



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 6 December 2023 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:50 P.M., 06 December 2023). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Batteries: Lithium

Janet Daby: [\[4551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether she has had recent discussions with the Office for Product Safety and Standards on lithium-ion batteries in e-bikes and e-scooters.

Janet Daby: [\[4552\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will make an estimate of how many lithium-ion batteries used in e-bikes and e-scooters have been found to be unsafe and removed from the market in the last 12 months.

Janet Daby: [\[4553\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent discussions he has had with local authority trading standards departments on the safety of lithium-ion batteries in (a) e-bikes and (b) e-scooters.

Kevin Hollinrake:

The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) is part of the Department for Business and Trade and Ministers are actively engaged on this important safety issue. Just last month I wrote to major online food delivery businesses to highlight the Fire England guidance on safe charging of e-bikes and e-scooters. OPSS is part of cross Government activities to understand the root cause of fires related to Lithium-ion batteries so they, in conjunction with local authority enforcement teams, can take the action necessary to help ensure safety.

OPSS works closely with Local Authority Trading Standards on this and other product safety issues, including through a co-ordinated system of product safety checks at the border. Details of safety alerts and recalls of unsafe and non-compliant products are published on gov.uk. OPSS has published details of ten separate product recalls and nine other enforcement actions relating to unsafe or non-compliant e-bikes or e-scooters since March last year.

Andy Slaughter: [\[4828\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether her Department has taken steps to monitor the general (a) use and (b) safety of new lithium battery products.

Andy Slaughter: [\[4830\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many (a) e-bikes and (b) e-scooters were purchased in the UK between 2023 and 2020; and whether she has made an estimate of projected sales in 2024.

Kevin Hollinrake:

We do not monitor or hold records on the sale of e-bikes and e-scooters. However, UK product safety laws require all consumer products to be safe and products using lithium-ion batteries, such as e-bikes and e-scooters, must comply with essential safety requirements set out in law.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS), part of the Department for Business and Trade, has established a multi-disciplinary safety study to understand data and evidence of risks in this area and has commissioned Warwickshire Manufacturing Group, to conduct research examining the safety of lithium-ion batteries. This forms part of cross Government work involving the Home Office and the Department for Transport alongside London Fire Brigade and the National Fire Chiefs Council.

Future Fund: Breakthrough**Chi Onwurah:**[\[4153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how much the British Business Bank has invested directly in companies through its Future Fund: Breakthrough programme as of 28 November 2023.

Kevin Hollinrake:

Future Fund: Breakthrough is delivered by the British Business Bank, via its subsidiary British Patient Capital. It is a UK-wide programme which encourages private investors to co-invest alongside government in high-growth, R&D intensive, innovative firms.

From the start of the programme in 2021 to 28 November 2023, Future Fund: Breakthrough has committed to invest £119 million of which £97.6 million has been paid. Across these transactions, the programme has leveraged £724 million of investment from the private sector.

The government has announced an extension to Future Fund: Breakthrough of at least £50 million, building on the original commitment of £375m.

Post Offices**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[4800\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many sub post offices there were in each year since 2012.

Kevin Hollinrake:

The table below shows the number of post office branches open since 2012. Government requires Post Office to maintain a network of at least 11,500 branches, and to fulfil access criteria, which ensures that 99% of the population lives within 3 miles of a Post Office. 2020-2021 was the only period in the last ten years where the number of branches fell below the Government-set 11,500 minimum, due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. During this period Government granted a waiver

which permitted the Post Office to have fewer than 11,500 open branches. The numbers of post office branches for 2022/23 have not yet been published.

YEAR	TOTAL NUMBER OF POST OFFICE BRANCHES
2012 - 2013	11780
2013 - 2014	11696
2014 - 2015	11634
2015 - 2016	11643
2016 - 2017	11659
2017 - 2018	11547
2018 - 2019	11638
2019 - 2020	11638
2020 - 2021	11415
2021 - 2022	11635

■ Postal Services: Standards

Sir Robert Neill:

[4379]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has had recent discussions with Royal Mail on the steps it is taking to tackle delays in delivery to the BR7 postcode area.

Kevin Hollinrake:

It is for Ofcom to set and monitor Royal Mail's service standards with powers to investigate and take enforcement action where there are reasonable grounds for concluding Royal Mail has failed to achieve its obligations.

I am aware that Royal Mail continues to have particular service challenges in some postcode areas. I note that Royal Mail management accepts its performance needs to be much better and has started to address this, for example, by recruiting an additional 3,000 postmen and women so far with a further 500 permanent delivery positions a week going forwards.

CABINET OFFICE**■ Coronavirus: Fraud****Neale Hanvey:****[4581]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what estimate he has made of how much (a) was lost from the public purse due to fraud during the covid-19 pandemic, (b) of that fraud has been recovered and (c) is irrecoverable.

Alex Burghart:

During the pandemic, the Government delivered an unprecedented package of economic support to preserve livelihoods and save businesses across the whole United Kingdom.

The Government is committed to transparency in its efforts to tackle fraud against the public sector. The UK is one of the few countries to publish data on fraud and error within the public sector in the [Fraud Landscape Report](#). The Government will continue to be transparent and prioritise its efforts in detecting, preventing and recovering fraud associated with the pandemic.

The Fraud Landscape Report showed that in 2020/21, across government and outside of tax and welfare (so, excluding COVID-19 expenditure in HMRC and DWP), departments reported £88m of recovered fraud and error related to COVID-19.

Since 2021, we have invested in taking action on fraud, to bolster the prevention and recovery of fraud losses in welfare, tax and COVID Business Loans, and prosecute those who have defrauded the public purse - this included the establishment of the Public Sector Fraud Authority (PSFA).

Fraud is a hidden crime and the Government's focus remains on detecting and recovering as much of it as is possible. That is done by deploying cutting edge tools supported by world leading expertise to find and recover as much fraud as possible.

■ Death**Geraint Davies:****[4782]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Answer of 30 May 2023 to Question 185872 on Death, if he will publish the total number of deaths from all causes (a) including and (b) excluding covid-19 for each (i) area, (ii) region and (iii) country in 2022 in which there was an estimated fraction of mortality attributable to particulate air pollution in 2021.

John Glen:

The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority.

A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 1 December is attached

Attachments:

1. [UK Statistics Authority](#) [PQ4782.pdf]

■ Elections: Subversion**Caroline Lucas:** [\[4127\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Intelligence and Security Committee report on Russia, HC 632, published on 21 July 2020, what steps he is taking to ensure that UK General Elections are not affected by political interference.

Alex Burghart:

I refer the Hon Member for Brighton Pavilion to my answer on 26th October 2023 (PQ 203720).

■ Ministers: Science and Statistics**Mary Kelly Foy:** [\[4272\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he is taking steps to increase levels of (a) scientific and (b) statistical literacy among ministers.

John Glen:

The Declaration on Government Reform committed to investing in training for ministers, and a ministerial training programme has been developed which includes two half-day induction sessions for new-to-government ministers, and a rolling programme of eight masterclasses open to all ministers. Specifically, the programme includes a masterclass on working with scientific advice led by the Government Chief Scientific Advisor and a masterclass on data led by the Government Chief Statistician.

■ Movement Assistance Scheme and Trader Support Service**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[4804\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many full time equivalent staff are employed in (a) implementing and (b) monitoring the (i) Trader Support Service and (ii) Movement Assistance Schemes.

Alex Burghart:

The Trader Support Service (TSS) and Movement Assistance Schemes (MAS) are both important schemes that provide support to traders.

The Movement Assistance Scheme is operated by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). Across DEFRA and APHA a combined 24.75 FTE staff are employed in the implementation and monitoring of the scheme.

The TSS is overseen by HMRC and operated by a Fujitsu-led consortium. There are currently 378 FTE staff employed by the consortium. Additionally, there are 39.4 FTE staff within HMRC working on the implementation of the service.

■ Parliamentary Private Secretaries

Wendy Chamberlain:

[\[4275\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will publish an updated list of Parliamentary Private Secretaries.

Alex Burghart:

A list of Parliamentary Private Secretaries is published on gov.uk. The Government plans to publish an updated list shortly, taking into account recent changes within Government.

■ Public Sector Fraud Authority

Neale Hanvey:

[\[4579\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the cost to his Department of (a) setting up and (b) running the Public Sector Fraud Authority each year are.

Alex Burghart:

HM Treasury announced £24.7m funding over three years to support the creation of the PSFA in the Spring Statement 2022. This was added to the £5.7m annual budget that the Centre of the Counter Fraud Function was provided by the Cabinet Office. The additional funding brought the PSFA budget in 2022/23 to £11.25m.

In 22/23 the PSFA set a target of delivering £180m of savings to the taxpayer. The PSFA far surpassed this within the first 12 months by preventing and recovering £311 million. As it enters its second year, the PSFA has a target of achieving £185 million of savings for the taxpayer.

Neale Hanvey:

[\[4580\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much Government expenditure lost to fraud has been recovered by the Public Sector Fraud Authority in each year since its establishment.

Alex Burghart:

The PSFA was established in August 2022 - as such we only have audited counter fraud savings up to March 2023 (FY 2022/23).

In 22/23 the PSFA set a target of delivering £180m of savings to the taxpayer. In fact the PSFA far surpassed this within the first 12 months by preventing and recovering £311 million. As it enters its second year, the PSFA has a target of achieving £185 million of savings for the taxpayer.

This shows the Government is delivering its mission to transform the way we fight fraud and safeguard taxpayers' money. Every pound we save in taking action on fraud reduces the cost of public services and makes taxpayers' money go further. Better use of data and technology has been key in achieving this.

■ Vetting: Mental Illness**Sarah Dyke:**[\[4311\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he has had recent discussions with United Kingdom Security Vetting on vetting clearance rates for applicants with mental health conditions.

John Glen:

I have had recent engagement with the UKSV across various aspects of National Security Vetting (NSV).

The NSV process takes into account many aspects of an individual's life in order to gather a greater understanding of any risks which may make them unsuitable to have access to sensitive information, assets or access to certain sensitive sites. The individual's health (both physical and mental) are just one of those aspects. Any mitigations to those risks are also taken into account when making a decision on suitability for clearance. I can advise that many people with mental health considerations do hold NSV clearance.

NSV policy is kept under constant review to ensure that policy reflects changes in society and addresses new and emerging global trends.

It may interest the Honourable Member and her constituents to know there is public facing guidance available on the UKSV government website. This includes information about the vetting process as well as mental health considerations and includes efforts made to help demystify the vetting process and ensure improved inclusivity.

In line with the practice followed by successive administrations, the Government does not otherwise comment on security matters.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**■ BBC: Local Broadcasting****Rachael Maskell:**[\[4669\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had recent discussions with the BBC on (a) local broadcasting and (b) the potential impact of its plans relating to local broadcasting on the (i) quality and (ii) availability of local content.

Sir John Whittingdale:

The Government remains disappointed that the BBC is planning to reduce parts of its local output. Ministers have met with the BBC on several occasions since the announcement where they have expressed our shared concerns in this House about the BBC's plans.

While it is up to the BBC to decide how it delivers its services, the Government is clear that the BBC must make sure it continues to provide distinctive and genuinely

local broadcasting services, with high-quality content that reflects and represents people and communities from all corners of the UK.

The Government expects Ofcom, as regulator of the BBC, to ensure the BBC is robustly held to account in delivering its public service duties. In the publication of the new Licence, which came into effect on 1 April, Ofcom set out that it requires the BBC to continue to deliver a broad range of UK content and play an important role in delivering local, regional and nations content. Ofcom will be monitoring the BBC's performance closely and will step in if they are concerned the BBC is not delivering for audiences.

■ **Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla: Expenditure**

Neale Hanvey:

[\[4841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how much her Department spent of the coronation ceremony; and how this money was spent.

Stuart Andrew:

The Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla was a moment of celebration for the UK and my department was privileged to play its part in this historic occasion.

The Government contributes funding to national state occasions. As with all events of this kind, we will publish costs in due course once all spend has been reconciled.

■ **Culture: Children**

Barbara Keeley:

[\[4117\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what data her Department holds on the accessibility of arts and culture to children and young people under the age of 16.

Sir John Whittingdale:

Until 2020, DCMS collected data on participation by young people in arts and culture through its Taking Part Survey, and statistical releases from that survey are available on the gov.uk [website](#). The last survey year (2019/20) showed that 96% of children aged 5–10 had engaged with the arts outside school in the 12 months prior to interview, and that 96% of 11–15 year olds had engaged with the arts, either inside or outside school.

In 2021, the Taking Part Survey was replaced by DCMS's Participation Survey, moving from a face-to-face survey to a push-to-web survey with a larger sample. This captures participation data for people aged 16 and over in England. DCMS has recently undertaken a pilot survey for young people aged between 10 and 19, which will provide data on access to arts and culture for children and young people. We will publish data on this pilot survey next year.

Furthermore, Arts Council England's National Portfolio Annual Data Survey (available on the Arts Council England [website](#)), also provides data on the number of

attendances at activities carried out by Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations which is specifically for, by, or with children and young people (aged 0–19). For the most recent published year (2022/23), this shows that there were 3.1 million attendances at performances, 2.5 million attendances at film screenings, 112,000 visits to exhibitions, and 111,000 attendances at festivals. This includes only ‘known attendance’ (i.e. calculated using more precise methods such as ticket sales). Including ‘estimated attendance’ increases this figure significantly.

■ Local Broadcasting

Rachael Maskell:

[\[4670\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending the definition of local broadcasting to mean content broadcast within the local licensing transmission area.

Sir John Whittingdale:

The Government recently consulted on the renewal of local TV licences. This consultation also addressed the current statutory objectives for local TV. Those objectives compel services to be distinctive and meet the needs and interests of those living or working in the locality they are received in.

The Government’s view, as set out in the consultation document, is that the current objectives still act as a pivotal framework for local TV services to operate within and provide clarity for providers when making local content. The objectives also ensure the main beneficiary of local TV output is the viewer and that the specific area and locality of the service remains at the heart of local content. Whilst we are not currently minded to amend the statutory objectives, we have sought stakeholder views on the matter through the consultation process. The consultation responses are currently being analysed and the Government will publish a response in due course.

■ Orchestras: Tax Allowances

Barbara Keeley:

[\[3756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many meetings on changes to Orchestra Tax Relief she has had with representatives of the orchestra sector since 18 July 2023.

Sir John Whittingdale:

The extension to the higher rates of cultural tax reliefs announced at Spring Budget 2023 are collectively estimated to be worth £350 million to theatres, orchestras, museums and galleries over the five-year forecast period.

On 18 July 2023, HM Government published draft legislation for several administrative changes to creative industry tax reliefs, including orchestra tax relief, for the purpose of consultation. Since then, senior officials at the Department for Culture, Media & Sport have engaged with the Association of British Orchestras (ABO) and others to seek their feedback on draft changes to legislation on cultural tax reliefs proposed by HM Treasury. Officials from HM Treasury and HM Revenue &

Customs have also met the ABO as the responsible Departments for this policy and its delivery. Details of Ministerial meetings can be found on the Gov.uk website [here](#).

■ Veterans: Radiation Exposure

Sir John Hayes:

[4035]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will publish (a) a copy of Lord Chancellor's Instruments (LCIs) Nos 76 and 118 and (b) set out which exemptions applied under those LCIs to retain Atomic Weapons Establishment files containing details of blood and urine testing of personnel in the UK nuclear weapons programme.

Sir John Whittingdale:

Lord Chancellor's Instruments (LCIs) are public records. Arrangements for their permanent preservation and public access are managed in line with public records and information rights legislation.

The schedules which accompany the named LCIs set out the reasons that specified Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) files have been retained by AWE. The grounds for retention of those AWE files covered by LCI 76 are national security, security against possible terrorist activity, international relations, and the UK's international obligations. AWE records covered by LCI 118 were retained due to the risk of proliferation of nuclear weapons or retained to allow a more detailed review of their access status.

■ Voluntary Work

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[4801]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department is taking steps to support volunteering through the Big Help Out campaign.

Stuart Andrew:

Volunteering is vital for society and the Government recognises this. It benefits volunteers and the organisations involving them and has transformational impacts on beneficiaries and their communities.

My department is funding and supporting the launch of the 2024 Big Help Out, following the success of the inaugural day of community volunteering to mark the Coronation of His Majesty the King and Her Majesty The Queen, held on 8 May 2023. The Big Help Out aims to raise awareness of volunteering and to provide opportunities for people to support their communities.

DEFENCE

■ Armed Forces

Maria Eagle:

[4062]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 218 of the publication entitled Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2022–23, what recent estimate

his Department has made of when it will complete a pan-Defence whole force skills picture.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Defence is working to implement the Pan Defence Skills Framework (PDSF) as a new Whole Force approach to identifying, defining, and managing the skills of Defence's people and their associated roles. The PDSF will be used by Regular and Reserve Armed Forces personnel as well as Civil Servants, giving Defence a Whole Force view of the skills we have and allowing us to identify the areas where we need to focus our resources.

The PDSF will also enable us to better recognise skills, as recommended in the Haythornthwaite Review into Armed Forces Incentivisation, to be able to better reward Armed Forces personnel for the skills they hold. Extensive work is currently underway to codify the skills we have in Defence. The PDSF project team expect to begin a phased roll-out of the PDSF through 2024 and we anticipate the whole Defence force will be incorporated by 30 March 2025.

As we move forward, the data provided by the PDSF will facilitate flexible deployment, zig-zag careers, lateral entry, empowered careers and will introduce more transparency to appraisal and promotion. It will ultimately enable teams to deploy personnel where they are needed most, helping Defence create the fighting force the nation needs for the future.

■ **Armed Forces: Applications**

John Healey:

[4053]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list the medical conditions for which an application to join the Armed Forces is automatically rejected.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Joint Service Publication 950 Leaflet 6-7-7 (JSP 950 Lft 6-7-7) sets out the medical entry standards for joining the Armed Forces and provides a framework for the medical assessment of potential recruits and Serving personnel. I attach a copy for the right hon. Member's information.

Every Armed Forces application is considered on a case-by-case basis by recruiting clinicians, taking account of the severity of an individual's medical condition and the ongoing need for treatment.

Attachments:

1. [Joint Service Publication 950](#) [JSP 950 Lft 6-7- 7 JSMMF (v2.4 Oct 22) (2).pdf]

■ **Armed Forces: Cost of Living**

Luke Pollard:

[4257]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans his Department has to support service personnel with the cost of living in winter 2023-24.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Defence recognises that no one is immune from recent higher than usual inflation and the cost of living. We are committed to doing what we can to assist Armed Forces personnel where possible, including implementing the independent Armed Forces' Pay Review Body's 2023 pay award recommendations in full. This provided an effective pay increase of between 9.7% for the most junior ranks and 5.8% for officers at one-star rank. It increased other allowances and retention payments by 5.8%, froze food charges and service accommodation charges which also continue to be heavily subsidised compared with civilian housing costs. In addition, Service families can now save around £3,400 per child per year through our wraparound childcare.

Service personnel can also obtain discounts on a wide range of goods using the Defence Discount Service, and, as members of Joining Forces Credit Union, can access affordable loans at competitive rates.

Luke Pollard:[\[4258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the cost to the public purse of his Department's spending on targeted cost of living support for service personnel was in (a) 2022 and (b) 2023 as of 28 November 2023.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

In 2022, a £150 contribution in lieu of council tax rebate for Service personnel replicated the national civilian council tax rebate. HM Treasury contributed circa £5 million, whilst the Ministry of Defence funded the delivery costs which amounted to circa £30,000. As there is no national council tax rebate scheme this year, we will not be repeating it for Service personnel.

■ Armed Forces: Housing**Luke Pollard:**[\[4746\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many families who live in service family accommodation properties are living in temporary hotel accommodation as a result of maintenance issues in their home as of 30 November 2023.

James Cartlidge:

As at 30 November 2023, 15 families who live in Service Family Accommodation properties are living in temporary hotel accommodation as a result of maintenance issues in their home.

There are currently 38,528 occupied Service Family Accommodation through the UK.

Luke Pollard:[\[4747\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many families have been required to move out of a service family accommodation property as a result of maintenance issues in each year since 2010.

James Cartlidge:

For the period 1 April 2022 to 1 December 2023 a total of 1,114 families living in Service Family Accommodation properties were required to move out of their home due to maintenance issues.

Information prior to April 2022 is unavailable.

Luke Pollard:[\[4748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many (a) service family accommodation and (b) single living accommodation homes have been left without (i) heating and (ii) hot water for more than 24 hours in the latest period for which data is available.

James Cartlidge:

As at 30 November 2023, 47 or 0.121% of occupied Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties had a total loss of heating, and six or 0.015% of occupied SFA properties had a total loss of hot water for more than 24 hours, but less than 48 hours. Alternative forms of heating and sources of hot water are provided.

For those sites managed under the Built Estate Contracts, there were 291 reports of heating issues and 342 reports of hot water issues lasting for more than 24 hours in Single Living Accommodation (SLA).

This data includes heating and hot water issues that also affect common rooms, and kitchens. Issues could relate to singular rooms, or a single tap, and is not limited to total loss of heating and/or hot water for an entire SLA building. It is not possible to provide data for sites managed under other arrangements.

Luke Pollard:[\[4749\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, for how many (a) service family accommodation and (b) single living accommodation homes have issues with (i) heating and (ii) hot water been reported since April 2022.

James Cartlidge:

As at 1 December 2023 there are:

20,800 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties have reported maintenance issues related to heating since April 2022. These work orders include all repairs associated with heating such as condensate pipes freezing in extremely cold weather or a faulty single radiator valve and are not limited to a total loss of heating.

6,945 SFA properties have reported maintenance issues relating to hot water since April 2022. Work orders include all repairs associated with hot water and are not limited to total hot water loss.

For those sites managed under the Built Estate Contracts for Single Living Accommodation (SLA), there have been 1,617 issues reported relating to heating and 1,685 issues reported relating to hot water since April 2022.

This data includes heating and hot water issues that also affect common rooms, circulation spaces, kitchens etc. Issues could relate to singular rooms, or a single tap,

and is not limited to total loss of heating and/or hot water for an entire SLA asset. It is not possible to provide data for sites managed under other arrangements.

Luke Pollard:

[\[4750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much compensation has been provided to service personnel to cover the increased energy costs of using a temporary heater in each month since January 2023.

James Cartlidge:

The figures for heating compensation paid in each month since January 2023, are provided in the table below:

MONTH	AMOUNT
Jan 2023	£59,280
Feb 2023	£78,460
Mar 2023	£63,900
Apr 2023	£36,640
May 2023	£29,340
Jun 2023	£12,980
Jul 2023	£13,040
Aug 2023	£17,920
Sep 2023	£8,960
Oct 2023	£32,840
Nov 2023	£30,460

Under the Future Defence Infrastructure Services Accommodation contracts, compensation is administered and funded by the suppliers at no cost to the Ministry of Defence.

■ **Armed Forces: Working Hours**

Luke Pollard:

[\[4255\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what data his Department holds on the number of excess hours worked by service personnel in each of the last five calendar years, broken down by service.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Regular members of the Armed Forces do not serve a set number of conditioned hours per week. As such, they are not paid overtime so the requested excess hours data is not held as it might otherwise be for other workforces. Instead, X-Factor is

paid, currently at 14.5%, as a pensionable addition to pay to recognise the relative disadvantages of conditions of Service experienced by members of the Armed Forces compared to those in the civilian sector, including hours of work.

Since 2014, MOD has undertaken and published the results of its annual Armed Forces Continuous Working Patterns Survey. This data is derived from a seven day diary completed by a sample of trained, UK regular personnel who record the number of hours spent at work, on call, on breaks and off duty. These annual reports can be accessed online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-continuous-working-patterns-survey-index>

Luke Pollard: [4256]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department has a target for the average number of hours per week worked by armed forces personnel, broken down by service.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The MOD does not set Service personnel specific targets to work to a certain number of hours, nor does it record the hours worked by Service personnel.

Routinely and where possible, Defence's intent is for all Service Personnel to work what might be considered a 'normal' working day (e.g. 08:30 to 17:00) five days a week, or equivalent for those required to work shifts, although this may be subject to change dependent upon operational tempo and / or other service commitments.

■ Asbestos: Industrial Diseases

Maria Eagle: [4074]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the average settlement payment was for asbestos-related diseases in the 2022-23 financial year.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The average settlement of damages was £150,000.

Maria Eagle: [4075]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many settlement payments were issued by his Department for asbestos-related diseases in 2022-23.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

In 2022-23, 105 cases. The answer reflects damages paid in settlement of common law compensation claims against the MOD in respect of asbestos related disease where the final damage payment has been made in 2022-23.

■ Conventional Weapons

Jessica Morden: [4109]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the average (a) AS90, (c) L118 light gun, (c) Jackal and (d) Foxhound vehicle availability rate was in each year since 2018.

James Cartlidge:

The British Army holds and maintains an appropriate amount of all its platforms to meet operational requirements. I am withholding further information on the number of platforms available for operational deployment for security reasons.

■ Cybersecurity: Finance**John Healey:**[\[4046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 12 of the Memorandum for the Ministry of Defence Main Estimate 2023-24, for what reason his Department provides funding for the National Cyber Security Programme.

James Cartlidge:

The information requested cannot be shared for security reasons.

■ Cybersecurity: Government Departments**John Healey:**[\[4048\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 12 of the Memorandum for the Ministry of Defence Main Estimate 2023-24, what recent estimate he has made of the amount of Other Government Departments (OGD) transfer there will be for the National Cyber Security Programme in the 2024-25 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

We currently estimate a similar amount will be provided to the National Cyber Security Programme for the 2024-25 financial year under Other Government Departments transfer.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Finance**John Healey:**[\[4044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 12 of the Memorandum for the Ministry of Defence Main Estimate 2023-24, for what reason his Department transferred £4.955 million to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

James Cartlidge:

Details of this transfer can be found in the Nuclear Liabilities Management Strategy – 2022.

■ F-35 Aircraft: Procurement**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[1833\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make it his policy to bring forward the delivery date for the F-35 fleet.

James Cartlidge:

UK F-35 aircraft are being procured in 'Tranches', in line with Defence need. Delivery of our Tranche 1 buy (48 aircraft) will complete by 2025. The Government has outlined plans to buy a further 27 aircraft as part of a second procurement phase,

which we expect to complete in the early part of the next decade. We expect the production line to continue to run for many years. We will consider again in the mid-2020s the F-35 fleet size as part of the next Strategic Defence Review

■ Intelligence Services: Finance

John Healey: [\[4042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 12 of the Memorandum for the Ministry of Defence Main Estimate 2023-24, what the reason was for each of the transfers totalling £310.498 million his Department made to the Single Intelligence Agency in 2023-24.

James Cartlidge:

The information requested cannot be shared for security reasons.

John Healey: [\[4049\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 12 of the Memorandum for the Ministry of Defence Main Estimate 2023-24, published on 23 May 2023, if he will clarify what HQS refers to in relation to the (a) £143.7 million and (b) £103.6 million transferred from his Department to the Single Intelligence Agency.

James Cartlidge:

The information requested cannot be shared for security reasons.

■ Land Enterprise Working Group: Membership

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[4358\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the membership of the Land Enterprise Working Group is as of 29 November 2023.

James Cartlidge:

The Land Enterprise Working Group is chaired by Director General (Land). Otherwise, the LEWG has no set attendance and representatives attend based on availability, the intended agenda and main discussion points.

■ Middle East: Armed Forces

John Healey: [\[4054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2023 to Question 2760 on Middle East: Armed Forces, how many UK troops were present in (a) Jordan, (b) Lebanon, (c) Oman, (d) Bahrain and (e) Cyprus in each year since 2010.

James Heappey:

Additional time is required to access this information from the MOD archives. I will write to the right hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

■ Ministry of Defence: Buildings

Luke Pollard:

[\[4259\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what progress has been made on surveys to identify buildings on his Department's land which may have been constructed with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete.

James Cartlidge:

As at 28 November 2023, 12,660 buildings on the Defence Estate have been assessed as requiring Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete surveys. Initial surveys have been completed for 11,602 of these; surveys for the remaining 1,058 buildings are ongoing.

■ Ministry of Defence: Consultants

Maria Eagle:

[\[4064\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department is taking steps to reduce expenditure on consultancy services.

James Cartlidge:

I can confirm that the Department has taken steps to reduce expenditure on consultancy services.

■ Ministry of Defence: Digital Technology

Maria Eagle:

[\[4060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 101 of the publication entitled Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2022–23, how much his Department has spent on developing whole force people data analytics solutions as of 28 November 2023.

Maria Eagle:

[\[4061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 101 of the publication entitled Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2022–23, what outcomes his Department plans to achieve from the development of whole force people data analytics solutions.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The Ministry of Defence has spent a total of £300,000 on a whole force workforce people data project. The development of whole force data analytics will support the development of the strategic workforce planning capability. It will enable us to better understand and manage the Defence workforce to ensure we have the right people, at the right time, in the right location to deliver Defence outputs.

■ Ministry of Defence: Ethnic Groups**Maria Eagle:** [\[4063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to encourage people from ethnic minorities groups to join his Department.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Defence operates optimally when it recruits and retains the best talent, drawn from the broadest diversity of thought, skills, and background, and reflects the society it serves. The Armed Forces Race Action Plan has been designed to set in motion significant change by ensuring that race equality is a fundamental principle in Defence. The plan is centred around three objectives; to be an inclusive employer better able to deliver operational effect, increasing representation, and improving progression and retention.

■ Ministry of Defence: Finance**John Healey:** [\[4043\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what mechanisms his Department uses to help ensure value for money when utilising Other Government Department transfers.

James Cartlidge:

Transfers from Other Government Departments are treated in the same way as any other public money and in line with His Majesty's Treasury's guidance on Managing Public Money.

John Healey: [\[4047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 12 of the Memorandum for the Ministry of Defence Main Estimate 2023-24, when his Department first began Other Government Departments (OGD) transfers for the National Cyber Security Programme; and how much has been transferred from his Department for this programme since the first of those transfers took place.

John Healey: [\[4050\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much budget his Department has transferred to the Cabinet Office for the Crisis Response Programme through Other Government Departments transfers each year since 2010.

John Healey: [\[4051\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department has transferred to other government departments each year since 2010; and what the purpose was for each of these transfers.

John Healey: [\[4052\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department has received from other government departments in each year since 2010; and what the purpose was for each transfer.

James Cartlidge:

This information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Ministry of Defence: Off-payroll Working**Maria Eagle:**[\[4072\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the average duration for an individual within his Department on an off-payroll engagement for over four years was in the 2022-23 financial year.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

As at 31 March 2023 the average duration for an individual on an off-payroll engagement of over four years within the Department was five years and nine months.

Engagement of individuals under off-payroll terms for longer periods of time is unusual but does arise where the Department is unable to recruit deep specialists on a permanent basis.

The Department does retain some long-standing arrangements, particularly in circumstances where specialist skills or experience are critical in supporting key projects/programmes.

Maria Eagle:[\[4073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the percentage change of people within his Department on an off-payroll engagement was between financial years 2019-20 and 2022-23.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The off-payroll engagements disclosed in the Annual Reports and Accounts reflected the requirements specified in the HM Treasury Financial Reporting Manual.

There have been changes in these disclosure requirements over the 2019-20 to 2022-23 period (for instance in 2019-20, the disclosure requirement was limited to engagements of >£245 per day and six months or more in duration whereas in subsequent years all engagements >£245 were disclosed).

There were also organisational changes over the 2019-20 to 2022-23 period (for instance the return of the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) to within the Departmental boundary and changes in the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) which is an executive agency of MOD).

These changes make comparisons between the numbers of off-payroll engagements of limited value.

The best comparison, reflecting the removal of the 6 months or more duration requirement, is between 2020-21 and 2022-23, and shows a percentage change of +42%. The bulk of this increase however is explained by the return of AWE and changes to Dstl given the highly specialised activities undertaken by these entities.

■ Ministry of Defence: Procurement

Maria Eagle: [\[4784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 53 of his Department's Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23, if he will publish the latest version of his Department's Sustainable Procurement Working Group strategic plan.

James Cartlidge:

There are currently no plans for the Sustainable Procurement Working Group (SPWG) 'Strategic Plan' to be published.

■ Ministry of Defence: Secondment

Maria Eagle: [\[4059\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many civil servants in his Department were seconded to other Departments in each since year since 2019.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The below table details the number of civil servants (CS) on loan to other government departments for each year since 2019.

CALENDAR YEAR	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 TO DATE
Number of CS	1,392	1,447	1,567	1,098	1,014

■ Ministry of Defence: Small Businesses

Maria Eagle: [\[4817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many contracts for his Department were reserved for SMEs in the (a) 2019-20, (b) 2020-21, (c) 2021-22 and (d) 2022-23 financial years.

James Cartlidge:

The specific information requested is not held centrally by the Department, and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

■ Ministry of Defence: Standards

Maria Eagle: [\[3124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2022 to 2023, published on 20 July 2023, what steps he is taking to improve (a) project and (b) programme management (i) monitoring and (ii) compliance processes.

James Cartlidge:

In October 2022 Defence mandated the Infrastructure and Projects Authority's best practice project and programme management control framework: Government

Functional Standard GovS002 Project delivery. The Department is working to achieve the 'Good' level of compliance against the standard.

The Ministry of Defence's Project Delivery Function works with Front Line Commands and delivery organisations to monitor the continuous improvement of project and programme management practices, to assess compliance with the 'Good' level of GovS002 and assist with the creation of plans to meet it, and to work to remove barriers to further improvement.

■ Rifles

John Healey: [\[4055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the current status is of Project Grayburn.

John Healey: [\[4056\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the current out-of-service date is for the SA80 rifle.

John Healey: [\[4057\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what estimate his Department has made of the cost of procuring a replacement for the SA80 rifle.

John Healey: [\[4336\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his Department's planned timescale is for procuring a replacement for the SA80 rifle.

James Cartlidge:

The current Out of Service Date for the SA80 rifle is 2030. The SA80 replacement Project (known as Project GRAYBURN) is working towards submission of the Strategic Outline Business Case, with the Project entering a formal Concept and Assessment Phase next Financial Year.

A new common basic weapon with up to four variants is expected to be delivered from Financial Year 2026-27. Cost estimates will continue to mature as the procurement strategy takes shape and it would therefore be inappropriate to provide an estimate of the procurement costs at this time.

■ Shipbuilding: Procurement

Maria Eagle: [\[4815\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much and what proportion of the social value weighting that is applied to his Department's shipbuilding competitions has been used for (a) covid-19 recovery projects, (b) tackling economic inequality, (c) tackling climate change, (d) increasing equal opportunities and (e) improving health and wellbeing in each of the last three years.

James Cartlidge:

The Ministry of Defence places contractual obligations on suppliers to meet social value commitments based on the supplier's social value proposal. Progress against

the obligations is monitored and measured through the life of the contract using appropriate reporting metrics and Key Performance Indicators.

■ Shipbuilding: Small Businesses

Maria Eagle: [4816]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department spent with small and medium-sized enterprises in the shipbuilding industry in each financial year since 2019-20.

James Cartlidge:

I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) on 17 May 2023 to Question number 184792.

Attachments:

1. [Question number 184792](#) [UIN 184792.docx]

■ Weapons: Procurement

John Healey: [4350]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the Answer of 11 September 2023 to Question 197994 on Armed Forces: Weapons, how much and what proportion of the funding will be allocated towards procurement programmes; and if he will list the specific programmes this funding has been allocated.

James Cartlidge:

The £1.95 billion referred to in the Integrated Review Refresh is not exclusively for the purpose of replenishing stockpiles. It also includes spending allocated for wider resilience such as, but not limited to, improving the resilience of infrastructure and medical stores.

In regards to as to how the £1.95 billion figure is being allocated, I refer the right hon. Member to my previous answer on the 21 November 2023. The funding is still subject to contract and I will write to the right hon. Member in due course once the position has changed.

EDUCATION

■ Apprentices: Degrees

Seema Malhotra: [4180]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many Degree Apprenticeship places have been available in each of the last ten years.

Robert Halfon:

Degree apprenticeships provide people with high-quality training and are important in supporting productivity, social mobility and widening participation in higher education and employment.

The department has developed an employer-led apprenticeship system with over 5,000 employers. Today there are over 170 degree-level apprenticeships in wide range of career routes. Employers can choose how many degree-level apprentices they take-on each year. The table below shows the number of people starting on degree-level apprenticeships in each year since 2014. The department has seen year-on-year growth of degree-level apprenticeships with over 195,000 starts since their introduction and we are providing an additional £40 million over the next two years to support degree apprenticeship providers to expand and help more people access this provision, on top of the department's £8 million investment in the 2022/23 financial year.

ACADEMIC YEAR	DEGREE LEVEL APPRENTICESHIP STARTS
2014/15	100
2015/16	780
2016/17	1,700
2017/18	10,880
2018/19	22,480
2019/20	30,460
2020/21	39,200
2021/22	43,240
2022/23	46,800

■ Apprentices: South Holland and the Deepings

Sir John Hayes:

[4618]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many youth apprenticeship starts there have been in South Holland and the Deepings constituency in each year since 2010.

Robert Halfon:

Under 19 apprenticeship starts in South Holland and the Deepings constituency can be found via the following links:

- 2017/18 onwards on the 'Explore Education Statistics' site: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/2c8e229c-df32-4259-798c-08dbf0809b23>
- 2016/17: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82c2ebe5274a2e8ab59384/2016_17_apprenticeships_geography_tool_by_sector_subject_area.xlsx

- 2010/11 to 2015/16:
<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fmedia%2F5a803a8ded915d74e33f9354%2Fapprenticeships-starts-by-geography-level-and-age.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

■ Apprentices: Wellingborough

Seema Malhotra: [4173]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many youth apprenticeship starts there have been in Wellingborough constituency in each year since 2011.

Robert Halfon:

Under-19 apprenticeship starts in Wellingborough constituency can be found via the following links:

2017/18 onwards on Explore Education Statistics:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/62a1e705-4a82-47f4-7947-08dbf0809b23>.

2016/17:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82c2ebe5274a2e8ab59384/201617_apprenticeships_geography_tool_by_sector_subject_area.xlsx

2011/12 to 2015/16:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a81e066e5274a2e87dbff30/201617_Oct_Apps_Geography_Data_Pack_Final.xlsm

■ Education and Skills Funding Agency: Wellingborough

Seema Malhotra: [4172]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much funding has been allocated by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in Wellingborough constituency in each year since 2017.

Damian Hinds:

The department is able to provide the schools national funding formula (NFF) allocations for schools in the Wellingborough constituency from the 2020/21 financial year. This covers mainstream schools funding only. The schools NFF determines school revenue funding for all mainstream schools in England, although schools' actual allocations are based on local authorities' local funding formulae. Constituency figures are based on an aggregate of schools' NFF allocations.

Funding through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which includes revenue funding for schools, high needs, early years, and central school services since 2018/19, is available at local authority level only. Wellingborough was within Northamptonshire for the 2017/18 to 2020/21 financial years. On 1 April 2021, Northamptonshire split into two unitary authorities (North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire) with Wellingborough residing within North Northamptonshire.

Pupil Premium provides additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Allocations are calculated based on the number of eligible pupils in each school. Wellingborough's NFF and Pupil Premium allocations, alongside Northamptonshire's DSG allocations, can be found in the attached tables.

In addition to this core revenue funding, schools receive funding through a number of separate streams, including: Universal Infant Free School Meals funding; PE and sport premium funding; and the recovery premium and the National Tutoring Programme to support education recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. The department also has a capital budget, which funds a range of programmes for schools such as the Schools Rebuilding Programme. Information about this programme is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-rebuilding-programme>.

The department also provides funding via the 16 to 19 funding formula for:

- Students aged 16 to 19
- Students up to the age of 25 when they have an Education, Health and Care plan
- Fourteen to sixteen year-olds who are directly enrolled into eligible further education (FE) institutions
- Home educated students of compulsory school age at any FE college

This is allocated via a variety of institutions including sixth-form and FE colleges, school and academy sixth-forms, independent learning providers, local authorities, special post-16 institutions (SPIs) and some higher education institutions.

The funding amounts allocated to institutions between 2017/18 and 2023/24 is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-funding-allocations#published-allocations>.

The department is also continuing to invest in education and skills training for adults through the Adult Education Budget (AEB). This funding totalled £1.34 billion in 2022/23.

The AEB fully funds or co-funds skills provision for eligible adults aged nineteen and above from pre-entry to Level 3, to help them gain the skills they need for work, an apprenticeship or further learning.

AEB allocations to training providers are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-allocations-to-training-providers-2022-to-2023>.

Attachments:

1. [4172_table](#) [4172_table.xlsx]

Extended Services**Mr Tobias Ellwood:****[4093]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to provide (a) activities and (b) food support for children over school holiday periods.

David Johnston:

The department has invested over £200 million every year since 2022 in free holiday club places for children from low-income families, through the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme, with all 153 local authorities in England delivering in the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays.

The HAF Programme supports disadvantaged children and their families with enriching activities, providing them with healthy food, helping them to learn new things, and improving socialisation.

While the Programme is targeted primarily towards children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals, local authorities also have flexibility to use up to 15% of their funding to target and support other children and families that align with the local authorities' own priorities.

Since 2022, the HAF programme has provided 10.7 million HAF days to children and young people in this country. The expansion of the programme year-on-year has meant a total of 5.4 million HAF days provided between Christmas 2022, Easter and summer 2023. Based on reporting from local authorities, over 680,000 children and young people attended the holiday activities and food programme in the 2023 summer holidays, including over 5,900 children and young people from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Over Easter 2023, local authorities reported that over 394,000 children attended the programme across the country, of which over 4,400 young people attended from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Over Christmas 2022, local authorities reported over 315,000 children attended the programme across the country, of which 1,800 young people attended from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Further Education: Teachers**Seema Malhotra:****[4176]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of levels of teacher (a) recruitment and (b) retention on the provision of (i) English, (ii) maths and (iii) functional skills in further education settings.

Robert Halfon:

The department is investing an additional £185 million in the 2023/24 financial year and £285 million in the 2024/25 financial year to drive forward skills delivery in the further education (FE) sector. This funding will help colleges and other providers to address key priorities, including tackling recruitment and retention issues in high-

value technical, vocational, and academic provision which are of critical importance to our economic growth and prosperity.

The department is also delivering a programme to support the sector to recruit excellent staff, which includes a national recruitment campaign, and strengthening and incentivising the uptake of initial teacher education (teacher training bursaries in priority subjects worth up to £29,000 each, tax free for 2023/24).

The department's Taking Teaching Further programme has supported around 1,000 industry professionals to train as FE teachers since 2018. The latest round of Taking Teaching Further is live, supporting FE providers to recruit and support those with relevant knowledge and industry experience to retrain as FE teachers. Taking Teaching Further covers the cost of a teaching qualification, as well as providing a reduced teaching timetable and mentoring support for new recruits.

To boost recruitment and retention of teachers, the department will give early career teachers in key science, technology, engineering, mathematics and technical shortage subjects, working in disadvantaged schools and colleges, up to £6,000 after tax annually on top of their pay. This will double the existing Levelling Up Premium paid to school teachers, and extend it to all FE colleges for the first time.

The department remains committed to supporting FE teachers and the vital work they do in improving achievement in English and mathematics. The department will continue investing in continuing professional development and research in 2023 and beyond, including supporting practitioners to test successful and transferable approaches to improving post-16 level 2 English and mathematics outcomes. The Essential Skills workforce grant is delivering professional development to enhance English and mathematics teaching in FE, supporting our policies and reforms. The department is investing up to £10 million to support teachers of English and mathematics re-sit learners. It will include training in mastery pedagogy for FE mathematics teachers.

■ Office for Students: Further Education

Seema Malhotra:

[\[4174\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much funding the Office for Students has provided to further education institutions in each of the last three years.

Robert Halfon:

The Office for Students (OfS) allocates both capital and programme funding to higher education providers, including to further education (FE) institutions, that are on the OfS's approved (fee cap) register.

Programme (recurrent) funding is allocated to providers by the OfS on an academic year basis. The below table shows the funding given to FE colleges in the academic years 2020/21 to 2022/23.

RECURRENT FUNDING (ACADEMIC YEAR)

2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
£ 37,401,497	£ 36,620,386	£ 41,236,058

The table below shows capital funding allocations to FE institutions on a financial year basis for 2020/21 to 2024/25, including the current three-year capital settlement for financial years 2022/23 to 2024/25.

CAPITAL FUNDING (FINANCIAL YEAR)

2022/23 to 2024/25	2021/22	2020/21	
Formula-based allocation	£ 8,808,891	£ 3,122,440	£ 43,686,475
Competition-based allocation	£ 135,245,778	£ 48,386,441	£ 2,299,692
Total	£ 144,054,669	£ 51,508,881	£ 45,986,167

■ Out-of-school Education

Munira Wilson:

[\[4282\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many unregistered schools there are in England.

Damian Hinds:

An unregistered school is defined as a setting that is operating as an independent school without having registered with the department. It is a criminal offence under section 96 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 for a person to operate an unregistered independent school. The department does not therefore retain data about unregistered schools.

The department funds a joint team with Ofsted to target unregistered schools. Ofsted has powers under section 97 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 that allows for unannounced inspections of settings believed to be operating in breach of registration requirements. A team of inspectors are employed to identify, investigate and inspect any setting where there is evidence to suggest that an unregistered independent school is operating.

■ Pre-school Education

Kate Osamor:

[4492]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department has taken to communicate with (a) schools and (b) local authorities about the extension of eligibility for free early education for 2-year-olds with no recourse to public funds.

David Johnston:

The department consulted on extending eligibility for the 15-hour early education entitlement for 2-year-olds between 25 March 2022 and 20 May 2022. The department published its response on 25 August 2022 alongside guidance, including a sample application form, for local authorities which can be found online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/30-hours-free-childcare-la-and-early-years-provider-guide>. In addition, the eligibility criteria has been updated on GOV.UK at: <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs/free-childcare-2-year-olds>.

■ Pupils: Absenteeism

Elliot Colburn:

[4279]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of trends in absence rates of children with pathological demand avoidance.

Damian Hinds:

The department does not collect data for pupils with pathological demand avoidance (PDA), a profile of autism. Therefore, we cannot accurately assess their current trends in absence rates. However, the department recognises the increase in absence generally for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). For pupils receiving Special Educational Needs (SEN) support, overall absence increased from 6.5% in 2018/19 to 10.0% in 2021/22. For pupils with a SEN provision statement or Education, Health and Care Plan, overall absence increased from 8.7% in 2018/19 to 12.1% in 2021/22.

On 22 November 2023, the department announced the Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools programme. This new programme, backed by £13 million of investment, will bring together Integrated Care Boards (ICB), local authorities and schools, working in partnership with parents and carers, to support schools to better meet the needs of neurodiverse children. The programme will deploy specialists from both health and education workforces to upskill schools and build their capacity to identify and meet the needs of children with autism and other neurodiverse needs. One of the key programme metrics will be attendance, as the department recognises that addressing unmet needs and making school more inclusive supports good attendance. The programme will be evaluated, and the learning will inform future policy development around how schools support neurodiverse children.

In 2022, the department published the 'Working together to improve school attendance guidance' to ensure greater consistency in the attendance support offered to pupils and families across the country. The guidance emphasises the importance of providing attendance support early and targeted to pupils' individual needs. The

guidance is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>.

For pupils with SEND, schools are expected to have sensitive conversations with pupils about their needs and work with families to develop specific support approaches. This includes establishing strategies for removing in-school barriers to attendance, ensuring attendance data for pupils with SEND is regularly monitored to spot patterns and provide support earlier, ensuring joined-up pastoral care is in place, and referring pupils to other services and partners where necessary. These expectations, alongside the expectations placed on academy trust boards, governing bodies, and local authorities to work in conjunction with school staff to provide joined-up support for all pupils and families, is intended to ensure that pupils with SEND are supported to attend school regularly.

Statistics on pupil absence, including breakdowns of absence by characteristics, are available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england/2021-22>.

■ Schools: Census

Daniel Zeichner: **[4695]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will add Down syndrome as a separate data item on the school census.

David Johnston:

The department is committed to improving the support in education for children and young people with Down syndrome, particularly given the passage of the Down Syndrome Act 2022, which My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State supported on behalf of the Government in her previous role in the Department for Health and Social Care. The Secretary of State for Education has also been speaking with representatives of Down syndrome organisations about how the department can best deliver on this commitment through the measures in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan. Discussions have included how the department best collects and uses data, and whether to collect data on the number of pupils with Down syndrome through the School Census. The department hopes to confirm the decision shortly.

■ Schools: Mental Health Services

Peter Gibson: **[4274]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of (a) mental health and (b) suicide prevention provision in secondary schools.

David Johnston:

Schools are best placed to decide what mental health and wellbeing support to offer to pupils. The department does not collect detailed data on suicide prevention provision in schools, but asks questions about schools' perceptions of mental health support, as part of its regular omnibus surveys, the results of which are published

here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-and-college-panel-omnibus-surveys-for-2022-to-2023>.

The department is supporting effective whole school approaches to mental health through our commitment to offer all state schools and colleges a grant to train a senior mental health lead by 2025. This includes training on how to make sure they are including processes for identifying individuals or groups who need additional mental health support. There are 14,400 settings that have claimed a grant up to 31 August 2023, including more than 7 in 10 state-funded secondary schools.

To expand access to early mental health support, the department is continuing to roll out Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) to schools and colleges. As of April 2023, MHSTs covered 47% of pupils in secondary schools in England. The department is extending coverage of MHSTs to an estimated 44% of pupils and learners in all schools and colleges by the end of this financial year and at least 50% by the end of March 2025.

Suicide prevention is part of school and system wide approaches to mental health and wellbeing, where schools should promote good mental health in children, provide a supportive environment for those experiencing problems, and help secure access to more specialist help for those who need it.

Schools can teach older pupils about suicide in an age-appropriate and sensitive way. The Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) statutory guidance advises that schools should approach teaching about self-harm and suicide carefully and should be aware of the risks to pupils from exposure to materials that are instructive rather than preventative, including websites or videos that provide instructions or methods of self-harm or suicide.

To support schools to deliver this content effectively, the department has produced teacher training modules. The mental wellbeing module contains key knowledge and facts to help teachers understand what they must teach, and is available to view here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-mental-wellbeing>.

The department has started work on the review of the RSHE statutory guidance. Suicide prevention is one of the key subjects that the department will explore as a priority area, and it will work with a range of experts and those with lived experience to do this.

■ Social Services: Children

Edward Timpson:

[4679]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent progress she has made on implementing the children's social care national framework and dashboard.

David Johnston:

The Children's Social Care National Framework (National Framework), along with proposed Children's Social Care Dashboard (Dashboard) indicators, were published

for consultation at the same time as the government's strategy for children's social care, 'Stable Homes, Built on Love', in February 2023. The National Framework describes the outcomes that children's social care should achieve when supporting children, young people and families. The Dashboard will serve as a learning tool for local and central government. It will have a national set of indicators, to help understand progress towards the children's social care outcomes, and to support learning and improvement at a local, regional, and national level.

The consultation took place over 14 weeks and gathered a range of views from the online consultation and over 30 engagement events that involved around 500 people from local authorities, education, health, and police, as well as members of the public. The government response to the consultation was published in September 2023 and committed to iterating the National Framework, giving more prominence to the important role of practice supervisors, as well as adding a new chapter on how multi-agency working enables good outcomes.

The National Framework will be issued as statutory guidance by the end of the year. Local authorities will have a one-year implementation period, and government has committed to provide advice to local authorities on embedding the National Framework. A phased roll-out of the Dashboard will begin in 2024 so that the department can test, evaluate and iterate the Dashboard.

■ Students: Loans

Martyn Day: [\[4210\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate her Department has made of the average length of time the Student Loans Company takes to refund people who have made an overpayment on their student loan.

Robert Halfon:

The Student Loans Company (SLC) is committed to processing any requests for refunds due to customer overpayments in a timely manner. When a customer gets in touch with SLC about a potential refund, the whole process, including eligibility checks, will typically take around 10 days. However, this can take up to 28 days in some instances.

Martyn Day: [\[4211\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of financial advice available to students before they take out a student loan.

Robert Halfon:

The government provides comprehensive guidance on student loans and grants for students and prospective students in higher education and on how to apply for student support on GOV.UK.

This includes statutory guidance from the Student Loans Company on the terms and conditions for student loans.

Guidance for students is reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis.

■ Teachers: Parents

Munira Wilson:

[\[4577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to retain teachers when they become parents.

Damian Hinds:

Great teaching is transformational for children's life chances, but the department cannot achieve its ambitions unless there are sufficient teachers. The department recognises there is more to do to ensure teaching remains an attractive, high-status profession, and to recruit and retain the best teachers. The department wants teaching to be an inclusive profession where all teachers, regardless of background or circumstance, are supported throughout their career journeys.

The department's 'Teacher Recruitment and Retention' strategy, published in 2019, outlines the department's approach to improving teacher retention, including activities which contribute to supporting teachers returning from parental leave or those with caring responsibilities.

Well-designed flexible working can enable individuals to reconcile work and caring responsibilities. The department is taking action to promote flexible working in schools, including by publishing non-statutory guidance and case studies on GOV.UK, a flexible working toolkit, and funding a programme focused on embedding flexible working in schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs).

This programme includes the delivery of supportive webinars and peer support provided by flexible working ambassador schools and MATs. This funded programme offers practical support with combining flexible working life as a parent, including how flexible working can be navigated alongside career progression.

The department is also clear about the importance of efforts to reduce unnecessary workload and an improved wellbeing offer for all teachers. Workload is often cited as an important reason why teachers leave the profession. The department is supporting schools to act and remove unhelpful practice that creates unnecessary workload. The department's school workload reduction toolkit, developed alongside school leaders, is a helpful resource for schools to review and reduce workload.

In September 2023, the department launched a workload reduction taskforce. The taskforce is made up of union representatives, experts and experienced practitioners. The taskforce will make recommendations to government, Ofsted and school and trust leaders by the end of March 2024.

Staff wellbeing is also crucial to the department's commitment to recruit and retain more teachers and support teacher quality. The department has worked in partnership with the education sector and mental health experts to co-create the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter and is encouraging schools to sign up as a shared

commitment to promote staff wellbeing. Over 3,000 schools and colleges have signed up to the charter since it was launched for sign-up in November 2021.

■ T-levels: Work Experience

Seema Malhotra:

[4175]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of age limits in regulated professions on the ability of colleges to provide industry placements for T-level students.

Robert Halfon:

Regulatory and health and safety considerations vary from sector to sector, including environments where it is acceptable for under-18s to work legally or safely. For industry placements, the same considerations should be made as with any new employee an organisation takes on. For example, many NHS organisations allow under-18s in clinical settings following a risk assessment and after putting in place reasonable adjustments to mitigate the risks.

The department has already built flexibility into the system with provision for placement hours to be delivered in a variety of different methods, including at pathway level or in simulated environments. These delivery models have been put in place to mitigate against situations where it is difficult to accommodate under-18s.

Further information on these approaches can be found at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1166331/Annex_A_industry_placement_delivery_approaches_guidance.pdf.

The department encourages providers to support their local employers in updating risk assessments and putting in place reasonable adjustments to mitigate any risks. Employers may also consider discussing requirements with their insurance provider. More general information on best practice can be found here:

<https://employers.tlevels.gov.uk/hc/en-gb/categories/4403442822418-During-industry-placements>.

■ Uniforms: Low Incomes

Jim Shannon:

[4427]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to support families on low incomes with the cost of school uniforms.

Damian Hinds:

Education is a devolved matter; the response outlines the information for England only, not Northern Ireland.

Rather than subsidising expensive uniform policies with financial assistance, the department published statutory guidance on the cost of school uniform to ensure uniform is affordable for all families. Schools needed to start being compliant with the guidance from September 2022. The guidance is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms>.

Schools must have regard to this guidance when designing and implementing their uniform policy. The guidance requires schools to ensure that their uniform is affordable and secures best value for money for parents.

There is no specific funding for schools to support families to meet the costs of school uniform, but schools may offer additional support in cases of financial hardship where they choose to do so.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Carbon Emissions: Buildings

Geraint Davies:

[\[4783\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to the Answer of 19 May 2023 to Question 185867 on Buildings: Carbon Emissions, what guidance he has issued to (a) owners, (b) operators and (c) occupiers of large buildings on the requirements of the Energy Act 2023.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government's landmark Energy Act 2023 gained Royal Assent on 26 October 2023. While the Department has not issued guidance for owners, operators, or occupiers of large buildings on the requirements of the Energy Act 2023, details of the Act have been published on the Gov.UK website.

■ North Sea Oil

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[\[4232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department expects the proportion of heavy crude oil to increase as a proportion of the UK's North Sea oil production up to 2035.

Amanda Solloway:

The Department expects that the proportion of total UK oil production from heavy oil fields is likely to be broadly the same in 2035 as it is now.

■ North Sea Transition Authority

Caroline Lucas:

[\[4119\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the North Sea Transition Authority for supporting the delivery of the UK's climate targets.

Amanda Solloway:

The North Sea Transition Authority plays a crucial role in helping to achieve the Government's commitment to reach Net Zero emissions by 2050. Its [Strategy](#) reflects the ongoing energy transition and features a range of net zero obligations on the oil

and gas industry, including stepping up efforts to reduce production emissions, supporting carbon capture and storage projects and unlocking clean hydrogen production.

■ Nuclear Power

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[4836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to the policy paper entitled Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener, published on 19 October 2021, when she plans to publish the nuclear roadmap for delivery; and whether her Department has consulted with relevant stakeholders on this roadmap.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government is finalising plans for the civil nuclear roadmap, which will be published soon. The document aims to send a clear signal to industry and set out the Government's role in supporting and enabling the delivery of our nuclear ambitions. The Department regularly engages with the nuclear sector regarding a range of issues, and these have helped inform the priorities for the civil nuclear roadmap.

■ Nuclear Power: Northern Ireland

Jim Shannon:

[\[4158\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of locating a nuclear power project in Northern Ireland.

Andrew Bowie:

The Department has no plans to assess the potential merits of locating a nuclear power project in Northern Ireland. Strategic decisions about siting energy projects are taken in Northern Ireland under the devolution settlement. Specifically, consenting decisions on onshore energy projects are generally determined by the relevant local planning authority, except where a planning application has been directed to the NI Department for Infrastructure or Department for Economy.

■ Offshore Industry: North Sea

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[\[4233\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department expects that new gas and oil produced in the North Sea will be allocated for domestic use.

Amanda Solloway:

The UK is a net importer of both gas and oil. Gas produced in the UK is the equivalent to about half of our demand; offshore crude production is equivalent to around 90 per cent of refinery demand (5-year average 2018-2022). However, due to UK refinery specifications and global market conditions, around 80% of the oil produced in the UK is refined overseas into the products demanded by the UK market. It is not desirable to force private companies to "allocate" oil and gas produced in the North Sea for domestic use.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ Birds of Prey: Conservation****Dan Jarvis:**[\[4436\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to tackle the illegal killing of raptors.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government takes wildlife crime seriously. Bird of prey persecution is a national wildlife crime priority and there are strong penalties in place for offences committed against birds of prey and other wildlife. Defra supports the work of Bird of Prey Crime Priority Delivery Group, which brings together police, government and stakeholders from conservation and country sports organisations to tackle raptor persecution. In 2022 Defra more than doubled its funding of the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) from a total of £495,000 over the three previous years to £1.2 million for the three-year period of 2022-25 to target wildlife crime priorities, in particular crimes against birds of prey. The Home Office is a further core funder of the NWCU. Defra is also providing funding to Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA) to develop DNA forensic analysis for the police and other organisations investigating crimes against peregrine falcons.

■ Dangerous Dogs Act 1991**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[4076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will hold discussions with the RSPCA on possible changes to the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

Robbie Moore:

The Secretary of State always considers representations from stakeholders, including the RSPCA.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Public Expenditure**Liam Byrne:**[\[3582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which spending programmes their Department devolves for administration to (a) local government in England and (b) other local spending bodies; and what the budget is of each such programme for each year for which budgets are agreed.

Mark Spencer:

The Government has set itself a mission that, by 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal, with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution, with a simplified, long-term funding settlement. At Spring Budget, the Government announced the trailblazer devolution deals with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), which included a commitment to introduce single funding settlements at the next Spending Review (SR) for these Combined Authorities. At Autumn Statement,

the Government published a Memorandum of Understanding with GMCA and WMCA, setting out how the single settlements will work. The Government also announced an ambitious new 'level 4' of the devolution framework, including a single transport funding settlement for eligible institutions, and a 'consolidated' pot at the next multi-year SR covering two Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities investment themes – local growth and place, and housing and regeneration. Following successful delivery of the 'consolidated' pot, and learning from the trailblazers, Level 4 institutions will then become eligible to receive a single settlement from the subsequent multi-year SR.

Details of major funding programmes, including those administered by local government or other local bodies, are available on gov.uk.

■ Flood Control

Holly Lynch: [\[900258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Minister for the Cabinet Office on strengthening national flooding preparedness.

Ashley Dalton: [\[900264\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Minister for the Cabinet Office on strengthening national flooding preparedness.

Robbie Moore:

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a wide range of issues, including future flood preparedness, and Cabinet discussions are considered confidential. Preparing for flooding in England remains a priority for Defra and the Environment Agency to protect communities.

■ Food: Waste

Anne McLaughlin: [\[4202\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will reinstate the role of Food Surplus and Waste Champion.

Robbie Moore:

There are no plans to appoint a food waste prevention champion at this time. The objectives set for the champion are now being taken forward by ministers, officials and our delivery partner the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP). The latter includes championing waste reduction through high profile ambassadors in the hospitality sector and well known figures to present Food Waste Action Week.

■ Hornets

Sir Charles Walker:

[\[4362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has considered the potential merits of increasing the resources available to the National Bee Unit to support the (a) identification and (b) elimination of Asian hornet nests in 2024.

Rebecca Pow:

Recognising the invaluable role that the general beekeeping community and the public play in spotting Asian hornets, we ask everyone to look out for Asian hornets and to report any sightings through the Asian hornet app or online. This is a significant resource and supports the work of the National Bee Unit (NBU) in finding and destroying Asian hornet nests.

In 2023, the National Bee Unit (NBU) responded to credible sightings of Asian hornet, resulting in the location and destruction of 72 nests. During the peak period, operating as part of the broader Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), the NBU was able to utilise APHA resources to bolster its capacity as needed.

Looking ahead to 2024, it is difficult to predict the number of nests, but arrangements will be made to ensure that the NBU has access to wider resources.

Sir Charles Walker:

[\[4363\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has taken steps to identify technologies that (a) eradicate Asian hornet colonies and (b) prevent their re-establishment.

Rebecca Pow:

Defra is committed to exploring the use of technology to detect and eradicate Asian hornets. During 2023, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) were deployed to support the National Bee Unit (NBU) in the field but were not successful in locating any nests.

Researchers from the University of Exeter also tested newer, lighter radio tags at a site known to have multiple nests. However, this method was not successful in locating any nests despite a number of attempts. However, the track and trace method which combines a mapping App with GIS data has been successfully used by the NBU to find the large number of nests destroyed this year.

Defra is not aware of any technology that currently exists which is capable of eradicating Asian hornets or preventing their re-establishment.

■ Hornets: Pollinators

Sir Charles Walker:

[\[4361\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Asian hornet on (a) the bee population and (b) the level of crop pollination.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government recognises the essential role played by honey bees and wild pollinators in our environment, acknowledging their contribution to crop pollination. All pollinators collectively contribute over £500 million annually to UK agriculture and food production by enhancing crop quality and quantity. Additionally, pollinators play a vital role in supporting the natural ecosystem.

Asian hornets prey on honey bees and other pollinators so pose a significant threat to the pollination services that these insects provide. To date rapid action has been taken in the UK to find and destroy Asian hornet nests. We would expect that there has been a localised impact on honey bee colonies and other pollinators. The Government remains committed to taking swift and effective contingency action in response to all credible sightings of Asian hornet.

■ Horticulture: Imports**Harriett Baldwin:**[\[4146\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the guidance entitled Apply for CITES permits and certificates to move or trade endangered species, published on 17 July 2019, whether he is taking steps to digitise the end-to-end process for importing horticultural products into the UK.

Rebecca Pow:

A project to move CITES permitting online and improve the functionality of the system used to consider and issue CITES permits and certificates, is nearing completion. The new system is due to be formally rolled out early in the New Year. Interested traders are welcome to join the testing platform, which includes live applications. An assessment of the feasibility of e-permitting for CITES documents is scheduled for a later phase of this ongoing work.

■ Hunting: Animal Products**Ruth Jones:**[\[4265\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what data his Department holds on the number of individuals who have imported hunting trophies in each of the past five years.

Ruth Jones:[\[4266\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what data his Department holds on the species from which the greatest proportion of hunting trophies was imported in each of the past five years.

Ruth Jones:[\[4267\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what data his Department holds on the number of hunting trophies imported in each of the past five years.

Mark Spencer:

The UK records data on import permits for hunting trophies of certain species. An import permit is required for hunting trophies of all species listed on Annex A of the Wildlife Trade Regulations, and 6 species listed on Annex B.

Data on the international trade in endangered species, including information about UK imports of hunting trophies, is published in the CITES trade database (available online at trade.cites.org). The UK has submitted data for 2022 imports, which will be publicly available shortly.

■ Milk: Environment Protection**Ian Byrne:****[4590]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on the comparative environmental impact of (a) plant-based and (b) animal-based milks.

Mark Spencer:

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a wide range of issues, and Cabinet discussions are considered confidential.

■ Milk: Plants**Ian Byrne:****[4589]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if his Department will take steps to encourage consumption of plant-based milks.

Mark Spencer:

The Government does not promote the consumption of one category of food over another but wants consumers to have access to a range of healthy and nutritious food and drink, as set out in the Eatwell Guide, to suit dietary tastes. This includes both animal products and alternative options.

Ian Byrne:**[4591]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to enable manufacturers of plant-based milks to label them as plant-based milks rather than plant-based drinks.

Mark Spencer:

Existing law regulates the labelling of milk and milk products and plant-based alternatives. The Government has no plans to bring forward legislation in this area.

■ Moorland: Fire Prevention**Jim Shannon:****[2894]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to help reduce the risk of wildfires breaking out on moorland.

Rebecca Pow:

Defra is a key stakeholder in the [Wildfire Framework for England](#). The Department's responsibilities are laid out in the framework, with the aim of mitigating the impacts of wildfire across England, including on moorlands.

Defra also fund a training programme designed to consolidate knowledge, skills and understanding of vegetation fires including wildfire incidents and prescribed fire operations. Since its development in 2021, more than 1,000 Lantra accredited training modules have been completed by both public and private land managers.

■ Nature Conservation**Caroline Lucas:****[4118]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for what reason he plans that the public consultation on the definition of irreplaceable habitats and principles for compensation for use in the Biodiversity Net Gain system due to come into force from January 2024 will be launched in the second half of 2024.

Rebecca Pow:

Biodiversity net gain will become mandatory for most major new development from January 2024, for small sites from April 2024 and for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects from 2025. When mandatory biodiversity net gain comes into force, the list of irreplaceable habitat for biodiversity net gain purposes will broadly mirror the existing list within planning policy.

The consultation will launch in the second half of 2024 to allow stakeholders time to adapt to the new mandatory requirement and evidence to be gathered from the early phase of implementation, as well as to allow Defra time to consider the impact of any new list or definition on wider planning policy.

We have published the [draft secondary regulations on irreplaceable habitat](#).

■ Recycling: Innovation**Jim Shannon:****[4419]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of funding innovative recycling ideas.

Robbie Moore:

Defra supports the funding of innovative recycling projects across the country. To support our ambitious goals to recycle plastic film, Defra alongside the Flexible Plastic Fund, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Zero Waste Scotland, is funding a multi-million-pound pilot project on flexible plastic kerbside collections. This is part of Defra's funding of the £60 million UKRI's Smart Sustainable Plastic Packaging (SSPP) programme and will support the nationwide introduction of plastic film collections from households and businesses from 31 March 2027. Through the SSPP, Defra has also supported a project to develop food-grade recycled polypropylene in the UK, the first of its kind.

■ Sugar Beet

Dr Dan Poulter:

[\[4724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help support negotiations between sugar beet growers and British Sugar PLC.

Mark Spencer:

The Government is committed to promoting fairness across the food supply chain, with risk and reward being properly shared, therefore we recognise the importance of sugar beet farmers receiving a price agreed for their 2024 sugar beet crop that benefits both growers and processors, in the context of the global market.

Defra had discussion with all parties and were pleased to see NFU Sugar and British Sugar resume negotiations and continuing with the well-established process in place which is designed to be independent between both parties.

It is very important that all parties involved now continue to follow that process and reach a mutually acceptable outcome.

■ Tree Planting

Wendy Chamberlain:

[\[4861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what information his Department holds on the number of trees planted during this Parliament.

Rebecca Pow:

The Forestry Commission produces statistics on all new planting of woodland for the UK. These can be found in [Forestry Statistics](#) on the Forest Research website. These statistics are reported for each financial year in thousands of hectares. The latest available figures are for 2022-23 published in September 2023.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Afghanistan: Refugees

Ruth Jones:

[\[4263\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has taken steps to help Pakistan create a commission for managing matters relating to Afghan refugees in that country.

Leo Docherty:

The UK Government continues to monitor the return of Afghans from Pakistan, including the humanitarian and human rights implications. We are working closely with Pakistan, the United Nations and other international partners to support vulnerable undocumented people returning to Afghanistan. Pakistan has a long history of welcoming vulnerable refugees and we urge them to respect the human rights of all Afghans in Pakistan. Since September, we have committed £18.5 million

to the International Organisation for Migration in Afghanistan to support those returning from Pakistan and Iran.

■ **British Nationals Abroad: Detainees**

Patrick Grady: [\[4879\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help secure the release of UK nationals who are being arbitrary detained overseas.

David Rutley:

The FCDO takes all allegations of human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, seriously. We tailor our support to British nationals depending on their specific circumstances, and what we consider to be in their best interests. Where appropriate, we raise allegations with the local authorities, often engaging at the highest levels. We expect all States to abide by their international human rights obligations.

■ **Climate Change: Finance**

Caroline Lucas: [\[4120\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if his Department will pledge (a) new and (b) additional finance to the Loss and Damage fund at COP28.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The UK is committed to honouring the agreements reached at COP27 and at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) Transitional Committee to operationalise the loss and damage fund. The UK was therefore delighted to announce up to £60 million on Day 1 of COP28: £40 million for the new fund and a further £20 million for funding arrangements. To deliver for the most vulnerable at the scale required, it is critical the fund can receive finance from the widest range of sources, including innovative sources, to complement grants and concessional loans.

Caroline Lucas: [\[4121\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the discussions ahead of COP28 on the World Bank potentially hosting the Loss and Damage fund for an interim period, what diplomatic steps his Department is taking to help ensure that the World Bank (a) meets the needs of communities most affected by loss and damage and (b) is accessible for local organisations and actors during this interim period.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The Government recognises that it is the most vulnerable who face the harshest realities of climate change, and too little climate finance reaches the local level. We will deploy our position and funding to work with the World Bank and others to ensure effective targeting of funding, including in line with our White Paper commitments to

localisation. The UK will continue to champion a significant minimum allocation floor for Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States within the Fund, as agreed in the text adopted by COP28 on Day 1.

Caroline Lucas:

[\[4122\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of delays to the delivery of the \$100 billion global climate finance target on negotiations at COP28.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The UK championed delivery of the collective \$100 billion climate finance goal through our COP26 Presidency. We regret that the goal is being met later than expected, but welcome the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report published on 16 November, which sets out that \$89.6 billion of climate finance was delivered in 2021 and states that, based on preliminary data, the \$100 billion goal is likely to have been met in 2022. The UK is committed to playing its part in delivering the \$100 billion goal, and will spend £11.6 billion on international climate finance by 2025/26.

■ Development Aid

Lisa Nandy:

[\[4414\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department takes to ensure that UK aid is administered in a way which does not discriminate based on religion or belief.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

As stated in the International Development White Paper published last month, upholding Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is vital for open and inclusive societies. We will ensure that UK development policies are inclusive of people who are marginalised for their religion or belief. Equality issues are routinely considered during the approval process for all our aid programmes. We provide guidance and capability building to ensure that all programmes consider the Public Sector Equality Duty and assess how their interventions will impact on those with protected characteristics, including religion or belief.

■ Development Aid: Climate Change

Caroline Lucas:

[\[4123\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference the Written Statement of 17 October 2023, HCWS1071, on International Climate Finance, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of reclassification of the UK's international climate finance contributions on the UK's partnerships with climate-vulnerable countries.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

We continue to work closely and effectively with climate-vulnerable countries. The Written Ministerial Statement published on 17 October showed that we have already

spent over £3.2 billion of International Climate Finance in 2021/22 and 2022/23. It also sets out the trajectory of spend for the remaining three years of the commitment, providing all-important certainty and predictability for our developing country partners. This followed the announcement in early September, by the Prime Minister, of the UK contribution to the Green Climate Fund of \$2 billion, the biggest single funding commitment the UK has made to help the developing countries tackle climate change.

■ Development Aid: Education

Seema Malhotra:

[\[4178\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how much and what proportion of UK Official Development Assistance spending has been on (a) 16-19 education, (b) adult education and (c) education in total in each of the last 10 years.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

Education is an important international development priority. From 2013 to 2022, the UK is estimated to have spent £6.9 billion of bilateral education Official Development Assistance (ODA). Of this, £1 billion was spent on secondary education and £1 billion on post-secondary education including scholarships. The UK is estimated to have spent £2.3 billion in multilateral education ODA from 2012 to 2021. Of this, £451 million was spent on secondary education and £381 million was spent on post-secondary education. Annual breakdowns of UK ODA spend on education, including as a proportion of total spend, are available here:

[<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-international-development>]

■ Diplomatic Service: Staff

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[3613\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, in which overseas countries are there no resident diplomatic staff from (a) his Department and (b) other Departments.

David Rutley:

(a) The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has a network of 281 officially designated overseas Posts. It does not currently have diplomatic staff permanently resident in the countries listed below. However, the list includes countries in which we have officially designated Posts which are temporarily suspended and diplomatic staff operate elsewhere for political or operational reasons (Afghanistan, North Korea, Sudan, Syria, Yemen) or do not have diplomatic staff in permanent residence (Haiti, Burundi). Locations defined as UK territories are excluded. Information about the FCDO overseas network is available at [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/list-of-foreign-office-posts>]

(b) The reporting of other government departments overseas staff locations is not the responsibility of the FCDO.

Afghanistan

Andorra

Benin

Bhutan

Burkina Faso

Burundi

Cape Verde

Central African Republic

Comoros

Congo

Dominica

East Timor

Equatorial Guinea

Gabon

Guinea-Bissau

Haiti

Honduras

Kiribati

Liechtenstein

Marshall Islands

Federated States of Micronesia

Monaco

Nauru

Nicaragua

North Korea

Palau

St Kitts and Nevis

San Marino

Afghanistan

Sao Tome and Principe

Sudan

Suriname

Syria

Togo

Tuvalu

Yemen

■ Embassies: Flags

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[4652\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what his Department's policy is on the flying of the Union flag at UK embassies and consulates.

David Rutley:

The FCDO's flag flying policy is that all our buildings at home and overseas should fly the Union, Diplomatic, or Consular flag, as appropriate, throughout the year on working days during office hours. The Union flag is flown in the UK and at our Missions and Residences in Commonwealth countries with the Diplomatic flag being flown at Sovereign Posts in other countries. The Consular flag is flown at subordinate Posts in non-Commonwealth countries. Heads of Mission have discretion to fly their flag 24/7 where this is acceptable locally, saves resources and does not pose a security risk.

■ Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Caroline Lucas:

[\[4126\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 24 November 2023 to Question 2123 on Gaza: Humanitarian Aid, what information his Department holds on the number of tonnes of aid that (a) were required and (b) entered Gaza each week since 9 October 2023.

David Rutley:

The FCDO is actively engaging with international partners and those operating on the ground to do all we can to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. However, the flow of aid into and through Gaza continues to be insufficient and we are urgently exploring all diplomatic options to increase this, including urging Israel to open other existing land border crossings such as Kerem Shalom. Since 9 October, at least 1,479 trucks have entered Gaza. Despite an increase in supplies entering Gaza since the pause began, the volume of incoming commodities is still insufficient to meet the

extensive needs. The total number of trucks that entered Gaza between 26th and 29th November is unclear as many have continued to be processed during the evening hours. The UK continues to support humanitarian aid provision, with a total amount delivered via British aircraft of 74 tonnes. The Foreign Secretary also announced an additional £30million, trebling our existing aid budget for the Occupied Palestinian Territories for the year. The UK continues to call for pauses that focus on humanitarian aid delivery.

Kim Leadbeater:

[4307]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made representations to his Israeli counterpart on allowing aid to enter Gaza directly through the Karem Shalom crossing.

David Rutley:

The FCDO is actively engaging with international partners and those operating on the ground to do all we can to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary engage regularly and closely with regional counterparts including Israel and Egypt on the humanitarian response. However, the flow of aid into and through Gaza continues to be insufficient and we are urgently exploring all diplomatic options to increase this, including urging Israel to open other existing land border crossings such as Kerem Shalom. Fuel remains a critical component - without sufficient aid, fuel cannot be distributed by humanitarian organisations and hospitals, bakeries as well as desalination plants cannot operate. We are also actively exploring other routes for aid to get into Gaza. The UK Government has already announced £60 million in humanitarian funding and has sent more than 74 tonnes of emergency relief for civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

■ Gaza: Internally Displaced People

Kim Leadbeater:

[4309]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether it is his policy that civilians displaced from the north of Gaza should be able to return when it is safe for them to do so.

Kim Leadbeater:

[4310]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to support reconstruction in Gaza; and what support his Department has provided to Palestinians affected by the conflict.

David Rutley:

Civilians displaced from the north of Gaza should only return home only when it is safe to do so and in a dignified and voluntary manner.

The FCDO is actively engaging with international partners and those operating on the ground to do all we can to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary engage regularly and closely with regional

counterparts including Israel and Egypt on the humanitarian response. However, the flow of aid into and through Gaza continues to be insufficient and we are urgently exploring all diplomatic options to increase this, including urging Israel to open other existing land border crossings such as Kerem Shalom. Fuel remains a critical component - without sufficient aid, fuel cannot be distributed by humanitarian organisations and hospitals, bakeries as well as desalination plants cannot operate. We are also actively exploring other routes for aid to get into Gaza. The UK Government has already announced £60 million in humanitarian funding and has sent more than 74 tonnes of emergency relief for civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

■ **Gaza: Israel**

Robert Courts:

[R] [\[4863\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterparts on reports on the presence of a tunnel beneath Al-Shifa Hospital.

David Rutley:

The UK cannot comment on specific reports. However, it is clear that Hamas has put Palestinians at grave risk by embedding themselves in the civilian population and using civilians as human shields. The Foreign Secretary visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 23 November, where he met President Isaac Herzog, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Eli Cohen and other senior Israeli interlocutors to discuss the conflict. We are also clear that, in pursuing its legitimate right to self-defence against Hamas, Israel's military actions in Gaza must be carried out in accordance with International Humanitarian Law and Israel must take all possible measures to protect civilians.

■ **Global Disinformation Index: Finance**

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[4806\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what funding his Department has provided to the Global Disinformation Index to assess media markets overseas in this financial year.

Leo Docherty:

The FCDO has not provided any funding to the Global Disinformation Index this financial year.

■ **Israel: Palestinians**

Kim Leadbeater:

[\[4306\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether the Government has taken steps to condemn settler violence and forced displacements since the start of the war in Israel and Gaza.

David Rutley:

Reports of Palestinian civilians being murdered by settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are appalling. The rapidly deteriorating human rights situation, increasing settler violence, high casualties, and mass arrests, is creating an environment conducive to increased risks of atrocities and intercommunal violence. As the Foreign Secretary said on 24 November, violence by settlers in Occupied Palestinian Territories is completely unacceptable. In addition, the joint G7 Foreign Ministers statement of 8 November, includes a point from the UK making clear that settler violence undermines security in the West Bank and threatens prospects for a lasting peace. Israel must prevent these acts of violence and hold those responsible to account. We are also clear that, in pursuing its legitimate right to self-defence against Hamas, Israel's military actions in Gaza must be carried out in accordance with International Humanitarian Law and Israel must take all possible measures to protect civilians. The Foreign Secretary highlighted the gravity of the crisis in his recent meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Cohen during his visit to Israel on 23 November. The Foreign Secretary has also stressed the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population.

■ Nicaragua: Human Rights**Ruth Jones:**[\[4558\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his Department's policies of reports that eight priests previously under house arrest have been transferred to El Chipote prison in Nicaragua, in the context of human rights.

David Rutley:

Reports of harassment and arbitrary detention, including against the church and its representatives, represent an unacceptable degradation of Nicaraguans' civil, political, and other human rights. Acts by the Ortega Government to restrict these rights, including the arrest of clergy, confiscation of Church property and the rescinding of legal permits and operating licences for Church affiliated institutions are of deep concern. We continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of affected clergy and all others wrongly deprived of their freedom in Nicaragua.

■ Occupied Territories: International Criminal Court**Kim Leadbeater:**[\[4308\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether the UK recognises the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court in (a) Gaza and (b) other Occupied Palestinian Territories; and if he will support an urgent investigation by that Court into all allegations of breaches of humanitarian law in the current conflict.

David Rutley:

The UK is a strong supporter of international justice and the independence of the International Criminal Court (ICC). As an independent organisation, it is for the ICC

Prosecutor to decide upon the focus of his investigations. Whether violations of International Humanitarian Law have occurred depends upon detailed knowledge of the operation, including the precise nature of the target, the methods used to attack, and the attacking party's knowledge and anticipated military advantage in launching that attack. The UK continues to call for International Humanitarian Law to be respected and civilians to be protected.

■ Sudan: Minority Groups

Carla Lockhart: [\[4595\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with the Sudanese authorities on the protection of religious minorities.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The UK has consistently denounced all human rights violations that have taken place in Sudan since the military coup in October 2021, including the escalation in abuses since conflict broke out in April. We are not aware of any significant increase in the discrimination or persecution of religious minorities in the country since April. We engage regularly with, and support the work of, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who continue to monitor this.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Air Pollution: Greater London

Geraint Davies: [\[4776\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Answer of 11 May 2023 to Question 183644 on Air Pollution: Greater London, whether the fraction of mortality attributable to particulate air pollution measured as PM2.5 should be multiplied by the (a) number of deaths from all causes aged 30 years and older and (b) total number of deaths to calculate the number of deaths attributable to PM2.5.

Maria Caulfield:

The fraction of mortality attributable to particulate air pollution, measured as PM2.5, for Greater London in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 was provided in the answer of 11 May 2023 to Question [183644](#). The provided values represented the percentage of annual deaths from all causes in those aged 30 and older attributed to PM2.5.

In estimating the burden of long-term exposure to air pollution mixture in 2019 in the United Kingdom, namely 29,000 to 43,000 deaths for adults aged 30 years old and over, the total number of deaths for that age group was used. A report detailing a methodology that local authorities can use to estimate local mortality burdens associated with particulate air pollution within their area was published by the former Public Health England, now the UK Health Security Agency, in 2014.

■ Ambulance Services: Rural Areas

Daisy Cooper:

[3353]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of closures of community ambulance stations on people living in rural areas.

Helen Whately:

No specific assessment has been made by the Department. Decisions on the provision of local services, including the location of ambulance stations, are a matter for local National Health Service commissioners working with NHS providers and must be taken in the best interests of patients and the local population.

Ambulance trusts will regularly meet with their commissioners to discuss performance within their localities including ambulance response times.

We recognise the significant pressure the ambulance service is facing which is why we published our Delivery Plan for Recovering Urgent and Emergency Care Services. This aims to deliver one of the fastest and longest sustained improvements in waiting times in the NHS's history, with an ambition to reduce Category 2 response times to 30 minutes on average this year, with further improvements down towards pre-pandemic levels next year.

■ Care Workers: Recruitment

Vicky Foxcroft:

[4478]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to increase the number of social care workers.

Helen Whately:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Strangford on 30 November 2023 to Question [3222](#).

■ Dementia: Continuing Care

Damien Moore:

[4249]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the process for assessing the eligibility of dementia patients for continuing healthcare funding.

Helen Whately:

Eligibility for National Health Service Continuing Healthcare (CHC) is not determined by age, diagnosis or condition, or financial means; it is assessed on a case-by-case basis considering the totality of an individual's needs. This ensures a person-centred approach to CHC, whereby the individual is placed at the centre of the assessment and care-planning process. We continue to work with our partners, including NHS England who are responsible for oversight of CHC delivery, external organisations, and people with lived experience, to seek feedback on CHC policy and implementation.

■ Dementia: Health Services**Jim Shannon:**[\[4421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress she has made on delivering the NHS Long Term Plan's priorities on dementia prevention.

Helen Whately:

In keeping with the commitments made in the NHS Long Term Plan, a dementia element was added to the NHS Health Check programme for healthcare professionals to talk to their patients about how they can reduce their dementia risk, such as by maintaining their social life, keeping mentally and physically active and stopping smoking.

■ Dementia: Research**Caroline Lucas:**[\[3766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to her Department's Press Release entitled, Prime Minister launches Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Mission, published 14 August 2023, what is her expected timeline to meet the Government's commitment to double dementia research funding in 2024.

Helen Whately:

The Government is strongly committed to supporting research into dementia. In our 2019 manifesto we committed to double funding for dementia research. We will double funding for dementia research to £160 million per year by 2024/25.

Government responsibility for delivering dementia research is shared between the Department of Health and Social Care, with research delivered by the National Institute for Health and Care Research, and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, with research delivered via UK Research and Innovation. The Government spent over £413 million on dementia research from 2017/18 to 2021/22. Spend for dementia research is calculated retrospectively and is usually finalised around eight months after the end of the financial year, therefore 2021/22 is the most recent year we have full data for.

■ Health: Disadvantaged**Catherine West:**[\[4723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Answer of 26 January 2023 to Question 128715 on Health: Disadvantages, what plans she has to expand the Major Conditions Strategy to address ethnic and gender disparities.

Andrew Stephenson:

As part of the policy development process, the Major Conditions Strategy will consider the full range of health disparities that may be experienced by different groups, including ethnic and gender disparities.

■ Hospitals: Staff

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[4986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to increase retention levels of experienced hospital staff.

Andrew Stephenson:

The NHS People Plan and the People Promise set out a comprehensive range of actions to improve staff retention. They provide a strong focus on creating a more modern, compassionate and inclusive culture within the National Health Service by strengthening health and wellbeing, equality and diversity, culture and leadership and flexible working.

NHS priorities and operational planning guidance 23/24 has asked systems to refresh their 2022/23 whole system workforce plans to improve staff retention through a systematic focus on all elements of the NHS People Promise. Staff wellbeing should be strategically aligned with elective recovery plans, including workforce demand and capacity planning. In addition, the NHS Retention Programme is continuously seeking to understand why staff leave, resulting in targeted interventions to support staff to stay whilst keeping them well.

The Long Term Workforce Plan builds on the People Plan and sets out how to improve culture and leadership to ensure that up to 130,000 fewer staff leave the NHS over the next 15 years. This includes measures to help retain experienced staff, such as implementing plans to improve flexible opportunities for prospective retirees and delivering the actions needed to modernise the NHS pension scheme.

■ Memory Clinics: Standards

Jim Shannon:

[\[4160\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make it her policy to establish national standards for (a) referral and (b) waiting times for memory assessment services.

Helen Whately:

The Dementia Care Pathway: Full implementation guidance was commissioned by NHS England. This document outlines the dementia care pathway and associated benchmarks to support improvements in the delivery and quality of care and support, for people living with dementia and their families and carers. The guidance includes information on key roles and activity for both primary care services and memory assessment services to facilitate an accurate and timely diagnosis of dementia, while ensuring access to appropriate support following diagnosis.

The guide also sets out an aspiration to increase the number of people being diagnosed with dementia, and starting treatment, within six weeks from referral, and showcases good-practice examples of services that have successfully reduced their waiting times. More information is available at the following link:

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/nccmh/dementia/nccmh-dementia-care-pathway-full-implementation-guidance.pdf>

■ NHS Learning Support Fund: Pharmacy

Kim Johnson:

[5132]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what reason students studying Masters of Pharmacy courses do not qualify for support from the NHS Learning Support Fund.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Learning Support Fund (LSF) is available only to those courses which were eligible for the NHS Bursary prior to the 2017 reforms, and therefore, subjects such as pharmacy are outside of the scope of the LSF arrangements.

■ Palliative Care

Rachael Maskell:

[4708]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding the Government has spent on research into improving palliative care in the last five years.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Department invests in research on palliative and end of life care through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). Between 2017/2018 and 2022/23, the NIHR Research Programmes spent approximately £22.3 million pounds on palliative and end of life care research.

■ Skin Diseases: Health Services

Jim Shannon:

[4684]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to provide training to (a) GPs and (b) specialists to help improve the time taken to (i) diagnose and (ii) refer patients with inflammatory skin conditions.

Andrew Stephenson:

All health professionals involved in assessing, caring for and treating people with inflammatory skin conditions should have sufficient and appropriate training and competence.

General practitioners are responsible for ensuring that their own clinical knowledge remains up-to-date, and for identifying learning needs as part of their continuing professional development. This activity should include taking account of new research and developments in guidance, such as that produced by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills relevant to their role as generalist community-based doctors. This includes understanding how to recognise common skin conditions and instigate appropriate treatment.

Individual employers are responsible for investing in post-registration training, ensuring that staff are trained and competent to carry out their role and are adequately supported throughout their training. All training undertaken by post-registration qualified staff should be in line with national and local guidelines covering the training being undertaken. Dermatologists will have knowledge and familiarity with inflammatory skin conditions and should be aware of care pathways for those living with inflammatory skin conditions.

■ Social Services: Fees and Charges

Vicky Foxcroft:

[\[4479\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she plans to reform the social care charging system.

Helen Whately:

As announced in the Autumn Statement 2022, we listened to the concerns of local government and took the difficult decision to delay the planned adult social care charging reforms. To ensure that these highly ambitious reforms are successful and to avoid destabilising the system, it is vital that we work with the sector to ensure that local authorities have the capacity and readiness to deliver reform successfully.

We are committed to working with local authorities to build preparedness, and the Government has made available up to £8.1 billion to put the adult social care system on a stronger financial footing.

HOME OFFICE

■ Asylum

Dan Carden:

[\[4245\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the Minister for Immigration's oral contribution on Monday 27 November 2023, column 536, what the evidential basis is for many people claiming asylum in the UK being economic migrants making spurious claims to game the system.

Robert Jenrick:

A wide body of evidence points towards key pull factors to the UK including language, diaspora, presence of friends and family, economic opportunity, and availability of education. That is why we have no plans to change right to work provisions and are trebling fines for illegal working.

■ Asylum: Rwanda

Alison Thewliss:

[\[2911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 2159 on Asylum: Rwanda, where on the Gov.uk website

information on legal fees for R (on the application of AAA (Syria) and others) v Secretary of State for the Home Department and related cases is available.

Robert Jenrick:

The answer to Question 2159 was corrected on 21 November to give a link to the published data, which was provided to the Home Affairs Select Committee.

■ **Asylum: Temporary Accommodation**

Christian Wakeford: [4298]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that private providers contracted to run asylum accommodation services deliver on their contractual obligations.

Christian Wakeford: [4299]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that the safety and wellbeing of asylum seekers is prioritised while in asylum accommodation.

Robert Jenrick:

We have a robust governance framework in place to manage service delivery of the Asylum Accommodation Support Contracts (AASC). Details of the AASC can be found at:

New asylum accommodation contracts awarded - GOV.UK

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-asylum-accommodation-contracts-awarded>

The Statement of Requirements sets out the delivery standards providers are required to meet. It also sets out provider obligations in adherence to legislation such as the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010 as well as duties such as under section 55 of the Border, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, and the children's duty, to safeguard children from harm and promote their welfare.

The Home Office has published Key Performance Indicator statistics covering the contractual obligations accommodation providers and others working in the asylum sector are required to deliver. This has been done since April 2020. This data is available on [.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

In all proposed accommodation sites, our accommodation providers work through a standardised regulatory checklist to verify the appropriateness of the site, including a detailed risk-assessment in advance of use. We work with our providers to carry out due diligence checks which include all relevant health and safety checks to ensure a site is able to operate in a legally compliant manner with all relevant standards met. We have also recently invested in ensuring these checks consider the mental and wellbeing aspects of asylum seekers and we are committed to working with all relevant providers to improve and build on the high service standards we expect.

Christian Wakeford: [\[4300\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an estimate of the average level of profit that private providers have made running asylum accommodation in the most recent period for which data is available.

Robert Jenrick:

It would not be appropriate to comment on commercial arrangements with suppliers.

All Home Office commercial contracts are designed to ensure the best value for tax payers and the Home Office closely monitors its contractors performance, including financial results. Any profits above the agreed contractual margins come back to the Home Office.

Sir Stephen Timms: [\[4612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of complaints concerning asylum accommodation were escalated to (a) the accommodation provider and (b) his Department in 2023.

Robert Jenrick:

The data requested cannot be provided as it comes from live operational databases that have not been quality assured.

■ Biometric Residence Permits

Stephen Morgan: [\[3929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many Biometric Residence Permits were issued within 10 days of a person receiving their decision confirming their refugee status since 1 August 2023.

Stephen Morgan: [\[3930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many Biometric Residence Permits have been reported as not received by those with newly granted refugee status since 1 August 2023.

Robert Jenrick:

The waiting times for biometric residence permits (BRP) are dictated by the BRP production and delivery processes.

We aim to deliver a BRP within 7 working days of the immigration decision. BRPs are produced at the secure delivery facility (Driver and Vehicle Licencing Agency (DVLA)) within 48 hours of the production request being made and are collected by our secure delivery partner the same day. Our secure delivery partner (FedEx) aims to attempt to deliver the BRPs within 48 hours of receipt of the BRPs. This equates to a minimum of 5 working days from date of production request being made to delivery of the BRP. We have added an additional 2 working days to the timeline advised to applicants to allow us to resolve any production issues.

Since 1st April 2022, DVLA have produced all BRPs within 48 hours of the production request, with 99.5% being produced within 24 hours. Since 1st April 2022, our Secure

Delivery Partners, FedEx and Royal Mail Group have attempted to deliver over 99% of BRPs within 48 hours, and delivered over 80% of BRPs successfully on first delivery attempt.

Information on incorrect or returned deliveries is not publicly available, and so we are unable to answer this question.

Statistics regarding the individual production time of each BRP from the time a decision is made is not available publicly and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Matt Western:

[\[4240\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the recent technical issue with the processing and issuing of Biometric Resident Permits has been; what steps his Department is taking to resolve that issue; and what estimate he has made of when that work will be complete.

Robert Jenrick:

Incidences of technical issues preventing BRP card production are extremely low, and no systemic issues have been identified.

Where individual card requests do fail, operational case working teams and IT Support endeavour to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

For any case that cannot be resolved immediately, the Employer Checking and Landlord Checking Services are available to provide support to customers to verify their immigration status and permission to work and rent properties in the UK.

■ Defending Democracy Taskforce

Sir Robert Buckland:

[\[4143\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he plans to take to support the work of the Defending Democracy Taskforce in the next 12 months.

Tom Tugendhat:

The *Defending Democracy Taskforce* is an enduring government function which seeks to protect the democratic integrity of the UK from threats of foreign interference in our democratic processes, institutions and society.

The Prime Minister asked me to set up and lead the Taskforce as a cross-Government endeavour. As a cross-departmental and inter-agency initiative it is already supported by ministers and officials from a range of departments, including the Home Office, the Cabinet Office, DSIT, DLUHC, law enforcement, the UK intelligence community and Parliament, amongst others.

The work done by the Taskforce to defend democracy will remain vital over the next 12 months.

■ Demonstrations: Palestinians

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[4134\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has made an assessment of the potential role of foreign state actors in pro-Palestinian protests in London.

Tom Tugendhat:

Whilst we do not routinely comment on operational or intelligence matters, any potential national security threats to the UK are continually assessed and where there are concerns, these are thoroughly investigated, and action taken where necessary and proportionate.

The management of protests, including the resourcing, is an operational matter for the police.

■ Drugs: Crime

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[4411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what guidance his Department provides on the enforcement of offences relating to Category B drugs.

Chris Philp:

The police have a range of powers at their disposal to deal with drug-related offences and how police choose to pursue investigations is an operational decision for Chief Constables. However, we are clear that we expect them to enforce the law.

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 sets out the penalties related to Class B drugs. Under the Act, possession of a Class B drug can be penalised by up to five years in prison, an unlimited fine or both. Supply or production of a Class B drug can be penalised by up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both. Where appropriate and proportionate, officers can issue an Out of Court Disposal.

■ Hate Crime: Transphobia

Dan Carden:

[\[4518\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help tackle the causes of transphobic hate crimes.

Chris Philp:

This Government is clear that all forms of hate crime are completely unacceptable, and we have a robust legislative framework to respond to hate crimes which target transgender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and disability. We expect the police fully to investigate these abhorrent offences and make sure those who commit them feel the full force of the law.

Whilst part of the increase in transgender hate crime may be due to a genuine rise, the biggest driver is likely to be general improvements in police recording. The police are also better at identifying whether a crime is a hate crime, along with increased

victim willingness to come forward. This is positive and reflects the hard work that has gone in to ensuring that police can target their resources, understand the scale of the challenge and ensure that victims get the support they need.

Our absolute priority is to get more police onto our streets, cut crime, protect the public and bring more criminals to justice. We are supporting the police by providing them with the resources they need. This has included the recruitment of 20,000 additional police officers by March 2023.

The Government continues to fund True Vision, an online hate crime reporting portal, designed so that victims of all forms of hate crime do not have to visit a police station to report. We also continue to fund the National Online Hate Crime Hub, a central capability designed to support individual local police forces in dealing with online hate crime. The Hub provides expert advice to police forces to support them in investigating these despicable offences.

The Government is providing over £3m of funding, between 10 August 2021 and 31 March 2024, to five anti-bullying organisations to support schools to tackle bullying. This includes projects targeting bullying of particular groups, such as those who are victims of hate-related bullying and homophobic, biphobic and transphobic based bullying. The providers are the Anti-Bullying Alliance, Diversity Role Models, EqualITeach, Anne Frank Trust and the Diana Award.

Stephen Morgan:

[\[4524\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to tackle the causes of changes in the level of transphobic hate crimes.

Chris Philp:

This Government is clear that all forms of hate crime are completely unacceptable, and we have a robust legislative framework to respond to hate crimes which target transgender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and disability. We expect the police fully to investigate these abhorrent offences and make sure those who commit them feel the full force of the law.

Whilst part of the increase in transgender hate crime may be due to a genuine rise, the biggest driver is likely to be general improvements in police recording. The police are also better at identifying whether a crime is a hate crime, along with increased victim willingness to come forward. This is positive and reflects the hard work that has gone in to ensuring that police can target their resources, understand the scale of the challenge and ensure that victims get the support they need.

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to report. We also continue to fund the National Online Hate Crime Hub, a central capability designed to support individual local police forces in dealing with online hate crime. The Hub provides expert advice to police forces to support them in investigating these despicable offences.

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■ Lasers: Children

Sarah Olney: [\[4224\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he plans to take steps with Cabinet colleagues to prevent purchases of laser pens by people under the age of 18.

Chris Philp:

The are no current plans to introduce such legislation.

The Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Act 2018 sets out that it is an offence to shine or direct a laser beam towards a moving vehicle or a vehicle about to move.

■ Passports

Sarah Olney: [\[4226\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many instances of passports being damaged by foreign border control agents have been reported to his Department in each of the last three years.

Robert Jenrick:

Where a passport is declared as damaged as part of an application to replace a British passport, His Majesty's Passport Office does not require information to be provided as to the cause of the damage for the application to progress.

Should a customer choose to inform HM Passport Office of the cause of damage to their passport and the information be recorded, the data is not held in a reportable format and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

■ Passports: Fees and Charges

Sarah Olney: [\[4225\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of waiving the cost of passport renewal in the event that renewal is required as a result of a passport having been damaged by a (a) UK and (b) foreign border control agent.

Robert Jenrick:

The circumstances where a passport fee may be waived are set out in the Passport (Fees) Regulations 2022. Further waivers to the passport fee would result in a reduction in income for covering the costs of administering a passport application, which may result in an increase in other passport fees or an increase to the burden upon the taxpayer.

In the circumstances where a passport has been damaged when being used for processing at a country's border, His Majesty's Passport Office would advise the holder to follow the complaints process of the relevant border agency.

Police: County Durham and Darlington**Peter Gibson:****[4273]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he plans to take steps to increase the number of police officers in (a) County Durham and (b) Darlington.

Chris Philp:

The Government has delivered its manifesto commitment to deliver 20,000 additional officers. At the end of March 2023, we had the highest number of officers on record in England and Wales, with 149,566 officers in post surpassing the previous peak of 146,030 officers in post in March 2010 (the latest uplift data can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-officer-uplift-final-position-as-at-march-2023/police-officer-uplift-final-position-as-at-march-2023>).

Durham Police recruited 239 additional uplift officers against a total three-year allocation of 225 officers. On 31 March 2023, there were 1,379 police officers in Durham, a total growth of 241 additional officers against the baseline (1,138) at the start of the Police Uplift Programme.

We expect forces to maintain officer numbers at uplift levels.

Decisions on how officers are deployed are a local operational matter for Chief Constables working with locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners.

Police: Mental Health**Rachel Hopkins:****[4762]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department is taking to help support police officers with mental health issues.

Rachel Hopkins:**[4763]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much funding his Department provided to help support police officers' mental health in each year since 2019.

Rachel Hopkins:

[\[4764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if his Department will commission research into the potential work-related causes of police officer suicides and attempted suicides.

Chris Philp:

This Government takes the physical and mental health of the police workforce very seriously and we are committed to making improvements in wellbeing support for officers and staff. Since 2019, the Home Office has provided over £14m to the National Police Wellbeing Service. The Service is helping forces to identify where there is most risk of impacts on mental health, and developing work around building resilience, as well as putting in place support for those who need it in response to traumatic events.

Through the Police Covenant, we continue to work with policing partners to ensure those who work in policing and their families get the support and protection they need. We have already delivered pre-deployment mental health support for all new starters, established a Chief Medical Officer for policing and set an initial priority work stream on suicide prevention.

The Home Office is also providing funding to establish and run the first year of a 24/7 Mental Health Crisis Support line for current and former members of the police workforce. This will provide urgent support for our police when they need it the most and can be accessed from any area at any time.

■ Radiology: Prescriptions

George Eustice:

[\[4131\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the oral contribution of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State during the debate in Grand Committee on Healthcare: Controlled Drugs in the House of Lords on 14 September 2023, what progress his Department has made on allowing therapeutic radiographer independent prescribers to prescribe (a) opioids and (b) other controlled drugs.

George Eustice:

[\[4132\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the oral contribution of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State during the debate in Grand Committee on Healthcare: Controlled Drugs in the House of Lords on 14 September 2023, what steps he is taking to allow therapeutic radiographer independent prescribers to prescribe (a) opioids and (b) other controlled drugs.

Chris Philp:

The Government responded to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) on 3 October 2022, accepting its further recommendations on administration and directions to administer controlled drugs by therapeutic radiographer independent prescribers.

As the letter set out, the Government intends to legislate to enable prescribing of controlled drugs by therapeutic radiographer independent prescribers, including tramadol, lorazepam, diazepam, morphine, oxycodone and codeine. The Government also intends to make changes relating to use of controlled drugs in healthcare by podiatrists, paramedic independent prescribers, and those acting under Patient Group Directions.

During a short debate on this topic, held in the House of Lords Grand Committee on 14 September 2023, Home Office Minister Lord Sharpe explained that we intend to bring forward legislation to make the necessary amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 by the end of the year. This remains the intention.

■ Retail Trade: Crime

Mr Jonathan Djanogly:

[4081]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many recorded incidents of (a) violence, (b) abuse, (c) theft and (d) other crimes against retailers took place in (i) 2019, (ii) 2020, (iii) 2021 and (iv) 2022.

Chris Philp:

The latest estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales show that levels of crime on a comparable basis are down by 56% compared with the year ending March 2010.

The Home Office collects and publishes data on crime affecting retail premises as part of the Commercial Victimization survey, the publication for 2022 was published in May 2023 and is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/crime-against-businesses-findings-from-the-2022-commercial-victimisation-survey>

The data collected includes an estimation of the proportion of commercial premises which were a victim of crime. The data does not provide an estimate of the number of specific incidents of violence, abuse, theft, or other crimes.

The Government is clear that violent and abusive behaviour towards any public-facing worker is never acceptable. We take this issue very seriously and recognise the implications these incidents can have on businesses as well as the victims.

On 23 October, the National Police Chiefs Council launched their Retail Crime Action Plan; which includes a police commitment to prioritise attending the scene of retail crime instances where violence has been used; where an offender has been detained; or where evidence needs to be promptly secured and can only be done in person by police personnel.

The 23 October also saw the launch of Pegasus, a unique private-public partnership that will radically improve the way retailers are able to share intelligence with policing, to better understand the tactics used by organised retail crime gangs and identify more offenders.

Mr Kevan Jones:

[\[4087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proportion of recorded crime against retailer workers was associated with age-related sales in the last 12 months.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office collects and publishes data on crime affecting retail premises as part of the Commercial Victimisation survey. The most recent publication covers the year 2022 and estimated that in 2022, 4% of premises which experienced violent incidents stated that asking for ID for age restricted products was one of the most common reasons for the violent crime.

The Government is clear that violent and abusive behaviour towards any public-facing worker is never acceptable. We take this issue very seriously and recognise the implications these incidents can have on businesses as well as the victims.

■ Subversion

Sir Robert Buckland:

[\[4144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what his planned timetable is for the introduction of the foreign interference offence.

Tom Tugendhat:

The National Security Act introduces new measures to modernise counter-espionage laws and address the evolving state threat to national security.

Parts 1 to 3 of the Act, including the foreign interference offences, will come into force on 20 December this year.

■ Tobacco: Seized Articles

Philip Davies:

[\[4648\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, on how many occasions the provisions in the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 allowing a constable to seize any tobacco or cigarette papers in the possession of any person apparently under the age of sixteen years whom they find smoking in any street or public place have been used in each of the last 10 years.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office collects and publishes data on use of police powers, as part of the 'Police Powers and Procedures' statistical bulletin, available here: [Police powers and procedures England and Wales statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-powers-and-procedures-england-and-wales-statistics)

However, data is not collected on the seizure of tobacco or cigarette papers under the Children and Young Person Act 1933.

■ Visas: Applications**Anneliese Dodds:**[\[4737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many UK Visa and Citizenship Application Services appointments have been available at the Oxford Service Point in each month since January 2023; and what the cost to the applicant of such appointments was.

Robert Jenrick:

A UK Visa and Citizenship Application (UKVCAS) service was opened in Oxford on 30th May 2023.

Capacity has fluctuated over time to meet demand, but UKVCAS has delivered on average (June 23 – Nov 23) 407 appointments per month and currently has capacity of c.480 free and chargeable appointments per month. The standard fee of £139 per appointment is applicable for chargeable appointments.

JUSTICE**■ Bedford Prison: Repairs and Maintenance****Ruth Cadbury:**[\[4447\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what maintenance work is required at HMP Bedford as of 29 November 2023.

Edward Argar:

HMPPS is continuing to invest in the prison estate to ensure that prisons remain safe and secure. The following works at HMP Bedford are in delivery or have been approved for future delivery: replacement of the segregation unit, fire safety upgrades across the prison, installation of CCTV in all 'hot spot' areas, installation of anti-ligature cells, replacement of window frames where necessary, installation of electrical points in constant watch cells electric points, rerouting of cell call bells, and repairs to burst hot water main.

In addition to the projects listed above, the establishment is also in the process of seeking approval a number of further works including: replacement of diesel-powered generator, provision of safe access to plant areas, installation of CCTV into E wing, refurbishment of gym showers, renewal of A & C Wing flooring., refurbishment of main kitchen, heating system replacement, and window replacement.

We will shortly publish an action plan responding to the Urgent Notification issued by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons on 17 November. This will set out what further measures we're implementing, including maintenance activity, to drive wider improvements at HMP Bedford.

■ Judges: Retirement

Jessica Morden:

[4114]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many judges retired in each of the last five years.

Mike Freer:

The number of judges in the courts and tribunals who retired in each of the last five financial years is:

		2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Salaried	Courts	80	80	41	45	67*
	Tribunals	34	32	8	14	25*
Fee paid	Courts	68#	54*	69*	29*	39*
	Tribunals	71#	38*	50*	44*	39*

Data for salaried judges who retired in the financial years 2018-2022 is taken from MoJ's evidence provided to the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) for the 2023 Annual Report on Senior Salaries (www.gov.uk/government/publications/ministry-of-justices-evidence-to-the-senior-salaries-review-body-2023).

#This data is the number of fee-paid judges who left office (including retirements, resignations and deaths in office) reported in the 2019 Diversity of the Judiciary statistics: <https://www.judiciary.uk/about-the-judiciary/diversity/judicial-diversity-statistics/>.

*This data is a subset of the data of judges who left office reported in the annual Diversity of the Judiciary statistics, which only reflects those who retired: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/diversity-of-the-judiciary-2023-statistics>.

■ Prison Accommodation: Costs

Alex Cunningham:

[4725]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the average cost was of a prison place in each of the last five years.

Edward Argar:

An average cost per prisoner, costs per prison place and overall prison unit costs for each private and public sector prison in England and Wales are routinely published by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. This information is produced on an annual basis and is published after the end of each financial year.

Information on prison expenditure can be accessed in the Prison and Probation Performance Statistics pages for each financial year on the www.gov.uk website that can be accessed on this link: [Prison and Probation Performance Statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-and-probation-performance-statistics).

The average cost per prisoner place for the last five years is provided in the table below:

FINANCIAL YEAR	AVERAGE COST PER PRISONER
2017/18	£37,543
2018/19	£41,136
2019/20	£42,670
2020/21	£48,409
2021/22	£47,434

The 2022/23 figures have not yet been published.

■ Prisons: Recruitment

Jessica Morden: [\[4112\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what data his Department holds on the number of applications received for jobs in prisons at grade bands 3 to 5 in each year since 2010.

Edward Argar:

SUBMISSION YEAR	NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS - BAND 3	NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS - BAND 4	NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS - BAND 5	TOTAL
2017	109520	6245	2647	118412
2018	108259	10182	6152	124593
2019	73709	11094	4820	89623
2020	95667	12143	4072	111882
2021	84635	12740	5309	102684
2022	112068	10366	4427	126861
2023 (January to September)	85610	9086	3305	98001

Notes

1. Data was extracted from the Oleo recruitment system. Oleo is a live system so records are subject to change.

2. The figures used here are based on applications submitted between 01 April 2017 and 30 September 2023 inclusive.
3. Data was only collected on Oleeo from 1 April 2017 and so data is not available for earlier dates.
4. Data for 2023 is incomplete and is only available up to and including 30 September 2023.
5. The data provided shows the number of applications rather than the number of applicants since Oleeo data is at the application level.
6. Figures included in our response only cover data available within our Oleeo system, so data for any recruitment that is not entirely processed on Oleeo will be incomplete.
7. These figures include internal progression to Band 4 and 5 roles.
8. These figures include applications to the "Unlocked Graduate Scheme", and to Operational Support Grade to Prison Officer / Youth Justice Worker fast track campaigns.
9. Figures do not include recruitment campaigns managed by external companies.
10. This data only includes recruitment for Public Sector Prisons (PSP).
11. The data request for this Parliamentary Question (PQ) and PQ 192091 is similar to PQ 118603 and PQ 125377. If comparing this data, please note that figures in PQ 118603 and PQ 125377 cover applications for prison officer roles only. Data in this PQ and PQ 192091 cover applications for all roles in Public Sector Prisons. In addition, please note that small differences in the data can occur when completing new analysis. There can be a small number of changes and corrections to historic applications, which is why the numbers can be fractionally different.
12. Applications in prisons relate to any vacancies in Public Sector Prisons in England and Wales. This includes non-frontline vacancies and vacancies which list the base location as a non-prison establishment. It excludes anyone working in HMPPS HQ or the Probation Service

■ Probation Service: Vacancies

Ruth Cadbury:

[4448]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many vacancies for roles in the probation delivery units within the probation service there are in the areas covering Greater London as of 29 November 2023.

Edward Argar:

As of September 2023, there were 150 FTE vacancies across Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) in the London Probation Service region. This is a net figure across Probation Service grades with surpluses in some grades and PDUs and deficits for others. This figure excludes surpluses and deficits in non-Probation Delivery Unit business units within the London Probation Service region.

Recruitment and retention remain a priority across the Probation Service. We have accelerated recruitment of trainee Probation Officers (PQiPs) to increase staffing levels, particularly in Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) with the most significant staffing challenges. As a result, over 4,000 PQiPs joined the service between 2020/21 and 2022/23 which we anticipate will start to directly impact reduction of caseloads. We continue to run centralised recruitment campaigns in priority regions to help bolster the number of applications and improve time to hire for key operational roles.

The Probation Service is in its second year of a multi-year pay deal for staff. Salary values of all pay bands will increase each year, targeted at key operational grades to improve a challenging recruitment and retention position.

Notes

1. Vacancies have been calculated as the difference between Target Staffing and Staff in Post (FTE - Full Time Equivalent).
2. Staff in Post data has been taken from an internal data source, completed by regions each month. This is subject to error as a result of the manual nature with which returns are completed.
3. Staff in Post data have been taken from internal management information and as such, may not align exactly with published quarterly statistics.
4. Data shows the net number of vacancies, with surpluses in some grades taken into account alongside vacancies for other grades.
5. Data shows the average number of vacancies across the month, adjusted for joiners and leavers within the month.
6. September 2023 is the most recent time point for which we have vacancy level information available.
7. Greater London has been interpreted as meaning the London Probation Service region. No Probation Delivery Units have been included from other Probation Service Regions.
8. Data presented does not factor in surpluses or deficits for those working in non-Probation Delivery Unit business units in London.
9. In calculating vacancies, Trainee Probation Officers have been included as full FTEs (Full Time Equivalents).
10. Data does not take into account long-term absences / loans / temporary cover / agency staff or sessional staff.

■ **Solicitors: Complaints**

Damien Moore:

[4248]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will make an assessment of (a) the adequacy of the support provided to people making complaints against solicitors and (b)

the potential merits of (i) increasing the support provided throughout the complaints process and (ii) simplifying the complaints process.

Mike Freer:

The legal profession in England and Wales together with its regulators, operates independently of the Government. The responsibility for regulating the sector sits with the approved regulators, overseen by the Legal Services Board (LSB).

The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) is the approved regulator for solicitors. The SRA is responsible for handling complaints regarding solicitor conduct, complaints can be made via their website at <https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/problems/report-solicitor/>.

If a consumer is dissatisfied with the service provided by a solicitor, they can log a complaint with the Legal Ombudsman. This can be done via their website at <https://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>.

The LSB recently led a consultation (24 August – 17 November 2023) on proposals to ensure that people who use legal services have access to fair and effective complaint procedures. The proposals aim to strengthen consumer protection and improve the overall quality and standards of legal services.

Their new proposal focuses on bettering the current complaints procedures. It sets clear outcomes for regulators to deliver, including collecting and analysing intelligence on complaints to support the best possible redress system, as well as fostering a culture of learning and continuous improvement. By engaging regulators on key issues, the LSB aims to drive higher standards in the provision of legal services across the board. The LSB will consider the feedback they receive and in turn make appropriate changes to their draft policy. A response to their consultation will be issued in early 2024, alongside the final Requirements, Guidance and statement of policy.

■ **Solicitors: Negligence**

Damien Moore:

[\[4247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward proposals to ensure that people who have lost a court case a result of a solicitor's negligence are able to access legal redress in the event that the law firm for which that solicitor worked has gone out of business.

Mike Freer:

The legal profession in England and Wales operates independently of Government. The responsibility for regulating the sector sits with the approved regulators, overseen by the Legal Services Board (LSB). There are several routes in place to ensure consumers have access to legal redress in the event of the collapse of their solicitor's law firm.

The Legal Ombudsman (LeO) deals with service complaints against regulated legal services providers – including those who are no longer operational. Their website

provides information with regards to the different routes available for consumers depending on their personal circumstances.

If an Ombudsman has made a final decision against a closed legal service provider and the consumer has not received any redress, they can decide to enforce the Ombudsman's decision in court or make a complaint against the firm's indemnity insurance. The Ombudsman can help consumers with finding contact details for relevant indemnity insurers.

The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) also considers redress where consumers have lost money as a result of fundamental ethical failures by solicitors that they regulate. Consumers affected by said issues may be able to claim against the provider's indemnity insurer or the 'Solicitors Indemnity Fund' via the SRA's website, in certain circumstances. The SRA offers support to members of the public in making claims and the relevant form can be found on their website at: www.sra.org.uk/sra-managing-sif . They also may be able to apply to the SRA's compensation fund if they believe a solicitor owes them money or believe their loss relates to services provided by a solicitor. The form and guidance on this can be found on the SRA's website at <https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/compensation-fund/application-process/>.

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

■ Homes England: Finance

Peter Gibson: [4740]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, how much and what proportion of the Homes England budget was not spent in each of the last three financial years.

Peter Gibson: [4741]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of enabling Homes England to use part of its budget for retrofitting homes.

Lee Rowley:

Homes England's financial information can be found in the organisation's [Annual Reports and Financial Statements](#).

Policy relating to insulating and energy efficiency of existing housing stock is a matter for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

■ Housing: Construction

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan: [4681]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pursuant to the Answer of 26 July 2023 to Question 194815 on Housing: Construction, what recent

progress his Department has made on raising the minimum accessibility standard for new homes; and what his planned timetable is for the implementation of this standard.

Lee Rowley:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer to Question [UIN HL8422](#) on 26 June 2023.

■ **Housing: Insulation**

Fabian Hamilton:

[\[4796\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he has had discussions with (a) United For Warm Homes and (b) Friends of the Earth on the potential merits of providing free insulation for homes.

Lee Rowley:

Details of ministerial meetings with external organisations are published on Gov.uk. Policy relating to insulating and energy efficiency of existing housing stock is a matter for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

■ **Islamophobia: Finance**

Naz Shah:

[\[4675\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, how much funding his Department has provided to tackle islamophobia since 2010.

Naz Shah:

[\[4676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, how much funding his Department has provided to tackle anti-semitism since 2010.

Lee Rowley:

I refer the Hon Member to my answer to Questions UIN [2961](#) on 29 November 2023, Question UIN [201247](#) on 23 October 2023 and Question UIN [117512](#) on 16 January 2023. As set out previously, antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred have no place in our society and we will continue to fund programmes that help tackle all forms of religious hatred.

■ **Roads: Access**

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

[\[4485\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of amending the planning rules on new accesses to the highway.

Lee Rowley:

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is already clear that transport issues should be considered from the earliest stage of plan-making and development proposals. This enables potential impact of development on transport networks to be addressed, including access. Local Plans should be prepared with the active involvement of local highways authorities. When determining a planning application for development which involves access to or from a trunk road the local planning

authority must consult the local highways authority. They will provide expert advice, based on technical standards and on any adopted local transport plan policies, relating to highways safety and impacts on the transport network as a whole.

■ System Building: Repairs and Maintenance

Mike Amesbury: [\[4541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make an estimate of the number of large panel system buildings that require remediation work.

Mike Amesbury: [\[4542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what data his Department holds on large panel system buildings that (a) have structural defects and (b) require remediation work.

Lee Rowley:

The issues with Large Panel System (LPS) buildings are longstanding and well known. When the Ronan Point tower block collapsed in 1968, following a gas explosion, it became clear that tower blocks erected in the 1960s and 1970s using a system of large pre-cast concrete panels were more vulnerable to collapse than other structures. A programme of remediation was put in place to strengthen these buildings and reduce the risk. In 2017 the Department for Communities and Local Government wrote to all local authorities and housing associations to raise awareness and to outline actions in relation to LPS buildings, advising them to seek expert advice and pointing them in the direction of the existing guidance on managing these buildings. Specifically local authorities were asked to check that buildings were structurally sound and could carry gas safely. Some buildings had gas supplies removed to mitigate the risk.

Responsibility for the safety and maintenance of large panel system blocks lies with the building owners, including local authorities where they are the owners. Local authorities are also responsible for keeping the housing conditions in their area under review (including structural safety) with a view to identifying any action that may need to be taken by them.

This system requires the accountable person for a building to take all reasonable steps to ensure they have effective and proportionate measures in place to manage building safety risks and that the appropriate level of protection is provided in these buildings.

All building owners should continue to fulfil their duties to manage safety risks of all kinds in their buildings in a proportionate, risk-based, and evidence-based manner, and taking action where they deem necessary.

In addition, and since April, the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) has a duty to keep under review the safety and standards of all buildings. The BSR is implementing a new safety case regime which all occupied 'higher-risk buildings', including all blocks of flats more than 18m, will be subject to. Under this new regime, accountable

persons are now required to register with the regulator and provide information about their building, including structural characteristics. They will also need to demonstrate to the Regulator how they are managing building safety risks related to the spread of fire and structural failure, on an ongoing basis. This data will provide the regulator with more information about the prevalence and current condition of LPS buildings.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Aviation

Emily Thornberry: [\[2833\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to her Department's publication entitled DSIT ministerial travel, April to June 2023, published on 21 November 2023, how much of the (a) £5,162.10 spent on the visit of the Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation to Japan from 10 to 16 June and (b) £7,101.35 spent on his visit to the United States and Canada from 5 to 10 June, was spent on air travel.

Andrew Griffith:

The Department's ministerial travel, April to June 2023 publication has been republished to amend previous errors.

The visit by the Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation to Japan was from 10 to 16 May. Of the £6,705.09 spent on the visit to Japan from 10 to 16 May, £4,814.01 was spent on air travel. Of the £11,979.35 spent on the visit to the United States and Canada from 5 to 10 June, £7,267.31 was spent on air travel.

Emily Thornberry: [\[2834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to her Department's publication entitled DSIT ministerial travel, April to June 2023, published on 21 November 2023, how much of the £7,117 spent on the visit of the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Tech and the Digital Economy to Japan from 26 April to 1 May was spent on air travel.

Saqib Bhatti:

The Department's publication has now been corrected due to a previous error. The correct cost of this visit is £6,475. The amount spent on air travel was £5,565.

■ Space Debris

Chi Onwurah: [\[4155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the press release G7 nations commit to the safe and sustainable use of space, published by the UK Space Agency on 13 June 2021, what steps her Department is taking to manage the risks posed by space debris.

Andrew Griffith:

Ensuring that space remains safe, sustainable and secure is a UK government priority, in line with the National Space Strategy. The growing volume of debris in space is both environmentally and commercially unsustainable, requiring swift action to clean up the Earth's orbit as well as to ensure future projects minimise their footprint through recyclable manufacturing, retrieving satellites and mitigating any debris. In 2022 the UK Government announced the UK Plan for Space Sustainability, demonstrating our commitment, ambition and drive to improve the UK's sustainable use of space. Implementation includes developing new, industry-led Space Sustainability Standards to create the right incentives for business and funding national projects designing missions to clear hazardous space debris and developing cutting-edge technologies. The Government's global leadership was reinforced at the European Space Agency Council of Ministers 2022, where we committed over £100 million to space safety and sustainability programmes.

■ **Space Technology****Chi Onwurah:**[\[4157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to page 36 of the National Space Strategy, published in September 2021, what steps her Department has taken to (a) set long-term space science and exploration goals and (b) move to a longer-term strategic planning approach for national space science and exploration.

Andrew Griffith:

The Government set out its long-term space science and exploration goals as part of the National Space Strategy in Action, published in July 2023. As part of the usual planning processes with the UK Space Agency and as part of the UK's membership of the European Space Agency, the Government will continue to make strategic and long-term decisions to participate in space science and exploration missions according to UK strengths and interests.

■ **Space: Treaties****Sarah Champion:**[\[4182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions the Government has had with the UN on international space conventions.

Andrew Griffith:

The UK Government is committed to the advancement of the peaceful use and exploration of outer space. The UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) is the primary multilateral forum which sets the future of global space law and guidelines for the benefit of all humanity: for peace, security and development. The UK attends COPUOS and its subcommittees, playing a significant role to shape law and guidelines that are fit for the future, strengthening relationships with Member Nations and showcasing UK thought leadership in space sustainability.

We also work closely with the UN Office of Outer Space Affairs and fund projects to support the peaceful uses of space, including the implementation of the Long-term Sustainability (LTS) Guidelines: publishing them in all six official UN languages and capacity building tools for emerging space nations. We and our experts in the UK Space Agency continue to work in these forums to improve the LTS guidelines and add to the range of guidance available.

The Government plays a leading role within the UN and with international partners to promote responsible space behaviours. In December 2021 the UN General Assembly adopted a UK-sponsored resolution, which established a new UN Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours. In October 2023, the UK General Assembly agreed to set up a further OEWG to build on the discussions of the first.

TRANSPORT

■ Diesel Vehicles: Cars

Geraint Davies:

[\[4770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the Answer of 24 May 2023 to Question 185865 on Diesel Vehicles, how many diesel cars were registered for the first time in each region of England in (a) 2022 and (b) each month in 2023.

Anthony Browne:

The number of new diesel cars registered to keepers in each region of England in a) 2022 and (b) each month in 2023, is given in the tables below for the period for which data are available:

REGION	2022
East Midlands	10,370
East of England	11,574
London	5,385
North East	3,931
North West	16,493
South East	24,300
South West	11,764
West Midlands	11,738
Yorkshire and Humberside	10,493
Total	106,048

REGION	JANUARY 2023	FEBRUARY 2023	MARCH 2023	APRIL 2023	MAY 2023	JUNE 2023
East Midlands	602	369	1,897	1,039	1,237	1,292
East of England	656	502	1,739	857	762	900
London	388	197	809	422	441	460
North East	223	128	589	291	284	320
North West	1,046	574	2,687	1,269	1,327	1,534
South East	2,279	1,243	5,048	2,046	2,237	2,449
South West	638	394	1,643	746	761	827
West Midlands	715	441	1,777	1,048	716	944
Yorkshire and Humberside	689	328	1,686	839	726	939
Total	7,236	4,176	17,875	8,557	8,491	9,665

Note that the keeper of the vehicle is responsible for registering and taxing the vehicle only. The keeper of the vehicle is not necessarily the owner or the driver, e.g. fleet vehicles owned by companies. Most (61% in 2022) new registrations of diesel vehicles are to company keepers.

■ Driving Tests: Large Goods Vehicles

Carol Monaghan:

[\[4677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many Driver CPC part 3b tests were available for public booking in each quarter since April 2021 in (a) the UK, (b) Scotland and (c) Bishopbriggs Test Centre.

Guy Opperman:

As the database for part 3b test availability is live and constantly changing, it is not possible to accurately calculate the test availability that was available for booking at each historic point in time since April 2021.

■ Electric Scooters

Janet Daby: [4550]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if his Department will publish guidance on the use of personal light electric vehicles.

Anthony Browne:

The Department has published guidance on gov.uk on powered transporters, which are otherwise known as personal light electric vehicles. It is currently illegal to use these on public roads unless they meet all the legal requirements of a motor vehicle or of an electronically assisted pedal cycle (EAPC).

The only exception is in the case of e-scooters, which may be used legally only as part of one of the rental trial schemes established by the Department across England in 2020. The Department has published guidance for local authorities, e-scooter operators and users on the conduct of e-scooter trials. Privately owned e-scooters remain illegal to use on public roads unless they meet the legal requirements of a motor vehicle.

All road users have a duty to behave in a safe, responsible manner and to follow the rules in The Highway Code.

■ Electric Vehicles: Fires

Andy Slaughter: [4829]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the potential risks to safety of trends in the level of fires caused by conversion kits for e-bikes.

Guy Opperman:

The Home Office publishes guidance on this issue on the Fire England website.

■ Electric Vehicles: Safety

Andy Slaughter: [4826]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to develop guidance for the public on (a) the potential risks of and (b) how to safely purchase conversion kits for (i) e-bikes and (ii) e-scooters.

Guy Opperman:

My Department is developing safety guidance for users of e-cycles and e-scooters and will publish this in due course. This will include information on conversion kits, and will complement the guidance already published by the Home Office on the Fire England website: www.fireengland.uk/fire-safety/charging-your-e-bike-or-e-scooter

■ North Wales Coast Line: Electrification

Mr David Jones: [4807]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent estimate he has made of when the North Wales Coast Railway will be electrified.

Mr David Jones: [\[4808\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the projected electrification of the main North Wales coast rail line will extend to Holyhead.

Mr David Jones: [\[4809\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the proposed electrification of the North Wales coast rail line will extend to (a) Manchester and (b) Crewe.

Huw Merriman:

We are working closely with the rail industry to develop and deliver on the Government priorities outlined in the Prime Minister's Network North announcement, which includes an unprecedented £1 billion investment to fund the electrification of the North Wales Main Line, bringing parts of North Wales within an hour of Manchester. We are in the early stages of planning the next steps for the North Wales electrification scheme and will share further information when that work is complete. Our investment is intended to enable the operation of electric trains over the full North Wales Coast line between Holyhead and Crewe.

■ Roads: Shipley

Philip Davies: [\[4368\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions his Department has had with Bradford Council on a commencement date for construction of the Shipley eastern relief road.

Guy Opperman:

Following the Prime Minister's Network North announcement, my officials have been in contact with Council officers to resume the review of the Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for the scheme, the first stage of business case development, in order that a decision can be made on whether the scheme can progress to the next stage.

TREASURY

■ Apostle Accounting

Imran Hussain: [\[4451\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has held with HMRC on payment requests issued to Apostle Accounting Ltd customers following HMRC compliance checks.

Nigel Huddleston:

HMRC cannot comment on any individual or identifiable businesses and their tax affairs due to strict confidentiality.

Imran Hussain:

[\[4452\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department plans to conduct an investigation with HMRC into the practices of Apostle Accounting Ltd following its liquidation.

Nigel Huddleston:

HMRC cannot comment on any individual or identifiable businesses and their tax affairs due to strict confidentiality rules, and can neither confirm or deny investigations.

■ Bank Services

Dan Carden:

[\[4519\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with relevant stakeholders on (a) the role of face-to-face banking services and (b) steps being taken to ensure that such services remain available.

Dan Carden:

[\[4520\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of bank branch closures on (a) local economies and (b) levels of inequality.

Bim Afolami:

Decisions on opening and closing branches are taken by the management team of each bank on a commercial basis.

Nonetheless, the Government believes that the impact of branch closures should be mitigated where possible so that all customers, wherever they live, continue to have access to appropriate banking services.

The Government supports industry working together to provide alternative banking and cash services, such as Banking Hubs. To date, industry has committed to delivering new shared Banking Hubs in over 90 communities. Further alternative options to access everyday banking services can be via telephone banking, through digital means such as mobile or online banking and via the Post Office. The Post Office Banking Framework allows 99% of personal banking and 95% of business customers to deposit cheques, check their balance and withdraw and deposit cash at 11,500 Post Office branches across the UK.

Guidance from the Financial Conduct Authority also sets out its expectation of firms when they are deciding to close their branches. Firms are expected to carefully consider the impact of a planned closure on their customers' everyday banking and cash access needs, particularly for customers in vulnerable circumstances, and consider possible alternative access arrangements. This seeks to ensure the implementation of closure decisions is done in a way that treats customers fairly. The Consumer Duty also requires that firms deliver "good outcomes" for customers.

■ Banks: Closures

Sir John Hayes:

[\[4617\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to help prevent the closure of high street banks in rural areas.

Bim Afolami:

Decisions on opening and closing branches are taken by the management team of each bank on a commercial basis, with which the Government does not interfere.

Nonetheless, the Government believes that the impact of branch closures should be mitigated where possible so that all customers, wherever they live, continue to have access to appropriate banking services.

The Government supports industry working together to provide alternative banking and cash services, such as Banking Hubs. To date, industry has committed to delivering new shared Banking Hubs in over 100 communities. Further alternative options to access everyday banking services can be via telephone banking, through digital means such as mobile or online banking and via the Post Office. The Post Office Banking Framework also allows 99% of personal banking and 95% of business customers to deposit cheques, check their balance and withdraw and deposit cash at more than 11,500 Post Office branches across the UK.

Guidance from the Financial Conduct Authority sets out its expectation of firms when they are deciding to close their branches. Firms are expected to carefully consider the impact of a planned closure on their customers' everyday banking and cash access needs and consider possible alternative access arrangements. This seeks to ensure the implementation of closure decisions is done in a way that treats customers fairly. The Consumer Duty also requires that firms deliver "good outcomes" for customers.

■ Taxation: International Cooperation

Kate Osamor:

[\[4487\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of the proposed UN framework on international tax cooperation.

Tahir Ali:

[\[4561\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits supporting the new UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation.

Nigel Huddleston:

The UK strongly supports developing countries' efforts to scale-up domestic resource mobilisation to finance sustainable development.

The UK engaged constructively in the negotiations on the UN tax resolution.

However, the UK, alongside many other countries, is concerned that proceeding with a UN convention on international tax at this time would not be the most effective way

to achieve these goals. An Explanation of Vote was published on GOV.UK on 22nd November. [[LINK](#)]

■ Vacancies

Jim Shannon:

[[4428](#)]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate his Department has made of changes in the level of job vacancies; and if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of that on economic activity.

Bim Afolami:

Information on the level of job vacancies was provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 14th November 2023. A link to that report is provided below.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/jobsandvacanciesintheuk/november2023>

WALES

■ Owner Occupation: Wales

Peter Grant:

[[900428](#)]

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the impact of changes in the level of interest rates on homeowners in Wales.

David T C Davies:

The Government is working to support homeowners by driving down inflation which leads to lower interest rates. In doing this, the Government has already met its goal to halve inflation this year.

We are also supporting borrowers struggling with their mortgage payments through the Mortgage Charter, helping customers manage their mortgage payments.

■ Rivers: Wales

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[[900430](#)]

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to improve the quality of water in rivers and streams in Wales.

David T C Davies:

Water is a devolved matter in Wales, as such the Welsh Labour Government is responsible for water in rivers and streams in Wales, not the UK Government. It is high time that the Welsh Government took greater action on this vital issue as a devolved responsibility.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES**■ LGBT+ People****Jeff Smith:**[\[4205\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, which stakeholder groups representing the LGBT+ community she has met in the last 12 months.

Stuart Andrew:

Equality Hub Ministers and officials conduct regular engagement with stakeholders across a wide range of topics in the LGBT area. Most recently, these have included hate crime and hate speech, homelessness, healthcare, conversion practices and gender recognition. This engagement consists of, but is not limited to, holding conversations with victims and survivors, LGBT groups, healthcare professionals, faith groups, groups advocating for sex-based rights and parliamentarians.

WORK AND PENSIONS**■ Social Security Benefits: Children****John McDonnell:**[\[4327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make an estimate of how many children would be lifted out of poverty if the household benefit cap was (a) uprated with inflation since 2016 and (b) abolished.

Jo Churchill:

It is not possible to produce robust estimates of the effect of the impact of uprating the household benefit cap by inflation on the number of children in child poverty or similar impacts of the removal of the household benefit cap on the same group.

There was a significant increase to the benefit cap levels following a review last year. The benefit cap continues to provide a strong work incentive and fairness for working taxpaying households and encourages people to move into work, where possible.

Where possible it is in the best interests of children to be in working households and, of course, returning to employment will significantly increase the likelihood of a household not being affected by the cap.

Both rates and numbers of children in absolute poverty (60% of 2010/11 median income, both before and after housing costs) were lower in 2021/22 than in 2009/10. In 2021/22 there were 400,000 fewer children in absolute low income after housing costs than in 2009/10.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CABINET OFFICE

■ Government signing the Hillsborough Charter

Deputy Prime Minister (Oliver Dowden):

[\[HCWS99\]](#)

In April 2016, the then Home Secretary commissioned Bishop James Jones to produce a report on the experiences of the Hillsborough families, to ensure their perspective was not lost. The Bishop's report was published in November 2017. The Bishop identified 25 points of learning in his report. A key recommendation among these was the creation of a Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy or, as it will be known, the Hillsborough Charter. The Charter, which the Government has signed, seeks to ensure that the lessons of the Hillsborough disaster and its aftermath are learned, to prevent those who are affected by public tragedy in the future from having the same experience.

Much of the Charter is already embodied in the rules, obligations and codes that already apply to those in Government. In signing the Charter, the Government is reaffirming its commitment to a continuing culture of honesty and transparency in public service and the wider public sector, in line with the existing frameworks and the underpinning values of the Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles), including in response to public inquiries.

The below sets out how the six points of the Charter are reflected in existing rules, obligations and codes that apply to those who work in Government, and how the Government understands the effect of the Charter in relation to these obligations:

1. In the event of a public tragedy, activate its emergency plan and deploy its resources to rescue victims, to support the bereaved and to protect the vulnerable.

Emergency response is provided for at a front-line level by organisations such as local authorities and emergency services, supported by statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. It is the responsibility of the Local Resilience Forum to coordinate the response to a major emergency, which is in line with this commitment in the Charter.

2. Place the public interest above our own reputation.

The concept of placing the public interest ahead of reputation is rooted in the Seven Principles of Public Life and, in particular, the first principle of selflessness. All public servants should follow this principle which states they should act solely in terms of the public interest. The Civil Service Code, which is underpinned by primary legislation, includes four values - Honesty, Integrity, Impartiality, Objectivity. It makes clear that all civil servants are expected to carry out their roles with dedication and a commitment to the Civil Service and its core values, including integrity (putting the obligations of public service above your own personal interests). Special advisers are temporary civil servants, and follow the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers and the Civil Service Code (other

than the provisions on impartiality and objectivity); they are also bound by the requirement in the Civil Service Code to act with integrity and honesty.

3. Approach forms of public scrutiny – including public inquiries and inquests - with candour, in an open, honest and transparent way, making full disclosure of relevant documents, material and facts. Our objective is to assist the search for the truth. We accept that we should learn from the findings of external scrutiny and from past mistakes.

The Seven Principles of Public Life embed a requirement for all public servants to behave with openness (acting and taking decisions in an open and transparent manner and only withholding information from the public for clear and lawful reasons) and with honesty (being truthful). It also requires public servants to be accountable by submitting themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this. The Civil Service Code requires that civil servants deal with the public and their affairs fairly, efficiently, promptly, effectively and sensitively, and they comply with the law and uphold the administration of justice. Ministers are subject to an overarching duty to comply with the law and to protect the integrity of public life.

The principles of the Charter reflect the existing approach under the Nolan Principles, Civil Service Code and Concept of Operations to deal with the public and in respective processes openly and honestly. These principles also reaffirm our commitment to comply with the duty of candour and our existing disclosure obligations in respect of all proceedings in which the Government participates.

In some situations, it may be inappropriate for official information to be disclosed publicly (for example, legally privileged information), or it may not be in the public interest to do so because of the subject matter (such as issues of national security). The Law Officers' Convention may also apply to such information. Public officials are also subject to other requirements around information sharing, such as the Official Secrets Act 1989, and exemptions within the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This means that full disclosure may not always be possible in relation to broader scrutiny or inquiries. In signing the Charter, the Government is not intending to widen the disclosure obligations which currently apply or to narrow the well-established exceptions to those obligations. Nevertheless, the Government is committed to ensuring transparency and openness in relation to public inquiries and inquests in the event of a public tragedy, and public officials are committed to this by the existing framework of obligations.

Hon. Members will be aware of the judicial review brought by the Government in relation to the Covid inquiry. This was to establish clarity on an important point of law. We now have a clear ruling on the powers of public inquiry chairs on the submission of material.

The Government does not understand the Charter to expand or alter such obligations whether in judicial review proceedings, inquiries or inquests (or any other proceedings), as defined in the Civil Procedural Rules, the Inquiries Act 2005 and settled case law. The Government will continue to comply with its existing duties in relation to candour and disclosure.

Similarly, the Government does not understand the existing duties in respect of the provision of information directly to the public to be expanded or altered by the signing of the Charter. This is subject to extensive regulation in for example the provisions (including public interest considerations) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations, as well as the Inquiries Act 2005.

4. Avoid seeking to defend the indefensible or to dismiss or disparage those who may have suffered where we have fallen short.

Under the Seven Principles of Public Life, all public servants are required to demonstrate leadership, which includes treating others with respect and challenging poor behaviour wherever it occurs. They are also required to act with selflessness, by acting solely in the public interest, and with honesty by being truthful. The Civil Service Code makes clear that all civil servants are expected to carry out their roles with dedication and a commitment to the Civil Service and its core values, including honesty (being truthful and open) and integrity (putting the obligations of public service above your own personal interests).

Special advisers are also bound by these requirements, by the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers, which sets out that “the preparation or dissemination of inappropriate material or personal attacks has no part to play in the job of being a special adviser as it has no part to play in the conduct of public life”, and the Civil Service Code. Ministers are expected to maintain high standards of behaviour and to behave in a way that upholds the highest standards of propriety.

In accepting this principle, the Government does note however the importance of individuals being able to explain the rationale for their actions in the face of public scrutiny, including in the context of public inquiries.

5. Ensure all members of staff treat members of the public and each other with mutual respect and with courtesy. Where we fall short, we should apologise straightforwardly and genuinely.

All seven Principles of Public Life broadly capture the need for public servants to treat the public and each other with respect and courtesy, and to be honest, transparent and genuine in assessing outcomes. The Civil Service Code requires that civil servants are professional in how they deal with the public and their affairs, and act fairly, efficiently, promptly, effectively and sensitively. It also requires that they comply with the law and uphold the administration of justice, acting with integrity by putting the obligations of public service above their own personal interests. As already noted, Ministers are expected to maintain high standards of behaviour and have an overarching duty to comply with the law and to protect the integrity of public life.

6. Recognise that we are accountable and open to challenge. We will ensure that processes are in place to allow the public to hold us to account for the work we do and for the way in which we do it. We do not knowingly mislead the public or the media.

All public servants, in line with the Seven Principles of Public Life, are required to demonstrate openness by acting and taking decisions openly and transparently, and not withholding information from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so. They are required to be accountable by submitting themselves to the necessary scrutiny to be held accountable by the public, and to demonstrate honesty - being truthful - which would include not knowingly misleading others.

The Civil Service Code requires that civil servants and special advisers deal with the public and their work fairly, and they comply with the law and uphold the administration of justice. Ministers have a duty to account to Parliament and will be held to account for the policies, decisions and actions of their departments and agencies, and must give accurate and truthful information to Parliament. Ministers should be as open as possible with Parliament, refusing to provide information only when disclosure would not be in the public interest), as set out in the extant 1997 Resolution on Ministerial Accountability to Parliament.

EDUCATION

■ Schools and Colleges Update

The Secretary of State for Education (Gillian Keegan):

[\[HCWS98\]](#)

This update follows from my oral and written ministerial statements to the House in September and October.

An updated list of schools and colleges with confirmed cases of RAAC in England has been published today. As of 27 November, there are 231 education settings with confirmed RAAC in some of their buildings. Thanks to the hard work of school and college leaders, 228 settings (99%) are providing full time face-to-face education for all pupils. 3 settings have hybrid arrangements in place. This may involve some remote learning on some days as not all pupils can currently receive full-time face-to-face education. There are no education settings with confirmed RAAC where all pupils are in full-time remote learning.

Last year we issued a questionnaire asking responsible bodies for schools and colleges to identify whether they suspected they had RAAC. Responsible bodies have submitted responses to the questionnaire for 100% of schools and colleges with blocks built in the target era. All schools and colleges that have advised us they suspect they might have RAAC have had a first survey to confirm if RAAC is present. The vast majority of schools and colleges surveyed to date have been found to have no RAAC.

Every school or college with confirmed RAAC is assigned dedicated support from our team of caseworkers. Project delivery teams are on site to support schools and colleges to implement mitigation plans. They will work with them to put in place a bespoke plan that supports face-to-face education for all pupils as soon as possible based on their circumstances. Mitigation plans include other spaces on the school site, or in nearby schools or elsewhere in the local area, until building works are carried out or temporary buildings are installed.

The government is funding the emergency work needed to mitigate the presence of RAAC, including installing alternative classroom space where necessary. All reasonable requests for additional help with revenue costs, like transport to locations or temporarily renting a local hall, are being approved. The government is funding longer-term refurbishment or rebuilding projects to address the presence of RAAC in schools. Schools and colleges will either be offered capital grants to fund refurbishment work to permanently remove RAAC, or rebuilding projects where these are needed, including through the School Rebuilding Programme.

I want to reassure pupils, parents and staff that this government is doing whatever it takes to support our schools and colleges in responding to RAAC and minimise disruption to education.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Future Gas Security Publications (Update to the Energy Security Plan, Powering Up Britain)

Minister of State (Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero) (Graham Stuart):
[\[HCWS97\]](#)

I am pleased to announce that the Government has today published two updates to the March 2023 Powering Up Britain Energy Security Plan. The first sets out key considerations on the future role that gas storage and other forms of flexibility can play in the security of gas supply. The second sets out a proposed methodology for assessing medium range gas supply security.

Energy security is a priority for this Government as we transition to net zero. While we expect UK gas demand to decline as part of this transition, natural gas will continue to play a critical role in our energy system for decades to come. Alongside this reduced demand we are facing reduced domestic supply. With declining domestic gas production from the UK's Continental Shelf, the UK will become more dependent on gas imports, including from global liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies. As the gas storage and flexibility update highlights, natural gas LNG and interconnector imports are estimated to be approximately 11% of our total gas demand in 2023, rising to just under 50% in 2045.

To slow this increasing dependence on gas imports and the risk of higher embedded emissions in them, the Government is backing the North Sea oil and gas industry - so as to make Britain more energy independent. That is why we have introduced the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill to give industry certainty as to the future of licensing rounds. The continuing award of new oil and gas licences is essential to the UK's energy security, further investment in moving the basin to net zero and in retaining the supply chain required for the transition. It will help slow the decline in the UK's domestic production of gas as we consider the ongoing role of flexibility in the UK's gas supply for the coming decades.

The role played by flexible sources of gas supply is expected to change over the coming years to provide two roles – continued and probably increased flexibility to respond to

patterns of demand as well as making a contribution to baseload supply. For the gas system, the three forms of supply side, infrastructure-based forms of flexibility (geological gas storage, LNG and interconnectors) all share three key features: they can respond to peaks in demand, can be dialled up or down depending on demand across days and seasons, and their gas supply contribution is driven by market signals.

The gas storage and flexibility update therefore explores the future role that flexible sources of gas supply might play in gas security over the medium to long term, and the associated policy decisions for Government. We are proposing to launch a Call for Evidence on flexible sources in the coming months to support policy development on the future role of flexibility in gas security of supply.

The second update publication outlines a proposed methodology that could be used by the planned Future System Operator (FSO) to deliver a new medium range gas supply security assessment. This will be an annual assessment that will consider how the UK's future estimated gas supplies compare against demand scenarios five and ten years into the future. It will help Government and industry gain insight and plan for the UK's future gas security. The Government will use this publication to engage with industry, academia, Ofgem, the system operators, and other stakeholders to further refine the methodology ahead of the FSO becoming operational.

I will place a copy of the documents: 'The role of gas storage and other forms of flexibility in security of supply' and the 'Medium range gas supply security assessment: methodology' in the Libraries of the House.

You can find the updates to the Energy Security Plan on:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/role-of-gas-storage-and-other-forms-of-flexibility-in-security-of-supply> and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/medium-range-gas-supply-security-assessment-methodology>

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Government response to the consultation on visiting in care homes, hospitals and hospices

Minister of State (Minister for Social Care) (Helen Whately):

[HCWS96]

I make this statement on behalf of myself, my Hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Health and Secondary Care, (Andrew Stephenson), and my Hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy (Maria Caulfield), to announce the conclusion of the Government's consultation on visiting in care homes, hospitals and hospices, and our response.

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us valuable lessons about restrictions that had a serious effect on the health and wellbeing of care residents, patients and their families and friends.

Visiting was restricted at the height of the pandemic to prevent the spread of Covid and keep people safe, but as restrictions eased the guidance for visiting in hospital and care settings changed accordingly.

The majority of settings adhered to the guidance but there have been reports of people being denied access to family members and loved ones, so the Government has acted to make sure expectations around visits are clear to providers.

On 21 June 2023, the Department for Health and Social Care launched a public consultation on our proposal to ensure that visiting in care homes, hospitals and hospices is protected in legislation.

Under the proposal, the importance of visiting for patients, care home residents and loved ones will become a fundamental standard of care, set out in regulations for the Care Quality Commission (CQC). This means that a visit from a loved one to patients and care home residents will be safeguarded, and Care Quality Commission inspections will monitor if health and care providers are meeting these obligations.

We received over 1,400 responses to the consultation from a wide range of stakeholders, the majority of which supported the Government's proposal. We therefore plan to bring forward secondary legislation to create a new fundamental standard in CQC regulations.

I would like to thank all those who participated in our consultation and in particular those from John's Campaign and Care Rights UK, the Member for Liverpool Walton (Dan Carden), the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) and the Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) who have continued to campaign on this issue.

The Government recognises their efforts and that of the many health and care settings which understand the importance of visiting and continue to follow our existing guidance that visiting should be facilitated. We will work closely with CQC to develop clear guidance so that all settings can be in no doubt as to the standard expected in the provision of care, including supporting visiting.

The Government's response to the consultation has been published on GOV.UK and I have deposited copies in the Libraries of both Houses.

■ Review of the duty of candour in health and care settings

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy) (Maria Caulfield): [\[HCWS100\]](#)

I wish to inform the House that the Department of Health and Social Care will lead a review into the effectiveness of the statutory duty of candour for health and social care providers in England. The review will formally commence early in the New Year.

The duty of candour is set out in regulation 20 of the *Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014*. It has been in place for NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts since 2014 and for all other providers regulated by the Care Quality Commission since 2015.

The duty of candour is about people's right to openness and transparency from their health or care provider. It means that when something goes wrong during the provision of

health and care services, patients and their families have a right to receive explanations for what happened as soon as possible and a meaningful apology.

Since its introduction, there has been variation in how the duty has been applied in some settings. To that effect, the review will look at the operation and enforcement of the existing duty, with a focus on delivering recommendations that can improve its application.

The Terms of Reference will be published on Gov.UK and I will deposit a copy in the Libraries of both Houses.

HOME OFFICE

■ Signing of the Rwanda Treaty

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (James Cleverly): [\[HCWS101\]](#)

On 15 November, the Supreme Court handed down its judgment in relation to the Migration and Economic Development Partnership between the UK and Rwanda. The Court acknowledged that changes can be delivered to address their concerns. We have been working with the Government of Rwanda to make these changes – they are equally as committed to deliver this partnership.

Yesterday, I signed a new treaty with Foreign Minister Biruta. This further strengthens our Partnership and addresses the conclusion from the Supreme Court on the risk of refoulement to those individuals who are relocated to Rwanda.

The treaty can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-rwanda-treaty-provision-of-an-asylum-partnership>

This treaty is binding in international law. It makes it absolutely clear that people relocated to Rwanda will be safe and supported and will not be removed to a country other than the UK. This ensures there is no risk of refoulement. For those who are not granted refugee status or humanitarian protection, they will get equivalent treatment which includes being granted permanent residence so that they are able to stay and integrate into Rwandan society.

Through the treaty, Rwanda will introduce a strengthened end-to-end asylum system. Individuals will have the right to appeal a decision on their asylum claim, which will be considered by a new, specialist asylum appeals body. It will have one Rwandan and one other Commonwealth co-president and be made up of judges from a mix of nationalities, selected by the co-presidents.

The treaty also enhances the role of the independent Monitoring Committee which will ensure adherence to obligations under the agreement. It will have the power to set its own priority areas for monitoring and be given unfettered access to complete assessments and reports. The Committee will monitor the entire relocation process, including initial screening, to relocation and settlement in Rwanda. It will develop a system to enable relocated individuals and legal representatives to lodge confidential complaints directly to the Committee.

The Prime Minister committed to stop the boats, and we are delivering on that. The number of arrivals is down by a third; the initial asylum backlog is down from 92,000 to less than 20,000; we have removed over 22,000 people this year; and we have already closed 50 asylum hotels.

To fully solve this problem, we need a strong deterrent as part of our wider toolkit. As our deal with Albania shows, deterrence works: Albanian arrivals are down by more than 90 per cent this year. That is why it is essential we remove illegal migrants to Rwanda. If people know they cannot stay in the UK if they come here illegally, we will prevent people from risking their lives by making the dangerous journey across the Channel.

The Prime Minister has announced we will be bringing forward legislation to complement this treaty. I look forward to introducing this to the House in due course.