



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 25 March 2021 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:32 P.M., 25 March 2021). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ **Advanced Research and Invention Agency**

Chi Onwurah:

[\[173015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what his role will be in setting the direction and missions of the Advance Research and Invention Agency.

Amanda Solloway:

ARIA will fund research in new ways across areas, industries, or technologies. ARIA will not have its research focus set by Ministers. Following an open and robust recruitment process, my Rt. Hon. Friend the Secretary of State will appoint an exceptional and visionary leadership team and entrust them to set the research agenda for ARIA.

While ARIA will not be given an overarching 'mission' by Government, ARIA's programmes will each be motivated by a single, clear ambition set by the programme manager. Research projects and funding decisions will all be motivated by that clear programme goal.

■ **Bus Services: Restart Grant Scheme**

Grahame Morris:

[\[172975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, for what reasons coach tour operators are ineligible for a Restart Grant payment.

Paul Scully:

Coach Tour Operators are not eligible for the Restart Grant Scheme. This is because eligible businesses must offer in-person services, where the main service and activity takes place in a fixed rate-paying premises, in the relevant sectors.

However, they may be able to access discretionary support through the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG). My Rt. Hon. Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced an additional £425m will be made available via ARG meaning that more than £2bn has been made available to local authorities since November 2020. This funding gives Local Authorities the ability to provide support that suits their local area including to support those businesses not required to close but which have had their trade severely affected by the restrictions. Guidance for the Additional Restrictions Grant identifies that group tour and coach operators can be considered for support through this funding.

Grahame Morris:

[\[172976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the exclusion of coach tour operators from the definition of a leisure business in the

Restart Grant: guidance to local authorities, what sector definition coach operators come under.

Paul Scully:

The Restart Grant guidance to local authorities seeks to define in-scope sectors for the purpose of the grants only and not in general terms.

Coach Tour Operators are not eligible for the Restart Grant Scheme. This is because eligible businesses must offer in-person services, where the main service and activity takes place in fixed rate-paying premises, in the relevant sectors.

They are eligible for support through the Additional Restrictions Grant.

■ **Carbon Emissions**

Virginia Crosbie:

[\[173229\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how the UK carbon budget contributes to the Government's Climate Change mitigation strategy; and what assessment he has made of what investment is required in educational buildings to retro-fit those building to net zero emissions standards as part of the Build Back Better Strategy.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The Climate Change Act 2008 introduced our framework of carbon budgets to mitigate climate change by ensuring continued progress towards our emission reduction target, capping emissions in successive five-year blocks. Through this legal framework and ambitious policy action, we have shown that cutting emissions and growing the economy go hand-in-hand – reducing our emissions by over 43% since 1990 while growing the economy by 78%.

We are going further and faster to mitigate climate change. This year we will set the sixth carbon budget in legislation and publish a Net Zero Strategy ahead of COP26, setting out the Government's vision for transitioning to a net zero economy.

The Government remains committed to its manifesto pledge to invest £9.2 billion in the energy efficiency of homes, schools, and hospitals, helping to decarbonise buildings to keep us on track to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme is a government-funded grant scheme to help public sector organisations in England, including schools, colleges and universities, and reserved public services across to the UK to install low carbon heating and energy efficiency measures on their estates. On 17th March 2021, £75m of funding was announced for Phase 2 Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.

■ **Climate Change: Ethnic Groups**

Catherine West:

[\[173116\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether his Department has made an assessment of the effect of the Government's climate policies on BAME communities.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The impacts of climate change are not equally distributed across people or communities, and it is well-established that existing social inequalities result in a disproportionate negative impact of climate change among disadvantaged groups. BEIS has committed to improving how it takes account of equality, diversity and inclusion in its policy-making, to develop our interventions in a more inclusive way. We comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty by considering the equality impacts of our climate policies on different protected characteristics – including BAME communities. BEIS will be setting out more detail on the work it is undertaking across its responsibilities, including climate change, to build understanding and take actions to reduce inequalities in areas relating to its responsibilities.

Fossil Fuels**Preet Kaur Gill:**[\[173126\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, when he plans to publish the results of the Government's consultation on subsidising overseas fossil fuel projects.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The Government published its response on the 24th March. The link to this publication will be available soon.

Investment Security Unit**Dr Julian Lewis:**[\[172844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 18 March 2021 to Question 168810, on Parliamentary scrutiny of the proposed Investment Security Unit, on how many occasions since 2016 the BEIS Select Committee has been given access to material protectively marked as Top Secret; and whether any Top Secret material was disclosed to that Committee during its scrutiny of the (a) civil nuclear programme and (b) other matters referred to in the Answer to that Question and described as sensitive.

Paul Scully:

Details of the frequency and subject matter of what sensitive or highly classified information is transmitted outside Government can itself be sensitive, and its disclosure may give rise to national security risks. I therefore cannot publish the information in the detail my Rt. Hon. Friend has requested.

Local Restrictions Support Grant**Chi Onwurah:**[\[173011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 18 March 2021 to Question 168909 on Business: Government Assistance, what the value per (a) capita and (b) business was for the Local Restrictions Support

Grant (Open) covering the periods of local covid-19 restrictions between (i) 1 August 2020 to 5 November 2020 and (ii) 2 December 2020 to 5 January 2021.

Paul Scully:

The Government is committed to continuing to provide financial support via Local Authorities for business premises that are required to close, or which are severely affected by the restrictions put in place to tackle Covid-19 and save lives.

For businesses in Tier 2 and Tier 3, funding was made available to Local Authorities to provide discretionary grants via the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSG) (Open). When the national lockdown was announced on 5 January, the LRSG (Open) was replaced by the LRSG (Closed) Addendum: 5 January onwards. From 1 April, the LRSG will be replaced by Restart Grants to support businesses as they begin to reopen.

Discretionary grants – the LRSG (Open) and the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) - are formula based. Data on Government allocations to, and payments by, Local Authorities, of the LRSG (Open) and other Government Business Support Grants, is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-grant-funding-local-authority-payments-to-small-and-medium-businesses> .

■ **Manufacturing Industries: Innovation**

Dr Philippa Whitford:

[173058]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how the UK manufacturing sector fits into the future of innovation in the (a) Plan for Growth and (b) upcoming Innovation Strategy.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Government is, and will continue to be, a champion of the needs of business and industry, including the UK manufacturing sector. This is why Build Back Better: plan for growth and its supporting strategies will put the UK at the forefront of opportunities, give businesses the confidence to invest, boost productivity across the UK, enable our green industrial revolution, and support our vision for Global Britain.

As announced in the Plan for Growth, published alongside Budget, the Department is engaging across Government to develop an Innovation Strategy. As well as working across Whitehall and with our Innovation Expert Group, we want to engage with the innovation community, including the manufacturing sector which accounts for 64% of all business expenditure on UK R&D, to ensure the evidence base is sound and the policy proposals in the Strategy are well developed.

■ **OneWeb**

Sarah Olney:

[173118]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what progress OneWeb has made towards being operational by 2022.

Amanda Solloway:

OneWeb currently has 110 satellites in orbit, with an additional 36 satellites due to be launched on 25th March. The launch pipeline is planned to complete UK coverage this year, so that commercial service introduction can be commenced in the UK by the end of 2021. Global coverage is planned for 2022.

■ Re-employment**Navendu Mishra:**[\[173185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 11 March 2021 to Question 164672, on Re-employment, if he will list the (a) employer bodies, (b) trade unions and (c) professional bodies with advisory contact with employers, such as employment lawyers, accountants, and payroll services, that were consulted in the Acas investigation into fire and rehire practices.

Paul Scully:

Acas spoke to a wide range of groups from across the business sector, both employer and employee groups, on the prevalence and use of fire and rehire practices.

Acas guaranteed the anonymity of their participants in order to maintain the confidentiality that is necessary to enable frank and open conversations on these matters.

Navendu Mishra:[\[173186\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 11 March 2021 to Question 164672, on Re-employment, what the terms of reference for the Acas investigation into fire and rehire practices were.

Paul Scully:

Due to the limited evidence available on the use of fire and rehire practices among employers, BEIS officials engaged Acas to hold independent and impartial conversations with stakeholders to gather evidence.

Acas spoke to a wide range of groups from across the business sector, both employer and employee groups. Acas guaranteed the anonymity of their participants to maintain the confidentiality needed to enable frank and open conversations on these matters.

■ Social Services: Minimum Wage**Barbara Keeley:**[\[172953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the Supreme Court judgement in the case of Royal Mencap Society v Tomlinson-Blake and Shannon v Rampersad and another dated 19 March 2021, whether he has plans to bring forward legislative proposals to amend National Minimum Wage regulations to clarify that sleep-in shifts for care staff should be counted for the purposes of calculating the minimum wage.

Paul Scully:

The Supreme Court has upheld the Court of Appeal judgment of July 2018 and provided legal clarity following years of evolving court judgments and legal uncertainty.

The Government welcomes the legal clarity and is considering the implications of the judgment, also with care commissioners and providers, to consider what action, if any, is needed.

CABINET OFFICE■ **[Subject Heading to be Assigned]****Gavin Robinson:**[\[913920\]](#)

What progress has been made by the UK-EU Joint Committee on revising the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Penny Mordaunt:

The Joint Committee has been working on the many difficulties presented to the operation of the Northern Ireland Protocol by the EU's decision to activate Article 16 on 29 January. There are outstanding issues to be resolved and we have taken temporary operational steps to avoid disruption to everyday life. We remain committed to working within the Joint Committee process to find solutions.

■ **10 Downing Street: Repairs and Maintenance****John Spellar:**[\[164350\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Cabinet Secretary was consulted on the financing of the recent refurbishment of No. 10 Downing St.

Rachel Reeves:[\[167191\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the total cost to the public purse of (a) refurbishments and (b) renovations to No.10 Downing Street since July 2019 has been notified to the Cabinet Secretary.

Chloe Smith:

The Downing Street complex is a working building, as well as containing two Ministerial residences. As has been the case under successive administrations, refurbishments and maintenance are made periodically.

Works to the Downing Street estate are overseen by the Cabinet Office. It is not the practice of successive administrations to comment on which officials have been consulted or advised on matters.

■ Cabinet Office: Written Questions

John Spellar:

[\[172856\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, for what reason Question 164350 tabled by the Rt Hon Member for Warley on 8 March 2021 has not received an answer; and when he plans to answer that Question.

Chloe Smith:

I apologise for the delay in responding to the question raised by the Rt Hon. Member. I refer him to the answer given to [PQ164350](#) on 25 March 2021.

■ Census: Disability

Catherine West:

[\[173112\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he made of the potential merits of including a question on disability in the 2021 Census.

Chloe Smith:

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

Attachments:

1. UKSAs response to PQ173112 [UKSA's final response to PQ173112.pdf]

■ Civil Servants: Apprentices

Mrs Heather Wheeler:

[\[913912\]](#)

What steps he is taking to improve the quality of civil service apprenticeships.

Julia Lopez:

The Civil Service will be launching a new Apprenticeships Strategy in the new financial year. The first phase will have delivered 30,000 apprenticeships by April. In this strategy we will focus not just on numbers but on the quality of training on offer to ensure that departments are better equipped to nurture talent in house and in plugging skills gaps

To this end, we recently published the "Curriculum and Campus for Government Skills", with the goal of setting the highest standard in vocational training for all Civil Servants, including apprentices.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control

Stephen Morgan:

[\[145871\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the scientific basis was for the decision to allow children's playgrounds to remain open while closing outdoor sports courts during the 2021 covid-19 lockdown.

Catherine West:

[151788]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will publish the scientific advice for the decision to close outdoor sports facilities during the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021 and keep children's playgrounds open.

Penny Mordaunt:

Throughout the pandemic, we have consistently adapted our response as we have learnt more about the virus and how best to tackle it. Decisions on when to lift restrictions, and in which order, seek to strike a balance between the epidemiological evidence and advice, the impact lockdown is having on people's health (including mental health and disproportionate impacts on certain groups), wellbeing, and the economy. Scientific evidence supporting the government response to coronavirus is regularly published here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/scientific-evidence-supporting-the-government-response-to-coronavirus-covid-19>.

On 22 February the Government published its ' [COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021](#) '

roadmap to recovery. The roadmap outlines four steps for cautiously easing restrictions across England. The first measures of Step 1 took place on the 8th March. Schools breaking up for the Easter holidays will provide an opportunity for further, limited relaxation particularly in outdoor settings where there is less risk. Therefore from 29 March, outdoor sports and leisure facilities will reopen and organised sport (for adults and children) will resume.

The design of the roadmap has been informed by the latest scientific evidence and seeks a balance between our key social and economic priorities, whilst preserving the health and safety of our country.

■ Coronavirus: Inquiries

Anne Marie Morris:

[173036]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, when the Government plans to establish an inquiry on its response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Julia Lopez:

COVID-19 is the biggest challenge the UK, together with nations around the world, has faced in decades. Throughout the pandemic, we have consistently adapted our response as we have learnt more about the virus and how best to tackle it. As stated by the Prime Minister on 15 July 2020 'we will seek to learn the lessons of the pandemic in the future, and certainly we will have an independent inquiry into what happened.' Any further updates will be announced in the usual way.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

Mr Steve Baker:

[R] [172996]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's consultation, COVID-Status Certification Review - Call for

evidence, published on 15 March 2021, how that consultation will make an assessment of the effect of the (a) covid-19 vaccine rollout and (b) high efficacy of the covid-19 vaccines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Steve Baker:

[R] [[172998](#)]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's consultation, COVID-Status Certification Review - Call for evidence, published on 15 March 2021, if he will publish a representative sample of the evidence that informs the outcome of that review.

Mr Steve Baker:

[R] [[172999](#)]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the consultation, COVID-status Certification Review - call for evidence, published on 15 March 2021, whether that review will include legal advice on whether the use of such certification will be compatible with the Equality Act 2010; and if he will make a statement.

Martyn Day:

[[173091](#)]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what digital architecture the Government plans to use to underpin the covid-19 vaccine certificate system.

Penny Mordaunt:

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer given to [PQ171522](#) on 23 March 2021.

■ **Electronic Government: Proof of Identity**

Daniel Zeichner:

[[913913](#)]

What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of GOV.UK Verify.

Julia Lopez:

Verify continues to work well, in support of 22 government services. Over 8 million people have used Verify, with 2 million added in the last year as citizens accessed critical online services during the pandemic.

Building on the lessons and experiences of Verify, and as we announced in last year's Spending Review, the Government Digital Service is collaborating with other departments to develop a new login and identity assurance system that will make it easier for more people to use online services safely.

For example, we know that extra data sources will be needed for a more inclusive service, so we are also working with the Home Office on its digitisation of birth, marriage and death records.

■ **Government Chief Scientific Adviser**

Greg Clark:

[[170571](#)]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many meetings he had with the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser from (a) 1 March

2020 to 31 May 2020, (b) 1 June 2020 to 31 August 2020, (c) 1 September 2020 to 30 November 2020 and (d) 1 December 2020 to 28 February 2021.

Penny Mordaunt:

The Cabinet Office draws from a range of scientific advice and expertise, including from the Government Chief Scientific Adviser, the Chief Scientific Advisers in individual Government Departments, and academics and researchers. In line with the practice of successive administrations, details of internal meetings are not normally disclosed.

■ **Internet: Safety**

Damian Collins:

[\[913916\]](#)

What assessment the Government has made of the effectiveness of the Defending Democracy programme as part of its plans to bring forward legislative proposals on online harms.

Chloe Smith:

The Defending Democracy programme coordinates work and expertise across government work to safeguard the integrity and security of our democratic processes.

Through the Online Harms legislative proposals, the programme is making good progress against two of its strategic objectives: to encourage respect for open, fair and safe democratic participation; and to promote fact-based discourse.

■ **Overseas Trade: Poland**

Daniel Kawczynski:

[\[172930\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the level of bilateral trade was with Poland in (a) 2018, (b) 2019 and (c) 2020.

Chloe Smith:

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

Attachments:

1. UKSAs response to PQ172930 [UKSA's final response to PQ172930.pdf]

■ **Public Sector: Procurement**

Rebecca Long Bailey:

[\[913904\]](#)

What steps his Department is taking to improve transparency in procurement in its response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Julia Lopez:

The government recognises the importance of maintaining public confidence in how we manage taxpayers' money and I have set out before the challenges we faced in our response to the covid 19 outbreak. We are taking steps to improve the processes already in place and ensure public spending is fair and transparent.

Proposals in the Green Paper aim to improve transparency in procurement across the public sector and include specific measures to strengthen transparency through the commercial lifecycle from planning through to procurement, contract award, performance and completion.

We are also taking forward all 28 recommendations from the independent Boardman report to set out areas for improvement within the Cabinet Office's own internal contracting procedures.

We have also made KPI data on 379 contracts available to the public, as a further step towards greater transparency.

■ **UK Government Union Capability Independent Review**

Sir Bernard Jenkin:

[913910]

What steps he is taking in response to the Dunlop Review on relations between the UK Government and the Governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Chloe Smith:

This government is a government for the whole of the United Kingdom.

Yesterday, my Right Honourable Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster updated the House on the significant progress we've made in implementing Lord Dunlop's recommendations, alongside a progress update on the intergovernmental relations review and our first IGR transparency report.

■ **Undertakers: Emergencies**

Carolyn Harris:

[172095]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of including funeral directors as Category 2 responders under the Civil Contingencies Act.

Julia Lopez:

The Government is committed to undertaking a statutory review of the Civil Contingencies Act every five years. This was last undertaken in March 2017 which means we must complete a further review by 2022. As part of this, we will consider whether changes need to be made to the list of category 1 and 2 responders under the Act. In doing so, we will want to reflect carefully on lessons from recent events, including the part funeral directors and others have played in ensuring the dignified and effective management of the deceased during the Covid pandemic.

■ **Veterans**

Sir George Howarth:

[171512]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what additional support is available to support service veterans during the covid-19 pandemic to (a) access employment opportunities, (b) access housing opportunities for those who

are homeless and (c) link those about to leave the armed services with training opportunities.

Johnny Mercer:

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, veterans have continued to be able to access support for employment, housing and training through services including the Veterans Gateway and the MOD's Veterans Welfare Service. The Department for Work and Pensions is delivering the £2bn Kickstart programme, creating high quality work placements for young people at risk of long-term unemployment, and each of Jobcentre Plus's Districts is currently supported by an Armed Forces Champion to cater for the specific needs of veterans. Training and resettlement is delivered to service leavers through the MOD's Career Transition Partnership.

As a result of the pandemic, access to CTP services has been extended by three months, and training courses available virtually wherever possible. The Defence Transition Services, which support the most vulnerable Service leavers and their families have continued to operate. The Government has provided additional housing support to the general population, helping rough sleepers into safe accommodation, and published updated guidance for local authorities in June 2020 to ensure the veteran community has appropriate access to social housing, placing a bigger emphasis on mental health needs.

■ **Veterans: Wakefield**

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[171765\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much funding his Department provided to veteran's groups in Wakefield in 2020.

Johnny Mercer:

The Government provides a range of financial support to veterans groups including through regular allocations of £10million per annum to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, to be distributed amongst the service charity sector. In 2020, as it has this year, the Government provided an additional £10million to deliver charitable projects and initiatives that support veterans with mental health needs. A further £6m was provided to over 100 charities through the COVID-19 Impact Fund, to sustain charitable operations through the pandemic.

These figures include both funding for local projects and for organisations who operate nationally. The Government does not hold a central breakdown of all funding received by veterans groups that operate in Wakefield. However, an example of local funding is the grant awarded to Age UK Wakefield District, which received £18,747 enabling them to reach out to over 100 local Veterans dealing with issues such as Shopping and other practical help to emotional and wellbeing calls to people struggling on their own in this uncertain time.

DEFENCE**■ Armed Forces: Housing****Stephen Morgan:**[\[172114\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent assessment he has made of Amey plc's ability to meet its contractual targets on (a) call out and (b) maintenance for service accommodation.

Jeremy Quin:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) monitors Amey's ability to meet its contractual targets on a monthly basis through a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which include KPIs covering both response maintenance and scheduled statutory and mandatory maintenance.

For Service Family Accommodation:

- Response Maintenance. Amey have maintained a response performance at or just above the KPI level of 95% over the last 12 months. In February 2021 it was 95.8%.
- Scheduled statutory and mandatory maintenance. Amey have maintained an overall monthly average of 98.9% of pre-planned maintenance tasks being completed on time, against a target of 100%. In February 2021 was 98.91%.

For Single Living Accommodation (SLA) a maintenance regime is in place to deliver minimum standards of health and safety in all occupied SLA with compliance monitored locally.

■ Armoured Fighting Vehicles**Mr Kevan Jones:**[\[172907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the timetable is for Boxer to reach full operating capability.

Jeremy Quin:

The first production vehicles are forecast to enter trials and training in 2023 for an initial operating capability by 2025 which we are working to accelerate. We are now aiming for full operating capability by 2030 bringing this forward from 2032 by accelerating the programme.

■ HMS Prince of Wales**Douglas Chapman:**[\[173060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether HMS Prince of Wales will be ready for her planned return to operations by May 2021.

James Heappey:

I can confirm that HMS PRINCE OF WALES will be ready for her planned return to operations by May 2021, when she will undertake activities in UK waters prior to her commencing NATO Command duties in 2022.

■ Ministry of Defence: Chief Scientific Advisers**Greg Clark:**[\[170584\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many meetings he had with his Department's Chief Scientific Adviser from (a) 1 March 2020 to 31 May 2020, (b) 1 June 2020 to 31 August 2020, (c) 1 September 2020 to 30 November 2020 and (d) 1 December 2020 to 28 February 2021.

Mr Ben Wallace:

The Ministry of Defence draws from a range of scientific advice and expertise, including from the Government Chief Scientific Adviser, the Chief Scientific Advisers in individual Government Departments, and academics and researchers. In line with the practice of successive administrations, details of internal meetings are not normally disclosed.

■ Nuclear Weapons**Dr Julian Lewis:**[\[172845\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what estimate his Department has made of the total of nuclear warheads deployed by (a) Russia, (b) China, (c) the US and (d) France on (i) intercontinental and (ii) intermediate-range missiles in each of the last five years.

James Heappey:

The Ministry of Defence continues to track the threat from nuclear and advanced novel weapons systems held by potential adversaries. Our estimates of our adversaries' nuclear warhead stockpiles remains classified. We judge that Russian strategic and intermediate nuclear capabilities continue to grow, both in terms of warheads and delivery systems. Figures declared by Russia under the New START Treaty do not provide an accurate picture of the growth in the nuclear threat that Russia presents. China does not declare its nuclear warhead numbers but is currently undertaking a significant modernisation programme with an expansion of its nuclear arsenal and development of a nuclear triad. Both countries are also investing heavily in novel weapons systems.

■ Royal Regiment of Scotland**Dave Doogan:**[\[173166\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many personnel there are in the Royal Regiment of Scotland.

James Heappey:

As at 1 January 2021, there were 2,060 Army personnel in the Royal Regiment of Scotland.

Notes/Caveats:

- Figures provided by Defence Statistics (Army).
- Figures have been rounded to 10 for presentational purposes.
- Figures are for Trade Trained Regulars only.
- The above figures are for Infantry only.
- The above figures include all members within the Regiment regardless of whether they are serving at Regimental Duty.
- All Officers of Paid Rank Colonel and above are included in Staff regardless of late Arm/Corps and therefore have been excluded from the figures.

■ **Scotland; Armed Forces**

Ian Murray:

[\[172974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the effect of the reduction in armed forces personnel on (a) total armed forces numbers in Scotland, (b) individual regiments in Scotland and (c) the sustainability of all of Scotland's current regiments.

James Heappey:

The hon. Member will be fully aware of the commitment made to the House by the Defence Secretary on Monday 22 March that the transformation of the Armed Forces will see no redundancies of our personnel or deletion of capbadges. He was also clear that there would be no further major unit deletions beyond those announced to the House. Whilst the announcement sets out some of the structural changes which will be implemented, this transformation requires significant reorganisation of force structures and so the Army will use the next several months to refine its work before releasing more detail.

■ **Warrior Armoured Vehicle: Procurement**

Mr Kevan Jones:

[\[172906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, on what date funding was last allocated from the public purse to the Warrior Capability Sustainment Programme.

Jeremy Quin:

Funding was last allocated to the Warrior Capability Sustainment Programme in March 2020. Payments are made to match milestones achieved, the most recent payment being made in December 2020.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**Bingo: Culture Recovery Fund****Alex Norris:****[170717]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of potential merits of extending eligibility to bingo clubs for access to the Culture Recovery Fund.

Caroline Dinanage:

The Culture Recovery Fund is being delivered by DCMS Arm's Length Bodies - Arts Council England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England, and the British Film Institute. These bodies can spend Government money on individuals or organisations within the sector they are responsible for.

The government recognises that the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be extremely challenging for businesses, including in the Bingo sector. Bingo clubs have accessed £44m of government support via the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme (£26.8m), Eat Out to Help Out (£600k), Business Rates Relief (£15.9m) and Grant funding (£1.6m). We are continuing to work with organisations in the land-based gambling sector to understand the impacts and how we may be able to support them.

Broadband: Finance**Chi Onwurah:****[173007]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent estimate he has made of the funding from the public purse required to meet the Government's target of 85 per cent gigabit capable coverage by 2025.

Matt Warman:

We estimate that delivering nationwide gigabit capable connectivity will cost around £30 billion as set out in the 2018 Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review, and the National Infrastructure Strategy in November 2020. The government's market-led approach to delivery will ensure that the majority of this investment will come from the private sector, with 80% of the country connected without government subsidy.

The government is contributing £5 billion to that in order to cover some of the costs of deployment in the most expensive and hard-to-reach 20% of the country through Project Gigabit.

The government will also continue to implement an ambitious programme of work to remove barriers to broadband deployment.

DCMS has made significant progress to date with the support of the industry. 39% of premises can now access gigabit-capable broadband, and we expect that gigabit broadband coverage will reach at least 50% during 2021.

The Spending Review 2020 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2020-documents/spending-review-2020#departmental-settlements>) provides

further details on our planned year on year capital spend of £1.2 billion from Project Gigabit within the period 2021-22 to 2024-25 in support of our target of reaching at least 85% gigabit capable coverage by 2025. DCMS continues to work closely with industry to progress this programme and our year on year rollout plans for these areas.

■ **BT Group: Profits**

Chi Onwurah:

[\[173006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to Ofcom's Statement: Promoting investment and competition in fibre networks – Wholesale Fixed Telecoms Market Review 2021-26, what steps he is taking to ensure that BT shareholders are not able to make an excessive return from their broadband investments (a) in general and (b) by raising the price for consumers in markets where they hold a dominant position.

Matt Warman:

The pricing of broadband is primarily a matter for Ofcom as the UK's independent regulator. Its regulation of the broadband market has delivered competitive broadband prices for consumers in both rural and urban areas.

On 18 March, Ofcom published its Wholesale Fixed Telecoms Market Review, which sets broadband regulations for the 2021 to 2026 period. In this period, Ofcom is proposing to vary some of its regulations according to the likely level of network competition in an area. However, in terms of pricing, Ofcom is proposing a flat, inflation adjusted, regulated price for Openreach's entry level superfast broadband service, regardless of the level of competition in an area. To further help the case for investing in gigabit capable broadband across the whole of the market, Openreach will be able to charge more (£1.70 per month extra) for the entry level superfast service if it is delivered over full fibre.

The government's view is that Ofcom's proposed regulations will allow those deploying networks to make a fair return on their investment whilst ensuring that customers across the country can continue to access world-class broadband at affordable prices.

■ **Clothing: UK Trade with EU**

Bill Esterson:

[\[172993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what meetings he has had with representatives of the fashion industry on trade between businesses based in the UK and based in (a) the EU and (b) Northern Ireland since the end of the transition period.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government regularly engages with the fashion industry.

The fashion sector is represented in the DCMS-led working group, composed of creative and cultural sector representatives and other government departments, to

look at issues regarding movement in the EU. The sector was also represented at the Brexit Business Taskforce (BBT) Meeting on 12th February, chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, which focused on the creative industries.

The Secretary of State met with the British Fashion Council recently to discuss the impact of Covid and Brexit.

■ Culture Recovery Fund

Dan Jarvis:

[R] [\[170645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he made of regional inequality when allocating funding from the Cultural Recovery Fund.

Caroline Dinenage:

Over £1 billion worth of funding from the Culture Recovery Fund has been allocated across all four nations of the UK. This includes over £800 million to almost 3800 arts, culture and heritage organisations in England, helping to support at least 75,000 jobs. Organisations were supported if they were culturally significant, could demonstrate that they are at risk of failure and that they had taken all reasonable steps to support themselves financially.

DCMS has worked closely with its Arm's Length Bodies, who are delivering the fund to so we can best support the valuable cultural fabric of our towns and regions. Criteria have been applied to allocate funding to ensure we are supporting organisations that have national and local importance. Grants have been awarded to organisations as diverse as the Birmingham Hippodrome, Shakespeare's Globe, Blackpool Tower Ballroom, Opera North and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, as well as thousands more ranging from internationally recognised cultural institutions to locally cherished organisations.

In the first round, 67% of grants awards worth over £1 million were awarded to organisations outside London. Regions particularly hard hit by the pandemic have felt the tangible impact of the fund. For example, funding is supporting organisations which employ 69% of arts sector employees in the West Midlands and 43% in the North West.

The second round is in progress, and a further £300 million of support was announced by HM Treasury at Spring budget to continue to support key cultural organisations, bridge the sector as audiences begin to return, and ensure a vibrant future for the culture sector, including theatres, as the nation recovers from the pandemic.

Dan Jarvis:

[R] [\[170646\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking to review the methodology used to allocate funding from the Cultural Recovery Fund.

Caroline Dinenage:

Last year the government announced the unprecedented £1.57 billion support package for the culture sector. Over £1 billion worth of funding from the Culture Recovery Fund has been allocated across all four nations of the UK. This includes over £800 million to almost 3800 arts, culture and heritage organisations in England, helping to support at least 75,000 jobs. A further £300 million of support was announced by HM Treasury at Spring Budget.

Rigorous criteria have rightly been applied, to ensure we are supporting organisations that have national and local importance. Our ALBs - Arts Council England, Historic England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and the British Film Institute - have the delegated authority to take decisions on grant applications due to their long established grant delivery role, their expertise and understanding of the sectors in which they operate.

In reviewing applications, our ALBs considered a number of factors, and organisations were only supported if they were both culturally significant and could robustly demonstrate that they are at risk of failure this Financial Year, and took all reasonable steps to support themselves financially.

They are overseen by the independent Culture Recovery Board, chaired by Sir Damon Buffini, which was created to increase assurance over the delivery of the Culture Recovery Fund programme, to leverage a range of external expertise to support decision making on grant applications and to take final decisions on loan applications.

DCMS works closely with the sector, Arm's Length Bodies, the Culture Recovery Board, HM Treasury and the National Audit Office to keep the progress of fund allocations and the level of need in the sector under close review.

■ Entertainers: EU Countries**Sir Robert Neill:**[\[172035\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions he has had with cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of negotiating a bespoke visa waiver agreement with the EU exempting touring musicians, performers, creative teams and crews from needing to obtain a visa when seeking paid work.

Sir Robert Neill:[\[172036\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions the Government has had EU Member States on cultural exemptions for work permits for musicians and other creative professionals seeking paid work in the EU.

Caroline Dinenage:

This government recognises the importance of our world leading creative and cultural industries. That is why the UK took an ambitious approach during negotiations that would have ensured that touring musicians, performers and their support staff did not

need work-permits to perform in the EU. Regrettably, our proposals were rejected by the EU, but our door remains open if the EU wants to reconsider its position.

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

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

It should also be noted that while the EU has visa-waiver deals with some other third countries, this does not bind Member States and many continue to apply visas on paid activity, while some Member States offer the same waiver regime to those with whom they don't have deals.

However, we will imminently be engaging with Member States to improve their guidance around their entry and work requirements. DCMS is working closely with the FCDO and other government departments on an engagement strategy with EU Member States, and DCMS Ministers will speak to our Heads of Missions in EU countries shortly. Should Member States be willing to change their rules to match the UK's significantly more generous arrangements for touring professionals, then we will have those discussions and encourage them to do so.

Sir Robert Neill:

[172037]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what progress his Department has made on producing guidance for the performing arts sector on the visa and work permit requirements for each EU Member State.

Caroline Dinenage:

While UK performing artists are still able to tour and perform in the EU, being outside the European Union means practical changes on both sides of the Channel that will require understanding and adaptation. We recognise this, and that is why we are working urgently across government to ensure guidance is clear, up to date and accessible for the performing arts sector travelling to the EU.

To date, we have published guidance on GOV.UK, signposting to official information provided by EU countries about their business travel routes. We will continue to enhance guidance for businesses to support travel for work purposes under our new trading relationship with the European Union, and we will publish business traveller summaries for each Member State in April. We are also developing sector specific "landing pages" for GOV.UK.

We will imminently be engaging with EU Member States to improve their guidance, specifically around their entry and work permit requirements, to ensure this is as clear and accessible as possible. Where there are issues around the clarity of Member States' immigration rules, we will also raise these with the European Commission.

And through the DCMS-led Working Group, we are working closely with sector bodies - several of whom have already produced excellent guidance in this area - to help distil and clarify the new rules further.

■ Football Index

Claire Hanna:

[173187]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what reports his Department received of concerns brought to the Gambling Commission in January 2020 on Football Index.

Mr John Whittingdale:

In May 2020 the Gambling Commission began a formal Review into BetIndex Ltd, the operator of Football Index, after concerns about the operator had been raised. The focus of its review was to address issues in relation to the betting aspect of the product. At that stage the Commission considered there were no grounds to suspend its operating licence and it did not consider there were sufficient grounds to make a report to DCMS. Further information can be found on the Commission's website:

<https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/news-action-and-statistics/news/2021/BetIndex-update.aspx>

■ Gaming: Coronavirus

Emma Hardy:

[173159]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of allowing adult gaming centres to reopen alongside retail from 12 April 2021 as covid-19 restrictions are eased.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Prime Minister announced on Monday 22 February that indoor entertainment venues, which will include Adult Gaming Centres as well as bingo halls, casinos and cinemas, will open at Step 3 of the roadmap, not before 17 May. The Government has designed the roadmap for reopening premises following careful consideration of the evidence and scientific advice. The roadmap strikes a balance between mitigating the social, health and economic impacts of closures and the need to avoid a resurgence of COVID-19 infections. It also takes account of the cumulative impact of easing restrictions and the need to assess the impact at each step. As the business of Adult Gaming Centres consists entirely of customers playing gaming machines within the premises, they are considered to be entertainment and will open at Step 3.

In recognition of the impact of requiring some businesses to remain closed for a longer period, the Chancellor announced an enhanced package of support at the Budget, including Restart Grants of up to £18,000 per premises, specifically for those which must remain closed beyond Step 2. Also included in the budget were extensions to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, with further discretionary funding for Local Authorities.

■ Mass Media: Wakefield

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[171766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what support his Department has recently provided to media outlets based in Wakefield constituency.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The government is committed to supporting local and regional media outlets as vital pillars of communities and local democracy. Local newspapers have benefited from a number of recent interventions, including the extension of business rates relief for local newspaper office space in England for an additional five years; the investment of £2 million in the Future News Fund; and the zero-rating of VAT on e-newspapers.

During the pandemic, many newspapers have also benefited from a unique and unprecedented government advertising partnership, designed to deliver important messages to UK citizens. Newspapers received up to £35 million additional government advertising revenue as part of the first phase of our coronavirus communications campaign. The campaign has subsequently been extended with at least 60% funding going to smaller regional and local titles. The Wakefield Express and Dewsbury Reporter are both included in the Partnership.

Looking ahead, the government announced in November 2020 that it will establish a new pro-competition regime for digital markets. At the heart of this will be a mandatory code of conduct to govern the relationships between dominant firms and those that rely on their services, including news publishers. The code will be a significant intervention in the government's effort to support the sustainability of the news publishing industry, helping to rebalance the relationship between publishers and the online platforms on which they increasingly rely.

We will continue to consider all possible options in the interests of promoting and sustaining high-quality news journalism at a local level.

■ Night-time Economy

Sarah Olney:

[\[173120\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department will take to support the reopening of the night-time economy.

Caroline Dinenage:

Many businesses that operate within the nighttime economy, including nightclubs and music venues, have received support via the Government's wider £280bn business support package, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and grants to businesses forced to close due to Covid-19.

In addition, the Culture Recovery Fund (CRF) has also provided support for venues that operate in the nighttime economy, such as nightclubs and music venues. So far, £170m has been awarded from the CRF to over 690 organisations classed as 'music'. Within that over £54m has been awarded to over 300 music venues

specifically. Examples of venues that have received CRF funding so far include Motion, Night People, Village Underground, Ministry of Sound and Fabric.

Additionally, a second round of CRF funding was announced in December 2020 with application portals closing on 26 January 2021. As in round one, night time economy businesses were eligible to apply and we know that many businesses have done so. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their applications by the end of March 2021.

■ Performing Arts: Finance

Sir Robert Neill:

[\[172039\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if the Government will provide an emergency funding package for the performing arts sector to mitigate the costs associated with touring in Europe and new visa and work permits rules.

Caroline Dinanage:

The Government recognises the world-leading position of the UK performing arts sector and the rich breadth of artistic talent across the UK.

Leaving the EU has always meant that there would be changes to how creative professionals operate in the EU. UK performing artists are still able to tour and perform in the EU. However, we understand the concerns about the new arrangements and we are committed to supporting the sectors as they get to grips with the changes to systems and processes.

We are now working urgently across government and in collaboration with the performing arts and wider creative industries, including through the DCMS-led working group, on plans to support the creative sectors tour in Europe. This includes producing new guidance to help artists understand what's required in different countries, and looking carefully at proposals for a new Export Office that could provide further practical help.

■ Platinum Jubilee 2022: Finance

Sir John Hayes:

[\[172875\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what funding the Government plans to make available to support the celebration of Her Majesty the Queen's forthcoming platinum Jubilee.

Caroline Dinanage:

The UK Government expects funding for the Platinum Jubilee celebrations to come from a range of sources and every effort will be made to ensure that any activities and programmes for the Jubilee do not impose an unnecessary burden on the taxpayer.

■ Sports: Coronavirus**Yasmin Qureshi:****[172960]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what support the Government has provided to sports clubs in (a) Bolton and (b) England as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Nigel Huddleston:

Sports and physical activity are incredibly important for our physical and mental health, and are a vital weapon against coronavirus.

As a result of COVID-19, Sport England have made 7,923 awards to sports clubs in England totalling £43,547,727 and 64 awards to sports clubs in Bolton totalling £207,794.

Government has provided unprecedented support to businesses through tax reliefs, cash grants and employee wage support, which many sport clubs have benefited from. The £300m Sports Winter Survival Package also aims to protect the immediate futures of major spectator sports in England over the winter period. On 22 October 2020, the Government also announced a £100m support fund for local authority leisure centres.

Sport England has also provided £220million directly to support community sport clubs and exercise centres through this pandemic, via a range of funds including their £35million Community Emergency Fund. On 26 January Sport England also published their strategy 'Uniting the Movement' and as part of this have committed an extra £50million to help grassroots sports clubs and organisations affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

We are continuing to work with organisations to understand what they need and how we may be able to support them.

■ Tourism: EU Countries**Conor McGinn:****[173081]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether his Department is providing specific (a) guidance and (b) support to UK-based mountain professionals to help them navigate the new systems of visa and work permits in EU member states.

Nigel Huddleston:

The Government has published an End of Transition Period [guidance page](#) for the tourism sector to help them navigate the new systems. The Business Secretary also wrote to all tourism businesses in November 2020.

My Department continues to engage with stakeholders in the tourism sector to hear their priorities for the UK's future relationship with the EU. Officials are currently engaging with the tourism trade bodies, including the British Association of International Mountain Leaders (BAIML) to gather feedback on priority regulators and qualifications for the tourism sector.

■ Video on Demand: Children

Tim Loughton:

[\[172847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment the Government has made of the risk of children being exposed to inappropriate content on streaming services in the event that the age ratings applied by those companies do not reflect the British Board of Film Classification's standards.

Caroline Dinenage:

The British Board of Film Classification's (BBFC) age ratings are currently used by a number of video on demand providers and, although adoption is voluntary, we welcome their use. We were particularly pleased to see Netflix announce on 1 December 2020 that they have become the first platform to achieve complete coverage of their content under the BBFC's ratings. We will continue to engage with industry to encourage platforms to use age ratings, and will keep the evidence for legislation in this area under review.

The video sharing platform regime, for which Ofcom is the regulator, came into force on 1 November 2020. UK-established video sharing platforms must now take appropriate measures to protect the public, including minors, from illegal and harmful material. Video sharing platforms are not currently mandated to adopt BBFC ratings, nor is it expected that they will be mandated to do so under Ofcom's regulatory regime for video sharing platforms. In order to comply with the video sharing platform regime, age assurance measures may be adopted by video sharing platforms along with other measures such as age ratings and parental controls. Age assurance measures comprise a broad range of technical measures which can be used by a service to establish the age of their users. Under the video sharing platform regime, services must take into account freedom of expression and should consider what measures are most appropriate and proportionate prior to introducing them.

Ofcom and the BBFC have a strong collaborative relationship when working on audience protection issues. The BBFC is engaging actively with both Ofcom and video sharing platforms to share their expertise on emerging technologies and the applicability of content ratings.

Protecting children is at the heart of our online harms agenda, and wider government priorities. Where sites host user-generated content or facilitate online user interaction such as video and image sharing, commenting and live streaming, then that content will be subject to the new duty of care. The government is working at pace to prepare online safety legislation, which will be ready this year.

EDUCATION**■ Disability: Children and Young People****Caroline Lucas:****[170598]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Disabled Children's Partnership's report, *The Longest Lockdown*, published in February 2021, if she will make it her policy to work with Cabinet colleagues to implement a cross-departmental covid-19 catch-up plan for disabled children and their families to implement the recommendations from that report to deliver (a) a therapies catch-up plan to address where children have regressed or plateaued in their development, (b) respite for families of disabled children suffering from exhaustion, (c) flexibility to extend or allow repeat funding for disabled young people in further education and (d) additional support for disabled children and young people at key transition points; and if she will make a statement.

Vicky Ford:

Supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families is a priority for this government, and their educational, physical and mental wellbeing remains central to our cross-government response to the COVID-19 outbreak. That is why education settings have remained open for those children and young people with an education, health and care (EHC) plan throughout.

Regarding therapies, our guidance is clear that where children and young people with an EHC plan are in receipt of health provision, settings should be working collaboratively with their local authority, clinical commissioning group and health providers to agree appropriate support in view of the latest and current local public health guidance. Therapists and other professionals may continue to visit education settings to provide therapies and support, where this is reasonably necessary. However, we recognise that the COVID-19 outbreak has been particularly challenging for these families and children and young people with SEND will need targeted support as part of the recovery from the COVID-19 outbreak.

Regarding wider education recovery, Sir Kevan Collins has been appointed as the Education Recovery Commissioner. He is considering how schools and the system can more effectively target resources and support at pupils in greatest need.

Already, the government has announced specific targeted support for children and young people with SEND, which includes a new one-off Recovery Premium for state primary and secondary schools, building on the £650 million catch-up premium for the 2020/21 academic year, which will be provided to schools to use as they see best to support disadvantaged students. This can include, for example, speech and language therapies or pastoral support for mental wellbeing. This funding can also be used to lay on additional clubs or activities or for other evidence-based approaches for supporting the most disadvantaged pupils, including those with SEND. The Recovery Premium will be allocated to schools based on the same methodology as

the pupil premium, including an additional weighting to specialist settings, recognising the significantly higher per pupil costs they face.

The National Tutoring Programme has been expanded, which will increase access to high-quality tuition for disadvantaged pupils, helping to accelerate their progress and tackling the attainment gap between them and their peers. In addition, 16-19 tuition fund providers are asked to have regard to the needs of students with SEND when prioritising students that would benefit most from small group tuition.

Furthermore, the proposals to support early language and literacy catch up will benefit all children including those with SEND. The Reception Year Nuffield Early Language Intervention catch-up programme is suitable for many children with SEND. It is not designed as specialist provision to replace Speech and Language Therapy interventions, but can supplement these.

£200 million will also be available to all secondary schools, including specialist settings, to deliver face-to-face summer schools. Schools will be able to target provision based on pupils' needs, such as those at key transition points. The size and shape of the summer schools will be decided by school leaders who know best what a most effective summer school will look like for their pupils, allowing them to tailor support for pupils with SEND.

Regarding respite support, we also recognise the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on families raising disabled children. We continue to encourage local authorities to prioritise respite support for disabled children, and to consider flexible and pragmatic options to deliver that support including using Direct Payments. The government provided £4.6 billion of funding to support councils through the COVID-19 outbreak, including to deliver services to support vulnerable children.

In addition, we have expanded the Holiday Activities and Food programme, which has provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children since 2018. From 2021, the programme will cover the Easter, Summer and Christmas school holidays at a cost of up to £220 million. It will be available to children in every local authority in England, building on previous programmes and we are working to ensure that the programme is fully inclusive and accessible for children with SEND.

Regarding flexibility around transition support and additional funding for those in Further Education, arrangements under an EHC plan can continue up to age 25 for those young people who need to take longer to complete their education or training. Local authorities will need to make a judgement, in consultation with parents and the young person, about whether or not agreed outcomes have been met, and the young person has been prepared and enabled to make a successful transition to adulthood. However, in every case the local authority needs to consider whether it is in the best interests of an individual to stay in education.

We have recently agreed that those young people with an EHC plan on a supported internship (a work-focused study programme for those with complex needs) who were not able to meet the core aim of their internship in the 2020-21 academic year may continue their internship into the 2021-22 academic year. It is not envisaged that

all supported interns will need to extend their internship for a full year. Providers should determine the length of time that a learner will require based on the needs of the individual, and in agreement with the local authority, noting that the legislative and funding arrangements for EHC plans do not allow for a plan to be extended beyond the age of 25.

■ Home Education: Coronavirus

Sarah Champion:

[173052]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department plans to issue additional covid-19 guidance on restrictions on group education activities for home schooled children.

Nick Gibb:

The Government recognises the important role group education activities play in providing enrichment opportunities which support the education of electively home educated children and young people. We also acknowledge the benefits they provide to the development of social skills and attitudes which promote their wellbeing and enhance their physical and mental health.

Any group activities undertaken by home educators should be carried out in line with government guidance.

From 8 March 2021, out-of-school settings (including tuition providers) have been able to open to all children for certain essential purposes. These essential purposes include where the provision is being used by vulnerable children and young people, and other children, where the provision is:

- reasonably necessary to enable their parents and carers to work, search for work, undertake education or training, or attend a medical appointment or address a medical need, or attend a support group;
- being used by electively home educating parents as part of their arrangements for their child to receive a suitable full-time education; and
- being used as part of their efforts to obtain a regulated qualification, meet the entry requirements for an education institution, or to undertake exams and assessments.

We have published updated guidance for providers, setting out the measures they should take to open for more children as safely as possible.

The Department will continue to review the guidance for out-of-school settings in line with the roadmap out of COVID-19 restrictions.

Further information is provided here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>.

■ Housing: Bolton

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[172962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he has taken to support victims of the July 2020 cladding-based fire in the Cube, Bolton.

Michelle Donelan:

The fire at The Cube, a privately owned hall of residence in Bolton, took place on 15 November 2019. The department was made aware of the fire and monitored the situation. The support for students following the fire was provided by the University of Bolton. Students were found alternative accommodation in the city. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, wrote to all university Vice Chancellors following the fire asking them to review their fire safety procedures in buildings they own and to seek assurances on fire safety from private owners of student residential blocks. All of the universities responded to this request.

■ Pre-school Education: Coronavirus

Zarah Sultana:

[\[167967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the need for early years teachers to be provided with personal protective equipment during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

COVID-19 related Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) use will be very limited for staff in schools, colleges, and nurseries. Most staff will not require PPE beyond what they would normally need for their work. Additional PPE for COVID-19 is only required in a very limited number of scenarios, for example:

- When an individual child, young person, or student becomes ill with COVID-19 symptoms and only then if a 2 metre distance cannot be maintained
- When performing aerosol generating procedures

Appropriate PPE for any staff involved in delivering asymptomatic testing for COVID-19 onsite in secondary schools and colleges is also delivered to schools, colleges and nurseries along with onsite testing kits.

Many schools, nurseries and colleges will be able to access PPE for their COVID-19 needs via their local authority or local resilience forum. Further information on local arrangements can be found on gov.uk.

Tulip Siddiq:

[\[172099\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the guidance entitled Use of free early education entitlements funding during coronavirus (COVID-19), updated 18 March, how local authorities will be supported to fund early entitlement take-up during spring term 2021.

Tulip Siddiq:**[172100]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the latest guidance on Use of free early education entitlements funding during coronavirus, whether the summer and autumn early years counts will include children temporarily absent from settings as a result of sickness, self-isolation and/or parental concerns about safety.

Vicky Ford:

As we announced in December 2020, we intend to fund local authorities for the 2021 spring term using the January 2021 census. If attendance rises after the census is taken, we will top-up local authority figures, up to 85% of their January 2020 census level, where a local authority can provide data of increased attendance during the Spring term. On 18 March 2021, we published guidance for local authorities setting out the process for accessing the top-up for the 2021 spring term and how they will be funded for the financial year 2021-22.

Given the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on childcare attendance levels, we announced that we are temporarily varying our approach to funding the entitlements for the 2021-22 financial year, to give local authorities and providers more protection over their funding income as we go through these uncertain times. Therefore, for the 2021-22 financial year, we intend to fund all local authorities on a termly attendance count that local authorities will need to provide to the department. The general principles set out in published guidance on how to conduct the usual annual early years January census should also be applied for these termly counts, to ensure consistency with the usual approaches taken in a normal early years funding year. In that, the existing census guidance already sets out how to record children who are temporarily absent (for example, due to sickness or on holiday), or if a provider is temporarily closed.

The technical guidance to local authorities is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-funding-spring-2021-and-financial-year-2021-to-2022>.

■ Pupils: Coronavirus

Sarah Olney:**[173121]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the evidential basis is for the decision that students in Year 7 and above should wear a face covering in classrooms and during activities.

Sarah Olney:**[173122]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the evidential basis was for his Department's guidance on pupils in Year 7 and above wearing a face covering in classrooms and during activities during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

The Department continues to work closely with other Government Departments throughout its response to the COVID-19 outbreak, including Public Health England

(PHE) and the Department of Health and Social Care, as well as stakeholders across the sector. The Department is continuing to work to ensure that our policy is based on the latest scientific and medical advice, in order to develop comprehensive guidance based on the PHE-endorsed 'system of controls' and to understand the effect of these measures on staff, pupils and parents.

On 22 February 2021, the Department published "Evidence summary: COVID-19 - children, young people and education settings" which includes a section on face coverings. It can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-summary-covid-19-children-young-people-and-education-settings>.

The Department recently published updated guidance for schools to support the return to full attendance, which includes updated advice on face coverings. The guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>.

In addition, the Department published updated guidance on the use of face coverings in education for schools and other education institutions that teach people in Year 7 and above in England. This guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education>.

As the guidance outlines, where pupils in Year 7 and above are educated, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff and pupils when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.

Since 8 March 2021, we recommended that face coverings should also be worn by staff and pupils in classrooms and in other learning environments such as workshops and during activities, unless social distancing can be maintained.

The best available scientific evidence is that, when used correctly, wearing a face covering may reduce the spread of COVID-19 droplets in certain circumstances, helping to protect others.

We recognise that the wearing of face coverings may impact communication, but, on balance, increased use of face coverings will strengthen the current safety measures in place in education settings.

We are recommending these additional precautionary measures for a time limited period until Easter. As with all measures, we will keep this under review and update guidance as necessary.

■ Pupils: Disadvantaged

Wes Streeting:

[173097]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the total net change was in the number of pupils eligible for free school meals between 1 October 2020 and 21 January 2021.

Vicky Ford:

Information on the change in numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals between October 2020 and January 2021 is not available because statistics are not available yet for January 2021. The information has been collected in the January school census and will be published in June 2021.

Schools: Coronavirus**Chi Onwurah:**[\[173016\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much covid-19 related funding per pupil has been provided to schools in each region since March 2020.

Nick Gibb:

The Department has provided a range of funding and support to schools since March 2020, to help with the challenges of responding to COVID-19. This includes making available:

- Exceptional costs funding. The Covid Exceptional Costs fund was established to reimburse schools for costs such as additional cleaning and lost income. We have paid schools £138 million for all claims within the published scope of the fund across both application windows.
- £1 billion catch-up funding announced in June 2020, including a one-off £650 million catch-up premium and £350 million to support tutoring across the National Tutoring Programme and 16-19 tuition fund (which will go to schools, colleges and other 16 to 19 providers).
- A further £700 million recovery package announced in February 2021, including a new one-off £302 million Recovery Premium for state primary and secondary schools in the 21/22 academic year; £200 million for summer schools; and a further £200 million expansion to tutoring including support for early language development.
- Free school meals support. Schools have been able to use either the national voucher scheme, where costs were met centrally, or claim back additional funding to provide meal parcels or locally arranged vouchers for children who would be eligible for free school meals while children were being taught from home. This funding has been in addition to the free school meals and universal infants free school meals funding that is with schools. As well as this, the free school meals supplementary grant was extended into 2020-21. This grant provides schools with extra funding to meet the costs of providing meals for newly eligible pupils before the lagged funding system catches up. The Department has made available over £760 million to support this.
- Remote education support. The Department has invested over £400 million to support access to technology and online social care services, including delivering 1.3 million laptops.

Some of this has been allocated on a per pupil basis and can be reported on a regional basis.

The £650 million Catch-up Premium has been allocated on the basis of £80 per pupil in mainstream schools, and £240 per pupil in special schools, special educational needs units, pupil referral units and hospital schools. The allocations can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-catch-up-premium-provisional-allocations>.

Other allocations will be published shortly. This includes the Recovery Premium, and the 16-19 tuition fund (of which £10 million has been allocated to schools with sixth forms and schools for 16 to 19 year olds) which is distributed based on the number of students who have not achieved GCSE grade 4 in English and/or maths.

Other forms of support listed above have been provided on a claims basis for specific costs, delivered through central programmes or on the basis of need.

Wes Streeting:

[173098]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, from which departmental budget the funding for the Government's £700 million Covid-19 catch up package, announced on 22 February 2021 was re-allocated.

Nick Gibb:

I refer the hon. Member for Ilford North to the answer I gave on 5 March 2021 to Question [160739](#).

■ Special Educational Needs

Huw Merriman:

[171649]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure schools and colleges are (a) trained to identify neurodiverse learners and (b) equipped to develop strategies to improve education outcomes for neurodiverse learners.

Vicky Ford:

The SEND Code of Practice is clear that schools (and further education colleges, sixth form colleges and 16-19 academies) are required to identify and address the special educational needs (SEN) of the pupils they support and to use their best endeavours to make sure that a child or young person who has SEN gets the support that they need.

One of the ways of ensuring that children with SEN are identified and receive good support is through the work of SEN Co-ordinators (SENCOs). All schools (including academies) must have a qualified teacher designated as a SENCO. SENCOs play an essential role in schools, supporting teaching staff to meet the needs of pupils with SEN and ensuring that schools have a clear and effective approach to inclusive education.

The department recognises the importance of teachers developing and building on their awareness and understanding of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Our school-led system places the responsibility on schools to determine the

training and support required by their staff to meet the needs of children with SEND, within their approach to school improvement, professional development and performance management.

The performance of all teachers in maintained schools must be assessed every year against the Teachers' Standards, which set out that teachers must have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including pupils with SEN, and that teachers must be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support their pupils.

Through our contract with nasen, we have funded the Whole School SEND consortium to produce information for families and resources for schools (including training to support teachers to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak). This activity complements their wider programme of work to equip the workforce to deliver high-quality teaching for all children with SEND, for which we have provided funding of over £6 million since 2018.

For those working with children with autism, the department has funded the Autism Education Trust (AET) since 2011 to deliver autism awareness training to staff in early years settings, schools and colleges. To date, the AET has trained more than 287,000 people – not just teachers and teaching assistants, but also receptionists, dining hall staff and caretakers, promoting a whole-school approach to support for pupils with autism.

Regional networks have also been established to promote the use of the training developed by the AET in schools, and we encourage schools to access this training. The AET has also developed national standards for autism support and a progression framework for those who work with children who have autism. These are available from their website at: www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk.

Emma Hardy:

[173160]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what progress has been made on his Department's review of support for children with special needs education in England that began in September 2019.

Vicky Ford:

The special educational needs and disability (SEND) review is a major priority for the government. We all want to see the vision of the 2014 reforms fully delivered: better outcomes for children and young people which prepare them for adulthood, coproduced with them and their families.

As you are aware, the COVID-19 outbreak has been extremely challenging for many families of children with SEND. Supporting them continues to be a priority for this government, and their wellbeing has been central to our response throughout.

The outbreak has unavoidably delayed completion of the review and altered the context in which it will be implemented. Our ambition is to publish SEND review proposals for public consultation in the spring of 2021.

■ Students: Finance

Tracy Brabin:

[\[173117\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when his Department plans to publish an update on the Alternative Student Finance product.

Michelle Donelan:

The government is committed to ensuring that all students with the potential to benefit from further and higher education are able to access it. The government will provide a further update on the Alternative Student Finance product when it sets out the full and final conclusion to the Post-18 Review of Education and Funding alongside the next multi-year Spending Review.

■ Universities: Admissions

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[170758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to encourage university applications amongst students from the backgrounds least likely to currently go to university.

Michelle Donelan:

It is more crucial than ever before that we tap into the brilliant talent that our country has to offer, and make sure that university places are available to all who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so.

All higher education (HE) providers wanting to charge higher level fees must have an Access and Participation Plan agreed by the Office for Students (OfS), in which they set out the measures that they intend to take to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups to access HE and succeed in it.

In our latest strategic guidance to the OfS, we asked them to urge providers to do more to ensure that all students, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, are recruited to HE courses that will deliver good outcomes. Too many students are being let down by HE courses with low completion rates and courses which have no real labour market demand and therefore do not lead them into skilled employment. We also asked the OfS to encourage providers to do much more to work with schools in a way which meaningfully raises the attainment of disadvantaged children.

We want to help disadvantaged students by driving up standards and providing equality of opportunity so that students have access to new skills and better paid jobs. This is fundamental to this government's ambition of enabling every person to fulfil their potential.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ Air Pollution****Mr Barry Sheerman:**[\[172883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to improve air quality in the UK.

Rebecca Pow:

Air pollution has reduced significantly since 2010. Emissions of nitrogen oxides have fallen by 33% and are at their lowest level since records began. Defra Ministers regularly hold discussions with Ministers and officials across Government, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Significant funding has been made available to address air pollution. In particular, we have put in place a £3.8 billion plan to improve air quality and deliver cleaner transport. This includes:

- £1.5 billion in funding to support charge point infrastructure and grants to support uptake of ultra-low emissions vehicles, which has now risen to £2.8 billion following subsequent funding announcements;
- £1.2 billion for the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy to increase cycling and walking and make our roads safer for vulnerable users;
- £880 million to help local authorities develop and implement local air quality plans and to support those impacted by these plans.

We have also provided over £16 million since 2016 directly to local authorities through our LA grants programme to fund innovative projects that tackle localised air pollution more generally.

■ Dogs**Kerry McCarthy:**[\[172912\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when the research on responsible dog ownership his Department has commissioned from Middlesex University is planned to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Victoria Prentis:

Middlesex University's draft report on measures to reduce dog attacks and promote responsible ownership was submitted to Defra this month (March 2021). The report is currently being peer reviewed and will be finalised in light of peer review comments. Our intention is to publish the final report later this year.

■ Green Recovery Challenge Fund**Lilian Greenwood:**[\[172981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much and what proportion of the Government's £40 million Green Recovery Challenge Fund will be allocated to the funding of parks and green spaces.

Rebecca Pow:

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund has provided much needed funding to environmental charities and their partners, enabling them to deliver projects across England to restore nature, tackle climate change and connect people with the natural environment. So far, funding totalling over £37.5 million has been awarded to 68 projects.

A £40 million second round of funding was launched on 9 March 2021. All applications to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund will be assessed against their ability to deliver at least one of the Fund's three themes: nature conservation and restoration, nature-based solutions, particularly for climate change mitigation and adaptation; and connecting people with nature. Projects awarded grants will be those that best meet the criteria of the Fund. There is no pre-allocation for specific types of projects.

■ Parks**Lilian Greenwood:**[\[172983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure all communities have access to a quality park to allow people to exercise in a safe outdoors space.

Rebecca Pow:

Defra recognises the crucial importance of having good access to green spaces for people's health and well-being. The 25 Year Environment Plan sets out our comprehensive and long-term approach to protecting and enhancing our natural landscapes in England for the next generation, and to helping people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces.

There are a wide range of initiatives within Defra which are helping to increase access to green spaces across the whole of England. These include, but are not limited to:

- Trees for Climate programme
- Green Recovery Challenge Fund
- Green Social Prescribing Project
- Engagement with Protected Landscapes to improve access
- Nature for Climate Fund
- Schemes that reward environmental land benefits
- National Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards
- Development of the England Coast Path and a new north coast to coast National Trail

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has responsibility for urban parks and green spaces. MHCLG is aiming to explore how it

can best support all urban parks and green spaces, taking into account the Government's environmental, social, and health priorities.

■ **Plastics: Recycling**

Virginia Crosbie:

[\[173230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of a plastic bottle return scheme on glass packaging use; what his planned timescale is for introducing such a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles; and whether he plans to introduce return schemes for (a) batteries, (b) tyres, (c) electrical equipment and (d) other materials.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government committed, in its 2019 manifesto, to introduce a deposit return scheme to incentivise people to recycle drinks containers.

On 24 March we published our second consultation on implementing a deposit return scheme for drinks containers. The materials we propose would be in-scope of the scheme are PET plastic containers, aluminium and steel cans, and glass bottles. Further details of the proposed deposit return scheme are presented in this second consultation.

Timelines have been reviewed to ensure we allow sufficient time for the roll out of a complex policy, and we therefore propose to implement the scheme in 2024, with views on this being taken in the consultation.

Powers from the Environment Bill will give us the option to establish deposit return schemes for other materials in the future and we will continue to consider these as policy options.

■ **Squirrels: Conservation**

Virginia Crosbie:

[\[173227\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an estimate of the number of red squirrel numbers in the UK; and if he will take steps with the Welsh Government to set a target for increasing red squirrel numbers by the end of the Parliament.

Rebecca Pow:

The latest 'Review of the Population and Conservation Status of British Mammals' estimates red squirrel populations in Britain as 287,000.

The conservation of red squirrels is a devolved matter and this response is with regards to England only. Defra, Natural England and the Forestry Commission are signatories to the United Kingdom Squirrel Accord, working with over 30 other signatories to secure and expand red squirrel populations.

The Environment Bill contains measures that will help improve the status of threatened species. This will include setting at least one biodiversity target in law, as

well as enhancing duties for public authorities to carry out strategic assessments of the actions they can take to enhance and conserve biodiversity.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Afghanistan: Taliban

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[171530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his US counterpart on their proposal to facilitate the restart of peace talks between the Afghanistan Government and the Taliban.

Nigel Adams:

We are, as ever, in close communication with the US, the Afghan government, and our other allies and partners on a range of issues, including making progress on peace. Most recently, the Foreign Secretary discussed Afghanistan with his US, German and French counterparts on 23 March. The UK Government welcomes and supports US-led efforts to advance Afghan peace talks towards a political settlement. An inclusive, sustainable political settlement is the only way to end the conflict. We urge all sides to come together to deliver the peace that Afghans want and deserve.

■ Africa: Financial Services

Anna McMorris:

[\[173131\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the value of CDC Group's support is for (a) Africa Finance Corporation, (b) Afrexim Bank and (c) the Trade and Development Bank; and what the value of funding provided by those institutions for the Gisagara peat-burning power plant in Rwanda was.

James Duddridge:

In 2019, the banks and other financial institutions supported by CDC lent \$34 billion to businesses across Africa and South Asia. This economic activity supported the jobs of an estimated 1.88 million workers.

CDC has trade finance facilities with Afrexim Bank (\$100 million) and the Trade and Development Bank (\$75 million). In addition, CDC has provided three loans to the Trade and Development Bank (\$200 million in total). CDC's capital, through both Afrexim and Trade and Development Bank, is enabling trade in critical goods as well as supporting broad economic growth across Africa. In 2010, CDC made an investment commitment to European Financing Partners IV (\$32.6 million) which has a small exposure to the Africa Finance Corporation.

CDC was not a party in any funding provided by the listed institutions to the Gisagara power plant.

■ African Union: Overseas Aid**Preet Kaur Gill:****[173124]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 18 March 2021 to Question 168997, on African Union: Overseas Aid, how much ODA was dispersed to the covid-19 response funding to the African Union in 2020-21.

Nigel Adams:

The UK has committed £20 million in 2020/21 to the African Union's COVID-19 Response Fund. £5 million has been disbursed to date. A second payment, covering the rest of the commitment is due to be made before the end of this financial year.

■ Bangladesh: Rohingya**Yasmin Qureshi:****[171557]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to his UN counterparts ahead of the UN delegation to Bhasan Char on (a) habitability, (b) the covid-19 pandemic and (c) access to education.

Nigel Adams:

The UK Government is in regular dialogue with the UN, our international Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) partners and with the Government of Bangladesh on the Rohingya response in Bangladesh, including on Bhasan Char. We continue to support the UN position that independent, full and detailed technical and protection assessments are needed to evaluate the safety and sustainability of living on Bhasan Char. We are pleased that these assessments began on 16 March. Through the British High Commission in Dhaka, we regularly engage with the UN Resident Co-ordinator and Heads of UN agencies on Bhasan Char. We also collaborate with other diplomatic missions to deliver joined-up messaging to the Government. We are clear that the refugees need to be safe and should have access to education and healthcare, including Covid-19 vaccinations as these become available.

■ CDC: Energy**Anna McMorris:****[173130]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the timeframe is for the publication of the CDC Group's full energy portfolio as of December 2020.

James Duddridge:

Information on CDC's portfolio, including new commitments made in 2020, will be made available following publication of its 2020 Annual Review and Annual Accounts in July 2021. CDC's latest Annual Review and Accounts, published in 2020, are available on its website - <https://www.cdcgroup.com/en/annual-review-2019/>.

■ China: Tibet**Hywel Williams:**[\[172895\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to the Chinese Government on human rights abuses in state-run re-education camps in Tibet.

Nigel Adams:

We continue to express our concerns about the human rights situation in Tibet both directly with the Chinese authorities and at the UN. We have consistently urged China to respect all fundamental rights in line with both its own constitution and the international frameworks to which it is a party. On 22 February, the Foreign Secretary delivered a ministerial statement at the Human Rights Council where he expressed our deep concerns about the situation in Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

■ China: Uighurs**Stephen Timms:**[\[172849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Chinese counterpart on the treatment of Uyghur Muslims in that country.

Nigel Adams:

We have repeatedly raised our deep concerns about the human rights situation in Xinjiang at senior levels with the Chinese government, including the Foreign Secretary raising directly with his Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister and State Counsellor Wang Yi on a number of occasions. Through these regular representations we have underlined a wide range of specific concerns, including the extra-judicial detention of Uyghurs and other minorities and the credible reports of forced labour, torture and forced sterilisation.

Stephen Timms:[\[172850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he has taken at the UN Security Council on tackling the treatment of Uyghur Muslims in China.

Nigel Adams:

The Government will continue to work with international partners to hold China to account for its gross violations of human rights in Xinjiang, including at the UN. We have regularly raised our concerns about Xinjiang in debates in the UN Security Council. Minister Cleverly, the Minister for Middle East and North Africa, did so most recently on 12 January 2021. We also regularly raise Xinjiang at the UN Human Rights Council and UN Third Committee. Last month, the Foreign Secretary used a personal address at the UN Human Rights Council to reiterate his call for China to allow the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, or another independent expert, urgent and unfettered access to Xinjiang.

Stephen Timms:

[\[172851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the evidential basis to suggest that the Chinese state is committing genocide against Uyghur Muslims; and if he will make a statement.

Nigel Adams:

The Government remains gravely concerned about the human rights situation in Xinjiang, and closely monitors the significant volume of credible, open source evidence suggesting serious, systemic violations are occurring in the region. The UK continues to work closely with international partners to hold China to account. On 22 March, the Foreign Secretary announced that the UK has imposed, under the UK's Global Human Rights sanctions regime, asset freezes and travel bans against four Chinese government officials, as well the Public Security Bureau of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, the organisation responsible for enforcing the repressive security policies across many areas of Xinjiang.

It is the long-standing policy of the UK Government that any judgment as to whether genocide has occurred is a matter for a competent court.

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[173207\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the finding of Amnesty International's report of 19 March 2021 alleging that China has been sending the children of exiled Uighur parents to orphanages.

Nigel Adams:

We are deeply concerned by reports of the mistreatment of Uyghur children, including reports of children being forcibly separated from their parents and placed in state run institutions. The Government has noted Amnesty International's report of 19 March 2021 and will continue to engage with a range of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and other experts, to inform our understanding of the situation in Xinjiang and guide policy development. We will also continue to take action to hold China to account for its human rights violation in Xinjiang, working closely with international partners. On 22 March, the Foreign Secretary announced that the UK has imposed, under the UK's Global Human Rights sanctions regime, asset freezes and travel bans against four Chinese Government officials, as well the Public Security Bureau of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, the organisation responsible for enforcing the repressive security policies across many areas of Xinjiang.

■ **Corruption: Sanctions**

Daniel Kawczynski:

[\[172929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 18 March 2021 to Question 168857 on Sanctions, when he plans to (a) make decisions on and (b) publish the first set of anti-corruption sanctions designations under the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018.

Nigel Adams:

As the Foreign Secretary announced to the House in July 2020, work is underway to consider how an anti-corruption sanctions regime could be added to our armoury. Sanctions are powerful tools, capable of having a significant impact, and are complex to design. We are taking the time to ensure we get them right and will update Parliament in due course.

■ Hong Kong: Press Freedom**Imran Ahmad Khan:**[\[173206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps his Department is taking to help encourage freedom of the press in Hong Kong.

Nigel Adams:

The UK is deeply concerned about the situation in Hong Kong and the erosion of rights and freedoms and the high degree of autonomy enshrined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration. The UK has already taken a number of actions in response to developments in Hong Kong. These include introducing a new bespoke immigration path for British Nationals (Overseas) (BNOs), suspending our extradition treaty with Hong Kong indefinitely, and extending our arms embargo on mainland China to Hong Kong.

Freedom of the press is one of the rights set down in paragraph 3(5) of the Joint Declaration. It is vital that journalists are able to investigate and report without undue interference. We expect the Hong Kong authorities to abide by their international obligations and to investigate instances of attacks on the media. It is imperative that this freedom is fully respected. We will continue to stand up for the people of Hong Kong as befits our historic commitment to them, to call out the violation of their rights and freedoms.

■ Hong Kong: Sanctions**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[171531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of introducing sanctions on Hong Kong officials who supported the recent electoral reforms in that country.

Nigel Adams:

The UK is deeply concerned about the situation in Hong Kong and the erosion of rights and freedoms and the high degree of autonomy enshrined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration. The UK has already taken a number of actions in response to developments in Hong Kong. These include introducing a new bespoke immigration path for British Nationals (Overseas) (BNOs), suspending our extradition treaty with Hong Kong indefinitely, and extending our arms embargo on mainland China to Hong Kong.

We will continue to consider designations under the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulations. It is not appropriate to speculate who may be designated under the sanctions regime in the future. We will continue to stand up for the people of Hong Kong as befits our historic commitment to them, to call out the violation of their rights and freedoms. We will also continue to engage and coordinate our actions with our international partners to hold China to their international obligations freely assumed under international law.

■ Myanmar: Human Rights

Jeremy Corbyn:

[\[171486\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the UK is taking with the UN to negotiate the restoration of human rights in Myanmar.

Nigel Adams:

The UK has been at the forefront of the international response to the coup in Myanmar. Following the coup, we urgently convened the UN Security Council and secured a statement on 4 February which called for the protection of human rights. On 12 February we co-led a Special Session of the UN Human Rights Council where a resolution calling for an end to human rights violations taking place in Myanmar was passed by consensus. In response to escalating violence we convened the Council again on 5 March and secured a Presidential Statement on 10 March which called for the restoration of democracy, respect for human rights and condemned violence against peaceful protestors. I [Minister Adams] have also met the UN Special Rapporteur for the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar and the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Myanmar to discuss human rights in Myanmar.

■ Myanmar: Rohingya

Alicia Kearns:

[\[171745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the risk to the Rohingya population in Myanmar of the recent coup; and what diplomatic steps he is taking to help protect the Rohingya from further violence.

Nigel Adams:

Our assessment is that the coup in Myanmar may increase the risks faced by the Rohingya population. We are in close contact with networks on the ground in Rakhine to monitor risks of atrocities, human rights abuses and deterioration in the humanitarian and health situation in camps and villages.

We continue to regularly raise the challenges facing the Rohingya diplomatically. Most recently in the UN Security Council Presidential Statement agreed on 10 March. The UK has provided over £44 million to all communities in Rakhine since 2017, including over £25 million for the Rohingya.

■ Pakistan: Ahmadiyya

Zarah Sultana:

[\[173180\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations his Department has made to the Pakistani Government on the matter of attacks on the Ahmadi community in Peshawar.

Nigel Adams:

The UK Government remains deeply concerned by reports of discrimination and violence against religious communities in Pakistan, including against the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

We continue to urge the Government of Pakistan at senior levels to guarantee the fundamental rights of all its citizens, regardless of their religion or belief. Most recently, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister for South Asia and Minister responsible for Human Rights, raised the need to promote respect for all religions, with Pakistan's Special Representative for Religious Harmony, Tahir Ashrafi, on 23 March 2021. He also raised our concerns on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Pakistan with the Minister for Human Rights, Dr Shireen Mazari, on 20 February 2021.

■ Palestinians: Curriculum

Tim Loughton:

[\[172846\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when the EU plans to publish its review into the Palestinian authority school curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

James Cleverly:

We expect the final report to be completed in the near future. We remain in close contact with our European partners and continue to press for completion and publication of the review as soon as possible. We will review the findings carefully before deciding on any next steps.

■ Research: Finance

Ian Mearns:

[\[172059\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of (a) the effect of reductions to the Overseas Development Assistance budget on the ability of the UK to fund research across the world and (b) the effect of that matter on the credibility and reliability of the UK as a research funding partner.

James Duddridge:

[Holding answer 24 March 2021]: The Covid pandemic's economic impact has forced the government to take the difficult decision to temporarily reduce ODA to 0.5% of GNI. Despite this reduction, we will remain a world-leading ODA donor, spending around £10 billion on ODA in 2021-22. The Foreign Secretary has set out a strategic

approach to ensure maximum impact for our aid spend for 2021-22, laying a Written Ministerial Statement for Parliament in January, summarising overall departmental cross-government allocations of ODA. FCDO and other departments are working through the implications of their allocations for the research programmes they manage.

The UK has led funding for scientific advances that have helped drive significant reductions in extreme poverty, increases in agricultural productivity, declines in childhood mortality, and increases in life expectancy across the developing world. We remain committed to the use of ODA to support research that can provide new solutions to critical challenges in development.

■ South America: Minority Groups

Catherine West:

[\[173115\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with partners in south America on protections for indigenous communities.

Wendy Morton:

The UK Government is committed to promoting and defending the human rights of all individuals, including indigenous peoples. I have spoken about a range of issues with partners in South America as part of our regular dialogues. On 13 October 2020, Lord Ahmad, Minister with responsibility for Human Rights and the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, undertook a virtual visit to Colombia, where he discussed a range of human rights issues, including women and girls in indigenous communities. The UK's Ambassador for Human Rights subsequently undertook a virtual visit to Colombia between 9-10 February, and discussed a broad human rights agenda with Colombian government representatives and civil society. During the visit she also discussed protection mechanisms for social leaders, including indigenous leaders in Colombia.

More widely, the UK continues to support work with indigenous communities across Brazil, including in the Amazon region. In Brazil, UK programmes on building back better after the COVID-19 pandemic include a focus on vulnerable groups, and in the Amazon region, work on issues such as solar energy, primary health, and skills development.

■ South America: Women's Rights

Catherine West:

[\[173114\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with regional partners in south America on women's rights.

Wendy Morton:

We remain committed to delivering a broad human rights agenda across Latin America, and this includes our work on promoting gender equality by tackling violence against women and girls. The UK is committed to advancing gender

equality, women's rights, and girl's rights. We are taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by 2021, including through the UK's Presidency of the G7, co-hosting the Global Partnership for Education replenishment, and COP26. On 13 October 2020, Lord Ahmad, Minister with responsibility for Human Rights and the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, undertook a virtual visit to Colombia, where he discussed a range of human rights issues, including women and young girls in indigenous communities.

This year, the UK will co-lead (with Uruguay, Iceland, and Kenya) the new global Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence as part of the Generation Equality Forum convened by UN Women, and co-hosted by the Governments of Mexico and France in March and June 2021. The Action Coalition also seeks to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach in developing evidence-based approaches to preventing all forms of Gender Based Violence. We have supported projects in South America, including in Colombia to prevent violence against women through art, empowering women, and creating meeting spaces.

■ South China Sea

Sir George Howarth:

[171506]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations his Department has made to China on that country's behaviour in the South China Sea.

Nigel Adams:

In the South China Sea, our commitment is to international law, particularly the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and to freedom of navigation and overflight. We encourage all parties to settle their disputes peacefully through the existing legal mechanisms, particularly UNCLOS. This is in line with the recently published Integrated Review where we set out our commitment to upholding the international rules and norms that underpin free trade, security and stability.

We routinely raise our concerns, both in private and in public, with Chinese officials, including about reports of militarisation, coercion and intimidation in the South China Sea. We will continue to do so where we have concerns. In May last year, officials raised concerns with Chinese authorities about recent incidents, including the creation of new administrative territories. On 3 September 2020, I [Minister Adams] set out our legal analysis on the South China Sea in full to Parliament for the first time. On 16 September 2020, we issued a joint Note Verbale with France and Germany to the UN's Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in response to assertions in Chinese Notes Verbale that we consider inconsistent with UNCLOS. On 8 December 2020, the UK made a national statement at the annual UN General Assembly debate on the Law of the Sea reiterating our legal position on the South China Sea.

■ Syria: Detainees**Stephen Timms:**[\[172852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he has taken to press for international access to monitor the conditions of Syrian detainees held by (a) the Assad regime, (b) ISIS, and (c) the Syrian Democratic Forces.

James Cleverly:

The latest UN report from the Commission of Inquiry is a shocking reminder of why Syria remains one of the worst human rights crises in the world. The UK has repeatedly condemned the use of illegal detention. We support the UN's request to the Asad regime and Syrian armed groups to allow humanitarian actors and medical teams unhindered access to prisons. We have raised the plight of detainees held by the Asad regime, affiliated militias and proscribed terrorist organisations at the UN Security Council, most recently during our national statement on 15 March and through our leadership at the Human Rights Council, where this month we are hosting a side event to discuss next steps for accountability. We expect all parties to the Syrian conflict to respect their obligations and responsibilities towards civilians under the applicable international law regimes that apply, including international humanitarian law - this includes providing the necessary access for humanitarian organisations to reach those in need.

Justice and accountability for detainees is a central issue for the UN-led political process and we fully support the UN Syria Envoy's efforts to work for the release of detainees, as a vital step towards a political settlement to end the conflict.

Additionally we continue to pursue sanctions as a policy tool to hold the Syrian regime to account and to bring about a peaceful solution to the conflict.

■ Taiwan: Foreign Relations**Sir George Howarth:**[\[171505\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of bi-lateral relations between Taiwan and the UK.

Nigel Adams:

The UK does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan but we do have a strong, unofficial relationship, based on dynamic commercial, educational and cultural ties. This relationship delivers significant benefits to both the UK and Taiwan and has featured a wide range of exchanges and visits, for example on environmental, judicial and educational issues.

■ Turkey: Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence**Catherine West:**[\[173113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made representations to his Turkish counterpart on the withdrawal of the Turkish Government from the Istanbul Convention on Women's Rights.

Wendy Morton:

The UK is committed to ending violence against women and girls. We were disappointed that Turkey began proceedings to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention on 19 March. While this is a matter for Turkey, we regret that it has taken this decision, especially in light of President Erdoğan's ambitions for reform as expressed in Turkey's human rights action plan, published on 2 March. I expressed our view publicly in these terms on 21 March, and my colleague the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa also raised it with his Turkish counterpart when they spoke on 23 March, urging Turkey to reconsider its decision. The UK signed the Convention in 2012 and remains committed to ratifying it.

■ Ukraine: Overseas Aid**Catherine West:****[169932]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much Official Development Assistance has been spent in support of Ukraine's reform programme in the financial years (a) 2016-17, (b) 2017-18, (c) 2018-19 and (d) 2019-20.

Wendy Morton:

[Holding answer 22 March 2021]: The UK continues to be a strong supporter of Ukraine's reform programme, a commitment the Prime Minister reiterated during President Zelenskyy's visit in October. Over the last year, the UK has provided a total of £40 million ODA and non-ODA assistance to support Ukraine's reform programme alongside broader UK objectives. As part of this support, the Good Governance Fund (GGF) is helping to address economic and governance reform in order to fight corruption, improve the business environment and increase accountability of government.

An annual summary of UK programming assistance to Ukraine since 2016 is published on the government website. The latest version can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-programme-assistance-to-ukraine-in-2020-2021>

■ Venezuela: Sanctions**Hilary Benn:****[171501]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to follow the steps taken by the EU and add 19 further names to the UK's Venezuelan sanction list.

Wendy Morton:

Sanctions are a useful tool for furthering our broader Venezuela policy. They help encourage democratic change by keeping pressure on the regime, targeting illicit finance and calling out human rights abuses. The UK introduced its autonomous Venezuela sanctions regime on 1 January 2021 transposing the existing 36 EU Venezuelan sanctions into English law. We will consider the introduction of further

designations in support of UK policy but it would not be appropriate to speculate publicly on potential designations.

■ Vietnam: Foreign Relations

Sir George Howarth:

[171504]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of current bi-lateral relations between Vietnam and the UK.

Nigel Adams:

The UK's relationship with Vietnam has strengthened over time. In September 2020 the Foreign Secretary signed the renewed UK-Vietnam Strategic Partnership Agreement in Hanoi with his counterpart Deputy Prime Minister Pham Minh Binh. The Agreement spans a range of interests including climate change, trade, security, innovation and human rights.

We use our broad relationship with Vietnam to advance bilateral and regional priorities: The UK-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed in December is already benefitting businesses in the UK and Vietnam. Vietnam has been a strong supporter of the UK's bid to be a Dialogue Partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and application to accede to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

We have regular dialogue on areas of mutual interest such as climate change and energy, maritime security and tackling human trafficking. We also regularly raise our concerns over restrictions on freedom of expression with the Government of Vietnam.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Abortion: Health Education

Nick Fletcher:

[169981]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps with the Secretary of State for Education to make it his policy to prevent distribution of the Abortion and Abortion Care Factsheet produced by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare in 2019 in schools until it has been (a) peer reviewed and (b) updated with recent research developments on fetal pain.

Helen Whately:

The Department is not responsible for production of this factsheet and has no role in its distribution. It is for individual schools to determine whether they use the factsheet.

■ Alzheimer's Disease: Research

Paul Maynard:

[\[168867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase funding for research into Alzheimer's disease.

Helen Whately:

The Government's 2020 Dementia Challenge contained the commitment to spend £300 million on dementia research over the five years to 2020. This commitment was delivered a year early, with £344 million spent on dementia research over four years to 2019. We are currently working on ways to significantly boost further research on dementia at all stages on the translation pathway including medical and care interventions.

■ Antenatal Care

Rosie Cooper:

[\[161724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what training on continence care is given to midwives to help (a) prevent and (b) mitigate postnatal incontinence.

Rosie Cooper:

[\[161725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is planning to take to help prevent incontinence as a result of (a) pregnancy and (b) the menopause.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 8 March 2021]: The Nursing and Midwifery Council 'Standards of Proficiency for Midwives' include a requirement that registrants are able to provide support and postnatal care, which can include referral to services and resources for urinary or faecal incontinence. The NHS Long Term Plan commits to improve access to postnatal physiotherapy and for all women across England to have access to multidisciplinary pelvic health care perinatally by March 2024. This will be delivered through national perinatal pelvic health services.

NHS England and NHS Improvement have identified 14 early implementer systems which will help develop the model for these services from Quarter 4 2021/22 to improve the prevention, identification and specialist treatment of pelvic floor dysfunction around pregnancy and birth. Further to the postnatal work, during 2021/22 NHS England and NHS Improvement will consider options for improving prevention of incontinence in menopausal women.

■ Blood: Contamination

Wayne David:

[\[172020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with the (a) Welsh Government and (b) other devolved Administrations on ensuring there is parity of support for all victims of the contaminated blood scandal across the UK.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

My Rt. hon Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care recently met with his counterparts in the devolved administrations to discuss this issue.

Breast Cancer: Complementary Medicine**Dr Lisa Cameron:**[\[157165\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of offering holistic support packages to secondary breast cancer patients in line with the NHS Long Term Plan.

Jo Churchill:

The NHS Long Term Plan sets a clear ambition that where appropriate every person diagnosed with cancer, including those with secondary cancers, should have access to personalised care by 2021, which is based on a holistic needs assessment.

The latest available data from December 2019 show that 94% of trusts offered personalised care and support planning for breast cancer patients.

Cancer: Health Services**Debbie Abrahams:**[\[172077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data her Department (a) collects and (b) reports for patients who are already being treated by the NHS for cancer and who experience delays with (i) treatment, (ii) surgeries, and (iii) radiotherapies.

Jo Churchill:

NHS England data includes information on patients waiting to start treatment for cancer and waits for subsequent cancer treatments including surgery, radiotherapy and anti-cancer drugs. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/cancer-waiting-times/>

National Health Service trusts use local patient tracking lists to effectively triage cancer patients, including those already receiving surgery, radiotherapy and anti-cancer drugs and use this data to minimise any delays in treatment.

Carcinogens: Regulation**Colum Eastwood:**[\[172125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to Answer of 22 February to Question 156628, what role can devolved institutions play in the Centre for Radiation, Chemical and Environmental Hazards group, part of Public Health England.

Jo Churchill:

The Department and Public Health England (PHE) regularly engage with other Government departments. The devolved administrations are represented on the Department's Expert Committees which are supported by PHE's Centre for Radiation, Chemical and Environmental Hazards. This includes the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment, the Administration of Radioactive

Substances Advisory Committee and the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants.

■ Care Homes: Coronavirus

Caroline Lucas:

[149740]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of whether high covid-19 risk residential care providers in (a) Brighton and Hove (b) other areas are receiving an uninterrupted supply of lateral flow tests from the DHSC Winter Plan supply stream; what recent discussions he has had with Deloitte on distribution of that supply stream; what steps are being taken to ensure that all care providers expecting lateral flow tests are receiving those tests on time; and if he will make a statement.

Helen Whately:

All residential adult social care settings, including those in Brighton and Hove, have access to routine COVID-19 testing through the National Testing Programme and all care homes and high-risk extra care and supported living settings have been provided with access to weekly polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing and twice weekly lateral flow device (LFD) testing for staff and weekly PCR testing for residents. As of 1 February, these settings are able to replenish their stock by calling 119 or at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test-care-home>

■ Community Discharge Fund

Alex Cunningham:

[168906]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether funding under the Community Discharge Fund is allocated to the local authority in which the person is ordinarily resident or the local authority where they are in hospital.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 18 March 2021]: Allocations of funding through the Community Discharge Grant are made on the basis of forecast future discharges of people for whom a Transforming Care Partnership has a commissioning responsibility.

In order to calculate the 2020-21 allocations for each Transforming Care Partnership in England under the Community Discharge Grant we have estimated the double running costs that each Transforming Care Partnership could face for the coming year. Double running costs occur in the period before a formal discharge when a person is still an inpatient requiring a bed and a community care package is also put in place.

■ Coronavirus

Jonathan Ashworth:

[146890]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data is being collected and held on the number of people testing positive for covid-19 after receiving a vaccination dose.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 4 February 2021]: Public Health England has published data on the early effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines, this includes data on the number of cases or individuals testing positive by period after vaccination. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.03.01.21252652v1>

■ Coronavirus: Airports**Olivia Blake:****[151887]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of providing free state-funded covid-19 testing sites in all major UK airports.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: Everyone who arrives into England from outside the Common Travel Area must receive a negative COVID-19 test result within three days of departure. They must also book two further tests on day two and day eight that must be taken during their mandatory 10-day quarantine period following their arrival. People should pay for these tests to ensure the protection of themselves and the public. For those facing significant financial hardship as a result of this charge, there will be an opportunity to apply for a deferred repayment plan when booking.

■ Coronavirus: Care homes**Munira Wilson:****[169967]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to publish a roadmap for the return of close contact care home visits.

Helen Whately:

New visiting arrangements started on 8 March. Every care home should ensure that each resident can nominate one named person who can have regular, indoor visits. Those residents with the highest care needs can nominate an 'essential care giver'.

In mid-April we will assess the data and take a decision on opening up further opportunities for visiting, setting out a plan for the next phase of visits for people in residential care.

■ Coronavirus: Children**Emma Hardy:****[170718]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data his Department holds on the prevalence of long-covid in people under the age of 18.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated that during the week commencing 27 December 2020, 301,000 people in England had symptoms that had persisted for between five and 12 weeks. The ONS found that 22.1% of people testing positive for

COVID-19 exhibit symptoms for a period of five weeks or longer. That percentage is lower for those between the ages of two and 11 years old (12.9%) and 12 to 16 years old (14.5%).

NHS England and NHS Improvement are developing a case definition and model of care for children with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.

■ **Coronavirus: Hospitals**

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[170759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the running cost of each NHS Nightingale Hospital to close in April 2021.

Edward Argar:

NHS England and NHS Improvement are in the process of reviewing all spending incurred for each individual site. The forecast for total costs including set-up, running costs, stand-by costs and costs of decommissioning across all sites will reach around £532 million covering the end of the financial year 2019/20 and 2020/21.

■ **Coronavirus: Medical Treatments**

Emma Hardy:

[\[170719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support studies on the treatment of long-covid.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Government has provided nearly £30 million of funding, through the National Institute for Health Research and UK Research Innovation, towards ambitious and comprehensive 'long' COVID-19 research projects. This includes £8.4 million invested into the 10,000 participant Post-HOSPitalisation COVID-19 study at the University of Leicester. This study is one of the world's largest comprehensive research studies of previously hospitalised patients. On 18 February, we announced £18.5 million would be given to four more research studies focusing on non-hospitalised patients. The studies will examine the causes, consequences and treatment of 'long' COVID-19.

■ **Coronavirus: North West**

Jon Trickett:

[\[110048\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, on what dates local leaders in (a) Greater Manchester, (b) Liverpool City Region and (c) Sheffield City Region were informed of the Government's plans to place those regions under Tier 3 local covid alert level restrictions.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

This information is not held centrally. While the Contain programme had a supporting role in the discussions with local leaders in October, it has no record of the specific date these regions were informed.

■ Coronavirus: Screening**Andrea Jenkyns:**[\[144761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken to encourage organisations to sign up to the workplace testing Government scheme to increase the use of lateral flow tests in the workplace.

Helen Whately:

An online portal has been launched for businesses to find out more about offering rapid workplace testing. To encourage more workplaces to sign up, businesses will be provided with all the information they need to plan and deliver their testing programme, along with promotional materials. The tests will be sent to businesses at no cost, making testing more accessible for businesses of all sizes.

Sir Christopher Chope:[\[162507\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the NHS National Screening Committee received any application for approval for the use of lateral flow tests for covid-19 from (a) the Government and (b) any other body; and for what reason the response to Question 124655 tabled on 3 December 2020 on that matter was not provided until 23 February 2021.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 8 March 2021]:

The Department is not aware of any such applications made by the Government to the UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC).

As an independent expert scientific committee, the UK NSC may have received applications for screening assessments from third parties

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

■ Coronavirus: Screening and Vaccination**Theresa Villiers:**[\[161700\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the planned timescale is for the review of potentially using certificates showing a (a) covid-19 vaccination or (b) recent negative covid-19 test result.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 8 March 2021]: The Government announced on 22 February that it will review whether COVID-19 status certification could play a role in reopening the

economy, reducing restrictions on social contact and improving safety. This will include assessing to what extent certification would be effective in reducing risk, and the potential uses to enable access to settings or a relaxation of COVID-19 secure mitigations. The Government will also consider the ethical, equalities, privacy, legal and operational aspects of this approach and what limits, if any, should be placed on organisations using certification. It will draw on external advice to develop recommendations that take into account any social and economic impacts, and implications for disproportionately impacted groups and individuals' privacy and security. COVID-19 status certification involves using testing or vaccination data to confirm in different settings that people have a lower risk of transmitting the virus to others.

Jim Shannon:

[\[171605\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of vaccinating secondary pupils against covid-19; and whether tests on children aged over 11 have been undertaken on the safety of the covid-19 vaccine for that age group.

Nadhim Zahawi:

At present, there is very limited data on vaccination in adolescents with no data on vaccination in younger children. The Joint Commission on Vaccination and Immunisation advises that only those children at very high risk of exposure and serious outcomes, such as older children with severe neuro-disabilities that require residential care, should be offered vaccination as part of phase one. The Green Book also sets out that children under 16 years of age, even if they are clinically extremely vulnerable, are at low risk of serious morbidity and mortality and given the absence of safety and efficacy data on the vaccine, are not recommended for vaccination. Vaccine trials including on those under 18 years old are the responsibility of vaccine developers. We are aware of a number of planned COVID-19 vaccine trials in children and will monitor the results closely.

■ **Coronavirus: Social Distancing**

Royston Smith:

[\[171660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Rule of Six restriction on social contact that will come into place on 29 March 2021, as part of the easing of covid-19 restrictions, includes infants and children.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps) (England) Regulations 2021, the 'rule of six' will apply to children of all ages. In recognition of the need for greater flexibility for families, the Regulations provide for people to meet outdoors in a group larger than six people if everyone present is from the same two households.

The Government will keep the rule of six restrictions under review in keeping with its commitment to remove current restrictions based on the data.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination**Dr Matthew Offord:**[\[132865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of promoting the safety and effectiveness of covid-19 vaccines through the scientific industry.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Department and the Vaccine Taskforce have worked extensively with organisations such as the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) and vaccine manufacturers and developers to highlight their work on vaccine safety. This includes the ABPI's Valuing Vaccines campaign and direct collaboration with manufacturers such as AstraZeneca and Valneva and with Wockhardt to highlight safety of the fill/finish aspects of vaccine manufacture.

Barry Gardiner:[\[141385\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what comparative assessment has been made of the relative risk of potentially overwhelming the health service by prioritising people aged 80 and over and prioritising all frontline health care workers in the NHS for the covid-19 vaccine.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 26 January 2021]: No such comparative assessment has been made. The Department has taken advice from the independent Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisation (JCVI) on priority groups for COVID-19 vaccination. The JCVI advised that the first priority for any COVID-19 vaccination programme should be the reduction of COVID-19 mortality and the protection of health and social care staff and systems. All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers have been offered vaccinations in priority group two.

Alex Sobel:[\[149328\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to recruit student nurses, who are already trained to administer vaccines, as part of the covid-19 vaccination programme; and whether that recruitment would contribute towards their university course placement hours.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 9 February 2021]: The Nursing and Midwifery Council re-introduced emergency standards that enable final year nursing students to undertake up to 100% of their time in clinical practice. Final year nursing students are able to choose whether or not to move into clinical placements which count towards their learning outcomes. Approved education institutions retain oversight of the students and where they are placed, which could include working on the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Mark Menzies:

[\[160626\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that people from priority cohorts who have missed vaccine appointments for reasons beyond their control receive a first dose at the earliest opportunity.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The top four priority groups have now all been offered the opportunity to be vaccinated. Cohorts one to nine can use the National Booking Service online or by calling 119 to book a vaccination appointment.

The system allows people to arrange an appointment at a vaccination centre or pharmacy service. Further follow-up contact is also being made to those individuals who have been invited to make an appointment but have not yet responded or received their vaccination.

Jim Shannon:

[\[160668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential effectiveness of vaccine passports.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Government is currently reviewing whether COVID-19 status certification could play a role in reopening the economy, reducing restrictions on social contact and improving safety. This will include assessing to what extent certification would be effective in reducing risk and the potential uses to enable access to settings or a relaxation of COVID-19 secure mitigations. The Government will also consider the ethical, equalities, privacy, legal and operational aspects of this approach and what limits, if any, should be placed on organisations using certification. It will draw on external advice to develop recommendations that take into account any social and economic impacts and implications for disproportionately impacted groups and individuals' privacy and security.

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[170760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of including people who have medical conditions which result in sleep deprivation in priority group six of the covid-19 vaccine programme.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's advice on priority groups for COVID-19 vaccination is based on a range of evidence including a review of United Kingdom epidemiological data on the impact of the pandemic so far and data on demographic and clinical risk factors for mortality and hospitalisation. To date, sleep deprivation in itself has not been identified as a condition that would place an individual at increased clinical risk to COVID-19.

Andrew Gwynne:

[172024]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation on moving people with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS/ME) into priority group 6 for the covid-19 vaccine.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 24 March 2021]: The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) are the independent body made up of scientific and clinical experts who advise the Government on which vaccines the United Kingdom should use and provide advice on prioritisation at a population level.

The JCVI's advice is that to date, chronic fatigue syndrome or myalgic encephalomyelitis has not been identified as a condition that would place an individual at increased clinical risk to COVID-19 and therefore eligible for vaccination in priority group six. The JCVI's advice is available at the following link:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-30-december-2020/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation-advice-on-priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-30-december-2020

Preet Kaur Gill:

[172107]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which age groups are planned to have received a covid-19 vaccine ahead of the FA Cup Final on 15 May 2021.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 24 March 2021]: Whilst an exact timeline of which age groups are planned to have been offered a COVID-19 vaccine by 15 May 2021 is not available, we are on course to offer a vaccine to all priority groups including those aged 50 years old and over by 15 April and all adults aged 18 years old and over by 31 July.

■ Cybercrime: Research

Carla Lockhart:

[171779]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what criteria his Department uses to determine good faith security research, as outlined in his Department's Vulnerability Disclosure Policy.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Department has two Vulnerability Disclosure Policies (VDPs) - the NHS COVID-19 App VDP, specifically for the NHS Test and Trace App and its supporting infrastructure and the NHSX VDP supporting the COVID-19 'Test, Track and Trace' programme of work.

The intention behind the reference to 'in good faith' is to support a mechanism for cooperation with security researchers with the aim to identify and quickly remediate reported vulnerabilities. As such, the research/ vulnerability disclosure must be carried out in an honest and sincere way with the intention of improving security and

without affecting the safety, security and continuity of any data or service in accordance with the disclosure policy and consistent with the law.

■ Dementia: Research

Dan Carden:

[\[171711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will set out a timeline for the implementation of the dementia moonshot.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 23 March 2021]: There is currently no planned date for publication of a strategy to deliver the dementia moonshot. However, the Government is strongly committed to supporting research into dementia. As part of our 2020 Challenge on Dementia, the Government has spent £344 million on dementia research in the past five years and we are currently working on ways to significantly boost further research on dementia at all stages on the translation pathway including medical and care interventions. Later this year, we plan to bring forward proposals for a new strategy to set out our plans for dementia care, support, awareness and research in England.

■ Dental Services: Children

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[156420\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on access to (a) routine and (b) emergency dental appointments for children.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 25 February 2021]: No such assessment has been made. Dental practices have been able to open for face to face National Health Service care from 8 June, with urgent provision backed up by over 600 urgent dental care centres across the country. NHS England and NHS Improvement have set out guidance that dentists should focus on care that is urgent, care to vulnerable groups and then overdue routine appointments.

The Department is working closely with NHS England and NHS Improvement and the Chief Dental Officer for England to increase levels of service, as fast as is safely possible. In circumstances where parents are unable to access an urgent dental appointment for their child directly through a NHS dental practice, they should contact NHS 111 for assistance.

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Written Questions

John Spellar:

[\[172855\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to answer named day Question 154739 tabled on 15 February 2021 by the hon. Member for Warley.

Edward Argar:

We take parliamentary scrutiny incredibly seriously and it is fundamentally important that hon. Members are provided with accurate and timely information to enable them to hold the Government to account. We are working rapidly to provide all Members with accurate answers to their questions, as well as supporting the Government's response to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Caroline Lucas:[\[172965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to respond to Question 164411 tabled by the hon Member for Brighton, Pavilion on 8 March 2021 for named day answer on 11 March 2021 on Travel: Quarantine.

Edward Argar:

We take parliamentary scrutiny incredibly seriously and it is fundamentally important that hon. Members are provided with accurate and timely information to enable them to hold the Government to account. We are working rapidly to provide all Members with accurate answers to their questions, as well as supporting the Government's response to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Disability: Children**Rosie Cooper:**[\[171554\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the recommendations made by the Disabled Children Partnership in their report, The Longest Lockdown, published February 2021, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of developing a catch-up plan for disabled children to address where children have regressed or plateaued in their speech, communication, physical development, or social skills.

Helen Whately:

No specific assessment has been made. However, identifying and addressing the needs of disabled people, including disabled children, is a key part of the Government's recovery planning. We will publish a National Strategy for Disabled People later this spring, taking into account the impacts of the pandemic on disabled people, including disabled children.

National Health Service recovery guidance makes clear that community services must be prioritised for children and young people aged up to 25 years old with special educational needs and disabilities and who have an Education Health and Care Plan in place or who are going through an assessment for one.

Florence Eshalomi:[\[172127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to research from the Disabled Children's Partnership which found that delays to health appointments during the pandemic has led to over half of surveyed parents saying their child's condition

has worsened, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the covid-19 on the health of disabled children.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 24 March 2021]: We will publish a national strategy for disabled people later this spring, taking into account the impacts of the pandemic. Additionally, National Health Service recovery guidance makes clear that community services must be prioritised for children and young people aged up to 25 years old with special educational needs and disabilities and who have an Education Health and Care Plan in place or who are going through an assessment.

■ Early Years Healthy Development Review

Sarah Olney:

[172101]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the Government's planned timeframe is for the publication of the Early Years Healthy Development Review.

Sarah Olney:

[172102]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of expediting publication of the Early Years Healthy Development Review.

Jo Churchill:

While the exact date of publication is not yet confirmed, we expect to publish the Review shortly.

■ Employment: Coronavirus

Mr Steve Baker:

[R] [155014]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will extend access to the workplace testing scheme to all companies with 10 or more employees that are operating in the covid-19 vaccine supply chain.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 24 February 2021]: NHS Test and Trace is coordinating the provision of free tests to all workers who cannot work from home across England. All organisations with workers in England unable to work from home can sign up for rapid workplace testing, including those still closed due to lockdown. They will need to register by 31 March and free tests will be provided until the end of June

All businesses in England can access lateral flow tests from Test and Trace to establish testing programmes on-site, for workers without symptoms. Companies can register for this service at the following link:

www.gov.uk/get-workplace-coronavirus-tests

All local authorities have also signed up to offer rapid lateral flow testing in the community through local asymptomatic test sites. Small businesses can direct workers to these test sites if they cannot offer rapid workplace testing on-site.

■ Epilepsy: Health Services

Sir David Amess:

[\[156230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many trusts have redeployed or significantly reduced their epilepsy services during the covid-19 outbreak; and what steps he is taking to prevent avoidable epilepsy deaths as a result of the outbreak.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 25 February 2021]: No assessment has been made on the number of trusts that have redeployed or reduced their epilepsy services.

National Health Service systems should continue to implement the guidance set out in NHS RightCare epilepsy toolkit. This toolkit provides expert practical advice and guidance on how to address epilepsy-related challenges, including sudden death in epilepsy and recommends that providers implement a standard risk template for people living with epilepsy, including all relevant resources.

■ Eyesight: Digital Technology

Rosie Cooper:

[\[156304\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 1 February 2021 to Question 141947, and with reference to the findings of YouGov's survey for Fight for Sight that more than four in ten working adults believe an increase in screen time during the covid-19 pandemic has negatively affected their vision, when his Department plans to make an assessment of the effect of increased screen time on eyesight due to the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 25 February 2021]: There are currently no plans to make an assessment.

■ Familial Hypercholesterolaemia: Screening

Henry Smith:

[\[171567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the target set out in the NHS Long Term Plan, what progress he has made on achieving the ambition of identifying 25 per cent of people with familial hypercholesterolaemia in the UK by 2024.

Henry Smith:

[\[171572\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure effective, joined up data collection for familial hypercholesterolaemia (FH) across the UK, such as a national FH registry from birth to death, to support the Government's ambition to identify 25 per cent of people FH in the UK by 2024, as set out in the NHS Long Term Plan.

Jo Churchill:

The NHS Long Term Plan sets the ambition to increase genetic testing and diagnosis of familial hypercholesterolaemia (FH) from 7% to 25% by 2024. To achieve this, the National Health Service will undertake a service evaluation of child-parent cascade screening in seven Academic Health Science Network areas in England. NHS England and NHS Improvement have provided £500,000 to enable this pilot to be implemented. The pilot will be launched in June 2021 and will test over 30,000 children for cholesterol at their one-year vaccination over the next 24 months.

This will support early diagnosis by identifying families with FH before the onset of clinical disease providing an opportunity for prevention with statin therapy and where necessary other lipid lowering drugs. NHS England and NHS Improvement are working with clinicians and patient representatives to inform on a functional FH registry and are investing an additional £335,000 on a single life-long nation-wide database.

Food: Labelling**Sir David Amess:**[\[172006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of clear portion size labelling on helping people make healthier choices.

Jo Churchill:

The Government's recommended front-of-pack nutrition labelling scheme expresses information in a way that should be easily recognised by and meaningful to the consumer. It uses percentage reference intakes for adults, based on the amount of each nutrient and energy value in a portion of the food and drink. Whilst there has been no specific assessment of portion size, we recently consulted on our front-of-pack labelling scheme and will publish a response shortly.

Health Services: Finance**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:**[\[172083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what evidence his Department used to calculate the total savings an individual can acquire before they are required to self-fund their own care.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 24 March 2021]: The upper capital limit or the level of savings or assets above which an individual is expected to self-fund their care and the lower capital limit or the level of savings and investment above which an individual is expected to make some contribution was set in April 2010 by the previous administration.

■ Health Services: Prisons and Youth Custody**Ms Lyn Brown:**[\[169818\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the report by Empowering People Inspiring Change, The impact of lockdown to physical health, published in March 2021, what steps he is taking to ensure the adequacy of (a) communications with patients and (b) access to healthcare is maintained in prisons and youth custody facilities in England and Wales.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of communication programmes were initiated across the English secure and detained estate, including prisons and youth offender institutions, with the support of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service including using prison television broadcasts to address COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 care. Prison radio continues to feature programmes providing general medical information for patients in prisons delivered by clinical providers and a number of articles have been written for the prison magazine, Inside Times, as well as general notifications, such as leaflets translated into a number of languages posted across individual sites.

General practitioner and nurse-led services have continued to be present within all prisons in England. In response to COVID-19, telemedicine has been deployed at speed across the estate, enabling video calling for primary care, secondary care and mental health appointments within dedicated healthcare facilities. The provision of health services to those in public sector prisons in Wales is a matter for the Welsh Government.

■ Heart Diseases: Preventive Medicine**Henry Smith:**[\[171569\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the focus in the NHS Long Term Plan on cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention, what effect the Integration and Innovation White Paper will have on previous commitments to CVD prevention (a) in general and (b) in the light of the effect of covid-19 on CVD outcomes.

Henry Smith:[\[171571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of adding cholesterol as a cardiac indicator in the Quality and Outcomes Framework.

Jo Churchill:

The Integration and Innovation White Paper builds on the commitments made in the NHS Long Term Plan. Whilst not having a direct impact on previous commitments to cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention legislation will allow every part of England to be covered by an integrated care system. This builds on the work the system has been doing since the publication of the NHS Long Term Plan, and is in line with NHS England's recommendation of formally recognising the need to bring together

National Health Service organisations, local government and wider partners at a system level to deliver more joined up approaches to improving health and care outcomes, coterminous with local authorities.

NHS Digital has made no such assessment.

■ **HIV Infection: Travellers**

Martin Docherty-Hughes:

[\[171627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the Gypsy and Traveller community can access (a) PrEP, (b) HIV testing and (c) HIV care.

Jo Churchill:

The Public Health Grant in 2021/22 includes £23.4 million to cover local authority costs of the routine commissioning of HIV prevention drug pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). The Department and Public Health England (PHE) will continue to work closely with local authorities across England to support the routine commissioning of PrEP in 2021/22.

PHE is currently developing a monitoring and evaluation framework for the routine commissioning of PrEP, which will use established surveillance systems and include measures of PrEP need and use among key population groups to inform equitable delivery and access. We will consider issues relating to equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services including HIV services and PrEP as part of the development of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy and the HIV Action Plan, which we plan to publish in 2021. The needs of the Gypsy and Traveller communities will be considered as part of this work.

■ **Home Care Services: Older People**

Mr David Jones:

[\[171541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is planning to take to increase housing-based care options for older people as part of its forthcoming plans for social care reform.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 23 March 2021]: Housing-based care options have a vital role in enabling older people to live independently. The Department of Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government provide capital funding subsidy to incentivise the supply of housing-with-care. We are committed to working closely together and across Government, to refine our understanding of the evidence around specialist housing, adult social care and health. We are also committed to further improve the diversity of housing options available to older people and continue to engage closely with a range of stakeholders on this issue.

Hospitals: Medical Equipment

Imran Ahmad Khan: [\[171755\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 17 March 2021 to Question 166600 on what type of equipment will be redistributed from Nightingale hospitals (a) to elsewhere within the NHS and (b) placed into storage for future use.

Edward Argar:

This includes clinical equipment, beds, other ward items and non-clinical IT.

Imran Ahmad Khan: [\[171756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 17 March 2021 to Question 166600, how it will be determined whether equipment from Nightingale hospitals will be (a) redistributed to elsewhere within the NHS and (b) placed into storage.

Edward Argar:

Equipment is being distributed based on immediate clinical need and to support current National Health Service provider plans. Where there are items to be stored, they will continue to be made available.

Human Papillomavirus: Vaccination

Caroline Nokes: [\[170621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many pupils missed their HPV vaccine in academic year 2019-20.

Jo Churchill:

All educational settings were closed from 23 March 2020 and the delivery of the 2019/20 school immunisation programmes were subsequently paused, which impacted the uptake of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme. The latest data shows that 64.7% of year nine females completed the two-dose HPV vaccination course in 2019/20 compared with 83.9% in 2018/19. HPV vaccination coverage for the priming dose in 2019/20 was 54.4% in year eight males.

Providers across the country are working with NHS England and NHS Improvement commissioners with clinical advice from Public Health England to catch up on vaccinations, including HPV. All vaccinations missed will be delivered as soon as possible and no later than August 2021.

Caroline Nokes: [\[170622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of pupils who will miss their HPV vaccine in academic year 2020-21.

Jo Churchill:

Data will be published in October 2021 showing coverage of the human papillomavirus vaccine for the academic year 2020-21.

Caroline Nokes:

[\[170623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the catch up programme for the HPV vaccine will take place in schools.

Jo Churchill:

All providers are working with NHS England and NHS Improvement's commissioners, with clinical advice from Public Health England, to deliver all missed school aged vaccinations as soon as possible and no later than August 2021. All areas were asked to establish vaccination programme recovery plans and many providers were able to offer some immunisation programme catch-up ahead of 2020/21. Where possible, providers have offered vaccinations through alternative school and community settings. In addition, support was sought from the Department for Education to ensure that wherever possible schools facilitated the vaccination continuation.

■ **Hyperactivity**

Dr Lisa Cameron:

[\[171639\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the risk of co-occurring conditions such as substance misuse and mental health issues in adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Helen Whately:

No specific assessment has been made. However, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guideline 'Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: diagnosis and management', which was last updated in September 2019, does identify the risk of co-occurring conditions in adults with ADHD. This includes substance misuse and mental health issues. The guidance highlights the recognition of co-occurring conditions as an important factor in the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD. We expect clinical commissioning groups to take account of clinical guidelines published by NICE when commissioning services for their local populations.

■ **Learning Disability: Nurses**

Rosie Cooper:

[\[172028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he has taken to ensure that patients with a learning disability are able to access a specialist learning disability nurse when they attend hospital.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 24 March 2021]: The latest national learning disability improvement standards annual survey shows that approximately two thirds of National Health Service trusts in England directly employ learning disability liaison nurses. Trusts that do not directly employ learning disability liaison nurses often have a shared support arrangement in place with their local specialist mental health trust to access a learning disability nurse.

Members: Correspondence**Rosie Cooper:**[\[170566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he expects Sir Simon Stevens, Chief Executive at NHS England, to reply to the correspondence from the hon. Member for West Lancashire dated 6 December 2020, reference ZA54791, on funding for social care enterprises.

Edward Argar:

NHS England and NHS Improvement have advised that they expect to provide a response by 26 March 2021.

Mr John Baron:[\[171523\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to respond to the correspondence of the Member for Basildon and Billericay, dated 29 December 2020, reference JB30428.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 23 March 2021]: We replied to the hon. Member's letter on 24 March 2021.

Mental Health Services: Children and Young People**Dr Rupa Huq:**[\[173110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the Government's funding plans are for NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for the 2021-22 financial year.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The 'NHS Mental Health Implementation Plan 2019/20 – 2023/24' sets out detailed plans to increase investment in mental health services over the life of the course of the Plan and how children and young people's mental health services will grow faster than both overall NHS funding and total mental health spending. The Implementation Plan is available at the following link:

www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/nhs-mental-health-implementation-plan-2019-20-2023-24.pdf

On 5 March we announced £79 million to be used to significantly expand children's mental health services. This funding forms part of the approximately £500 million for mental health and National Health Service workforce announced at the Spending Review in November 2020. This additional funding will allow around 22,500 more children and young people to access community health services; 2,000 more children and young people to access eating disorder services; and a faster increase in the coverage of mental health support teams in schools and colleges over the next financial year.

■ Mental Health Services: Health Professions

Sir George Howarth:

[\[172015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what programmes are in place to provide mental health support for NHS staff.

Helen Whately:

NHS England and NHS Improvement have developed a comprehensive package of mental health support for National Health Service staff, including virtual staff common rooms for mutual support, free access to a range of well-being apps and a helpline and text service for counselling and support. Last autumn, £30 million was invested to strengthen mental health and occupational health support. This funding is being used to set up mental health hubs that will provide outreach and assessment services to help staff receive rapid access to mental health services. Staff referred will be treated by local mental health specialists and those with severe needs will be referred to a specialist centre.

■ NHS: Protective Clothing

Bill Esterson:

[\[172994\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of personal protective equipment supplied to the NHS has been manufactured in the UK since 1 September 2020.

Jo Churchill:

The Government's personal protective equipment (PPE) strategy stated that by 1 December 2020, United Kingdom manufacturers would be able to provide 70% of the PPE we expected to use in England through the winter, except gloves. That commitment was met and exceeded. The volume of UK manufactured PPE supplied in the three months from 1 December 2020 to 28 February 2021 was sufficient to meet 82% of the amount required over that period.

Data prior to December 2020 is not available in a fully validated form.

■ NHS: Resignations

Jonathan Ashworth:

[\[171611\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of NHS staff left the NHS in England in (a) 2018-19 and (b) 2019-20; and for what reasons did those staff leave.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 23 March 2021]: NHS Digital publishes Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS) workforce statistics. These include staff working in hospital trusts and clinical commissioning groups, but not staff working in primary care or in general practice surgeries, local authorities or other providers.

The following table shows the total number and proportion of National Health Service staff who left the NHS in England in 2018-19 and 2019-20 by reason for leaving.

	MARCH 2018 TO MARCH 2019	MARCH 2019 TO MARCH 2020
All HCHS Staff - Leavers	133,041	132,032
All HCHS Staff - Leavers rate	10.9%	10.5%
Bank Staff not fulfilled minimum work requirement	47	44
Death in Service	777	889
Dismissal - Capability	1,983	1,839
Dismissal - Conduct	989	962
Dismissal - Some Other Substantial Reason	763	693
Dismissal - Statutory Reason	149	103
Employee Transfer	3,776	3,265
End of Fixed Term Contract	6,207	5,525
End of Fixed Term Contract - Completion of Training Scheme	1,488	1,293
End of Fixed Term Contract - End of Work Requirement	487	549
End of Fixed Term Contract - External Rotation	1,265	1,191
End of Fixed Term Contract - Other	698	714
Flexi Retirement	558	662
Has Not Worked	32	32
Initial Pension Ended	1	2
Merged Organisation - Duplicate Record	1	3
Mutually Agreed Resignation - Local Scheme with Repayment	327	232
Mutually Agreed Resignation - National Scheme with Repayment	17	21

	MARCH 2018 TO MARCH 2019	MARCH 2019 TO MARCH 2020
Not Set in Legacy at Migration	4	2
Pregnancy	30	26
Redundancy - Compulsory	696	562
Redundancy - Voluntary	256	216
Retirement - Ill Health	1,037	1,000
Retirement Age	13,342	13,914
Voluntary Early Retirement - no Actuarial Reduction	929	839
Voluntary Early Retirement - with Actuarial Reduction	1,092	1,137
Voluntary Resignation - Adult Dependants	616	659
Voluntary Resignation - Better Reward Package	2,833	2,402
Voluntary Resignation - Child Dependants	1,466	1,477
Voluntary Resignation - Health	2,899	3,157
Voluntary Resignation - Incompatible Working Relationships	849	969
Voluntary Resignation - Lack of Opportunities	1,415	1,340
Voluntary Resignation - Other/Not Known	16,984	15,196
Voluntary Resignation - Promotion	5,098	5,002
Voluntary Resignation - Relocation	10,011	9,677
Voluntary Resignation - To undertake further education or training	2,928	2,963

	MARCH 2018 TO MARCH 2019	MARCH 2019 TO MARCH 2020
Voluntary Resignation - Work Life Balance	9,885	10,458
Unknown	41,333	43,232

Source: NHS Digital NHS HCHS workforce statistics

Notes:

Leavers data are based on headcount and shows staff leaving active service. This would include those going on maternity leave or career break, as well as those leaving a NHS provider to work in another part of the health and social care sector, including social care or primary care. Totals for NHS leavers that are different to the sum of constituent parts indicate where staff have left the NHS in more than one post.

■ NHS: Staff

Liz Twist:

[\[166514\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on the (a) amount of overtime worked by NHS staff during the covid-19 outbreak to date and (b) expenditure on overtime worked by NHS staff during that timescale.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 15 March 2021]: The amount of overtime worked is not held centrally. The total value of overtime worked by National Health Service staff working in the hospital and community health sector between March 2020 and September 2020 is £926.4 million.

■ Nurses: Pay

Jim Shannon:

[\[171602\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on ensuring nurses are offered a pay rise of at least 2 per cent.

Helen Whately:

The Department for Health and Social Care and HM Treasury work closely throughout the Pay Review Body process.

■ Obesity: Coronavirus

Jim Shannon:

[\[171604\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect of obesity on the intensity of covid-19 (a) symptoms and (b) mortality rate.

Jo Churchill:

Public Health England published a report reviewing the evidence relating to COVID-19 and its association with obesity in July 2020. The review found an increased risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 in people living with obesity or morbid obesity. The evidence suggests that excess weight is associated with an increased risk of hospitalisation, advanced levels of treatment and death from COVID-19. The risks increase progressively with increasing body mass index above the healthy weight range. The report is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/excess-weight-and-covid-19-insights-from-new-evidence>

■ Ophthalmic Services**Rosie Cooper:****[141944]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to collect standardised data on treatment outcomes of (a) glaucoma, (b) wet age-related macular degeneration and (c) diabetic retinopathy.

Jo Churchill:

NHS England and NHS Improvement are working closely with the Royal College of Ophthalmologists and NHS Digital to improve the collection of eye care related data captured by National Health Service trusts and the independent sector. They are drawing upon the clinical data sets already produced by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists for age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy and the data set in production for glaucoma.

■ Pharmacy: Coronavirus**Chi Onwurah:****[173014]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to write off the £ 370 million advance payments provided to community pharmacy owners to cover costs incurred during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

Discussions are ongoing with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee about additional funding for costs incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of its ongoing assessment of COVID-19 costs incurred by the sector, the Government will take account of the £370 million increased advance payments paid to community pharmacies

The COVID-19 support package for community pharmacy also included general COVID-19 business financial support, funding for Bank Holiday openings, social distancing measures and the medicine delivery service to shielded patients and free personal protective equipment, as well as non-monetary support, including the removal of some administrative tasks, flexibility in opening hours and the delayed introduction of new services.

■ Protective Clothing: Health Hazards**Philip Davies:****[169811]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of wearing a mask on the level of microplastic inhalation by the wearer.

Jo Churchill:

Masks which fall under the classification of personal protective equipment (PPE) must meet stringent safety and technical standards, which are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technical-specifications-for-personal-protective-equipment-ppe/essential-technical-requirements-for-ppe-medical-devices-further-information-for-manufacturers-and-suppliers>

Any mask manufactured to a standard will have passed essential health and safety requirements. A product regulator such as the Health and Safety Executive or the Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency will have confirmed they are safe for use. For fabric face coverings, microplastic inhalation should not arise as the Government's guidance states that a face covering should cover nose and mouth while allowing you to breathe comfortably and therefore be made of a material the wearer finds breathable, such as cotton.

Philip Davies:**[169812]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the implications for its policies of the Leipzig University Hospital study relating to impaired breathing caused by face coverings.

Jo Churchill:

The Department has not undertaken a specific assessment. However, the Scientific Group for Emergencies and Public Health England regularly monitor and review the international evidence on the effectiveness of face coverings.

■ Shotley Bridge Hospital: Domestic Visits**Mr Richard Holden:****[171746]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 22 September 2020 to Question 89871 on Shotley Bridge Hospital: Domestic Visits, when the last visit was by a Minister from the Department of Health and Social Care, or its predecessor departments, to Shotley Bridge Hospital.

Edward Argar:

We have no record of any Ministerial visits to Shotley Bridge Hospital prior to 14 September 2020.

■ Slaughterhouses: Inspections

Ben Lake:

[170708]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of veterinarians available to fulfil the duties of Official Veterinarians and Meat Hygiene Inspectors as required by the Food Standards Authority to deliver veterinary official controls in meat establishments.

Jo Churchill:

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) works with a Service Delivery Partner (SDP) to provide Official Veterinarian (OV) resource and some of the Meat Hygiene Inspector (MHI) resource to deliver Official Controls in 244 abattoirs in England and Wales.

Appropriate contingency arrangements have been implemented to enable the FSA to maintain service delivery throughout this period. The FSA continues to work with our SDP which recruits suitably qualified personnel from a variety of sources to ensure that appropriate numbers of OVs and MHIs continue to be available.

■ Surgical Mesh Implants

Mrs Sharon Hodgson:

[171547]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent progress the Government has made on the retrospective audit of mesh implants announced in January 2018.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

After a pilot phase, NHS Digital is now able to receive historical data from healthcare providers on pelvic floor surgical procedures, including the use of mesh or its alternatives. Data collected will be in accordance with the data specification which has been designed in consultation with stakeholders, including patient representatives and is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/corporate-information-and-documents/directions-and-data-provision-notices/data-provision-notices-dpns/surgical-devices-and-implants>

This includes, where possible, a retrospective submission of historic data for procedures undertaken since 1 July 2017.

■ Travel: Quarantine

Kate Osamor:

[169922]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people have applied for a deferred repayment plan in relation to the managed quarantine charge.

Jo Churchill:

For the period 14 February to 17 March, excluding cancellations, there have been 1,252 bookings for managed quarantine hotels which applied for a deferred

repayment plan. Their eligibility for the income related benefits that would entitle them to claim is currently being assessed.

HOME OFFICE

■ Asylum: Contracts

Carol Monaghan:

[\[173077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent steps she has taken to monitor the performance of private contractors providing accommodation and support to asylum seekers.

Kevin Foster:

We expect the highest standards from our providers, who are expected to conduct regular checks across the accommodation estate. The Home Office has access to providers' systems to monitor compliance.

The Asylum Accommodation and Support Services contracts (AASC) have a robust performance management system, against which providers are expected to deliver. Where performance falls short of the required standard, failures are recorded and can result in the award of points and, ultimately, service credits being applied. Providers' performance is monitored closely by dedicated staff in each contract area, who are in daily contact with them.

This is supplemented by a formal governance process which includes quarterly Strategic Review Management Boards and monthly Contract Management Groups. Service credits and subsequent improvement plans are discussed and monitored as part of this process.

Contract management is operated in line with Covid-19 guidance. Service Delivery Managers speak daily with providers about service delivery and performance. In response to the global pandemic, officials also have formal meetings on a weekly basis to ensure individuals are housed safely, services are delivered in line with their contractual obligations and adherence to guidance from Public Health England (PHE) is followed.

Asylum seekers can also raise specific issues or concerns about their accommodation through the 24/7 Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) service operated by Migrant Help. The Home Office and our providers receive feedback on complaints raised through our regular dialogue with Migrant Help, which enables attention to be focussed on particular areas of concern.

■ Asylum: Employment

Carol Monaghan:

[\[173076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when her Department's review of the rules regulating asylum seekers' permission to work, commenced in December 2018, will conclude and report.

Chris Philp:

Asylum seeker right to work is a complex issue. A review of the policy is ongoing, and we are considering the evidence put forward on the issue. The findings of the review will be announced once the work has been completed.

■ Biometric Residence Permits: EU Nationals**Sir Charles Walker:**[\[172914\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of whether the 10 working days target for the issuance of the Biometric Residence Permit to EU citizens residing in the UK is being met; what assessment she has made of the average time taken to issue such permits in the most recent period for which figures are available; what steps her Department is taking to improve the process to issue such permits in order to meet that target; and if she will make a statement.

Kevin Foster:

UKVI does not hold figures relating to the number of customers who received their BRP within 10 working days. However, it does have service level agreements with its production provider the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and its secure delivery provider FedEx.

The DVLA have a target of producing 90% of BRPs within 24 hours of receiving the production request and 100% within 48 hours. For the financial year 1 April 2020 to 12 March 2021 DVLA were achieving 71.5% BRPs produced within 24 hours, 97.7% within 48 hours and 2.3% took longer than 48 hours to produce, all of which were produced within 72 hours and was due to a production problem experienced during October 2020. Since October no BRPs have taken longer than 48 hours to produce.

UKVI meets with DVLA weekly to monitor performance. The impacts of Covid-19 restrictions and safe working practices have reduced staffing capacity within the production site and contributed to the delays experienced.

FedEx has a target to attempt first delivery for 99% of BRPs within 48 working hours of collection of the BRP from DVLA. FedEx have recently provided revised data which indicates they have attempted first time delivery within 48 hours for 99.2% of BRPs between 1 July 2020 and end of February 2021.

FedEx has a detailed improvement plan in place, and UKVI meet with them at least twice a week to progress actions within the plan. We are confident we will see improvements in service as they are implemented.

■ Borders: Security**Sir George Howarth:**[\[170549\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what additional measures are under consideration to provide additional security for UK borders.

Chris Philp:

On 17th December the cross -Government 2025 Border Strategy was published which sets out the Government's ambition to create the world's most effective border by 2025, the can be accessed on the following link -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2025-uk-border-strategy>

Border Force (BF) is committed to working collaboratively at the border with all partner law enforcement agencies, including the Police Counter Terrorism Borders Operations Centre (CTBOC), to mitigate National Security threats and to strengthen border security. BF was a key participant in the Collaboration at the Border programme involving all National Security agencies with an interest in border crossing interception opportunities, aiming for an enhanced collaborative working at the border.

■ Clothing: Manufacturing Industries**Bill Esterson:****[172992]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential effect of the UK having left the EU on increasing the prevalence of modern slavery in UK garment factories.

Kit Malthouse:

The UK was the first country in the world to require businesses to report on the steps they have taken to tackle modern slavery.

The landmark provision in section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 requires businesses, in all sectors, including the garment industry, with a turnover of £36m or more to report annually on the steps they have taken to prevent modern slavery in their operations and supply chains. This obligation on businesses will be unaffected by our exit from the EU.

The prevalence of modern slavery and complexity of global supply chains means that it is highly unlikely that any sector or company is immune from the risks of modern slavery. The Government encourages companies to report transparently about how they are mitigating modern slavery risks and to use their modern slavery statements to demonstrate year on year progress.

The transparency legislation was designed to enable consumers, investors and civil society to scrutinise business action. To improve the quality and detail of reporting and accelerate action to prevent modern slavery, the Government has committed to strengthen the reporting requirements on businesses and to introduce financial penalties for those that fail to meet their obligations under section 54.

In March 2021, the Government launched a digital registry for modern slavery statements which will enhance transparency by making statements available in one place for the first time. It will enable greater visibility and scrutiny of the step's organisations are taking to prevent modern slavery.

In addition, following allegations of labour exploitation in Leicester's textiles industry, a multi-agency taskforce of enforcement bodies has been set up to secure robust intelligence and to carry out appropriate enforcement activity. The taskforce is engaging directly with the garment sector to understand the issues that lead to labour market non-compliance and to consider the measures needed to protect vulnerable workers and drive-up standards.

■ Crime

Colleen Fletcher:

[173055]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of trends in the level of crime in (a) Coventry North East constituency, (b) Coventry, (c) the West Midlands and (d) England in each of the last five years; and what assessment she has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the level of crime in those areas.

Colleen Fletcher:

[173056]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what (a) financial and (b) other steps her Department is taking to reduce crime in (i) Coventry North East constituency, (ii) Coventry, (iii) the West Midlands and (iv) England.

Colleen Fletcher:

[173057]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what (a) financial and (b) other steps her Department is taking to support victims of crime in (i) Coventry North East constituency, (ii) Coventry, (iii) the West Midlands and (iv) England.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office collects data from police forces on police recorded crime, broken down by Police Force Area and Community Safety Partnership Area, including Coventry. However, data is not collected at parliamentary constituency level. The latest data, including the number of recorded offences can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables>

The Government recognises the significant impact crimes can have on victims and communities, which is why the Government is ensuring the police have the resources they need alongside investments focused on preventing and reducing particular types of crime.

To assist the police, the Government has funded an additional 20,000 police officers to support existing forces and organisations in England and Wales. Specifically, the West Midlands Police were allocated an additional 366 officers in the first year of the police uplift, and in December 2020 357 officers had been recruited. For year two of the programme, the force has been allocated 343 additional officers.

From 2019 to 2022, the West Midlands PCC has been allocated £15,541,485 to fund a surge in police operational activity, alongside £10,110,000 to develop the West Midlands VRU. Furthermore, in response to COVID-19, the West Midlands VRU received an additional £483,928 to invest in frontline organisations working on violence prevention projects which support vulnerable children and young people.

West Midlands PCC have also been allocated £549,040 through the Safer Streets Fund, which provides neighbourhood measures such as better lighting and CCTV to better protect our streets from crime, to tackle neighbourhood related crime in Coventry.

■ **Detention Centres: Durham**

Mr Alistair Carmichael:

[\[171528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what visiting rights are planned for the proposed new immigration removal centre for women at Hassockfield for (a) the legal profession, (b) chaplaincy, and (c) friends and family.

Chris Philp:

The rights of all detained individuals are protected by the Detention Centre Rules 2001 (DCR), published Operating Standards for immigration removal centres (IRCs) and individuals under escort and Detention Services Orders (DSO). This framework includes specific guidance on visits, as set out in DSO 04/2012 'Visitors and visiting procedures'.

In addition to the DCR and Operating Standards for IRCs, the provision of religious services is mandated in relevant sections of the service provider contracts and service level agreements relating to religious affairs. All IRCs have a number of appointed religious chaplains in place.

Hassockfield will be operated in line with these provisions.

■ **Fire and Rescue Services**

Daisy Cooper:

[\[170745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of creating a Firefighters and Rescue Service staff covenant to enhance support and protection for those personnel.

Kit Malthouse:

Fire and Rescue Services do vital, life-saving work, and we will continue to ensure that Fire and Rescue Services have the resources and support they need to do their important work.

Whilst there is a compelling case for a Police Covenant, due to the nature of the job and what society expects of the police, there are no current plans to develop covenants in other sectors.

Responsibility for health and wellbeing ultimately rests with Fire and Rescue Services and inspection shows that services are rapidly expanding the range of wellbeing support available to their staff.

■ Hassockfield Secure Training Centre

Mary Kelly Foy: [\[173169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what public consultation has been undertaken prior to the commencement of plans to re-open the former Hassockfield Detention Centre in Medomsley as an Immigration Detention Centre; and what plans she has to hold a further public consultation before the planned opening of that centre in Autumn 2021.

Mary Kelly Foy: [\[173170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions were held with (a) Durham County Council, (b) local councillors and (c) other local stakeholders before plans were progressed to redevelop the former Hassockfield Detention Centre in Medomsley as an immigration removal centre; and what plans there are for discussions with each of those bodies before its planned opening in autumn 2021.

Mary Kelly Foy: [\[173171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether, before the commencement of plans to redevelop the former Hassockfield Detention Centre in Medomsley as an immigration removal centre, the Government consulted with (a) victims of historic abuse (b) other inmates at the Hassockfield Detention Centre.

Mary Kelly Foy: [\[173173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions her Department has had with (a) the Refugee Council, (b) local refugee support groups and (c) advocacy organisations prior to the commencement of plans to re-open the former Hassockfield Detention Centre in Medomsley as an Immigration Detention or Removal Centre; and whether alternatives to the incarceration of women who seek refuge in the UK have been assessed.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office has acquired the former Hassockfield Secure Training Centre in County Durham and will open it as an immigration removal centre by the autumn.

Initial discussions with Durham County Council have taken place and will continue throughout the development of plans for the site. Consultations with local councillors, other local stakeholders and interested non-governmental organisations including the Refugee Council, will take place over the coming months.

The former Medomsley Detention Centre was demolished and rebuilt in 1988. Whilst I have every sympathy for victims of historic abuse at the former centre, officials do not have plans to undertake any consultation on the future immigration removal centre.

Now in its second year, the Action Access pilot has provided women who would otherwise be detained with a programme of support in the community, including case management support. We are working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and they have appointed the National Centre for Social

Research to independently evaluate this work, once the pilot concludes in March 2021. The evaluation is scheduled for publication in June 2021. We will use the evaluation to inform our future approach to case-management focused alternatives to detention.

Mary Kelly Foy:

[173172]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the (a) number, (b) security and (c) pay of new jobs which will be created by plans to re-open the former Hassockfield Detention Centre in Medomsley as an Immigration Detention or Removal Centre in Autumn 2021.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office has acquired the former Hassockfield Secure Training Centre in County Durham and will open it as an immigration removal centre by the autumn. The proposed site will provide modern, decent and secure accommodation for around 80 women. We expect approximately 200 permanent jobs to be created when the centre is fully operational.

■ Immigration: EU Nationals

Rachael Maskell:

[173084]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of extending the deadline for the EU Settled Status Scheme beyond June 2021 in response to covid-19 restrictions.

Kevin Foster:

There are no plans to extend the deadline for applications to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS).

We have continued to receive and process thousands of applications a day to the scheme throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with more than 5.1 million applications received and more than 4.8 million applications concluded by 28 February 2021.

Support for applicants who need it has remained available, including from the network of 72 organisations across the UK grant-funded by the Home Office to help vulnerable people apply to the EUSS.

In line with the Withdrawal Agreement, the Government has been clear, where a person has reasonable grounds for missing the 30 June 2021 deadline for applications to the EUSS by EU citizens and their family members resident in the UK by the end of the transition period, they will be given a further opportunity to apply.

We will publish clear, non-exhaustive guidance in the near future on what constitutes reasonable grounds for missing the deadline. For now, the focus remains on communicating information about the scheme and helping people to apply.

Published guidance for EUSS applicants on the impact of COVID-19 is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-eu-settlement-scheme-guidance-for-applicants>.

■ Knives: Crime

Robert Halfon:

[\[172977\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to prevent knife crime.

Kit Malthouse:

This Government is determined to turn the tide on knife crime in all areas, wherever it occurs.

On 4 February 2021, the Government published a total police funding settlement of up to £15.8 billion in 2021/22, an increase of up to £636 million compared to 2020/21. Across England and Wales, we are also recruiting 20,000 additional police officers by the end of March 2023.

From 2019 to 2022, this government will have provided over £242 million, through the Serious Violence Fund (SVF), to address the drivers of serious violence at the local level and significantly bolster the police response in 18 Police Force areas most affected by serious violence across England and Wales.

We have also invested £200 million through the 10-Year Youth Endowment Fund to ensure those most at risk are given the opportunity to turn away from violence and lead positive lives.

We have also made it easier for the police to use enhanced stop and search powers and we have introduced Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVROs) in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Bill which will give the police powers to make it easier to stop and search those already convicted of knife and offensive weapon offences.

Through the PCSC bill, we have also introduced legislation which will place new duties on a range of specified agencies across different sectors, such as local government, youth offending, and health and probation, to work collaboratively, share data and information, and put in place plans to prevent and reduce serious violence.

The Offensive Weapons Act 2019 includes specific measures for knife offences, in particular making it an offence to possess certain offensive weapons in private, and stopping knives being sent to residential addresses after they are bought online, unless the seller has arrangements in place with the delivery company to ensure that the product would not be delivered into the hands of a person under 18. The measures on knives in the Act also include:

- changing the legal definition for threatening with an offensive weapon to make prosecutions more straightforward;
- banning the possession of a knife on a further education premises;
- updating the definition of a flick knife to reflect changing weapon designs;
- introducing Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs) to help the police target those most at risk of being drawn into serious violence, to set them on a more positive path.

■ Lincolnshire Police: Public Appointments

Dame Diana Johnson: [172919]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she plans to take to ensure that the Lincolnshire Police and Crime Panel publishes an interim report of its findings relating to the events surrounding the recent appointment of the Chief Constable.

Kit Malthouse:

In performing their scrutiny function Police and Crime Panels hold regular public meetings and produce reports and recommendations to the Police and Crime Commissioner on a range of issues, including proposed chief constable appointments.

Where reports must be published by the Police and Crime Panel, this is set out clearly in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.

■ Members: Correspondence

John Spellar: [171500]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Warley of 27 January 2021 on Mr Ahmed Jubran.

Chris Philp:

I apologise for the delay. UK Visas and Immigration, MP Account Management team responded on 19 March 2021.

■ Passports: Children

Dan Jarvis: [173032]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to increase the speed of the passport application process for (a) foster and (b) adopted children.

Kevin Foster:

British passports can only be issued when all checks have been satisfactorily completed. Subject to receiving the necessary evidence to complete these checks, there is no difference to the indicative processing time for processing applications for an adopted, fostered, or any other child.

Guidance for how to apply for adopted or fostered children can be found on gov.uk at:

<https://www.gov.uk/get-a-child-passport/adopted-fostered-children><https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-notes-for-social-services-departments-when-applying-for-passports-on-behalf-of-looked-after-children>

■ Refugees: Resettlement

Carol Monaghan: [173075]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the timescale is for the commencement of her Department's future UK refugee resettlement scheme.

Chris Philp:

The global UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) launched following the completion of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. Through UKRS we are committed to welcoming refugees through resettlement in the months and years to come. This commitment, alongside a fair and firm asylum system, will see us continue to offer safe and legal routes to the UK for vulnerable refugees in need of protection.

Road Traffic Offences: Fixed Penalties**Stephanie Peacock:****[170700]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much revenue to the Exchequer was generated through fixed penalty notices for speeding in each region of the UK in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office does not collect data on the revenue generated through fixed penalty notices (FPNs) issued for speed limit offences in each region.

Data on the number of FPNs issued for motoring offences including speed limit offences can be found in the 'Police Powers and Procedures, England and Wales' statistical bulletin, which can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-powers-and-procedures-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2020>

Undocumented Migrants: Coronavirus**Andrew Rosindell:****[171535]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the number of illegal immigrants to the UK in 2021 who tested positive for covid-19 upon apprehension.

Chris Philp:

I refer the Honourable Member to the answer to PQ HL11404 answered by Baroness Williams of Trafford on 22 December 2021

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-14/hl11404>

Visas**Hilary Benn:****[172889]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans she has to extend the validity of leave to remain visas issued to persons overseas in red list countries who are unable to exercise their right to enter the UK on such a visa as a result of they, and any family members, not being able to afford the hotel isolation fee; and if she will make a statement.

Kevin Foster:

If an individual overseas in a red list country has UK residence rights and is concerned about their ability to pay for their [managed quarantine facility](#) costs, they may be eligible to apply for a deferred repayment plan when booking.

We have set out how to apply for this, in particular for individuals who receive income related benefits. They will be required to pay back their debt to the government in 12 monthly instalments. Further guidance can be found on the GOV.UK website:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/booking-and-staying-in-a-quarantine-hotel-when-you-arrive-in-england#what-you-need-to-do-before-you-arrive-in-england>

If an individual overseas with UK residence rights chooses not to travel to the UK within the validity of their visa, they will need to make an application for a replacement visa or a new visa in an appropriate route. Further guidance can be found on the GOV.UK website:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents#outside-uk>

Sir Charles Walker:**[172913]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 3 March 2021 to Question Visas on Visas, whether (a) priority and (b) super priority visa services have been fully reinstated in the UK for (i) in-country routes, (ii) study routes and (iii) applications for indefinite leave to remain; and if she will make a statement.

Kevin Foster:

Super Priority and Priority services have been reinstated in the UK for Work and Study routes, including applications for Indefinite Leave to Remain.

It is anticipated these services for Marriage and Settlement routes in the UK will be reinstated by the end of March 2021.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ Buildings: Fire Extinguishers****Sir George Howarth:****[171507]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the potential merits for fire-safety of bringing forward legislative proposals for installing water sprinkler systems in (a) public, (b) residential, (c) commercial and (d) industrial premises.

Christopher Pincher:

We have already brought forward changes to Building Regulations guidance (Approved Document B) by lowering the height threshold for sprinklers from 30 metres to 11 metres in new blocks of flats. Assessments were set out in the Government impact assessment, available here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachm>

[ent_data/file/887225/Impact_Assessment_-_Sprinklers_and_other_fire_safety_measures_in_high-rise_blocks_of_flats_2020.pdf.](#)

We are assessing the body of evidence available on the costs, benefits, and implications of installing sprinkler systems for selected other residential building types within the full technical review of Approved Document B (ADB) which began on 17 June 2020 with research into specialised housing and care homes. We have not made an assessment of the potential merits of sprinklers in commercial, industrial, or other types of premises.

■ **Derelict Land: West Midlands**

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[170676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent discussions his Department has had with local authorities on the development of brownfield sites for housing in the West Midlands.

Christopher Pincher:

This Government strongly encourages re-using suitable brownfield land for development to meet the country's housing need and level up communities. We are committed to making the most of brownfield land as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

We are providing nearly £20 billion to underpin our long-term housing strategy, and in the West Midlands, we are specifically supporting housing growth through an ambitious devolution deal, a Land Fund of up to £100 million and £108 million through our £400 million Brownfield Fund.

We continue to engage with the West Midlands to make sure plans are in place to drive the housing and economic recovery the region needs.

■ **Free Zones**

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[172986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether each of the eight successful freeport bids had been submitted in full by the 12.00 noon on 5 February 2021 deadline published in the Freeports Bidding Prospectus.

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[172988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many of the organisations that submitted a bid for proposed freeports were (a) asked for, permitted to submit and (c) encouraged to submit additional submissions in relation to their bid between the deadline for bids on 5 February 2021 and 3 March 2021.

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[172989\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many of the organisations that submitted a bid for proposed freeports were asked for

clarifications in respect of any element of their bid between the deadline for bids on 5 February 2021 and 3 March 2021; and if he will make a statement.

Luke Hall:

Site operator contact details were sought from all bidders to assist HMG in checking customs site authorisations. No other information was requested or encouraged from bidders as part of the bid assessment. All information that was assessed as part of the Freeport selection process was received by 12 noon on February 5 2021 or within a grace period of a few minutes after this deadline to allow for technical issues.

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[172987\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the maximum distance between two sites within the freeports announced in Budget 2021 is greater than 45 km; what assessment his Department made of the extent to which each of those Freeports meets the requirement for a clear economic rationale under section 3.1.6 of the Freeports bidding prospectus; and if he will make a statement.

Luke Hall:

The Government has led a fair, open and transparent selection process to determine successful Freeport locations in England.

We were clear in the Freeports Bidding Prospectus that the Government would consider bids for exceptional additional customs subzones and tax sites outside the Outer Boundary where this could be supported by a clear economic rationale.

■ **Free Zones: Employment**

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[171585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to English Freeports selection decision-making note, updated 17 March 2021, what assessment he has made of the effect on skills and jobs, (a) within each of the eight regions in which a freeport was designated and (b) on (i) towns, (ii) cities, and (iii) other employment centres within that region which were not included within the successful Freeport bid.

Luke Hall:

Freeports will be national hubs for international trade, innovation and commerce, regenerating communities across the UK by attracting new businesses, spreading jobs, investment and opportunity to towns and cities up and down the country. They will bring together ports, local authorities, businesses and other key local stakeholders to achieve a common goal of shared prosperity and opportunity for their regions. Our focus is on encouraging new investment to create new businesses and new economic activity. This will create jobs in deprived communities across the country.

■ Green Belt: Hertfordshire

Daisy Cooper:

[\[170744\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the effect of the Government's housing standard methodology on the greenbelt in Hertfordshire.

Christopher Pincher:

To help enable England to deliver 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s, in December we changed the formula for assessing local housing need to increase need in our 20 most populated urban areas following consultation. There were no changes to the approach in Hertfordshire and so local housing need will continue to be calculated in the same way they had been previously. The uplift aims to maximise use of existing infrastructure and to support development that reduces the need for high-carbon travel. It also supported our wider objectives of regenerating brownfield sites, renewal and levelling up.

The standard method is only the starting point in the process of planning for new homes. Councils decide their own housing target once they have taken account of local constraints (such as Green Belt) that prevent it from allocating enough sites to meet need. As we set out in our manifesto, we will continue to protect and enhance the Green Belt. Our revised National Planning Policy Framework is still clear that most new building is inappropriate in Green Belt, and should be refused planning permission unless there are very special circumstances. Policy on the Green Belt will remain a local decision for local authorities.

■ High Rise Flats: Insulation

Neil Coyle:

[\[171622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when the loans for leaseholders in buildings affected by cladding-related issues will be introduced; and when the application process for those loans will open.

Christopher Pincher:

We are working swiftly to launch the scheme as soon as is feasible and will publish more details on how it will work.

Neil Coyle:

[\[171623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate he has made of the average waiting time for decisions to be made on applications for loans made by leaseholders living in blocks affected by cladding-related issues; and what plans he has to implement an appeals process for leaseholders declined a loan.

Christopher Pincher:

We have announced an unprecedented multi-billion investment to protect hundreds of thousands of leaseholders from the cost of replacing unsafe cladding on their homes. Now that the significant increase in Government funding and the financing

solution have been announced, we will publish more details on how these will work as soon as is possible.

Neil Coyle: [\[171624\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how his Department plans to ensure that loans taken out by leaseholders living in block affected by cladding-related issues are capped at £50 per month for repayments.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government will fund the removal and placement of unsafe cladding on buildings over 18 metres. In buildings of 11-18 metres, with a lower risk to safety, leaseholders will gain new protection from the costs of cladding removal through a financing scheme so that leaseholders will never pay more than £50 a month. We will be publishing further details of the financing scheme.

■ Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018

Mike Amesbury: [\[171713\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment has he made of the effectiveness of the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018.

Christopher Pincher:

We supported the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 because it, for the first time, empowers tenants in both the Private and Social Rented Sectors to hold their landlord to account if they fail to keep the property fit for human habitation. We have not yet made an assessment of the Act, which came into force for all tenancies in March 2020. The Act forms a vital part of the work we are doing to improve standards in the Private Rented Sector, including our review of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and the strengthening of local authorities' enforcement powers.

■ Housing: Anti-social Behaviour

Colleen Fletcher: [\[170671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to protect (a) tenants and (b) homeowners from (i) anti-social behaviour and (ii) noise nuisance problems during the covid-19 outbreak.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government is committed to tackling and preventing anti-social behaviour (ASB). We know the serious effect that persistent anti-social behaviour can have on both individuals and communities.

That is why we have provided police, local authorities and other local agencies with a range of tools and powers that they can use to respond quickly and effectively to ASB through the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. These powers are

unaffected by emergency measures introduced in response to the pandemic and we expect these powers to continue to be used during the period affected by Covid-19.

It is for local areas to decide how best to deploy these powers depending on the specific circumstances, as they are best placed to understand what is driving the behaviour in question, the effect that it is having, and to determine the most appropriate response.

Local councils are responsible for investigating complaints about issues that could be a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This includes "noise emitted from premises so as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance".

The Government considers that there is sufficient flexibility within the provisions for local authorities to exercise discretion on timing and means of investigation, and therefore do not consider that additional formal measures are necessary during the Covid-19 outbreak.

The Government has introduced a range of measures to protect renters during the pandemic. As part of this, we have ensured that landlords can still continue to take action against anti-social behaviour, to assist tenants and local communities. We have returned notice periods for anti-social behaviour cases to their pre Covid-19 levels, so that these cases can progress quickly to court. The judiciary are also prioritising the most serious cases for action in the courts, including those involving anti-social behaviour. Finally, whilst the Government has put in place legislation to ensure bailiffs do not enforce evictions during this stage of the pandemic, there are exemptions for the most serious circumstances that present the most strain on landlords, including anti-social behaviour.

For homeowners, anti-social behaviour should be reported to the police and/or local authority. If anti-social behaviour takes place within the property of a housing association, complaints may be made to the relevant officials.

■ Housing: Construction

Sir Charles Walker:

[172915]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans he has to ensure that the National House Building Council guarantee for new builds is fit for purpose; and what assessment he has made of the potential merits of ensuring that all new builds are approved and signed off by local authority officers; and if he will make a statement.

Christopher Pincher:

It is the responsibility of the Financial Conduct Authority to regulate new build warranties and protect consumers. If a consumer is unhappy with the warranty provider's action, they can contact the Financial Ombudsman Services and raise a complaint for free.

The Building Safety Regulator will be responsible for oversight of the competence and performance of building control professionals and the building control bodies in

which they work, taking a wider view of the professionalism and culture that needs to support building safety in all classes of work, not just in-scope buildings. To do this, we are introducing a system of oversight of the performance of building control bodies (Local Authorities and Approved Inspectors), and a system of individual registration based on competence and adherence to a code of conduct, all overseen by the Building Safety Regulator.

■ Housing: Older People

Mike Amesbury:

[170733]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to increase number of local authorities with local plan policies relating to older people's housing.

Christopher Pincher:

We place great importance on the provision of suitable homes for older people.

Having an up-to-date plan in place is essential to planning for our housing requirements and the housing needs of older people.

Our planning rules already mean councils must consider the needs of older people when planning for new homes. In 2019 we published guidance to help councils implement the National Planning Policy Framework policies.

On 19 January 2021 our Written Ministerial Statement set the expectation that all authorities should have up to date plans in place by the end of 2023.

Further to this, the *Planning for the Future* white paper sets out our vision of a simpler, quicker and more accessible planning system, where Local Plans are visual, digitised and map-based, prepared to a new statutory timetable, and judged against a single 'sustainable development' test at examination.

■ Kingspan Group

Mike Amesbury:

[171714]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in the context of the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry, whether the Government plans to exclude Kingspan plc from eligibility for departmental and Government contracts.

Christopher Pincher:

Matters concerning the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 are the responsibility of the Cabinet Office, including the grounds for the exclusion of bidders from public procurement procedures that are set out within the regulations.

These rules set out the circumstances in which bidders must, or may, be excluded from a public procurement process for a variety of criminal offences and in other specific situations. Decisions need to be based around firm evidence and individual contracting authorities, including local authorities, are responsible for their own decisions on these matters.

It is clear that further measures must be put in place to prevent unsafe products being placed on the market and there must be action against companies which advertise and sell unsafe products, or who game the testing regime.

That is why we have brought forward proposals to strengthen the regulation of construction products in the draft Building Safety Bill. We have also announced in January a new national regulator for construction products, and a review into the construction product testing regime. We expect all public suppliers to act with integrity and to high standards, and will act where we see standards falling short.

■ **Levelling Up Fund: Northern Ireland**

Louise Haigh:

[173088]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much and what proportion of the £800 million Levelling Up Fund for the devolved administrations will be allocated to Northern Ireland.

Luke Hall:

The Fund will set aside at least £800 million across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland over four years from 2021-22 to 2024-25. For the first round of funding, at least 9% of total UK allocations will be set aside for Scotland, 5% for Wales, and 3% for Northern Ireland.

■ **Local Government Finance: Coronavirus**

Sir George Howarth:

[171508]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what representations he has received on funding for local government to (a) increase Government support to pre-2010 levels and (b) ensure that local government additional spending on Covid-19 is fully recovered by councils.

Luke Hall:

Core Spending Power for local authorities in England could rise from £49.0 billion in 2020-21 to up to £51.3 billion in 2021-22, depending on local decisions - a 4.6% increase in cash terms. If councils do decide to take up the entirety of the increase on offer, they will see an overall increase in line with last year's. This recognises the resources councils need to meet their pressures and maintain current service levels. These resources were reflected in the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2021/22, which received broad support from the majority of those who responded to the consultation and was passed in Parliament unopposed.

We are collecting monthly financial monitoring returns to better understand the additional costs councils are facing due to COVID-19. According to the latest of these returns, the estimated expenditure pressures for the financial year are £7.3 billion. The Government has allocated over £8 billion directly to councils since the start of the pandemic specifically for their expenditure pressures. Furthermore, the Chancellor took action at the Spending Review to provide local authorities with over £3 billion of additional support in 2021-22, taking total support committed to local authorities to

tackle COVID-19 to over £11 billion. This level of support has been broadly welcomed by the sector.

■ Local Government: Devolution

Mike Amesbury: [\[171715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when the framework details for new Devolution Deals for areas such as Cheshire and Warrington are planned to be published.

Luke Hall:

We want to devolve and decentralise to give more power to local communities, providing an opportunity for all places to level up. We intend to bring forward the Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper in due course. This will cover how the UK Government will partner with places across the UK to build a sustainable economic recovery and set out our plans for future devolution arrangements.

■ Local Government: Flags

Andrew Rosindell: [\[171533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of flying the flags of the Historic Counties for the full week in the lead up to Historic County Flags Day.

Luke Hall:

The Government attaches great importance to the history and traditions of this country and recognises that the tapestry of our historic counties is one of the bonds that draws the nation together. We remain committed to the celebration of historic counties. We are considering with colleagues across Government how best to repeat the 2019 display in Parliament Square to mark Historic County Flags Day in the week of the 23 July, so as to raise the profile of this national celebration.

■ Members: Correspondence

Matthew Pennycook: [\[171676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich of 15 January 2021 on Habinteg Housing Association.

Christopher Pincher:

A response to the Hon Member's letter has been issued.

■ Parks

Imran Ahmad Khan: [\[171764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether his Department plans to reopen applications for Pocket parks.

Luke Hall:

The Government recognises the value of parks and green spaces in providing vibrant and inclusive locations for communities to socialise, volunteer, work, and exercise. We have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic how important access to parks and green spaces are to local communities. We recognise that green spaces foster health, well-being, integration, and social engagement. There are no immediate plans to continue the Pocket Parks Scheme. However, as we move beyond the threat of COVID-19, we will explore how we can best support all urban parks and green spaces, taking into account the Government's environmental, social, and health priorities.

Lilian Greenwood:[\[172982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many joint meetings the cross-departmental working group and park sector group have had; and what the outcomes of those meetings were.

Luke Hall:

The Parks Action Group has met four times since its inception in 2017. These meetings led to the development of a workplan that focused on: funding; quality standards; a shared vision for the futures of parks (including establishing a robust picture of their benefits); empowering local communities involvement and improving equitable access.

MHCLG provided £500,000 to support sector-led initiatives including:

- Appointment of the Parks Action Group Coordinator.
- Joint research delivered by APSE and academics '21 st Century Parks' which aims to identify the knowledge and skills of existing park managers.
- New Policy Institute research exploring parks funding, new funding models and to identify good practice:
- Public Health England and Natural England research on accessibility of green spaces:
- The Natural England Green Infrastructure project to improve benchmarking on standards for green spaces:
- Locality and National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces Empowerment Programme
- Skills: Using the 21 st Century Parks research mentioned above, the Skills Task & Finish group are developing a competency framework to form a greenprint for the parks profession.

■ Planning**Henry Smith:**[\[171573\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether a future replacement of the Duty to Cooperate will ensure that in two-tier areas all local

authorities, including county councils, are involved in plan-making for the future of their areas.

Christopher Pincher:

As part of the proposed reform of the planning system announced in the 2020 White Paper, Planning for the Future, the Government announced its intention to abolish the Duty to Co-operate. We are developing our proposals further following the consultation responses to the White Paper. It is too early to speculate about the detailed arrangements which will replace the Duty to Co-operate. However, the reformed planning system will ensure that all relevant authorities are involved in plan making, and this will include County Councils, where applicable. The new system will be more efficient, effective and flexible in the way that plans are prepared.

Henry Smith: [\[171574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what provisions will be made through reforms of the planning system to better enable strategic planning across broader geographies.

Christopher Pincher:

It is too early to speculate about the detailed arrangements of the reformed Planning system. However, I can assure you that those parts of the country that currently have strategic plan making responsibilities will continue to do so, and that as part of the reform proposals we are considering how such powers can be made available to other parts of the country where they will be most useful in addressing long term development and infrastructure needs.

Henry Smith: [\[171575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the removal of the Duty to Cooperate on sustainable place making.

Christopher Pincher:

There is no formal assessment of the effect of the removal of the Duty to Co-operate. However, the Duty has previously led to a number of Local Plans failing at Examination, leading to delays in plan making and some areas not having an up to date local plan for many years.

■ **Recreation Spaces**

Lilian Greenwood: [\[172984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, which Minister has responsibility for parks and green spaces.

Luke Hall:

Parks and green spaces share joint responsibility between the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs. MHCLG is responsible for urban parks and green spaces and the responsible

minister is Luke Hall MP. The DEFRA minister responsible for green spaces is Rebecca Pow MP and Lord Gardiner is responsible for country parks.

■ Regional Planning and Development

Dan Jarvis:

[R] [\[173034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what support he is providing to each Mayoral Combined Authority as part of the Government's levelling-up agenda.

Dan Jarvis:

[R] [\[173035\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what support he is providing to each local authority in Sheffield City Region as part of the Government's levelling-up agenda.

Luke Hall:

Levelling up all areas of the country remains at the centre of the Government's agenda. Mayoral devolution has strengthened local leadership and institutions, devolving key powers over transport, planning, skills and funding away from Whitehall so that they are exercised at the right level to make a difference for local communities.

Through an ambitious programme of 9 devolution deals, £7.49 billion worth of investment funding is being unlocked over 30 years to the directly elected combined authority mayors, empowering mayors to level up their local areas.

The £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund will invest in infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK, including regenerating town centres and high streets, upgrading local transport, and investing in cultural and heritage assets.

■ Retail Trade: Coronavirus

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[173054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what (a) financial and (b) other steps his Department is taking to help high streets in (i) Coventry, (ii) the West Midlands and (iii) England recover from the effect of the covid-19 outbreak.

Luke Hall:

The Government recognises that this is a challenging time and COVID-19 is having a significant impact on our communities, businesses and town centres.

In December we announced that up to £830 million has been allocated from the Future High Streets Fund. 15 areas have been awarded £255 million, with a further 57 areas to receive provisional funding of £576 million. This investment will support areas to recover from the pandemic and help transform underused town centres into vibrant places to live, work and shop. 10 high streets from the West Midlands will receive funding of up to £146 million from the Future High Streets Fund.

In September 2019, we announced the initial 101 places invited to develop Town Deal proposals as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

The objective of Town Deals is to drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long-term economic and productivity growth through land use, economic assets including cultural assets, skills and enterprise infrastructure, and connectivity.

Through the Towns Fund we will invest up to £25 million in each town, or more in exceptional cases, to drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long-term economic and productivity growth.

There are 15 towns in the West Midlands which have submitted Town Investment Plan proposals to MHCLG to secure a Town Deal.

On 3 March at Budget, the Chancellor announced 7 Town Deals for places in the West Midlands.

- o Burton-upon-Trent - £22.8 million

- o Kidsgrove - £16.9 million

- o Nuneaton - £23.2 million

- o Rowley Regis - £19 million

- o Smethwick - £23.5 million

- o West Bromwich - £25 million

- o Wolverhampton - £25 million

We will make further announcements on the remaining Town Deals in due course.

Government is also providing support to local leadership through the High Streets Task Force, giving places expert advice to support their high streets and town centres to adapt and thrive. Coventry has been able to benefit from this as one of the pilot areas that have been leading the way in benefiting from expert and tailored support from the High Streets Task Force. More widely in the West Midlands, Stirchley and West Bromwich were also part of the 14-town pilot alongside Coventry. On 20 March we announced the next 70 Local Authorities to receive support from the Task Force, which included Stoke, Walsall and Wolverhampton from the West Midlands area.

In March we also announced the £56 million Welcome Back Fund to further support local authorities and their business communities as we begin to return to the high street. This builds on the £50 million Re-opening High Streets Safely Fund (RHSSF) announced in May 2020 to include an additional £5.6 million for the West Midlands and a further £335,000 for Coventry.

More widely, the Levelling Up Fund will directly support communities across the UK. It will make available up to £4.8 billion over four years from 2021-22 to 2024-25. The Fund will invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities - including regenerating town centres and high streets, investing in local transport schemes, and upgrading local culture and heritage assets. The prospectus published at Budget sets out how local areas can access the first round of funding.

■ Right to Buy Scheme: Bolton

Yasmin Qureshi:

[172959]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will publish data on the number of social housing properties bought under the Right-to-Buy scheme in Bolton since 2010.

Christopher Pincher:

The number of properties sold to tenants under the Right to Buy scheme by local authorities since 2006-07 can be found in Live Table 691 here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-social-housing-sales>.

■ Tenants: Coronavirus

Sir Alan Campbell:

[171521]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether landlords can require that tenants have a covid-19 test before undertaking safety checks within a property.

Christopher Pincher:

Landlords can take steps to carry out repairs and safety inspections, including routine and essential inspections and repairs, as well as any planned internal works to the property under the national lockdown which is in force in England, provided these are undertaken in line with guidance for people working in other people's homes and the relevant coronavirus (COVID-19) legislation. This legislation does not allow landlords to require tenants to have a test for COVID-19.

It is important to remember that tenants still have a right to a decent, warm and safe place to live – and it is in the best interests of both tenants and landlords to ensure that properties are kept in good repair and free from hazards.

■ Towns Fund: Northern Ireland

Louise Haigh:

[173087]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many bids his Department received from Northern Ireland to the Towns Fund.

Luke Hall:

The Towns Fund operates in England only. Devolved Administrations receive funding according to the Barnett formula and are responsible for decisions on how that funding is used within their devolved responsibilities.

■ UK Community Renewal Fund: Northern Ireland

Stephen Farry:

[171768]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reasons Northern Ireland is not included in the top 100 priority places identified for the UK Community Renewal Fund.

Luke Hall:

The UK Government will run a national competition against a fixed national allocation in Northern Ireland, equating to £11 million of funding. Project applicants in Northern Ireland will submit bids directly to the UK Government for assessment and approval. We are taking a different approach to delivering the UK Community Renewal Fund in Northern Ireland, to take account of the different local government landscape in Northern Ireland compared to Great Britain. Treating Northern Ireland as one eligible geographical area will also ensure that all communities across Northern Ireland have equal access in being able to apply for these funds.

■ UK Community Renewal Fund: Wales**Jonathan Edwards:**[\[172971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on the determination of priority places under the Community Renewal Fund.

Jonathan Edwards:[\[172972\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what representations he has received from the Welsh Government following the determination of priority places under the Community Renewal Fund.

Luke Hall:

The UK Government is providing an additional £220 million funding through the UK Community Renewal Fund to help local areas prepare for the launch of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2022. The UK Government regularly engages with a wide range of stakeholders as part of its ongoing work, including with our counterparts in the Welsh Government.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE**■ Import Duties: USA****Emily Thornberry:**[\[172927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what estimate she has made of the cost to the Exchequer of the decision to suspend tariffs on imports from the US arising from the Boeing-Airbus dispute during the period from 1 January to 4 March 2021.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

Countermeasures are not designed as a revenue raising measure and place an additional cost on British importers. The United Kingdom's bold, de-escalatory decision to suspend tariffs brought the US to the negotiating table, resulting in joint tariff suspension. The suspension of US tariffs on around £550 million of British exports benefits businesses in every corner of our country.

■ Trade Agreements

Sir George Howarth:

[\[172891\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, if she will list the countries with which the Government is conducting bilateral trade negotiations.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

HM Government has agreed trade deals with 66 countries, in addition to the EU, covering trade worth £890 billion in 2019.

My Department has agreed continuity arrangements with the European Economic Area (EEA) and continue to make progress towards a new comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA). We are continuing discussions from last year with Serbia too, with a view to concluding an agreement soon.

FTA negotiations are continuing with the US, Australia and New Zealand. We will re-open negotiations with Canada and Mexico this year, which supports our strategy to accede to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

■ Trade Agreements: Cameroon

Emily Thornberry:

[\[172925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, when she plans to publish the (a) Economic Partnership Agreement between the UK and Cameroon signed on 9 March 2021 and (b) Memorandum of Understanding previously in place between the UK and Cameroon as a bridging mechanism until that agreement was signed.

Emily Thornberry:

[\[172926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, when she plans to publish the Trade Partnership Agreement between the UK and Ghana signed on 2 March 2021.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

Both agreements will be published at the earliest opportunity. The corresponding Memorandum of Understanding for the United Kingdom-Cameroon agreement will be published at the same time.

■ UK Export Finance

Emily Thornberry:

[\[172924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, if she will publish the new Memorandum of Understanding agreed between her Department and UK Export Finance.

Graham Stuart:

The Memorandum of Understanding will be published in due course. A letter from my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade to UK Export Finance's Chief Executive, Louis Taylor, on its annual priorities has been published.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-the-department-of-international-trade-to-uk-export-finance-on-ukefs-annual-priorities/letter-from-the-department-of-international-trade-to-uk-export-finance-on-ukefs-annual-priorities>.

JUSTICE

■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

Grahame Morris:

[913911]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the ability of prison officers to continue frontline work beyond the age of 60.

Alex Chalk:

HMPPS takes very seriously the health and safety of all staff working within prisons.

All prison officers who joined the service after April 2001 must pass an annual fitness test in order to remain a prison officer. HMPPS recruits staff up to the normal pension age of sixty-five and has employed new Prison Officers in their sixties, who have passed the fitness test and are performing in their roles effectively. In addition, many staff who have the right to retire at sixty choose to work beyond their retirement age.

The Ministry of Justice and HMPPS supports all their staff, especially those working in an operational environment. Staff also have access to medical professionals to ensure continued physical and mental wellbeing.

■ Magistrates: Retirement

Alex Cunningham:

[173004]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, when he plans to bring forward legislative proposals to increase the retirement age for Magistrates.

Chris Philp:

On 8 March, we published the government response to the Judicial Mandatory Retirement Age Consultation, which set out our intention to increase the mandatory retirement age of judicial office holders, including magistrates, to 75. The legislative proposals will be brought forward when parliamentary time allows.

The legislation will include a transitional provision to enable retired magistrates who are younger than the new MRA to apply to return to the bench subject to business need. The process by which such applications are to be made and considered will be set out in due course.

■ Young Offenders: Sentencing

Alex Cunningham:

[173003]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 15 March 2021 to Question 166405, how many and what proportion of young adults aged 18 to 25 years sentenced to life imprisonment received (a) a pre-sentence report, (b) a maturity assessment alongside a pre-sentence report and (c) an assessment for neuro-disabilities

alongside a pre-sentence report in the most recent period for which that information can be collated at proportionate cost.

Alex Chalk:

The National Probation Service (NPS) views maturity assessments as a critical component of an offender assessment within a Pre-Sentence Report (PSR) as articulated in Probation Instruction 04/2016: Determining PSR.

The NPS has produced maturity guidance to support PSR writers which highlights how to identify low maturity, particularly for young adults aged 18-25 years old. It also provides examples of how report writers can communicate with courts about maturity, offending and sentencing proposals.

Between July to September 2020, there were two cases of young adults aged 18 to 25 sentenced to life imprisonment who received a pre-sentence report in England and Wales.

It is not possible to give figures for the proportion of young adults aged 18 to 25 sentenced to life imprisonment who received a pre-sentence report, as this would involve a process of matching court record data with probation data and the cost of doing so would be disproportionate.

Due to the disclosure risk regarding the identification of certain attributes about a data subject that may not otherwise have been known, figures cannot be provided on the number of cases where an assessment for neuro-disabilities or maturity has been conducted.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Community Ownership Fund: Northern Ireland

Louise Haigh:

[\[173089\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how much funding under the Community Ownership Fund is being allocated to Northern Ireland.

Mr Robin Walker:

The detail of how the fund will be allocated UK-wide will be announced with the publication of the bidding prospectus. This is due to be published in June 2021.

■ Terrorism: Northern Ireland

Louise Haigh:

[\[173085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with reference to his announcement of 19 March 2021 on Twitter on Victims' Payments, from which New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) priorities outlined in Annexe A funding is planned to be drawn; and how much funding he plans to be drawn from total NDNA funding to meet that commitment.

Mr Robin Walker:

The New Decade, New Approach deal provided the restored Executive with a £2bn financial package that delivers for the people of Northern Ireland. This included £140m to be allocated to address Northern Ireland's unique circumstances.

£40m of this funding has already been earmarked for various projects in conjunction with the Executive. To enable the Executive to begin implementing the Troubles Permanent Disablement Scheme, I have agreed with the Treasury that the Executive will be able to access the remaining £100m NDNA funding earmarked for Northern Ireland's unique circumstances.

This flexibility will substantially reduce the costs in those years where costs are more significant. There is nothing standing in the way of the Executive delivering the scheme as set out in legislation.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY**■ Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority: Buildings****John Spellar:**[\[172857\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, how much IPSA spent on rent for its premises in the Strand in London in 2020-21.

Sir Charles Walker:

IPSA incurred costs in 2019 - 20 of £524K on rent, rates and service charges. The equivalent figure for 2020 - 21 will be published after the end of the financial year in IPSA's 2020 - 21 annual report and accounts.

TRANSPORT**■ Aviation: Repayments****Caroline Lucas:**[\[172055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to ensure that airline companies are providing refunds to (a) travel agencies and (b) tour operators within timeframes that are consistent with those that dictate when travel agencies and tour operators must legally provide refunds to consumers whose flights or holiday packages have been cancelled due to the covid-19 pandemic.

Robert Courts:

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) are currently reviewing the practices of travel agents and airlines in issuing refunds to customers affected by the travel restrictions during COVID-19. In February the CMA issued an update on enforcement action being taken with individual agencies.

The Civil Aviation Authority reviewed airlines' compliance on refunds last summer and concluded that a number of airlines were failing to meet the process time for refunding their customers for cancelled flights. Latest data suggests that airlines are now paying the vast majority of refunds in a timely manner between 4 and 14 days.

■ **Department for Transport: Chief Scientific Advisers**

Greg Clark:

[\[170579\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many meetings he had with his Department's Chief Scientific Adviser from (a) 1 March 2020 to 31 May 2020, (b) 1 June 2020 to 31 August 2020, (c) 1 September 2020 to 30 November 2020 and (d) 1 December 2020 to 28 February 2021.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Between 1st March 2020 and 31st May 2020, the Secretary of State for Transport attended one meeting with DfT CSA. Parliamentary under-Secretary of State Rachel Maclean who has responsibility for Research, Science, Technology and Innovation, attended three meetings with DfT CSA, during the same period.

Between the 1st June 2020 and 31st August 2020, the Secretary of State for Transport did not attend meetings with DfT CSA, Phil Blythe. Parliamentary under-Secretary of State Rachel Maclean attended three meetings with DfT CSA, Phil Blythe during the same period. Minister of State Chris Heaton-Harris attended one meeting with DfT CSA during the same period.

Between the 1st September 2020 and 30th November 2020, the Secretary of State for Transport did not attend meetings with DfT CSA. Parliamentary under-Secretary of State Rachel Maclean attended one meeting with DfT CSA during the same period.

Between the 1st December 2020 and 28th February 2021, Ministers did not attend any meetings with DfT CSA.

■ **Diesel Vehicles: Exhaust Emissions**

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[172879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) all UK-registered vehicles have an in-tact diesel particulate filter and (b) the UK ensures good practice in the regulation of particulate matter emitted from vehicles.

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[172880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans his Department has to improve roadside air quality across the UK by incorporating diesel particulate filters during the MOT testing process.

Rachel Maclean:

The Department for Transport ensures good practice in the regulation of particulate matter emitted from vehicles by reviewing the best available evidence and commissioning research to inform future standards for new vehicles. This includes

world-leading research commissioned by the Department to better understand emissions from brake and tyre wear, which is now estimated to account for the majority of particulate matter originating from road vehicles.

Checks for the proper functioning of diesel particulate filters already form part of the MOT test and are explicitly mentioned as an item to be checked in the MOT inspection manual. Where emission control equipment fitted by the manufacturer is missing, obviously modified or obviously defective, the vehicle should receive a "Major" failure and not pass the MOT test. Guidance on the implications of modifying a vehicle's emissions system has been issued by the Department.

The Department has carried out research to assess whether new measurement equipment could be used to improve the assessment of emissions within the MOT test and roadside checks. This included equipment for detection of removed or damaged diesel particulate filters. Results of this research will be considered for any future changes to the MOT emissions test.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) conducts roadside enforcement inspections nationally using specialist equipment to detect manipulations to vehicle systems and components. A driver using a vehicle on a public road where the diesel particulate filter has been removed may be issued with a prohibition or fixed penalty. Furthermore, the Market Surveillance Unit, within the DVSA, may prosecute a company or individual that carries out an emissions tampering service such as removal of a diesel particulate filter for vehicles used on the road.

■ Electric Vehicle Homecharge Scheme

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[172878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to ensure that the Electric Vehicle Homecharge Scheme data is made publicly available to ensure that local insights are provided in order to mitigate roadside air pollution.

Rachel Maclean:

The Department for Transport will publish new quarterly experimental official statistics on grants awarded under the Electric Vehicle Homecharge Scheme, with the first publication scheduled for 20 May 2021. This will include numbers of grant-funded chargepoint installations broken down by Local Authority and postcode district.

■ Electric Vehicles

Bill Esterson:

[\[172990\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what environmental impact assessment his Department undertook when deciding to reduce the (a) maximum grant for electric cars from £3,000 to £2,500 and (b) price cap for cars eligible for the subsidy from £50,000 to £35,000.

Rachel Maclean:

No formal Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out. The grant scheme for electric cars, vans and trucks has been updated to target less expensive

models and reflect a greater range of affordable vehicles available, allowing the scheme's funding to go further and to help more people make the switch to an electric vehicle. This will mean the funding will last longer, and be available to more drivers.

We have been clear since 2018 that we intend to reduce the Plug-in Car Grant. We are retaining support for the switch to electric vehicles through other, new investments. We've pledged a £2.8 billion package of measures to support industry and consumers to make the switch to cleaner vehicles, which includes:

- £1.3bn for charging infrastructure;
- £582m to continue to support the vehicle grants, which have now been in place for 10 years; and,
- Up to £1bn to help secure the transformation of the automotive sector by developing and embedding the next generation of cutting-edge automotive technologies in the UK.

These measures are in addition to our generous tax incentives, including favourable company car tax rates, which can offer savings of over £2,000 a year for drivers switching from a medium-sized petrol or diesel to a zero-emission car, and zero Vehicle Excise Duty.

■ Motor Vehicles: Biofuels

Emma Hardy:

[\[172111\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he plans to facilitate the continued use of E5 fuel for Classic Car owners.

Rachel Maclean:

On 25th February we published the Government response to the consultation paper "Introducing E10 petrol". The Government response confirmed our intention to introduce E10 petrol in the standard 95-octane petrol grade by 1 September 2021 and to ensure that E5 will remain available at the higher-octane super grade. The Department has taken the needs and concerns of classic car users into consideration in developing these proposals and understands that many owners of classic cars already use the higher-octane option.

E10 (Petrol containing up to 10% bioethanol)

1. Currently, petrol blends supplied in the UK contain no more than 5% bioethanol. These blends are referred to as E5. E10 (petrol containing up to 10% bioethanol) has become widely available in several countries within and outside Europe, but it has not yet been introduced in the UK.
2. A majority of vehicles on the road now are optimised to use E10 petrol, as E10 has been the reference fuel for new car type approval for fuel consumption and emissions standards since 2016.

3. Switching from E5 to E10 petrol could help further reduce CO₂ emissions from petrol cars and help the UK meet emissions targets.
4. Bioethanol production in the UK also results in valuable by-products, such as high protein animal feed and stored CO₂ for the nuclear and food and drink industries, reducing the need to import these products.
5. Introducing E10 would also have wider economic benefits in terms of providing support for UK bioethanol producers, and farmers in the supply chain, which will support local economies.
6. On the 4 March 2020 the Government published the consultation paper "Introducing E10 petrol". The consultation closed on 3 May 2020 and the Government Response was published on 25 February 2021.
7. As proposed in the consultation the Government response affirms our commitment to keep petrol with a lower ethanol content (E5) available. This fuel will continue to be supplied in the higher octane super grade.
8. This will be achieved by requiring that filling stations that have sold over one million litres of fuel in the last calendar year (including diesel sales), and which stock at least two grades of petrol, would sell a petrol grade with no more than 5% ethanol, 2.7% oxygen and have a minimum of 97 octane. It would also prohibit these filling stations from selling super grade petrol that contains more than 5% ethanol.
9. Both measures to introduce E10 petrol UK-wide in the standard 95-octane grade and ensure the higher-octane 'Super' grade remains E5 at all forecourts that stock two petrol grades, will be reviewed within 5 years to ensure they remain appropriate as is required by good legislative practice.
10. In relation to the E5 protection grade, such a review will examine if there's a viable and widely available alternative to ensure suitable low-ethanol fuel remains available for older vehicles and other petrol-powered machinery that require it. We have also sought to provide reassurance that, without such an alternative becoming available, it's highly likely the E5 protection grade would continue to apply.
11. The final impact assessment which accompanies the Government response notes that the majority of incompatible vehicles in 2021 will be classic and cherished cars and assumes a significant proportion of those are already using the Super grade, as it is generally considered preferable for older cars. We expect therefore that relatively few users of classic vehicles will need to switch to the Super grade.

■ Motor Vehicles: Exhaust Emissions

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[172881]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to improve the UK's global performance in mitigating harmful levels of air pollution through the introduction of economic incentives to increase the number of sustainable vehicles for personal and commercial use.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government committed £1.5 billion to support the early market and remove barriers to Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) ownership. We have pledged a further £2.8 billion package of measures to support industry and consumers to make the switch to cleaner vehicles. This includes:

- £582m to incentivise the uptake of ultra low emission cars, vans, motorcycles and taxis to 2022/23.
- £1.3 billion to accelerate the roll out of charging infrastructure over the next four years, targeting support on rapid chargepoints on motorways and major roads, and installing more on-street chargepoints near homes and workplaces to make charging as easy as refuelling a petrol or diesel car.
- Up to £1 billion to support the electrification of UK vehicles and their supply chains, including developing “Gigafactories” in the UK to produce the batteries needed at scale

Our grant schemes and the £400m Charging Infrastructure Investment Fund will see thousands more electric vehicle charge-points installed across the UK.

Transitioning the new car and van market to ZEVs is vital if we are to meet our statutory commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The Government is going further and faster to decarbonise transport by phasing out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030, and, from 2035, all new cars and vans must be zero emissions at the tailpipe. This will also improve air quality in our towns and cities and support economic growth and position the UK at the forefront of the electric vehicle revolution.

■ Motor Vehicles: Fuels**Jim Shannon:****[170635]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with car manufacturers on the fuel economy of hybrid cars.

Rachel Maclean:

I meet regularly with a range of organisations and individuals on the subject of transport decarbonisation. The Government recognises that hybrid cars and vans, both non-plug in and plug in, are an important technology in reducing emissions from road transport. While the environmental benefits of these vehicles depend on their use, they are amongst the cleanest vehicles on the market today and will contribute to our interim carbon reduction targets in the coming years. We are clear that the technologies on sale, and the market share of those technologies, must be compatible with achieving our 2050 net zero climate change target and long-term air quality goals.

The Government is taking a technology neutral approach to meeting our ambitions, but we are not outcome neutral. The end goal must be zero emissions from the tailpipe.

■ Motorways: Cameras**Jim Shannon:**[\[170637\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to ensure motorway speed cameras are operational.

Rachel Maclean:

On the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in England, Highways England follows several steps to ensure motorway speed cameras are operational. This includes a rolling programme of routine maintenance, camera calibration, focusing supplier contracts on the prevention and rapid correction of faults, as well as monitoring faults to understand trends and root causes to proactively reduce their frequency. Highways England works closely with the Police toward the shared objective of increased compliance with speed limits. The provision and maintenance of motorway speed cameras in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for the Devolved Administrations.

■ Parking: Pedestrian Areas**Emma Hardy:**[\[173157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department plans to update the Highway Code to prohibit parking on pavements throughout England.

Rachel Maclean:

The Department recently carried out a public consultation on possible solutions to the complex pavement parking problem. This closed on 22 November 2020 with over 15,000 responses received. The Department is now carefully analysing the responses, following which decisions will be taken on the next steps.

■ Petrol: Northern Ireland**Stephen Farry:**[\[171773\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that older high octane fuel will continue to be available in Northern Ireland alongside E5 and E10 fuel after 1 July 2021 in relation to the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Rachel Maclean:

The roll out of E10 petrol in the standard 95-octane petrol grade in September 2021 will be preceded by legislation requiring that E5 remains available in the higher 97-octane petrol grade. In line with our obligations under the Northern Ireland Protocol we will notify the European Commission of our intention in advance.

■ Railways: Concessions**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[171704\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 01 March 2021 to Question 158174, what assessment the Government has made of the potential merits of

providing other alternative ways to recompense people who have not been able to recover the cost of their Railcard in a single whilst it is valid.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[171705]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 01 March 2021 to Question 158174, what assessment the Government has made of the potential merits of providing other alternative ways to offer (a) refunds or (b) extensions for Railcard users who have been unable to use their railcards because of shielding requirements from covid-19.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department recognises that railcard holders have been unable to use their cards whilst travel restrictions are in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and railcard holders have not been able to benefit to the fullest extent over recent months.

Passenger demand has fallen dramatically over the last year and my Department recognises that recovery is uncertain. We will continue to work closely with industry on initiatives to encourage passengers back to the railway when the time is right.

However, many passengers are able to recover the cost of their railcard in a single trip over the period of validity of their railcard. Having carefully considered the situation, we are not discussing the prospects of offering refunds or extensions for railcard users.

■ Railways: Electrification

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[170712]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many kilometres/miles of the rail network have been electrified in (a) England, (b) Wales, (c) Scotland, (d) Northern Ireland and (e) the UK in each year of the last 10 years.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Office of Rail and Road publishes information about delivered electrification, which can be found here: <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/infrastructure-and-emissions/rail-infrastructure-and-assets/table-6320-infrastructure-on-the-mainline/>.

Responsibility for rail infrastructure in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a devolved matter.

■ Railways: Season Tickets

Caroline Lucas:

[171561]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 8 February 2021 to Question 150750 on Railways: Season Tickets, what progress he has made on his work with the Treasury to develop a solution for people who need part-time and flexible season tickets; and if he will make a statement.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Government recognises the change in travel patterns, the impact of COVID-19 and therefore the need to accommodate a more flexible style of working and travelling. We also understand concerns about the cost of some rail fares and the impact that this can have on people's budgets.

The Department is actively working with both Treasury and train operators to develop a solution that offers better value and convenience for those who commute flexibly, and we will provide further details in line with the Government's four-step roadmap out of lockdown.

Railways: Staff

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[170710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 12 March 2021 to Question 165645, what plans he has to make an assessment on the number of female train drivers in the UK.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

We have included requirements for train operating companies within the Emergency Recovery Measure Agreements to provide the Department with diversity data across a range of characteristics, including gender comparisons.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[170711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 12 March 2021 to Question 165647 on Railways: Females, what his timescale is for setting out details of his Department's consideration of the issues affecting the diversity of the rail workforce over the next decade; and if he will gather and publish information on the number of women in senior roles within the rail industry.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The government is committed to bringing forward vital sector-wide reforms and commissioned Keith Williams to carry out the first root and branch review of the rail industry in a generation.

The government intends to publish a White Paper with details of its plans for rail reform, including its consideration of diversity within the rail workforce, when the course of the pandemic becomes clearer.

We have included requirements within the Emergency Recovery Measure Agreements for train operating companies to provide the Department with diversity data across a range of characteristics, including gender comparisons.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[171702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 12 March 2021 to Question 165648, what steps his Department plans to take to increase the number of female train conductors in the UK.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Government intends to publish a White Paper with details of its plans for rail reform, including its consideration of diversity within the rail workforce, when the course of the pandemic becomes clearer.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[171703\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 12 March 2021 to Question 165646 on Railways: Females and Ethnic Groups, if he will set a date on publishing details on the number of (a) female, (b) BAME, (c) LGBTQ+ and (d) disabled people in the rail industry.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Government intends to publish a White Paper with details of its plans for rail reform, including its consideration of diversity within the rail workforce, when the course of the pandemic becomes clearer.

■ Railways: Tickets**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[170709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the effect of a cashless rail network on rail passengers.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

We want to modernise the way passengers buy and pay for their rail travel to improve accessibility and enable a smoother purchasing and journey experience. As we do this people will naturally migrate to using smart ticketing, contactless cards and buying online at their own convenience. During the COVID-19 crisis these methods of buying and paying for travel have been important in supporting the health and safety of passengers and station staff.

Before there is any move to remove paper ticketing or cash payments we would need to ensure passengers who are dependent on cash payments or do not have access to the internet or a smartphone can continue to purchase train tickets as readily as they can do today.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[171701\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the ability of passengers to use cash to pay for railway tickets.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

We want to modernise the way passengers buy and pay for their rail travel to improve accessibility and enable a smoother purchasing and journey experience. As we do this people will naturally migrate to using smart ticketing, contactless cards and buying online at their own convenience. During the COVID-19 crisis these methods of buying and paying for travel have been important in supporting the health and safety of passengers and station staff.

Before there is any move to remove paper ticketing or cash payments we would need to ensure passengers who are dependent on cash payments or do not have access

to the internet or a smartphone can continue to purchase train tickets as readily as they can do today.

■ Roads: Construction

Jim McMahon:

[171685]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the cost to the public purse was of the Oxford to Cambridge expressway project before it was cancelled.

Rachel Maclean:

Highways England invested approximately £28 million in developing the Oxford to Cambridge expressway project. The analysis undertaken as part of that project is now supporting the consideration of where alternative future road investment may be needed in this area.

■ Roads: Litter

Anthony Browne:

[171743]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he plans to mandate the netting or sheeting of open (a) pick-up trucks and (b) small lorries to minimise litter on the highways.

Rachel Maclean:

When transporting loads, it is the operator's and driver's responsibility to make sure the vehicle's load is secured safely. There is already legislation in place to ensure that vehicle loads are secure and do not cause a danger to other road users, but if a vehicle's load is found to be unsafe, then the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) and the police can take enforcement action where appropriate.

The action taken will vary from encounter to encounter but generally will result in the driver receiving a prohibition preventing the continuation of a journey until such time as the load has been satisfactory secured. Where the driver is culpable of the offence, they will receive a fixed penalty (£100) or, in the most serious cases, can be prosecuted for using a dangerous vehicle. The DVSA will also follow up these incidents with the vehicle's operator to establish the cause of the problem and to ensure that it does not happen again.

Guidance outlining the responsibilities of operators and drivers to ensure loads are secure, and further information about the use of netting and sheeting can be found online at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/load-securing-vehicle-operator-guidance/load-securing-vehicle-operator-guidance

■ Transport for the North: Finance

Dame Diana Johnson:

[172920]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister of State for Transport of 17 March 2021, Official Report, column 447 on Transport for the North: Funding, what funding made up the £9.5 million in reserves.

Dame Diana Johnson:

[\[172921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister of State for Transport of 17 March 2021, Official Report, column 447 on Transport for the North: Funding, whether the £9.5 million referred to in that debate was earmarked expenditure.

Andrew Stephenson:

Transport for the North (TfN) project that, had they received £10 million in core grant this financial year, their reserves would have risen to £9.5 million at the end of this financial year. It is for Transport for the North to manage their core funding allocation within the parameters set out in the Grant Funding Agreement between the Department and TfN, and therefore questions on the makeup of their projected reserves should be directed to TfN rather than the Department.

Dame Diana Johnson:

[\[172922\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister of State for Transport of 17 March 2021, Official Report, column 448 on Transport for the North: Funding, how the £150 million was made available to Transport for the North.

Dame Diana Johnson:

[\[172923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister of State for Transport of 17 March 2021, Official Report, column 448 on Transport for the North: Funding, whether Transport for the North was required to pay back the unspent £126 million to his Department.

Andrew Stephenson:

TfN was allocated up to £150m at the 2015 Spending Review to support its Integrated and Smart Travel programme, with this multi-year funding allocation expiring at the end of the current financial year. Following the approval of business cases TfN utilised around £24m to enable the roll-out of smart ticketing across the north in addition to incurring development, business-case and other project costs of around £10 million but were unable to produce a business case for their ambitious multi modal project which was acceptable to all transport operators in the North.

As the £150m funding was not allocated as a lump sum, there is no need for TfN to pay back the balance.

■ Travel Restrictions: Coronavirus

Sir George Howarth:

[\[170548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress has been made on bilateral negotiations for a covid-19 vaccine visa with countries that are popular as holiday destinations for UK tourists.

Robert Courts:

The Department for Transport is leading a successor to the Global Travel Taskforce to develop a framework that can safely facilitate international travel when the time is

right, while still managing the risk from imported cases and variants. As part of that, we continue to engage with bilateral partners to explore how to open up international travel safely, including the role of vaccine and testing certificates. We also continue to work with a range of international partners to look at new technology and evidence as it emerges, assessing if it could be applicable to international travel.

■ Travel Restrictions: Portugal

Tulip Siddiq:

[\[170691\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he next plans to review (a) the red list of travel ban countries and (b) Portugal's inclusion on that list.

Robert Courts:

The government announced on 15 March that Portugal (including Madeira and the Azores) and Mauritius would be removed from the red list and Ethiopia, Oman, Somalia and Qatar added to the red list, with the changes coming into force at 4am on 19 March. The decision to remove Portugal was made following a review of data and evidence that showed Portugal had put steps in place to mitigate the risk of variants of concern, including genomic surveillance, which indicates the risks of importing a variant of concern has reduced.

The decision to add or remove countries from the red list are made in direct response to scientific and medical data, which represents an increased risk to UK public health and an increased risk of community transmission of COVID-19 variants of concern identified in those countries. These are intended to be temporary measures and the government keeps data for countries and territories under regular review.

■ Travel: West Midlands

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[170677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information his Department holds on the number of people who travel to work by (a) car, (b) bus and (c) rail in (i) the West Midlands and (ii) Coventry; and what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the (A) patterns and (B) modes of travel to work in those areas.

Rachel Maclean:

The National Travel Survey (NTS) publishes statistics on travel patterns, data for 2020 will be released in Summer 2021, but data for 2019 showed that, in (i) the West Midlands:

- (a) 74% travelled to work by car
- (b) 5% travelled to work by bus
- (c) 4% travelled to work by rail

Data for (ii) Coventry are unavailable from the NTS due to insufficient sample size. For that area, alternative sources of similar information have been made available by the Office for National Statistics on their website:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/coronavirusandtraveltowork/june2020>

Regional data on (A) patterns and (B) modes of travel to work for the COVID-19 outbreak period are not yet available. However, the Department currently publishes weekly indicators on use of transport by mode nationally on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-use-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic>

TREASURY

■ Bounce Back Loan Scheme

Neil Coyle:

[173053]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the effect on businesses of reclaiming Coronavirus Bounce Back Loans from firms that are unable to open until permitted to do so under the easing of covid-19 restrictions.

John Glen:

The Government has already taken action to give businesses the flexibility and space they need to repay Bounce Back loans. No repayments are due from the borrower for the first 12 months of the loan, giving businesses the breathing space they need during this difficult time. In addition, the Government covers the first 12 months of interest payments charged to the business by the lender.

In order to give businesses further support in making their repayments, the Chancellor has announced “Pay as You Grow” (PAYG) options. PAYG will give businesses the option to repay their Bounce Back loan over ten years. This will reduce their average monthly repayments on the loan by almost half. Businesses will also have the option to move temporarily to interest-only payments for periods of up to six months (an option which they can use up to three times). They can also pause their repayments entirely for up to six months – and given the continued challenges businesses are facing, HM Treasury has opted to enable borrowers to make use of this option from the first repayment, which means that businesses can choose to make no payments on their loans until 18 months after they originally took them out. If borrowers want to take advantage of this option, they should notify their lender when they are contacted about their repayments.

Together, the 12-month payment holiday and interest-free period for borrowers, along with the PAYG options, form a generous part of the Government’s unprecedented support package for businesses to protect jobs - including paying wages through the furlough schemes and self-employed support payments, generous grants, tax deferrals.

■ Clothing: Exports

Bill Esterson:

[172991]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of the ending the VAT Retail Export Scheme on the fashion industry.

Kemi Badenoch:

On 11 September 2020, the Government announced the VAT and excise duty treatment of goods purchased by individuals for personal use and carried in their luggage arriving from or going overseas (passengers) following the transition period. The following rules were implemented on 1 January 2021:

- Passengers travelling from Great Britain to any destination outside the United Kingdom (UK) can purchase duty-free excise goods once they have passed security controls at ports, airports, and international rail stations.
- Personal allowances apply to passengers entering Great Britain from any destination outside of the UK, with alcohol allowances significantly increased.
- The VAT Retail Export Scheme (RES) in Great Britain has not been extended to EU residents and has been withdrawn for all passengers.
- The concessionary treatment on tax-free sales for non-excise goods has been removed across the UK.

The Government published a consultation which ran from 11 March to 20 May 2020. During this time the Government held a number of virtual meetings with industry stakeholders to hear their views and received 73 responses to the consultation. The Government has also met and discussed these changes with many stakeholders following the announcement of these policies.

The detailed rationale for these changes are included in the written ministerial statement and summary of responses to the recent consultation: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2020-09-11/hcws448> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-consultation-on-duty-free-and-tax-free-goods-carried-by-passengers>. A technical note has also been issued to stakeholders to expand on this document and to respond to issues raised by stakeholders.

On 25 November 2020 the independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) set out their assessment of the fiscal impact of the withdrawal of the VAT RES.

Factoring in a higher-than-usual elasticity of 1.9 to account for spending on luxury goods, the OBR estimate that the withdrawal of the VAT RES will result in a significant direct Exchequer saving of around £400 million per year, once passenger numbers recover from the impacts of Covid-19. Based on the 1.2 million users of the scheme who received a refund in 2019, this includes an assumption that approximately 20,000 – 30,000 fewer tourists visit Great Britain a year. That is 0.07% of the 40 million visitors to the UK in 2019.

The OBR also looked at this package in the round when assessing the indirect impact on the economy – including the effects of extending duty-free sales – alongside the substantial support provided to the economy and retail industry.

■ Free Zones

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[172985\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 22 March 2021 Question 170613, on Revenue and Customs: Staff, when HMRC plans to complete the development of the operational processes required to support the introduction of freeports; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

The Chancellor has set out that the first freeports will be open for business in 2021. Initial tax reliefs are planned to be implemented from April 2021 and the ambition is for freeports to be operational from Autumn 2021.

■ Greensill

Pat McFadden:

[\[172947\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will publish the notes made at the meetings between his officials and Greensill Capital.

Pat McFadden:

[\[172949\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will list the dates of his contacts with David Cameron in relation to Greensill Capital.

Alison Thewliss:

[\[173073\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what representations he received from former Prime Minister David Cameron on Government support to Greensill Capital; what responses were given; and when those responses were recorded.

John Glen:

Ministers routinely meet with a range of private sector stakeholders. Transparency releases are published on a quarterly basis and are currently publicly available for Ministerial meetings up to and including September 2020, which is in line with normal reporting timelines on disclosures.

■ Income Tax: Low Incomes

Owen Thompson:

[\[173090\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy to not freeze the threshold for payment of the basic rate of income tax in the financial year 2021-22 to avoid penalising low earners.

Jesse Norman:

As confirmed at Budget, the Government will fulfil its promise to increase the income tax Personal Allowance to £12,570 in financial year 2021-22.

The Government has almost doubled the Personal Allowance since 2010 and it is now the highest basic personal tax allowance of all countries in the G20.

The decision to maintain the Personal Allowance at this higher level will not come into effect until April 2022, when the economy will be on a stronger footing.

■ Iron and Steel: Import Duties

Louise Haigh:

[173086]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of 20 January 2021 on the Work of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Q100, HC 264, whether the Government plans to publish guidance for businesses on steel tariffs.

Jesse Norman:

On the issue of steel movements into Northern Ireland, the Government wrote to affected businesses in January and published guidance on 3 March.

This guidance is available online:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reference-document-for-the-customs-northern-ireland-eu-exit-regulations-2020/the-steel-notice>

■ Pensions: Up-rating

Peter Grant:

[173082]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) maintaining RPI beyond 2030 and (b) putting in place mitigating measures to ensure that defined benefits pensions are not reduced.

John Glen:

On 25 November 2020, the Government and UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) published their response to the consultation on the timing of reform to the Retail Prices Index (RPI). Owing to shortcomings in its calculation, UKSA intends to bring the methods and data sources of the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) into RPI.

The Government and UKSA are mindful of the widespread use of RPI in the economy, and, as such, sought views in the consultation on the broader impacts of reform. The Government and UKSA received approximately 550 responses from members of defined benefit (DB) pension schemes whose benefits are linked to RPI.

It is apparent that some DB pension schemes members will be affected by UKSA's reform. The effect of reform on the members of such schemes will depend on whether their benefits are linked to RPI under the trust deed and rules of the scheme.

The announcement in the response by the Chancellor and UKSA Chair means that reform will not be implemented before 2030. The Government keeps the occupational pensions system under review and will continue to do so.

For further information please see the consultation response at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-consultation-on-the-reform-to-retail-prices-index-rpi-methodology>.

■ Personal Care Services and Weddings: Females

Dr Lisa Cameron:

[173067]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department has made an impact assessment of the potential effect of Budget 2021 on women working in the (a) wedding and (b) the hair and beauty industries.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Treasury carefully considers the impact of its decisions on those sharing protected characteristics, including at Budgets and other fiscal events, in line with its legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Measures announced at Budget which the wedding and hair and beauty sectors may benefit from include an extension of the furlough scheme until September; extensions to the Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS); 12 months of relief from business rates; a new UK-wide recovery loan scheme; enhanced Time to Pay for taxes; a 12 month VAT cut; and cash grants to protect businesses. The Government recognises that employees in the wedding events sector, and the hair and beauty sector are more likely to be female. Therefore, in as much as these business support measures contribute to business survival, and thus the continued employment of these employees, these support measures will benefit women working in these sectors.

WALES

■ Transport: Wales

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[173143]

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on investing in cross-border transport infrastructure.

Simon Hart:

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales and I have regular discussions with Ministerial colleagues about connectivity within Wales and between Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom, which is one of my top priorities. In addition, earlier this month the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales participated in a cross-border transport forum involving representatives from North Wales and North West England and, separately, met with Sir Peter Hendy, the Chair of the Union Connectivity Review.

On 10 March, the UK Government published the Interim Report of the Union Connectivity Review. The report highlights the strategic importance of cross-border travel to and from Wales and draws attention to four Welsh transport routes in

particular which will be further considered as part of the development of the Final Report. Wales will benefit from some of the £20m committed on the back of the Interim Report to explore the development of potential projects.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Disability Living Allowance

Hywel Williams:

[\[172896\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of increasing the uplift to the disability living allowance for 2021-22 so that it is above the rate of inflation.

Justin Tomlinson:

DLA was most recently uprated by 1.7 per cent from 6 April 2020 and will see a further increase of 0.5% from 12 April 2021, in line with CPI.

The disability benefits are not means-tested and are non-contributory and thus paid regardless of any income or savings. They are also tax-free and worth up to £151.40 a week. DLA can be paid in addition to other financial support that those with a health condition or disability may be eligible for, such as Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit. DLA also passports families to a range of additional support, including Carer's Allowance, additional amounts and premiums paid within the income-related benefits, such as child disability additions paid within UC, the Blue Badge scheme, or financial help with NHS costs.

■ Disability: Coronavirus

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[173144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions her Department has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the financial situation of disabled people and their carers.

Justin Tomlinson:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer I gave on 11 March 2021 to question number [164607](#).

Zarah Sultana:

[\[173179\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the briefing published by Scope entitled Emergency support for disabled people and their families, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the evidence gathered by Scope on the effect of Government policy on disabled people and their families during the covid-19 outbreak.

Justin Tomlinson:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer given on 9th February to question number [149299](#).

■ Pensions: Upating

Peter Grant:

[\[173083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of using the consumer prices index including housing to calculate pension increases for defined benefit pension schemes.

Guy Opperman:

No assessment has been made.

Private pension increases are calculated according to the rules of the scheme.

■ Social Security Benefits: Appeals

Kate Osamor:

[\[171674\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department takes to inform benefit claimants who have been offered an increased benefits award after lodging a successful appeal of those claimants' rights associated with that new increased offer.

Kate Osamor:

[\[171675\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what policy guidance departmental staff follow when offering claimants an increased benefits award over the telephone after their appeal has been lodged; and if she will place a copy of that policy in the Library.

Justin Tomlinson:

A copy of the guidance will be placed in the library. It includes a step by step approach that must be taken to ensure that claimants fully understand the nature of the call and their rights; it also enables any representative to play a full part in the discussions and the decision to be made.

During the call claimants are told that should the decision be revised and the appeal lapsed, they will have a new right of appeal against the new decision. The decision notification itself includes, as it must in law, details of those appeal rights.

■ Social Security Benefits: Terminal Illnesses

Virginia Crosbie:

[\[173228\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what her timescale is for (a) publishing and (b) implementing the recommendations from her Department's review of the benefits system for terminally ill people and the Special Rules for Terminal Illness scheme announced in July 2019.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Department is committed to delivering an improved benefit system for claimants that are nearing the end of their lives and is working across Government to bring forward proposals following the evaluation. I remain committed to implementing the key areas identified in the evaluation; a consensus to change the six-month rule;

improving consistency with other services used by people nearing the end of their lives; and raising awareness of the support that is available.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ Business Update

Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kwasi Kwarteng):

[\[HCWS887\]](#)

In April 2019, the Government entered into a commercial agreement with British Steel Ltd in relation to its annual obligations under the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS). This agreement was needed to support the operator in complying with their 2018 EU ETS obligations, in the absence of receiving its expected 2019 free allowances, due to restrictions placed on the UK's participation in the EU ETS during negotiations on the Withdrawal Agreement.

The Rt Hon Greg Clark informed the House of this agreement on 1st May 2019 – a bridge facility valued at around £120 million under Section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 at an interest rate of LIBOR plus 7%. Under this commercial agreement, the Government was entitled to recover the next allocation of allowances issued to British Steel Ltd, and sell these back to the ETS market to recover the full cost of the bridge facility.

Following ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement, restrictions on the UK's participation in the EU ETS market were lifted in February 2020 and the Government successfully recovered the allowances to which it was entitled. The Government has since successfully sold these allowances back to the EU ETS market, and concluded the contractual obligations with British Steel (in compulsory liquidation), under control of the Official Receiver.

I am pleased to inform the House that sale proceeds of nearly £140 million have been received. This exceeds the total cost owed to the Government from this bridge facility, delivering value for money for the UK taxpayer.

The Government has also sold a separate 3,191 allowances in its possession. These allowances were transferred to the UK national government holding account within the EU ETS Union Registry, over several years, following the closure of several operator and trader accounts, in line with EU ETS Registry Regulations. The net sale proceeds from this transaction is around £80,000. This transaction is not related to the agreement with British Steel Ltd, and the sale of 3,191 allowances was undertaken separately for administrative reasons to provide value for money to UK taxpayers.

■ **Departmental Contingent Liability Notification (Recovery Loan Scheme)**

Minister for London and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets) (Paul Scully): [\[HCWS903\]](#)

I am tabling this statement for the benefit of Honourable and Right Honourable Members to bring to their attention the details of the Recovery Loan Scheme (RLS) announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 3 March 2021.

RLS will be facilitated by the Government-owned British Business Bank and delivered through its delivery partners. Lenders will offer facilities of up to £10 million to support businesses 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 Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) but is open to all businesses regardless of turnover.

The key parameters of the scheme are as follows:

- The percentage of the remaining balance of each loan that is guaranteed by the Government is 80 per cent.
- The maximum facility size will be £10 million per business, and the minimum facility size will be £25,001 for loans and overdrafts and £1,000 for asset and invoice finance.
- Businesses will be required to meet the costs of interest payments and any fees from the outset.
- Businesses who have made use of the current Coronavirus loan schemes will be able to access the new scheme.
- The lender must establish that the borrower has a viable business proposition assessed according to its normal commercial lending criteria. This may, but is not required to, be determined without regard to any concerns over the borrower's short-to-medium term business performance due to the uncertainty and impact of Coronavirus.

The scheme launches on 6 April and is open until 31 December, subject to review. The Government will be subject to an equivalent contingent liability as for CBILS. The maximum contingent liability for assumed initial lending of £12 billion (our central estimate) is £9.6 billion.

I will be laying a Departmental Minute today containing a description of the liability undertaken.

■ **Government Full Response to the Law Commission's Review of the Land Registration Act 2002**

Minister for London and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets) (Paul Scully): [\[HCWS888\]](#)

My Right Honourable friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Climate Change and Corporate Responsibility (Lord Callanan) has today made the following statement:

I am grateful to the Law Commission for its review of the Land Registration Act 2002 which it published on 24 July 2018. The Government has today published its full response to the review recommendations.

HM Land Registry is committed to becoming the world's leading land registry for speed, simplicity and an open approach to data. The land registration regime provides essential trust and confidence to the property and lending markets. It does so by providing efficient access to secure and accurate information needed to transact land and use it as security for borrowing. The regime is underpinned by a state-backed guarantee of title. It is important the regime is examined, from time-to-time, to ensure that it is working effectively.

The Law Commission made 53 recommendations, most of which are quite technical in nature and narrowly focused. That should give us confidence that the land registration system is generally working well.

The full response sets out the Government's conclusions in respect of each of the recommendations.

Once again, I thank the Law Commission for the diligence that has gone into its work examining the land registration regime, and for the clarity of its conclusions expressed in its report.

CABINET OFFICE

■ **Civil Service Delegated Pay Remit Guidance**

Parliamentary Secretary (Julia Lopez): [\[HCWS890\]](#)

Today we publish this year's Civil Service Pay Remit Guidance. This document provides a framework for setting pay for civil servants throughout the Civil Service, including departments, non-ministerial departments and agencies, as well as for public sector workers in non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and other arm's length bodies for the 2021/22 pay remit year.

Public sector pay context

In November 2020, the Chancellor announced at the Spending Review that the public sector workforces, excluding the NHS, would be subject to a pay pause for the 2021/22 pay year. The exception to this policy are organisations in legally binding pay deals (including those in multi-year deals).

This pay pause is necessary in order to help protect public sector jobs and protect investment in public services as well as ensuring fairness between the private and public sectors in this time of crisis. Performance pay, overtime, pay progression where it is in place, and pay rises from promotion will continue. Departments may continue to utilise existing allowances.

To protect the lower paid staff earning below the national median, those on full time equivalent base pay of under £24,000pa (excluding overtime and allowances) will receive a consolidated increase of £250. For those who will be receiving an increase to the new national living wage rate of £8.91 an hour, which from April 2021 will be extended to individuals aged 23 years and over, they will receive the National Living Wage increase or £250, whichever is greater.

Civil Servants benefit from a competitive employment offer including access to one of the best pension schemes available and flexible working arrangements in managing work and family life. In addition to this our ambition is for the Civil Service to be the most inclusive employer in the country, offering opportunities and a chance to progress in challenging roles delivering vital public services across the country.

Strategy for Civil Service modernisation

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a huge challenge to the Civil Service over the last year and to civil servants at all levels both through the work required in response, but also through the significant changes to working practices individuals have faced, as well as the impact on their personal lives. The significant task of tackling the pandemic, as well as EU Exit Transition, has placed an immediate pressure on resources. The Civil Service has been increasing its capacity and capability to meet this challenge, bringing on its own talent, investing in specialist skills and sourcing external support where necessary. Frequently this has meant the necessary redeployment of staff across and within departments, as well as the creation of and recruitment to new posts within departments at both junior and senior grades.

We intend to learn from the experience of both EU Exit Transition and the COVID-19 pandemic, modernising Government to respond to the big challenges facing the country and deliver our ambitious agenda. We will ensure that our people are closer to citizens and have the skills and experience to meet the needs of those we serve. We will put innovation at the core of how we work and seize the power of digital systems and data to improve our services. We will ensure the whole of Government works together with a common purpose to deliver outcomes for citizens rigorously and efficiently, improving the delivery of our major projects.

The Government has committed to level up across the UK, including relocating roles to the regions and nations of the UK. The Places for Growth programme within Cabinet Office is driving the necessary planning within departments and public bodies, with a commitment to relocating a minimum of 22,000 Civil Service roles over the next decade, with the majority of these in the regions and nations of the UK.

By 2030, large numbers of Civil Service roles and public bodies will be moved out of London and South East England – moving whole organisations, and business units and

functions of larger bodies and departments, with a view to reducing our central London footprint but also to:

- Strengthen the Union;
- Support levelling-up of the regions and nations;
- Ensure that the Civil Service and administration of Government is better connected with communities across the UK;
- Tackle the recruitment and retention challenges of a London-centric Civil Service;
- Reduce costs overall, especially estate and people costs.

A more regionally dispersed workforce has significant benefits for the UK Civil Service. Places for Growth is working closely with departments on their plans to relocate a number of Civil Service roles to the regions and nations, providing opportunities for civil servants to progress and build sustainable career paths.

■ Infected Blood Update

Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt):

[\[HCWS895\]](#)

Today I am providing an update on parity of financial support, the commitment to considering a compensation framework, and enhancements to the psychological support for the victims of the Infected Blood tragedy.

Parity

In July 2019, a UK-wide agreement was reached in principle to resolve disparities in levels of support for people infected and affected. In January 2020 at a meeting with campaigners, the UK Government committed to resolving the disparities in financial support in Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland as well as addressing broader issues of disparity, including support for bereaved partners.

I am pleased to confirm that the following changes are planned to the four separate schemes to bring them into broader parity. Increases in annual payments will be backdated to April 2019. Where lump sum payments are being increased, this will apply to all current scheme members. We will work with the four schemes to communicate the changes to beneficiaries. Beneficiaries will continue to receive their current payments until the changes can be made. We hope that the schemes will be able to make additional payments where required by the end of the calendar year, and sooner if possible.

The key elements of change for the England Infected Blood Support Scheme are:

- annual payments for bereaved partners will be increased to an automatic 100% of their partners annual payment in year 1, and 75% in year 2 and subsequent years, in line with the position in Scotland;
- the lump sum bereavement payment will move from a discretionary £10,000 to an automatic £10,000, in line with the position in Wales;

- the lump sum payment paid to a beneficiary in the scheme with Hepatitis C Stage 1 will increase by £30,000 from £20,000 to £50,000, in line with the position in Scotland; and
- the lump sum payment paid to a beneficiary in the scheme with HIV will increase from up to £80.5k maximum in England, to an automatic £80.5k.

In addition, the schemes managed by the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be similarly adapted so that across the UK there is broad parity of payments to infected and affected people. These adaptations are in line with the UK-wide agreement reached in July 2019.

In Scotland, the changes are to increase annual payments for infected beneficiaries and bereaved partners, and to introduce £10,000 lump sum bereavement payments for the families of those beneficiaries who have died since the scheme began.

In Wales, the changes are to increase annual payments for infected beneficiaries, increase both the payments and length of payments for the bereaved partners, in line with the position in Scotland, and changes to the lump sums for Hepatitis C & HIV.

In Northern Ireland, the changes are to annual payments for non-infected bereaved spouses/partners, lump sum bereavement payments, and a commitment to introduce enhanced financial support for Hepatitis C (Stage 1), at the same payment levels as in England, as soon as a system can be put into operation.

We have agreed with health Ministers that any future changes to national schemes would be subject to consultation between the UK Government and devolved administrations.

Compensation framework

To meet the Government's commitment to consider a framework for compensation, we can confirm our intention to appoint an independent reviewer to carry out a study, looking at options for a framework for compensation, and to report back to the Paymaster General with recommendations, before the Inquiry reports.

The terms of reference of this study will be finalised in consultation between the independent reviewer and those infected and affected. The study will include consideration of the scope and levels of such compensation, and the relationship between a compensation framework and the existing financial support schemes in place.

The study is entirely separate from the public inquiry, which continues to have this Government's full support; it will not duplicate the work of the Inquiry, or cut across the Inquiry's findings. The study shall provide the Paymaster General with advice on potential compensation framework design and solutions which can be ready to implement upon the conclusion of the Inquiry, should the Inquiry's findings and recommendations require it.

The name of the independent reviewer will be announced shortly.

Psychological support

Since May 2020, there have been important improvements to how beneficiaries of the England Infected Blood Support Scheme can access psychological support. Beneficiaries are now able to receive funding for counselling directly from the scheme without GP

approval or the need to access waiting lists. This change has been communicated to beneficiaries.

The Department of Health and Social Care will continue to work with EIBSS and NHS England and Improvement to review if further improvements are necessary to the psychological support which is available for beneficiaries.

Finally I would like to place on record my thanks to the Inquiry Chair, Sir Brian Langstaff, and his team for the way the Inquiry has managed to continue its work throughout the last 12 months despite the challenges presented by Covid-19, and for consistently putting the interests of the infected and affected victims at the heart of their decision-making when dealing with significant logistical and planning challenges.

■ **Local Government Elections and Referendums COVID-19 Indemnity**

Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution (Chloe Smith):

[[HCWS899](#)]

On 5 February, the Government confirmed that the council, mayoral and Police & Crime Commissioner elections scheduled for 6 May 2021 will be going ahead as planned, and published a Delivery Plan outlining how these polls will be delivered in a COVID-secure way. Since then, the Government has put in place a number of measures to support statutorily independent Returning Officers to deliver these elections successfully and with the right precautions in place. I have also today updated Parliament separately on the wider progress being made to support delivery of the local polls on 6 May 2021.

The Government has already, in line with usual practice, provided an indemnity in relation to Police & Crime Commissioner elections. The Delivery Plan also included a commitment to provide a further indemnity for local elections and referendums^[1], in respect of COVID-19 risks, in order to address any gaps in coverage of existing local authority insurance.

It is necessary to indemnify Returning Officers and Counting Officers in England against uninsured claims in this way because, for the purposes of local elections and referendums, Returning Officers and Counting Officers are statutorily independent officers and are separate from both central and local government. As such, they are personally liable for the conduct of the local elections and referendums. Existing insurance that covers Returning Officers and Counting Officers in discharging their statutory duties at local elections will not, in most cases, cover them against claims in relation to COVID-19.

In light of this, I have today laid a Minute setting out the Cabinet Office's intention to indemnify Returning Officers and Counting Officers on this very limited basis at local elections and referendums in England taking place between 6 May 2021 and 4 May 2022 inclusively. The Treasury has approved the proposal in principle.

The purpose of the indemnity is to ensure that Returning Officers are financially supported if any COVID-19 related claims are brought against them in relation to the local polls. Whilst the indemnity provides for reimbursement of costs incurred once a claim has been concluded, we want to support Returning Officers wherever possible to deal

effectively with claims brought against them. We will look at any such claims on their merits and seek to provide Returning Officers with any relevant support we are able to give them to effectively and robustly defend such claims. It is right that Returning Officers can be held to account for the conduct of the polls but it is also right that we support these individuals financially in that process.

The indemnity covers (but is not limited to) a Returning Officer's or Counting Officer's liabilities to the public, as an employer, or otherwise incurred in his or her professional capacity:

- in relation to any claim for personal injury or death where the cause of action relates to the contracting of COVID-19 due to participation in the election or referendum process in the context of the Returning Officer's or Counting Officer's exercise of their functions, or
- as a result of a challenge to the conduct of the election or referendum by an election or referendum petition arising from alleged poll irregularities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The indemnity only covers losses, liability, damages, costs, claims, proceedings or expenses incurred in relation to the conduct of the local government election or referendum arising from COVID-19 related issues. There is no limit on the number of claims which a Returning Officer may make under this indemnity.

It is normal practice, when a Government department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 for which there is no specific statutory authority, for the Minister concerned to present a departmental Minute to Parliament giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from incurring the liability until 14 Parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the Minute, except in cases of special urgency.

[1] This refers to council tax referendums, neighbourhood planning referendums and governance referendums held in England under the relevant legislation.

■ Machinery of Government – Change of Ministerial Accountability for the Prosperity Fund

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt):

[\[HCWS889\]](#)

The cross-government Prosperity Fund arrangement will end on 31 March and prosperity programming will move to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) as part of a Machinery of Government transfer. The transfer will help drive strategic coherence across Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) programmes. This will allow the Foreign Secretary to make decisions on aid to implement the UK Government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy.

The Machinery of Government change will take effect on 1 April 2021.

■ Update on May 2021 Elections

Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution (Chloe Smith):

[\[HCWS900\]](#)

I am updating Parliament today on the progress being made to support delivery of the local polls on 6 May 2021 and to outline our expectations for the respective verification and count process. I have also today separately laid before Parliament the indemnity the Government is providing to Returning Officers and Counting Officers, in relation to COVID-19, for the local elections and referendums in England taking place between 6 May 2021 and 4 May 2022 inclusively.

Safe and secure elections are the cornerstone of our democracy. On 5 February, the Government published a [Delivery Plan](#) outlining how these polls will be delivered in a COVID-secure way. The Government has been working closely with Public Health England, the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Local Government Association, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), political parties and independents to support the delivery of these polls.

On 26 February, the Government published guidance on [COVID-secure campaigning](#) for the May polls, supporting a level playing field for candidates and ensuring that voters can make a well-informed choice while continuing to protect the NHS and save lives.

Parliament has made changes to the nomination process to reduce the amount of movement and person-to-person contact that might otherwise be necessary, but ensuring there remains a democratic check and balance for candidates.

Legislation has also been made to change the rules for proxy voting, enabling those who need to self-isolate close to polling day to request an emergency proxy vote at very short notice, right up to 5pm on polling day itself.

Building on these changes to legislation and guidance, the Government is also continuing to provide practical support to Returning Officers where appropriate, including the sourcing of over 2000 additional volunteer staff for the polls to date.

This work supports the significant preparations already being undertaken by local authorities and is backed up by Government funding. The Government is directly providing around £95 million for the running of the polls, which includes an additional allocation of around £32 million to specifically cover additional COVID-19 related costs.

As outlined in my written statement of 9 March 2021, the Government is also committed to tackling intimidation in public life. Further to this, we are today publishing security guidance for Returning Officers and candidates to support the May 2021 polls.

Of course, polling day is not the end of the electoral process and I am aware that many Returning Officers are considering carefully how they can conduct the verification and count, which are often large and complex events, in a COVID-secure way. It is vital for free and fair elections that polls are transparent and effectively scrutinised. However, minimising the transmission of COVID-19 and protecting public health is a priority during

these elections. A strong set of measures will therefore be in place to ensure every aspect of the polls are COVID-secure for voters, staff and observers.

It is the responsibility of Returning Officers to manage the conduct of the count and to ensure that appropriate reasonable measures are taken to comply with COVID-19 regulations and to allow fair scrutiny of the count. Returning Officers will want to put in place arrangements to allow the effective scrutiny of their counts while ensuring the count is COVID-secure for everyone present. To support Returning Officers with this, the Government has been working with the Electoral Commission to update their [guidance on the verification and count process](#) in the context of the pandemic, in line with prevailing COVID-19 restrictions. I have also written today to election administrators to provide guidance on there being no public health need to quarantine ballot papers or postal votes.

The announcement of results will, as usual, be made as soon as is practicable after the close of the polls. However, it is important to be clear that counts, like other aspects of these polls, may look and feel different to previous occasions. Due to COVID-secure measures, each stage of the count may take longer than in previous years. It is essential that all involved recognise the need to work together to support them taking place effectively and safely.

Democracy should not be cancelled because of COVID-19, and the Government has every confidence in the ability of the Returning Officers and their teams to run these polls in a way that meets the highest standards of both public safety and democratic integrity. The Government is committed to supporting the sector to achieve this. I would like once again to express gratitude for the tireless efforts and exceptional dedication of all those involved.

The associated documents have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

■ Update on UK Government's Work to Strengthen the Union and Intergovernmental Relations

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office

(Michael Gove):

[[HCWS885](#)]

Today I am providing an update on the UK Government's work on the Union and intergovernmental relations (IGR) with devolved administrations. These are:

1. A progress update on the joint IGR review.
2. The inaugural quarterly report on the UK Government's engagement with the devolved administrations.
3. The Dunlop Review into UK Government Union Capability, alongside our response to Lord Dunlop which sets out UKG's progress in implementing recommendations.

Copies of all these documents have been laid in the libraries of both Houses of Parliament and are available on GOV.UK.

The UK Government is steadfast in its commitment to protect and promote the hundreds of years of shared history, beliefs and interests embodied in our Union – the most successful political and economic partnership the world has seen.

Our response to the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the importance of the broad shoulders of the UK Government in supporting the whole country. It has shown we are at our strongest when we come together as one United Kingdom. Together we are better able to tackle big problems, from defending our borders and fighting national cyber security threats, to delivering the furlough scheme to protect our jobs, and being first to secure the COVID-19 vaccine for citizens across the UK.

Today demonstrates the UK Government's commitment to putting the foundations in place for our COVID-19 recovery. For our family of nations to thrive – for the Union of the UK to prosper – the UK Government will continue to work smarter for people in every part of the country, building back better and stronger from COVID-19 and able, outside the European Union, to target money where it is most needed.

Progress update on the IGR review

The IGR review is a joint review by the UK Government and devolved administrations to make sure intergovernmental structures are fit for purpose. This publication is the product of months of detailed analysis of how the UK Government and devolved administrations can work together effectively, reconciling a range of goals and aspirations from all parts of the UK. It details our ambitious and forward-looking approach to future IGR, ensuring an effective culture of collaboration and cooperation, protecting the integrity of our Union and shaping our common future. Where discussions are ongoing, the UK Government's suggested position is included in square brackets. We are committed to continuing discussions with our devolved administration colleagues on these areas after the May elections.

Work has already begun to implement these measures across UK Government departments, allowing this improved collaboration between the UK Government and the devolved administrations to begin as soon as possible. We will continue to reflect on these arrangements to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

The UK Government and devolved administrations continue to work together on the Common Frameworks programme. This has resulted in further frameworks being agreed - including Food Compositional Standards and Labelling; Blood Safety and Quality; Organs, Tissues and Cells Safety and Quality; and Public Procurement - which have been laid in Parliament.

Quarterly report on the UK Government's engagement with the DAs

Our first quarterly report on the UK Government's engagement with the devolved administrations reflects the value the Government places on the core principles of transparency of intergovernmental relations. Due to the pre-election periods in Wales and Scotland, we are publishing this information early, covering a shorter period of two months; the next quarterly report will be published in July 2021.

This report predominantly provides information from all UK Government departments on their participation in intergovernmental meetings with the devolved administrations in January and February 2021. It is supplemented with a summary of engagement which has taken place since July 2019. The report will support the UK Parliament's capacity to scrutinise our role in intergovernmental relations, so that parliamentarians can help guide our approach to strengthening our Union, while also demonstrating our commitment to transparency of IGR.

Dunlop Review into UK Government Union Capability

We are very grateful to Lord Dunlop for his independent and expert assessment and analysis of the UK Government's operations in the areas of devolution and IGR. We have carefully studied all of his recommendations and his Report has provided the impetus for a wide ranging programme of reform that I and my colleagues will continue to pursue vigorously.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Myanmar update

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Dominic Raab): [\[HCWS898\]](#)

The UK condemns the coup in Myanmar and reiterates our deep concern at the violent crackdown on peaceful protestors. We call on the military to hand back power to the democratically elected government; protect rights and freedoms, including the right to peaceful protest; and to ensure unobstructed humanitarian access.

The UK has been at the forefront of a strong, co-ordinated international response. On 10 March we secured a Presidential Statement at the UN Security Council that condemned the violence against peaceful protestors and called for respect of Myanmar's democratic transition and the release of all those detained arbitrarily. This followed further UK-led statements by the UN Security Council on 04 February and G7 Foreign Ministers on 03 February and 23 February.

Working closely with partners in the US, Canada and the EU, the UK has already sanctioned nine individuals responsible for serious human rights violations during the coup, including three military cabinet members and all the military members of the State Administration Council. This is in addition to 16 individuals already sanctioned for their role in serious human rights violations against the Rohingya and other minorities.

Today, I am announcing, further measures to target the Myanmar military's economic interests in conjunction with the US.

The UK will enforce sanctions against Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd (MEHL), the military owned conglomerate supporting the Tatmadaw. We have found credible evidence that MEHL contributed funds to support the Tatmadaw in their campaign on ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya in 2017, knowing or having reasonable cause to suspect that the funds would or may contribute to the serious human rights violations committed,

and that MEHL is associated with the Commander in Chief and Deputy Commander in Chief.

Designating MEHL will immediately impose an asset freeze on any assets that MEHL may hold in the UK and a ban on any UK individual or company from providing funds or economic resources to MEHL directly or indirectly. This will also prohibit funds being made available to any subsidiaries “owned or controlled” by MEHL as defined by the Global Human Rights sanctions regime.

These sanctions complement the ongoing strategic review of the UK’s trade and investment approach led by the Department for International Trade. The Government’s position is that UK businesses should not be supporting the military or their businesses.

Along with the UN Security Council and the wider international community, we will continue to make clear that military must stop killing its own people, release all those who have been detained arbitrarily and respect the democratic wishes of the people of Myanmar.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Completion of phase one of the Early Years Healthy Development Review and publication of *The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days*

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care) (Jo Churchill): [\[HCWS896\]](#)

Title: Completion of phase one of the Early Years Healthy Development Review and publication of *The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days*

In summer 2020 the Prime Minister commissioned the *Early Years Healthy Development Review*. Chaired by the Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP, the Review looks across the ‘1,001 critical days’ from conception to the age of two, ensuring babies and young children in England can be given the best start in life.

The focus on these 1,001 critical days from pregnancy to the age of two is important. They are a unique period of time, when the foundations for an individual’s cognitive, emotional and physical development are developed and set. It is also a period of time when babies are at their most vulnerable and susceptible to, and influenced by, the environment around them.

It is for these reasons, and many more, that I am pleased to share the first publication from the Early Years Healthy Development Review entitled: *‘The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days’*.

This comes at a timely moment for our nation as we reflect on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and begin to turn our focus on building back better. As we do this, we must place our youngest citizens at the centre of our ambition.

Our vision sets out an ambitious programme of work to transform how we support families across England throughout these 1,001 critical days. It sets out **six action areas**

(below) to ensure that families have access to the services they need, when they need them. We want to enable the system to work even better together to provide this support.

Action Area 1: Seamless support for families - our vision is for seamless support for families, with local areas encouraged to publish a Start for Life offer. The offer should explain clearly to parents and carers what services they are entitled to and how they can access them.

Action Area 2: A welcoming Hub for the family - all families need a welcoming space to access services. Our vision is that Family Hubs are a place for families to access Start for Life services.

Action Area 3: The information families need when they need it –all families need to have access to trustworthy information at the times they most need it. This includes digital, virtual and telephone services designed around the needs of the family.

Action Area 4: An empowered Start for Life workforce - our vision is that every family will be supported by a range of professionals and volunteers, each of whom brings skills, knowledge and empathy to interactions with families. From their first appointment, every parent and carer must feel that they are heard and that they can ask for help.

Action Area 5: Continually improving the Start for Life offer - we want every parent and carer to have confidence that the services and support in their area will help them give their baby the best start for life. A brilliant Start for Life offer will continuously improve with better data, evaluation, and proportionate inspection.

Action Area 6: Leadership for change - leadership is critical to the success of the vision. There must be local and national commitment and accountability.

This is just the beginning of our work, and the Early Years Healthy Development Review will continue with a second phase where we will focus on the implementation and delivery of these six action areas.

■ **Contingent liability arising from an extension of the temporary indemnity for designated care home settings**

Minister of State (Minister for Care) (Helen Whately):

[\[HCWS894\]](#)

Further to the Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment's written statement on 18 January 2021, I am tabling this statement for the benefit of Honourable and Right Honourable members to bring to their attention the undertaking of a contingent liability. This relates to an extension of the Designated Settings Indemnity Support (DSIS), which offers targeted and time-limited state-backed indemnity arrangements to care homes registered, or intending to register, as "Designated Settings", and which are unable to obtain sufficient insurance cover.

On 18 January 2021, the Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment announced in a Written Ministerial Statement, and accompanying Departmental Minute, provision of these temporary indemnity arrangements under the DSIS. The DSIS includes cover for clinical negligence, employer's and public liability where a care provider seeking to become a Designated Setting is unable to secure sufficient commercial insurance, or

where an existing provider has been operating without sufficient cover. Employer's and public liability is covered under the new Coronavirus Temporary Indemnity Scheme; clinical negligence is covered by the Clinical Negligence Scheme for Trusts. The DSIS is supervised by DHSC and administered by NHS Resolution, and to date, has proved to be an effective package of support to Designated Settings.

DSIS initially provided cover for Designated Settings until the end of March 2021. Following a review of DSIS, it will now be extended until 30 June 2021, in order to maintain the current level of support for these vital settings. This extension will benefit current DSIS participants, as well any additional settings who may wish to apply for the support and who meet the criteria for inclusion. A review of DSIS will take place in early June.

I regret that in this circumstance, due to the need to ensure that there are no gaps in DSIS cover after the current 31 March end-date, the normal 14 sitting days for consideration has not been possible. A Departmental Minute will be laid in the House of Commons providing more detail on this contingent liability.

■ **Mandate to NHS England and NHS Improvement for 2021-22**

Minister of State for Health (Edward Argar):

[\[HCWS893\]](#)

The Prime Minister paid tribute to the extraordinary success of the UK's Covid-19 vaccination programme when setting out on 22 February 2021 his roadmap for easing lockdown restrictions in England. This vaccination programme would not be possible without the dedication and commitment of many thousands of NHS staff who have already worked tirelessly for many months to support the Covid response whilst doing their utmost to reduce the impact on wider NHS services.

I am today laying before Parliament the Government's 2021-22 mandate for NHS England and NHS Improvement. It will make clear that Covid-19 – including further roll out of the vaccination programme to ensure that every adult in England will be offered a first vaccination by 31 July - remains the NHS's top priority in 2021-22. At the same time, and taking account of the pandemic's impact, the NHS will return to implementation of the important transformative ambitions set out in its Long Term Plan and our 2019 manifesto. These will underpin recovery, and support the NHS' longer term resilience and sustainability. There will be a renewed focus on prevention to empower people to live as healthily as possible, and on tackling those health challenges which have been highlighted by the pandemic. The NHS will also work to recover performance of non-Covid services that were unavoidably impacted by the pandemic – including elective care.

The new mandate is underpinned by our further funding commitments to the NHS. In addition to the substantial support made available for the pandemic response in 2020-21, and the further £6.3 billion increase in NHS funding already confirmed as part of its Funding Settlement to 2023-24, we are providing a further £3 billion in 2021-22 to support NHS recovery. This includes £1.5 billion for indirect covid pressures in 2021-22 as well as £1 billion for tackling backlogs in elective activity, and £500 million for mental health and

workforce, for which operational delivery will be agreed in due course. This is in addition to the £6.6 billion announced last week for operationally necessary costs arising from the pandemic in the first half of 2021-22.

As in previous years, I will also today lay a revised 2020-21 mandate. As required by the NHS Act 2006, this revision is to reflect changes to the capital and revenue resource limits included in it that result from in-year funding decisions.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Construction update

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): [\[HCWS902\]](#)

As England moves towards step 2 of the COVID-19 response roadmap out of lockdown, which will take place no earlier than 12 April, the Government wants to ensure that planning measures are in place to support businesses to operate safely and drive the economic recovery.

Firstly, the Government recognises that the construction industry will need to continue to operate in a safe and productive way. Temporary extensions to working hours were introduced over the last year on some sites to facilitate safer working and allow tasks to be completed where social distancing can be challenging. These changes have also helped to protect and support jobs in the construction industry and reduced pressures on public transport at peak hours throughout the pandemic.

This Written Ministerial Statement confirms that the approach set out in my previous statement to the House of 13 May 2020, about construction working hours due to COVID-19, will remain in place until 30 September 2021. This continued flexibility is necessary due to the continued impact of COVID-19 and to support the construction industry to recover and operate safely as we emerge from the pandemic. This date will be kept under review.

Secondly, the Government would like local planning authorities to continue to take a positive and flexible approach to planning enforcement action to support economic recovery and support social distancing while it remains in place. The National Planning Policy Framework already emphasises that planning enforcement is a discretionary activity, and local planning authorities should act proportionately in responding to suspected breaches of planning control.

In particular, to ensure a safe and successful reopening of the non-essential retail sector from Step 2 of the roadmap, the Government wants to see retailers given the opportunity to extend their daily opening hours from Monday to Saturday, notwithstanding local planning restrictions on opening hours, where appropriate. This will help to spread footfall, ease transport pressures and make shopping in a socially distanced way easier by giving shoppers greater flexibility to choose when they shop and avoid peak times.

Accordingly local planning authorities, having regard to their legal obligations, should not seek to undertake planning enforcement action which would result in the unnecessary restriction of retail hours between 7am to 10pm, Monday to Saturday, from Step 2 of the roadmap (no earlier than 12 April) until the introduction of Step 4 of the roadmap (scheduled for no earlier than 21 June 2021).

Where appropriate, local planning authorities should also highlight this temporary relaxation to retailers in their area so that they can take advantage of longer opening hours if they wish to do so.

The Government recognises that longer retail opening hours could have a temporary impact on local residents, but this needs to be balanced by the significant public interest in ensuring there is a safe retail environment when non-essential shops reopen. The 10pm limitation should also mitigate the impact for local residents. There will be no change in licensing restrictions on retailers.

Finally, I am through this Written Ministerial Statement extending the statement that I made to the House on 13 March 2020 about planning enforcement and the delivery of food and other essential goods to retailers until the introduction of Step 4 of the roadmap (scheduled for no earlier than 21 June 2021). This will help supermarkets and other retailers to continue to provide home deliveries while restrictions are still in place.

■ Land Supply Update

Minister of State for Housing (Christopher Pincher):

[[HCWS897](#)]

In March 2017 the Government committed to the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal (the deal), to support ambitious plans to deliver 100,000 homes by 2031. The deal committed to an Oxfordshire-wide Joint Statutory Spatial Plan to be adopted by 2021, and to be supported by £215 million of funding to help deliver more affordable housing and infrastructure improvements to support sustainable development across the county.

As part of the deal, to support this strategic approach to supporting housing delivery through joint working, Oxfordshire was granted flexibility from the National Planning Policy Framework policy on maintaining a five year housing land supply. Since 2018, Oxfordshire have had to provide proof of a three-year land supply for planning purposes. This has worked to support the delivery of the local plans for the area and ensure that the local authorities could focus their efforts on their Joint Spatial Strategy.

This flexibility was laid out by Secretary of State at the time the Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP in a Written Ministerial Statement on 12 September 2018 - <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2018-09-12/hcws955>.

Since 2018, Oxfordshire have not finalised and adopted their Joint Statutory Spatial Plan. Therefore, in the best interests of housing delivery in the region, my Department have extended the time afforded to Oxfordshire for the delivery of this plan to 2023. This extension however will not be subject to the original land supply flexibilities. From today,

Oxfordshire will need to maintain a five year housing land supply in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.

This statement is a material consideration in planning decisions and applies to those local planning authorities in Oxfordshire with whom the Government agreed the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal with, namely Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council. This statement applies from today.

■ Local Government Finance

Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government (Luke Hall): **[\[HCWS901\]](#)**

COVID-19 has presented a significant challenge for businesses in all sectors. The Government's response to the pandemic has been unprecedented in scale, with more than £280 billion provided to protect millions of jobs and businesses, and the Budget in March setting out an additional £65 billion support in 2020-21 and 2021-22.

On business rates specifically, at Budget 2020 the Government announced a 100% business rates relief to all eligible retail, hospitality and leisure properties, given the acute and direct impact of COVID-19 restrictions (Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions) on these sectors. This was worth around £10 billion in 2020-21 and, alongside other business rate reliefs, ensured that over 1 million properties paid no business rates this year. At Budget 2021, the Government announced that it would extend the scheme for the first 3 months of 2021-22 at 100%, followed by a 9-month period of relief at 66%, subject to a cash cap for businesses. Taken together, this amounts to business rates relief worth £16 billion for retail, hospitality and leisure properties.

While support has been needed to support these sectors, our business rates system is designed to provide a stable source of income for local councils and help fund vital local services – such as street lighting and keeping streets safe and clean. It is based on the principle of regular revaluations, with changes in property values reflected at these revaluations. Market wide economic changes affecting property values, such as from COVID-19, can only be properly considered at these general revaluations, which is why we have changed the date of the next revaluation to 1 April 2023 (based on rental values at 1 April 2021) to ensure it can better reflect the impact of the pandemic.

Between these revaluations rateable values should only change for Material Change of Circumstances, which is a process intended to consider individual cases like roadworks near a property that affect its value. A number of businesses that do not qualify for our existing reliefs have sought to challenge their business rates liability by seeking reductions to their property's value through this Material Change of Circumstances provision.

Relying on this system to help businesses that need further support from the pandemic is not the right mechanism. These appeals would seek to reduce rate bills, and funding for local councils, based on the estimated impact of COVID-19 on the market value of a property, and not on the economic circumstances of the business. This system was not

designed to address the challenges we face and would mean significant amounts of taxpayer support going to businesses based in offices – like banks, large online retailers and technology businesses, law firms and consultancy firms – many of whom have been able to operate successfully throughout the pandemic.

The process of resolving these appeals and litigation through the courts could take years and would not provide the support now when it is most needed. It would also expose local authorities to uncertainty about their financial position – including whether they would need to return money spent on their response to COVID-19, and how much.

Without action and legislation, there would also be a significant impact on the entire business rates system, as the Valuation Office Agency faced working through these cases, further valuation tribunals, wider separate cases, and preparing for the next revaluation in 2023. This would be at the detriment of other ratepayers who would suffer as a result of the valuation system grinding to a halt.

Nevertheless the Government recognises that businesses outside of the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors have also been adversely affected by the pandemic, including through limitations on how their property can be used. So we are now going even further than the £16 billion of relief since Budget 2020 – and providing £1.5 billion of additional support to businesses that have not already received business rates relief. This is the fastest and fairest way to support businesses outside the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors who have been adversely affected by the pandemic.

The new relief will ensure a fairer and more proportioned allocation of support, by awarding funding through local authorities, who will be able to use their knowledge of their local businesses and the local economy to award dedicated support to those businesses who need it most. Funding will be allocated to councils taking into account the economic impact COVID-19 has had on specific sectors. This approach will ensure relief is awarded quicker than would be the case if businesses sought support under the sometimes drawn out process of a rating appeal, which can often last years.

At the same time we will legislate to ensure that the Government's response to COVID-19, including restrictions on the use of property, is reflected at the next revaluation in 2023, in line with the principle of the Business Rates system, and not through complicated and protracted property-by-property litigation. We will do this through:

- Introducing primary legislation with retrospective effect, when parliamentary time allows, to clarify that COVID-19 and the Government's response to it is not an appropriate use of Material Change of Circumstance provisions; and
- Laying a Statutory Instrument today with the same effect prospectively and bringing it into force on the same day.

Taken together, this will ensure support for COVID-19 continues to be directed to ratepayers through rate reliefs – including the additional £1.5 billion of support – in the fairest and fastest way, and not through valuation appeals made by rating agents. We will work with and support local government to enable ratepayers to apply as soon as

possible this year, once the legislation relating to Material Change of Circumstance provisions has passed and local authorities have set up local relief schemes.

This will give local councils the certainty they have been seeking, and will ensure that support flows to businesses in need across England, rather than primarily to high value locations and the office market.

■ Troubled Families Programme Update

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for rough sleeping and housing (Eddie Hughes): [\[HCWS904\]](#)

As required by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, section 3(1), today my Department has published the 2020/21 annual report of the Troubled Families Programme. The report sets out how the programme has been supporting our most disadvantaged families who face multiple and complex problems. We are laying this report today and will place a copy in the House of Commons library.

The Troubled Families Programme has been at the heart of our ambition to strengthen families and improve their futures since 2015. In last year's Spending Review the Chancellor announced £165 million of new investment to extend the programme until the end of 2021-22.

Improving families' lives: annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2020-2021 includes an update on the programme's performance and a summary of the latest research findings and policy developments for the programme.

It sets out how the programme has driven a profound shift in the way that local services respond to entrenched problems and support our most disadvantaged families. The programme assigns a single key worker to each family, backed by multi-agency partners and coordinated data. This joined up 'wrap-around' support for families has been shown to be successful in tackling the range of issues they face.

Since 2015 the programme has supported 401,719 families to achieve successful outcomes. This includes 32,382 adults who were helped into sustained employment. These families faced multiple and complex problems including a combination of crime, truancy, neglect, anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, poor mental health, worklessness and financial exclusion. Every successful family outcome represents a family's life changed for the better – a considerable achievement for the families and the local services supporting them.

The report sets out how local services funded by the programme have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme has been a key part of the local response to COVID-19 by supporting families with immediate needs such as food and equipment for home learning. The programme will play an important role in the recovery, supporting families with longer term impacts of the pandemic such as unemployment and mental ill health.

The report summarises the latest research findings relating to the programme. Staff survey research showed consistent support for the programme from local teams. 95% of

Troubled Families Coordinators agree the programme is effective at achieving whole family working and 89% agree it's successful at achieving long term change for families. An independent evaluation of the Supporting Families Against Youth Crime fund shows that the fund improved the provision of local services addressing youth crime. The fund supported a number of innovative approaches in 21 local areas. Local areas reported that whole family interventions, role model based and mentoring interventions were most successful.

This builds on previous analysis which found that the programme has made a significant impact in reducing the proportion of children who are taken into care. A cost benefit analysis showed that for every £1 spent on the programme it delivers £2.28 of economic benefits (*includes economic, social and fiscal benefits*) and £1.51 of fiscal benefits (*only budgetary impacts on services*).

'Improving families' lives: annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2020-2021 is accompanied by a range of publications that evaluate the programme's progress which can be accessed at Gov.uk. These are:

1. Evaluation report: Supporting Families Against Youth Crime
2. Staff Surveys: Troubled Families Coordinators: part five
3. Staff Surveys: Troubled Families Keyworkers: part five
4. Staff Surveys: Troubled Families Employment Advisors: part five

TRANSPORT

■ Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 2

Minister of State for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris):

[[HCWS891](#)]

In 2017 the Government published the first statutory Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Strategy (CWIS 1) which covered the period 2016/17 to 2020/21. Since it was produced, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister have significantly expanded the ambition and funding of the Government's cycling and walking programme, launching the Gear Change white paper in Summer 2020 with £2bn of additional funding over this parliament for active travel, the largest amount of dedicated spending ever committed to increasing cycling and walking in this country. Significant delivery on the ground has already occurred.

Because of the pandemic, the multi-year Spending Review planned for autumn 2020 was postponed. Instead, as with most other budgets, a single-year settlement for cycling and walking reflecting the ambitions set out in Gear Change has been set for the year 2021/22. The Government will set out plans for future years, including future funding for cycling and walking beyond 2021-22, at the Spending Review later this year.

I am today informing Parliament of my intention to publish as soon as possible thereafter a second four-year statutory Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS 2), reflecting the new policies in Gear Change and the multi-year funding settlement. The

Government will consult on CWIS 2, with relevant stakeholders, ahead of its publication, as required by the legislation.

■ Roads Update

Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

[[HCWS886](#)]

Since becoming Secretary of State for Transport, I have shared the concerns of many regarding All Lane Running (ALR) motorways. Any question about safety on our road network must be taken with the upmost seriousness. Therefore, one of my first actions as Secretary of State was to commission a stocktake to set out recommendations to raise the bar on safety. While the evidence has suggested that ALR motorways are in most ways as safe as, or safer than, conventional ones, I am determined to go further and ensure that they are the safest roads in Britain.

To this end, in March 2020, I announced a package of 18 measures, costing £500million, including the faster rollout of a radar-based stopped vehicle detection (SVD) across the ALR motorway network.

Earlier this year, I asked for a one-year on report from Highways England detailing its progress in delivering the 18-point Action Plan and identifying actions that can be delivered ahead of schedule. I asked for this by 12 March 2021.

Highways England has now provided my Department with that Anniversary Report, and work is rapidly being completed to assess it, including stocktake actions, and to establish next steps. The report will be published by summer, once I am assured that the proposals are sufficiently robust.

The publication of this report will not, however, mark the end of the process, and I am determined to ensure all possible actions to make ALR motorways safer still are explored. I have therefore ordered my officials to continue to work with Highways England on developing possible future options, working closely with road safety groups and Parliamentarians, as well as the Transport Select Committee which currently has an active inquiry into this issue. I am interested to receive their final report.

The latest safety evidence drawn from data and analysis of the 2019 STATS19 official statistics has been produced by Highways England and will be contained within its report. There has been considerable public and media interest in understanding motorway accident and fatality data and I have commissioned the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to independently review the data to provide further analytical assurance and ensure that the conclusions arrived at are robust. The ORR is the independent statutory monitor of Highways England and its management of the strategic road network.

Within this role, the ORR already scrutinises Highways England's delivery of the smart motorway stocktake actions, and its performance against its road safety KPIs. However, I believe there may be scope to go further. In addition to asking ORR to undertake an independent review of the available safety evidence on ALR motorways, my officials will explore what further independent scrutiny may be appropriate.

Ensuring our roads are safe for those who use them is my top priority.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Annual Households Below Average Income and Separated Families Statistics 2019/20

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey):
[\[HCWS892\]](#)

The Department for Work and Pensions has today published annual statistics covering 2019/20 including on Households Below Average Income (HBAI) and Separated Families. HBAI covers a range of information, including household incomes and a range of low-income indicators for 2019/20, derived from the Family Resources Survey of around 20,000 households.

Between 2018/19 and 2019/20, the proportion of people below the absolute low income line fell. Before housing costs, this was a decrease of 1 percentage point to 14% or 9.2 million people. After housing costs, it was a fall of 2 percentage points to 18% or 11.7 million people. There were also decreases in absolute low income after housing costs for children, pensioners, working-age people and individuals living in a household where someone is disabled. Compared to 2009/10, there were over 1.3 million fewer people in absolute low income, after housing costs: 260,000 fewer children, 890,000 working age adults and 180,000 pensioners.

In 2019/20, median household incomes grew by 4.5% after inflation, an increase of over £1,000 a year to reach an all-time high, alongside a record high employment rate. This was the strongest annual income growth since 2001/02. Incomes increased across the entire income distribution, with the poorest 20% of households seeing their real incomes increase by over 6% on average after housing costs. This growth in median income reflects the success of government policies we have taken to help people move into work and keep more of what they earn, for example, raising the National Living Wage and increasing the personal tax allowance.

The statistics show increases in the proportions of households below the relative low income lines, reflecting the very strong growth in median income in 2019/20. The proportion of households below the relative low income line, before housing costs, increased by one percentage point to 18% or 11.7 million individuals, and, after housing costs, the proportion remained the same at 22% or 14.5 million individuals. There were increases in relative poverty both before and after housing costs for children, pensioners and those living in households where someone is disabled.

Rates of combined low income and material deprivation for children were lower in 2019/20 than in 2010/11 and rates of material deprivation for pensioners remained at a record low of 6%.

Today's statistics also show that 44% of separated families did not have a child maintenance arrangement in place in 2019/20. We know that child maintenance payments have a significant impact on reducing the number of children living in low income households. For the first time, estimates relating to the income distributions of parents in separated families have been published, showing that 60,000 children move

out of absolute low income before housing costs; 120,000 after housing costs as a result of child maintenance payments from 2017/18 to 2019/20.

We have also published data on household food security from the Family Resources Survey for the first time, to get a better understanding of the lived experience of families. This shows that 8% of households are classed as food insecure, with 4% of households in low food security and 4% in very low household food security.

Overall, these statistics reinforce that the economy entered the pandemic in a strong position, with people seeing rising incomes. The Government has built on this firm financial foundation with an unprecedented package of measures to protect livelihoods and incomes, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, the Self Employment Income Support Scheme and an extra £7.1 billion of welfare support in 2020/21. Our Plan for Jobs and the support provided through Universal Credit are helping people to raise their incomes by moving into and progressing in work.