: Pastoral Care**

**Tommy Sheppard:**

[R] [163840]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to implement the recommendations of the review of the provision of non-religious pastoral support to the Armed Forces; and whether he plans to work with Humanists UK and the Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network to accredit humanist and non-religious chaplains to the Armed Forces.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Military Chaplains are professionally qualified to provide pastoral care to everyone, regardless of faith or belief background. However, should a Service person feel uncomfortable with talking to a Chaplain, they are able to seek appropriate professional support from a variety of alternative sources, which can be facilitated by the Chaplain. This includes their Chain of Command, through the Services' professional social workers, medical staff, and dedicated welfare staff. Mutual support is also available via the various staff networks, including the Humanist and Non-Religious in Defence (HAND) Network.

Having carefully considered whether this provision is adequate and suitably reflects the needs of all our people, we have recently conducted a review of this matter and consider the provision of pastoral care merits enhancement so that we can deliver even better support. Accordingly, we are intending to recruit a non-religious pastoral officer for each of the Armed Services, and are currently working with a range of stakeholders from the within the breadth of the AF community to determine how best to take this forward including how we engage with appropriate professional endorsing bodies.

**Luke Pollard:**

[163947]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to help ensure non-religious armed forces recruits have access to suitable pastoral support.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Military Chaplains are professionally qualified to provide pastoral care to everyone, regardless of faith or belief background. However, should a Service person feel uncomfortable with talking to a Chaplain, they are able to seek appropriate professional support from a variety of alternative sources, which can be facilitated by the Chaplain. This includes their Chain of Command, through the Services' professional social workers, medical staff, and dedicated welfare staff. Mutual support is also available via the various staff networks, including the Humanist and Non-Religious in Defence (HAND) Network.

Having carefully considered whether this provision is adequate and suitably reflects the needs of all our people, we have recently conducted a review of this matter and consider the provision of pastoral care merits enhancement so that we can deliver even better support. Accordingly, we are intending to recruit a non-religious pastoral officer for each of the Armed Services, and are currently undertaking work to determine the appropriate competency framework and subsequently consider options to deliver an assured capability.

## ■ AUKUS

**John Healey:**

[\[163700\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the £3 billion of funding to support the AUKUS pact announced by the Prime Minister on 13 March 2023 will be drawn from (a) the Dreadnought contingency fund or (b) HM Treasury reserves.

Alex Chalk:

The £3 billion announced by the Prime Minister represents new additional funding to support investment across the defence nuclear enterprise and will form part of the Defence core budget.

## ■ Defence Infrastructure Organisation

**John Healey:**

[\[162118\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will provide for each distinct job role, the job description and number of staff in that role, and salary band information at the Defence Infrastructure Organisation as of 1 March 2023.

Alex Chalk:

As at 28 February 2023, there were 6,142 staff employed by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation in 439 job roles, this includes Military, Agency Staff and Consultants.

Detailed job roles and job descriptions could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Information regarding salary bands can be found on the Gov.uk website via the following link: MOD-Organogram of Staff Roles & Salaries-DIO - data.gov.uk

**■ Defence: Procurement****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[163910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the defence procurement system.

Alex Chalk:

The Ministry of Defence is committed to driving effective delivery of capability to the front line and this is reflected in overall performance. For example, from the main investment decision point, the majority of Defence Equipment & Support programmes deliver on or ahead of their original cost estimates, and about half deliver on or ahead of original time estimates.

The Department continues to work to increase pace and improve delivery. We are focusing on our people and learning from experience to set new programmes up for success and embed improvement into the future. Our pan-Defence acquisition reform agenda which was established in early 2022 covers five themes:

- Improving cost estimating and cost control
- Improving relationships with industry
- Delivering strategic intent and Defence priorities through our requirements
- Empowering and enabling programme leadership
- Streamlining acquisition and approvals processes and addressing project resourcing challenges

**■ Hercules Aircraft****Mr Tobias Ellwood:** [\[163730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans he has for the C130J fleet after its replacement by A400M.

Alex Chalk:

The Royal Air Force's C-130J Hercules capability is planned to be withdrawn from service on 30 June 2023. Appropriate disposal activities have already begun in support of the potential sale of the airframes, flight simulators, support equipment, and the remaining specialised C130J spares inventory.

**■ Tidworth Garrison****John Healey:** [\[162470\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what is the (a) size in hectares and (b) Housing Unit Potential of Assaye Barracks.

**John Healey:** [\[162472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the (a) size in hectares and (b) Housing Unit Potential are of Bhurtpore Barracks.

**John Healey:** [\[162474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the (a) size in hectares and (b) Housing Unit Potential are of Delhi Barracks.

**John Healey:** [\[162476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the (a) size in hectares and (b) Housing Unit Potential are of Jellalabad Barracks.

**John Healey:** [\[162478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the (a) size in hectares and (b) Housing Unit Potential are of Candahar Barracks.

**John Healey:** [\[162480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what is the (a) size in hectares and (b) housing unit potential of Kiwi Barracks.

**John Healey:** [\[162482\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what is the (a) size in hectares and (b) housing unit potential of Lucknow Barracks.

**John Healey:** [\[162484\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what is the (a) size in hectares and (b) Housing Unit Potential of Mooltan Barracks.

Alex Chalk:

Assaye Barracks is 20.3 hectares in size.

Bhurtpore Barracks is 8.4 hectares in size.

Delhi Barracks is 7.7 hectares in size.

Jellalabad Barracks (Tidworth) is 15.4 hectares in size.

Candahar Barracks is 13.6 hectares in size.

Kiwi Barracks is 23.5 hectares in size.

Lucknow Barracks is 19.1 hectares in size.

Mooltan Barracks is 18.5 hectares in size.

No assessment has been made of the Housing Unit Potential on these sites, as they have not been identified for disposal.

#### ■ Unmanned Air Vehicles: Costs

**John Healey:** [\[163702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the projected whole-life cost to the public purse for the Protector drone programme is as of 13 March 2023; and what the projected whole-life cost was when the programme was announced.

Alex Chalk:

The 2016 Main Gate Business Case approved a Whole Life Cost of £1,248.039 million, at 50% Confidence. The current Whole Life Cost projection is £1,764.021 million. The difference includes £325 million in acquisition costs and around £190 million in through life costs.

## ■ Unmanned Air Vehicles: Finance

**John Healey:**

[\[163701\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the evidence of the Permanent Secretary to the Select Committee on Defence on 11 January 2023, at Q21, that the budget for the Protector programme has increased by around £300 million, how that figure was calculated.

Alex Chalk:

As was noted in the published transcript of the Select Committee on Defence hearing on 11 January 2023, the acquisition cost of the Protector programme has increased by £325.6 million. This figure includes the costs associated with a Department decision to delay the programme by two years to manage wider affordability challenges (£186.8 million); the cost of changing the primary sensor to avoid future obsolescence (£64.6 million); additional programme costs identified in advance of the delay (£23.4 million); and Foreign Exchange and accounting adjustments (£50.8 million).

## ■ Veterans: Health

**Jack Lopresti:**

[\[163872\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the review of welfare provision for veterans will include a detailed examination of the medical discharge process.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The independent review of His Majesty's Governments' veterans' welfare support services, announced by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Office for Veterans' Affairs on the 2 March 2023, will encompass the MOD's Veterans' Welfare Services, as well as the Northern Ireland Veterans Support Office, and the Government's role in the Veterans' Gateway, and how they fit into wider Government support to veterans. It will also align with the Reviews of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme and Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees that are currently underway.

The medical discharge process is delegated to the single Services to afford each branch of the Armed Forces the necessary flexibility to respond effectively to the unique and varying environments in which their people are employed. While each of the single Services' medical discharge process is subject to regular review, there are no current plans to include these in the independent review.



**EDUCATION****■ Children: Mental Illness**

**Rachael Maskell:** [\[163862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department is taking steps to help tackle levels of anxiety in children at school; and whether she plans to provide additional support to schools for this.

**Rachael Maskell:** [\[163863\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of the potential impact of (a) exam pressures, (b) wider mental wellbeing and (c) peer pressure through social media on levels of anxiety in children.

Claire Coutinho:

The mental health of children and young people is a priority for this government. In February 2023 we published our fourth annual State of the Nation report, collating and analysing published evidence about the wellbeing of children and young people over the 2021/22 academic year. The report includes consideration of a range of issues related to wellbeing, including anxiety, expectations around schoolwork and exams, and experiences of social media and online bullying. Findings from this series of reports informs work across government to support young people's mental wellbeing. This publication can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2022-children-and-young-peoples-wellbeing>.

The department is committed to ensuring all schools are safe, calm and supportive environments, which promote mental wellbeing and provide early, targeted support that can help all pupils thrive. It is important to recognise education staff are not mental health professionals and should not be expected to diagnose or treat mental health issues. However, they are well placed to observe and identify children whose behaviour suggests that they may be experiencing a mental health issue.

The department is offering all schools and colleges a grant to train senior mental health leads who can put in place whole school approaches to mental health and wellbeing. This should include work to promote good mental wellbeing and prevent the onset of mental illness, informed by an understanding of common issues that can affect pupils, such as anxiety. Two thirds of schools and colleges will have been able to access funding for this by April 2023, backed by funding of £10 million in the 2022/23 financial year.

We are also increasing the number of Mental Health Support Teams working in schools and colleges. These teams offer support to children and young people experiencing common mental health issues, including anxiety, and facilitate smoother access to external specialist support. As of Spring 2022, there are 287 Mental Health Support Teams covering 26% of pupils in schools and learners in further education. More teams are on the way, with over 500 planned to be up and running by 2024.

To support children and young people to manage stress around exam season, we have produced guidance on coping with exam pressure which we updated in 2022. This can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coping-with-exam-pressure-a-guide-for-students>.

The mandatory relationships, sex and health education curriculum includes teaching about online safety to ensure children are kept safe both in school and at home. It also covers topics around respect for others and the importance of mental wellbeing.

## ■ Educational Psychology: Bristol

**Darren Jones:** [\[162260\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many educational psychologists providing services to children in Bristol had their training funded by the NHS in each year since 2017.

**Darren Jones:** [\[162261\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional funding to train more educational psychologists in (a) Bristol and (b) the South West of England.

Claire Coutinho:

The department does not hold specific data on the proportion of educational psychologists currently employed in local authorities that had their training funded by the government.

Between 2017 and 2019, the department funded 160 training places for educational psychologists across England per year. Since 2020, the department has increased the number of trainees that it funds to over 200 per year. This includes funding training places at the University of Bristol and the University of Exeter. Immediately following graduation, these trainees will be required to work for a minimum of two years in a local authority in England.

In November 2022, the department announced further funding, worth £21 million, to go towards training over 400 more educational psychologists from 2024. The department will use this opportunity to improve the distribution of course places across England and support local authorities to access a strong supply of qualified educational psychologists.

## ■ Free School Meals

**Rachael Maskell:** [\[153849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of expanding the provision of free (a) breakfasts and (b) lunches in schools.

Nick Gibb:

Since 2010, the number of children receiving a free meal at school has increased by more than two million. This increase in provision is due to the introduction of universal

infant free school meals and generous protections put in place as benefit recipients move across to universal credit.

The Department will continue to keep all free school meal (FSM) eligibility under review to ensure that these meals are supporting those who most need them. Most recently, the Department has:

- Permanently extended eligibility for FSM to children from families with No Recourse to Public Funds.
- Introduced new eligibility criteria in April 2018 in recognition of the transition to Universal Credit. The arrangements in place are forecast to reach more children than would have been the case under the legacy system. There are currently 1.9 million pupils that receive a nutritious FSM through this benefits related criteria.
- Supported around 1.25 million more infants to enjoy a free, healthy, and nutritious meal at lunchtime following the introduction of universal infant free school meals in 2014.
- Extended FSM to disadvantaged further education students in September 2014.
- Increased per pupil funding rate for universal infant free school meals to approximately £18 million per year, in recognition of rising costs. More information is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/boost-in-activities-and-food-pledged-to-support-children--2>.

Over a third of pupils in England now receive FSM, compared with one in six in 2010. The Department has made further funding available to the National School Breakfast Programme to extend the programme for another year, backed by up to £30 million. Research has revealed the benefits breakfast clubs have had on children in disadvantaged areas, including with their improved readiness to be taught, increased concentration, and improved wellbeing and behaviour.

## ■ Teachers: Hearing Impairment

**Abena Oppong-Asare:**

**[163927]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to (a) stop the long-term decline in the number of deaf teachers and (b) increase the ratio of deaf children to teachers in (i) Erith and Thamesmead constituency and (ii) the rest of the UK..

Claire Coutinho:

On 2 March 2023, the department published the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan in response to the Green Paper published in March last year. The Plan outlines the government's mission for the SEND and AP system to fulfil children's potential, including those with sensory impairment.

As stated in the Improvement Plan, the department has developed a new approval process to determine providers of Mandatory Qualifications in Sensory Impairment

(MQSI) from the start of the 2023/24 academic year. This is to support the supply of teachers with an MQSI.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) is also developing an apprenticeship for teachers of sensory impairment. IfATE is working with universities, local authorities, and sector representatives, including the National Deaf Children's Society, the Royal National Institute of Blind People, and the British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People to develop the qualification and expects it to be available from 2025.

The department is exploring further options to maximise take up of MQSIs with a view to improving the supply of teachers for children with sensory impairments.

## ■ Teachers: Pay

**Beth Winter:**

[\[150654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact on industrial relations and service provision of a 3.5 percent pay increase recommendation to the School Teachers Pay Review Body for 2023-24, as set out in her Department's evidence document of 21 February 2023.

Nick Gibb:

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, continues to work with Cabinet colleagues to seek a fair and reasonable resolution to the pay dispute with teachers. She has made a serious offer to the leaders of the National Education Union (NEU) to pause the planned strikes so that we can talk about pay, conditions and reforms. The NEU, however, refused to call off strike action last week, once again causing disruption to families and thousands of children who missed out on their education.

Teacher pay is set by the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) and the Government respects its independence. The Government published its written evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) on 21 February 2023, giving views and input to help them form their recommendations for teachers' pay. This evidence sets out how a 3.5% overall award, which includes raising starting salaries to £30,000, would be manageable within schools' budgets, on average. The Department recognises that this year this judgment is particularly finely balanced, with the possibility that changing conditions, such as an improvement to energy prices, might allow schools to accommodate a higher award.

The Department has asked the STRB to carefully consider this evidence setting out the Department's views on a fair pay award for teachers, the recruitment and retention challenges, and the impact that pay rises will have on schools' overall budgets.

The Government values the independent advice of the STRB and the final pay award decisions for the 2023/24 academic year will be determined in light of the STRB's recommendations.

Pay rises for teachers in the 2023/24 academic year must strike a careful balance between recruiting and retaining the best teachers and recognising their vital importance, alongside considering both affordability for schools and the wider economic context.

The Secretary of State has been clear that her offer to the NEU still stands. It is in the best interests of children, parents, and teachers for the NEU to take up her offer and engage in talks on all areas of their dispute.

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### ■ Alternative Fuel Payments

**Sarah Olney:**

[\[163961\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many and what proportion of eligible households have taken up the Alternative Fuel Payment in each region of the UK.

Amanda Solloway:

Regional data is not yet available. Electricity suppliers, who deliver the automatic enrolment element of the scheme, will provide MPAN-level delivery data to Government shortly. The Alternative Fund for the Alternative Fuel Payment, the element which requires an application, launched recently on 6 March and early data is still being collected. Transparency data will be published in due course.

### ■ Energy Bill Relief Scheme

**Bill Esterson:**

[\[163850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of the potential impact of ending the Energy Bill Relief Scheme on 1 April 2023 on small businesses.

Amanda Solloway:

During the Energy Bill Relief Scheme review, the Government assessed a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence from businesses and stakeholders, including small businesses, on sectors that may be most affected by rising energy prices based on energy and trade intensity.

The outcome of the review informed the criteria of the new Energy Bill Discount Scheme, which will run from April until March 2024, and continue to provide a discount to eligible non-domestic customers, including small businesses. The new scheme strikes a balance between supporting businesses and other non-domestic customers over the next 12 months and limiting taxpayer's exposure to volatile energy markets.

## ■ Energy: Houseboats

**Drew Hendry:**

[\[163781\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to ensure caravan tenants paying their landlord directly for energy, who live on domestic private land, are able to access off-grid energy support payments.

Amanda Solloway:

Caravan tenants on domestic private land who pay their landlord directly for energy, and where the landlord holds a commercial electricity contract, are eligible to apply for support through the Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding (EBSS AF) which launched on 27 February, if they meet full eligibility requirements. A landlord with a domestic electricity contract will already have been receiving the Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS) automatically through their electricity supplier and must ensure this is passed through to the caravan resident in a just and reasonable manner.

## ■ Warm Home Discount Scheme: Disability

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

[\[163696\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of reversing the changes to Warm Home Discount scheme eligibility that exclude disabled people.

Amanda Solloway:

The Warm Home Discount was reformed in England and Wales to maximise the proportion of households in fuel poverty receiving rebates. The Government estimated that 54% of those receiving rebates will be those with a long-term illness or disability, compared to 35% of the general population and 47% of those in fuel poverty having a long-term illness or disability.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### ■ Air Pollution

**Dan Carden:**

[\[161393\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of the (a) capacity and (b) resources of local authorities to carry out their duties regarding clean air.

Rebecca Pow:

Local authorities receive grant in aid to fund their statutory duties. In addition, our Air Quality Grant provides funds for specific air quality projects. Since 2010 the Air Quality Grant has awarded around £53 million across almost 500 projects, and an additional £883 million is dedicated to help local authorities to reduce nitrogen dioxide exceedances to within legal limit.

## ■ Air Pollution: Pollution Control

**Dan Carden:** [\[161390\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what evidential basis her Department used to determine the air quality targets in the Environment Improvement Plan 2023; and for what reasons these targets differ from World Health Organisation guidelines.

**Dan Carden:** [\[161391\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to use (a) scientific research and (b) global air quality standards to inform decisions on air quality targets.

**Dan Carden:** [\[161392\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make a comparative assessment of the impact of air quality targets in the (a) Environment Improvement Plan 2023 and (b) World Health Organisations guidelines on the environment.

Rebecca Pow:

We have published reports and an impact assessment as part of the process of setting air quality targets on our UK Air website: [Air Quality Targets in the Environment Act - Defra, UK](#). The Environmental Improvement Plan establishes our first interim targets and outlines the actions that we will take to meet them.

## ■ Animal Experiments and Animal Welfare

**Abena Oppong-Asare:** [\[163925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans her Department has to (a) establish the UK as a leader in the protections for animal rights and (b) reduce animal testing that does not constitute vital medical research.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government's Action Plan for Animal Welfare was published in May 2021 and can be found [here](#).

The use of animals remains important for improving the understanding of how biological systems work, in the development of safe new medicines, treatments and technologies, and in testing chemicals. Government's current approach is to actively support and fund the development and dissemination of techniques that replace, reduce and refine the use of animals in research (the 3Rs) through UK Research and Innovation, and to ensure that the UK has a robust regulatory system for licensing animal studies and enforcing legal standards. The legal framework in the UK requires that animals are only ever used in science where there are no alternatives, where the number of animals used is the minimum needed to achieve the scientific benefit, and where the potential harm to animals is limited to that needed to achieve the scientific benefit.



The Home Office Regulator will only grant licences to use animals in science where there are no alternatives, where the number of animals used is the minimum needed to achieve the scientific benefit, and where the potential harm to animals is limited to that needed to achieve the scientific benefit.

#### ■ Apples and Pears: Somerset

**David Warburton:** [\[162527\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent steps she has taken with Cabinet colleagues to support apple and pear growers in Somerset.

Mark Spencer:

We have supported, and will continue to support, apple and pear growers through multiple avenues. This includes establishing the seasonal worker visa route, the Independent Review of Labour Shortages in the Food Supply Chain, a review of automation in horticulture, and working across Government on energy support. Support for the development of new methods and technologies is available through the Farming Innovation Programme and help to improve environment sustainability and productivity can be sought through the Farming Investment Fund. Apple and pear growers can also benefit from our Environmental Land Management schemes.

#### ■ Badgers: Disease Control

**Helen Morgan:** [\[164010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether she plans to issue further licenses for badger culling.

Mark Spencer:

We are transitioning away from intensive badger culling towards widescale badger vaccination. 2022 was the last year that new Intensive Cull areas were licensed. Supplementary Badger Culling (SBC) is limited to a maximum of two years and the issuing of SBC licences for previously licensed areas or areas licensed for Badger Disease Control after 2020 is prohibited.

However, culling would remain an option where epidemiological assessment indicates that it is needed.

#### ■ Clothing: UK Trade with EU

**John McNally:** [\[161318\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to support sustainable fashion and textiles businesses who export to the EU with meeting the EU's Extended Producer Responsibility commitments.

Rebecca Pow:

The Commission announced their intention to propose harmonised EU Extended Producer Responsibility rules for textiles as part of the revision of the Waste



Framework Directive and we look forward to seeing these final proposals and will consider how they might fit with our own independent regulatory framework.

The Government's 2018 Resources & Waste Strategy for England identified textiles as a priority sector for action. A key part of this strategy is working with the textiles industry to reduce their environmental impact. We have brought major retailers together to commit to reducing carbon and water footprints through our Textiles 2030 programme and we are currently looking into both near and longer-term policies to reduce textiles waste.

## ■ **Convention on Biological Diversity**

**Alex Sobel:**

**[164000]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to achieve the targets in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Trudy Harrison:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Cardiff North on 27 February 2023, PQ [150587](#).

**Alex Sobel:**

**[164001]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to Decision 15/6 adopted by the conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity on Mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting and review, whether her Department is taking steps to update the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan; and if she will take steps to enable the participation of the groups listed in para 23 of that decision in developing and implementing the strategy.

Trudy Harrison:

At COP15 all Parties committed to reviewing and updating their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to bring them into line with the new Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework by COP16. In England the EIP will form an important contribution to the revised NBSAPs. We will provide further information on the next steps for the UK and our revised NBSAPs as they are developed.

## ■ **Country Food Trust**

**Sir Charles Walker:**

**[R] [162142]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the oral contribution of 2 February 2023 by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Official Report columns 543-544, when he plans to meet the Chief Executive of the Country Food Trust.

Mark Spencer:

I would be happy to meet the Chief Executive of the Country Food Trust. I will ask my office to make the arrangements.

## ■ Dangerous Dogs

**Fleur Anderson:**

[\[162306\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) adding American XL bully dogs and their various cross breeds to the list of prohibited dogs, (b) bringing forward legislation making it illegal to import a dog with cropped ears from another country and (c) increasing sentences for people found guilty of selling illegal dog breeds.

Rebecca Pow:

We currently have no plans to add these breed types to Section 1 of Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 or increase sentences for people found guilty of selling illegal dog breeds.

The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill includes powers to introduce restrictions on pet travel and on the commercial import of pets on welfare grounds, via secondary legislation. In August 2021, the Government launched a consultation on how these powers should be used, including proposals to ban the import of dogs with cropped ears and docked tails. We are currently analysing the replies to this consultation and will publish our response in due course.

## ■ Dogs: Animal Breeding

**Dr Lisa Cameron:**

[\[161315\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the finding by the British Veterinary Association in its survey entitled Voice of the veterinary profession, reported in October 2022, that 93 per cent of vets are concerned about the increase in unregulated canine fertility clinics, whether her Department is taking steps to tackle illegal breeding practices in canine fertility clinics.

Rebecca Pow:

Significant steps have already been taken to improve and update the laws on dog breeding to crack down on unscrupulous breeders who breed dogs purely for financial greed at the expense of animal welfare. Under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 (the 2018 Regulations), anyone in the business of breeding and selling dogs and/or who breeds three or more litters in a twelve-month period needs to hold a valid licence issued by 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.

All dog breeders, including canine fertility clinics who do not meet the threshold for licensing under the 2018 Regulations, are obliged under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (the 2006 Act) to protect their animals from suffering and provide for their welfare needs in line with best practice. Carrying on a licensable activity without a licence, or breaching the 2006 Act, may result in imprisonment, a fine or both.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** [\[163971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will take steps to remove the business test in the dog breeding regulations.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** [\[163972\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make it her policy to include the Kennel Club assured breeder scheme in the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 to allow the scheme to self-regulate its members.

Rebecca Pow:

Under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 (the 2018 Regulations), 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.

We are always seeking to learn from the implementation of legislation and make improvements where necessary. The 2018 Regulations are currently being reviewed, and the Government's report on the review will be published later in 2023. As part of this review my department is re-examining the scope and operability of the licensing framework. We currently have no plans to introduce self-regulation by systems such as the Kennel Club Assured Breeders scheme.

#### ■ **Electronic Cigarettes: Complaints**

**Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[161272\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many complaints the Environment Agency received on disposable vaping devices in each of the last five years.

Rebecca Pow:

The Environment Agency has not received any complaints on disposable vaping devices in the last five years.

#### ■ **Electronic Cigarettes: Waste Disposal**

**Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[161271\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will take steps to convene a roundtable of companies that manufacture disposable vaping devices on steps to reduce littering and potential environmental damage from vaping devices.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government is aware that the use of disposable vaping products has increased substantially in recent years and is concerned about their impact on the environment. Defra and the Department for Health and Social Care are working closely together on developing an evidence base to better understand those impacts. There are no immediate plans to establish a round table discussion with the companies that manufacture these products.

Defra officials and relevant regulators have engaged with the vaping industry, including the Vaping Industry Association. These engagements have been in accordance with the UK's commitment to article 5.3 of the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco.

## ■ Electronic Training Aids

**Nicola Richards:** [\[161445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when she plans to bring forward the ban on electric shock collars.

Rebecca Pow:

We plan to introduce regulations soon which will prohibit the use of remote controlled electronic training collars that deliver an electric shock to cats and dogs.

**Nicola Richards:** [\[161446\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the cost to the public purse of case R (The Electronic Collar Manufacturers Association and Petsafe) v DEFRA was; and when she plans to introduce the ban on electric shock collars.

Rebecca Pow:

We have not made an assessment of the costs to the Department in responding to this case, which was concluded in Defra's favour. We plan to introduce regulations soon which will prohibit the use of remote controlled electronic training collars that deliver an electric shock to cats and dogs.

## ■ Fisheries

**Anthony Mangnall:** [R] [\[163884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions she has had with (a) Natural England and (b) the Duchy of Cornwall on the aquaculture sector in England.

Mark Spencer:

Defra officials are in regular contact with Natural England about a wide range of policy matters including the aquaculture sector in England. There have been no recent discussions with the Duchy of Cornwall on this issue.

## ■ Food Supply

**Mr Barry Sheerman:** [\[163719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to monitor data from retail supply chains to understand the impact on food supply and consumer choice.

**Mr Barry Sheerman:** [\[163720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what indicators her Department uses to determine the threshold for intervention in the food supply chain.

**Mr Barry Sheerman:** [\[163721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps her Department takes to routinely monitor the range of food products available to consumers.

**Mr Barry Sheerman:** [\[163723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether sufficient data is available to monitor domestic food production across all agricultural sectors.

Mark Spencer:

The UK has a highly resilient food supply chain, as demonstrated throughout the Covid-19 response. It is well equipped to deal with situations with the potential to cause disruption. UK consumers have access through international trade to food products that cannot be produced here, or at least not on a year-round basis. This supplements domestic production and also ensures that any disruption from risks such as adverse weather or disease does not affect the UK's overall security of supply.

Defra has well established ways of working with the industry and across Government to monitor risks that may arise. This includes extensive, regular and ongoing engagement in preparedness for, and response to, issues with the potential to cause disruption to food supply chains. We speak regularly with food industry figures, who remain confident in the food supply chain.

We continue to keep the market situation under review through the UK Agriculture Market Monitoring Group, which monitors UK agricultural markets including price, supply, inputs, trade and recent developments. Defra has requested weekly data from supermarkets on supplies of the foods to ensure we have the latest available data. Defra's view is that the most effective response to food supply disruption is industry-led, with appropriate support and enablement from HM Government.

Recognising the importance of food security, in the Agriculture Act 2020, the Government made a commitment to produce an assessment of our food security at least once every three years. The first UK Food Security Report was published in December 2021. This report will serve as an evidence base for future policy work.

In recent weeks some supermarkets applied item limits to a small number of fruit and vegetables due to poor weather affecting the harvest in Spain and North Africa, where a high proportion of produce consumed in UK at this time of year is grown.

Defra is closely monitoring markets and supply chains to explore the factors that have contributed to ongoing supply chain pressures and is considering how government and industry can work together to mitigate them, in the short and longer term.

Defra has requested weekly data from supermarkets on supplies of the foods affected to ensure we have the latest available data.

Supermarkets are confident that supply will be back to normal by the end of this month.

**■ Hunting Trophy Import (Prohibition) Bill****Anthony Mangnall:****[164023]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what response she has provided to the letter dated 22 February 2023 from Dr Dilys Roe, Chair of the International Union for Conservation of Nature Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group, on the Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill; and if she will place a copy of that response in the Library.

Trudy Harrison:

A reply to the letter in question is being prepared and will be issued shortly.

**■ Infrastructure: Environment Protection****Dan Carden:****[161394]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans he has to invest in green infrastructure to enable local authorities to achieve the (a) net zero and (b) air quality goals set by the Government.

Trudy Harrison:

Government recognises the value of multifunctional green infrastructure to deliver benefits including carbon storage and, if carefully designed, to help manage the impacts of air quality. Natural England launched the Green Infrastructure Framework: Principles and Standards for England in January 2023. This will help local planning authorities and planning developers to create or improve green and blue infrastructure, particularly where provision is poorest. As set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, we will support local authorities to improve access to green infrastructure. We will build more parks and incorporate green infrastructure in towns and cities, and encourage more urban street trees.

**■ Lake District National Park: Swimming****Tim Farron:****[163774]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many users would have been required for (a) Monk Coniston, Coniston Water, (b) Coniston Boating Centre, Coniston Water, (c) Coniston North-Western Shore, Coniston Water, (d) Coniston Southern Tip, Coniston Water and (e) an area of the River Kent at Staveley Village to meet her Department's threshold for consideration for Bathing Water Status.

Rebecca Pow:

The Bathing Water Regulations 2013 require the Secretary of State to identify and maintain a list of the surface waters in England where it is expected that a large number of people would bathe. All applications for bathing water designation are assessed against this criterion and others set out in the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 and in the guidance available at [Bathing waters: apply for designation or de-designation - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/bathing-waters-apply-for-designation-or-de-designation) (www.gov.uk). Only sites where the application provides evidence of a large number of people bathing have been taken forward for consideration for bathing water status.

## ■ Per- and Polyfluorinated Alkyl Substances

**Tim Farron:**

[\[161258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of per-fluoroalkyl and poly-fluoroalkyl substances on the natural environment.

Rebecca Pow:

The Environment Agency is continuing its extensive programme of PFAS monitoring across England

In the UK REACH Work Programme for 2021-22, Defra asked the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive to examine the risks posed by PFAS and develop a 'Regulatory Management Options Analysis' (RMOA). The RMOA will be published in spring 2023 and will make recommendations for risk management measures, building on the commitment in the 25 Year Environment Plan to tackle chemicals of concern. Defra and the Devolved Administrations will carefully consider its recommendations to inform future PFAS policy

The EA is working with key partners including Defra, UK HSA, Food Security Agency (FSA), Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

## ■ River Thames: Waste Disposal

**Abena Oppong-Asare:**

[\[163924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to clean the banks of the river Thames from plastics and other waste.

Rebecca Pow:

The riparian owner is usually responsible for clearing watercourses and waterside land and they will be best placed to understand how to tackle local issues such as littering. The statutory Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse sets out the standards of cleaning that litter authorities are expected to be able to achieve on waterside land.

We have been proud to support and endorse national clean-up initiatives such as the Great British Spring Clean, and the Great British Beach Clean, and we will continue to use our influence to encourage as many people and businesses as possible to participate in these types of events again.

## ■ Rivers: Swimming

**Tim Farron:**

[\[163775\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 25 July 2022 to Question 38596 on Rivers: Swimming, whether revised guidance to make it easier to understand the criteria for bathing water status has been published.



Rebecca Pow:

We want to make the application process for bathing water designation clearer and easier for applicants to understand, and to ensure only necessary information is requested. We are considering how this can be achieved most effectively, and will provide an update in due course.

## ■ Swimming

**Tim Farron:** [\[163776\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many applications for bathing water status (a) have been made, (b) are pending, (c) have been granted and (d) have been rejected since January 2022.

Rebecca Pow:

Defra has received 21 applications for bathing water status since January 2022. Since this date, 2 sites have been designated as bathing waters, and we are currently consulting on designating 4 more sites.

## ■ Swimming: Local Government

**Tim Farron:** [\[163777\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether she plans to allocate funding to local authorities who have had applications for bathing water status rejected to encourage swimmers and other beach and water users, so that prospective bathing waters might meet the criteria to be considered for bathing water status.

Rebecca Pow:

Defra has no plans to allocate funding to local authorities whose applications for bathing water status have not progressed to the consultation stage. Defra encourages bathing water applications by writing to the Chief Executive of every local authority in England each year, as well as by sending similar letters to other stakeholders like swimming associations. It is these local authorities and stakeholders who will best know which popular bathing areas may be suitable for designation.

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### ■ Ales Bialiatski and Andrzej Poczobut

**Daniel Kawczynski:** [\[161253\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the imprisonment of (a) Ales Bialiatski and (b) Andrzej Poczobut by the regime in Belarus.

Leo Docherty:

The UK Government is appalled by the brutal and ongoing repression that the Lukashenko regime conducts against its own people. We condemn the politically



motivated sentencing and continued detention of Ales Bialiatski and Andrzej Poczobut and we have issued statements of support in both cases. We have already applied wide-ranging sanctions to Belarus in response to the regime's continued human rights violations and are supporting further accountability measures including the International Accountability Platform for Belarus. We continue to urge the Belarusian regime to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners and to take action to protect the human rights of its citizens.

## ■ EU Countries: Visas

**Mark Pritchard:**

[\[161257\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will hold discussions with the EU on securing visa-free access for UK nationals to the Schengen area for up to 180 days at a time.

Leo Docherty:

The UK's Trade and Cooperation Agreement with the EU confirms that both the UK and EU currently provide for visa-free travel for short-term visits for each other's nationals in accordance with their respective laws.

The UK's offer to EU citizens is the same as our offer to the nationals of all other countries. Similarly, the EU has legislated to grant British citizens the same visa-free travel permissions they offer as standard to all other third countries.

Negotiations with the EU have concluded and the Government's focus is on the smooth, robust and effective implementation of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

## ■ Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill

**Anthony Mangnall:**

[\[164021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has received from High Commissioners from (a) Namibia, (b) South Africa, (c) Tanzania, (d) Acting High Commissioner Zambia, and (e) Ambassador of Zimbabwe on the UK Hunting Trophies (import prohibition) Bill; and if he will place a copy of his responses in the Library.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

Trudy Harrison, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, as HMG lead on the Hunting Trophies bill, has offered to meet with High Commissioners from Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Acting High Commissioner Zambia and the Ambassador of Zimbabwe to discuss the UK Hunting Trophies (import prohibition) Bill. FCDO Africa Directorate is actively engaged and will be present at this meeting.

## ■ Nigeria: Foreign Relations

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[163911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what plans he has for engagement with Nigeria following the 2023 elections in that country.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

Nigeria's recent presidential elections marked a significant moment in the country's democratic progress. I [Minister Mitchell] met all the frontrunner candidates ahead of the election and officials have continued engagement with a range of counterparts throughout. Nigeria is a priority partner for the UK and I look forward to working with the new administration to support a more prosperous and secure Nigeria, which is in all of our interests.

## ■ Ukraine: Humanitarian Aid

**Hilary Benn:** [\[163724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he expects the humanitarian fund set up with the proceeds of the sale of Chelsea FC will start delivering funds to support those affected by the invasion of Ukraine.

Leo Docherty:

The proceeds from the sale of Chelsea FC (£2.35 billion) are frozen in a UK bank account. They cannot be moved or used without a licence from The Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation. An independent foundation is being established to manage and distribute the funds for humanitarian purposes in Ukraine.

Humanitarian experts outside of Government are responsible for this highly complex process. Setting up an organisation of this scale rightly takes time.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ Antibiotics: Shortages

**Dan Jarvis:** [\[163855\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the impact of the local shortages of some antibiotics experienced in winter 2022 on the operation of the National Health Service in affected areas.

Will Quince:

No assessment has been made. The increased demand for the antibiotics prescribed to treat Strep A in Winter 2022 meant that some pharmacists were unable to supply the medicine shown on the prescription. To make things easier for patients, pharmacists, and general practitioners, we issued serious shortage protocols (SSPs) for penicillin medicines, which allowed pharmacists to supply an alternative medicine without the need for the patient to return to their prescriber.

At the request of the Pharmaceutical Service Negotiating Committee, we have granted a number of concessionary prices for antibiotics where pharmacies have not

been able to purchase products at or below the Drug Tariff NHS reimbursement price. This has helped to ensure overall pharmacy contractors are paid enough for the medicines they dispense.

We have provided advice to primary and secondary care on the management of supply issues affecting antibiotics for the treatment of Strep A, including direction to supply alternatives, as set out in the SSPs, if necessary.

We are continuing to work with the UK Health Security Agency and NHS England to coordinate any further communications to healthcare professionals advising on availability of antibiotics, if needed.

## ■ **Blood: Greater Manchester**

**Navendu Mishra:**

[\[163985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to encourage more people to become blood donors across the Greater Manchester region.

Neil O'Brien:

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) are responsible for raising awareness of blood donation in England to make sure blood components are available at the right time, including platelet and plasma components and plasma for medicines. They do this through a range of local and national media, marketing activity, donor and patient case studies, partnerships, and engagement with faith organisations, including work within Greater Manchester.

NHSBT continues to invest and prioritise the diversification of the donor base to better support the changing demographics of National Health Service patients and help reduce health disparities. Since September 2021, the science relating to blood, organ and stem cell donation forms part of the secondary school curriculum in England, aimed at promoting awareness in young people.

## ■ **Care Homes: Private Sector**

**Abena Oppong-Asare:**

[\[163889\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to safeguard private care home residents from being subject to hidden costs for their care.

Helen Whately:

The Government agrees that transparency is important in enabling people to make informed decisions about the support that is right for them and that they should be able to compare providers more easily. We are exploring ways to allow better, more transparent feedback about services and offer other comparative information, including on price. This includes considering a new requirement for providers regulated by the Care Quality Commission to be more transparent about their fees and any additional costs. Any new requirement would be a legislative change and would need the appropriate legislative vehicle to be identified.

## ■ Dental Services: Bristol

**Darren Jones:**

[\[162262\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps his Department has taken to increase the number of dental practices providing NHS services in Bristol.

Neil O'Brien:

The National Health Service contracts with independent dental providers to deliver NHS dental treatment in primary care settings.

In September 2022, we announced 'Our plan for patients' which sets out how we will meet oral health needs and increase access to NHS dental care, including in Bristol, whilst making the NHS dental contract more attractive to dental practices to offer NHS treatments. These changes have been implemented, including through regulations that came into effect on 25 November 2022. The changes include fairer remuneration for practices providing complex treatment within current Band 2 treatments and removing barriers around use of staff skills mix in NHS dentistry.

NHS England is holding further discussions with the British Dental Association and other stakeholders for additional reforms of the NHS Dental System planned to take place this year.

## ■ Drugs and Vaccination

**Esther McVey:**

[\[161284\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the impact of the use by the NHS of (a) vaccines and (b) antiviral drugs on trends in the level of excess deaths.

Will Quince:

A detailed assessment of trends in the causes of excess deaths over winter 2022/23 is not available, it is likely that a combination of factors has contributed, including high flu prevalence, cold weather, the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 and health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes.

While there are many explanatory factors, the Office for National Statistics published new analysis on 21 February 2023 which showed that up to 31 December 2022 the COVID-19 mortality rate has been consistently lower each month since the COVID-19 vaccine booster introduction in September 2021 for people who've had at least a third dose or booster, compared with unvaccinated people and those with just a first or second dose.

The Antivirals and Therapeutics Taskforce is working to provide the highest levels of protection possible for the United Kingdom population including those for whom vaccines may be less effective, such as those who are immunocompromised, by making available treatments to prevent progression to severe disease. There is now a range of treatment options, such as antiviral treatments, dexamethasone and monoclonal antibodies accessible under published UK policies, for hospitalised and

non-hospitalised patients in the UK. These pharmaceutical interventions play an important role, alongside vaccines.

### ■ Elective Recovery Taskforce

**Wes Streeting:** [\[160337\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many meetings of the Elective Care Taskforce have been held since 7 December 2022.

**Wes Streeting:** [\[160338\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many meetings of the Elective Care Taskforce held since 7 December 2022 have been attended by (a) Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and (b) the Prime Minister.

Will Quince:

*[Holding answer 14 March 2023]:* Since 7 December 2022, four Elective Recovery Taskforce meetings have taken place. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and the Prime Minister have attended one meeting.

### ■ Health Services: Racial Discrimination

**Janet Daby:** [\[160415\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to address negative and racial stereotypes in healthcare settings.

Will Quince:

Racism in any form is at odds with our National Health Service values. A key tool for tackling racism across the NHS is the Workforce Race Equality Standard. It measures NHS organisations against nine indicators which look at issues such as discrimination in the workplace, career progression, bullying and harassment and entry into disciplinary processes. Each employer is required to develop an action plan to tackle these challenges and this plan is considered by the Care Quality Commission as part of their well-led domain.

NHS England is also developing an NHS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion workforce plan which will include specific actions and expectations to embed inclusive and fair recruitment and promotion practices in organisations, to address under-representation and talent management across all protected characteristics.

### ■ Health Services: Ventilation

**Geraint Davies:** [\[160112\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will apply the latest 2022 update to The Building Regulations on Ventilation for New Buildings to existing Healthcare Buildings.

Will Quince:

*[Holding answer 13 March 2023]:* There are no plans to apply the 2022 update to the Building Regulations on Ventilation for New Buildings to existing Healthcare Buildings.

Guidance on ventilation and air filtration systems in National Health Service facilities is provided in Health Technical Memorandum 03-01: Specialised ventilation for healthcare premises. As with all guidance provided on the NHS estate, it is reviewed on an ongoing basis and will be updated to reflect changes in approach to relevant areas.

### ■ Health Services: Waiting Lists

**Peter Dowd:**

[\[162205\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Government is on track to deliver the 18 month target within the elective recovery plan.

Will Quince:

Cutting waiting lists is one of the Government's top priorities. All efforts are being made to deliver the next long wait ambition by April 2023, eliminating waits of 18 months or more for treatment. Thanks to incredible National Health Service staff, the total number of patients waiting more than 18 months went down more than two thirds from its peak of 123,969 in September 2021 by February 2023. Over 70 NHS trusts in England now have fewer than 100 patients waiting more than a year and a half, ahead of the target to virtually eliminate these by April.

### ■ Hospices: Children

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

[\[163697\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to increase the NHS England Children's Hospice Grant by at least the rate of inflation each year, beyond 2023-24.

Helen Whately:

In 2019, NHS England committed to increase the Children's Hospice Grant until financial year 2023/24, which is the final year of the agreement. Palliative and end of life care is commissioned locally by integrated care boards (ICBs) in response to the needs of their local population. Following their establishment, ICBs are now best placed to determine future provision of palliative and end of life care from within their system allocation of funding, and the statutory guidance published by NHS England formalises the requirement for them to do this.

### ■ Hospices: Energy

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[163907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 7 March 2023 to Question 151378 on Hospices Energy, what his Department's current assessment is of the impact of the cost of energy on the hospice sector.

Helen Whately:

The Energy Bill Relief Scheme provides a discount on the wholesale element of gas and electricity bills to ensure that all eligible charities, including hospices and care homes, are protected from high energy costs over the winter period. Although no specific assessment has been made in regard to hospices, following a Treasury-led review, the new Energy Bill Discount Scheme which will run from April 2023 until March 2024, will continue to provide a discount to eligible non-domestic customers, including the health and care sector.

## ■ Hospitals: Construction

**Rob Roberts:**

**[160437]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Government's commitment to build 40 new hospitals, where those hospitals will be located.

Will Quince:

*[Holding answer 13 March 2023]:* The locations of the announced schemes in the New Hospital Programme, along with hospital upgrades and other investment in equipment and technology, are available at the following link:

<https://engage.dhsc.gov.uk/nhs-recovery/buildings/>

**Feryal Clark:**

**[160443]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many individual trusts and foundation trusts applied for inclusion in the final cohort of the New Hospital Programme.

Will Quince:

A total of 128 applications were received from 100 trusts across the country for the next eight new hospitals, to conclude the Government's commitment to build 40 new hospitals. The applications have been assessed and we intend to make an announcement in due course.

## ■ Housing: Heating

**Martyn Day:**

**[159082]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Building Research Establishment's analysis entitled Tackling cold homes would save the NHS £540 million per year, published 1 March 2023, whether his Department has made an assessment of the implications for its policies of that analysis.

Will Quince:

The Government recognises that living in a cold home can affect physical and mental health and welcomes the new Building Research Establishment analysis as a helpful contribution to the evidence base.

The Government is committed to addressing poor housing conditions and reducing the impact of cold weather. The Department of Health and Social Care works closely with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the UK Health



Security Agency (UKHSA) on these matters. This work includes a review of guidance on damp and mould in the rented housing sector, and UKHSA's Cold Weather Plan for England.

The Government is also providing a £37 billion package of cost-of-living support to help households and businesses, including a £15 billion targeted package of direct support for the most vulnerable households. A further funding package worth £26 billion will provide support to the most vulnerable households in 2023/24.

## ■ Influenza: Vaccination

**Maria Eagle:** [\[160211\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department prepared an impact assessment before deciding to delay the delivery of the flu vaccine for children and adolescents until the end of January 2023.

Maria Caulfield:

*[Holding answer 15 March 2023]:* The Department did not take a decision to delay the delivery of the flu vaccine for children and adolescents until the end of January 2023. The National Health Service commissioned School Aged Immunisation Service providers to vaccinate as many children as possible before the onset of the flu season, which typically peaks between January and March, with a priority focus on vaccinating the youngest children first from primary school age and then move to secondary school children in years seven, eight and nine.

## ■ Life Sciences: Drugs

**Jim Shannon:** [\[163758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the report *False economy? How NHS medicine procurement threatens the UK's Life Sciences growth engine*, published by WPI in February 2022.

Will Quince:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 March 2023 to Question [158915](#).

## ■ Medical Equipment: Equality

**Janet Daby:** [\[160419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he expects the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to publish details of its plans to pilot a proportionate approach to Equality and Health Inequalities Assessment in its health technology evaluations.

Will Quince:

Contributing to the reduction of health inequalities forms part of the National Institute of Care and Excellence (NICE) strategic ambition. As part of that work NICE has developed a framework to assess the impact of its guidance on equality and health



inequalities which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/nice-and-health-inequalities>

The health technology evaluation programmes, for example, technology appraisals and highly specialised technologies, allow for the consideration of health inequalities, and the existing equalities impact assessment form is being expanded to include specific consideration of health inequalities in addition to protected characteristics, in line with the agreed framework. NICE's approach will be proportionate to the importance of addressing health inequalities, the scope and potential for health technology evaluation recommendations to address health inequalities, and the resource and evidence implications for NICE and its stakeholders.

NICE also published a report to its board (item 9) in December 2022. This report detailed the progress on Equality and Health Inequalities Assessment and outlined next steps, including introducing this approach to appraisals of medicines and medical technologies. This report is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/get-involved/meetings-in-public/public-board-meetings/agenda-papers-december-2022>

#### ■ **Medical Equipment: Imports**

**Dr Philippa Whitford:**

**[160304]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent representations his Department has received from (a) MedTech Directorate and (b) the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency on the (i) import of (A) urine drainage bags and (B) other medical devices, (ii) security of supply of those devices and (iii) cost to the NHS of imposing six per cent import tariffs on those devices.

Will Quince:

*[Holding answer 14 March 2023]:* The Secretary of State has received no representations on these matters from the Medical Technologies Directorate or the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

With regards to import tariffs specifically, the Government implemented temporary tariff suspensions on a set of goods in 2021, including urine drainage bags, to support the healthcare response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government has extended the majority of these suspensions until 31 December 2023.

Departmental officials are aware of plans to remove temporary tariff suspensions and are considering information provided by industry alongside wider United Kingdom government analysis.

#### ■ **Medical Equipment: Shortages**

**Mr Virendra Sharma:**

**[160242]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the British Healthcare Trades Association's survey entitled The impact of the current economic landscape on UK health and social care, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the finding that 41 per cent of medical device

manufacturers are considering reducing the amount of stock they produce and distribute as a result of financial and regulatory pressures.

Will Quince:

*[Holding answer 13 March 2023]:* No specific assessment has been made. The Department, NHS England and NHS Supply Chain work closely with suppliers to ensure supply chain resilience and the continued availability of affordable clinical consumables and devices.

Recent amendments to the EU Medical Device Regulation, in respect of the timescales for transitional arrangements, combined with the United Kingdom Government's commitment to extend the standstill period and to introduce transitional arrangements for compliance with the new UK Medical Devices Regulations, substantially reduce regulatory pressures on suppliers.

### ■ Medical Equipment: Technology

**Dr Lisa Cameron:**

[\[161316\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when his Department plans to publish the implementation plan for the Medical Technology Strategy.

Will Quince:

The Department's inaugural Medical Technology (Medtech) Strategy was published on 3 February 2023. The strategy identified four key priorities to achieve the vision of right product, right price, right place. The Medtech Directorate is currently working in collaboration with industry and delivery partners across the United Kingdom to determine key actions and initiatives for the four priorities of the implementation plan. We aim to publish the plan by June 2023. In parallel, the Directorate is setting up a governing board to oversee strategy implementation.

### ■ NHS Trusts: Databases

**Mr David Davis:**

[\[160181\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish his Department's internal assessments of the performance of the pilots of Palantir Foundry at (a) Chelsea and Westminster, (b) the Royal Free London, (c) Barts Health and (d) Milton Keynes University Hospital NHS Trusts.

Will Quince:

*[Holding answer 13 March 2023]:* The Improving Elective Care Coordination for Patients Programme is one of the two main Foundry pilots. It supports trusts to effectively deliver care through care coordination.

The Chelsea and Westminster pilot has so far achieved these benefits:

- 79% of patients on waiting lists have been assessed for accuracy, leading to 27,200 patients being removed for example if they no longer need their procedure;
- 3,507 patients have been reprioritised to date;

- 3,279 theatre actions have been created to manage patients through the 6-4-2 process, a model to improve operating theatre productivity, safety, and patient experience;
- 4,372 booking requests have been completed;
- waiting lists for 392 consultants have been managed through care coordination;
- there has been a 55% reduction of bookings cancelled on the day due to missing Pre-Operative Assessment from, 2.89% to 1.29%; and
- patients with suspected cancer had their first appointment on average two days sooner.

The Royal Free London, Barts Health and Milton Keynes University Hospital Trusts pilots have not yet gone live.

**Mr David Davis:**

**[160183]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the use of Foundry, a Palantir product, by NHS England as part of some of its pilots of the collection and dissemination of the Faster Data Flow Acute Data Set, how much money from the public purse has been spent on the elective care recovery pilots involving the use of Palantir Foundry to date; and if he will provide a breakdown of (a) spending on individual trusts' implementation costs and (b) payments made to (i) Palantir and (ii) consultants.

Will Quince:

The elective recovery programme aims to help trusts across England better plan, schedule and manage patients through the Elective pathway. The spend-to-date on the pilot is £20.2 million. This includes £11.2 million on implementation within individual trusts. The spend-to-date includes £1.2 million paid to Palantir to accelerate elective surgical waiting list validation, correctly prioritise patients awaiting treatment and improve theatre utilisation. This also includes £5.4 million to external consultants to help with the discovery stage, delivery, strategic direction, management and training within the programme. The remaining £2.4 million has been spent on internal consultant teams within the Commissioning Support Units.

## ■ NHS: Anniversaries

**Wes Streeting:**

**[161352]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what (a) his Departments' and (b) NHS England's budget is for marking the 75th anniversary of the NHS.

Will Quince:

*[Holding answer 14 March 2023]:* There is no specific budget set aside by the Department to mark the 75th anniversary of the National Health Service.

Preparations are underway, and resources will be allocated as needed. NHS England have established and recruited one temporary nine month post. They are also organising a national event for 2,200 NHS staff, volunteers and partners. Other costs will be covered by sponsorship, donations or similar income.

**■ NHS: Finance****Feryal Clark:**[\[160444\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will provide additional resources to the NHS to fund (a) an additional pay award uplift for NHS staff and (b) additional technology and diagnostic capacity.

Will Quince:

The Pay Review Body (PRB) process is the established process for determining pay uplifts for all public sector workers including National Health Service staff. We have committed to give NHS workers a pay rise for 2023/24, asking the PRBs for recommendations on pay for staff in scope. As the PRBs are independent, we cannot pre-empt their recommendations, and we will carefully consider their reports when we receive them later this year.

£2.3 billion was awarded at Spending Review 2021 to transform diagnostic services over the next three years. Most of this will help increase the number of Community Diagnostic Centres to up to 160 by March 2025, expanding and protecting elective planned diagnostic services. The remainder of the funding will increase capacity for imaging, endoscopy as well as lung and mammography screening and improve digital diagnostics.

On technology, the implementation plan for the Medtech Strategy seeks to streamline capacity for innovation adoption via an end-to-end innovation pipeline. Details will be published later this year.

**■ NHS: Staff****Navendu Mishra:**[\[159065\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his timetable is for (a) publication and (b) implementation of the NHS workforce plan.

Will Quince:

To support the workforce as a whole we have commissioned NHS England to develop a Long Term Workforce Plan for the NHS workforce for the next 15 years.

This Plan is currently being developed and we have committed to publishing it this year.

**■ Nurses: Carer's Allowance****Richard Foord:**[\[163913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many Registered Nurses are both currently not working and in receipt of Carer's Allowance.

Will Quince:

The information requested is not held centrally.

## ■ Operose Health: Standards

**Ruth Cadbury:**

[\[162199\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the (a) value for money and (b) effectiveness of contracted health services provided by Operose Health in (i) England and (ii) London.

Neil O'Brien:

Health services in England are commissioned by integrated care boards, through delegated responsibility from NHS England. It is for local commissioners to make assessment of the value for money and effectiveness of different providers of service and commission services accordingly. The detail of these assessments is not held by central Government. No national assessment is made of individual providers.

## ■ Palliative Care

**Lilian Greenwood:**

[\[163870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support ICBs to deliver upon the new legal requirement to commission palliative care services which meet the need of their local populations.

Helen Whately:

NHS England has actively increased its support to local commissioners to improve the accessibility, quality and sustainability of palliative and end of life care for all. This has included the publication of statutory guidance and service specifications, with further resources available on the FutureNHS Collaboration Platform. In addition, NHS England has funded the establishment of a Palliative and End of Life Care Strategic Clinical Network in every NHS England region, which work closely with local commissioners regarding the development of accessible, high quality and sustainable services.

## ■ Palliative Care: Telephone Services

**Lilian Greenwood:**

[\[163869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of 24/7 palliative care telephone advice lines for people with a terminal illness and their carers.

Helen Whately:

No assessment has been made. NHS England has published statutory guidance on palliative and end of life care to support commissioners with implementation of the Health and Care Act 2022. The guidance makes specific reference to commissioners defining how their services will meet population needs 24 hours a day, seven days a week (24/7). Furthermore, between December 2021 and March 2022, NHS England provided circa £4 million to support 24/7 and single point of contact specialist palliative care support and advice services in local areas.

**■ Protective Clothing: Procurement****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[904110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the value for money of personal protective equipment procured under covid-19 emergency regulations.

**Ellie Reeves:** [\[904117\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the value for money of personal protective equipment procured under covid-19 emergency regulations.

Neil O'Brien:

I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bristol South on 6 February 2023 to Question [903412](#).

**■ Public Health: Finance****Andrew Gwynne:** [\[163735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 13 March 2023 to Question 160224, on Public Health: Finance, if he will take steps to ensure that local public health services will not be affected by the timing of the announcement of the 2023-24 Public Health Grant.

Neil O'Brien:

The Public Health Grant allocations to local authorities in England for 2023/24, and indicative allocations for 2024/25, were published on 14 March 2023 and are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-health-grants-to-local-authorities-2023-to-2024>

**■ Surgery: Waiting Lists****Feryal Clark:** [\[160446\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of ongoing industrial action on meeting the elective recovery milestone of eliminating 18-month waits by the end of March.

Will Quince:

While no formal assessment has been made by the Department, we continue to support the National Health Service to take every step to meet the milestone of eliminating 18 month waits by the end of April. We recognise that industrial action means that services are under increased pressure. NHS England has been working with trusts to avoid cancellations and implement mitigation plans to reduce the impact of any industrial action on the waiting list.

The NHS is prioritising urgent, emergency and cancer care and will continue to do its best to maintain appointments and elective procedures wherever possible. Cancelled appointments that need to be rescheduled will be done so as a priority.

### ■ Surgical Hubs

**Mr Virendra Sharma:** [\[162151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when the accreditation of surgical hubs will be rolled out.

Will Quince:

Plans are now underway for a national roll-out of the Accreditation scheme to other surgical hub sites across England. While it is not mandatory for National Health Service trusts to seek accreditation, the long-term goal is for every elective hub to be accredited.

### ■ Swimming Pools: Closures

**Andrew Gwynne:** [\[163733\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of closures of public swimming pools on public health.

Neil O'Brien:

No specific assessment has been made.

### ■ Telemedicine: Hospital Wards

**Wes Streeting:** [\[160336\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the bed occupancy rate of NHS virtual wards was in January 2022.

Will Quince:

*[Holding answer 14 March 2023]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

### ■ Transplant Surgery: North West

**Navendu Mishra:** [\[163984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average waiting time for an organ donation in the North West region was in the latest period for which data is available.

Maria Caulfield:

NHS Blood and Transplant are responsible for organ donation in the United Kingdom. Listing of registrations is by transplant centre rather than by patient address, therefore the following table shows the most recent median waiting times by organ and by centre.



ORGAN		LIVERPOOL	LEEDS	
		MANCHESTER TRANSPLANT CENTRE	TRANSPLANT CENTRE	
Kidney	1 April 2016 to 31 March 2019	526 days	425 days	N/A
Pancreas	1 April 2016 to 31 March 2020	272 days	N/A	N/A
Lung	1 April 2018 and 31 March 2021	272 days	N/A	N/A
Liver	1 April 2018 and 31 March 2021	N/A	N/A	74 days
Heart non urgent transplant list	1 April 2015 to 31 March 2018	856 days	N/A	N/A
		Heart urgent or super urgent transplant list 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2021	Super urgent: 34 days	N/A N/A

Urgent: 18 days

## HOME OFFICE

### ■ Animal Experiments

**Sir Greg Knight:**

[\[163727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress has been made in (a) reducing the number of animals used in experiments and (b) increasing the use of non-animal technologies in scientific experimentation; and if she will make a statement.

Tom Tugendhat:

The Home Office Regulator will only grant licences to use animals in science where there are no alternatives, where the number of animals used is the minimum needed to achieve the scientific benefit, and where the potential harm to animals is limited to that needed to achieve the scientific benefit.

The Government is committed to the development of alternatives to using animals in scientific procedures and continues to actively support and fund the development and dissemination of the 3Rs (replacement, reduction and refinement) for the use of animals in scientific procedures.

This is achieved through UK Research and Innovation's funding of the National Centre for the 3Rs, which works nationally and internationally to drive the uptake of

non-animal technologies, and through research into the development of alternatives by Innovate UK, the Medical Research Council, and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

## ■ Asylum: Hotels

**Bambos Charalambous:**

[\[162258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what provision is being made for the education of and the disruption caused to children from asylum seeking families who are moved to hotel accommodation.

Robert Jenrick:

Irrespective of where “school aged” asylum seeking children are housed, the responsibility for the provision of education remains with the Local Authority in conjunction with the parent(s). When dispersal accommodation is identified a dispersal notification is issued which generally provides 5 days’ notice to the family. For those children of service users who are due to be dispersed there is a responsibility on the parent to ensure that their children’s school is advised they are due to move. Where necessary, accommodation providers will signpost and assist asylum seekers with this.

In terms of the new receiving school, it remains the responsibility of the asylum seeker to ensure that the new school is advised of their child’s previous place of education so effective ‘link up’ can be made by both schools, as is the case for the general population. Accommodation providers reiterate the importance of this when signposting asylum seekers to schools within the local area. Receiving councils will work quickly to ensure that available school places are offered to the children of asylum seekers.

## ■ Hate Crime: LGBT+ People

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[163909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps the Government is taking to tackle hate crime directed towards LGBT+ people.

Miss Sarah Dines:

Hate crime is a scourge on communities across the country. It does not reflect the values of modern Britain.

All forms of hate crime, including those crimes that target individuals based on their sexual orientation or transgender identity, are completely unacceptable. We expect the police to fully investigate these hateful attacks and make sure the cowards who commit them feel the full force of the law.

We also fund the National Online Hate Crime Hub, a central police capability designed to support forces in dealing with online hate crime. It includes a public reporting portal and provides expert advice to forces to support them in investigating these abhorrent offences.

Our absolute priority is to get more police onto our streets, cut crime, protect the public and bring more criminals to justice. We are supporting the police by providing them with the resources they need, including recruiting 20,000 extra police officers.

## ■ Human Trafficking

**Dr Caroline Johnson:** **[164056]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, in relation to modern slavery and the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), (a) how many people were referred to the NRM during 2022; (b) how many cases received a positive reasonable grounds decision during 2022; (c) how many cases received a negative reasonable grounds decision during 2022; (d) how many cases are currently waiting for a reasonable grounds decision; and (e) what recent estimate the Government has made of the (i) number and (ii) proportion of non UK citizens referred to the NRM who may have been referred to that mechanism with the intention of circumventing immigration requirements.

Robert Jenrick:

The Home Office publishes quarterly and annual statistics regarding the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The 2022 statistics can be found here;

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1139171/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2022.ods](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1139171/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2022.ods).

## ■ Missing Persons: Ethnic Groups

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** **[163908]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the findings of The Ethnicity of Missing People report, published 7 March 2023.

Tom Tugendhat:

The Government is determined that missing people and their families receive the best possible protection and support from Government, statutory agencies, and the voluntary sector.

The Government acknowledges that the most recent data published by the National Crime Agency, covering the period 2020-21, indicated that Black people are disproportionately affected by missing incidents: <http://missingpersons.police.uk/en-gb/resources/downloads/missing-persons-statistical-bulletins>. This aligns with the findings from The Ethnicity of Missing People report, which also indicates the over-representation of Black children in care in missing reports.

To improve the police response to missing people from all backgrounds and address racial and ethnic disparities, the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) works with police forces across England and Wales, the charity Missing People and the NCA Missing Persons Unit to consider these issues and what action is needed.

To ensure the response to all missing people is prioritised by all relevant agencies and that existing resources and processes are adapted to improve that response, the

NPCC published the Missing from Care Framework (February 2022), which the previous Safeguarding Minister endorsed. This provides a blueprint for how to respond to those who go missing from health and care settings. Protecting and supporting all vulnerable missing people is also a key element of our action to tackle exploitation and abuse, including sexual abuse and county lines exploitation.

## ■ Refugees: Afghanistan

**Hilary Benn:**

[\[163725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will waive the requirement for an English language test for refugees from Afghanistan who are in Pakistan seeking to join their spouse in the UK and who are unable to register for such tests because they lack immigration status in Pakistan.

Robert Jenrick:

The Government believes those seeking to enter and make a permanent home in the UK should be equipped to integrate successfully in UK society, with an appropriate level of English and an understanding of British life.

There are no plans to waive the requirement for family members from Afghanistan to pass an English language test to enter the UK.

However, under the Immigration Rules an applicant can already be exempted from the English language requirement to enter the UK if a decision maker considers there are exceptional circumstances preventing the applicant from meeting the requirement.

The applicant must demonstrate, as a result of these circumstances, they are unable to learn English before coming to the UK, or it is not practicable or reasonable for them to travel to another country to take an approved English language test.

Each application for an exemption on the basis of exceptional circumstances will be considered on its merits on a case-by-case basis.

## ■ Refugees: Resettlement

**Selaine Saxby:**

[\[163977\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have settled in the UK under the UK Resettlement Scheme in 2023.

Robert Jenrick:

The Home Office publishes data on resettlement in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on refugees resettled in the UK by scheme can be found in table Asy\_D02 of the '[asylum and resettlement detailed datasets](#)'. Information on how to use the datasets can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbooks.

The latest data relate to the year ending December 2022. Data for the year ending March 2023 will be published on 25 May 2023. Information on future Home Office statistical release dates can be found in the '[Research and statistics calendar](#)'.

**■ Speed Limits: Cameras****Dan Carden:**[\[164009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 13 March 2023 to Question 160374 on Home Office: Correspondence, what proportion of emails to the urgent queries inbox were responded to within 24 hours in each of the last 12 months.

Robert Jenrick:

This information is not held by the Home Office in a reportable format.

**■ Visas: Fees and Charges****Grahame Morris:**[\[163834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to extend the visa fee waiver to the immediate family of Commonwealth Armed Forces personnel.

Robert Jenrick:

The Armed Forces settlement fee exemption was launched in April last year in recognition of the immensely valuable contribution that thousands of overseas personnel make to the UK while serving in HM Forces. It applies to discharged personnel who have served in the UK Armed Forces for a minimum period of six years or have been discharged due to an illness or injury attributable to their service.

The fees and policies that apply to family members of Commonwealth and other non-UK members of HM Forces are closely aligned with those that apply to British citizens and settled persons under the standard family rules. As such there are no plans to extend the fee exemption to family members of Armed Forces personnel.

Further support for Armed Forces families in planning for the cost of visa fees is provided by the Joining Forces Credit Union service. Additionally, families of all HM Forces personnel are exempt from paying the Immigration Health Surcharge, reducing the overall cost of their visa applications compared with the families of most other employment groups.

**HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION****■ New Palace Yard: Flags****Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[163728\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the House of Commons Commission, whether the Commission has had discussions on the flying of the St Patrick's Cross on 17 March in New Palace Yard.

Sir Charles Walker:

The Commission has not had discussions on the flying of the St Patrick's Cross on 17 March in New Palace Yard.

**JUSTICE****■ Prisoner Escorts**

**Ellie Reeves:** [\[164006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what penalties for the late arrival of prisoners at court hearings may be imposed under contracts held by his Department with the relevant transportation providers.

**Ellie Reeves:** [\[164007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the definition of late arrival at court is under contracts held by his Department with providers of prisoner transportation; and what the threshold is for the application of a penalty to such a provider for the late arrival of a prisoner at court.

Damian Hinds:

For the purposes of the Prisoner and Escort Custody Services contract, a delay occurs when a court is prevented from commencing its planned business at the intended start time, and it has no other business that can reasonably be rescheduled to take its place, resulting in one or more parties being inconvenienced.

If a prisoner is unavailable at the start time, and this unavailability results in a delay of more than 15 minutes in proceedings, service points are incurred. After the initial 15 minutes, points are incurred for each period of 15 minutes of court time lost. For delays in the Crown Court, the contractor, if at fault, will forfeit £2000 for each hour of delay; in magistrates' courts the penalty is £1200 per hour.

If the problem persists, additional measures, such as the requirement for an improvement plan, will be taken.

**LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES****■ English Language: Education**

**Seema Malhotra:** [\[160293\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether his Department plans to announce another round of funding of the English for Integration Fund.

Lee Rowley:

As announced at Budget, the government is providing £11.5 million to offer intensive English language courses and employment support to up to 10,000 individuals.

**■ Heat Pumps: Permitted Development Rights**

**Dr Alan Whitehead:** [\[163694\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pursuant to the Answer of 23 January 2023 to Question 126504 on Property: Heating, if he will make

an assessment of the potential merits of amending part 14 of schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 to ensure that air source heat pumps may be installed under permitted development rights in all properties.

Rachel Maclean:

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) are currently conducting an independent review of air source heat pumps. Future policy announcements will be made in the usual way.

### ■ Homelessness: Facilities

**Rachael Maskell:** [\[162228\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what measures are in place for enabling external inspection of homeless facilities by bodies outside of the local authority.

Felicity Buchan:

Housing authorities must, as a minimum, ensure that all temporary accommodation used for homeless households is free of Category 1 hazards as identified by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

Officers qualified in HHSRS inspections and assessments carry out property inspections. Commonly these officers are employed by the local authority, but inspections may also be undertaken by third party providers.

### ■ Leasehold: Service Charges

**Apsana Begum:** [\[160435\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what means of redress are available to leaseholders who cannot afford legal representation who wish to contest service charges under the Building Safety Act 2022.

Lee Rowley:

If leaseholders wish to contest service charges, they can seek advice from the Citizen's Advice Bureau and the Leasehold Advisory Service - both organisations offer free advice.

### ■ Refugees: Ukraine

**Dr Philippa Whitford:** [\[163756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he has taken steps with Cabinet colleagues to advertise English language (a) tuition services and (b) other learning initiatives to Ukrainian refugees.

Felicity Buchan:

We recognise that English language skills are vital for Ukrainians to integrate into UK and find employment. The Government announced on 15 March a £11.5 million employment and support programme for Ukrainians which includes provision of



English language training. We are working with other government departments to consider how to promote and harness the current ESOL offer available through the Adult Education Budget and engaging with employers to understand what flexibilities might be available within the overall employment offer. Further information can be accessed [here](#).

## TRANSPORT

### ■ Beckenham Junction Station: Bridges

**Bob Stewart:**

[\[162159\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will take steps to urge Network Rail to reopen the footbridge at Beckenham Junction station without delay.

Huw Merriman:

I have been informed that the footbridge is due to be reopened in April.

### ■ Blue Badge Scheme: USA

**Tim Loughton:**

[\[162111\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether UK blue badges are recognised in the US; and whether he has had discussions with his US counterpart on recognition of blue badges in the US.

Mr Richard Holden:

Not all countries offer recognition of UK issued Blue Badges and the US is one country that currently does not. Holders may either need to obtain a temporary badge for the duration of their stay, or may need to park in standard parking bays, and pay any applicable charges. UK Government advice to disabled travellers is always to check locally in the area of travel before parking.

### ■ Cycle to Work Scheme

**Gavin Newlands:**

[\[162217\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to help increase participation in the cycle to work scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The Department regularly promotes the cycle to work scheme, and in 2019 revised the scheme's guidance so as to make it simpler for employers to offer it to their employees.

The Department previously commissioned Business in the Community and Sustrans to publish best practice guidance for employers and local authorities, highlighting how employers can enable more of their staff to cycle to work using the scheme.

Officials from this Department and HM Revenue & Customs are in regular contact on the scheme, and the Department regularly meets with the Cycle to Work Alliance in order to identify further opportunities to increase take-up of the scheme.

## ■ Cycling and Walking

**Louise Haigh:** [\[162518\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information his Department holds on how many short journeys in towns and cities were (a) walked and (b) cycled in (i) 2020, (ii) 2021 and (iii) 2022.

Jesse Norman:

The Department holds information on trips under 5 miles which are referred to as short journeys. This information is publicly available and derived from the National Travel Survey ([NTSQ09025](#)).

In England, in 2020, the average person completed 243 trips under 5 miles by walking in towns and cities and cycled 15 trips under 5 miles in towns and cities. In England, in 2021, the average person completed 241 trips under 5 miles by walking in towns and cities and cycled 12 trips under 5 miles in towns and cities. Data covering 2022 will be published in summer 2023.

## ■ Cycling and Walking: Finance

**Gavin Newlands:** [\[162219\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will take steps to ensure that per capita spending by Active Travel England is distributed equitably between regions in England.

Jesse Norman:

Active Travel England provides funding to local authorities in England, outside London, based on several criteria. These include local authorities' technical capability to deliver active travel projects, the quality of bids received and population levels.

**Louise Haigh:** [\[163761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the Written Ministerial Statement entitled Transport update, published on 9 March 2023, whether in the context of the change in the level of active travel investment set out in that statement, it remains his Department's policy to deliver all of (a) the four objectives to 2025 and (b) the two further objectives beyond 2025 set out in the second cycling and walking investment strategy.

Jesse Norman:

Yes, this remains the Department's policy.

## ■ Cycling and Walking: Rural Areas

**Harriett Baldwin:** [\[162177\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment he has made of the ways in which the (a) walking and (b) cycling requirements of rural communities differ from those of major urban centres; and if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of producing a revised version of existing guidance on cycle infrastructure design

(LTN 1/20) on the ability of rural authorities including Worcestershire County Council to take steps to promote a modal shift to walking and cycling in their areas.

Jesse Norman:

The Department has established Active Travel England (ATE) to help local authorities to develop appropriate walking, wheeling and cycling schemes, and to use Departmental guidance such as the 'Manual for Streets' and 'LTN 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design'.

ATE plans to develop specific additional guidance for rural settings by the end of the year. Officials of Active Travel England have recently met with officials at Worcestershire County Council to help them to support local priorities.

### ■ **Railway Stations: Access**

**Wendy Chamberlain:**

[\[162295\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the timeline is for (a) announcing the outcome of Access for All applications for 2024-26 and (b) applying for future funding under the Access for All scheme.

Huw Merriman:

The Department is currently assessing over 300 stations nominated for Access for All funding beyond 2024. I hope to be in a position to announce successful projects later this year. Funding on any subsequent funding for Access for All will be announced in due course.

### ■ **Railways: Standards**

**Matthew Pennycook:**

[\[163950\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what data his Department holds on the proportion of scheduled services cancelled since 11 December 2022.

Huw Merriman:

The Office for Rail and Road (ORR) collect and publish data on trains cancelled by operator. Data is available up to the end of Rail Period 11 (4 February 2023) and can be found on the ORR website in Table 3124).

### ■ **Southeastern Trains: Overcrowding**

**Matthew Pennycook:**

[\[163952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment his Department has made of potential overcrowding on the (a) Greenwich, (b) Woolwich, (c) Bexleyheath and (d) Sidcup train services at peak travel times.

Huw Merriman:

There has been significant disruption to Southeastern services over recent months driven by industrial action, multiple infrastructure incidents and mobilising the new timetable, introduced on 11 December 2022.

When there is disruption it can cause crowding both at stations and on trains, especially at peak times. A joint task force has been set up by Network Rail and Southeastern focusing on improving underlying performance and to consider tactical interventions. Several changes have already been made including operating additional services and lengthening some trains where demand is higher than expected. Southeastern continues to assess performance and demand in order to consider further targeted interventions. Department officials and I continue to monitor this work very closely whilst Southeastern will continue to keep stakeholders informed of developments.

### ■ Southeastern Trains: Standards

**Matthew Pennycook:**

[\[163949\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment his Department has made of the punctuality of Southeastern train services since 11 December 2022.

Huw Merriman:

There has been significant disruption to Southeastern services over recent months driven by industrial action, multiple infrastructure incidents and mobilising the new timetable introduced on 11 December.

Southeastern and Network Rail have established a Joint Task Force and have already made several changes, including operating additional services, and lengthening some trains where demand is higher than expected in the peaks. This work continues and will provide further tactical interventions as well as focusing on improving underlying performance. There is evidence that it is having a positive impact with underlying performance on an improving trend in recent weeks.

My officials and I continue to monitor Southeastern performance very closely whilst Southeastern will continue to keep stakeholders informed of developments.

### ■ Southeastern Trains: Timetables

**Matthew Pennycook:**

[\[163951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the new National Rail timetable on the reliability of Southeastern train services.

Huw Merriman:

Department officials monitor Southeastern performance very closely and regular discussions take place covering all aspects of its service. There has been significant disruption to Southeastern services over recent months driven by industrial action, multiple infrastructure incidents and mobilising the new timetable, introduced on 11 December 2022.

Southeastern and Network Rail have established a Joint Task Force and have already made several changes, including operating additional services and lengthening some trains where demand is higher than expected. This work continues and will provide further tactical interventions as well as focusing on improving

underlying performance. There is evidence that it is having a positive impact with underlying performance on an improving trend in recent weeks. My officials and I continue to monitor Southeastern performance very closely whilst Southeastern will continue to keep stakeholders informed of developments.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

[\[163956\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department is taking steps to ensure Southeastern is required to consult passengers on possible timetable changes in May 2023.

Huw Merriman:

Southeastern's contract with the Department requires it to carry out formal consultation when considering material changes to its timetable. Southeastern is not considering material changes to its timetable in May 2023 and therefore is not required to conduct a formal consultation. However, Southeastern is considering making some key targeted changes, including adding additional services in the peaks, to better match fluctuating demand and in doing so will continue to take passenger and stakeholder feedback onboard.

## TREASURY

### ■ Banks

**Damien Moore:**

[\[165495\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that UK banks are trading responsibly in global markets.

Andrew Griffith:

All UK regulated banks are subject to robust prudential and conduct regulation and supervision, overseen by the UK's independent regulators, who operate under a legislative framework set by the Government and Parliament.

Authorised UK banks are subject to prudential requirements, overseen by the Prudential Regulatory Authority, which includes minimum requirements for capital and liquidity, in line with international standards.

In addition, any business carrying out a regulated activity on a UK regulated market must be authorised by the FCA, unless they are otherwise exempt. Once authorised, the FCA requires such firms to meet the standards for authorisation on a continuous basis, and supervises them including to ensure that their conduct on markets does not compromise market integrity.

The IMF has said that the UK 'operates a sound and transparent regulatory and supervisory framework for banks' and that the UK's 'effective prudential and supervisory structure is helping support the safety and soundness of the United Kingdom's banking... system'.

## ■ Business Rates

**Bill Esterson:** [\[163849\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he plans to reform business rates at the Spring Budget.

Victoria Atkins:

At Autumn Statement 2022, the Government announced a package of changes and tax cuts worth £13.6 billion over the next five years. The package contains new measures to reduce the burden of business rates, including a freeze in the multiplier, extended relief for high street businesses, and targeted support for small businesses.

As part of the 2020 Business Rates Review, the Government committed to more frequent revaluations from 2023, which represents significant reform of the system and will ensure that liabilities are more responsive to changing market conditions. The Government is also permanently scrapping downwards caps from Transitional Relief, so that businesses will see the full benefit of falling bills immediately, meeting a key business ask. Alongside the Government's commitment to more frequent revaluations this represents significant reform and will make the system fairer and more responsive for all ratepayers.

## ■ Cost of Living Payments: Disability

**Cat Smith:** [\[161322\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on what evidential basis his Department set the disability cost of living payment at £150.

John Glen:

At Autumn Statement 2022, the Government announced it will provide a further Disability Cost of Living Payment of £150 in 2023/24. This was on top of the previous one-off Disability Cost of Living Payment, worth £150, announced in May 2022.

Cost of Living Payments, available to those on means-tested benefits, are also designed to support those on low incomes with the rising cost of living, with a £650 payment announced in May and a £900 payment announced at Autumn Statement 2022.

Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions will also benefit from other forms of Cost of Living support. This includes the Energy Price Guarantee, Energy Bills Support Scheme and the Council Tax rebate.

## ■ Inheritance Tax

**Andrew Selous:** [\[162140\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many estates HMRC has yet to conclude the inheritance tax assessments on within two years after the death.

Victoria Atkins:

There are no estates for which IHT400 Accounts (self-assessment of inheritance tax by executors) have been filed for which inheritance tax assessments have not been concluded within two years of death.

Compliance enquiries may be opened within 12 weeks from processing of the IHT Account.

**Andrew Selous:**

[\[162141\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the impact on the (a) economy and (b) public purse of delays in concluding inheritance tax assessments.

Victoria Atkins:

No assessment has been made of the impact on the economy and public purse on the time taken to conclude inheritance tax assessments.

## ■ **Medical Equipment: Energy**

**Luke Pollard:**

[\[163968\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what reasons his Department have not introduced an energy tariff discount for people using energy to run medical and disability equipment.

James Cartlidge:

The Government has provided an unprecedented package to support households with their rising energy bills. The additional measures announced at Spring Budget bring total government support for energy bills to £1,500 for the typical household since October 2022.

As announced at Autumn Statement, the Government will develop a new approach to consumer protection in domestic energy markets, which will apply from April 2024 onwards. The Government will work with consumer groups and industry to consider the best approach, including options such as social tariffs, as part of wider retail market reforms. The objectives of this new approach will be to deliver a fair deal for domestic consumers, ensure the energy market is resilient and investable over the long-term, and support an efficient and flexible energy system.

The Government also meets with disability focus groups and charities to understand the impacts the changes in the cost of living are having on disadvantaged people, which includes those who use life-saving treatment at home. The Government recognises that the rising cost of living has presented additional financial challenges to many people, and especially to the most vulnerable members of society, such as disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.

At Autumn Statement 2022, the Government announced that it will provide a further Disability Cost of Living payment of £150 in 2023/24 to people in receipt of extra-costs disability benefits such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Disability Living Allowance (DLA), in addition to the £150 payment from the Cost of Living



package in May last year. These payments can be received in addition to the other Cost of Living Payments for households on means-tested benefits, namely the £650 payment announced in May and the additional £900 payment announced at Autumn Statement.

## ■ Social Enterprises: Tax Allowances

**Helen Morgan:** [\[164008\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he plans to extend social investment tax relief beyond 31 March 2023.

Victoria Atkins:

As the Chancellor announced in his Spring Budget, the Social Investment Tax Relief (SITR) will be allowed to expire in April 2023. New investments made on or after 6 April 2023 will no longer qualify for income and capital gains tax relief.

## ■ Tax Avoidance

**Mr Virendra Sharma:** [\[162153\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many people seeking refunds due to the changes made as a result of the Morse Review have been refunded by HMRC.

Victoria Atkins:

I refer the Honourable Member to the answer that was given on 12 January 2023 to the Question UIN 114508.

**Mr Virendra Sharma:** [\[162154\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an estimate of the number of people who will become bankrupt as a result of the Loan Charge in the next twelve months.

Victoria Atkins:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer that I gave on 6 February to the Hon Members for Richmond Park, UIN [136718](#) and Strangford, UIN [137775](#).

**Stephen Morgan:** [\[162282\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of requesting a new independent review of the Loan Charge.

Victoria Atkins:

The 2019 Independent Loan Charge Review drew upon all the available evidence and expert advice to consider the appropriateness of the Loan Charge, and its impact on individuals, reflecting the main concerns that had been raised by MPs and campaigners. The Government accepted all but one of the twenty recommendations in the review.

There are no plans for a further independent review.

**Stephen Morgan:** [\[162283\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to prevent self-harm or suicide of people who are facing HMRC action, in relation to disguised remuneration schemes.

Victoria Atkins:

Any loss of life is a tragedy, and HMRC takes issues relating to loss of life or serious injury extremely seriously.

HMRC is committed to , wherever possible, identifying taxpayers who need extra help and giving them the support they need.

Taxpayers who have used disguised remuneration schemes can face large tax bills which may have a significant impact. HMRC can agree an affordable and sustainable instalment plan based on taxpayers' specific circumstances and for as long as they need. HMRC can also refer taxpayers for free debt advice that is independent from HMRC.

Taxpayers are also supported by HMRC's trained advisers. Where appropriate, they signpost taxpayers to voluntary and community organisations. To further improve the emotional support offered to taxpayers, HMRC's Extra Support Teams and Samaritans are working together to deliver an 18-month project. As part of the project, Samaritans will help strengthen HMRC's Extra Support Teams by providing additional guidance to identify taxpayers who might be in vulnerable circumstances, and signpost them to support. Where needed, HMRC will signpost customers to a dedicated Samaritans helpline for specialist emotional support.

**Stephen Morgan:** [\[162284\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the rate of bankruptcy as a result of the Loan Charge.

Victoria Atkins:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer that I gave on 6 February to the Hon Members for Richmond Park, UIN [136718](#) and Strangford, UIN [137775](#).

**Stephen Morgan:** [\[162285\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether HMRC continue to pursue people for pre 2010 tax years following the Morse Review.

**Stephen Morgan:** [\[162287\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the cost for staff to administer the Loan Charge including (a) legal advice and (b) consultants.

Victoria Atkins:

I refer the Hon Member to the answers given on 23 February 2023 for [PQ UIN 147156](#) and on 21 October 2022 for [PQ UIN 61846](#).

**Stephen Morgan:** [\[162289\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many people seeking refunds due to the changes made by the Morse Review have been refunded by HMRC.

Victoria Atkins:

I refer the Honourable Member to the answer that was given on 12 January 2023 to the Question UIN 114508.

**Theresa Villiers:** [\[163732\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the conclusions of the Morse Review, for what reason HMRC are pursuing people for pre-2010 tax years, in relation to Loan Charge legislation.

Victoria Atkins:

In the 2019 Independent Loan Charge Review, Lord Morse recommended that the Loan Charge should only apply to loans made on or after 9 December 2010.

However, he was also clear that, for years before this date, where there is an open enquiry or assessment under appeal, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) should continue with enquiries and settling cases under their normal powers.

HMRC continues to work with and support taxpayers to resolve all outstanding enquiries and assessments relating to their use of disguised remuneration (DR) loans, in accordance with their published DR settlement terms and HMRC Litigation and Settlement Strategy.

**■ Tax Avoidance: Suicide****Theresa Villiers:** [\[163731\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to prevent suicides by people facing HMRC action in relation to Loan Charge legislation and disguised remuneration schemes.

Victoria Atkins:

Any loss of life is a tragedy, and HMRC takes issues relating to loss of life or serious injury extremely seriously.

HMRC is committed to, wherever possible, identifying taxpayers who need extra help and giving them the support they need.

Taxpayers are supported by HMRC's trained advisers. Where appropriate, they signpost taxpayers to voluntary and community organisations. To further improve the emotional support offered to taxpayers, HMRC's Extra Support Teams and Samaritans are working together to deliver an 18-month project. As part of the project, Samaritans will help strengthen HMRC's Extra Support Teams by providing additional guidance to identify taxpayers who might be in vulnerable circumstances, and signpost them to support. Where needed, HMRC will signpost customers to a dedicated Samaritans helpline for specialist emotional support.

## ■ Travel: Insurance

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:**

**[162259]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to prevent travel insurance companies from discriminating against elderly travellers based on their medical history, including (a) requiring complete details of a potentially extensive medical history and (b) charging higher premiums for medical conditions that are no longer relevant.

Andrew Griffith:

The Government continues to work closely with insurers and the independent regulator to ensure that everyone has access to suitable and affordable insurance.

Insurers must treat customers fairly and firms are required to do so under the Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA) rules, although a well-functioning insurance market requires clear information from customers too. Since April 2021, the FCA requires firms offering retail travel insurance to signpost consumers to a directory of specialist providers if they are declined cover, offered cover with an exclusion, or charged a significantly higher premium for the medical coverage element.

## ■ Urine Drainage Bags: Import Duties

**Dr Philippa Whitford:**

**[163757]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will instruct HMRC officials to work with their counterparts in the World Customs Organization's Harmonized System Committee on the potential merits of reclassifying urine drainage bags as medical devices for import tariff purposes.

Victoria Atkins:

Covid-19 critical goods, which include Urine drainage bags, are currently subject to a 0 per cent rate of Customs duty until the end of 2023.

HMRC has reviewed the classification of urine drainage bags and consider the classification 3926 to be correct. This is in line with classification decisions previously issued by the World Customs Organization, which member countries are expected to follow.

Businesses who wish to make representations to reduce the UK import duty rate for these goods, or to make an application for a temporary suspension of import duties, may contact the Department for Business and Trade at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/duty-suspensions-and-tariff-quotas>.

**WOMEN AND EQUALITIES****■ Conversion Therapy**

**Alicia Kearns:** [\[160436\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether she plans to complete pre-legislative scrutiny on the bill to ban conversion therapy in this parliamentary term.

Stuart Andrew:

The Government will publish a draft Bill setting out our approach to banning conversion practices (also known as 'conversion therapy') for pre-legislative scrutiny by joint committee in this parliamentary session. It is the Government's intention to complete pre-legislative scrutiny in the current parliamentary session.

**Anneliese Dodds:** [\[161400\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, which Department will sponsor the forthcoming legislation to ban conversion therapies.

**Anneliese Dodds:** [\[161401\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether the Government plans to bring forward legislative proposals to ban conversion therapies before the end of this Session.

Stuart Andrew:

The Government will publish a draft Bill setting out our approach to banning conversion practices (also known as 'conversion therapy') for pre-legislative scrutiny by joint committee. This legislation will be sponsored by the Equality Hub, overseen by the Minister for Women and Equalities. It is the Government's intention to complete pre-legislative scrutiny in the current parliamentary session.

**■ Equality**

**Anneliese Dodds:** [\[161402\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, with reference to the report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities entitled Inclusive Britain, how many of that reports recommendations (a) have been actioned, (b) will be actioned by the end of 2023.

Maria Caulfield:

Inclusive Britain, the government's response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, sets out a ground-breaking action plan to tackle persistent, negative disparities, promote unity and build a fairer Britain for all.

The Minister for Women and Equalities will report back to Parliament shortly on progress in Inclusive Britain with each of the actions, including how many have been completed and how many we intend to complete over the next 12 months.

## ■ Women and Equalities: Written Questions

**Anneliese Dodds:** [\[164049\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, when she will respond to Question 147163 tabled on 17 February 2023 by the hon. Member for Oxford East.

**Anneliese Dodds:** [\[164050\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, when she will respond to Question 147165 tabled on 17 February 2023 by the hon. Member for Oxford East.

**Anneliese Dodds:** [\[164051\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, when she will respond to Question 147166 tabled on 17 February 2023 by the hon. Member for Oxford East.

**Anneliese Dodds:** [\[164052\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, when she will respond to Question 147167 tabled on 17 February 2023 by the hon. Member for Oxford East.

Maria Caulfield:

A [response](#) was issued on Tuesday 14 March.

**Anneliese Dodds:** [\[164054\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, when she will respond to Question 147306 tabled on 17 February 2023 by the hon. Member for Oxford East.

Stuart Andrew:

A [response](#) was issued on Tuesday 14 March.

## ■ Women: Business

**Julian Knight:** [\[163799\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps her Department is taking to increase the number of female-founded high-growth businesses.

Maria Caulfield:

We are committed to harnessing the skills, innovation and talents of female entrepreneurs.

That's why this Government launched a Women-Led High-Growth Enterprise Taskforce in July 2022, led by Anne Boden of Starling Bank and with a membership which includes some of this country's most successful female entrepreneurs.

The Taskforce is working to support women entrepreneurs, tackle investment barriers, and challenge outdated gender stereotypes. It also has a strong regional focus and members are looking at ways to diminish regional disparities using robust, regional data and drawing in local support.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### ■ Access to Work Programme

**Alison McGovern:**

[\[165354\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 22 February 2023 to Question 146951 on Access to Work Programme, how many advisors there are in each region.

Tom Pursglove:

There are 303 Case Managers (Advisors) in Access to Work (ATW), out of the 451 currently employed ATW colleagues.

The programme is delivered nationally, so covers all regions and colleagues are based across 5 sites:

- Barnsley;
- Bradford;
- Halifax;
- Harrow; and
- Salford.

### ■ Air Pollution: Housing

**Dan Carden:**

[\[161395\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will bring forward proposals to create duties to measure and report concentrations of indoor air pollutants in public buildings.

Mims Davies:

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is the regulator for workplace health and safety. HSE expects businesses to consider any risks arising from the quality of the air in their premises and to ensure they have mitigations in place where, for example, work generating fumes or dust that is harmful to workers. As such, they have no plans to create duties to measure and report concentrations of indoor air pollutants in workplaces.

### ■ Cost of Living Payments

**Martyn Day:**

[\[162246\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make it his policy to extend the eligibility for the 2023-24 Cost of Living Payments to people in receipt of contributions-based Employer Support Allowance.

Mims Davies:

The government has targeted the means-tested Cost of Living Payments to those on means tested benefits as those with the lowest incomes are most vulnerable to increases in the cost of living.



Contributory and new style benefits such as contributory Employment and Support Allowance are not means-tested benefits, and people claiming them may have other financial resources available to them.

Low-income claimants of these benefits may also be able to claim a means-tested benefit. For example, they may be eligible for Universal Credit and, if their claim is successful, they may qualify for future cost of living support. They may also be eligible for a disability benefit and the Disability Cost of Living Payment.

Contributory and new style benefits will also be up-rated by 10.1% from April. And for those who need further support, we are extending the Household Support Fund in England throughout 2023/24 to help households with the cost of essentials including those in need who may not be eligible for the other support we have recently made available. The Devolved Administrations will receive Barnett funding to spend at their discretion with their local knowledge.

**Sarah Olney:** [\[163962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of eligible people received the Cost of Living Payment 2022 in each region.

Mims Davies:

As part of the package of support announced in May 2022, households in receipt of means tested benefits were eligible to receive a one-off Cost of Living Payment of up to £650, made in two payments, and people who receive non-means tested disability benefits were eligible for a one-off Disability Cost of Living Payment of £150.

The Department for Work and Pensions has published management information on the total number of Cost of Living Payments made. The information can be found here [Cost of Living Payment management information - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/cost-of-living-payment-management-information)

In line with the Code of Practice for Statistics, the number of Cost of Living Payments made in specific regions is the subject of an upcoming statistical release, and cannot be released before that publication is ready, subject to usual quality assurance.

## ■ Pension Credit: Scotland

**Amy Callaghan:** [\[161423\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he provide data on the take up of Pension Credit by constituency in Scotland as of 8 March 2023.

Laura Trott:

Take-up statistics for Pension Credit are available at Great Britain level only. The most recent take-up statistics are publicly available in the “Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up” publication which can be found on the statistics section of gov.uk. The latest publication relates to the financial year 2019 to 2020.

[Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up: financial year 2019 to 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/income-related-benefits-estimates-of-take-up-financial-year-2019-to-2020)

The most recent caseload statistics for Pension Credit refer to August 2022, and are publicly available via [DWP Stat-xplore](#). The table below shows the Pension Credit caseload statistics by constituency in Scotland in August 2022.

<b>ABERDEEN NORTH</b>	1766
<b>Aberdeen South</b>	1143
<b>Airdrie and Shotts</b>	2662
<b>Angus</b>	2043
<b>Argyll and Bute</b>	2290
<b>Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock</b>	2690
<b>Banff and Buchan</b>	1822
<b>Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk</b>	2123
<b>Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross</b>	1744
<b>Central Ayrshire</b>	2714
<b>Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill</b>	2886
<b>Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East</b>	2102
<b>Dumfries and Galloway</b>	2877
<b>Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale</b>	2201
<b>Dundee East</b>	1962
<b>Dundee West</b>	2414
<b>Dunfermline and West Fife</b>	1529
<b>East Dunbartonshire</b>	1123
<b>East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow</b>	2194
<b>East Lothian</b>	1936
<b>East Renfrewshire</b>	1479
<b>Edinburgh East</b>	2041
<b>Edinburgh North and Leith</b>	1618
<b>Edinburgh South</b>	1262
<b>Edinburgh West</b>	1251

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<b>ABERDEEN NORTH</b>	1766
<b>Edinburgh South West</b>	1457
<b>Falkirk</b>	2491
<b>Glasgow Central</b>	3089
<b>Glasgow East</b>	3939
<b>Glasgow North</b>	1878
<b>Glasgow North East</b>	3736
<b>Glasgow North West</b>	2829
<b>Glasgow South West</b>	3337
<b>Glasgow South</b>	2632
<b>Glenrothes</b>	2218
<b>Gordon</b>	1114
<b>Inverclyde</b>	2603
<b>Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey</b>	1941
<b>Kilmarnock and Loudoun</b>	2670
<b>Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath</b>	2300
<b>Lanark and Hamilton East</b>	2825
<b>Livingston</b>	2331
<b>Linlithgow and East Falkirk</b>	2412
<b>Midlothian</b>	1693
<b>Moray</b>	1895
<b>Motherwell and Wishaw</b>	2928
<b>Na h-Eileanan an Iar</b>	1043
<b>North Ayrshire and Arran</b>	2943
<b>North East Fife</b>	1338
<b>Ochil and South Perthshire</b>	1954
<b>Orkney and Shetland</b>	810

<b>ABERDEEN NORTH</b>	1766
<b>Paisley and Renfrewshire North</b>	2006
<b>Paisley and Renfrewshire South</b>	2357
<b>Perth and North Perthshire</b>	2058
<b>Ross, Skye and Lochaber</b>	1628
<b>Rutherglen and Hamilton West</b>	3205
<b>Stirling</b>	1685
<b>West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine</b>	996
<b>West Dunbartonshire</b>	2858
<b>Total</b>	<b>127080</b>

#### ■ Social Security Benefits: Disqualification

**Chris Stephens:**

[\[163835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many benefit claims were subject to sanctions by constituency in the last three months for which data is available; and how much was the (a) total and (b) average sum of benefit income lost by claimants due to sanctions by constituency in that period.

Guy Opperman:

The latest monthly statistics, taken from Stat-Xplore, on the number of Universal Credit full service claimants with a payment that has been reduced due to a sanction, by Westminster parliamentary constituency, for September to November 2022, are provided in the attached spreadsheet.

The additional information requested for (a) and (b) is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

Sanctions are only ever applied when a claimant fails to meet their agreed conditionality requirements without good reason.

**Attachments:**

1. Attachment [Attachment.xlsx]

#### ■ State Retirement Pensions: Age

**Amy Callaghan:**

[\[161422\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what his planned timetable is for increasing the the state pension age to 68.

Laura Trott:

State Pension age is currently 66 and two further increases are currently in legislation: a gradual rise to 67 for those born on or after April 1960; and a gradual rise to 68 between 2044 and 2046 for those born on or after April 1977.

The Pensions Act 2014 requires Government to regularly review State Pension age. The first review in 2017 accepted a recommendation by John Cridland CBE to bring forward the increase in State Pension Age to 68 to between 2037 and 2039, subject to a further review before legislating. Work is underway on the second Government Review of State Pension age which, must be published by May 2023. This Review will consider a wide range of evidence, including findings from two independent reports, to assess whether the rules about State Pension age remain appropriate. We cannot pre-empt the outcome of the Review.

### ■ State Retirement Pensions: British Nationals Abroad

**Wendy Chamberlain:**

[\[162298\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many pensioners in (a) Canada and (b) elsewhere have been impacted by his Department's administrative errors relating to the processing of Proof of Life letters, which have led to the suspension of UK state pension payments.

Laura Trott:

The issues which occurred in 2022, relating to the temporary suspension of the State Pension of some customers living in Canada, was not caused by DWP and was due to reasons outside the Department's control.

In 2022, there were 120,479 Life Certificates issued to State Pension customers living in Canada. DWP's international postal provider confirmed there were postal issues in Canada due to air capacity. This resulted in the temporary suspension of 12,858 customers State Pension after 16 weeks of the issue of the Life Certificate, which was due to a completed Life Certificate not being returned within the prescribed time limit. At this point, corrective action was taken by DWP to reinstate the State Pension of all customers effected and allowed a further 48 weeks for customers to return their completed Life Certificate.

**Wendy Chamberlain:**

[\[162299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps he (a) has taken and (b) plans to take to rectify the administrative error with Proof of Life forms which led to some overseas pensioners having their State Pensions suspended.

Laura Trott:

The issues which occurred in 2022, relating to the temporary suspension of the State Pension of some customers living in Canada, was not caused by DWP and was due to reasons outside the Department's control.

DWP is closely monitoring international postage issues with our service provider and we use this information to determine any necessary changes to the Life Certificates

process. DWP is also monitoring the return of completed Life Certificates and, if we identify any particular postal issues within countries, we are allowing customers an additional 16 weeks to return their documents before any potential temporary payment suspensions may be required.

The Life Certificate (CFN698) is a form which DWP routinely issues to customers in receipt of State Pension who permanently reside in certain countries outside the UK. The form is used to verify that the customer is still eligible to receive their State Pension and it is an integral part of DWP's strategy to ensure that all overseas State Pensions are being paid correctly.

Life Certificates are an integral part of protecting the public purse and are issued in accordance with The Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987.

### ■ State Retirement Pensions: Women

**Amy Callaghan:** [\[161425\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether he has made an assessment of the socioeconomic impact of changes to the state pension for 1950s-born women in each constituency in Scotland.

Laura Trott:

Successive governments have given due consideration to the impact of the proposals made in the Pensions Acts of 1995, 2007, 2011 and 2014, that introduced changes to the State Pension age. These assessments have been published.

No assessments have been made specifically on individual constituencies in Scotland.

### ■ Support for Mortgage Interest

**Sarah Olney:** [\[163958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff his Department has employed to work on the Support for Mortgage Interest Scheme in each of the last 5 years.

Mims Davies:

The information requested is not available and to provide would incur disproportionate cost.

### ■ Unemployment: Young People

**Colleen Fletcher:** [\[161314\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment his Department has made of trends in the level of long-term youth unemployment in (a) Coventry North East constituency and (b) Coventry; and what (i) financial and (ii) other steps he is taking to tackle long-term youth unemployment in those areas.

Mims Davies:

The sample size of the Annual Population Survey is too small to provide robust estimates of the trends in long-term youth unemployed in the areas identified.

The Government is committed to delivering targeted support for all young people, no matter what their start in life or the challenges they face, to give them the best chance of getting into work.

The DWP Youth Offer provides individually tailored work coach support to young people aged 16 to 24 who are in the Universal Credit Intensive Work Search group

As well as the DWP Youth Offer, this support offer includes skills training, work experience, Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs), mentoring circles and support funded through other organisations.

Skilled Jobcentre Youth Work Coaches are working harder than ever to help employers fill vacancies. It remains our top priority to match the right young jobseeker with the right job. Key to this is our three Coventry Jobcentres, one based at the Coventry Building Society (CBS) Arena, in North Coventry, continuing to host daily successful recruitment events for both local and national employers.

Sector-based Work Academy Programmes are also proving a vital tool in offering unemployed young people a route into employment. Through Pre-Employment Training, Work Experience and a Guaranteed Job Interview, these academies offer a successful and unique approach to recruitment. Employers currently working with us on this initiative are Coventry Rugby Club, Marriott Hotels, DHL, NHS, Premier Inn, Coop, Coventry City Council, Atalian Servest.

In Coventry Youth Hub, DWP are on site with local partner organisations to offer a range of services to young people in Coventry. We have two permanent Work Coaches co-located whose primary focus is to address barriers to work, motivate and move claimants closer to the labour market.

In the Progression to work program there is a Flexible Support Fund funded grant for St Giles to support 16 – 30 year olds who need support removing barriers to move them closer to work, to include NEETs (not in education employment or training), ex-offenders, those at risk of exploitation or gang violence.

## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

#### ■ Update on the UK-Iraq Relationship on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Conflict in Iraq

**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (Leo Docherty):** [\[HCWS640\]](#)

My Noble Friend, the Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and United Nations (Lord Ahmad) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

The 20th March 2023 marks the twentieth anniversary of the beginning of the conflict in Iraq. This anniversary is an opportunity to remember the service and sacrifice of all those who served in the conflict. At this time, we pay particular regard to those service personnel, British, allied and Iraqi, as well as civilians who died or were wounded in the conflict in Iraq. It is also a time to reflect upon the conflict and Parliament's role in it, and to restate the UK's enduring commitment to support the development of a stable, prosperous and democratic future for all Iraqi people.

All of us will undoubtedly have in mind today the 179 British and allied personnel who lost their lives in the conflict. I pay tribute to them and to their bravery, and my sympathy goes out to their families for their loss. Their sacrifice and determination to make the world safer for all of us will never be forgotten. Next week Ministers from HM Government will attend commemorative events across the UK, remembering all those who served in the conflict and particularly those who gave the most. Today we have in our thoughts those service personnel that died, and those who were wounded or injured as a result of the conflict. We also remember and give thanks to all personnel of the UK armed forces who served in Iraq, and their families, who provided vital support at home whilst their loved ones were deployed.

We also have in mind the many Iraqi citizens who were killed during the conflict or who have died since in military operations, bombings, acts of terrorism or through sickness and disease. There is no doubt that the people of Iraq have faced enormous and grave challenges over the last twenty years.

As part of our remembrance, we must ensure we continue to implement the hard won and costly lessons. The UK Government has learned much from the Chilcot Inquiry and continues to draw upon it as we improve national security decision-making and implementation. The purpose of the Inquiry was to examine the United Kingdom's involvement in the conflict in Iraq, including the way decisions were made and actions taken, to establish as accurately and reliably as possible what happened, and to identify lessons to be learned. The FCDO continues to institutionalise the Chilcot lessons learned across policy, operations and strategy so that staff are equipped to support decision-making and implementation in complex contexts.



We should also look forward. Today, the UK and Iraq share a close and enduring partnership, working together to address shared global challenges. Through the Global Coalition Against Daesh, NATO Mission Iraq and our long-term bilateral initiatives, we remain committed to Iraq in its fight to defeat Daesh and to enjoy peace and stability. We are working with the Government of Iraq to support economic reform, energy transition, human rights and freedom of religion and belief, and to mitigate the effects of climate change. These joint efforts to unlock Iraq's immense potential, as represented by its young population, characterise the relationship in 2023.

I saw this for myself during my visit to Iraq at the end of February. There has been significant progress since 2003 but we are committed to supporting further progress and strengthening our partnership with Iraq. The UK remains committed to preserving the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Government and people of Iraq to safeguard stability and deliver prosperity.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ Health Update

**Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay):** [\[HCWS642\]](#)

I am pleased to be able to inform the House that today 16 March 2023, I have made a formal offer on pay for 2022-23 and 2023-24 to the unions representing staff on the Agenda for Change contract. The NHS Staff Council has discussed this offer and the Royal College of Nursing, UNISON, GMB, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and the British Dietetic Association will recommend the offer to their members in consultations that will be held over the coming weeks. Strike action will continue to be paused while they are consulted.

Under the offer, over 1 million NHS staff on the Agenda for Change contract would receive two non-consolidated payments for 2022-23. This is on top of an at least £1,400 consolidated pay award that they have already received, which was in line with the recommendations of the independent pay review body.

Under the terms of the offer, all staff would receive an award worth of 2% of an individual's salary for 2022-23. In addition, staff would receive a one-off bonus which recognises the sustained pressure facing the NHS following the Covid-19 pandemic and the extraordinary effort these members of staff have been making to hit backlog recovery targets and meet the Prime Minister's promise to cut waiting lists. This NHS Backlog Bonus is an investment worth an additional 4% of the Agenda for Change paybill, and would mean staff would receive an additional payment of between £1,250 and £1,600. With both of these payments, a nurse at the top of band 5, for example, would receive over £2,000 in total.

For 2023-24, the Government has offered a 5% consolidated increase in pay. In addition, the lowest paid staff, such as porters and cleaners will see their pay matched to the top of band 2, resulting in a pay increase of 10.4%.

For example, this would mean a newly qualified nurse would get over £1,300, increasing their base salary to £28,407. A nurse at the top of band 6 would receive a pay rise of over £2,000, increasing their base salary to £42,618

The Government firmly believes this is a fair offer which rewards all Agenda for Change staff and commits to a substantial pay rise in 2023-24 at a time when people across the country are facing cost of living pressures and there are multiple demands on the public finances.

Setting pay is an annual process and, as is always the case, decisions are considered in light of the fiscal and economic context and ensuring awards recognise the value of NHS staff whilst delivering value for the taxpayer. While it is right that we reward our hard-working NHS staff with a pay rise, this needs to be proportionate and balanced with the need to deliver NHS services and manage the country's long term economic health and public sector finances, along with inflationary pressures.

The Government asked the NHS Pay Review Body (NHSPRB) to report by the end of April 2023. We anticipate the progress made and the outcome of the union ballot to be taken into account. If the offer is accepted by unions, it will be implemented, but the Government would welcome observations from the NHSPRB on the pay deal in England.

On top of the pay package, the Government is also committing to important measures including the development of a national, evidence-based policy framework which will build on existing safe staffing arrangements and amendments to terms and conditions to support existing NHS staff develop their careers through apprenticeships.

In addition, having heard the concerns of nursing staff and their representatives about the specific challenges they face in terms of recruitment, retention and professional development, the Government has committed to address these issues and will therefore work with NHS Employers and unions to improve opportunities for nursing career progression.

The Government is also committed to improving support for newly qualified healthcare registrants. It will commission a review into the support received by those transitioning from training into practice. And the Government will consult on the permanent easement of pension abatement rules.

This package, alongside the comprehensive NHS Long Term Workforce Plan NHS England will publish later this year, will help ensure the NHS can recruit and retain the staff it needs to meet the growing and changing health and wellbeing needs of patients.

Alongside making this formal offer, I have today also written to the Royal College of Nursing to outline that in undertaking work to address the specific challenges faced by nursing staff – in terms of recruitment, retention and professional development – this work will involve: how to take account of the changing responsibilities of nursing staff; and the design and implementation issues, including scope and legal aspects, of a separate pay spine for nursing staff exclusively.

The Government intends to complete this work such that resulting changes can be delivered within the 2024-25 pay year. In conducting this work, the Government will also

consider whether any separate measures may apply to other occupational groups, taking into account the views of NHS Employers and unions.

## HOME OFFICE

### ■ Publication of the Director of Labour Market Enforcement (DLME) interim annual strategy 2022-23

#### **The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Safeguarding (Miss Sarah Dines):** **[\[HCWS637\]](#)**

Alongside my hon Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business (Kevin Hollinrake), I am today publishing the Labour Market Enforcement Annual Strategy for 2022-23, submitted by the DLME Margaret Beels OBE. The Strategy will be available on GOV.UK.

The Director of Labour Market Enforcement's role was created by the Immigration Act 2016 to bring better focus and strategic co-ordination to the enforcement of labour market legislation by the three enforcement bodies which are responsible for state enforcement of specific employment rights:

- The Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate (EAS);
- Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs National Minimum and Living Wage enforcement team (HMRC NMW/NLW team); and
- The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA).

Under Section 2 of The Act, The Director of Labour Market Enforcement is required to prepare an annual labour market enforcement strategy, which assesses the scale and nature of non-compliance in the labour market and sets priorities for future enforcement by the three enforcement bodies and the allocation of resources needed to deliver those priorities. The annual strategy, once approved, is laid before Parliament.

In line with the obligations under the Act, Margaret Beels submitted a labour market enforcement strategy for 2022-23 in March 2022.

The Director is a statutory office-holder with a degree of independence from Government, and is accountable to the BEIS Secretary of State and the Home Secretary. In agreement with sponsor departments, the Director decided to submit what she describes as an interim strategy ahead of a more comprehensive 2023-24 annual strategy, to enable the three enforcement bodies and sponsor departments to continue to focus on work to address the recommendations in previous strategies (2020-21 and 2021-22) published in December 2021.

This interim strategy provides an assessment of the scale and nature of non-compliance and focuses on the emerging threats posed by the dynamics of the shifting labour market. It consolidates existing themes from previous recommendations, highlights where the enforcement bodies and sponsor departments should be focusing their efforts and sets out 4 priority areas which include:

- Improving the radar picture,
- Improving focus and effectiveness,
- Better joined up thinking,
- Engagement and support.

We believe the enforcement bodies have been funded sufficiently to deliver the activities set out in the strategy. The DLME carried out stakeholder engagement for the 2022-23 strategy with the enforcement bodies prior to submission.

In previous years, we have published a government response to the strategy setting out the approach we will take to the recommendations. For the latest strategy, we have instead worked closely with the Director and their office and the enforcement bodies to agree the recommendations ahead of publication of the strategy.

We look forward to receiving the Director's 2023-24 annual strategy and a summary of the results of the Director's call for evidence to better understand the changing nature of the labour market.

## LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

### ■ Levelling Up Update

**Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations (Michael Gove):** [\[HCWS641\]](#)

Levelling up the United Kingdom is at the heart of our ambition as a Government. The Chancellor has announced a package of measures in his Budget which put power and money in the hands of our cities, towns, counties, and rural and coastal areas. Through this package, we continue to deliver the ambitions we set out in our Levelling Up White Paper, further supporting places across the country to reap the benefits of our economic success and strengthen their local economies and communities.

#### **Devolution and local economic growth institutions in England**

We have concluded our negotiations with the Mayors of Greater Manchester and the West Midlands on our "trailblazer" deeper devolution deals, subject to ratification. These deals mark a new chapter for English devolution and further progress in delivering our 2030 Levelling Up Mission on local leadership. They transfer more control and influence over the levers of economic growth and levelling up to local, empowered, and more accountable leaders in England's second city regions.

We have agreed a trailblazing package, including a single departmental-style settlement, unprecedented 10-year retention of business rates, devolution of post-19 skills funding and functions, and control of the affordable homes programme outside London for the first time ever. This will enable the mayors and local authority leaders to grow the economies of Greater Manchester and the West Midlands and drive levelling up, for the benefit of local residents and businesses.

These deals will act as a blueprint for deepening devolution elsewhere in England. We will begin talks with other MCAs on deeper devolution this year. The Government will set out more on plans for those talks soon.

We are continuing to work with places to implement the new devolution deals signed in 2022, and to invite new areas to come forward with proposals, as we progress towards our Levelling Up mission for every area of England that wants one to have a deal by 2030.

Through this work, we will empower places to take control of their own destinies. But with power must come accountability. We have published an English Devolution Accountability Framework, which sets out clear and robust arrangements to ensure that decision-makers in areas with devolution deals are accountable to their residents and deliver value for money.

### **Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)**

The Government is committed to empowering local leadership at every opportunity. To this end, the Government intends for the functions of LEPs to be delivered by democratically elected local leaders, where appropriate in future. Therefore, the Government is minded to withdraw central government support for LEPs from April 2024. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Department for Business and Trade will now consult on these proposals, before confirming a decision. The Government will publish an updated policy position to confirm next steps by summer 2023.

### **Investment Zones**

The Autumn Statement set out the Government's ambition to embed innovation throughout the economy and support the growth of priority sectors. Investment Zones will harness existing local strengths and leverage places' innovation potential to drive productivity and support Levelling Up across the UK.

Government has announced plans to enter discussions with places to host 12 high growth Investment Zones across the UK, each backed by £80 million over five years including generous tax incentives, bringing opportunity into areas which have traditionally underperformed economically. Investment Zones will be clustered around research institutions such as universities and will be focused on driving growth the UK's key sectors: digital and technology, creative industries, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and green industries.

Eight places in England have been shortlisted to host Investment Zones, with the intention to agree plans with local partners by the end of the year. The eight places are those covered by: the proposed East Midlands Mayoral Combined Authority; Greater Manchester Mayoral Combined Authority; Liverpool City Region Mayoral Combined Authority; the proposed North East Mayoral Combined Authority; South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority; Tees Valley Mayoral Combined Authority; West Midlands Mayoral Combined Authority, and West Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority. An

explanation of the methodology used to identify these places has been published on gov.uk.

The Government is also working closely with the devolved administrations to establish how Investment Zones in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be delivered, which will account for the four final locations.

### **Levelling Up Partnerships (LUPs)**

Levelling Up Partnerships will bring the collective power of Government to provide bespoke place-based regeneration in a further twenty of England's areas most in need of levelling up over 2023-24 and 2024-25.

The following places will be invited to form Levelling Up Partnerships over 2023-24 and 2024-25: City of Kingston upon Hull, Sandwell, Mansfield, Middlesbrough, Blackburn with Darwen, Hastings, Torbay, Tendring, Stoke-on-Trent, Boston, Redcar and Cleveland, Wakefield, Oldham, Rother, Torridge, Walsall, Doncaster, South Tyneside, Rochdale, and Bassetlaw. Our starting assumption is that we will work with the largest urban area within these local authorities, unless there is a strong rationale for choosing somewhere else.

These places have been selected based on the analysis in the Levelling Up White Paper which considered places in England against four key metrics: the percentage of adults with Level 3+ qualifications; Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked; median gross weekly pay; and healthy life expectancy. Geographic spread has been considered to make sure regions across England benefit from the programme. The methodology used to identify the 20 places has been published on gov.uk. We also want to explore delivering this programme in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and will consult with the Devolved Administrations.

### **Mayoral Capital Investment**

To give mayors the resources they need to level up their areas, the Government has also provided a further £161 million for high-value capital regeneration projects in city regions across England, including business premises and food science facilities in Tees Valley, and unlocking investment in a research campus in the Liverpool City Region. The funding will support delivery of 32 projects, and a list of these has been published.

### **Capital Levelling Up Bids**

Following the second round of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF), in which the full £2.1 billion LUF was awarded, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is using unallocated departmental budgets to fund, subject to subsidy checks, three further bids which narrowly missed out. These are in Sefton, Rossendale and Stockport local authorities, and are worth just under £58m in total. Further detail on this is outlined in the Accounting Officer Assessment for Capital Levelling Up Bids.

### **Capital Regeneration Projects**

Since the conclusion of the Levelling Up Fund round two, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has identified further funding to support regeneration and



town centre bids that were made into the Fund. The Government is announcing grants for 16 projects that can start to spend and deliver quickly across England, worth a combined £211 million. These projects, subject to subsidy checks, are located in the following local authorities: Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, East Suffolk, Kirklees, London Borough of Waltham Forest, North East Lincolnshire, Northumberland, Redcar and Cleveland, Rotherham, Salford, Sandwell, Tameside, Telford and Wrekin, Tendring, Wigan and Wolverhampton. Further detail on the selection process is outlined in the Accounting Officer Assessment for Regeneration Projects.

### **Community Ownership Fund**

To empower local people to save community assets that matter most to them, the Government has announced 30 more projects across the UK that will benefit from the Community Ownership Fund. These projects will receive a total of £7.73 million in funding, bringing the total number of assets to 98 and our overall investment to £23.9 million for neighbourhoods right across the United Kingdom. The list of successful projects has been published on GOV.uk.

### **Other measures**

To support local authorities to continue to deliver their existing development plans and bring forward new council housing supply, HM Treasury will be offering a new preferential Public Works Loan Board borrowing rate for council housing activity through the Housing Revenue Account from June 2023.

To stimulate new housing supply and unlock development that would otherwise be stalled due to high levels of nutrient pollution, we will announce a call for evidence (CfE) from affected local authorities on nutrient neutrality credit scheme opportunities. Where high quality nutrient-credit schemes are presented, this Budget will provide investment to accelerate their delivery and unlock housing supply.

All relevant documents are available as links from [www.gov.uk/government/news/levelling-up-at-heart-of-budget](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/levelling-up-at-heart-of-budget) .

## ■ **Local Government Update**

**Minister for Local Government and Building Safety (Lee Rowley):** [\[HCWS638\]](#)

Local councils play an essential role every day. They deliver core services, including to the most vulnerable citizens, they help shape our communities, and support local democracy. Where councils do not meet the high standards that we set for local government, it is right that government intervenes in order to protect the interests of residents.

Today I am updating the House on the intervention arrangements at three councils of concern to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. These are Thurrock Council, the London Borough of Croydon, and Slough Borough Council.

### **Thurrock Council**

On 24 January 2023, I informed the House that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities and I were minded to expand the ongoing intervention in

Thurrock Council. Over recent months, the new leadership at Thurrock Council have worked cooperatively and collaboratively with the Commissioner, Essex County Council, to start the long journey back. In addition, our proposals were to appoint an independent Managing Director Commissioner to work alongside Thurrock's existing Commissioner, Essex County Council, to provide Commissioners with further powers over governance and staffing, and to direct Thurrock Council to take additional actions to support their improvement.

I made this announcement after receiving two reports from Essex County Council in December last year: the Commissioner's first report, and an update letter on the Best Value Inspection. Both documents laid bare the scale and complexity of the financial challenges facing Thurrock Council and noted significant concerns regarding a lack of robust governance and leadership capacity at the Council.

I invited representations on our proposal from Thurrock Council, and from members of the public, which I have now received and considered.

Since that announcement, the Secretary of State and I have also received a Best Value Inspection report on Thurrock Council, from Essex County Council in their role as Best Value Inspector, which I will publish in due course following a further representations process whereby any particular individuals criticised are given an opportunity to read and respond to those relevant parts of the report before it is published.

Having carefully considered the Best Value Inspection report, and the representations I have received about the intervention, I am satisfied that Thurrock Council is continuing to fail to comply with its Best Value Duty. I am today announcing a formal expansion to the intervention in Thurrock Council to implement the changes we proposed on 24 January 2023.

To begin, we will appoint Dr Dave Smith to be a Managing Director Commissioner. He is a highly experienced former local authority Chief Executive who has held senior executive positions within Local Government for the past fifteen years, including Chief Executive of South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, and Chief Executive of Sunderland City Council. He will work closely with the existing Commissioner, Essex County Council, to support Thurrock Council in its improvement journey. He will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Council and will provide strategic direction and leadership, until such time as a permanent appointment to the post of chief executive can be made. As I noted in my January announcement, I intend for this appointment to strengthen the intervention model and to increase the Council's capacity to deliver vital improvements.

The Secretary of State will also use his powers under the Local Government Act 1999 to update and expand his Directions to Thurrock Council and its Commissioners.

In addition to the finance powers they already hold, the new Directions will permit the Commissioners to exercise further powers over:



- All functions associated with the governance, scrutiny and transparency of strategic decision making by the Authority to ensure compliance with the Best Value Duty. This will include oversight of an audit of the Council's governance.
- All functions associated with the Council's operating model and redesign of council services to achieve value for money and financial sustainability.
- The appointment, suspension and dismissal of statutory officers, including powers to determine the process for making these appointments and dismissals, and to define a new officer structure for senior positions at the Council.
- The development, oversight and operation of an effective performance management framework for senior positions.

The new Directions will also instruct the Council to take specific actions to support their improvement. These will incorporate the existing instructions to the Council issued back in September, but they will go further, and instruct Thurrock Council to undertake the following new actions to the satisfaction of Commissioners:

- To prepare, produce and implement an enhanced Improvement and Recovery Plan, which builds on their existing Improvement Plan. This will include new elements to cover:
  - o An action plan to reconfigure the Authority's services commensurate with the Authority's available financial resources.
  - o A plan to ensure that the Authority has personnel with sufficient skills, capabilities and capacity to deliver the Improvement and Recovery Plan, within a robust officer structure.
  - o An action plan to strengthen the Authority's governance function, to secure improvements in transparency and formal decision making. This should include measures to improve the Authority's scrutiny function, including the taking and recording of formal decisions.
  - o Arrangements to secure the proper resourcing and functioning of the system of internal controls, including risk management and internal audit.
    - To undertake any action that Commissioners may reasonably require to avoid, so far as practicable, incidents of poor governance that would, in the Commissioners' reasonable opinion, give rise to the risk of the Authority failing to comply with its Best Value Duty.
    - To take steps to ensure that the role of Accountable Body to the Thames Freeport is exercised to the satisfaction of the Commissioners. This should also be reflected in the Improvement and Recovery Plan.

As part of this next phase of intervention, Essex County Council will continue to act as a Commissioner and I look forward to their report in June. As part of the January announcement, I indicated my intent to formalise the role of the Leader of Essex County Council in this intervention. I can confirm that I will today issue an updated Explanatory Memorandum, to accompany the new Directions.

I am hopeful that the expansion to the intervention that I am announcing today will help the Council to address the concerns set out in the Commissioner's first report and the Best Value Inspection update letter, and to continue its work to improve the way in which the Council is run. There will be an opportunity for further reflection on Thurrock Council when I publish the Best Value Inspection report.

### **The London Borough of Croydon**

Regarding the London Borough of Croydon, the Council has been subject to two Public Interest Reports by external auditors relating to poor financial decision making and associated governance failings (October 2020) and failures in financial control and poor governance arrangements relating to the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls (January 2022). Croydon has issued three Section 114 Notices since 2020, the latest being in November 2022 following the conclusion that it cannot balance its budget in 2023/24 and beyond.

The former Secretary of State appointed an independent Improvement and Assurance Panel in February 2021, chaired by Tony McArdle OBE and made up of independent experts, to offer the Council advice, expertise and challenge as it sought to address failings related to poor financial control and governance. The Panel has provided regular assurance reports to the Secretary of State on the Council's progress throughout this time, with their latest report being submitted in November 2022.

Whilst the Council has struggled to resolve serious governance and financial issues for several years, I want to place on record that the Secretary of State and I recognise the positive steps taken by the Council, with oversight from the Improvement and Assurance Panel, to lay the foundations for its recovery and ensure that legacy issues are being addressed. In May 2022, Croydon changed its model of governance with the election of a Mayor, Jason Perry, and a new Council. The Secretary of State acknowledges the Panel's assessment in their latest report that the Mayor has been working constructively with them and is prepared to "take firm decisions" to return the Council to a sustainable financial footing. The Panel have also commented that within the Council there is "much evidence of managers and staff grasping the scale of the problem and doing their best to fix it."

Historic issues have continued to be unearthed at Croydon and their potential impact on the Council and the progress they have made to date cannot be underestimated, particularly given their precarious financial position. Croydon is currently unable to achieve financial sustainability on its own accord and has requested an unprecedented level of support from Government as a result of these historic issues.

On balance, the Secretary of State agrees with the Panel's latest assessment, that the acknowledged and welcome work of the new leadership has made good progress, however he has concluded, including as a result of the historic problems and the extent of improvement necessary, that the Council is not meeting its Best Value Duty.

The Secretary of State is minded to implement the intervention package set out below and in line with procedures laid down in the Local Government Act 1999 to assist the existing extensive effort to go even quicker. Officials in the department have, as a result, written to the Council seeking representations on the proposed intervention package.

The proposed package is centred on the Council continuing to make the necessary improvements to the satisfaction of the Improvement and Assurance Panel. The Panel will be backed by Directions issued to the Council requiring them to follow the instructions of the Panel if they are not satisfied with the progress being made. The Panel will report to the Secretary of State every six months.

It is important that the Council leads their recovery but that it does not lose momentum in making the necessary improvements. As part of the representations period, Ministers will reflect on membership of the Panel to ensure the arrangements are fit for purpose to support the Council moving forward.

We are inviting representations from the Council on the Secretary of State's proposals by 30 March. We want to provide the opportunity for members and officers of the Council, and any other interested parties, especially the residents of Croydon, to make their views on the Secretary of State's proposals known. Should the Secretary of State decide to intervene along the lines described here, he will make the necessary statutory directions under the 1999 Act. I will update the House in due course.

### **Slough Borough Council**

I would also like to take this opportunity to provide an update on the intervention at Slough Borough Council. On 22 December 2022 I received a copy of the Commissioners' second report on the progress of the intervention. The report has made for stark reading. Commissioners describe there being '...a real sense that many in leadership roles do not see leading and modelling corporate improvement as their overriding responsibility but only as something they have to do...' This is wholly unacceptable. The well-publicised failures of Slough have stemmed from a poor culture of checks and balances, as well as inadequate leadership. The Council and its leadership must accept this and embrace the need to change. The results of these past failures have devastated the Council and made its financial position unsustainable. Within their report Commissioners have gone so far as to query the viability of Slough as a unitary authority. For Slough to remain in its current form there will need to be a fundamental shift in the attitude and behaviour of the Council and its leadership. The role of Commissioners will be of paramount importance and their focus in the coming months will be on a new operating model for the authority.

Our intervention now needs to move from its discovery phase to one of requiring the Council to do the hard work of transformation. The Council must step up. Equally, we will put in place a Commissioner team who will move the Council through the next stage of this journey. Max Caller CBE, Lead Commissioner for the intervention, wrote to the Secretary of State on 1 March to tender his resignation and stated his intention to retire from public life. The Secretary of State has accepted Mr Caller's decision and I would like to thank him not only for the work he has undertaken as part of the intervention, but also for his many contributions to the local government sector. In addition, Margaret Lee, Finance Commissioner, also wrote to the Secretary of State on 12 March to tender her resignation for personal reasons. The Secretary of State has accepted Ms. Lee's resignation with immediate effect and I would like to thank her for her excellent work in Slough and Croydon and wish her well for the future. We will make an announcement on the revised commissioner team in due course and we will make appointments with the

experience and skillset to ensure the Council progresses, alongside the enhanced senior officer team now in place at the Council.

The intervention at Slough remains challenging. I strongly urge the leadership in Slough to consider the findings of Commissioners' report and reflect on what more they could be doing to not only meet the requirements of the statutory Directions, but to drive forward necessary changes. Things must change.

### **Conclusion**

I want to acknowledge the work of the dedicated staff who deliver the business-as-usual services of the councils included in today's announcement, many of whom have strived to deliver those services over recent years despite the financial, leadership and governance challenges faced by their respective authorities. They will play a vital role in each council's recovery. I have deposited in the House library copies of those reports I have referred to that are also being published on gov.uk today.

We are also today publishing on gov.uk the second report from the Sandwell Commissioners, which the House may wish to note. The Commissioners report that they have seen some progress at the Council in the past six months, though there is still a lot of significant work to be done – with a particular focus on the customer journey and culture.

Last week I also published the third report from the Liverpool Commissioners. The report is cautiously optimistic about the Council's progress. It is clear, however, that the Council faces significant change in the months ahead with a transition in officer and political leadership plus the implementation of a significant transformation programme. The continuation of the intervention in Liverpool will be vital to support the Council through this period of change.

## **WORK AND PENSIONS**

### ■ **Personal Independence Payment (PIP) Update**

**Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work (Tom Pursglove):**

**[[HCWS639](#)]**

Today, the department will publish the latest statistics on making backdated payments to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claimants who are affected by the KT&SH decision of the Upper Tribunal (UT). The release will be published at: [List of upcoming releases of management information and ad hoc analyses - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

The KT&SH UT decision, handed down on 21 August 2020, concerned how we decide whether hearing impaired or deaf people need an aid, appliance, or supervision, to wash or bathe safely under the PIP assessment.

The department revised the guidance used for the PIP assessment process, for all new decisions, on 17 May 2021. We started the administrative exercise, to check eligible claims back to the date of the UT decision on 4 April 2022.

Since April 2022, we have reviewed around 4,000 cases against the KT&SH decision. This includes cases where claimants have previously been assessed as needing an aid or appliance to hear. All reviews have been carried out by a Case Manager within the department.

Around 4,000 arrears payments, totalling around £11 million, have been made. No one should have seen their PIP reduced because of this exercise.

Although we have completed the exercise, claimants can still ask the Department for Work and Pensions to conduct a review of their case, if they think they are affected.

Our approach demonstrates that we have prioritised claimants who are most likely to benefit, to make backdated payments as quickly as possible.