



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 24 March 2020 and the information is correct at the time of publication (07:02 P.M., 24 March 2020). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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**Notes:**

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

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

## ANSWERS

### BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

#### ■ Animal Experiments

**Grahame Morris:** [\[31478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what proportion of funding for science and research and development has been allocated to new approach methodologies to replace animal experiments.

**Grahame Morris:** [\[31479\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what proportion of the £400 million in funding for research, infrastructure and equipment announced in Budget 2020 for 2020-21 will be allocated to the development of new approach methodologies to replace animal experiments.

**Amanda Solloway:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* The National Centre for Replacement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3R) is the UK's national centre dedicated to replacing, refining and reducing the use of animals in research and testing (the 3Rs). Their core funding is from the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), both of which are part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Over the last five years the NC3Rs, as the main conduit for research to develop new methods that replace the use of animal experiments, has committed £20.39 million.

Further detailed plans, will be set out at Spending Review later this year.

**Grahame Morris:** [\[31480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department will take to ensure that the additional equity commitments from the Life Sciences Investment Programme to the British Business Bank announced in Budget 2020 are allocated to support innovative health and life sciences firms that are developing new approach methodologies to replace animal experiments.

**Nadhim Zahawi:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* The Life Sciences Investment Programme (LSIP), delivered by the British Business Bank, will provide investment to support innovative health and life science companies that are looking to grow and scale in the UK. This programme is intended to support all areas of UK life science innovation.

## ■ Business: Government Assistance

**Gerald Jones:** [\[32274\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will take steps to ensure that (a) preservation of jobs and (b) payment of wages are conditions for support offered to business during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Nadhim Zahawi:**

The Government has outlined an unprecedented package of measures to protect millions of people's jobs and incomes as part of the national effort in response to Coronavirus.

A new Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will be set up to help pay people's wages. Employers will be able to contact HMRC, who will reimburse 80% of furloughed workers wage costs, up to a cap of £2,500 per month. This will apply to members of the workforce who remain on businesses' payroll, but are temporarily unable to work due to the Coronavirus outbreak.

## ■ Business: Loans

**Neil Coyle:** [\[30774\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the ability of small and medium-sized businesses to access the Business Interruption Loan Scheme to help cover the costs of coronavirus.

**Paul Scully:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) is now live. Eligible businesses can apply for a loan or other form of finance through one of 40-plus providers accredited by the British Business Bank to offer the scheme. These include all the major UK banks. The application process is typically online for smaller amounts and the lending decision is made by the provider concerned.

Full guidance, including eligibility criteria, is available on the British Business Bank website at [www.british-business-bank.co.uk/cbils](http://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/cbils) and this information is being widely disseminated online, through the Government's Business Support Helpline and by accredited providers.

## ■ Carbon Capture and Storage: Scotland

**Alan Brown:** [\[30115\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether it is his policy that at least one of the carbon capture plants will be in Scotland.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

The Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) Infrastructure Fund announced at Budget 2020 will enhance long-term competitiveness of UK's industrial regions by providing at least £800m to establish CCS in at least two UK clusters, one by the mid-2020s

and another by 2030. The CCS Infrastructure Fund will support delivery of our Industrial Clusters Mission.

We will work collaboratively with all potential projects across the UK, with value for money considerations at the centre, before taking decisions on how, and where, the Fund will be allocated.

## ■ Carbon Emissions

**Kenny MacAskill:** [\[30819\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, in what statistical form and on what statistical basis he plans to present UK carbon emission reduction targets and results.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

The UK follows the agreed international approach for estimating and reporting greenhouse gas emissions under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, which is for countries to report the emissions produced within their territories.

Under the Climate Change Act, we are required to publish, by the end of March each year, the Annual Statement of Emissions which reports to Parliament the UK's latest progress against carbon budgets.

## ■ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: GMB

**Alex Sobel:** [\[30133\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many meetings his Department had with representatives from the GMB union in each year from 2010 to 2020.

**Paul Scully:**

Ministers and officials across the Department regularly engage with trade unions, including GMB, on employment issues and we will continue to do so.

## ■ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Off-payroll Working

**Justin Madders:** [\[29235\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many contractors working for his Department have had their employment status assessed in relation to the new IR35 rules on off-payroll working; and how many of those staff are subject to those rules.

**Nadhim Zahawi:**

The Department conducts IR35 status determinations on all its self-employed contractor roles. The status determination is based on HMRC's Check Employment Status for Tax tool, as well as HMRC guidance on finance risk, control, and supervision over the worker and right to substitution. The Department then uses its agencies to recruit based on the job description and IR35 status.



For 2018-19, the Department employed 66 contractors, with 59 outside of scope of IR35.

IR35 statistics relating to self-employment are published in the Department's annual report and accounts at: [beis-annual-report-accounts-2018-2019](#).

## ■ Energy Company Obligation and Warm Home Discount Scheme

**Alex Cunningham:**

**[29934]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what estimate he has made of the number of energy customers that do not contribute to the (a) Energy Company Obligation and (b) Warm Homes Discount as a result of being with a smaller supplier.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

The current threshold for participation in the Energy Company Obligation and Warm Home Discount is 200,000 domestic customer accounts and this is changing to 150,000 customer accounts from 1 April this year.

In the final stage impact assessment for ECO3, published in October 2018, we estimated that suppliers over the 200,000 threshold covered 96% of the market and those over 150,000 covered 99%. While the number of energy suppliers in the market and their customer numbers fluctuate, we expect the current market coverage to be similar now.

How energy suppliers pass on their costs depends on their individual pricing decisions.

## ■ Energy Supply: Coronavirus

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

**[32249]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the capacity of the national grid to provide electricity to homes in the event that (a) 25 percent, (b) 50 percent and (c) 75 percent of the population have to stay at home during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

The National Grid Electricity System Operator (ESO) uses a number of tools to balance electricity supply and demand on a minute by minute basis.

The ESO closely monitors electricity demand, looking at a range of different scenarios across domestic, commercial and industry demand. This modelling is refined on a daily basis as further usage data becomes available.

National Grid is confident that it will be able to keep electricity flowing, as the reduction in industry and commercial demands outweighs the increase in residential demand

The ESO is also working with energy partners from across Europe to understand how different measures have impacted demand in their areas and what patterns can be applied to the GB demand forecast

## ■ Energy: Meters

**Jessica Morden:** [\[32098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to support people with prepayment (a) gas and (b) electricity meters during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

The Government announced on 19 March that we have secured a voluntary agreement with domestic energy supply companies to support customers impacted by Covid-19.

Under the terms of this agreement, energy suppliers will seek to identify and prioritise customers at risk, support customers who are impacted financially, and support prepayment meter customers to stay on supply.

The support offered will be based on the individual circumstances of the customer and the systems, processes and capability of the supply company. It could include extending discretionary or friendly credit, or sending out a pre-loaded top up card for prepay customers who are unable to leave home to top up.

**Conor McGinn:** [\[32177\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many households use prepayment electricity meters in (a) St Helens, (b) Liverpool City Region and (c) the North West.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

There are approximately 4 million prepayment meters in Great Britain, of which 36% are smart meters. Statistics are not kept on regional or local level.

## ■ Home Energy and Lifestyle Management: Scotland

**Alan Brown:** [\[30028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 12 March 2020 to Question 25155 on Home Energy and Lifestyle Management: Scotland, how many green deal agreements were issued to Home Energy & Lifestyle Management Ltd for the purpose of installing external building insulation in each local authority in Scotland.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

The number of Green Deal plans provided by Home Energy & Lifestyle Management Ltd which included External Wall insulation in Scotland by local authority are shown in the table below.

To manage the risk of revealing personal or commercial data, our approach is not to release non-zero counts of less than five for a small geographic area. Items marked \* are small and have been suppressed to achieve this disclosure control.

LOCAL AUTHORITY	GD PLANS
City of Edinburgh	5
East Ayrshire	48
East Dunbartonshire	5
Falkirk	18
Fife	*
Glasgow City	80
Inverclyde	27
Midlothian	*
North Ayrshire	39
North Lanarkshire	81
Renfrewshire	243
Scottish Borders	10
South Ayrshire	35
South Lanarkshire	157
Stirling	18
West Dunbartonshire	63
West Lothian	9
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>846</b>

## ■ Housing: Energy

**Rebecca Long Bailey:**

[\[28672\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to encourage homeowners to invest in energy efficiency; and what incentives the Government is providing to improve energy efficiency in homes.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

In the Clean Growth Strategy, Government set an aspiration for as many homes as possible to be Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C by 2035 and is

developing a suite of mutually supporting policies and measures that will help deliver this:

Our current Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme and its successor will drive £6bn of additional investment to support energy improvements in low-income, vulnerable and fuel poor households between 2018 and 2028.

In order to improve rented properties, we introduced the Private Rented Sector Minimum standard regulations on 1 April 2018. The regulations require landlords to bring their properties to EPC Band E or above. We will consult on tightening the minimum energy standards in due course.

We have also committed to consult on requirements for mortgage lenders to help households improve the energy efficiency of the homes they lend to and last summer we launched the £5m Green Home Finance Innovation Fund to support the development of green finance products.

In addition, we have launched Simple Energy Advice, a digital platform offering impartial and tailored advice for consumers on how to make their homes more energy efficient.

**Alex Cunningham:** [\[29932\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what estimate he has made of the percentage of Energy Company Obligation funding that has been spent on identifying suitable homes for energy efficiency measures.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

The costs for identifying suitable homes has been estimated at around £257m for the three and a half year duration of ECO3 (2018 – 2022). That would be around 11% of the total estimated cost of the scheme.

These costs include finding suitable homes whose residents are eligible and willing to have energy efficiency measures installed.

**Alex Cunningham:** [\[29933\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many energy efficiency measures were installed through the obligation trading route in the last 12 months.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

In the Clean Growth Strategy, Government set an aspiration for as many homes as possible to be Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C by 2035, where practical, cost-effective and affordable. We are developing policies and measures that will help to build a sustainable market for energy efficiency.

The Energy Company Obligation Scheme provides support for low income and vulnerable households. Since ECO launched it has delivered energy efficiency measures to more than 2 million households. ECO, or a successor scheme, will continue to drive at least £640 million investment per year in home energy efficiency until 2028.

A total of 793 energy efficiency measures were installed through the Energy Company Obligation's trading route (ECO Brokerage) from the start of January 2019 to the end of December 2019.

## ■ Housing: Health

**Alex Cunningham:** [\[29942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what responsibilities his Department has for ensuring that homes and buildings are healthy for its occupants.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

As part of the impact assessments of our policies, we include the benefits to a household's health from improving their homes' thermal performance.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is the lead department for standards in buildings.

## ■ Hygiene: Products

**Taiwo Owatemi:** [\[31579\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to guarantee an adequate supply of isopropyl alcohol for the manufacture of hand sanitiser during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Nadhim Zahawi:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* We have a growing effort to secure the supply of hand sanitiser. The Department of Health and Social Care has hand sanitiser in storage and further deliveries are being made. We are working rapidly with wholesalers to ensure a longer-term supply is available.

**Taiwo Owatemi:** [\[31580\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to encourage relevant manufacturing companies to switch production to the manufacture of (a) personal protective equipment and (b) hand sanitiser or its key ingredients.

**Nadhim Zahawi:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Chancellor is chairing a regular Economic and Business Response Committee with Ministers from across the Government. The Committee will respond to the impact on businesses, supply chains, and the wider economy caused by the pandemic, and will request advice and support from industry where necessary.

Secretaries of State will also hold sector-specific roundtables, including with the aviation, retail, manufacturing, food, insurance, financial services, sport, entertainment and events, and tourism and hospitality industries.

Any business who is able to help should get in touch at:  
gfcovid19enquiries@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.

## ■ Motor Vehicles: Manufacturing Industries

**Bridget Phillipson:**

[\[31496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent meetings he has had with representatives of (a) the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and (b) Nissan to discuss the health of the UK automotive industry.

**Nadhim Zahawi:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* Ministers in the Department have been regularly engaging with with key industry bodies, to understand how we can support the continued resilience and competitiveness of UK manufacturing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Organisations include the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) and Nissan, which has been a critical part of the UK's automotive industry and the North East's manufacturing landscape for the past 30 years.

In order to support UK business and industry during the Covid-19 outbreak, the Chancellor has announced an unprecedented package including government-backed and guaranteed loans. We have made an initial £330 billion of guarantees available, alongside the Coronavirus Job Retention and VAT deferral schemes.

The Government also has a long-standing programme of support to maintain the competitiveness of the UK automotive sector. Through our landmark Automotive Sector Deal, we have secured joint investment and long-term commitments to develop world-leading battery technologies, positioning the UK as the location of choice for the development and deployment of connected and autonomous vehicle technologies.

The Government, alongside industry, have jointly committed almost £1.5 billion through the Advanced Propulsion Centre and Faraday Battery Challenge to research, develop, and commercialise low carbon automotive innovations. In October last year, we announced up to £1 billion of new money to support research and development, including within supply chains, to support electric vehicle manufacture.

## ■ Post Office

**Gill Furniss:**

[\[30050\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the oral contribution the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on 10 March 2020, Official Report, column 43WH, what steps he is taking to challenge Post Office Ltd leadership on its engagement with sub-postmasters.

**Paul Scully:**

The Government believes that Post Office Limited's commitments for cultural and organisational change following the mediation are of the utmost importance and is determined to see them delivered.

I have personally challenged the Post Office CEO and Chair to strengthen their relationship with postmasters and take onboard the lessons learnt through the litigation. I will continue to raise this issue and test progress during my regular meetings with the CEO going forward. Officials will also monitor progress at regular meetings with Post Office officials.

BEIS has established and chairs a quarterly working group with the National Federation for Subpostmasters and the Post Office. This is a forum for discussing how the relationship between the Post Office and postmasters can be improved and highlighting any concerns that postmasters may have. This is a further forum where we will test whether progress is being made.

The Government is also committed to establishing an independent review to look at these issues further. We will announce more details in due course. We will ensure that any review does not undermine the Criminal Cases Review Commission's work or the separate Director of Public Prosecution's consideration.

**■ Private Rented Housing: Energy****Alex Cunningham:**[\[29940\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department has taken to ensure that energy efficiency measures are implemented in the private rented sector.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

*The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property)(England and Wales) Regulations 2015* require that, subject to certain exemptions, domestic and non-domestic private rented sector landlords improve their properties to a minimum energy efficiency rating of E by: April 2020 for domestic property; and April 2023 for non-domestic property.

The Department has published detailed guidance to assist landlords in complying with their obligations under the existing regulations, and is conducting enforcement pilots with Local Authorities to develop best practice around enforcement of the regulations. The Department has also launched a landlord exemptions register, a requirement of the Regulations, which is used by enforcement authorities to help target their enforcement activities.

On 15 October 2019, the government published a consultation on the future target for the non-domestic private rented sector regulations alongside the government's response to the Committee on Climate Change Progress Report. The consultation, which closed on 7 January 2020, set out that the government's preferred target was for all non-domestic rented buildings to achieve an EPC Band B by 2030, where cost-effective. A government response is due to be published later this year. The

government will also consult in due course on options for tightening the standards required of domestic private rented properties over time.

## ■ Sales: Coronavirus

**Fleur Anderson:**

[\[31656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to prevent panic buying.

**Nadhim Zahawi:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* The UK is well prepared for this type of outbreak; we are taking all necessary precautions to protect the public, such as engaging with industry and businesses to discuss their preparedness planning. We will continue to work closely with sectors, companies, and business representative organisations to ensure we are fully aware of the issues and how to best provide support.

In order to help the industry respond to Covid-19, we will work with local authorities to extend delivery hours for supermarkets and other food retailers. This will allow retailers to increase the frequency of their deliveries and move stock quickly from warehouses to shelves.

The Government has also announced a temporary relaxation of the enforcement of EU drivers' hours rules in England, Scotland, and Wales. This extends to drivers of vehicles involved in the delivery of food, non-food (personal care and household paper and cleaning), and over-the-counter pharmaceuticals. Additionally, we have announced a temporary relaxation of drivers' hours, allowing delivery drivers to work the hours needed to meet the demand for home deliveries.

The Government has also announced the temporary relaxation of elements of competition law to allow supermarkets and retailers to work together. Legislation is being laid to amend elements of the Competition Act 1998, which prevents certain types of anti-competitive behaviour.

## ■ Seabed: Mining

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[29892\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, for which oceans have exploratory deep sea mining licences been issued.

**Nadhim Zahawi:**

To date, the International Seabed Authority (ISA) has issued 29 exploration contracts to entities from 20 countries. The contractors include state-owned enterprises, as well as commercial organisations with a state sponsor.

The two UK exploration licence areas issued by the ISA are in the Clarion-Clipperton fracture zone in the Pacific Ocean.

The Government is developing the ISA's deep sea mining code, so future mining is conducted in a safe and environmentally sensitive way.



## ■ Small Businesses: West Midlands

**Marco Longhi:**

[\[30025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent steps he has taken to support small businesses in (a) Dudley and (b) throughout the West Midlands.

**Paul Scully:**

The Government-backed British Business Bank (BBB) is working alongside LEPs in the Midlands to deliver the Investment Strategy for the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF). To date it has made over £80m of investments in firms located across the Midlands and includes £31 million of private sector leverage.

The Chancellor's has announced temporary measures to support businesses during the coronavirus outbreak. This support is comprised of two packages that we are asking local authorities in England to administer to support small businesses. They are the Small Business Grant Fund and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants Fund.

The first scheme is a £10,000 grant per eligible business. Eligible businesses will be those with a rateable value of £15,000 or less and thus eligible for relief under the Small Business Rates Relief scheme (full relief and tapered relief) or the Rural Rate Relief Scheme. We estimate that this will apply to some 730,000 businesses across England.

The second scheme is the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants Fund. This fund is intended to support businesses in sectors that we know are being profoundly impacted and which are crucial to local economies across England. The businesses that are eligible will be those that eligible for a discount under the Expanded Retail Discount scheme. Grants will be provided in respect of each property (hereditament); so businesses with multiple outlets would receive more than one grant and may receive grants from separate local authorities.

There will be two levels to this grant: £10,000 for properties with a rateable value for £15,000 or less; £25,000 for properties with a rateable value of more than £15,000 but less than £51,000.

## ■ Trade Unions: Yorkshire and the Humber

**Alex Sobel:**

[\[30134\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to (a) protect and (b) support trade unions in Yorkshire and the Humber.

**Alex Sobel:**

[\[30135\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking with trade unions to inform workers in Yorkshire and the Humber of their workplace rights.

**Paul Scully:**

The Government recognises the important role that trade unions play in industrial relations. We regularly engage with trade unions and employer organisations on employment issues and have ramped up this engagement in light of the COVID-19 outbreak

**■ Zero Hours Contracts: Disciplinary Proceedings****Alex Sobel:**[\[29974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to ensure zero-hours contract workers who contract covid-19 are not penalised through disciplinary measures by their employers.

**Nadhim Zahawi:**

The Chancellor has outlined an unprecedented package of measures to protect millions of people's jobs and incomes as part of the national effort in response to Coronavirus.

We urge employers to be understanding when individuals are unable to work as a result of following Government advice on Coronavirus.

Many people on zero-hours contracts will be entitled to statutory sick pay, although some individuals will not meet the qualifying criteria. Those who are ineligible to receive statutory sick pay are able to claim Universal Credit and/or Employment and Support Allowance, where they qualify.

Under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, UK employers with a PAYE scheme will be able to access support, so they can continue paying part of their employees' salary where they might otherwise have been laid off. This applies to furloughed workers that have been asked to stop working, yet are being kept on the payroll. HMRC will reimburse 80% of their wages, up to £2,500 per month, to safeguard workers from being made redundant. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will cover the cost of wages backdated to 1 March and is initially open for 3 months, but will be extended if necessary. This scheme aims to support all those employed through the PAYE system regardless of their employment contract, including those on zero-hour contracts.

Businesses and employees can get further advice on individual employment issues at the Acas website.

**CABINET OFFICE****■ Elections: Candidates****Marco Longhi:**[\[30026\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps his Department is taking to (a) support and (b) make it easier for single parents and guardians to stand in elections.

**Chloe Smith:**

The Government is committed to ensuring that our democracy is more accessible and more representative of the public. People from all walks of life are encouraged to stand in elections and participate in the democratic process.

■ **Health: Databases****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[29250\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the ONS data on the well-being of adults, if he will make it his policy to collect data on the well-being of children at the same (a) level and (b) frequency and (c) data size as for adults.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[29256\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what sample size the Office for National Statistics uses to produce well-being data for (a) adults and (b) children.

**Chloe Smith:**

The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority. I have therefore asked the Authority to respond.

**Attachments:**

1. UKSA Response [PQ29250\_29256.pdf]

■ **Public Bodies: West Midlands****Marco Longhi:** [\[30027\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what plans he has to relocate public bodies to the West Midlands.

**Chloe Smith:**

The Government has committed to relocating a minimum of 22,000 Civil Service roles outside of central London over the next decade. This will include the West Midlands alongside other parts of the UK. There is now a policy presumption against the creation of new public bodies in London.

**CHURCH COMMISSIONERS**■ **Cemeteries: Repairs and Maintenance****Aaron Bell:** [\[32199\]](#)

To ask the right hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Church is taking to ensure the maintenance of its burial grounds.

**Andrew Selous:**

The responsibility for maintenance of Church of England churchyards that are open for burials lies with each Parochial Church Council. However, if the churchyard has been closed for burials by order of the Privy Council or other agreement, the usual

practice is for responsibility to transfer to the relevant Local Authority. Maintenance of a closed churchyard is still undertaken in line with the relevant ecclesiastical legislation, which still applies. Each diocese similarly produces its own guidance and regulations.

Advice and guidance is always available for parishes and all local authorities from the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division of the Archbishops' Council. The Church Buildings Division is currently developing a digital Burial Grounds Management System with external partners. This will in the next few years digitally map all graveyards and burial records to allow a publicly available and searchable records and monuments map to increase access to our churchyards. Following a successful trial in the Diocese of Leeds this project will gradually roll out to the rest of the country.

### ■ Church of England: Charitable Donations

**Mr Steve Baker:**

[32147]

To ask the right hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Church of England is taking to change the way parish donations are collected in response to reductions in the use of cash.

**Andrew Selous:**

The Church recognises the need to adapt to the move away from cash towards contactless payments. A large and fast-evolving range of contactless solutions is available through the Church's own Parish Buying service, with over 1,900 churches now having the means to accept payments or donations by card or mobile phone. The Church aims to have over half of its 16,000 churches able to take contactless payments and donations in the next three years.

The Church of England in partnership with the Church in Wales is working through its Parish Buying programme to negotiate competitive prices for churches. More information on that can be found at the Parish Buying website:

<https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/categories/giving-and-payments>

The Church of England has also been encouraging congregations to move to electronic planned giving schemes. This is primarily to reduce administrative burdens on volunteers, but at a time when churches have closed for public health reasons, electronic planned giving ensures continuity of a regular income.

## DEFENCE

### ■ Armed Forces: Training

**Mr Laurence Robertson:**

[32050]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will take steps to accelerate training for new Armed Forces recruits to increase capacity to support the response to the covid-19 outbreak.

**James Heappey:**

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has placed over 20,000 personnel on standby to support Government's efforts to tackle COVID-19. We are in the process of providing extra training to our Service personnel to enhance their capabilities to assist in specific circumstances, such as driving oxygen tankers to enhance resilience within the NHS.

Our training programmes across the MOD are as efficient as is currently possible. There is a danger and liability concerns around deploying military personnel who have not been through our rigorous training programme, which provides practical skills as well as developing emotional intelligence and command capability.

The MOD stands ready to provide vital support to the Government where required and we are fully staffed and equipped to deal with any such requests.

**Defence: Innovation****Grahame Morris:**[\[32137\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will introduce a Defence and Security Accelerator Themed Competition focusing on security.

**Jeremy Quin:**

The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) is a cross-Government organisation, launched in December 2016 by the Secretary of State for Defence. DASA finds and funds exploitable innovation to support UK defence and security quickly and effectively, and support UK prosperity. Its vision is for the UK to maintain its strategic advantage over its adversaries through the most innovative defence and security capabilities in the world. DASA's security competitions are sponsored by other government departments eg the Home Office or Department for Transport. There are no security themed competitions currently open, as and when the next one is launched it will be advertised on Gov.UK There are however a number of security related open call competitions ongoing through the Innovation Focus Areas. These can be found at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-and-security-accelerator-dasa-open-call-for-innovation/open-call-innovation-focus-areas>

**Ministry of Defence: Infrastructure and Projects Authority****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[31628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 17 March 2020 to Question 28772 on Ministry of Defence: Infrastructure and Projects Authority, how many times the scope of an ongoing project listed in his Department's Major Projects Portfolio changed in each of the last 5 years.

**Jeremy Quin:**

Information about individual Programmes is owned and held within the relevant Top Level Budget areas by the programmes Senior Responsible Owners. There are currently 38 Programmes on the Defence Major Programmes Portfolio. Many of these

programmes contain numerous projects. Therefore, the information to answer this question could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### ■ War Widows: Pensions

**Angela Crawley:**

[\[30112\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what alternative methods his Department is examining to mitigate the effect of the loss of the war widows' pension for people who remarried between 1973 and 2015.

**Johnny Mercer:**

The Government recognises the unique commitment that Service families make to our country and remains sympathetic to the circumstances of those widows who remarried and cohabited before 1 April 2015. However, the Government currently has no plans to reinstate War Widows' Pensions for war widows who remarried or cohabited before the 2015 changes took effect.

As the Secretary of State for Defence said to the House on 3 February 2020, we are examining alternative methods to see whether we can mitigate the impact. However, this is a complex policy area and it is taking time to carefully consider the potential options within both financial and legal constraints. This work is ongoing, and any recommendations will have to first be agreed with other Government Departments.

## DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### ■ Arts: Coronavirus

**Thangam Debonnaire:**

[\[30872\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions he is having with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the provision of temporary financial assistance for organisations in the creative industries who are affected by covid-19.

**Caroline Dinéage:**

Last week, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced additional measures to support businesses and organisations that have been impacted by the pandemic.

This includes the Government stepping in to help pay people's wages – a scheme which is one of the most generous of any in the world – paying grants to support as many jobs as necessary. Any employer in the country who promises to retain their staff, can apply for a grant to cover most of the cost of paying people's wages. Government grants will cover 80 per cent of the salary of retained workers up to a total of £2,500 a month, with this limit set well above the median income. The cost of wages will be backdated to 1st March and will be open for at least three months. The Government will consider extending the scheme for longer if necessary.

We are also deferring the next three months of VAT, a direct injection of £33 billion of cash to employers which means no business will pay any VAT in March, April or May; and they will have until the end of the financial year to repay those bills.

The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme will now be interest free for twelve months, an extension from the initial announcement of six months. We have already introduced and announced an extension to the Business Interruption Loan Scheme, which is for small and medium-sized businesses. On Tuesday, the Chancellor expanded the amount that can be borrowed from £1.2 million to £5 million.

### ■ **BBC: Accountability**

**Alex Sobel:**

[\[30129\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking to make the BBC more democratically accountable.

**Mr John Whittingdale:**

The BBC is an independent body governed by the Royal Charter.

The Royal Charter requires the BBC to prepare, publish and lay before Parliament an annual report for each financial year to set out the details of its activities and compliance with its duties. Further, the Royal Charter sets out that the BBC must also comply with requests to appear before or submit evidence to either of the Houses of Parliament or one of their committees.

The BBC also allows licence fee payers to hold it to account on a range of issues by contacting the BBC directly.

### ■ **BBC: Carbon Emissions**

**Alex Sobel:**

[\[30131\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking to encourage the BBC to become carbon neutral.

**Mr John Whittingdale:**

The BBC is operationally and editorially independent from the government, and is responsible for its environmental policies.

In its environmental sustainability strategy, 'Greener Broadcasting', published in 2018, the BBC set a target of a 24% reduction in CO2 emissions from buildings and technology by 2022. The BBC's Director-General, Lord Hall, said: "as a publicly-funded organisation, the BBC has a particular duty to ensure we are doing everything we can to keep our environmental impact to a minimum".

The BBC sets out its sustainability strategy on its website:

<https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/reports/policies/sustainability>.

■ **BBC: Coronavirus**

**Daniel Zeichner:**

**[32149]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will hold discussions with the BBC on (a) the role of programming in supporting public morale and (b) replaying the the 1966 World Cup match during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Mr John Whittingdale:**

As the national broadcaster, the BBC has a vital role to play in supplying information to the public in the weeks and months ahead. It has now announced a wide-ranging package of measures to help keep the nation informed, educated, and entertained through these unprecedented times.

Decisions on the content that the BBC decides to show, including whether or not it could replay the 1966 World Cup match, are a matter for the BBC which is independent of the government.

■ **BBC: Video on Demand**

**Alex Sobel:**

**[30130]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking to support the BBC in competing with (a) Amazon, (b) Hulu, (c) Netflix and (d) other foreign private streaming services.

**Mr John Whittingdale:**

The BBC is a world-class broadcaster and a cultural institution producing some of the best television and radio in the world. As the national broadcaster it plays a vital role in the UK, particularly in these challenging times.

The government is committed to ensuring that the BBC and all public service broadcasters adapt to a fast changing market, ensuring they remain at the heart of our world class TV sector. There are several important milestones that will support this in the coming years, including the mid-term review of the Charter that will take place between 2022 and 2024.

Ofcom's review into Public Service Broadcasting will also play an important role in this work, and we look forward to the outcome of its review in due course. We have asked Ofcom to be bold and ambitious in its thinking.



## ■ Broadband: Standards

**Fleur Anderson:** [\[32170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions he has had with broadband providers on ensuring service reliability whilst social distancing is being advised.

**Matt Warman:**

The industry has well established business continuity arrangements to ensure that the sector remains resilient. DCMS is working with the industry and Ofcom to closely monitor such arrangements.

## ■ Disclosure of Information: Coronavirus

**Chi Onwurah:** [\[31503\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what advice or guidance his Department has provided on public interest data sharing throughout the public sector in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

**Mr John Whittingdale:**

We have been working closely with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to make it clear that data protection and electronic communications legislation does not stop the Government, the NHS or any other health professionals from sending public health messages to people, nor stop them using the latest technology to facilitate safe and speedy consultations and diagnoses. Guidance published by the ICO also recognises that public bodies may require additional collection and sharing of personal data to protect against serious threats to public health. The full guidance can be viewed at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-and-coronavirus/>.

## ■ Google: Data Protection

**Chi Onwurah:** [\[31505\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 17 March 2020 to Question 28618, whether UK citizen data has been involved in cases concerning Google investigated by the Irish Data Protection Commission since 25 May 2018.

**Mr John Whittingdale:**

The Irish Data Protection Commission acts independently of the governments in both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. We cannot comment on the specific nature of its investigations, but are aware of its inquiry into Google's use of geo-location data following complaints brought by consumer groups from across the EU. Further details on this and other investigations can be viewed on the Commission's website at: <https://www.dataprotection.ie/>.

**■ Mobile Phones: Emergencies****Gerald Jones:** [\[32270\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the potential for the Government to issue SMS communications to all mobile telephones in the UK at a time of national emergency.

**Matt Warman:**

The Government is in regular contact with the major fixed and mobile operators, technology providers and Ofcom regarding the current situation. Discussions relating to measures and options to mitigate and inform on the impacts of Covid-19 are ongoing with industry stakeholders and relevant parties.

**■ Telecommunications: Coronavirus****Chi Onwurah:** [\[32156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will ask Ofcom to model the effect of the covid-19 on changes in the level of traffic in relation to (a) work, (b) leisure and (c) other patterns.

**Matt Warman:**

DCMS is working with the industry and Ofcom to closely monitor the changes in the level of traffic in real time. The sector to date has provided reassurance that broadband and mobile capacity will remain resilient in the event of large numbers working from home and usage for leisure.

**EDUCATION****■ Dudley College: Standards****Marco Longhi:** [\[30030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure Dudley College has the (a) funding and (b) teaching staff to deliver effectively the skills required for the future.

**Gillian Keegan:**

The government is committed to developing world-class technical and vocational education in order to level up skills and opportunities across the country and is therefore investing significantly in our further education (FE) institutions and their people.

Dudley College, like all 16-19 providers, will benefit in 2020-21 from £400 million of additional funding announced last August. This is the biggest injection of new money into 16-19 education in a single year since 2010, with 16 to 19 funding increasing at a faster rate than 5 to 16 school funding. This includes an additional £120 million of funding for high cost and high value subjects, £35 million to support students on level 3 courses who did not achieve a grade 4 in GCSE Maths or GCSE English (or who

did not achieve a grade 4 in GCSE Maths and GCSE English) and a £10 million increase in resources allocated for the Advanced Maths Premium.

As a 2020 T level provider, Dudley College will also benefit from additional funding for the delivery of T levels, including funding for the extra hours and industry placements, as well as the Early Adopter Development Fund to enable early providers to support the department to co-create high quality courses.

Our ambitions can only be achieved if our FE institutions are able to recruit, retain and develop outstanding FE teachers. We are therefore investing an additional £24 million in programmes designed to boost the FE workforce in 2020-21. This includes £11 million for training bursaries and grants worth up to £26,000 each in priority subjects and £10 million to expand the government's successful Taking Teaching Further programme, which brings industry professionals into FE teaching. It also includes £3 million for a new high-quality mentor training programme to support FE teachers.

#### ■ Educational Visits: Coronavirus

**Tim Farron:**

[32101]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans there are to provide compensation for (a) schools and (b) parents for school trips that have been cancelled due to covid-19 outbreak.

**Nick Gibb:**

As of 12 March 2020, the Government has been advising all schools and other education settings in England against arranging or undertaking any overseas trips for children under 18.

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

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

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

#### ■ ERASMUS

**Mhairi Black:**

[29977]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to replace Erasmus after the end of the transition period.

**Michelle Donelan:**

As we set out in the UK's approach to negotiations, we remain open to the UK participating in elements of the Erasmus+ programme, on a time-limited basis, provided the terms are in the UK's interest.

The specific terms under which the UK could participate in the programme are subject to the future negotiations with the EU, which we hope to conclude as soon as possible.

In parallel with the ongoing negotiations, we continue to develop an alternative domestic scheme as part of preparing for every eventuality.

**Free School Meals: Coronavirus**

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:** [\[32071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the vouchers offered during school closures to children eligible for free school meals will cover the costs of breakfast.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:** [\[32072\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when he plans to launch the national voucher system for free school meals.

**Vicky Ford:**

While schools are closed to help reduce the spread of coronavirus, they will be able to provide meals or vouchers for supermarkets or local shops for families. The government has confirmed that the total value of vouchers offered to each eligible child per week will exceed the rate it pays to schools for free school meals.

In addition to this, we are working to consider options to support children who receive a free breakfast through our contracts with Family Action and Magic Breakfast.

We are continuing to work on a national approach to supporting free school meal pupils and will announce further details and relevant dates in due course.

**Wes Streeting:** [\[32189\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the closure of schools as a result of covid-19, whether the vouchers provided to children that are eligible for free school meals will cover the costs of breakfast.

**Vicky Ford:**

Schools will be able to provide meals or vouchers for supermarkets or local shops which can be sent directly to families who are either self-isolating at home or whose schools are closed on government advice. The government has confirmed that the total value of vouchers offered to each eligible child per week will exceed the rate it pays to schools for free school meals.

## ■ GCSE: Coronavirus

**Damien Moore:**

[\[30182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department plans to reschedule GCSE examinations during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Nick Gibb:**

As my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced to the House on 18 March, the Government has taken the difficult decision to cancel all examinations due to take place in schools and colleges in England this summer, as part of the fight to prevent the spread of coronavirus. This includes all GCSE examinations.

The Department's priority for GCSE students is to ensure they can move on as planned to the next stage of their education, including starting college, sixth form courses or apprenticeships, in the autumn. We will ensure they are awarded a grade which reflects their work. Our intention is that a grade will be awarded this summer based on the best available evidence, including any non-examination assessment that students have already completed. The qualifications regulator Ofqual is working urgently with examination boards to set out proposals for how this process will work and more information will be provided as soon as possible.

The Department recognises that some students may nevertheless feel disappointed that they have not been able to sit their examinations. If they do not believe the correct process has been followed in their case, they will be able to appeal on that basis. In addition, if they do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance, they will have the opportunity to sit an examination, as soon as is reasonably possible after the beginning of the new academic year. Students will also have the option to sit their examinations in summer 2021.

## ■ Schools: Coronavirus

**Thangam Debbonaire:**

[\[30144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he plans to provide Statutory Sick Pay to (a) teachers and (b) other staff supplied to schools by agencies in the event that schools close as a result of covid-19.

**Nick Gibb:**

The Government is asking all schools to close from Friday 20 March until further notice, except for children of critical workers and vulnerable children, as part of the country's ongoing response to coronavirus.

Schools will continue to be fully funded. That will ensure that they are able to continue to pay all their staff, and meet their other regular financial commitments, throughout these difficult times.

The Government has announced changes to statutory sick pay to support those affected by coronavirus. Details can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19>.

**Thangam Debbonaire:** [30145]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that schools have the funds and access to supplies to ensure continuous provision of soap, gel and other hygiene materials required to respond to the covid-19 outbreak.

**Grahame Morris:** [30740]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make additional funding available to schools for increased costs of supply staff to cover absences during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Nick Gibb:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* The Department understands the sector's concerns about the additional cost pressures associated with COVID-19, especially following our announcement on 18 March, about schools only remaining open to make provision for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

The Department recognises that schools may face additional costs as a result of COVID-19. We are working with other Government departments and public sector buying organisations with the aim of prioritising schools. All schools will continue to receive core funding payments as normal, and we will put in place a new process to reimburse schools for exceptional costs that they face as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Department will discuss how best to deliver this funding with stakeholders over the next few days. We will publish details of the scheme shortly and we trust that this will give head teachers the reassurances they need to enable them to concentrate on their vital role in supporting the nation through this crisis.

## ■ Schools: Uniforms

**Andrew Rosindell:** [29859]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to encourage schools to introduce the use of school uniforms.

**Nick Gibb:**

It is for the governing body of a school (or the academy trust, in the case of academies) to decide whether there should be a school uniform, and if so, what it should be. It is also for the governing body or academy trust to decide how the school uniform should be sourced. To support them to do this the Department issues best practice guidance which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform>.

Our guidance is clear that the Department strongly encourages schools to have a school uniform and recognises the valuable role it can play in contributing to the ethos of a school and setting an appropriate tone.

The Government is pleased to support the Private Members' Bill, Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Bill, in order to make our guidance on the cost considerations for school uniform statutory at the earliest opportunity. This guidance will further support governing bodies in their decisions regarding school uniform policies.

## ■ Students: Loans

**Emma Hardy:**

[\[30814\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of freezing the interest on student loans while university education is disrupted by the covid-19 pandemic.

**Michelle Donelan:**

The system for setting interest rates on student loans is set out in The Education (Student Loans) (Repayment) Regulations 2009, as amended.

The current system protects borrowers if they see a reduction in their income. Repayments are made based on a borrower's monthly or weekly income, not the interest rate or amount borrowed, and no repayments are made for earnings below the repayment thresholds. Repayments are calculated as a fixed percentage of earnings above the relevant repayment threshold. Any outstanding debt is written off at the end of the loan term with no detriment to the borrower.

If, at the end of the year, the borrower's total income is below the annual threshold, they may reclaim any repayments from the Student Loans Company made during that year.

## ■ Universities: Freedom of Expression

**Marco Longhi:**

[\[30031\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to protect freedom of speech and promote diverse debate within universities.

**Michelle Donelan:**

This government has committed to strengthen free speech and academic freedom and ensure our universities are places where debate can thrive. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has made it clear that if required he will look at changing the underpinning legal framework. We have made it clear that if universities do not uphold free speech, the government will.

## ■ Universities: Industrial Disputes

**Alex Sobel:**

[\[30059\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 5 March 2020 to Question 21389 on Universities: Industrial Disputes, if he will make an assessment of the potential effect of the provisions of the Higher Education (Higher Amount) (England) Regulations 2010 on industrial disputes in universities.

**Michelle Donelan:**

The 2010 Higher Amount Regulations prescribed the higher amounts of tuition fees for new students from 1 September 2012 up to and including the 2016/17 academic year. These regulations were superseded in the 2017/18 academic year.

As stated in the answer to Question [21389](#), Government has made no specific assessment of the potential effect of the Higher Education (Higher Amount) (England) Regulations 2010 on the current disputes. It would not be proportionate to do so at this time.

**ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS****■ Agriculture: Sewage****Dr Matthew Offord:**[\[29957\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department takes to ensure that people who spread sludge monitor potential toxic elements contained in the product.

**Rebecca Pow:**

The use of sewage sludge on agricultural soils is regulated under the Sludge (Use in Agriculture) Regulations (SUiAR). These regulations and their supporting Code of Practice include maximum permissible concentrations of potentially toxic elements in soil after application of sewage sludge and maximum annual rates of application. Information on these regulations and the Code of Practice for sewage sludge in agriculture can be found on the GOV.UK website at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/sewage-sludge-in-agriculture-code-of-practice](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sewage-sludge-in-agriculture-code-of-practice).

Compliance checking against the SUiAR is undertaken by the Environment Agency (EA). On 17 March the EA published its Sludge Strategy to facilitate the safe and sustainable use of sludge on land. This strategy sets out the purpose, principles and priorities for delivering change to the regulation of sludge. Defra and the EA are working together to update the current legislation and provide industry and the public with the confidence that sludge is being managed correctly and safely.

**Dr Matthew Offord:**[\[29958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the closest distance is that sludge can be spread near residential properties.

**Rebecca Pow:**

There are no prescribed limits for spreading near residential areas, but it is the responsibility of local authorities to deal with any odour or nuisance issues. The Environment Agency will step in where there is a pollution risk.



## ■ Bees

**Alex Sobel:**

**[30136]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 12 March 2020 to Question 26166, what assessment he has made of the reasons for the increase in bee colonies since 2009.

**Rebecca Pow:**

In 2009 the Government launched the Healthy Bees Plan. The plan's aim was to achieve a sustainable and healthy population of managed honey bees in England and Wales via strengthened partnership working between Government and beekeeping stakeholders.

The first stage included a drive to increase our knowledge of the number and location of honey bee colonies. This meant promoting the benefits to beekeepers of registering their managed honey bee colonies on the National Bee Unit's voluntary website, BeeBase. Since 2009 the number of colonies in England and Wales recorded on BeeBase has increased from 108,649 to 212,054 in 2019. However, some of this increase will be due to new registrations of existing beekeepers rather than entirely made up of new colonies or beekeepers.

Knowing the location of beekeepers and their honey bee colonies has improved our ability to manage bee pests and diseases, raising husbandry standards through the sharing of best practice. In addition to better recording of colony numbers, it is thought beekeeping itself has also seen a revival with respondents to a recent Government survey indicating that pleasure, production of honey and conservation were important reasons for taking up the craft.

## ■ Bees: Research

**Alex Sobel:**

**[30137]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 12 March 2020 to Question 26166 on Bees, what the cost was of establishing a UK-wide pollinator monitoring and research partnership.

**Victoria Prentis:**

The UK-wide Pollinator Monitoring Research Partnership was established with funding from Defra and the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

The total cost over the three-year project period from 2016 to 2019 was £282,720.

In-kind contributions from UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UK CEH) and other academic and voluntary organisations were also committed to the project, to a value of £201,804 (for example for staff time, data sharing, software). The monitoring work itself was co-ordinated by UK CEH.

A follow-up project is now underway, building on the outcomes from this first one. Further details are available on the GOV.UK website at:

<http://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/>

**■ Cats: Meat****Jim Shannon:** [\[29956\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans the Government has to bring forward legislative proposals to ban human consumption of meat from cats.

**Victoria Prentis:**

The Government shares the public's high regard for animal welfare, including the welfare of cats, and we are committed to making the UK a world leader in protection of animals now we have left the EU.

The Government is appalled by the prospect of cats being consumed. However, it is already illegal to sell cat meat for human consumption and the Government has seen no evidence that cat meat is being sold or consumed in this country. We are confident that the current position in this country sends a clear message that the slaughter and consumption of cats will never be acceptable.

**■ Clean Air Zones: Computer Software****Afzal Khan:** [\[29995\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that the software required to enforce clean air zones is available by 2021.

**Afzal Khan:** [\[29996\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who will be responsible for collecting payments in relation to the enforcement of clean air zones.

**Rebecca Pow:**

The UK-wide Pollinator Monitoring Research Partnership was established with funding from Defra and the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

The total cost over the three-year project period from 2016 to 2019 was £282,720.

In-kind contributions from UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UK CEH) and other academic and voluntary organisations were also committed to the project, to a value of £201,804 (for example for staff time, data sharing, software). The monitoring work itself was co-ordinated by UK CEH.

A follow-up project is now underway, building on the outcomes from this first one. Further details are available on the GOV.UK website at:

<http://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/>

**■ Clean Air Zones: Finance****Afzal Khan:** [\[29997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will allocate additional funding to support the introduction of clean air zones.

**Rebecca Pow:**

The Government is committed to bringing roadside nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) concentrations within legal limits in the shortest possible time. That is why the Chancellor recently announced an additional £304 million to enable local authorities to take action to reduce nitrogen dioxide levels, including implementing clean air zones. This brings the total amount of funding committed to tackling NO<sub>2</sub> to £880 million.

**■ Derelict Land: Regeneration****Mr Ranil Jayawardena:**[\[30062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the environmental merits of brownfield regeneration rather than development on green field sites.

**Rebecca Pow:**

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has not recently had such discussions with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The Government supports the re-use as far as possible of suitable brownfield land for housing and other development needs over development on green field sites. We have announced further measures to support regeneration of brownfield land in our 'Planning for the future' policy paper dated 12 March 2020. Planning practice guidance also recognises that some brownfield land is of high environmental value, providing habitats for protected or priority species and other environmental benefits.

**■ Flood Control****Andrew Rosindell:**[\[29857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of river dredging on levels of flooding.

**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[29865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of using dredging to minimise the effects of flooding.

**Rebecca Pow:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bosworth on 3 March 2020, PQ UIN 20056.

**■ National Wildlife Crime Unit: Finance****Andrew Rosindell:** [\[29858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure the financial sustainability of the National Wildlife Crime Unit

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[29972\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his department is taking to ensure the continued financial sustainability of the National Wildlife Crime Unit.

**Victoria Prentis:**

Under a four-year funding agreement with the National Wildlife Crime Unit, Defra and the Home Office have jointly contributed £301,000 a year between 2016 and 2020 to the Unit's activities. Both departments have committed to maintain this funding for 2020/21. Defra will work with the unit to develop the case for continued funding as part of the next spending review.

In addition to the funding provided to the unit, we provide up to £6.3 million per year to support international action to counter poaching and the illegal wildlife trade.

**■ Recycling****Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[29902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support circular economy approaches to reduce the demand of raw primary materials.

**Rebecca Pow:**

The Government's Resources and Waste Strategy published in December 2018, sets out how we will reduce the demand for primary raw materials by moving from a make, take and throw society towards a more circular economy. It adopts a holistic approach covering the full product lifecycle from production, to consumption, to end of life.

To keep products in circulation for longer we are taking steps through the Environment Bill, seeking powers to: require products to be designed to be durable, repairable, and recyclable; require provision of information as to products in that respect; and use extended producer responsibility schemes in a way that incentivises more resource efficient design.

The Environment Bill also includes powers to enable us to deliver on other commitments in the Strategy which will improve the quantity and quality of the materials we recycle. These include commitments on extended producer responsibility; implementation of a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers; and introduction of consistent recycling collections across the country. Government is also taking steps to directly reduce demand for primary materials through a new tax on

plastic packaging - from April 2022, manufacturers and importers will be charged £200 per tonne on packaging made of less than 30% recycled content.

To make further progress with taking action up the waste hierarchy, we are developing proposals, on which we will consult, for a new Waste Prevention Programme for England, aimed at supporting reuse, repair, and remanufacture.

#### ■ **Rural Development Programme: Yorkshire and the Humber**

**Alex Sobel:**

[\[30138\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 12 March 2020 to Question 26167, how much of the £2.9 billion spending on agri-environment schemes was spent in Yorkshire and the Humber.

**Victoria Prentis:**

Under the current Rural Development Programme for England, the total amount paid under agri-environment Schemes in the Yorkshire & the Humber region so far is £243,607,972.

#### ■ **Seabed: Mining**

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[29893\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the findings of Flora and Fauna International's report entitled The Risks and Impacts of Deep Seabed Mining to Marine Ecosystems, published 12 March 2020.

**Rebecca Pow:**

The UK is implementing a precautionary principle to deep sea mining and has agreed not to sponsor or support the issuing of any exploitation licences for deep sea mining projects until there is sufficient scientific evidence about the potential impact on deep sea ecosystems and strong and enforceable environmental standards are in place. We will consider the report and its findings as we continue to negotiate the deep sea mining regulations and the environmental standards and guidance currently being developed by the International Seabed Authority.

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[29900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect on levels of biodiversity of the exploration and exploitation of seabed minerals by methods used in deep sea mining.

**Rebecca Pow:**

Defra is investigating the risks and environmental effects of deep sea mining through a cross-Government working group including the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The working group is supported by input from the National Oceanography Centre, Natural History Museum and British Geological Survey who

are involved in a number of ongoing academic projects considering the impacts of deep sea mining. In addition, FCO and Defra commissioned a workshop in 2019 which brought together UK universities, industry and consultancies involved in the assessment of deep sea mining activities, to share information, progress and research findings. The outputs of these discussions are being used to inform the UK's input into the development of regulations, standards and guidelines at the International Seabed Authority (ISA).

The UK implements a precautionary principle to deep sea mining and has agreed not to sponsor or support the issuing of any exploitation licences for deep sea mining projects until there is sufficient scientific evidence about the potential impact on deep sea ecosystems and strong and enforceable environmental standards have been developed by the ISA and are in place.

### ■ Supermarkets: Coronavirus

**Tommy Sheppard:**

[\[31643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he is having with supermarket chains and others to ensure that people with coeliac disease are guaranteed access to gluten-free foods while stocks are under pressure as a result of covid-19-related panic buying.

**Victoria Prentis:**

The Government has well-established ways of working with the food industry during disruption to supply situations. The food retail industry is working around the clock to ensure people have the food and products they need. We are aware of the additional availability issues faced by people who have particular dietary requirements, including those intolerant to gluten, and are working with the industry to ensure that everybody is able to get the food that they need. Industry is adapting quickly to any changes in demands, and food supply into and across the UK is resilient.

The Secretary of State is holding regular conversations with industry to discuss any additional support the Government can provide. To help industry respond to this unprecedented demand we have already introduced new measures to keep food supply flowing. We have issued guidance to local authorities to allow extended delivery hours to supermarkets so that shelves can be filled up quicker, and we have implemented extensions to drivers' hours.

The rules around labelling of allergens in food as well as labelling of 'gluten free' and 'very low gluten' will remain unchanged during the current challenging period.

We will continue to work closely with the industry over the coming days and months.

### ■ Trade Agreements: Standards

**Caroline Lucas:**

[\[29962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the Government's policy that trade negotiations will not compromise environmental and food standards includes no weakening of current UK pesticides standards relating to (a)

maximum residue levels for currently approved pesticide active substances, (b) bans on food being imported into the UK which contains detectable residues of currently unauthorised active substances, (c) authorisation of new active substances and (d) maintaining existing bans on active substances including the ban on the three neonicotinoids clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam; and if he will make a statement.

**Victoria Prentis:**

The UK is proud of its world-leading food, health and animal welfare standards. We will not compromise on our standards nor put the UK's biosecurity at risk as we negotiate new trade deals. Any trade agreements must respect the regulatory autonomy of both parties. Now that we have left the EU, the UK will operate an autonomous Sanitary and Phytosanitary regime, which covers the regulation of pesticides, to uphold our existing high standards.

The UK Government and devolved administrations have assured stakeholders that we will maintain current standards of environmental and health protection. Our EU exit legislation has carried across unchanged all of the statutory requirements of the EU regime relating to standards of protection, maximum residue level and approval of active substances. We will continue to ensure that decisions on the use of pesticides are based on careful scientific assessment of the risks, with the aim of achieving a high level of protection for people and the environment.

We will continue to draw on the considerable scientific and technical expertise of the Health and Safety Executive which will continue to operate as our expert national regulator on behalf of the UK Government and the devolved administrations. This puts the UK in a strong position in terms of having the necessary capacity and expertise to be able to take its own independent decisions after the transition period. There is a comprehensive Government programme of monitoring of pesticide residues in food, including imports, to determine whether food available to UK consumers complies with the statutory residue levels and is safe. The results of this monitoring are published following consideration by the Defra Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food. We will not compromise on these standards in our trade negotiations.

■ **Tree Felling: New Forest**

**Sir Desmond Swayne:**

[\[30665\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish the scientific evaluation undertaken by Natural England on the benefits of felling Scots Pines at Slap Bottom in the New Forest.

**Rebecca Pow:**

Natural England's advice to land owners and managers responsible for the New Forest is laid out in our "European Site Conservation Objectives: Supplementary advice on conserving and restoring site features" which brings together the best

available scientific evidence relating to the site's priority habitats and species (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6183967367626752>).

Heathland management requires the removal of trees such as birch and conifers to enable the rare heather habitat, grassland and mire habitats to thrive. The New Forest is a unique mosaic of natural habitats including broadleaved woodland which, where appropriate, is allowed to naturally expand its range supporting both biodiversity and climate change demands.

The biodiversity benefits of heathland are well known and its management and restoration forms part of the Government's commitments in the 25 Year Environment Plan. Heathland supports a range of specialist species that cannot live anywhere else. A total of 133 UK priority species are associated with lowland heathlands in England. These are species found exclusively on heathland sites or for which a significant proportion of records come from heathlands. The New Forest is now the UK stronghold for a number of these species as addressed in the following publication: Managing for species: Integrating the needs of England's priority species into habitat management (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/30025>).

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### ■ British Nationals Abroad: Coronavirus

**Emily Thornberry:**

[\[32097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the insurance industry on whether British nationals will be able to claim the cost of repatriation flights on their travel insurance policies.

**Nigel Adams:**

We are in regular contact with the insurance industry to understand the impact on them and keep the information on our travel advice pages up to date. The situation is fast moving, and our advice at this time is for British nationals to speak to their insurance company to discuss the options available to them.

### ■ Cameroon: Homicide

**Emily Thornberry:**

[\[29868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of which party or parties were responsible for the Ngarbuh massacre in Cameroon on 14th February.

**James Duddridge:**

The British Government is deeply concerned about reports of human rights violations and abuses by both security forces and armed separatists in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. The killing of civilians, including children, on 14 February in Ngarbuh was appalling. In my statement of 19 February I called for an



urgent and transparent investigation into what happened, and for those responsible to be held accountable. These messages were reiterated by the UK at the Human Rights Council on 27 February. We continue to call for restraint, an end to the violence and inclusive dialogue about the root causes of the crisis.

## ■ **Cameroon: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**

**Emily Thornberry:**

[\[29869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what reports his Department has received on the reasons that Andrew Pendleton, UNOCHA representative in Cameroon left that country; and whether he has received reports that Mr Pendleton received threats from (a) Cameroonian governor, Paul Atanga Nji and (b) other members of the Cameroonian elected officials.

**James Duddridge:**

We welcome the ongoing work of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in coordinating humanitarian responses in Cameroon. We also welcome the contribution of the former UN OCHA representative, Andrew Pendleton, and note the UN announcement of 25 February that he had departed Cameroon at the end of his contract. Allegations of intimidation of UN staff or humanitarian actors are deeply worrying. We call on all parties to respect humanitarian space and to ensure humanitarian access is protected. The UK urges the Government of Cameroon to engage with all international partners to bring peace to the North-West and South-West (Anglophone) regions.

## ■ **Commonwealth: Membership**

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[29846\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to promote the benefits of membership of the Commonwealth to potential new members.

**Nigel Adams:**

As Chair-in-Office, the UK is working with our partners to demonstrate the continuing relevance of the modern Commonwealth. This includes working with its three pillars - the Commonwealth Secretariat, the 53 other Member States, and its organisations and networks - to deliver on the ambitious commitments made during CHOGM 2018.

With the support of over £500m of UK programmes and projects, the Commonwealth has already made impressive progress on shared priorities, such as international trade, climate change and governance and rule of law. 31 Commonwealth countries are together now tackling marine plastic pollution, whilst over 3,000 women entrepreneurs across the Commonwealth have been supported to internationalise their businesses, and barriers to trade have been reduced.

**■ Diplomatic Service: Telephone Services****Emily Thornberry:** [\[32084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how many people have contacted the FCO consular services hotline since 16 March 2020 from the (a) UK and (b) rest of the world.

**Nigel Adams:**

Since 16 March, over 35,000 people have telephoned the FCO Consular Customer Contact Centres, over 400 calling from the UK. An additional 2800 email enquiries have been answered.

**■ Hong Kong: Press Freedom****Catherine West:** [\[31647\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent diplomatic steps he has taken to help ensure the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration is adhered to in relation to freedom of the press in Hong Kong.

**Nigel Adams:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* As Lord Ahmad said in the Lords on 19 March, we have consistently stated our concern about media freedoms in China. The Chinese Government's announcement that they will prevent certain American journalists from working in China and Macao further restricts transparency at a particularly important time. The suggestion by the Chinese MFA that this measure may apply in Hong Kong is deeply concerning. The Sino-British Joint Declaration is clear. It sets out that immigration decisions are the sole responsibility of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, and freedom of the press is guaranteed. It is imperative that these rights and freedoms are fully respected.

We are concerned about the implications this decision could have upon British Journalists. We will continue to monitor the situation and work with the Chinese and Hong Kong Governments on this issue. On 5 March Minister Adams met Liu Xiaoming, the Chinese Ambassador and discussed China and Hong Kong.

We remain fully committed to upholding Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and rights and freedoms underpinned by the legally binding Joint Declaration, and the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework set out in the Hong Kong Basic Law.

**■ Iran: Coronavirus****Catherine West:** [\[30920\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether the Government has assessed the effect of foreign sanctions on Iran on that country's ability to respond to covid-19.

**James Cleverly:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* Sanctions on Iran have had a significant economic impact. We are working with the international community to ensure that Iran receives

the humanitarian support it needs: the E3 (the UK, France and Germany) have provided a EUR 5 million package of financial and material assistance to Iran via the World Health Organisation and UN bodies to help with the response.

#### ■ **Iraq: Politics and Government**

**Emily Thornberry:** [\[29871\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has received from Iraqi politicians on the political situation in Iraq.

**James Cleverly:**

The UK maintains frequent engagement with all levels of Iraqi political leadership, both in London and through our Embassy in Baghdad. We are also working closely in coordination with international partners and the UN, to support the Government of Iraq. This engagement is critical to ensure that the UK and Iraq continue to work together to support the safety, security and prosperity of all Iraqis - including by deescalating recent tensions, and enabling the Iraqi Government to implement reforms in response to recent protests.

#### ■ **Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe**

**Emily Thornberry:** [\[29867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent attempts he has made to establish direct contacts with individuals within the Iranian regime with potential responsibility for the detention and treatment of Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe following the recent Iranian elections.

**James Cleverly:**

The permanent release of all arbitrarily detained dual nationals in Iran and their return to their families in the UK remains our top priority. Since the Iranian elections we have continued to raise the detention and treatment of Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe and other UK dual nationals at all appropriate levels with Iran. The Foreign Secretary raised this with Foreign Minister Zarif on 16 March and our Ambassador to Iran has consistently raised this with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

#### ■ **Saudi Arabia: Capital Punishment**

**Mr Alistair Carmichael:** [\[31451\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the effect on human rights of the use of the death penalty in Saudi Arabia.

**James Cleverly:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* We regularly make clear, using a range of Ministerial and diplomatic channels, that the British Government opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and in every country. This is especially the case for crimes other than the most serious and for juveniles. This is in line with the minimum standards set out in the EU Guidelines on the Death Penalty of 2008 and the

provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Arab Charter on Human Rights. We regularly raise human rights issues with Saudi Arabia, most recently by the Foreign Secretary during his visit earlier this month.

### ■ Seabed: Mining

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[29904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if she will undertake a review of the (a) scope and (b) objectives of the proposed International Seabed Authority Mining Code to ensure that that code includes a process for (i) protecting biodiversity, (ii) assessing the potential effects of mining on the environment and (iii) avoiding those effects that is (A) is able to take into account independent scientific advice, (B) includes stakeholder consultation, (C) allows for the rejection of mining proposals where the potential effects of those proposals are too great or uncertain and (D) provides for the potential closure of large, ecologically important areas of the deep sea to mineral extraction.

**James Duddridge:**

The draft Regulations for the exploitation phase of deep sea mining are being negotiated at the International Seabed Authority (ISA). The UK will continue to call for transparent, science-based and environmentally sound regulation of seabed mining by the ISA to ensure effective protection of deep sea habitats and biodiversity. We will use our position in the Council and Assembly of the ISA to secure the adoption of a mining code that provides for robust and accountable oversight of mining activity. This includes enshrining the precautionary principle and an ecosystem approach in the mining code; ensuring that in addition to the core regulations, effective and binding standards and guidelines to ensure environmentally sound mining have been adopted before exploitation licences are granted, and that these reflect the different specific environmental and other features of the different mineral deposits; ensuring that Regional Environmental Management Plans (REMPs) with robust environmental objectives are established before exploitation licences can be granted and that there is a clear regulatory link between the REMPs and exploitation licences; ensuring transparency in the implementation of the Regulations; reinforcing the importance of consultation and expert input both in the development of the Regulations, Standards and Guidelines and in the consideration of any future applications; allowing for the suspension of mining activities when operators fail to adhere to environmental safeguards or where new evidence of risk of serious harm arises.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ Alcoholism: Health Services

**Mary Glendon:**

[\[29906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to provide support for people with alcohol dependency who cannot access support services; and if he will make a statement.

**Mary Glendon:**[\[29907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to decrease the number of alcohol-related hospital admissions.

**Jo Churchill:**

Local authorities are responsible for assessing the needs of their local population, including people with alcohol dependency, and commissioning services to meet these needs.

Public Health England (PHE) supports local authorities in their work of needs assessment and commissioning alcohol prevention and treatment services by providing advice, guidance and data.

PHE is allocating £10.5 million of funding to help improve the lives of adults and children affected by alcohol. This includes £4.5 million innovation fund for local projects working with children and families and £6 million capital fund to improve access to alcohol treatment in the community. More information can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-awarded-to-23-projects-to-help-those-affected-by-alcohol>

As part of the NHS Long Term Plan, NHS England and NHS Improvement, with support from PHE, is helping acute hospitals with the highest rates of alcohol harm to establish or improve specialist alcohol care teams.

It is estimated that fully optimised alcohol care teams in the 25% of hospitals with the highest rates of alcohol-dependence-related admissions could prevent 50,000 admissions over five years. The NHS Long Term Plan can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/>

**■ Autism: Health Services****Kerry McCarthy:**[\[31452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to establish specialist autism teams in each region of England to (a) diagnose and (b) support autistic people.

**Helen Whately:**

The NHS Long Term Plan, published on 7 January 2019, sets out National Health Service commitments to improve diagnosis and support for autistic people. The NHS Long Term Plan does not prescribe that there should be specialist autistic teams in each region of England to diagnose and support autistic people. However, the NHS Long Term Plan sets out clear commitments and support, including increased investment, for local areas to increase the range of support and care available to autistic people in their area including children and young people with the most complex needs and their families.

**■ Cancer: Alcoholic Drinks****Mary Glendon:****[29909]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase people's awareness of the links between cancer and alcohol consumption.

**Jo Churchill:**

In 2018, Public Health England's Drink Free Days campaign highlighted the harm associated with drinking alcohol including cancer, weight gain and high blood pressure, and encourages middle-aged drinkers to use the tactic of taking more days off from drinking as a way of reducing their health risks from alcohol.

The links between alcohol and cancer are also highlighted in PHE's One You campaign, available to view at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/for-your-body/drink-less/>

**■ Care Homes: Finance****Dan Jarvis:****[R] [29918]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to increase funding to local authorities for care home places.

**Helen Whately:**

*[Holding answer 19 March 2020]:* Adult social care is delivered locally, and local authorities are responsible for deciding how they spend money on adult social care in their area.

We are providing £1.6 billion of additional funding to local authorities to assist them in their response to COVID-19. We expect the majority of this resilience funding will go to adult social care to meet increased demand and support providers and the workforce. In addition to this we are giving £1.3 billion to enhance the National Health Service discharge process which will get patients who no longer need urgent treatment home from hospitals safely and quickly.

In addition we are providing councils with access to an additional £1.5 billion for adults and children's social care in 2020/21. Future funding for social care will be set out at the next spending review.

**■ Coronavirus: Dental Services****Mohammad Yasin:****[32238]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of closing all dental practices to non-essential patient care to minimise the spread of covid-19.

**Jo Churchill:**

NHS England issued guidance, on 20 March 2020, setting out expectations for primary care dentistry to minimise spread of disease and protect dentists and patients during the current pandemic. The advice includes radically reducing the number of

routine check-ups and agreeing local arrangements to consolidate, where necessary, the provision of any essential, routine National Health Service work that cannot be delayed and urgent dental problems. The guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/Issue-2-Preparedness-letter-for-primary-dental-care-20-March-2020.pdf>

## ■ Coronavirus: Disease Control

**Yvette Cooper:**

[29832]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether it is the Government's objective to establish herd immunity against covid-19; and what level of infection is required for that immunity to be established.

**Jo Churchill:**

Herd immunity is not part of the Government action plan but is a natural by-product of an epidemic.

Our aims are to save lives, protect the most vulnerable, and relieve pressure on the National Health Service. We have now moved out of the contain phase and into delay, and we have experts working round the clock.

Every measure that we have or will introduce will be based on the best scientific evidence.

We are still learning about the properties of the new coronavirus so we cannot yet say with accuracy at what level of infection herd immunity might be realised.

**Yvette Cooper:**

[29833]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how the Government will assess whether the steps being taken are delaying the spread of covid-19 in the absence of full testing.

**Jo Churchill:**

Since February, the Government has had a sophisticated surveillance programme in place to test for COVID-19.

In addition to having expanded testing more generally, and continuing to do so, Public Health England specifically tests a sample of the population in order to assess the level of virus circulating in the community.

This helps us to understand what proportion of the population is affected at a given time and is used by modellers to estimate where we are in the pandemic and to assess the impact of the steps that have been taken.

## ■ Coronavirus: General Practitioners

**Mr Laurence Robertson:**

[29821]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent advice he has issued to GP surgeries on restricting patients' access as a result of covid-19; and if he will make a statement.

**Jo Churchill:**

*[Holding answer 19 March 2020]:* The latest guidance for general practitioners (GPs) is being updated on NHS England and NHS Improvement website at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/preparedness-letters-for-general-practice/>

The full utilisation of technology such as online triage is important.

**■ Coronavirus: Health Education****Sam Tarry:****[30197]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure provision of public information on covid-19 guidance in all languages spoken in cities throughout the UK.

**Jo Churchill:**

As part of the Government's work to ensure the population are informed about COVID-19 and how best to respond, work is ongoing to translate the stay at home guidance for households with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) and the guidance on social distancing for everyone in the United Kingdom and protecting older people and vulnerable adults (COVID-19) into a range of languages. These are the critical pieces of guidance that are relevant to a general public audience.

The translations include Polish, Welsh, Arabic (Modern), French, Simplified Chinese (Mandarin), Traditional Chinese (Cantonese), Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, and Portuguese.

**■ Coronavirus: Intensive Care****Mr Kevan Jones:****[29838]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps the Government is taking to ensure the NHS has an adequate number of intensive care beds to respond effectively to the covid-19 outbreak.

**Jo Churchill:**

It is the Government's priority that the National Health Service has appropriate equipment to respond to COVID-19. This includes the provision of intensive care beds. The Department is working closely with NHS England and the devolved administrations to ensure this is achieved.

NHS England is actively assessing the critical care capacity of NHS organisations and the availability of additional facilities in the independent sector. It is working to ensure that hospitals have as much ventilation equipment as required and, crucially, the skilled and trained people to use it.



Information on critical care bed capacity is published by NHS England and can be found at the following link:

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

## ■ Coronavirus: Pharmacy

**Thangam Debbonaire:** **[30141]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure pharmacies do not run out of medical supplies as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

**Jo Churchill:**

The country is well prepared to deal with any impacts of COVID-19 and we have stockpiles of generic drugs in the event of any supply issues.

We are working closely with industry, the National Health Service and others in the supply chain to help ensure patients can access the medicines they need.

Precautions are in place to reduce the likelihood of future shortages.

## ■ Coronavirus: Prescription Drugs

**Lilian Greenwood:** **[29959]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, what steps he is taking to ensure that immunosuppressed people are not required to attend GP surgeries to collect prescriptions of controlled medication.

**Lilian Greenwood:** **[29961]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to simplify the process for immunosuppressed people collecting controlled medication during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Jo Churchill:**

*[Holding answer 19 March 2020]:* There are already e-prescriptions and medicine delivery services in place around the country. For controlled medications, someone can pick up the medicine for someone else, they just need to show their ID.

## ■ Coronavirus: Public Health

**Ellie Reeves:** **[30119]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure users of (a) other languages, (b) British Sign Language and (c) Braille have timely and accessible information on covid-19.

**Jo Churchill:**

All guidance, statements and public information released by the Government are readily available to read online information on COVID-19 from Public Health England

and the Department is translated into British Sign Language videos can be found at the following link:

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

Resources for COVID-19 are currently available in nine other languages to ensure that support and advice can be given to non-English speakers. These languages are Polish, Welsh, Arabic (Modern), French, Simplified Chinese (Mandarin), Traditional Chinese (Cantonese), Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, and Portuguese.

NHS England's Accessible Information Standard sets out the National Health Service's obligations around providing information in an accessible format for people who use British Sign Language and braille.

**Afzal Khan:**

**[32233]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when his Department's guidance on covid-19 will be made available in other languages; what information is being translated; and into which languages that guidance will be translated.

**Jo Churchill:**

As part of the Government's work to ensure people are informed about COVID-19 and how best to respond, work is ongoing to translate the stay at home guidance for households with possible COVID-19; the guidance on social distancing and protecting older people and vulnerable adults into a range of languages. These are the critical pieces of guidance that are relevant to a general public audience.

The translations include Polish, Welsh, Arabic (Modern), French, Simplified Chinese (Mandarin), Traditional Chinese (Cantonese), Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, and Portuguese.

The stay at home guidance for households with possible COVID-19 can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>

## ■ **Coronavirus: Screening**

**Mr Stephen Morgan:**

**[30157]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the Government's eligibility criteria are for covid-19 testing.

**Jo Churchill:**

As we have moved from 'contain' and into the 'delay' phase of COVID-19, Public Health England, together with NHS England and the Department, has agreed we will need to prioritise testing for those most at risk of severe illness from the virus.

Most adults in good health who develop symptoms will fully recover, and the Chief Medical Officer has advised that we need to prioritise testing to those who have the greatest clinical need.

Tests will primarily be given to:

- all patients in critical care for pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) or flu like illness;
- all other patients requiring admission to hospital for pneumonia, ARDS or flu like illness; and
- where an outbreak has occurred in a residential or care setting, for example long-term care facility prisons.

We are also seeking testing capacity to extend to National Health Service staff who are symptomatic.

**Sam Tarry:** [\[30199\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how long the covid-19 testing and diagnosis process takes; and what steps he is taking to make covid-19 testing more (a) accessible and (b) efficient.

**Jo Churchill:**

Testing in most laboratories currently takes 24-48 hours from the time a sample arrives. This is because of the numbers received and handling the COVID-19 specimens safely involves a complex laboratory process.

Public Health England (PHE) has rolled its own test out to a number of National Health Service collaborators to increase daily testing capacity and it is evaluating commercial tests to allow the NHS to consider faster tests.

On 17 March, the Prime Minister announced that capacity would increase to 25,000 a day in two weeks.

## ■ Coronavirus: Voluntary Work

**Mr Stephen Morgan:** [\[30168\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that people volunteering to help people vulnerable to covid-19 do so safely.

**Jo Churchill:**

Guidance has been provided for those who are caring for those who are vulnerable to COVID-19, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults#what-is-the-advice-for-visitors-including-those-who-are-providing-care-for-you>

## ■ Eating Disorders

**Scott Benton:** [\[30192\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve the teaching of eating disorders in medical training.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

Mental health should be an integral part of medical education and training so that all doctors have the necessary knowledge and experience of mental health to assess patients holistically, considering the individuals' physical, social and psychological needs. All newly qualified doctors, as a condition of their registration with the General Medical Council (GMC), must explain and illustrate by professional experience the principles for the identification, safe management and referral of patients with mental health conditions.

The Government is committed to provide the best training experience for all doctors in training and works with the GMC and relevant stakeholders to ensure doctors in training receive the necessary mental health training to meet the current and future needs of patients. The GMC, at the request of the Department held a roundtable on 21 November 2019 to use their influence to improve educational knowledge and skill in the recognition and treatment of eating disorders.

■ **General Practitioners: Home Visits**

**Jane Stevenson:**[\[30055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his Department's policy is on GP home visits during the covid-19 outbreak, and if he will make a statement.

**Jo Churchill:**

Home visits are at the discretion of the local practitioner. However, the full utilisation of technology will be of benefit to patients and staff. Specific guidance on how general practitioners (GPs) delivering home visits should deal with cases or suspected cases of COVID-19 has been issued to GPs as part of the Standard Operating Procedure for General Practice.

■ **General Practitioners: Standards**

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[30099\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of GP appointments made in (a) 2019 and (b) 2015.

**Jo Churchill:**

The estimated number of general practice appointments for 2019 is shown in the following table. Figures for 2015 are not available.

	NUMBER OF GENERAL PRACTICE APPOINTMENTS
2019	312.0 million

Source: NHS Digital

Notes:

1. The data in the response includes appointments with all healthcare professional types, including general practitioners (GPs) and other practice staff.

2. Monthly appointment totals are affected by seasonality and the number of working days in a month. For this reason, we use 12-month totals comparisons over time.
3. The January 2020 publication included data from over 95.8% of GP practices, covering over 96.5% of all registered patients and all clinical commissioning groups. Data from all four main system suppliers - EMIS, TPP, Microtest and Vision - are included in the publication.
4. The publication draws on responses from practices that use management information systems supplied by the four main GP information system providers in England. Between them, these supply approximately 95% of the systems in use in England.

## ■ Health: Older People

**Alex Cunningham:**

[\[29943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress has been made on meeting the objective in the Ageing Society Grand Challenge to ensure that people can enjoy at least 5 extra healthy, independent years of life by 2035.

**Helen Whately:**

Delivering the Ageing Society Grand Challenge (ASGC) mission will require complex systems thinking across a number of areas and we are already working closely across Government, industry, academia and the voluntary sector to do this.

We have invested £98 million through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund Healthy Ageing programme to enable businesses, including social enterprises, to develop and deliver services and products to support people as they age. We have also announced Andy Briggs as the ASGC Business Champion and our plans to establish the UK Longevity Council.

In 2019, the Department published the consultation document 'Advancing our Health: Prevention in the 2020s', which has the ASGC mission at its core and sets out the commitments to contribute towards achieving it.

## ■ Hearing: Screening

**James Wild:**

[\[30054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to include hearing screening in the NHS Health Checks programme.

**Jo Churchill:**

The Government's prevention Green Paper 'Advancing our Health: Prevention in the 2020s' recognised that while the NHS Health Check programme has achieved a lot and continues to support key aims of the NHS Long Term Plan, the time is right to undertake an evidence-based review of how it could be improved in light of advances

in medical and behavioural science; digital technology, and opportunities for more innovative implementation. This will include consideration of extending the range of health and care advice checks can offer. The review will take into account the responses to the Green Paper consultation. Further information on arrangements for the review will be published in due course.

## ■ Hospitals: Crimes of Violence

**Mary Glendon:**

[29910]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support healthcare staff who are (a) abused and (b) injured by people intoxicated with alcohol.

**Helen Whately:**

The Government and the National Health Service will not tolerate any form of verbal or physical abuse against NHS staff. The NHS recently agreed the Joint Agreement on Offences Against Emergency Workers with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. This Joint Agreement provides a framework to ensure effective investigation and prosecution of cases where staff are the victim of a crime and sets out the standards victims of these crimes can expect. This Joint Agreement also sets out the support that NHS staff will receive from their line manager or supervisor if they are victims of abuse or violence.

## ■ Hospitals: Languages

**Ellie Reeves:**

[30120]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure hospitalised users of (a) other languages and (b) British Sign Language have access to communication support.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

National Health Service providers working with their NHS commissioners should be taking steps to ensure hospitalised users receive access to interpreters in community languages and British Sign Language (BSL).

NHS England and NHS Improvement published guidance for Interpreting and Translation principles in primary care. This guidance is available for NHS providers and commissioners to help them in their roles providing hospitalised patients with communication support, whether that is community languages or BSL.

The guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/primary-care/primary-care-commissioning/interpreting/>

**■ Housing: Health****Alex Cunningham:**[\[29944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has responsibilities for ensuring that homes and buildings are healthy places for their occupants; and if he will make a statement.

**Jo Churchill:**

A high-quality, safe, and suitable home can help people stay independent and healthy for longer, whilst reducing health and social care costs.

The Department funds the Disabled Facilities Grant to support older and disabled people on low-incomes to adapt their homes to make them suitable for their needs. It was recently announced that funding for 2020-21 will be maintained at £505 million.

We also provide funding to build specialised housing - through the Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund, with up to £76 million available in 2019-20.

With reference to new mainstream housing, the Home of 2030 is a cross-government initiative between Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department of Health and Social Care to bring forward the design and delivery of high-quality homes which are energy efficient, inclusively designed, and suitable for all generations. The design and delivery competition launched in March 2020.

**■ Liver Diseases: Diagnosis****Jim Shannon:**[\[29880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve the diagnosis of liver disease.

**Jim Shannon:**[\[29881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made on the need for improved diagnosis of liver disease.

**Jim Shannon:**[\[29882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect on diagnosis rates of incentives for local health systems to improve the diagnosis of liver disease.

**Helen Whately:**

From an alcohol-related liver disease perspective, the National Health Service was planning to introduce a new incentive (Commissioning for Quality and Innovation, or CQUIN) to support early identification of cirrhosis and enhanced fibrosis in alcohol dependent individuals. The CQUIN will incentivise acute and mental health providers to ensure that appropriate tests are carried out on inpatients who have a diagnosis of alcohol dependence. However, in light of COVID-19, the CQUIN 2020/21 scheme will be suspended until further notice.

In line with the commitment in the NHS Long Term Plan, hospitals with the highest rate of alcohol dependence-related admissions will be supported to optimise Alcohol Care Teams. Areas at highest need will be supported by targeted national investment.

In 2019 to 2020, Public Health England (PHE) awarded £6 million capital funding to 23 local authorities to support their ambitions to increase access to alcohol treatment. This includes supporting nine areas to purchase Fibroscan machines to increase early detection of fibrosis/cirrhosis and access to treatment for those with alcohol-related liver disease.

PHE are also supporting work to increase opportunities for the earlier detection of alcohol-related liver disease in people drinking at or above high-risk levels. This includes new NHS Health Check guidance to encourage referral for liver investigation.

NHS England is supporting a programme to identify people with hepatitis C infection at an early stage to avoid subsequent liver disease.

## ■ Loneliness: Older People

**Ellie Reeves:**

**[30124]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what guidance he plans to issue to people aged 70 and over that are self-isolating to (a) combat loneliness and (b) stay fit and healthy.

**Jo Churchill:**

Those who are self-isolating are protecting the lives of others, as well as making sure the National Health Service does not get overwhelmed. However, it can be difficult, frustrating and lonely for some people, especially if there is limited space or no access to a garden.

Guidance on looking after personal wellbeing while self-isolating is provided at the following link:

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

This guidance advises those who are self-isolating to stay in touch with family and friends over the phone or on social media, and signposts sources of support and information that can help, such as the Every Mind Matters website, available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

The guidance also suggests activities such as cooking, reading, online learning and watching films, or taking part in light exercise within the home or garden if those who are self-isolating feel well enough.



## ■ Lung Cancer

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[29843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people were diagnosed with lung cancer in the last year for which figures are available.

**Jo Churchill:**

The number of lung cancers diagnosed in 2018 was 38,996. This is the latest complete year of registration. The 2018 cancer registration statistics are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/cancer-registration-statistics-england-2018>

## ■ Mental Illness: Veterans

**Marco Longhi:**

[\[30215\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what support his Department provides to veterans in Dudley with mental ill health.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

In Dudley, veterans can access mainstream National Health Service mental health services along with the veteran specific mental health services NHS England and NHS Improvement have put in place, the Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service and the Complex Treatment Service.

## ■ NHS

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

[\[30709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate his Department has made of the amount of (a) civil service time and (b) resources used for the development of the NHS People's Plan.

**Helen Whately:**

We have not assessed how much civil service time or resources have been used in the development of the NHS People Plan.

The final NHS People Plan is the long-term workforce strategy for the National Health Service and will be crucial to the success of several Government commitments. It will set out a clear framework for collective action on workforce priorities, with a focus on growing and retaining a well-skilled workforce across the whole NHS.

## ■ NHS 111: Health Professions

**Dan Jarvis:**

[\[31513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has plans to increase the number of medical professionals available via the NHS 111 telephone service.

**Edward Argar:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* Around 1,000 additional call handlers have already been trained, responding to the increased volumes of calls to the NHS 111 telephone service.

The NHS has been clear that investment will increase if demand continues to rise.

The new NHS 111 online service provides people with the right advice which frees up clinical call handlers time so that they are able to prioritise those experiencing symptoms.

**■ NHS and Public Health England: Children****John Cryer:****[32047]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans the Government has for the care of children of NHS workers and Public Health England workers if they are (a) incapacitated due to illness and (b) hospitalised.

**Jo Churchill:**

The NHS England has recently published in-depth guidance covering a range of scenarios for National Health Service and Public Health England workers, which will be updated as the situation develops, which can be found at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/>

NHS England has written to all colleagues recently and a copy of the letter is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/urgent-next-steps-on-nhs-response-to-covid-19-letter-simon-stevens.pdf>

Support for NHS and PHE workers is a high priority for the Government, and it will continually assess the measures required to support them fully.

**■ NHS: Cancer****Alberto Costa:****[30088]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps the Government is taking to increase the number of oncologists in the NHS.

**Jo Churchill:**

The Cancer Workforce Plan (published in 2017), identified a range of measures to increase the numbers of clinical radiologists, histopathologists, oncologists and radiographers by 2021. This included improving working practices, attracting qualified people back to the National Health Service and international recruitment. Between March 2016 and March 2019, there has been a net increase of 2,515 full time equivalent staff across the seven priority professions identified in the Cancer Workforce Plan, including an increase of 167 clinical and medical oncologists.

The People Plan will build upon the progress already made and take targeted action to ensure the supply of NHS staff who play a vital role in delivering cancer care, including oncologists.

## ■ NHS: Coronavirus

**Marco Longhi:**

[\[30038\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps the Government is taking to facilitate the return of retired medical professionals to help the NHS during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Helen Whately:**

The General Medical Council (GMC) has powers to temporarily register medical practitioners during an emergency situation with the threat of loss of life and serious illness.

We are working closely with the GMC to ensure they have plans in place to identify, contact and register key groups of staff (including recently retired doctors) using these powers.

The National Health Service in each of the four countries will be responsible for overseeing the deployment of doctors who come forward to provide services in response to COVID-19.

## ■ NHS: Negligence

**Fiona Bruce:**

[\[32133\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much compensation was paid from the public purse in (a) 2015, (b) 2016, (c) 2017, (d) 2018 and (e) 2019 for wrongful births.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

NHS Resolution manages clinical negligence and other claims against the National Health Service in England.

NHS Resolution have provided the following information:

NHS Resolution define “wrongful birth” as a clinical negligence claim brought by the parents of a child born with birth defects, alleging that negligent treatment or advice deprived them of the opportunity to avoid conception or terminate the pregnancy.

Number of Claims Closed/Settled with damages paid related to ‘Wrongful Birth’ per financial year

YEAR OF CLOSURE (SETTLEMENT YEAR FOR PERIODICAL PAYMENT ORDERS)	NUMBER OF CLAIMS	DAMAGES PAID £
2014/15	6	8,158,352
2015/16	13	17,313,513
2016/17	13	12,520,949
2017/18	16	13,363,110
2018/19	10	17,296,750

Note: The figures supplied are for each financial year rather than calendar year. The figures for the 2019/20 financial year are not yet available.

#### ■ Nurses: Recruitment

**Daniel Zeichner:**

[\[30862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has for nurses who qualified outside of the UK and whose qualifications are not recognised in the UK to work in the NHS during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Helen Whately:**

The Government recognises the valuable contribution that healthcare workers who have trained outside of the United Kingdom make to the health and social care sector.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is the independent regulator of nurses and midwives in the UK and nursing associates in England. It sets the standards that registrants must meet to demonstrate that they are capable of practising safely and effectively in those professions.

Overseas professionals whose qualifications and training do not meet the NMC's qualification standards will continue to be able to work in the National Health Service and wider health and care sector during the COVID-19 outbreak, delivering a range of vital non-regulated roles.

**■ Obesity: Health Services**

**Mary Glendon:** [\[32239\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 5 March 2020 to Question 21988 on World Obesity Day, what plans the Government has to improve weight management services for adults living with obesity.

**Mary Glendon:** [\[32241\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 5 March 2020 to Question 21989 on Obesity, what steps the Government is taking to reduce weight stigma among adults living with obesity.

**Jo Churchill:**

Through chapter three of the childhood obesity plan, published in July 2019 as part of 'Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s', we are exploring how we can support individuals to achieve and maintain a healthier weight. As part of this process, we have launched a review into weight management services to understand how we can empower people living with obesity to achieve and maintain a healthier weight and we are working with NHS England to develop approaches to improve the quality of brief advice given by health and care professionals on weight management in general practice.

The Department recognises the stigma associated with overweight and obesity, and is taking action to meet our bold ambition to halve childhood obesity by 2030 and significantly reduce the gap in obesity between children from the most and least deprived areas by 2030.

**■ Obesity: Take-away Food**

**Mary Glendon:** [\[32243\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of food delivery orders with minimum value requirements on trends in the level of (a) takeaway calorie consumption and (b) obesity; and if he will he make a statement.

**Mary Glendon:** [\[32244\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment his Department has made of the effect of the takeaway delivery sector on levels of obesity.

**Jo Churchill:**

The Department has not made a recent assessment of the effect of the takeaway delivery sector on levels of obesity.

Through the second chapter of our Childhood Obesity Plan, published in June 2018, we have consulted on introducing consistent calorie labelling in the out-of-home sector to help families make healthier choices. The consultation closed in December 2018. We will publish our response as soon as we can.

**■ Pregnancy: Leukaemia****Sir Greg Knight:** [32067]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of pre-natal testing for HTLV-1; and if he will make a statement.

**Jo Churchill:**

The United Kingdom National Screening Committee (UK NSC) advises Ministers and the National Health Service in the four UK countries about all aspects of population screening and supports implementation of screening programmes.

The UK NSC last reviewed the evidence for the introduction of an antenatal screening programme for Human T-cell Lymphotropic Virus (HTLV) infection in pregnancy in the UK in 2017 and concluded that the evidence did not support the introduction of screening. The UK NSC's assessment is published and available at the following link:

<https://legacyscreening.phe.org.uk/htlv>

**■ Public Health Laboratory Service****Meg Hillier:** [32075]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many public health laboratories have closed in England and Wales from 2010 to 2020.

**Jo Churchill:**

Since 2010 the Health Protection Agency (HPA) and Public Health England (PHE) have withdrawn from the direct management of four regional laboratories. In each instance HPA and PHE then commissioned arrangements with the National Health Service laboratories in these regions to support the required public health functions.

**■ Social Workers****Jeremy Hunt:** [31464]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many social care workers voluntarily left Social Work England's register in each of the last three years.

**Jeremy Hunt:** [31465]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many social care workers were struck off Social Work England's register in each of the last three years.

**Helen Whately:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* Social Work England (SWE) took over the regulation of social workers in England on 2 December 2019 from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). The figures for 2020 are between the period of 1 January – 18 March 2020.

The number of social workers in England who voluntarily left the register of social workers in England since 2017 is shown in the following table:

TOTAL	2017 HCPC	2018 HCPC	2019 HCPC	2020 (TO 18 MARCH) SWE
9,436	1,099	7,090	1,078	169

The number of social workers in England who were struck off the register of social workers in England in since 2017 is shown in the following table:

TOTAL	2017 HCPC	2018 HCPC	2019 HCPC	2020 (TO 18 MARCH) SWE
202	71	62	65	4

## HOME OFFICE

### ■ Action Fraud

**Rehman Chishti:** [\[30752\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent steps she has taken to ensure Action Fraud deals with cases in (a) a timely and (b) an effective manner.

**James Brokenshire:**

We are clear that the law enforcement response to fraud must improve. As the National Lead Force for fraud, the City of London Police (CoLP) are responsible for the performance of the Action Fraud service.

This includes ensuring that reports are dealt with in a timely and effective manner. We are working closely with law enforcement to ensure the recommendations set out in Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report, as well as the independent review led by Sir Craig Mackey into the standards, culture and management of Action Fraud, are implemented effectively in order to improve the response to fraud at the local, regional and national levels, including the support provided to victims of fraud.

### ■ Asylum: Croydon

**Alison Thewliss:** [\[31544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will introduce alternatives to the requirement for people to travel to Croydon to submit an asylum application for the duration of the covid-19 outbreak.

**Chris Philp:**

We continue to monitor the Covid-19 virus situation closely and we will make appropriate adjustments to requirements and processes where necessary and appropriate.

■ **Asylum: France****Philip Davies:****[29919]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many asylum seekers who have arrived in the UK from France have been returned to France in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

**Chris Philp:**

The UK has a proud history of providing protection to those who need it, in accordance with our international obligations under the Refugee Convention and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Those found not to need protection are refused and if unsuccessful at a subsequent appeal will be removed from the UK and it is an established principle that those seeking asylum should claim it in the first safe country they reach.

The Home Office publishes data on the number of returns from the UK and Dublin regulation in the ' [Immigration Statistics Quarterly Release](#) '.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>

However, the data do not show which of these have previously arrived from France.

Data on:

1) The number of Returns to country of destination are published in table Ret\_D02 of the [Returns detailed datasets](#), <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-datasets/returns-and-detention-datasets>

2) The number of individuals who have been transferred to an EU member state are published in table Dub\_D01 of the Dublin regulation datasets. This data is published annually and includes data dating back to 2015. Please note that this shows the country where the individual has been transferred to and not necessarily the nationality of the individual.

Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbook. The latest data relates to the year ending December 2019.

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



## ■ European Institute of Human Sciences: Muslim Brotherhood

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[29860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information her Department holds on potential links between the European Institute for Human Sciences and the Muslim Brotherhood.

**James Brokenshire:**

The Government's comprehensive review of the Muslim Brotherhood, completed in December 2015 and published on gov.uk, concluded the movement is a secretive organisation and that parts of it – globally – have a highly ambiguous relationship with violent extremism. The Government keeps under review the views promoted and activities undertaken by the Muslim Brotherhood's associates in the UK in accordance with the five commitments included in the former Prime Minister's statement to Parliament.

## ■ Fraud: Convictions

**Rehman Chishti:**

[\[29921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to increase conviction rates for fraud offences.

**James Brokenshire:**

The Government recognises that to increase conviction rates, there needs to be an increased pipeline of cases under investigation. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS) carried out an inspection of the police response to fraud last year. The review, published in April 2019, found that significant improvements are required to ensure the model works more effectively and efficiently, including the need for a much more co-ordinated national approach with clear roles and responsibilities.

The Home Office is working closely with law enforcement to ensure the recommendations set out in the HMICFRS report are implemented effectively in order to improve the response to fraud at the local, regional and national levels, including the support provided to victims of fraud.

In addition, working with the Home Office, the National Economic Crime Centre are currently progressing work to step up the immediate operational response to fraud, delivering an immediate surge in operational activity across law enforcement to tackle fraud.

The scale and complexity of the threat from serious and organised crime, including fraud, means that we need to do more to develop our response. A formal review is in progress, led by Sir Craig Mackey QPM, to identify the powers, capabilities, governance and funding needed to enable us to improve our response to serious and organised crime in all its forms, including fraud. The final report is due in Spring 2020.

**■ Home Office: Coronavirus****Alison Thewliss:** [\[31543\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will suspend the requirement for people to report to the Home Office during the period of the covid-19 outbreak.

**Chris Philp:**

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 16 March, and Public Health England (PHE) advice in relation to COVID-19, Home Office Immigration Enforcement are reviewing the frequency with which people need to report. While this goes ahead, we have temporarily deferred reporting. We will continue to contact all those who report via SMS text message with details of their future reporting dates. We will keep this under constant review in light of the ongoing situation.

**■ Immigrants: Detainees****Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[31559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has plans to release immigration detainees to reduce the rate of infection of covid-19 in response to the decision to extend early release for some prisoners.

**Chris Philp:**

The health of those in immigration removal centres is of the utmost importance but we remain committed to removing foreign national offenders or those who violate our immigration rules. Detention plays a key role in securing our borders and maintaining effective immigration control.

Decisions to detain an individual are based on all of the information known at the time. As circumstances change, temporary release may then become the most appropriate option.

We are following all Public Health England guidance and have robust contingency plans in place. Measures such as protective isolation will be considered to minimise the risk of Covid-19 spreading to vulnerable groups in the immigration detention estate.

Basic hygiene is a key part of tackling Coronavirus. Handwashing facilities are available in all immigration removal centres and we are working closely with suppliers to ensure adequate supply of soap and cleaning materials.

All immigration removal centres have dedicated health facilities run by doctors and nurses which are managed by the NHS or appropriate providers.

**■ Visas: Foreign Nationals****Dame Diana Johnson:** [\[31456\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 17 March 2020 to Question 28642 on Foreign Nationals, what plans she has to make

provision under paragraph 39E (1) of the Immigration Rules that a good reason for extension of leave will include self-isolation as a result of covid-19.

**Kevin Foster:**

Paragraph 39E (1) of the Immigration Rules already provides for a limited period of overstaying to be disregarded where an application is made within 14 days of the applicant's previous leave expiring, if it is considered that there was a good reason beyond the control of the applicant or their representative, provided in or with the application, why the application could not be made in-time.

The Home Office has also put in place a range of measures to support those affected by travel restrictions associated with coronavirus, including taking a pragmatic approach to visa extensions. We continue to monitor the situation in all countries, and we are keeping this under constant review.

A dedicated coronavirus immigration helpline

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

No one will be unfairly penalised for events beyond their control.

■ **Visas: Married People**

**Alison Thewliss:**

[31541]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will relax the requirements of the minimum income threshold in spousal visas during the period of the covid-19 outbreak.

**Chris Philp:**

The Home Office has put in place a range of measures to support those affected by the covid-19 outbreak. We continue to monitor the situation closely and may make adjustments to requirements where necessary and appropriate.

## HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ **Charities: Contracts**

**Daniel Zeichner:**

[30143]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the (a) accessibility of the tendering processes for Government and local authority contracts for smaller charities and (b) ability of smaller charities to successfully compete for those contracts.

**Mr Simon Clarke:**

My Department and all local authorities are required to tender for contracts in ways which comply with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. This includes a duty of fairness and equal treatment of all types of organisations, which includes small

charitable organisations. Local authorities are separate contracting authorities under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and as such free to set their own local policies and procedures.

Wherever practical, the Department takes steps to make interested parties aware of our need in advance through advertising on Contracts Finder, the UK Government tendering system, and pre-tender market engagement activities. We will ensure that any limitations on those that can tender are proportionate to the specific tender, including any financial stability assessment.

Contract award criteria will be specific to the tender to make sure that the best blend of quality and price are obtained. These are designed to make sure any type of organisation is able to demonstrate their capability to deliver our requirements.

My department and the Government as a whole is committed to creating diversity of supply for its contracts, recognising the skills and expertise to deliver can come from different organisation types.

#### ■ Heating: Carbon Emissions

**Alex Cunningham:**

[\[29939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities, and Local Government, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of low carbon heating technologies on new build homes; and what funding from the public purse is being made available to those technologies.

**Christopher Pincher:**

The Government remains fully committed to meeting its target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and recognises the important contribution that the energy efficiency of buildings has to make in meeting it. We have committed to introduce a Future Homes Standard by 2025. This means new homes will be fit for the future, with low carbon heating and lower energy use through high levels of energy efficiency.

As a stepping stone towards the Future Homes Standard we are proposing a strengthening of these requirements in 2020 and then a further strengthening by 2025. We have consulted on a meaningful and achievable increase to the energy efficiency standards for new homes to be introduced through the Building Regulations in 2020. The analysis that underpinned this consultation considered the effect of low carbon heating technologies on the cost of building new homes, the cost of bills for consumers and of the carbon emissions of these new homes.

There are no current plans for any additional funding to be made available to support low carbon heating in new homes.

## ■ Homelessness: Coronavirus

**Mr Stephen Morgan:** [\[30895\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that (a) homeless people, (b) rough sleepers who do not meet the legal test of Priority Need but have (i) underlying health conditions and (ii) are in the age demographic most susceptible to the effects of covid-19 are safeguarded.

**Mr Stephen Morgan:** [\[30896\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans he has to amend the criteria for Priority Need for (a) homeless people and (b) rough sleepers to reflect the (i) age and (ii) underlying health condition implications of covid-19.

**Mr Stephen Morgan:** [\[30898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what additional funding will be made available to local authorities to provide housing for (a) rough sleepers and (b) homeless people to cater for the additional number of people that will qualify for Priority Need during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Luke Hall:**

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

As an initial first step we have announced £3.2 million in emergency funding for local authorities to help rough sleepers and those at risk of sleeping rough to self-isolate. This funding will assist local authorities with providing accommodation and support to vulnerable people who are at risk of, or who have been diagnosed with, Covid-19.

Priority need is decided by local authorities on a case by case basis. We have advised local authorities to use this funding flexibly to accommodate any rough sleeper or person at imminent risk of sleeping rough, who is unable to self-isolate. £1.6 billion will go to local authorities to help them respond to other pressures related to Covid-19 across all the services they deliver. This includes increasing support for the adult social care workforce and for services helping the most vulnerable, including homeless people.

## ■ Housing

**Antony Higginbotham:** [\[30203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans are in place for local authorities to bring derelict housing stock back into use.

**Christopher Pincher:**

Local authorities are equipped with a range of powers and strong incentives to tackle empty homes, including those that are derelict. Through the New Homes Bonus, they

earn the same financial reward for bringing an empty home back into use as for building a new one. Billing authorities have the discretion to charge up to 100 per cent extra council tax – on top of the standard bill – on properties that have been empty for at least two years.

In certain circumstances, local authorities can apply for an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) to temporarily take over the management of a property that has been empty for more than two years and bring it back into use. Local authorities have a variety of compulsory purchase powers which they can use to acquire and develop derelict or empty property, including for housing purposes. However, compulsory purchase is intended for use as a last resort and there must always be a compelling case in the public interest.

### ■ Housing: Blackpool

**Scott Benton:**

**[30208]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many new (a) houses and (b) social houses have been constructed in Blackpool in each year since 2011.

**Christopher Pincher:**

The number of new homes built by local authority area since 2012-13 is published in Live Table 123, which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-net-supply-of-housing>. The number of new affordable homes by local authority area, type (new build or acquisition) and tenure (e.g. social rent) since 1991-92 is published in Live Table 1011, which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply>.

### ■ Housing: Construction

**Marco Longhi:**

**[30036]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans the Government has to strengthen the rights of local communities on section 106 agreements.

**Christopher Pincher:**

The Government has introduced a requirement for all local authorities that receive developer contributions, including from section 106 agreements, to publish an annual Infrastructure Funding Statement. The statements, which must first be published by 31 December 2020 should identify income and spend on infrastructure and affordable housing and the choices local authorities have made about how future contributions will be used. This transparency will help local people to understand what contributions are being collected towards infrastructure. The neighbourhood allocation of the Community Infrastructure Levy also enables communities to have a say in how funds should be used to help support their local area.

**■ Housing: Energy****Alex Cunningham:**[\[29936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent steps his Department has taken to ensure that new homes are being built to high EPC standards.

**Christopher Pincher:**

The Government is fully committed to meeting its target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and recognises the important contribution that the energy efficiency of buildings has to make in meeting it.

We have committed to introduce a Future Homes Standard from 2025 which means that new homes will be fit for the future, with low carbon heating and lower energy use through high levels of energy efficiency. In October 2019 we published a consultation on the Future Homes Standard which proposed that new homes built to this standard should have carbon dioxide emissions 75-80 per cent lower than those built to current building regulations standards.

As a stepping stone to the Future Homes Standard, we have also consulted on a meaningful and achievable increase to the energy efficiency standards for new homes to be introduced through the Building Regulations in 2020, with a further strengthening by 2025.

The Future Homes Standard consultation closed on 7 February 2020. The responses we have received will be considered carefully and a Government response will be published in due course.

**Alex Cunningham:**[\[29937\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what proportion of homes were built to EPC A or B standards last year.

**Christopher Pincher:**

In 2019, 83 per cent of newly constructed homes in England and Wales had an EPC rating of A or B.

**Alex Cunningham:**[\[29938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many new homes were built in the last 12 months to EPC C or D standards.

**Christopher Pincher:**

In 2019, 15 per cent of newly constructed homes in England and Wales had an EPC rating of C or D.

**Alex Cunningham:**[\[29941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what powers do local authorities have to ensure compliance of developments with regulations on energy efficiency.

**Christopher Pincher:**

Minimum energy efficiency requirements for new buildings are set through the Building Regulations. Local authorities have formal enforcement powers for dealing with breaches of the Building Regulations.

Section 35 of the Building Act 1984 allows a local authority to bring a prosecution in the Magistrates' Court for a breach of the Building Regulations, where an unlimited fine may be imposed.

Through Section 36 of the Building Act, local authorities have the power to require work to be rectified if it does not meet Building Regulations' requirements.

**Local Government Finance: Coronavirus****Neil Coyle:****[32162]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Hardship Fund announced in Budget 2020; and how the effectiveness of the Hardship Fund will be measured.

**Mr Simon Clarke:**

The Government will provide English councils with £500 million to support financially vulnerable residents, and expects that most of the funding will be used to provide additional council tax relief.

Further guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/council-tax-covid-19-hardship-fund-2020-to-2021-guidance>.

**Judith Cummins:****[32178]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the allocation of the covid-19 hardship fund to local authorities will take into account levels of deprivation.

**Mr Simon Clarke:**

The Government will provide English councils with £500 million to support financially vulnerable residents, and expects that most of the funding will be used to provide additional council tax relief. Further guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/council-tax-covid-19-hardship-fund-2020-to-2021-guidance> .

**Louise Haigh:****[32253]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what his timetable is for (a) announcing (i) eligibility criteria and (ii) allocations to local authorities for and (b) disbursing funding from the Hardship Fund announced in the Budget 2020.

**Mr Simon Clarke:**

The Government will provide English councils with £500 million to support financially vulnerable residents, and expects that most of the funding will be used to provide additional council tax relief. Further guidance is available at the following link:



<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/council-tax-covid-19-hardship-fund-2020-to-2021-guidance> .

## ■ Local Government: Freedom of Information

**Conor McGinn:**

**[31658]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he has plans to waive obligations on local authorities to reply to freedom of information requests as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

**Mr Simon Clarke:**

*[Holding answer 23 March 2020]:* During the current pandemic, we recognise that resources may be unavailable to deal with FOI Requests. Although statutory deadlines will not be extended, the Regulator, the Information Commissioner, has stated that organisations will not be penalised during this extraordinary period.

## ■ Refuges: Coronavirus

**Jess Phillips:**

**[32165]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will provide compensation for rental income lost due to the closure of a refuge service as a result of covid-19.

**Luke Hall:**

The Government will do everything it can to support refuge providers to keep these vital services open, up and running.

Officials from my Department are in discussion with domestic abuse service providers to understand and respond to the challenges facing them as they make their contingency plans to keep refuges and other types of safe accommodation support services open and available to victims of domestic abuse and their children.

We have provided reassurance to refuge providers on key worker status for domestic abuse support workers working in refuges.

My officials will continue to work closely with and support refuge service providers.

## ■ Refuges: Finance

**Robert Halfon:**

**[32140]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what funding grants his Department is making available to women's refuge not-for-profit organisations during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Luke Hall:**

My Department will do everything we can to support domestic abuse service providers to keep these vital services up and running during the Coronavirus outbreak.

My officials are in daily contact with the domestic abuse sector to understand the additional challenges they are facing and how best to respond to help support services in these unprecedented times.

#### ■ **Refuges: Repairs and Maintenance**

**Robert Halfon:**

**[32139]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance his Department has issued to women's refuge centres and charities on the maintenance of services during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Luke Hall:**

My Department has been engaging with domestic abuse service providers on a daily basis to understand the additional challenges they are facing and the support needed to ensure essential provision is kept open and available to victims and their children.

Following these discussions, on 23 March we published guidance to assist domestic abuse service providers in service delivery at these unprecedented times. The guidance, in line with current Public Health England advice, sets out the advice for daily service operation within the context of domestic abuse safe accommodation provision

The guidance can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-provision/covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-settings>

#### ■ **Rented Housing: Coronavirus**

**Mr Stephen Morgan:**

**[30176]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to safeguard renters who lose earnings as a result of covid-19 from (a) eviction and (b) homelessness.

**Christopher Pincher:**

On 18 March, we announced a radical package of measures to protect renters and landlords affected by coronavirus. Emergency legislation will be taken forward as an urgent priority so that landlords will not be able to start proceedings to evict tenants for at least a three-month period. As a result of these measures, no renter in private or social accommodation needs to be concerned about the threat of eviction.

More information on these plans can be found at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/complete-ban-on-evictions-and-additional-protection-for-renters>.

**Mr Stephen Morgan:**

**[30177]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of an immediate freeze on (a) section 21 no-

fault evictions and (b) section 8 evictions for rent arrears in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

**Christopher Pincher:**

On 18 March, we announced a radical package of measures to protect renters and landlords affected by coronavirus. Emergency legislation will be taken forward as an urgent priority so that landlords will not be able to start proceedings to evict tenants for at least a three-month period. As a result of these measures, no renter in private or social accommodation needs to be concerned about the threat of eviction.

More information on these plans can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/complete-ban-on-evictions-and-additional-protection-for-renters>.

■ **Social Services: Coronavirus**

**Judith Cummins:**

**[32179]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what support his Department is providing to local authorities to support adult social care services through the covid-19 outbreak.

**Mr Simon Clarke:**

The 2020-21 settlement for local government provided local authorities with access to the largest increase in spending power in a decade to help local authorities meet rising demand for adult social care. In total, local authorities will have access to almost £6 billion of dedicated funding across adult and children's social care in 2020-21.

The Government has also announced additional funding of £2.9 billion to support hospitals, councils and adult social care providers through the COVID-19 outbreak. Of this, £1.6 billion will go to local authorities to allow them to address increased pressures on services in their local areas, including adult social care.

■ **Towns Fund**

**Conor McGinn:**

**[32301]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the timeline for lead councils set out in the Annex of his Department's Towns Fund prospectus published in November 2019; and if he will publish updated guidance on the roll out of the Towns Fund for Town Deal Boards.

**Mr Simon Clarke:**

We are taking a pragmatic approach to the impact Covid-19 will have on the timeline published in the Towns Fund Prospectus and will take the best course of action for all parties involved. The further guidance set to be published for local authorities will acknowledge the effects of the current circumstances and will be released in due course.

**INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT****■ Developing Countries: Children**

**Mr Barry Sheerman:** [\[30684\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the recommendations of Unicef UK's report entitled, Ending Preventable Child Deaths: How Britain Can Lead The Way.

**Wendy Morton:**

We welcome the UNICEF report and its recognition that DFID's work already saves children's lives and makes a real difference. The Government's commitment to end preventable maternal, new-born and child deaths by 2030 is well aligned with the report's recommendations.

We are currently working on the detailed action plan on ending preventable deaths, setting out the key shifts we, with partners in the international community, need to make to achieve the goal. An example of this action is the UK commitment to help secure at least \$7.4 billion for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, through its replenishment this year. This funding will allow Gavi to vaccinate 300 million more children and save up to 8 million lives from preventable deaths by 2025.

**■ Developing Countries: Debts Written Off**

**Preet Kaur Gill:** [\[31552\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her Answer of 17 March 2020 to Question 28702 on Developing Countries: Debts Written Off, what the value of UK ODA Crisis Reserve is.

**Wendy Morton:**

The UK ODA Crisis Reserve is an annual allocation of £500m, enabling flexible, quick and effective cross government responses to crises as they happen as set out in the UK Aid Strategy published in 2015.

**■ Developing Countries: Poverty**

**Caroline Lucas:** [\[29884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, with reference to the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy announced by the Prime Minister on 26 February 2020, what steps she is taking to ensure that her Department retains decision making responsibility for Official Development Assistance with a primary objective of poverty alleviation.

**Wendy Morton:**

The Prime Minister appointed separate Secretaries of State for the Foreign Office and DFID in the recent reshuffle.

The Integrated Review will be a wholesale reassessment of the UK's foreign, defence, security and development policy. DFID is closely involved in the Review's

work. We are clear that tackling global poverty is in the UK's interest and is the right thing to do.

A range of departments across Whitehall undertake ODA programming, with DFID support and guidance, but most UK ODA is still spent by DFID. All UK ODA is spent in accordance with the rules set by the OECD DAC and the UK's International Development Act 2002. As outlined in the Conservative manifesto, this Government will continue to be a champion of the rules-based international system. Where the UK has considered the international aid rules to be outdated, we have led the way in working with others to push for reforms. Ensuring the rules remain fit for purpose is an ongoing commitment.

## ■ Overseas Aid

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[29853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how much Official Development Assistance his Department has allocated to (a) Commonwealth and (b) non-Commonwealth countries in each of the last five years.

**Wendy Morton:**

The table below sets out how much UK bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) was received by Commonwealth and Non-Commonwealth countries between 2014 and 2018.

### **UK Bilateral ODA to Commonwealth and Non-Commonwealth countries: 2014 to 2018**

*£ millions*

ODA RECIPIENT	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Commonwealth Countries</b>	<b>2,005</b>	<b>2,121</b>	<b>2,001</b>	<b>1,961</b>	<b>1,748</b>
<b>Non-Commonwealth Countries</b>	<b>2,024</b>	<b>2,501</b>	<b>2,839</b>	<b>2,922</b>	<b>2,765</b>
Regional/Developing Countries, unspecified	2,793	3,040	3,695	3,920	4,750
Total UK Bilateral ODA	6,822	7,662	8,534	8,803	9,263

*Note:* These figures are based on the Commonwealth Countries that are currently members in March 2020

*Source:* Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2018

Bilateral ODA is spending where the UK has specified what the ODA is spent on and in which country or countries. In 2018, Bilateral ODA accounted for 64% of total UK ODA. The remaining proportion of ODA (36%) is delivered in the form of core contributions to ODA-eligible Multilaterals. These contributions are spent by Multilaterals on projects that benefit developing countries across the world, including in many Commonwealth countries. In 2018, the UK provided £5.3 billion in core contributions to Multilaterals.

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

### ■ Trade Agreements: USA

**Sam Tarry:** [\[32748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, if the Government is continuing FTA talks with the US Administration virtually during the covid-19 pandemic.

**Greg Hands:**

Both the UK Government and the US Government are fully committed to negotiating a comprehensive free trade agreement with one another.

However, these are unprecedented times and both sides are looking at options to conduct the negotiations in a way that reflects the current situation and respects public health.

We remain in regular contact with the US on this matter.

## JUSTICE

### ■ Community Rehabilitation Companies: Coronavirus

**Liz Saville Roberts:** [\[32266\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether community rehabilitation companies will be financially penalised for not delivering (a) unpaid work and (b) group programmes during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Lucy Frazer:**

We are working closely with the CRCs to understand the implications of Covid-19 on their ability to deliver unpaid work and group programmes and to consider alternatives. No decisions about the contract implications have yet been taken.

### ■ Domestic Abuse: Children

**Dame Diana Johnson:** [\[29898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many services for children affected by domestic abuse are funded through Police and Crime Commissioners in (a) England and (b) Wales.

**Alex Chalk:**

In 2019/20, the Ministry of Justice provided over £70 million for Police and Crime Commissioners to commission support services for all victims of crime, including children affected by domestic abuse. Many of the support services for victims of domestic abuse are either co-commissioned between Police and Crime Commissioners and Local Authorities or solely commissioned by Local Authorities. It is not possible to obtain a complete picture of the commissioning landscape of domestic abuse services for children, as this would involve a review by PCCs of all domestic abuse services available locally as well as a significant input from the Local Authorities. This would incur disproportionate cost to the department.

**Family Proceedings: Coronavirus****Jess Phillips:**[\[32227\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what guidance he has provided to people who have orders in place through the family courts that stipulate limited contact with children during the covid-19 outbreak where contact cannot be granted due to self-isolation; whether court orders in such circumstances would be classed as a breach; and whether contact arrangements can be changed due to the need to self-isolate in family groups.

**Chris Philp:**

The Government has published on gov.uk updated guidance on staying at home and away from others, which everyone must follow. This makes clear that children can if necessary move between parents living in different households, subject to the Government's guidance on what to do if self-isolating or shielding and protecting people who are defined as vulnerable.

Compliance with court orders is ordinarily a matter for the courts. In general, a parent who is required by a Child Arrangements Order to facilitate contact between their child and the other parent should continue to do so where this is practicable and consistent with the Government's revised guidance. Where either parent is reasonably self-isolating or genuinely protecting someone vulnerable (provided that this is in line with Government advice in either case) then remote technology offers temporary alternative means by which to facilitate contact via telephone, the internet or social media which should be used.

Any person named in a Child Arrangements Order may apply to the court to vary the terms of that order, but this should not be necessary if a parent is following the Government's guidance. If an alleged breach of a Child Arrangements Order or other application is later brought to court then this will be for judicial consideration. The Government encourages parents to adopt a pragmatic approach. The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) has published helpful advice for families on effective co-parenting and child arrangements which is available at <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/covid-19-guidance-for-children-and-families/>

**■ Funerals: Coronavirus**

**Chris Bryant:** [\[30692\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans he has for funerals during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Chris Bryant:** [\[30693\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, what assessment he has made of available capacity at crematoria and cemeteries.

**Chris Bryant:** [\[30694\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the capacity of morgues, mortuaries and funeral homes to cope with additional casualties of covid-19.

**Chris Bryant:** [\[30695\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he will be taking for funerals as a result of covid-19.

**Alex Chalk:**

Government is putting in place a range of measures to ensure the UK is prepared to manage the impacts of a Covid-19 outbreak. Part of this planning is ensuring we are prepared for higher numbers of people dying over the period of the pandemic.

Ensuring the deceased are treated with dignity and respect whilst minimising the risks to public health is at the forefront of Government planning. Measures underway will increase capacity at a local level to manage additional demand.

The Government's Action Plan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>) sets out planning principles that underpin the response to the Covid-19 outbreak. As part of this response, provisions have been included in the Coronavirus Bill which will ensure the sector can manage the impact of the pandemic.

**■ National Probation Service for England and Wales: Coronavirus**

**Liz Saville Roberts:** [\[32267\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of probation offices have hand sanitisers available for probation staff during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Lucy Frazer:**

In line with guidance issued by Public Health England we are encouraging staff to follow basic hygiene routines in the workplace to combat the spread of germs, including regular hand washing with soap and water for 20 seconds.

Information on how many probation offices have hand sanitisers is not readily available. We have instructed our facilities management providers to provide hand sanitiser gel and wipes. The orders have been placed, but like most employers, we are finding that the lead-in times for supply are longer than average.



In line with the latest Public Health England guidance our facilities management providers have also adopted new cleaning regimes to minimise the risk of infection.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** [\[32268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether Victim Liaison Officers in the National Probation Service are expected to carry out home visits during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Lucy Frazer:**

The statutory National Probation Service Victim Contact Scheme is available to victims of violent and sexual offences, where the offender receives a sentence of 12 months or more. The Scheme provides victims with information and advice about the criminal justice process – including explaining the sentence, and ensuring that they are informed of the offender's release.

In such cases, victims also have the statutory right to request conditions that can be attached to the offender's release licence. These can include a no contact condition, and an exclusion zone covering areas where the victim lives or works, or to which the victim travels frequently.

The Victim Liaison Officer will visit the victim at home, or at the victim's preferred location, after sentence, to explain their rights under the Victim Contact Scheme.

In light of the public health advice encouraging social distancing, we have decided to suspend, in all but exceptional circumstances, home visits to victims. Victim Liaison Officers will continue to use alternative methods of communication, such as telephone and Skype, being mindful of the victim's preferences, rescheduling home visits when it is safe to do so.

We feel this approach balances the need to keep victims informed, while keeping them and probation staff safe. In exceptional circumstances, where the NPS feels there is a vital reason for a home visit, it will only take place after a risk assessment that considers the health of victims and the VLO, and the risks of COVID-19 transmission.

#### ■ **Prison Officers: Coronavirus**

**Grahame Morris:** [\[32135\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he is taking to protect prison officers from covid-19.

**Grahame Morris:** [\[32136\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment has he made of the availability of personal protection equipment for prison staff during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Lucy Frazer:**

Prisons have existing, well-developed policies and procedures in place to manage outbreaks of infectious diseases. We have procedures agreed with our public health colleagues for protecting staff in the workplace but, like any member of the community, some prison staff may need to self-isolate in line with public health

advice, or may become infected. All staff working in prisons have clear advice on the steps they should take should they become unwell, or if they have been exposed to COVID-19 risk. That includes specific advice on how establishments should work together with public health authorities and the NHS to control any outbreaks which may occur.

Together with Public Health England (PHE) we have identified what Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is required to keep staff safe. We are working with providers to ensure the continued supply of PPE and cleaning and hygiene products, so that staff are protected and our establishments are hygienic.

We are also taking steps to boost staff availability, this includes operationally qualified staff in HMPPS HQ returning to prisons to support continuity of service. This will help us to maintain as normal a regime as possible within prisons.

## ■ Prisons: Coronavirus

**Richard Burgon:** [\[30081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Government news story of 12 March 2020 on preparedness to deal with coronavirus in prisons, how many and what proportion of (a) prisoners, (b) prison officers and (c) other prison staff have regular access to (i) soap and (ii) hot water; and if he will make a statement.

**Richard Burgon:** [\[30082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Government news story of 12 March 2020 on preparedness to deal with coronavirus in prisons, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of access to handwashing facilities for teaching staff in prisons.

**Richard Burgon:** [\[30083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Government news story of 12 March 2020 on preparedness to deal with coronavirus in prisons, whether (a) policies and (b) procedures to manage outbreaks of disease have been updated to include coronavirus.

**Richard Burgon:** [\[30085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans he has to offer prison staff bonuses to cover shortages during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Lucy Frazer:**

Prisons have existing, well-developed policies and procedures in place to manage outbreaks of infectious diseases. These policies and procedures are being built upon in response to the specific risks posed by COVID-19 and we have put in place robust contingency plans, informed by Public Health authorities.

HMPPS has introduced a procedure for the protective isolation of individuals in prison custody when it is considered that they may be potentially infected with the virus. This has been communicated to all prison staff.

Basic hygiene is a key part of tackling COVID-19. All prisoners have access to soap and hot water for handwashing – not just in cells but also in other shared areas such as education blocks, kitchens, showers, workplace toilets and the gym.

All prison staff, including teaching staff, also have access to adequate handwashing facilities and we have worked closely with suppliers to ensure adequate supply of soap and cleaning materials

We are looking at ways to increase front line staff availability so that we can minimise the impacts on regimes of staff absences. This includes the possibility of pay and reward enhancements.

## ■ Prisons: Drugs

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**

[\[32068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department is taking to halt drug supplies into prisons.

**Lucy Frazer:**

We are taking decisive action to improve security to: stop illicit items being smuggled in by prisoners, staff and visitors; to strengthen staff resilience to corruption; and to target organised criminals who exploit prisons as a lucrative illicit market. This package of measures is being funded through the £100m investment to tackle crime behind bars, announced by the Prime Minister last summer.

Enhanced gate security is being deployed to the most challenging prisons in the estate. Cutting-edge x-ray body scanners will target prisoners internally smuggling illicit items into prisons. We recently announced the first 16 sites to receive this equipment.

Whilst the vast majority of our staff are honest and hardworking, we are also investing new resource to step up our counter corruption capability and strengthen (in scale and reach) intelligence-led operations and investigations with law enforcement partners against those that present the greatest threat of harm to prison security and the community.

We will also equip sites with new technology and staff to enhance staff and visitor searching at the gate. We have already announced the first 7 sites for this provision.

We are fully supporting the Right Hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham's Private Member's Bill on Prisons (Substance Testing) which is due to have its second reading on the 15 May. This Bill will improve our ability to test for drugs across the estate and provide the appropriate support to prisoners using drugs.

## ■ Prisons: Education

**Liz Saville Roberts:**

[\[32236\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the oral contribution by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice on 18 March 2020, Official Report

column 335WH, whether there will be any penalties by HMPPS for non-delivery of teaching hours during a closure of education provision in prisons.

**Lucy Frazer:**

Where HMPPS is unable to facilitate the delivery of education in England there are payment mechanisms in the contract to ensure that suppliers are not financially disadvantaged. Prison education in Wales is a devolved responsibility of the Welsh Government.

We are in regular communications with education suppliers to ensure relationships continue to be managed well and that their key questions are answered.

■ **Prisons: Violence**

**Mary Glendon:**

[\[29924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether a rise in levels of violence has been recorded in any of the prisons where PAVA has been rolled out.

**Lucy Frazer:**

Published data on violence is only available until September 2019, and the only prisons with PAVA for the duration of this period were the four pilot sites: HMPs Hull, Wealstun, Preston and Risley.

There was an increase in the average number of assaults in prisons in across England and Wales between January 2018 to September 2019, which is the timeframe that PAVA has been in available in these four prisons.

When comparing the 21 months prior to January 2018, HMPs Hull, Wealstun and Preston had a slightly lower increase in violence compared to the wider estate.

We have been rolling out PAVA incapacitant spray to all band 3-5 staff in the adult male estate. Staff need appropriate training to use PAVA and only prisons that have implemented the key worker scheme – which is vital in building relationships between offenders and staff – will receive it.

PAVA has not been introduced as a violence reduction measure, it is intended to help protect staff and prisoners from incidents where there is serious violence, or an imminent or perceived risk of serious violence. It has been introduced alongside a range of other measures aimed to improve safety.

## TRANSPORT

■ **Airports: National Policy Statements**

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[32186\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he plans to publish a revised Airports National Policy Statement that takes account of the judgement of the Court of Appeal on 27 February 2020 on Heathrow Airport.

**Kelly Tolhurst:**

We are still considering the Court of Appeal's judgment. At this stage the Government will not be able to make any further comment beyond what was set out in the Written Statement on 27 February from the Secretary of State for Transport. The Department is currently focused on the response to Covid-19.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[32187\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he will publish a new Airports National Policy Statement.

**Kelly Tolhurst:**

The Court of Appeal has ruled that the designation of the Airports National Policy Statement has no legal effect unless and until this Government carries out a review.

The Government will need time to consider the judgment carefully. At this stage the Government will not be able to make any further comment beyond what was set out in the Written Statement on 27 February from the Secretary of State for Transport. The Department is currently focused on the response to Covid-19.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[32188\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he or his officials have had with (a) Heathrow Airport Ltd and (b) other stakeholders on a revised Airports National Policy Statement since 27 February 2020.

**Kelly Tolhurst:**

We are carefully considering the Court of Appeal's judgment and will set out our next steps in due course. The Department is currently focused on the response to Covid-19.

**■ Airports: Thames Estuary****Rehman Chishti:**[\[29923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what his policy is on proposals for a Thames estuary airport.

**Chris Heaton-Harris:**

The Court of Appeal has ruled that the designation of the Airports National Policy Statement has no legal effect unless, and until, this Government carries out a review.

It is a complex judgment that the Government will need time to consider carefully.

**■ Bus Services: Coronavirus****Dan Jarvis:**[\[32184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to remove time restrictions on England National Concessionary Travel Scheme smart permits during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Rachel Maclean:**

We are acutely aware of the issues around the time restrictions of the current concessionary travel scheme and are considering next steps as a matter of urgency.

The Government is very pleased to see that some local authorities and operators have already agreed to provide free morning travel to concessionary pass holders due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

In addition, free or discounted travel before 9.30am is the most commonly offered discretionary concession, with 68 of the 89 Travel Concession Authorities in England outside London (predominantly local authorities) already offering free or discounted morning travel to older person's and/or disabled person's concessionary pass holders.

**■ Bus Services: South East****Rehman Chishti:****[29922]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to improve bus services in (a) Medway, (b) Kent and (c) the South East.

**Rachel Maclean:**

The bus market outside London is deregulated and decisions regarding service provision are primarily a commercial matter for bus operators. However, the Bus Services Act 2017 provides the tools local authorities need to improve local bus services and increase passenger numbers.

The annual Bus Service Operators Grant the Government provided for Kent County Council during 2018/19 was £1,087,788.

We have announced an additional £30 million of additional funding to improve current services and restoring lost services. Kent County Council has been allocated £1,007,624 which will be available from April 2020 if the funding requirements are met. This is from the £220 million Better Deal for Bus Users package to transform bus services. The Government's ambition is to secure a long term, sustained improvement in bus services underpinned by a National Bus Strategy for England which will be accompanied by a long-term funding settlement.

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-better-deal-for-bus-users/a-better-deal-for-bus-users](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-better-deal-for-bus-users/a-better-deal-for-bus-users)

On 11 February 2020, the Prime Minister announced there will be £5 billion of new funding to overhaul bus and cycle links for every region outside London which may benefit bus services serving Medway, Kent and the wider South East.

**■ Bus Services: West Midlands****Marco Longhi:****[30041]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to improve bus connectivity between rural areas of the West Midlands.

**Rachel Maclean:**

In September 2019 £220 million was announced to improve bus connectivity, including £30 million to restore and improve bus services and £20 million to trial demand responsive transport pilots in rural areas. £5 billion was also committed in February 2020 to transform bus services and cycling links, with further details to be announced in the National Bus Strategy.

■ **Buses: Hydrogen****Alex Sobel:**[\[30057\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 27 February 2020 to Question 22047 on Buses: Hydrogen, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of his Department's technology blind policy in relation to investment in hydrogen buses.

**Rachel Maclean:**

On 10 February, the Prime Minister announced £5 billion of new funding to overhaul bus and cycle links, including at least 4,000 new zero emission buses, to support the Government in reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2050.

The National Bus Strategy, due to be published later this year, will include further details on these plans.

The Transport Decarbonisation Plan, due to be published later this year, will also set out more information on the Department's approach to decarbonisation.

Through the Department's various competitively-bid grant funding schemes for new clean buses over the past few years, under the Low Emission Bus Scheme where funding was awarded in 2015 and 2017, £3,814,000 was allocated to hydrogen buses and supporting infrastructure; under the Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme, £4,360,435 was allocated in 2019 to hydrogen buses and supporting infrastructure.

■ **Electric Vehicles: Charging Points****Marco Longhi:**[\[30204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent steps his Department has taken to support the roll-out of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles in Dudley.

**Rachel Maclean:**

We have doubled the funding available for the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCs) to £10 million. This scheme provides grant funding to local authorities looking to install chargepoints for residents that lack off-street parking.

In October last year, the Secretary of State wrote to all LAs encouraging them to send their strategies for infrastructure deployment and to take advantage of ORCS funding.

For major roads the Government is providing £500 million over the next five years to support the rollout of a fast-charging network for electric vehicles, ensuring that drivers will never be further than 30 miles from a rapid charging station. Our jointly funded £400 million Chargepoint Infrastructure Investment fund's first investment

round, worth a total of £70 million, will also ensure the delivery of a further 3,000 rapid charging devices across the UK by 2024, more than doubling the current number of rapid charging devices.

Homeowners and businesses in Dudley (as with the rest of the country) will continue to be able to apply for grants in 2020/2021 to help with the purchase of an electric vehicle (via HMG's Plug-in Car Grant) and for help with installing an electric vehicle chargepoint (via either HMG's Electric Vehicle Homecharge Scheme or Workplace Charging Scheme).

### ■ Govia Thameslink Railway: Rolling Stock

**Tom Tugendhat:**

**[30020]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions (a) he, (b) his predecessors, (c) current and former Ministers and (d) officials have had with GTR on making available an adequate level of rolling stock for the Thameslink service on the Maidstone East line.

**Chris Heaton-Harris:**

Officials held a number of discussions from late 2018 until late 2019 with GTR and within the cross-industry group, the Thameslink Timetable Industry Readiness Board, to consider rolling stock provision for a Thameslink Maidstone East service. Ministers have not met with GTR specifically to discuss rolling stock provision for a Thameslink Maidstone East service, but do regularly engage with GTR on a wide range of issues.

We know how important it is to introduce the long awaited regular services between Maidstone East and the City as soon as possible. My officials continue to work with the industry to resolve the issues which have so far prevented a regular service from being introduced and to provide passengers in Maidstone with a regular all-day service to the City at the earliest opportunity. We will endeavour to arrange a meeting between my Honourable Friend, other relevant MPs and senior representatives from GTR and Network Rail to update on the situation and the work that is ongoing to find a solution as soon as practically possible in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ■ Govia Thameslink Railway: Standards

**Tom Tugendhat:**

**[30019]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 6 March 2020 to Question 22006 on Thameslink Railway Line, if he will list the meetings (a) he, (b) his predecessors, (c) Ministers, (d) the predecessors of those Ministers and (e) his officials have had with (i) GTR and (ii) Network Rail to discuss the delivery of the Thameslink service on the Maidstone East line.

**Chris Heaton-Harris:**

A large number of meetings took place in 2018 and 2019 about the delivery of Thameslink services to Maidstone East.

We know how important it is to introduce the long awaited regular services between Maidstone East and the City as soon as possible. My officials continue to work with



the industry to resolve the issues which have so far prevented a regular service from being introduced and to provide passengers in Maidstone with a regular all-day service to the City at the earliest opportunity. We will endeavour to arrange a meeting between my Honourable Friend, other relevant MPs and senior representatives from GTR and Network Rail to update on the situation and the work that is ongoing to find a solution as soon as practically possible in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

■ **High Speed 2 Railway Line: CCTV**

**Greg Smith:**

[\[30096\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what guidance has been issued to HS2 Ltd on the placing of CCTV cameras around enabling works sites.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

There has been no specific guidance issued to HS2 Ltd by the Secretary of State for Transport in regards to the placement of CCTV cameras around site. HS2 Ltd's Tier 1 contractors need to comply with all legislation around the use of CCTV on their sites, which has been provided to them by HS2 Ltd.

■ **High Speed 2 Railway Line: Steeple Claydon**

**Greg Smith:**

[\[30097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what communications his Department have undertaken with (a) HS2 Ltd and (b) Buckinghamshire Country Council on the designs for the Addison Road Bridge in Steeple Claydon, Buckinghamshire.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The design of the HS2 railway, including associated features such as the Addison Road Bridge, is a matter for HS2 Ltd, the company charged with the project's delivery, and its contractors. The design of the Addison Road bridge was developed by the main works contractor to Scheme Design stage during 2019. This was shared with the HS2 project team at Buckinghamshire County Council in July 2019 and feedback was received from them in October 2019. The design for the highway is expected to be finalised in May 2020, where further review and pre-application discussions are planned with the local authority. The Department is not directly involved in the detail of this process, but was involved in establishing the overall framework and continues to monitor it.

■ **Maidstone Railway Line**

**Tom Tugendhat:**

[\[30018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will publish all communications from his Department to Network Rail on infrastructure improvements required on the Maidstone East line to deliver two Thameslink trains per hour between Maidstone East and Cambridge.

**Chris Heaton-Harris:**

The Department regularly engages with Network Rail on a whole host of infrastructure matters.

We know how important it is to introduce the long awaited regular services between Maidstone East and the City as soon as possible. My officials continue to work with the industry to resolve the issues which have so far prevented a regular service from being introduced and to provide passengers in Maidstone with a regular all-day service to the City at the earliest opportunity. We will endeavour to arrange a meeting between my Honourable Friend, other relevant MPs and senior representatives from GTR and Network Rail to update on the situation and the work that is ongoing to find a solution as soon as practically possible in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Roads: Repairs and Maintenance****Scott Benton:****[30207]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to paragraph 1.132 of the Budget 2020 Red Book, how much funding will local authorities in (a) Lancashire and (b) Blackpool receive to repair pot holes.

**Rachel Maclean:**

The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget 2020 that £500 million is being made available in 2020/21 to local highway authorities in England, outside London, to repair potholes. The North West's share is £53 million. The Department will shortly publish details of the individual funding allocations we are making available, including (a) Lancashire and (b) Blackpool.

**Taxis: Coronavirus****Stephanie Peacock:****[32292]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of using taxis as an additional emergency service for isolated households and families.

**Rachel Maclean:**

The Department is aware of and appreciates the role taxis and private hire vehicles have always played in assisting those that are unable to access public transport. We would encourage everyone to follow the health advice, which can be found at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/>.

**TREASURY****[Subject Heading to be Assigned]****Miss Sarah Dines:****[901712]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what fiscal steps he is taking to improve local transport infrastructure.

**Steve Barclay:**

The Government is committed to improving the transport links that people rely on every day.

The Budget announced a new England-wide Potholes Fund that will provide £500 million a year, resulting in a 50% increase to local road maintenance budgets in 2020-21. Alongside this, the Budget also announced the development of 15 local road upgrades across the country.

It also confirmed over £1 billion worth of allocations to shovel-ready local transport upgrades across nine city regions through the Transforming Cities Fund, and the intention is to agree long-term transport settlements with eight elected Mayors starting in 2022-23 worth £4.2bn.

These commitments build on the Prime Minister's announcement of £5 billion for buses and cycling.

**Giles Watling:**[\[901724\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on school funding.

**Steve Barclay:**

I regularly discuss school funding with the Secretary of State for Education. At the Spending Round, the government committed to a £7.1 billion cash increase in funding for schools in England by 2022-23. This funding settlement reflects the government's commitment to high quality education for all school children.

**Mr Ranil Jayawardena:**[\[901728\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on the economic benefits of improving the Reading to Gatwick road corridor.

**Steve Barclay:**

At Budget, the Chancellor confirmed a record £27.4 billion to improve England's strategic roads from 2020 to 2025. This funding will help maintain and improve the Reading-Gatwick road corridor, which includes converting part of the M4 to a smart motorway. Highways England will complete work to upgrade the 18 km stretch of the M23 near Gatwick Airport to a smart motorway this year. They are also looking at ways to optimise capacity on the existing M25.

**■ Bank Services: Fees and Charges****Catherine West:**[\[32285\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with (a) the Financial Conduct Authority and (b) banks on delaying changes proposed for April 2020 to overdraft fees during the covid-19 outbreak..

**John Glen:**

The Treasury is working closely with industry and the financial regulators to ensure the steps they take are properly coordinated with Government's wider economic response to COVID-19.

Banks and building societies are ready and able to offer support to their customers who are impacted directly or indirectly by COVID-19. The Government encourages anyone concerned about their overdraft to contact their provider.

Last June, the FCA announced reforms to the overdraft market, including mandating that firms cannot charge more for unarranged overdrafts than arranged overdrafts, banning fixed daily and monthly charges, and a package of measures to improve the transparency of pricing. Overall the FCA expects these changes to make overdrafts simpler, fairer, and easier to manage and will protect the millions of consumers that use overdrafts, particularly more vulnerable consumers. All providers have set their new charging structures ahead of the deadline in April.

The overdraft reforms will end high unarranged charges and the removal of fees means many occasional arranged borrowers will pay less even though their headline rate of borrowing may increase. Across the market, FCA analysis in January found that 7 out of 10 overdraft users will be better off or see no change when the new rules come into force in April.

In instances where consumers see an increased cost for their overdraft borrowing, the FCA expects firms to engage with customers with large overdraft balances and repeat users of overdrafts to make appropriate interventions. This includes customers who are impacted by COVID-19.

**■ Business: Coronavirus****Mr Laurence Robertson:**[\[31427\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to prevent businesses engaging in excessive profiteering during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Steve Barclay:**

This is first and foremost a public health emergency but the coronavirus is having a significant impact on people's lives and on our economy. The government has announced an unprecedented package of measures to support jobs, incomes and businesses, and will do whatever it takes to get our nation through this crisis. At the same time, the government expects businesses to play their part too, to act responsibly and not seek to make excessive profits. The Competition and Markets Authority have launched a Covid-19 taskforce to monitor the market and enable them to intervene as quickly as possible where required.

**Tim Farron:**[\[31467\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will publish details of the process by which businesses can access grants to mitigate the effect of the covid-19 outbreak.

**John Glen:**

The Business Secretary will write to all Local Authorities by the end of the week with information on the small business grant scheme, and to encourage them to prepare to deliver this quickly. Detailed guidance for Local Authorities will follow by 1st April, and Local Authorities will then write to all eligible businesses with information on how to claim this grant.

We will give small businesses in the retail, hospitality or leisure sectors a higher grant of £25,000 per business if they have a property that has a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000. Properties in those sectors with a rateable value of £15,000 or less will receive a £10,000 grant even if they are not eligible for small business rates relief. It will be administered in the same way as the small business grant scheme.

**■ Business: Government Assistance****Mr Laurence Robertson:**[\[32049\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will increase financial support for businesses affected by flooding and covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

**John Glen:**

At Budget, the Chancellor announced a record funding for flood defences between 2021 and 2027, offering better protection from flooding for 336,000 homes and non-residential properties. Additional funding of £200 million will help communities most at risk of flooding recover faster in cases where they are affected by flood damage. Alongside this, the Chancellor has announced an unprecedented package of support for businesses affected by the covid-19 outbreak, including that all businesses eligible for Small Business Rates Relief and Rural Rates Relief would receive a grant of £10,000 each to help with the impact of Covid-19. Details of this package are available at: [www.businesssupport.gov.uk](http://www.businesssupport.gov.uk)

**■ Care Homes: Coronavirus****Mr Kevan Jones:**[\[31446\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will take steps to make financial support available to care home if they cannot claim against their insurance for any losses incurred as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

**John Glen:**

I have announced an unprecedented package of support for businesses and workers to protect them during this economic crisis. I stand ready to go further to support businesses of all sizes, including in our vital social care sector, wherever necessary. We are providing £1.6 billion to local authorities to help them respond to coronavirus pressures across all services, including vital social care services.

## ■ Catering: Coronavirus

**Hilary Benn:** [\[31439\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what financial assistance is available to mobile catering businesses affected by covid-19.

**Steve Barclay:**

This is an incredibly challenging time for all types of businesses, both large and small. Therefore, the Chancellor has announced an unprecedented package of measures to protect businesses and workers against the current economic emergency, including an initial £330 billion of loan guarantees. This is on top of compensation for statutory sick pay as announced in the Budget.

On Friday 20 March the Chancellor announced the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms continue to keep people in employment. Businesses can put workers on temporary leave and the government will pay them cash grants of 80% of their wages up to a cap of £2,500, providing they keep the worker employed.

## ■ Charities: Coronavirus

**Rachel Reeves:** [\[32245\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans the Government has to support charities who face a loss of income due to covid-19.

**Steve Barclay:**

The government has announced an unprecedented package of financial support that will also support charities. Many charities are already eligible for 80% charitable rate relief, and charities will also benefit from the new enhanced retail rate relief at 100%. Charities will also benefit from the new Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Further detail of government support is available at: [www.businesssupport.gov.uk](http://www.businesssupport.gov.uk)

## ■ Cooperatives: Yorkshire and the Humber

**Alex Sobel:** [\[30128\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many co-operative businesses closed in Yorkshire and the Humber each year from 2010 to 2020.

**John Glen:**

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) is the registering authority for co-operative and community benefit societies under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act (2014). The FCA does not classify registrations by region, and therefore, an accurate figure for the number of co-operative businesses that have closed in Yorkshire and the Humber cannot be given.

## ■ Coronavirus: Wales

**Jonathan Edwards:**

[\[30736\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, whether he has plans to provide emergency funding to the Welsh Government; and what discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on accessing the HM Treasury Reserve as set out in the Statement of Funding Policy published in November 2015.

**Steve Barclay:**

As of the 18<sup>th</sup> March the UK government has provided the Welsh Government with £1.6 billion of funding to support people, businesses and public services affected by COVID-19.

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

The UK government will continue to work closely with the devolved administrations as the situation develops to ensure they have the funding needed to tackle the impacts of COVID-19.

## ■ Dental Services: Coronavirus

**Mohammad Yasin:**

[\[32237\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has plans to reimburse the fixed practice overheads of dentists to allow them to close their dental practices to non-essential services to prevent the transmission of covid-19.

**Jesse Norman:**

Dentists holding a contract to provide NHS dental services are remunerated through an annual contract value dependent on delivery of an agreed amount of treatment (activity). There is no separate reimbursement of practice costs apart from rates reimbursement.

NHS England are in discussion with the British Dental Association about how the impact of coronavirus on service delivery will be managed.

On 20 March 2020, the Chancellor announced the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms continue to keep people in employment. The scheme will apply to dental practices.

## ■ Employee Ownership

**Jessica Morden:**

[\[29951\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to promote employee share ownership schemes and on what basis tax exemptions should apply to beneficiaries; and if he will make a statement.

**Jesse Norman:**

The Government wants to support hard-working people to share in the success of the businesses for which they work.

To encourage this, the Government offers several tax-advantaged employee share schemes: Employee Ownership Trusts (EOTs), Share Incentive Plans (SIP), the Save as You Earn (SAYE) scheme, Company Share Option Plans (CSOP), and the Enterprise Management Incentives (EMI) scheme. These provide a range of tax benefits to participating employees and businesses. More information on the schemes can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/tax-employee-share-schemes>.

By sharing financial rewards with staff, businesses can better motivate their workforce, support productivity and help recruit and retain staff. The Government keeps all employee share schemes under review, to ensure that they remain effective in these ways.

**■ Food Supply: Non-domestic Rates**

**Bill Esterson:** [\[32217\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to extend business rate relief to food producers to mitigate the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on national food security.

**Bill Esterson:** [\[32218\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department has plans to introduce tax breaks to enable food producers in financial distress as a result of the covid-19 outbreak to main food supplies.

**Jesse Norman:**

The Government has provided enhanced support to the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors given the acute impacts of COVID-19 on those sectors. A range of measures to support all businesses has been made available, including the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan scheme, and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms continue to keep people in employment. HMRC have also set up a dedicated COVID-19 helpline to help those in need, and they may be able to agree a bespoke Time to Pay arrangement.

This is the right response at the right time. As the wider economic picture becomes clearer, the Government will do whatever it takes to get the nation through the impacts of COVID-19, and the Government stands ready to announce further action wherever necessary.

**■ Locums: Off-payroll Working**

**Greg Smith:** [\[30095\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policy on public sector off-payroll reforms of locum health workers responding to covid-19.



**Jesse Norman:**

In April 2017, the Government changed the off-payroll working rules for those working in the public sector, shifting responsibility for determining employment status from the worker's own limited company to the organisation they work for. These existing rules continue to apply.

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

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

The Government remains committed to this policy to ensure that people working like employees, but through their own limited company, pay broadly the same tax as individuals who are employed directly.

**■ National Insurance Contributions****Dan Jarvis:**[\[32269\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department plans to remove class 2 national insurance contributions.

**Jesse Norman:**

The Government has no plans to remove Class 2 National Insurance contributions. The Government does not want to discourage the lowest paid from building their entitlement to the State Pension and having security and choice in retirement. A £3 per week Class 2 payment allows the self-employed with low profits to be able to build entitlement to the new State Pension (worth up to £168.60 per week in 2019-20).

The department will keep this issue under review in the context of the wider tax system and the sustainability of the public finances.

**■ Non-domestic Rates****Mr Kevan Jones:**[\[32070\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what support the Government is providing to businesses that operate from residential residences and therefore do not receive small business rate relief.

**Jesse Norman:**

A range of measures to support all businesses has been made available. These include the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, allowing businesses to benefit from loans of up to £5m, with the first 12 months of that finance interest free, and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help keep people in employment. This scheme means businesses can put workers on temporary leave and the Government

will pay cash grants of 80% of their wages up to a cap of £2,500 per month, providing they keep the worker employed. They will receive the grant from HMRC, and all UK organisations can self-certify that they have furloughed employees. The scheme will cover the cost of wages backdated to 1 March.

#### ■ Non-domestic Rates: Coronavirus

**Neil Coyle:** [\[30775\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the viability of businesses affected by coronavirus in (a) north Southwark and (b) other areas with higher than average business rates which are not covered by the business rates exemption for companies with a rateable value of less than £51,000.

**Jesse Norman:**

On 17 March, in response to Covid-19, the Government introduced a 12 month business rates holiday for all eligible retail, leisure and hospitality businesses in England, including Southwark, with no cap on rateable values. Eligible businesses, large and small, will benefit from this exceptional step worth an additional £9.5bn in 2020-21.

#### ■ Nurseries: Non-domestic Rates

**Damien Moore:** [\[30180\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans his Department has for private nurseries to be included in the plans for 100 per cent business rates relief.

**Jesse Norman:**

In an exceptional response to Covid-19, from 1 April non-local authority providers of childcare will pay no business rates in 2020-21. This is alongside eligible businesses in retail, leisure and hospitality sectors who will benefit from a business rates holiday, irrespective of a property's rateable value. MHCLG will publish guidance on the business rates holiday for nurseries shortly.

#### ■ Personal Income: Coronavirus

**Colum Eastwood:** [\[32229\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Northern Ireland on introducing a universal basic income scheme for the duration of the covid-19 outbreak.

**Jesse Norman:**

The Government is doing whatever it can to ensure that individuals, families and businesses are supported during the Covid-19 outbreak.

The Government's priority has been to focus on measures that can be operationalised as quickly as possible in order to provide support to those who need it.

The Government has announced a wide-ranging package of measures to support individuals and families affected by Covid-19. These measures include:

- making Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) available for individuals diagnosed with Covid-19 or those unable to work because they are self-isolating in line with Government guidance. This is in addition to the change announced by the Prime Minister that SSP will be payable from day one instead of day four for affected individuals.
- introducing the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms continue to keep people in employment. Businesses can put workers on temporary leave and the Government will pay cash grants to cover 80% of their wages up to a cap of £2,500 per month, providing they keep the worker employed.
- ensuring that those who are not eligible for SSP can now more easily make a claim for Universal Credit or Contributory Employment and Support Allowance.
- increasing the standard allowance in Universal Credit and the basic element of Working Tax Credit by up to £20 per week.
- a further temporary relaxation of earnings rules for self-employed Universal Credit claimants
- increasing the Local Housing Allowance for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit claimants to the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of market rents.

While all welfare policy is devolved to Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive will be fully funded to deliver these measures and the Government expects them to replicate GB policy.

## ■ Personal Income: Insurance

### Wes Streeting:

[\[32201\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with his Danish counterpart on the feasibility of implementing a Danish-style system for income protection for workers in the UK.

### Jesse Norman:

The Government is taking an approach that best fits the specific circumstances of the UK. On Friday 20 March, the Chancellor announced the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms continue to keep people in employment. This is in addition to nearly £7bn of extra funding for welfare, including: a £20 per week increase to the Universal Credit standard allowance and Working Tax Credit basic element; a relaxation of earnings rules for self-employed Universal Credit claimants affected by the economic impacts of Covid-19; and extension of Statutory Sick Pay from day one.

## ■ Pharmacy: Coronavirus

### Taiwo Owatemi:

[\[31577\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department plans to take steps to change licensing rules to enable pharmacists to produce hand sanitiser.

**Steve Barclay:**

HMRC are now prioritising applications to receive and use denatured alcohol in the production of sanitising hand gel. This includes putting in place new targets to reduce the time taken to process such requests from within 45 working days to within five working days.

**■ Self-employed: Coronavirus****Mr Laurence Robertson:**[\[32048\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether self-employed people will be able to access the grants and loans announced in response to the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

**John Glen:**

The government has always said that the best way to support freelancers and the self-employed through this crisis is through the welfare system. Since 20 March they have been able to benefit from changes such as the £20 increase in the Universal Credit standard allowance and the uprating of Local Housing Allowance. The government is temporarily relaxing the Minimum Income Floor for all self-employed UC claimants for the duration of the outbreak. This means a drop in earnings due to sickness or self-isolation or as a result of the economic impact of the outbreak will be reflected in claimants' awards. Self-employed people unable to work because they are directly affected by Covid-19 or self-isolating will also be eligible for Contributory Employment and Support Allowance. As announced at Budget, this is now payable from the first day of sickness, rather than the eighth. The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme is available to self-employed individuals with an eligible business entity. People who are self-employed or own a business and are concerned about not being able to pay their tax bills because of Covid-19 should contact Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' (HMRC) dedicated Time to Pay service.

**■ Small Businesses: Government Assistance****Liam Byrne:**[\[32066\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the procedure is for small firms to apply for access to (a) Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and (b) cash grants of £25,000 to the smallest businesses in the (i) retail, (ii) hospitality and (iii) leisure sectors and (c) £10,000 for all business in receipt of Small Business Rates Relief and Rural Rates Relief.

**John Glen:**

Officials are working at pace to deliver the measures for small businesses as announced by the Chancellor. The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, which will provide financing facilities for SMEs of up to £5 million, was launched Monday 23 March. The Business Secretary will write to all Local Authorities by the end of the week with information on the small business grant scheme, and to encourage them to prepare to deliver this quickly. Detailed guidance for Local

Authorities will follow by 1st April, and Local Authorities will then write to all eligible businesses with information on how to claim this grant.

We will give small businesses in the retail, hospitality or leisure sectors a higher grant of £25,000 per business if they have a property that has a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000. Properties in those sectors with a rateable value of £15,000 or less will receive a £10,000 grant even if they are not eligible for small business rates relief. It will be administered in the same way as the small business grant scheme.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhési:**

[\[32158\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps the Government is taking to protect the (a) homes and (b) other assets of business owners that may be repossessed as a result of their businesses failing due to the covid-19 outbreak.

**John Glen:**

The UK is well prepared to tackle COVID-19 and support businesses through this difficult period. The Chancellor has announced a £350bn package to support businesses access finance and tackle short-term cash-flow problems that arise as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, and is working closely with the banking industry to monitor developments.

The Government also welcomes the statement by UK Finance on behalf of the sector which announced that banks, building societies and credit card providers are committed to supporting their business customers in continuing to trade, and would encourage businesses to speak to their lender if they need finance.

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

On 18 March the Government confirmed that the mortgage payment holiday of up to 3 months will also be extended to landlords whose tenants are experiencing difficulty due to coronavirus.

On 20 March, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) published guidance for all regulated mortgage lenders to follow on the mortgage payment holiday and announced that lenders should stop repossession activity during this period.

## ■ **Small Businesses: Non-domestic Rates**

**Rosie Duffield:**

[\[32198\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of extending the small business rate relief grant to businesses operating in non-rateable premises.

**James Murray:**[\[32223\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he will take to ensure (a) circuses and (b) other leisure businesses who do not have fixed premises with a rateable value can potentially benefit from the cash grants being made available to other leisure businesses with a rateable value of £51,000 or less.

**Jesse Norman:**

The Government has set out a package of measures to support businesses through this period of disruption caused by COVID-19, including those businesses not eligible for the small business grant or the retail, leisure and hospitality grant.

This support for business includes the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan scheme for small and medium-sized businesses, a statutory sick pay relief package, the HMRC Time To Pay Scheme, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms continue to keep people in employment and a new lending facility from the Bank of England for larger firms.

These measures provide a comprehensive, coordinated and coherent response to what is a serious and evolving economic situation. As the wider economic picture becomes clearer, the Government will do whatever it takes to get the nation through the impacts of COVID-19 and the Government stands ready to announce further action wherever necessary.

**■ Third Sector: Coronavirus****Dame Diana Johnson:**[\[32077\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to provide a loan guarantee offer through the business interruption loan scheme for community organisations affected by covid-19.

**John Glen:**

The government has announced a significant package of financial support for businesses and organisations, including through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme. Details of this package are available at: [www.businesssupport.gov.uk](http://www.businesssupport.gov.uk)

**WORK AND PENSIONS****■ Carer's Allowance: Coronavirus****Alison Thewliss:**[\[32161\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will take steps to (a) update and (b) relax the eligibility requirements for carers allowance during the covid-19 outbreak to help carers that may be required to cease paid employment.

**Justin Tomlinson:**

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19 and we have been clear in

our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

#### ■ **Carers: Coronavirus**

**Marco Longhi:**

[\[30043\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if the Government has plans to extend financial support for people that need to take time off work to care for vulnerable relatives suffering from covid-19.

**Justin Tomlinson:**

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

#### ■ **Department for Work and Pensions: Coronavirus**

**Alison Thewliss:**

[\[32160\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will take steps to remove the requirement for explicit consent for enquiries to her Department during the covid-10 outbreak.

**Mims Davies:**

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

The Universal Credit system is structured around an online personal account which contains all the information relevant to the claim. This includes claimant's bank account details, savings, capital, medical history, family relationships and address information, which means that we have a responsibility to ensure that a high level of security and protection is in place, and that we take all reasonable steps to protect the position of claimants and their data which includes ensuring that consent is explicitly given to share it.

#### ■ **Employment: Mental Illness**

**Marco Longhi:**

[\[30042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to support people with mental disabilities (a) into and (b) to remain in employment.

**Justin Tomlinson:**

The Government is committed to reducing the disability employment gap and seeing a million more disabled people in work by 2027.

We help disabled people, including those with mental health conditions and learning disabilities, return to and stay in work through programmes including the Work and Health Programme, the new Intensive Personalised Employment Support Programme, Access to Work and Disability Confident.

**Food Banks: Coronavirus****Robert Halfon:****[31483]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent discussions she has had with supermarket chains and suppliers on ensuring that the foodbanks can meet the increased demand as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

**Will Quince:**

Food banks are independent charitable organisations and, as such, are best placed to decide on the most appropriate arrangements for supporting people who use them. As both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

I also refer the honourable member to the response given by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in response to an oral question made on 19 March:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-03-19/debates/EBB8F3D7-F9F4-4C5C-B913-86FD27851B5D/VulnerablePeopleFoodSupplies> ”

[Additionally announcements were made at the Prime Minister’s daily briefings on 21 and 22 March in relation to food supply]

**Food: Voucher Schemes****Stephanie Peacock:****[32296]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans his Department has for an emergency food voucher referral system due to (a) the closure of referral agencies due to staff self-isolation or sickness relating to the covid-19 outbreak and (b) increased need for food banks due to the economic effects of that outbreak.

**Will Quince:**

Food banks are independent charitable organisations and, as such, are best placed to decide on the most appropriate arrangements for supporting people who use them. As both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are



rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

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[Additionally announcements were made at the Prime Minister’s daily briefings on 21 and 22 March in relation to food supply]

## ■ Pension Credit

**John Nicolson:**

**[30051]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans her Department has to measure the effectiveness of the 12-week awareness campaign on Pension Credit take-up that started on 12 February 2020.

**Guy Opperman:**

The Government wants to make sure that all pensioners eligible can claim the Pension Credit to which they are entitled. There are already around 1.6 million people claiming some £5.4 billion in Pension Credit but some people may be missing out. That is why on the 10<sup>th</sup> February we launched a 12 week nationwide campaign to raise awareness of Pension Credit and encourage those over State Pension age to check whether they’re eligible. The campaign includes a short, animated video that is being shown in GP waiting rooms and in Post Offices. It is also being shown to Facebook users and supported by messaging on social media.

As part of the campaign we are asking a sample of callers to the Pension Credit claim line whether they are calling as result of having seen the campaign materials and where they heard about Pension Credit. We are monitoring the Facebook activity using digital metrics which will give us insight on the performance of the adverts and how long people are watching the videos for. We are also monitoring the number of visits to the Pension Credit pages on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) and use of the Pension Credit Toolkit ( <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pension-credit-toolkit> ). At the end of the campaign, we will carry out a full evaluation based on these results in order to measure the effectiveness and impact of the campaign.

## ■ Pregnancy: Coronavirus

**Stuart C McDonald:**

**[30854]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what additional support will be made available to pregnant women who lose earnings as a result of advice to avoid social contact as a precaution against covid-19.

**Mims Davies:**

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

■ **Sign Language: Television****Dawn Butler:**[\[29899\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment the Government has made of the merits of providing a British Sign Language interpreter to accompany televised announcements to ensure the deaf community has access to information.

**Justin Tomlinson:**

The Government is committed to ensuring deaf people can fully participate and play a full role in society. We support initiatives aimed at improving understanding of the needs of deaf people and how the barriers they face can be removed, as well as giving deaf people more say in how they access services.

We worked with the BBC to introduce a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter on Monday 16 March to accompany the Prime Minister's daily coronavirus press conference. The BSL interpreter is available on the BBC News Channel and BBC iPlayer. We intend to continue to work with the BBC to ensure there is a BSL interpreter in our daily updates on coronavirus and are prioritising the exploration of additional methods to ensure that all disabled people have access to pertinent communication in accessible formats.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Coronavirus****Emma Hardy:**[\[30013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to limit (a) Statutory Sick Pay and (b) other benefits in the event that people are required to self-isolate repeatedly.

**Justin Tomlinson:**

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

**Emma Hardy:**[\[30017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what alternative arrangements will be made available for benefit claimants who are unable to attend face to face meetings.

**Mims Davies:**

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

**Tim Farron:**[\[32100\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans she has to waive National Insurance requirements in determining the eligibility of claimants for social security in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

**Will Quince:**

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

**■ Statutory Sick Pay****Ellie Reeves:**[\[30126\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of statutory sick pay in covering individual weekly living expenses; and if she will increase the value of that pay to the European average during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Justin Tomlinson:**

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

**■ Winter Fuel Payments: Coronavirus****Ms Angela Eagle:**[\[32053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has plans to extend the winter fuel allowance for recipients who (a) have to self-isolate or (b) are diagnosed with covid-19.

**Guy Opperman:**

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

**■ Zero Hours Contracts: Coronavirus****Robert Halfon:**[\[32138\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what support her Department is providing to people on zero-hours contracts whose employment has been terminated as a result of covid-19 and do not qualify for Statutory Sick Pay because they are not self-isolating.

**Justin Tomlinson:**

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances and we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

#### ■ Departmental Contingent Liability Notification (Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme)

**Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Alok Sharma):**  
[\[HCWS177\]](#)

I am tabling this statement for the benefit of Honourable and Right Honourable Members to bring to their attention the details of the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 11 March 2020.

The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme will be facilitated by the Government-owned British Business Bank and delivered through its delivery partners. Lenders will offer loans of up to £5 million to support small and medium sized businesses with a turnover up to £45 million that are affected by the coronavirus outbreak. There will be no limit on the number and aggregate value of loans that can be made under the scheme.

The scheme is based on the British Business Bank's existing Enterprise Finance Guarantee scheme, is available on a temporary basis and can be extended as required. The key parameters of the scheme are as follows:

- The percentage of the remaining balance of each loan that is guaranteed by the Government will be increased to 80 per cent (currently 75 per cent of each EFG loan is guaranteed);
- A cap on gross Government liability at the level of the lender's whole CBILS portfolio of 75 per cent of losses (currently the Government's gross liability is capped at 20 per cent of losses across the lender's whole EFG portfolio);
- A government grant (the 'business interruption payment') will be provided for the benefit of businesses, equal to the fees and interest incurred on the facility for the first twelve months. The maximum grant payable is capped at a level that will allow a significant majority of businesses to be compensated in full. A lower cap applies to businesses in some sectors;
- The lender must establish that the SME has a viable business proposition assessed according to its normal commercial lending criteria. However, where there are some concerns over the short-term business performance due to Covid-19 impacts, provided the lender reasonably believes that the finance will help the business to 'trade out' of any short-term cashflow difficulty, then the business is considered eligible for the scheme; and
- Subject to the lender's policy, businesses can access CBILS loans up to a value of £250,000 without the lender undertaking an assessment of their security position

(currently, only businesses that have been assessed by the lender as having insufficient security can access EFG loans).

The new scheme was launched on 23 March, will run for an initial period of six months, and will be extended as required. The Government will be subject to a greater contingent liability than is the case for the Enterprise Finance Guarantee, and I will be laying a Departmental Minute today containing a description of the liability undertaken.

For more information on this and other support for business, please go to <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/>

## CABINET OFFICE

### ■ Update: Strengthening Democracy

**Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith):**

[\[HCWS183\]](#)

In the written statement of 19 March, 'Postponement of electoral events' (HCWS174 and HLWS169), the Government outlined its proposals for urgent electoral legislation to postpone forthcoming elections as part of the wider steps to tackle the spread of the coronavirus.

Working to ensure the health and safety of the British public is the Government's top priority. We still however have a responsibility to govern, plan for the future and ensure that where possible, essential Parliamentary business continues and legal obligations are met.

The House of Commons may debate the Government's policy stance on UK Parliamentary boundaries on Friday 27 March, in light of the Private Members' Bill tabled by the Hon. Member for Wellingborough (Peter Bone).

I believe clearly setting out the Government's emerging policy position would provide clarity for Parliament, the public and electoral administrators. Given this policy area is of direct relevance to the Commons, it is important that the first Chamber is properly informed.

This is also pertinent because at present, the Government is legally required to give effect to the recommendations from the Boundary Commissions as set out in their 2018 reports - including reducing the number of constituencies to 600. In this statement I lay out the Government's thinking on this matter.

#### **Need for equal and updated boundaries**

The Conservative Government committed, in its 2019 Manifesto, to delivering updated and equal UK Parliamentary boundaries with the essential aim of making sure that every vote counts the same - a cornerstone of democracy.

The last boundary review to be implemented in England was based on data from 2000; the last to be implemented in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland used data from 2001-2003. In effect, our current constituencies reflect how the UK population was at the beginning of the century. Today's youngest voters have been born since then: this

disregards significant changes in demographics, house building and geographical migration.

The Government has also taken into account representations from colleagues on all sides of the House, and from the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

When Parliamentary time allows, the Government is minded to bring forward primary legislation to set the framework for future boundary reviews, including the next review due to begin in early 2021. Such provisions would cover the number of constituencies, the frequency of reviews, the boundary review process, and the process by which those recommendations are brought into legal effect.

### **Maintaining 650 seats**

Legislation currently provides that, on implementation of the 2018 Boundary Review recommendations, the number of constituencies in the UK shall be 600. The Government is minded to instead make provision for the number of parliamentary constituencies to remain at 650. In doing so, we would also remove the statutory obligation to implement the 2018 Boundary Review recommendations and the statutory obligation on the Government to make arrangements to review the reduction in constituencies to 600 by 30 November 2020.

Under current legislation the Boundary Commissions are required to report on their next review by October 2023. In order to meet this deadline they would have to begin that review in early 2021. Without changes to primary legislation, there would be a legal obligation for the Boundary Commissions to undertake that review on the basis of 600 constituencies.

This is a change in policy from the position previously legislated for under the Coalition Government. Since that policy was established in the Coalition Agreement, the United Kingdom has now left the European Union. The UK Parliament will have a greater workload now we are taking back control and regaining our political and economic independence. It is therefore sensible for the number of parliamentary constituencies to remain at 650.

### **Electoral quota tolerance**

The Boundary Commissions are generally required to propose constituencies whose electorates vary in size by no more than +/- 5% from the average ("the electoral quota"). The Government is not minded to amend this tolerance level which achieves equal and fair boundaries whilst allowing the Boundary Commissions the flexibility to take account of other factors, such as physical geographical features and local ties, subject to the overriding principle of equality in constituency size.

### **Equal representation**

Updated and equal boundaries will ensure that every constituent nation in the United Kingdom has equal representation in the UK Parliament, and deliver parity of representation across the United Kingdom's constituencies.

Under the existing legislation, passed in 2011, there are four protected constituencies where the electoral quota tolerance does not apply on account of their unique geography: Orkney and Shetland, Na h-Eileanan an Iar, and two seats for the Isle of Wight. The Government is not minded to make changes to these protected constituencies, or to propose any more protected constituencies given the need to ensure equal representation.

### **Boundary review cycle**

Under the current legislation, boundary reviews must take place every five years. As the Government also intends to repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, future boundary reviews will inevitably be decoupled from the cycle of general elections. We need to strike a balance between regularly updated parliamentary constituencies and the disruption caused to local communities and their MPs by boundaries changing at every general election.

The Government is minded to consider that conducting boundary reviews every eight years strikes the right balance. An eight-year review cycle would generally allow for updated constituencies to be in place for two general elections before being reviewed in time for a third general election.

### **Implementing the recommendations of the independent Boundary Commissions**

Currently, at the end of a boundary review, the Government lays the reports of the independent and impartial Boundary Commissions before Parliament. The recommendations contained in the reports are then brought into effect by way of an Order in Council that must be approved by Parliament by the affirmative procedure before it can be made.

The Government is minded to continue to provide that the reports are still laid before Parliament (by the Speaker who is Chair of the Boundary Commissions) but would change the means of bringing the Boundary Commissions' recommendations into effect. The new recommended constituency boundaries will be brought into effect automatically by the Order in Council.

This change would provide certainty that the recommendations of the independent Boundary Commissions - developed through a robust and impartial process that is open to extensive consultation - would then be implemented without interference. Parliament, of course, would remain sovereign and can amend primary legislation as it sees fit.

### **Engagement with political parties**

The Government is keen to establish the broad support of Parliament for such changes and will engage with the political parties represented in the UK Parliament on such proposals.

This will include engagement with the Parliamentary Parties Panel on the technical measures planned. These include provisions relating to the length of time the Boundary Commissions have to conduct their reviews within the boundary review cycle and the process involved in the reviews, such as public hearings and consultation. I hope there is scope for broad cross-party agreement on such improvements.



In due course, the Government hopes that such reforms will strengthen democratic accountability of Parliament to the British people.

I hope this provides clarity on the Government's policy intent over this Parliament. Of course, as stated above, the Government's immediate legislative priority will be taking the necessary steps to protect the health and safety of the British public.

## DEFENCE

### ■ **RAF Battle Honours for Operation TELIC (Post War)**

**Minister of State for the Armed Forces (James Heapey):**

[\[HCWS181\]](#)

My noble Friend the Minister in the House of Lords (The Rt Hon Baroness Goldie DL) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement.

On the 10 October 2017, the Minister in the House of Lords made a Written Ministerial Statement announcing the award of Battle Honours to squadrons of Her Majesty's Royal Air Force, for their participation in Operation TELIC Post-War Consolidation and Reconstruction Phase during the period 1 May 2003 – 22 May 2011.

I am today announcing that Her Majesty The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the award of a Battle Honour to one further squadron of Her Majesty's Royal Air Force for their participation in Operation TELIC Post-War Consolidation and Reconstruction Phase during the period 1 May 2003 – 22 May 2011.

Battle Honours may be "awarded to commemorate any notable battle, action or engagement in which aircrew or Royal Air Force Regiment personnel played a memorable part". There are two levels of Battle Honour within the Royal Air Force. The first is the award of a Battle Honour which recognises that a squadron played a notable and significant role in the campaign. The second, higher level confers the right to emblazon the Battle Honour on the Standard itself. This ultimate accolade is reserved for those squadrons which are involved in direct confrontation with an enemy and demonstrate gallantry and spirit under fire.

In addition to the twenty-seven Battle Honours and eight Battle Honours with the right to emblazon previously approved for squadron's participation on Operation TELIC, one further operational flying squadron has been approved for the award of a Battle Honour.

A Battle Honour is awarded to:

No. 78 Squadron RAF

### ■ **RAF Battle Honours for Operations in Afghanistan**

**Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heapey):**

[\[HCWS179\]](#)

My noble Friend the Minister in the House of Lords (The Rt Hon Baroness Goldie DL) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement.

I am today announcing that Her Majesty The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the award of Battle Honours to squadrons of Her Majesty's Royal Air Force for

their participation in operations in Afghanistan during the period 7 October 2001 to 31 December 2014.

Battle Honours may be “awarded to commemorate any notable battle, action or engagement in which aircrew or Royal Air Force Regiment personnel played a memorable part”. There are two levels of Battle Honour within the Royal Air Force. The first is the award of a Battle Honour which recognises that a squadron played a notable and significant role in the campaign. The second, higher level confers the right to emblazon the Battle Honour on the Standard itself. Battle Honours with emblazonment are reserved for those squadrons which are involved in direct confrontation with an enemy and demonstrate gallantry and spirit under fire.

Six operational flying squadrons and nine Royal Air Force Regiment squadrons were awarded the highest honour of a Battle Honour with the right to emblazon. Battle Honours were approved for twenty-six operational flying squadrons for their participation in operations in Afghanistan.

A Battle Honour with the right to emblazon ‘AFGHANISTAN 2001-2014’ on their Squadron Standard is awarded to:

No. 7 SQUADRON RAF	No. 3 SQUADRON RAF REGIMENT
No. 18 (Bomber) Squadron RAF	No. 15 Squadron RAF Regiment
No. 27 Squadron RAF	No. 27 Squadron RAF Regiment
No. 28 (Army Cooperation) Squadron RAF	No. 34 Squadron RAF Regiment
No. 47 Squadron RAF	No. 51 Squadron RAF Regiment
No. 78 Squadron RAF	No. 58 Squadron RAF Regiment
No. 1 Squadron RAF Regiment	No. 63 Squadron RAF Regiment
No. II Squadron RAF Regiment	

A Battle Honour is awarded to:

No. 1 (FIGHTER) SQUADRON RAF	NO. 30 SQUADRON RAF
No. II (Army Cooperation) Squadron RAF	No. 31 Squadron RAF
No. 3 (Fighter) Squadron RAF	No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron RAF
No. IV (Army Cooperation) Squadron RAF	No. 39 Squadron RAF
No. V (Army Cooperation) Squadron RAF	No. 51 Squadron RAF
No. 8 Squadron RAF	No. LXX Squadron RAF
No. IX (Bomber) Squadron RAF	No. 99 Squadron RAF

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No. 1 (FIGHTER) SQUADRON RAF	NO. 30 SQUADRON RAF
No. 10 Squadron RAF	No. 101 Squadron RAF
No. 12 (Bomber) Squadron RAF	No. 120 Squadron RAF
No. XIII Squadron RAF	No. 201 Squadron RAF
No. 14 Squadron RAF	No. 206 Squadron RAF
No. 23 Squadron RAF	No. 216 Squadron RAF
No. XXIV Squadron RAF	No. 617 Squadron RAF

### ■ **RAF Battle Honours for Operations Vulcan and Barras**

**Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heapey):**

[\[HCWS180\]](#)

My noble Friend the Minister in the House of Lords (The Rt Hon Baroness Goldie DL) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement.

I am today announcing that Her Majesty The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the award of Battle Honours to squadrons of Her Majesty's Royal Air Force, for their participation in Operation VULCAN (Bosnia) during the period August to September 1995 and Operation BARRAS (Sierra Leone) during the period August to September 2000.

Battle Honours may be "awarded to commemorate any notable battle, action or engagement in which aircrew or Royal Air Force Regiment personnel played a memorable part". There are two levels of Battle Honour within the Royal Air Force. The first is the award of a Battle Honour which recognises that a squadron played a notable and significant role in the campaign. The second, higher level confers the right to emblazon the Battle Honour on the Standard itself. This ultimate accolade of Battle Honours with emblazonment is reserved for those squadrons which are involved in direct confrontation with an enemy and demonstrate gallantry and spirit under fire.

The highest honour of Battle Honour with the right to emblazon has been awarded to two squadrons for their participation on Operation VULCAN.

The highest honour of Battle Honour with the right to emblazon has been awarded to one squadron for their participation on Operation BARRAS.

A Battle Honour with the right to emblazon 'BOSNIA 1995' on their Squadron Standard is awarded to:

No. IV (Army Cooperation) Squadron RAF

No. 6 Squadron RAF

A Battle Honour with the right to emblazon 'SIERRA LEONE 2000' on their Squadron Standard is awarded to:

No.7 Squadron RAF

■ **Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations Annual Report 2019**

**Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heappey):**

[\[HCWS178\]](#)

I am today publishing the report of the Review of the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations 2019.

The Review's purpose was to assess and challenge the continuing requirement, efficiency and good governance of the thirteen RFCAs and, their Joint Committee, the Council of RFCAs. The Review was undertaken by MOD, and an independent Challenge Panel was appointed to assure its robustness and impartiality. The Review was conducted with the full participation of the RFCA community, and gathered evidence from a wide range of stakeholders across government, Defence and the RFCAs' customers at the national and regional levels. I would like to thank all those who contributed to the Review.

The Review concluded that the functions of the RFCAs remain valued and necessary and the RFCAs should continue in their role of key partner to Defence – a point made clear by the wide range of beneficiaries of the RFCAs' work. The Review makes a number of recommendations to strengthen the relationship between Defence and the RFCAs, ensuring the RFCAs are on a stable, sustainable footing to continue to deliver advocacy and support for Reserves and Cadets across the UK.

Defence is currently working with other Government Departments and the RFCAs to understand how best to implement the recommendations. This will be announced in due course.

The Report will be placed in the library of the House.

## DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ **Media Matters**

**Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden):**

[\[HCWS182\]](#)

On 22 January 2020, DCMS informed the House that my predecessor had issued a Public Interest Intervention Notice (PIIN) in respect of the acquisition by Daily Mail and General Trust (DMGT) of JPI Media Publications Ltd, and thus the i newspaper.

The PIIN triggered the requirement for the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to report to me on jurisdictional and competition matters, and for Ofcom to report on the following media public interest consideration:

- the need for, to the extent that it is reasonable and practicable, a sufficient plurality of views in newspapers in each market for newspapers in the United Kingdom or a part of the United Kingdom.

I received the CMA and Ofcom reports on by the deadline of 13 March and have today published these on the gov.uk website.

I accept the CMA's findings that whilst it is, or may be, the case that a relevant merger situation has been created, the merger does not give rise to a realistic prospect of a substantial lessening of competition in any market.

I have also agreed with Ofcom that the merger does not raise concerns in relation to plurality of views in newspapers.

In light of this, and having considered representations submitted by interested parties in response to the PIIN, DCMS has written to the parties today confirming my decision not to refer the merger for a Phase 2 investigation.

The role of the Secretary of State in this process is quasi-judicial and procedures are in place to ensure that I act independently and have followed a process which is fair and impartial.

## JUSTICE

### ■ Tenth Annual Report of the UK's National Preventive Mechanism

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland):**  
[\[HCWS185\]](#)

The United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), which the UK ratified in December 2003, requires States Parties to establish a "National Preventive Mechanism" (NPM) to carry out visits to places of detention to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The Government established the UK NPM in March 2009 (Hansard 31 March 2009, Vol. 490, Part No. 57, Column 56WS). The UK NPM is currently composed of 21 scrutiny bodies covering the whole of the UK.

Following previous practice, I have presented to Parliament the 10<sup>th</sup> NPM's annual report (Command Paper CP 228). This report covers the period from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. I commend the important work that the NPM has carried out over this period and the NPM's independent role in safeguarding the human rights of detainees across the

UK. I also note the NPM's observations around prisons, children in detention, police custody, immigration detention and court custody. The Government is committed to making prisons places of safety and reform. We are investing an additional £2.75 billion to transform jails, with tough new security measures including x-ray body scanners, and creating 10,000 modern prison places to rehabilitate offenders. Our long-term ambition is to replace Secure Training Centres and Young Offender Institutions with Secure Schools, putting education, healthcare and purposeful activity at the heart of young offender rehabilitation.

## TREASURY

### ■ Notification of Contingent Liability

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak):**

[\[HCWS184\]](#)

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Bank of England decided at its meeting ending on 19 March to ask for an expansion in the maximum limit of purchases that may be undertaken by the Asset Purchase Facility (APF). This will encompass up to £200 billion of further purchases of gilts and corporate bonds to support the economy through the disruption caused by Covid-19.

In light of the evidence on the impact of Covid-19 on the global and domestic economy, and conditions in the UK and international government bond markets, the MPC judged further asset purchases financed by the issuance of central bank reserves should be undertaken to enable the MPC to meet its statutory objectives. The MPC expects that purchases of corporate bonds will improve the availability of credit to UK companies and that further purchases of gilts will reduce borrowing costs, raise asset prices, affect expectations and confidence, and thereby support the economy. I have therefore authorised an increase in the total size of the APF of £200 billion. This will bring the maximum total size of the APF from £445 to £645 billion.

In line with the requirements in the MPC remit, the amendments to the APF that could affect the allocation of credit and pose risks to the Exchequer have been discussed with Treasury officials. The risk control framework previously agreed with the Treasury will remain in place, and HM Treasury will keep monitoring risks to public funds from the Facility through regular risk oversight meetings and enhanced information sharing with the Bank.

There will continue to be an opportunity for the Treasury to provide views to the MPC on the design of the schemes within the APF, as they affect the Government's broader economic objectives and may pose risks to the Exchequer.

The Government will continue to indemnify the Bank and the APF from any losses arising out of, or in connection with, the facility. If the liability is called, provision for any payment will be sought through the normal supply procedure.

A full departmental Minute has been laid in the House of Commons providing more detail on this contingent liability.