



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 19 December 2023 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:32 P.M., 19 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

ATTORNEY GENERAL

■ Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill

Neale Hanvey:

[6928]

To ask the Attorney General, what discussions she has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) the Scottish Government on the potential impact of the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill on the Act of Union 1707.

Robert Courts:

The Law Officers' Convention prevents me from disclosing outside Government whether the Attorney General has been asked to provide advice or the contents of any such advice. This is a longstanding principle of Cabinet collective agreement. The Attorney General has not had any discussions with the Scottish Government on this topic.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Arms Trade: Israel

Kenny MacAskill:

[6926]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2023 to Question 4277 on Israel: Military Aid, if she will list all UK-based organisations which have supplied (a) lethal and (b) other military equipment other than medical supplies to Israel since 7 October 2023.

Greg Hands:

Exports of military goods from the UK require an export licence. HM Government published data on export licensing decisions on a quarterly basis, including data on outcome, end user destination, overall value and a summary of the items covered by these licences. This data is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-export-controls-licensing-data>.

The most recent publication was on 30th August 2023, and covered the period 1st January – 31st March 2023. Information covering 1st April – 30th June 2023 will be published on 16th January 2024.

Information regarding export licences granted between 7 October and end of December 2023 will be published after April 2024.

The fact that an export licence is granted, does not necessarily mean that an export takes place, as some licences may expire unused, others may expire after only partial use, and some licences may subsequently be revoked or suspended.

■ Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership: Exports

Liam Byrne:

[\[6097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what proportion of exports by (a) number of exporters and (b) value of exports used the tariff rates agreed in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership during the last period for which data is available.

Greg Hands:

We do not have this information as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) has not yet entered into force.

The Accession Protocol for the UK's entry into the CPTPP was signed on 16 July 2023. Entry into force will take place once the UK and the requisite number of CPTPP Parties have finished their legal procedures. We expect this to happen in the second half of 2024.

Joining CPTPP means that over 99% of current UK goods exports to CPTPP will be eligible for tariff-free trade.

■ Export Controls

Antony Higginbotham:

[\[6671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment she has made of the (a) effectiveness and (b) efficiency of the export controls and licensing regime.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

HM Government takes its export control responsibilities very seriously and we operate one of the most robust and transparent export control regimes in the world.

We rigorously assess every application on a case-by-case basis against strict assessment criteria, the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria. We draw on all available information, including reports from NGOs and our overseas network.

These Criteria provide a thorough risk assessment framework for assessing export licence applications and require us to think hard about the impact of providing equipment and its capabilities.

We are mindful of the commercial pressures exporters face and keep our licensing process under continuous review.

■ Foreign Investment in UK and Overseas Trade: China

Liam Byrne:

[\[6087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, which firms (a) based in China and (b) based outside China and with Chinese owners have been subject to restrictions on trade and investment under the (i) Import of Goods (Control) Order 1954, (ii) Export Control Act 2002, (iii) Export Control Order 2008, (iv) Procurement Act 2023, (v) Telecommunications (Security) Act 2021 and (vi) National Security and Investment Act 2021.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

- i. The Import of Goods (Control) Order 1954, together with licences made under it, do not make Chinese-origin firms the subject of any restrictions on trade and investment.
- ii. Export controls apply to anyone exporting controlled items from the UK, regardless of country of origin. The Government assesses all export licence applications against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria. We will not licence the export of equipment where to do so would be inconsistent with these Criteria.
- iii. None. The Procurement Act is not due for commencement until Autumn 2024.
- iv. Huawei
- v. Eight final orders (which imposed conditions on, or blocked or unwound deals) issued involved acquirers linked to China. All notices of final orders are available on gov.uk.

■ Freeports**Emily Thornberry:**[\[6154\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2023 to Question 4105 on Freeports, how many of the 12 freeports were recorded as having (a) a number of jobs created as a result of verified foreign direct investment of (i) 0-50, (ii) 51-100, (iii) 101-150, (iv) 151-200 and (v) more than 200 and (b) an amount of capital expenditure resulting from that investment of (A) £0-£50 million, (B) £51-£100 million, (C) £101-£150 million, (D) £151-£200 million and (E) more than £200 million between December 2021 and November 2023.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

The investments making up the totals published on 24 November 2023 are spread across the 12 Freeports but details of individual investments are commercially sensitive.

This means that releasing information that indicates the specific characteristics associated with these investments risks identifying the identity of the companies. The limitation prevents the Department for Business and Trade to publish further detail about the investments.

■ Small Businesses: Greenhouse Gas Emissions**Jim Shannon:**[\[6567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps she is taking to encourage SMEs to cut greenhouse gas emissions in their supply chains.

Kevin Hollinrake:

The Government is committed to supporting SMEs to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

One of the key objectives of the Net Zero Council, co-chaired by Energy Minister Graham Stuart, is identifying the key challenges facing SMEs up and down the

country in reducing their carbon footprints and supporting their transition with new guidance and advice.

The Department of Trade and Business continues to support small businesses, providing access to information and guidance on tackling a range of issues and challenges facing SMEs.

CABINET OFFICE

■ Covid-19 Inquiry: Cost Effectiveness

James Wild:

[6312]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's publication entitled UK Covid-19 Inquiry Management Statement, published in August 2022, what steps he is taking to ensure the Covid-19 public inquiry represents overall value for money.

Alex Burghart:

The UK Covid-19 Inquiry is an independent public inquiry.

In line with the UK Covid-19 Management Statement, the Inquiry's Accounting Officer must conform to value for money and good financial management requirements and must provide financial updates to the Cabinet Office as its sponsor department.

The Chair is under a statutory obligation to avoid unnecessary costs in the Inquiry's work and she has been clear that she intends to complete her work as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The Inquiry publishes regular financial updates, the latest from November 2023 can be found at the link here: <https://covid19.public-inquiry.uk/documents/uk-covid-19-inquiry-financial-report-for-quarter-2-2023-24/>. The total expenditure for the financial year to 31 March 2023 was £22.4m.

■ Emergencies: Utilities

Olivia Blake:

[7154]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the implications of the Stannington gas flood in Sheffield Hallam constituency for his policies on emergency responses to a major incident; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of creating a single consolidated priority register for all utility providers.

Alex Burghart:

The Central Government Concept Of Operations provides clear guidance on the levels of emergencies as well as responsibilities for response and recovery activities. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places duties on gas distributors and other utility companies (as Category 2 responders) to cooperate and share information with other local responders with regards to emergency planning and response.

Regarding the priority register, it was announced in the recent Autumn Statement, that the Government will consult on strengthening the economic regulation of the energy, water and telecommunications sectors, with proposals that include a consolidated Priority Services Register so that vulnerable people can be confident their status is recognised by all their utilities providers and support will be provided when needed.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

Dr Luke Evans:

[900702]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to support disabled access to venues.

Sir John Whittingdale:

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is committed to improving the accessibility of cultural and heritage venues across the UK for everyone.

In June 2021, the Government Disability Unit launched an enhanced programme of Disability and Access Ambassadors. As part of this, David Stanley BEM was appointed as the Arts and Culture Disability and Access Ambassador. The Department is working closely with him to improve accessibility to the sector and its venues for people with disabilities.

DCMS investment is enabling important accessibility upgrades in cultural venues across the country, including via infrastructure grants to DCMS-sponsored cultural bodies. The joint DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund also has improvements to access and/or interpretation for visitors with disabilities as a core criterion, with recent awards including new accessible doors, lifts, ramps, and signage at the People's History Museum in Manchester, amongst other projects.

Arts Councils across the UK are also working together with the British Film Institute to launch a free, UK-wide arts access scheme, called 'All-In'. The pilot of this scheme is set to launch in Spring 2024. This scheme will operate across the UK in arts and cultural venues, for seamless, barrier-free booking which is responsive to individual circumstances and needs.

■ Arts and Culture: Disability

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[4924]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many times she met with the Disability and Access Ambassador for Arts and Culture in (a) 2022 and (b) 2023.

Sir John Whittingdale:

David Stanley BEM was appointed as the Disability and Access Ambassador for Arts and Culture on 8 June 2021 for a term of three years. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) regularly engages with him on opportunities to support the

Government's work to widen access to culture for people with disabilities. This has included supporting Mr Stanley when he was appointed as one of the panel of experts who helped to devise the joint Department for Education and DCMS National Plan for Music Education.

On 8 February 2022, Mr Stanley met the then DCMS Ministerial Disability Champion, the Minister for Sport, Tourism, Heritage and Civil Society, as part of a meeting with the other DCMS Disability and Access Ambassadors.

On 17 October 2023, the current DCMS Ministerial Disability Champion, The Rt. Hon. Stuart Andrew MP, held a roundtable discussion with all the DCMS Ambassadors to discuss young disabled people's access and participation in DCMS sectors. The Arts and Culture Ambassador was part of this discussion.

Mr Stanley also regularly engages with the Department for Work & Pensions to discuss his work in the arts and culture sectors. For example, on 16 May 2022, Mr Stanley met the then Minister for Disabled People to provide an update on his work as Disability and Access Ambassador and to discuss his wider work as CEO of The Music Man Project. In June 2022 a video of Mr Stanley and his work was included within a presentation from the Minister at the United Nations' 15th Conference of states parties to the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (COSP15) in New York.

On 5 June 2023, Mr Stanley met the previous Minister for Disabled People, to provide an update on his work as Disability and Access Ambassador and discuss The Music Man Project. The Rt. Hon. Penny Mordaunt MP and Anna Firth MP were also in attendance at this meeting in their roles as patrons of The Music Man Project.

■ Culture: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes:

[\[6965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of funding provided by Arts Council England for cultural activities in Lincolnshire.

Sir John Whittingdale:

His Majesty's Government is deeply committed to supporting access to high-quality arts and culture across the country, including through public funding to organisations in Lincolnshire via Arts Council England.

Through Arts Council England's 2023–26 National Portfolio, public funding is being provided to 11 organisations in Lincolnshire (an increase from 6 in the previous, 2018–22 portfolio) encompassing theatre, dance, museums, visual arts, and literature and libraries. The total investment in Lincolnshire through the national portfolio is £2.4 million per year – an increase of over £1 million per year from the last portfolio.

Funding offered or administered by the Arts Council in the previous financial year and the current financial year to date totals £14.2 million. This includes £5 million through the third round of the Government's Cultural Development Fund, administered by Arts

Council England, for East Lindsey District Council to support partners in transforming the Embassy Theatre and regenerating Skegness Pier and the surrounding public space. Arts and cultural organisations in Lincolnshire also benefited from over £15 million through the Culture Recovery Fund during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are three Arts Council England 'Priority Places' in Lincolnshire: Boston, East Lindsey, and North East Lincolnshire. There are six DCMS 'Levelling Up for Culture Places' in Lincolnshire: Boston, East Lindsey, South Holland, North Kesteven, North Lincolnshire, and North East Lincolnshire. Levelling Up for Culture Places were agreed between DCMS and Arts Council England, and will be the focus for additional Arts Council England engagement and investment to strengthen cultural and creative opportunities in the areas and for the people who live there.

■ Exercise and Sports: Children and Young People

Stephanie Peacock: [\[6590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what consultations her Department undertook with children and young people to (a) inform and (b) prepare the policy paper entitled Get Active: a strategy for the future of sport and physical activity.

Stuart Andrew:

The Youth Voice Advisory Group was set up to encourage young people to participate and engage with national policy. They were consulted to help inform and shape the focus of the 'Get Active' strategy. We intend to continue to engage with young people as we implement measures in Get Active, as we have done at a recent roundtable with the Youth Sport Trust and at the most recent meeting of the National Physical Activity Taskforce.

■ Monuments: Victoria Tower Gardens

Sir Peter Bottomley: [\[6060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department holds information on when barriers were erected around the Buxton memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens; for what reason those barriers were erected; and how long they will remain in place.

Sir John Whittingdale:

Barriers were erected around the Buxton memorial in April 2023, in order to protect the monument ahead of and during essential structural repairs needed to maintain it. They will remain in place until completion of the repairs, which has an estimated date of July 2024.

■ Music

Barbara Keeley: [\[5797\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department holds data on the number of music rehearsal spaces there were in England in (a) 2003, (b) 2010, (c) 2013, (d) 2019 and (e) 2023.

Barbara Keeley:

[5798]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department holds data on the number of community choirs there were in England in (a) 2003, (b) 2010, (c) 2013, (d) 2019 and (e) 2023.

Sir John Whittingdale:

The Department does not hold data on the numbers of music rehearsal spaces or on community choirs in England.

Estimates of the numbers of community choirs in England may be available from Arts Council England's Investment Principles Support Organisation [Making Music](#), which represents voluntary and leisure-time music organisations in the UK – although its membership will likely not represent the total number of community choirs in England.

Through Arts Council England's 2023–26 Investment Programme, more money is going to more music organisations in more parts of the country than ever before, supporting 139 organisations classed as 'music' by investing c.£65 million of public funding per annum.

Separately, HM Government funds a diverse portfolio of music and arts education programmes which are designed to improve participation in the arts for all children. The National Plan for Music Education and the upcoming Cultural Education Plan will encourage more young people to take up music lessons, attend local cultural events, and consider careers in the music sector.

■ **Veterans: Radiation Exposure**

Sir John Hayes:

[6074]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2023 to Question 4035 on Veterans: Radiation Exposure, whether a security classification is automatically given to documents locked by Lord Chancellor's Instruments (LCIs) citing national security exemptions; and whether a classification was given to the documents noted in Question 4035 under LCIs (a) 76 and (b) 118.

Sir John Whittingdale:

The process for assigning security classifications to Government records is separate to the process of retaining records through a retention instrument (formally known as a Lord Chancellor's Instrument). The originating Department assigns a classification in line with the Government Security Classifications Policy.

Records selected for permanent preservation which are classified at Secret or above are retained by the relevant Government Department through a retention instrument as The National Archives cannot hold material of this classification.

DEFENCE

■ Afghanistan: Refugees

John Healey:[\[6082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many (a) RAF and (b) UK Government funded commercial flights have taken off from Pakistan each month carrying eligible Afghan nationals under the (i) ARAP and (ii) ACRS schemes since the end of Operation PITTING in August 2021.

James Heapey:

Since September 2021, 39 Government-funded flights have been organised by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to relocate Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) eligible individuals to the UK. This figure includes both RAF Voyager flights and civilian charter flights. The monthly breakdown is captured in the table below. In addition to the below, some individuals have relocated to the UK on commercial flights with their travel funded by HM Government.

MONTH	RAF VOYAGER FLIGHTS	CIVILIAN CHARTER FLIGHTS
September 2021	0	0
October 2021	3	0
November 2021	3	0
December 2021	1	0
January 2022	2	0
February 2022	2	0
March 2022	1	0
April 2022	2	0
May 2022	2	0
June 2022	1	0
July 2022	2	0
August 2022	1	1
September 2022	1	3
October 2022	2	0
November 2022	2	1
December 2022	0	0

MONTH	RAF VOYAGER FLIGHTS	CIVILIAN CHARTER FLIGHTS
January 2023	0	0
February 2023	0	0
March 2023	0	0
April 2023	0	0
May 2023	0	0
June 2023	0	1
July 2023	0	0
August 2023	0	0
September 2023	0	0
October 2023	0	1
November 2023	0	5
December 2023	1	1

As stated by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs in the House on 8 November, we were aiming to relocate 2,800 ARAP eligible people from Pakistan between October 2023 and the end of 2023 and are on target to deliver this commitment, with over 2,000 having arrived so far. More flights are scheduled throughout the remainder of December.

For the separate Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), flights and travel assistance are arranged by the Home Office and its partners, including the International Organization for Migration.

John Healey:

[6084]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy applications are awaiting an initial eligibility decision from his Department as of 11 December 2023.

James Heappey:

As of 12 December 2023, around 2,000 Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) principal applicants are awaiting an eligibility decision, of which many are new applications to the scheme.

I made a commitment to clear the backlog of applications by August 2023. This drove improvement in casework systems and processes and the bringing in of extra resource. The result was that between January and November this year, the Ministry of Defence issued decisions on over 75,000 applications, clearing virtually the

entirety of the backlog and providing applicants the clarity they both need and deserve.

A large percentage of the remaining 2,000 are new applications to the scheme, which is still open.

John Healey: [\[6085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy applicants have been awaiting an initial eligibility decision for more than (a) six months, (b) 12 months, (c) 18 months and (d) 24 months.

James Heappey:

As of 12 December 2023, around 2,000 Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) principal applicants are awaiting an eligibility decision, of which many are new applications to the scheme. Of these:

684 principals have been awaiting an eligibility decision for more than six months; of which

579 principals have been waiting more than 12 months; of which

500 principals have been waiting more than 18 months; of which

379 principals have been waiting more than 24 months.

The longest outstanding ARAP applications are all complex cases. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) are working at pace to resolve these cases, often alongside colleagues across Government. All cases that are found eligible are prioritised after the necessary checks have been conducted.

After a concerted effort to clear the virtually the entire application backlog, between January and November this year MOD have issued decisions on over 75,000 applications, providing applicants the clarity they both need and deserve.

■ Armed Forces: Housing

John Healey: [\[6086\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 8 December 2023 to Question 4337, how many of the 9,121 unoccupied service family accommodation properties have been graded (a) at grade 1, (b) at grade 2, (c) at grade 3, (d) at grade 4 and (e) below grade 4.

James Cartlidge:

As at 1 December 2023, 96.11% of Service Family Accommodation (SFA) was assessed as meeting or exceeding the Government's Decent Home Standard. Any homes below this standard should not be allocated to families.

■ Armoured Fighting Vehicles

Clive Lewis: [\[6229\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many and what types of FV107 Scimitar reconnaissance vehicles (a) went out of service and (b) remain in service since November 2022; how many out of service FV107 Scimitar reconnaissance vehicles have been disposed of; and of those disposed how many were (i) managed through the Defence Equipment Sales Agency and (ii) sold externally including to whom they were sold.

James Cartlidge:

As at 31 March 2023 no FV107 Scimitar remain in service, with 102 withdrawn since November 2022.

Since November 2022, through the Defence Equipment Sales Agency, one FV107 Scimitar has been disposed of and 18 have been sold externally. I am withholding the details of the end customers due to commercial confidentiality.

■ Armoured Fighting Vehicles and Military Aircraft

Clive Lewis: [\[6239\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what types of (a) vehicles, (b) tanks, and (c) aircraft have been disposed of via (i) sale, (ii) donation, (iii) auction and (iv) scrapping since 24 February 2022; and if he will publish a list of the number (A) sold and (B) donated including whom the recipient was.

James Cartlidge:

It is taking time to collate the information. I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

■ Army: Procurement

Maria Eagle: [\[6100\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1040 on Army: Procurement, what specific social and industrial value outcomes are to be included in the 20% weighting.

Maria Eagle: [\[6101\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1040 on Army: Procurement, what metrics will his Department use to measure the effectiveness of the 20% weighting on social and industrial value outcomes.

James Cartlidge:

The Land Industrial Strategy Objectives Framework (LISOF) constitutes a common, consistent decision-making framework at key influence points in the Army's equipment acquisition lifecycle to embed a broader definition of value. These five pillars of the LISOF are sub-divided into 19 objectives as shown in Figure 3 (page 27) of the published Land Industrial Strategy and reflect the outcomes sought. The LISOF

is not a prescriptive checklist but is to be tailored to each specific procurement – not all 19 LISOF objectives will necessarily apply in every case.

Maria Eagle: [\[6102\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1040 on Army: Procurement, how often does his Department plan to (a) review and (b) refine the Land Industrial Strategy Objectives Framework to ensure it is achieving its intended objectives.

James Cartlidge:

Lessons from the early application of the Land Industrial Strategy Objectives Framework (LISOF) to in-flight procurements are already informing its subsequent application and refinement as part of routine activity. Head Land Industrial Strategy, as a Standing Advisor to the Army Investment Committee (which scrutinises and approves business cases), is positioned to share best practice and offer a portfolio-level view of the LISOF impacts. In addition, industry, through its participation in the regular Land Enterprise Working Group (LEWG), has already had opportunities to review and refine the LISOF. There is currently no date planned for a formal review of the LISOF.

Maria Eagle: [\[6103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1042, what criteria industry partners need to meet in order to be invited to those briefing meetings.

James Cartlidge:

The national trade association, ADS Group, provides the MOD with administrative and sector-specific support to allow for appropriate representation from across the community of interest. ADS membership is not mandated, and non-ADS members do attend. There is no set attendance and representatives attend based on availability, the intended agenda and main discussion points.

Maria Eagle: [\[6104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1043, when he plans to (a) complete and (b) publish the outcome of the Land Industrial Operating Services programme.

Maria Eagle: [\[6105\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1043, what steps that programme team has completed as of 11 December 2023.

Maria Eagle: [\[6106\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1043, when he plans for the concept phase to be completed.

James Cartlidge:

Since the completion of the pre-concept phase, the Programme Team have been working with DE&S to conduct research, analysis and industry engagement to generate an optimal operating model.

The Outline Business Case for the Land Industrial Operating Service (LIOS) is scheduled to be submitted by the end of 2024. This will signify the end of the concept phase.

Maria Eagle: [\[6107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1043, what lessons from similar ventures in the other Services the programme team are building on.

James Cartlidge:

The Land Industrial Operating Services programme team are building on lessons learnt from a range of initiatives including:

- Maritime domain: Future Maritime Support Programme (FSM).
- Air domain: Typhoon Total Availability eNterprise (TyTAN),
- Land Aviation domain: the Wildcat Integrated Support and Training Contract (WIST) and the Apache Integrated Operational Support (IOS).

■ Army: Training**Luke Pollard:** [\[6896\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the Answer of 23 October 2023 to Question 202061 on Army: Training, what the cost to the public purse is of (a) Phase 1 (basic) and (b) Phase 2 (trade) infantry training for a Standard Entry (over-18 recruit) recruit enrolled at the Infantry Training Centre, Catterick.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

In Recruiting Year 2022-23, Basic Training at the Infantry Training Centre, per successful trainee, cost £0.036 million for standard Basic Training, £0.034 million for Guards and £0.046 million for Paras. And for Initial Trade Training, £0.035 million for standard training, £0.042 million for Guards and £0.059 million for Paras.

■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Mauritius**Daniel Kawczynski:** [\[6130\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he has had with his US counterpart on the proposed transfer of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius.

James Heappey:

We are in regular contact with the US administration on matters related to the British Indian Ocean Territory at both Ministerial and official levels.

■ Challenger Tanks

Clive Lewis: [\[6224\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what is the size of the Challenger 2 tank fleet; whether it remains his policy that 148 existing Challenge 2 tanks will be upgraded to the Challenger 3 programme; and what his plans are for those tanks not scheduled for upgrade.

James Cartlidge:

There are 213 Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks in service. It remains the Department's policy to build 148 Challenger 3 tanks. A decision on what will happen to the remaining Challenger 2 platforms has not yet been taken.

■ Chinook Helicopters: Decommissioning

Clive Lewis: [\[6231\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Chinooks (a) have been and (b) are scheduled to be retired since February 2022; and what his Department's policy is on disposing these helicopters.

James Cartlidge:

Following the Integrated Review, nine Chinook airframes are being retired from the fleet of 60. Four airframes have been retired so far with the remaining five due to be withdrawn from service by 2025.

Retired airframes will be disposed of in accordance with normal Ministry of Defence policy.

■ Chinook Helicopters: Procurement

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[6990\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he expects the first new Chinook CH47 to be delivered.

James Cartlidge:

Under the current programme of record, aircraft deliveries are due to start from 2027. Future announcements will be made as the programme progresses.

■ Defence Equipment: Land Mines

Clive Lewis: [\[6233\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many (a) minefield breaching systems and (b) Trojan armoured engineer vehicles remain in use by the army; and whether he has plans to (i) retire and (ii) dispose of existing minefield breaching systems.

James Cartlidge:

There are three types of minefield breaching systems currently in use with the British Army and there are no current plans to retire or dispose of any of them.

As per the annual published statistics on Armed Forces' Equipment and Formations, there are currently 32 Trojan platforms in service. The latest publication of these statistics can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-armed-forces-equipment-and-formations-2023>.

■ Defence: Artificial Intelligence

Maria Eagle: [6113]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November 2023 to Question 1453 on Army: Artificial Intelligence, what steps he has taken to govern the use of AI in defence.

Maria Eagle: [6114]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November 2023 to Question 1453 on Army: Artificial Intelligence, what steps he has taken to engage with (a) international partners, (b) academia, (c) industry and (d) Cabinet colleagues on the use of AI.

James Cartlidge:

As set out in the Defence AI Strategy (2022), the Ministry of Defence is embedding an effective framework of policies, accountabilities and process controls to govern the development and adoption of AI technologies across the Department and Armed Forces.

Extensive engagement with international allies, the UK AI sector (industry and academia) and partners across Government is central to our implementation efforts.

■ Defence: Employment

Dr Kieran Mullan: [6363]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to support defence jobs.

James Cartlidge:

The most recent estimate shows that MOD investment supports 209,000 jobs in industries across the UK.

We continue to support UK businesses through research and development, exports and supply chains.

■ Defence: Skilled Workers

Maria Eagle: [6118]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1812 on Defence: Employment, what steps he plans to take to help (a) upskill and (b) reskill workers in the defence sector to adapt to new technologies.

James Cartlidge:

In the 2023 Defence Command Paper Refresh we committed to upskilling our people in digital, nuclear, space, cyber, and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. We are already working with industry and academia to nurture a collaborative ecosystem and ensure we grow these skills nationally.

We are supporting skills development for now and the future across major programmes and supply chains that stretch right across the UK.

For example, in the air sector, the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) is driving the development of entirely new industrial processes and blending digital twinning - open architecture, AI, and robotic engineering - to create a truly cutting-edge capability.

■ **Defence: Technology**

Dr Kieran Mullan:[\[6364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to support innovative defence technology.

James Cartlidge:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 22 September 2023 to Question 199358.

Attachments:

1. Defence: Technology [UIN 199358.docx]

■ **Firearms: Lost Property and Theft**

Luke Pollard:[\[6897\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many of his Department's (a) handguns, (b) rifles and (c) automatic weapons have been (i) lost and (ii) stolen in (A) the UK and (B) operations overseas in each of the last two years.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

We take the security of our small arms and light weapons extremely seriously and have a range of measures in place to ensure the integrity of these arrangements. The table below details weapon losses over the last two years; two of the weapons listed were subsequently found, and four were historic deactivated display weapons. None were stolen and all were lost in the UK.

YEAR	WEAPON TYPE	LOST
	2023	Handguns 1
Rifles	1	
Automatic weapons	2	
	2022	Handguns 1

YEAR	WEAPON TYPE	LOST
Rifles	1	
Automatic weapons	1	

■ Global Combat Air Programme

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[6362]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent progress he has made on the Global Combat Air Programme.

James Cartlidge:

On 14 December 2023, the Secretary of State met with his Japanese and Italian counterparts in Tokyo to sign the GCAP Treaty, signifying a landmark milestone in the Global Combat Air Programme.

This Treaty will establish the GCAP International Government Organisation (GIGO), which will work to support timely programme delivery and an in-service date of 2035. The GIGO, to be located in the UK, will be responsible for delivering vital military capability, strengthening each country's combat air industrial capability, and achieving value for money.

A transcript for the statement made on 18 December 2023 by the Defence Secretary on the Global Combat Air Programme Treaty can be found here -

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-12-18/debates/774DA45D-51D9-42C7-A050-5C5C9F5CADCD/GlobalCombatAirProgrammeTreaty>

■ Iraq and Syria: Islamic State

James Wild:

[6339]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many (a) flying hours and (b) air strikes have been conducted by UK armed forces against Daesh in (a) Iraq and (b) Syria in each of the last 12 months.

James Heapey:

There have been three air strikes conducted by UK Armed Forces against Daesh in Iraq and Syria in the last 12 months (two in Iraq and one in Syria). The combined flying hours of Reaper, Typhoon and Voyager during from November 2022 – November 2023 were 16,255 (Reaper: 6,940; Typhoon: 6,314; and Voyager: 2,999). As the data concerns operational activity, figures may be updated in the future.

James Wild:

[6340]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Global Coalition Against Daesh in reducing the threat from terrorists in (a) Iraq and (b) Syria.

James Heappey:

As a leading member of the Global Coalition, the UK will continue to provide military support to the Iraqi Security Forces and regional partners in order to tackle the threat of terrorism from Daesh, including to the UK. This remains a priority for the international community.

Since 2014, the Coalition has helped liberate over 110,000 square kilometres of former Daesh territory and continues to provide essential support to the Iraqi Security Forces and Kurdish Security Forces at the request of the Iraqi Government. The Coalition also delivers essential aid to liberated communities, and the UK leads on the Coalition's mission for countering Daesh propaganda.

■ Islamic State: Military Intervention**James Wild:**[\[6341\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what (a) diplomatic and (b) military contribution the UK is making to the Global Coalition Against Daesh.

James Heappey:

The UK remains committed to the Global Coalition Against Daesh and is the second largest contributor to Operation INHERENT RESOLVE.

As part of this military contribution, the UK provides support and funding for a range of initiatives across the region, including providing training, mentoring and professional military education to the Iraqi Security Forces. The UK has trained over 111,000 members of Iraqi Security forces, including over 21,000 of the Kurdish Peshmerga.

The UK also leads the Coalition's counter-Daesh communications activity, working with Government and civil society partners.

■ Military Exercises**Grahame Morris:**[\[6475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when the last (a) division level manoeuvre exercise in the field was that was not a close air support exercise and (b) brigade level manoeuvre exercise in the field was that was not a close air support exercise.

James Heappey:

The last Division level exercise in the field that was not a close air support exercise was Exercise WARFIGHTER 23 from March to June 2023. This was a US-led Corps level exercise, which saw HQ 3 (UK) Div deployed to Fort Hood, Texas to work alongside US Army's III Armoured Corps.

The last Brigade level manoeuvre exercise in the field that was not a close air support exercise was Exercise IRON TITAN 23 in September 2023 which saw 101 Operation Sustainment Brigade deployed with enablers from across HQ 3 (UK) Div.

■ Ministry of Defence: Artificial Intelligence

Maria Eagle: [6108]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 16 November 2023 to Question 1447 on Ministry of Defence: Artificial Intelligence, what criteria are used to select which AI projects are monitored.

Maria Eagle: [6112]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November 2023 to Question 1453 on Army: Artificial Intelligence, what steps the Defence AI Centre has taken to increase the speed of AI adoption in his Department.

James Cartlidge:

The projects previously mentioned (answer of 16 November to Question 1447) were selected as AI-centric projects, ranging in size and complexity, where the Defence AI Centre (DAIC) can centrally support them to ensure optimum outcomes for Defence.

The DAIC has supported the adoption of AI within Defence through enabling activities and offering advice and guidance across the MOD. The DAIC has worked collaboratively with the Chief Data Officer and Defence Digital Foundry to enable TLBs and FLCs to drive towards sustainable Ai-enabled solutions. The DAIC has also delivered select projects with pan-Defence benefit, which has allowed for the refinement of the AI delivery processes within the MOD.

■ Ministry of Defence: Bullying and Discrimination

Maria Eagle: [6971]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when did his Department last conduct a review into its bullying, discrimination and harassment policy.

Maria Eagle: [6972]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will conduct an internal review into his Department's bullying, discrimination and harassment policy.

Maria Eagle: [6973]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will commission an external audit of his Department's bullying, discrimination and harassment policy.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The Wigston Review into unacceptable behaviours was published in July 2019 and a full review of Bullying Harassment and Discrimination (BHD) policy was undertaken and updated throughout 2020 and published in June 2021 in Joint Service Publication 763 *Behaviours and Informal Complaints Resolution*:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jsp-763-the-mod-bullying-and-harassment-complaints-procedures>. This defined what unacceptable behaviours are for the first time and mandated the use of Climate Assessments to measure prevalence of BHD in units.

In December 2020 Danuta Gray published her follow up report into the implementation of the Wigston Review; her work included her independent scrutiny of the Ministry of Defence's BHD policies. The House of Commons Defence Committee has scrutinised the Department's BHD policies over the last two years and made a number of recommendations aimed at redressing the balance to ensure that women in the Armed Forces feel valued and want to continue their service once they join.

The Department continues to review and update its policies on BHD subjects, published its Zero Tolerance of Sexual Harassment policy in 2022, and will update the relevant Joint Service guidance in 2024; this will be undertaken in conjunction with the Armed Forces.

Maria Eagle: [\[6974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many meetings (a) has he, (b) have Ministers in his Department and (c) have senior civil servants had with Prospect trade union to discuss (i) bullying, (ii) discrimination and (iii) harassment within his Department.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Regular engagement on behalf of Secretary of State and Ministers occurs between Senior Civil Servants and Trade Unions, including Prospect, as a minimum twice a year to enable matters of importance to both Trade Unions and Defence to be addressed. Prospect attended a meeting in early December this year with Senior Civil Servants where bullying, harassment and discrimination were discussed in relation to the focussed matter of women working in Defence.

Maria Eagle: [\[6975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many complaints of (a) bullying, (b) discrimination and (c) harassment have been upheld in his Department in (i) 2019, (ii) 2020, (iii) 2021, (iv) 2022 and (v) 2023.

Maria Eagle: [\[6976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many (a) formal and (b) informal complaints of sexual harassment have been made by staff members in his Department in each year since 2019.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The below table shows the number of military complaints upheld for bullying, discrimination and harassment in each year since 2019.

Calendar Year	CASE TYPE			Total
	Bullying	Discrimination	Harassment	
2019	63	35	8	106
2020	70	39	7	116
2021	95	33	18	146

	CASE TYPE			
2022	69	18	14	101
2023 (up to 15 December)	64	21	7	92
Total	361	146	54	561

The below table shows the number of civilian complaints upheld for bullying, discrimination and harassment in each year since 2019. This data is representative of MOD Main Department core workforce, including DE&S and SDA, with numbers based on the year of the final outcome date.

	CASE TYPE			
Calendar Year	Bullying	Discrimination	Harassment	Total
2019	9	0	7	17
2020	24	0	9	42
2021	24	0	1	27
2022	24	3	1	28
2023 (up to 15 December)	33	5	4	42
Total	114	20	22	156

It is important to note that before 2022, 'discrimination' was not an explicitly defined category available for civilian data, so it is not possible to be able to say which – if any – complaints were due to Discrimination.

The below table shows the number of military sexual harassment complaints received in each year since 2019.

	NUMBER OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS RECEIVED	
	YEAR	
Informal	Formal	
2019	7	8
2020	6	4

	YEAR	NUMBER OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS RECEIVED
2021	13	14
2022		13
2023		8
Total	28	47

The below table shows the number of civilian sexual harassment complaints received in each year since 2019. This data is for MOD main, however does not include DE&S and SDA.

YEAR	NUMBER OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS RECEIVED
2019	7
2020	6
2021	3
2022	2
2023	16
Total	34

■ Ministry of Defence: Power Failures

Sarah Olney:

[\[7077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether there have been any power cuts on their Department's property in each of the last three years.

James Cartlidge:

Information on power cuts on Ministry of Defence property in each of the last three years can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

■ Ministry of Defence: Training

Maria Eagle:

[\[6116\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1812 on Defence: Employment, what steps he takes to ensure that his

Department's skills development policies are aligned with the changing needs of the defence sector.

Maria Eagle:

[\[6117\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1812 on Defence: Employment, what steps he takes to measure the effectiveness of his Department's skills development policies at meeting the needs of the defence sector.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is a member of the Defence Suppliers' Forum (DSF), working to understand the needs of the Defence Enterprise and collaboratively address them. The DSF's aims and objectives demonstrate the commitment of government and industry to work in an increasingly collaborative way, taking an enterprise approach to securing the capability and capacity required by our Armed Forces and further strengthen our UK defence industry. Delivering against these key aims will help to guarantee the security of the UK and increase productivity and prosperity, for the long term.

Regular work with a range of Defence Suppliers, collaboration with Other Government Departments and regular sharing of policy and practice with partner nations ensure that we understand the evolving needs of Defence and our people. Through the DSF's People and Skills Steering Group, approaches to skills, training and employment across the Defence sector are discussed and, where appropriate, collaborative approaches to training and skills are developed, shared and evaluated. The MOD's skills policies are also reviewed routinely to ensure they provide the appropriate direction and guidance to all our people and provide them with the support they need to develop.

Rolling-out through 2024, the Pan Defence Skills Framework (PDSF) has been developed as a new Whole Force approach to identifying, defining, and managing the skills of Defence's people and their associated roles. By combining expertise across Defence, the PDSF will provide a single common language for skills that will help teams to be more agile and flexible. The PDSF will be used by civil servants and Regular and Reserve Armed Forces personnel, giving Defence a whole-force view of the skills we have and allowing us to see the places where we need to focus our resources. The data provided by the PDSF facilitates 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.

The needs of Defence and the needs of our people are aligned wherever practicable. Over 95% of our non-commissioned military recruits are offered an apprenticeship on the back of their trade training. The majority of the apprenticeships completed by military personnel are currently delivered at Level 2 (GCSE) and 3 (A Level); but they are increasingly available at higher levels up to Level 6 (degree level), which supports

an individual's 'through career' personal and professional development. The MOD is actively involved in 'Trailblazer' groups which develop the Apprenticeship Standards and ensure the apprenticeships match the current and future needs of the Service.

For employment beyond Service, the MOD's Career Transition Partnership provides specific employment pathways to facilitate the transition from military Service to the Defence sector.

■ Ministry of Defence: Video Recordings

Luke Pollard: [\[6898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department spent on videographers in each of the last two years.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The total capitation cost to the Department to actively employ the six people identified as videographers on 31 March 2022 for one year, and the seven people identified on 31 March 2023 for one year is £538,707.

There is no grade or job that can be used to determine if someone is a photographer or a videographer, therefore my previous answer to Question 4344, tabled on 29 November 2023 was based on anyone flowing into a position, where the position description appears to describe a photographer or videographer. This would be based on the interpretation of the position title and whether it included the words "photo" or "video". These same parameters have been used for this answer, but for the number of people employed on 31 March 2022 and 31 March 2023.

Therefore any figures would not include anyone in a position as a photographer or videographer, where the position title does not give any indication of that profession.

■ Puma Helicopters

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[6993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans he has to replace Puma helicopters.

James Cartlidge:

Through competitive procurement, the New Medium Helicopter programme will deliver up to five rotary wing requirements, including the provision of medium rotary wing to Land forces currently provided by the Puma helicopter.

■ Royal Military Academy: Admissions

James Sunderland: [\[7137\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether entry requirements for officer direct entry at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst have changed in the last two years.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The entry requirement for the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS) is a pass at the Army Officer Selection Board Main Board. The standard required to commission from RMAS into the British Army has not changed.

AOSB recently reviewed its assessment methodology following a study which identified that RMAS was able to improve the practical performance of Officer Cadets to a greater extent than had previously been assumed. This has resulted in a number of candidates who would previously have narrowly missed the mark being given the opportunity to commence training. These candidates are categorised as 'President's Risks'.

Those who do not meet the required standard after 12 months training at RMAS will not commission. A trainability study will assess the correlation of President's Risk Candidates and their performance at RMAS to inform future selection criteria.

■ Tanks

Clive Lewis: [\[6226\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether any (a) Chieftain and (b) Challenger 1 tanks remain in storage.

James Cartlidge:

The Department does not hold any Chieftain or Challenger 1 Main Battle Tanks in storage.

■ Typhoon Aircraft

Clive Lewis: [\[6236\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Typhoon Tranche 1's have been (a) retired from service and (b) donated to Ukraine since February 2022; and what his Department's policy is for disposing of these planes.

James Cartlidge:

Since February 2022 no Tranche 1 Typhoon aircraft have been retired from RAF service or donated to Ukraine.

The Tranche 1 fleet will undergo a Reduce to Produce programme to strip them of useable parts to contribute to the Typhoon fleets spares inventory.

■ Typhoon Aircraft: Decommissioning

Clive Lewis: [\[6237\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has plans to dispose of any Typhoon Tranche 1 planes before 31 March 2025.

James Cartlidge:

There are currently 30 Tranche 1 aircraft on the military register of which 26 will leave service by the end of March 2025.

■ Ukraine: Armoured Fighting Vehicles

Clive Lewis: [\[6230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many FV107 Scimitar reconnaissance vehicles have been donated to Ukraine since February 2022.

James Heappey:

The UK has not donated any FV107 Scimitar reconnaissance vehicles to Ukraine.

■ Ukraine: Challenger Tanks

Clive Lewis: [\[6225\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Challenger tanks have been donated to Ukraine since 24 February 2022.

James Heappey:

The UK has donated 14 Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine since 24 February 2022.

■ Ukraine: Chinook Helicopters

Clive Lewis: [\[6232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Chinooks have been donated to Ukraine since February 2022.

James Heappey:

The UK has not donated any Chinook to Ukraine.

■ Ukraine: Defence Equipment

Clive Lewis: [\[6234\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Minefield Breaching System's have been donated to Ukraine since February 2022.

James Heappey:

The UK has provided considerable equipment and training to Ukraine to improve their ability to clear mines. This has included over 1,500 sets of both vehicle-mounted and 'on-the person' mine clearing and explosive ordnance disposal equipment, including necessary training.

Several mine clearance capabilities are included in the UK-administered International Fund for Ukraine Maintenance and Manoeuvre support package, which was announced in October 2023.

Clive Lewis: [\[6235\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has plans to donate further Minefield Breaching Systems to Ukraine.

James Heappey:

The UK has no plans to donate additional Minefield Breaching systems to Ukraine at this time.

Several mine clearance capabilities are included in the UK-administered International Fund for Ukraine Maintenance and Manoeuvre support package, which was announced in October 2023.

■ **Ukraine: Military Aircraft**

Clive Lewis: [\[6238\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what type of (a) aircraft and (b) helicopters (i) have been and (ii) are scheduled to be donated to Ukraine.

James Heappey:

The UK has donated three Sea King search and rescue helicopters to Ukraine.

There are no plans to donate fixed wing aircraft or additional helicopters to Ukraine at this time.

■ **Ukraine: Warrior Vehicles**

Clive Lewis: [\[6228\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Warrior vehicles have been donated to Ukraine since February 2022.

James Heappey:

The UK has not donated Warrior vehicles to Ukraine.

■ **United Arab Emirates: Arms Trade**

Caroline Lucas: [\[6179\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in the UAE on arms shipments to Darfur.

James Cartlidge:

The Secretary of State for Defence has had no recent discussions with his counterpart in the UAE on arms shipments to Darfur.

■ **Warrior Vehicles**

Clive Lewis: [\[6227\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many warrior armoured fighting vehicles are (a) in service, (b) set to be retired and (c) declared for disposal since November 2022.

James Cartlidge:

There are currently 625 Warrior in service. Activity is ongoing to draw the Warrior fleet down to the post-Integrated Review 21 funded position of 540 platforms and to reflect the *Future Soldier* structure. On current planning, Warrior will be retired from service by the end of 2030.

Across the initial tranches of disposal, 172 platforms were identified. Two tranches were completed prior to November 22, and 138 of the 172 platforms have been declared for disposal since this date.

EDUCATION

■ All Saints Roman Catholic School York: Construction

Rachael Maskell: [\[6297\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to help build a new school for All Saints Catholic School.

Damian Hinds:

The department has already included All Saints Roman Catholic School in the School Rebuilding Programme. The department wrote to the school and the responsible body, Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust, in July 2023 to confirm it is expected to enter delivery from April 2025.

■ Apprentices: Gender

Seema Malhotra: [\[6807\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of 16-19 year-olds (a) starting and (b) achieving apprenticeships in the last academic year were (i) male and (ii) female.

Seema Malhotra: [\[6808\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of people aged 19 and over (a) starting and (b) achieving apprenticeships in the last academic year were (i) male and (ii) female.

Robert Halfon:

The number of apprenticeship starts and achievements by age group and sex in the 2022/23 academic year are available at:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/1acab47d-9d76-4623-b73f-08dbfa51496d>.

The proportion of apprenticeship starts in the 2022/23 academic year by male and females in the under 19 and 19+ age groups are shown in the table below:

AGE GROUP	SEX	STARTS	ACHIEVEMENTS	
	Under 19	Female	40.9%	44.4%
Male	59.1%	55.6%		
	19+	Female	54.3%	53.6%
Male	45.7%	46.4%		

Further information on apprenticeship starts can be found in the apprenticeships and traineeships statistics publication, which can be accessed at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships>.

■ Business

Seema Malhotra: [6806]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many businesses the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education met in each of the last 12 months.

Robert Halfon:

I meet with representatives from businesses and business representative bodies in a variety of ways and on a regular basis in this role. For example, through Ministerial visits, roundtables, stakeholder events and formal meetings.

The exact information requested is not held centrally. The department does, however, publish a list of all external meetings and overseas travel of department Ministers.

This can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfes-ministerial-gifts-hospitality-travel-and-meetings-july-to-september-2023>.

■ Childminding

Dr Thérèse Coffey: [6138]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on the number of childminders that provide access to free childcare in (a) Suffolk Coastal constituency, (b) Suffolk and (c) England.

Dr Thérèse Coffey: [6139]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on the number of nurseries that provide access to free childcare in (a) Suffolk Coastal constituency, (b) Suffolk and (c) England.

Dr Thérèse Coffey: [6140]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many free childcare places were provided through childminders in (a) Suffolk Coastal constituency, (b) Suffolk and (c) England in the latest period for which data is available.

Dr Thérèse Coffey: [6141]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many free childcare places were provided through nurseries in (a) Suffolk Coastal constituency, (b) Suffolk and (c) England in the latest period for which data is available.

Dr Thérèse Coffey: [6142]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of free childcare places are available in nurseries during out of school term times in (a) Suffolk Coastal constituency, (b) Suffolk and (c) England.

Dr Thérèse Coffey: [6143]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of free childcare places are available in child minders during out of school term times in (a) Suffolk Coastal constituency, (b) Suffolk and (c) England.

David Johnston:

The number of childminders and state-funded nursery schools delivering government funded early years provision for children aged 2 to 4 in Suffolk and in England in each year from 2018 to 2023 can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/d229a86f-25c9-4388-af45-08dbfa4e7cea>.

Statistics relating to government funded early years provision for children aged 2 to 4 are published in the annual 'Education provision: children under 5 years of age' National Statistics publication which can be found at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-provision-children-under-5>. The latest statistics containing January 2023 data were published in July 2023 and the next release containing January 2024 data is expected to be published in June 2024.

Figures at parliamentary constituency level are not readily available.

The department does not centrally hold figures on the number and proportion of free childcare places that are available in nurseries and childminders during out of school term times.

■ Offences against Children

Mary Kelly Foy: [\[6917\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on implementing the recommendations in the report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, published in October 2022.

Mary Kelly Foy: [\[6918\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, published in October 2022, what steps she is taking to implement Recommendation six of that report.

David Johnston:

The department is working closely with the Home Office and others on implementing the recommendations in the final report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. This was most recently discussed with the Home Secretary on 17 October.

With regard to recommendation six, the government accepted unequivocally the need for children and young people to have their voices heard, to feel empowered to raise concerns, and challenge any aspect of their care. The department is prioritising work to update national standards and statutory guidance for the provision of children's advocacy services. In September the department launched a consultation on proposals, including extending the scope of the standards to apply to special residential settings and introducing a new standard on non-instructed advocacy for children who are non-verbal. This consultation closed on 18 December.

The department also remains committed to reviewing and strengthening the Independent Reviewing Officer and Regulation 44 visitors' roles, and is continuing to engage with stakeholders on different options.

■ Out-of-school Education

Rachael Maskell: [\[5848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that students not in school are able to access a full education.

Rachael Maskell: [\[5849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that children not in school are not at risk of harm.

Rachael Maskell: [\[5852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help improve the educational outcomes of pupils who are not in school.

Damian Hinds:

Parents have a right to educate their children at home and must provide an efficient, suitable full-time education if the child is of compulsory school age. The department supports this right and wants parents and local authorities to be supported in ensuring the education children receive at home is suitable and delivered well.

Local authorities have duties to ensure all children in their area are receiving a suitable education and are safe. They have powers to make enquiries with parents as to whether a suitable education appears to be being provided. If home education appears not to be suitable, then the local authority must commence the school attendance order process by first issuing a preliminary notice.

Local authorities also have the same safeguarding responsibilities for children educated at home as for other children. They should be ready to use safeguarding powers appropriately and when warranted. Local authorities also have a duty to make arrangements to identify children missing education (not in school or receiving suitable education).

The department is committed to a local authority registration system for children not in school, as well as a duty for local authorities to provide support to home-educating families. This will help local authorities undertake their existing duties to ensure all children receive a suitable education and are safe, regardless of where they are educated. The government will legislate for this at a suitable future opportunity.

On 26 October 2023, the government opened a public consultation to gather views on proposed changes to the non-statutory elective home education guidance to local authorities and parents, with the aim of emphasising responsibilities and improving practices and relationships. This consultation is open for contributions until 18 January 2024.

The government also ran a call for evidence on improving support for children missing education from 18 May to 20 July 2023. Evidence will be used to inform future policy to ensure all children, especially the most vulnerable in our society, are safe and have access to an excellent education. The government will issue a response in due course.

■ Religion: Education

Rachael Maskell: [6205]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make a comparative assessment of the number of Ofsted deep dives by core subject; and if she will take steps to increase the number of deep dives on religious education.

Damian Hinds:

This is a matter for His Majesty's Chief Inspector. I have asked the Chief Inspector to write to the hon. Member for York Central directly and a copy of that reply will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

■ Schools: Concrete

Justin Madders: [6205]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what her Department's timescale is for replacing (a) school buildings and (b) sports facilities affected by RAAC; and what criteria her Department plans to use when judging the suitability of replacement buildings.

Justin Madders: [6206]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate her Department has made of the number of (a) school buildings and (b) sports facilities affected by RAAC; and whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of compensating schools for lost income due to their inability to rent out such buildings.

Justin Madders: [6207]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to allow discretion in (a) grading and (b) OFSTED inspections for schools affected by RAAC.

Damian Hinds:

An updated list of schools and colleges with confirmed cases of RAAC was published on 6 December, which is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-raac-management-information>.

The department has committed to remove RAAC from the school estate. This will be delivered through capital grants or the School Rebuilding Programme. The department will set out further details in due course.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is providing support to Responsible Bodies with revenue funding to cover a range of RAAC-related costs, including lost income due to cancelled lettings. Affected Responsible Bodies should

contact their RAAC caseworker to discuss any revenue needs including lost income, so that support from the ESFA can be sought as soon as possible.

On grading, the department's focus is on supporting schools and colleges to put in place suitable mitigations to minimise disruption to learning. Officials in the department have also been working hard to ensure that any school or college that is struggling to deliver particular assessments due to RAAC receives the support they need for their specific circumstances. Officials have asked awarding organisations to agree extensions to coursework and non-examined assessment deadlines with affected schools and colleges wherever possible within the confines of their processes and regulations.

Special consideration is only given to a candidate who has temporarily experienced illness, injury or some other event outside of their control at the time of the exam or assessment. Decisions on special consideration are made by exam boards on an individual basis. The Joint Council for Qualifications' guidance is clear that students would not be eligible for special consideration on the grounds that teaching and learning has been disrupted by building work or a lack of facilities. This is important so that employers and/or further or higher education institutions can rely on the qualification outcomes as evidence of an individual's abilities against the published content requirements.

The department has a robust offer of support for pupils including extra education support for those who need it. The department has made more than £1 billion available to support tutoring. Since the launch of the National Tutoring Programme in November 2020, nearly four million tutoring courses have been started.

The department is investing record amounts of pupil premium funding with £2.6 billion in 2022/23 and £2.9 billion this financial year. The department also offers wider support for pupils who are disadvantaged and may need more support, such as free school meals that support 1.9 million children and the holiday activities and food programme where the department investing over £200 million a year for the next 2 years and support for 2,500 breakfast clubs.

Ofsted is avoiding scheduling school inspections during this term for schools on the department's published list of settings affected by RAAC. For schools impacted by RAAC, but not on the list, Ofsted will carefully consider any requests for a deferral of an inspection.

Justin Madders:

[6208]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to instruct Ofqual to give special consideration for students whose schools have been affected by RAAC.

Damian Hinds:

Our focus is on supporting schools and colleges to put in place suitable mitigations to minimise disruption to learning.

Special consideration is given to a candidate who has temporarily experienced illness, injury or some other event outside of their control at the time of the exam or

assessment. Decisions on special consideration are made by individual exam boards, following guidance published by the Joint Council for Qualifications.

Officials in the department have been working hard to ensure that any school or college that is struggling to deliver particular assessments due to RAAC receives the support they need for their specific circumstances. Officials have asked awarding organisations to agree extensions to coursework and non-examined assessment deadlines with affected schools and colleges wherever possible, whilst providing as much flexibility as they can within the confines of their processes and regulations.

Rachael Maskell: [6298]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the need to retrofit school buildings containing RAAC.

Damian Hinds:

The department has already committed to fund both the immediate mitigation of RAAC in schools and colleges, as well as its removal either via grant funding or the school rebuilding programme where appropriate.

■ Schools: Construction

Rachael Maskell: [6293]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans her Department has for further school building projects this Parliament.

Damian Hinds:

The School Rebuilding Programme (SRP) was announced in 2020 with a commitment to 500 projects and is providing modern buildings, designed to be net zero carbon in operation. The department has announced 400 projects to date, including 239 in December 2022, prioritising school buildings in poor condition. The programme includes All Saints Catholic School and Tang Hall Primary Academy in York Central.

The department will announce further projects in the SRP in due course.

■ Schools: Gender Recognition

Sir John Hayes: [6401]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure school children are provided with age-appropriate (a) discussions and (b) materials on gender self-identification.

Damian Hinds:

The Relationships and Sex and Health Education (RSHE) statutory guidance is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>.

It is for schools to make decisions about the content they teach and the materials they use when teaching RSHE. However, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State

for Education, has been concerned to hear reports of inappropriate materials being used in schools and that contested topics are being taught as fact. This is why the department has brought forward the first review of the RSHE statutory guidance, including appointing an independent panel to provide expert advice on what is appropriate to be taught in RSHE and at what age. Details of the independent review panel are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/relationships-health-and-sex-education-independent-review>.

In March 2023, the Secretary of State for Education wrote to schools to remind them that copyright law does not prevent them sharing external resources with parents. In October 2023, she wrote again to clarify that any contractual clause that prevents schools from sharing materials is void and unenforceable, and to provide practical advice on how to share materials with parents in a way that is in line with copyright legislation. The department will ensure that the updated guidance fully reflects this very clear position. The guidance is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/secretary-of-state-letter-to-schools-about-sharing-curriculum-resources-with-parents>.

A draft of the amended guidance will be published for consultation, at the earliest opportunity, in the new year.

■ Schools: Inspections

Rachael Maskell:

[6299]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how often does her Department plan to inspect the condition of the schools estate.

Damian Hinds:

This government was the first in history to collect comprehensive condition data of the school estate, enabling the department to take the long term decisions to improve school condition based on need. The Condition Data Collection (CDC) programme was the first ever comprehensive survey of the school estate. Previous administrations took no action to understand the condition of the school estate. Running from 2017 to 2019, the survey allowed the department to understand the condition of the school estate over time and informed capital funding and programmes by providing information on the condition of all 22,000 government funded school buildings and 260 further education colleges in England.

Currently, the CDC2 programme is collecting data on the condition of the government funded school estate. CDC2 started in 2021 and will complete in 2026.

The department is considering options for further school condition data collection activities beyond 2026.

■ Social Services: Children

Sir Bill Wiggin:

[6161]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the press release by Pause entitled Pause responds to Government's plans for children's social care, published on 11

May 2023, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of their recommendation on annual data collection on parents who have experienced the removal of more than one child from their care.

David Johnston:

The department appreciates the need to improve the data available about children's social care, including by making it more relevant to the experience of children, young people and families. That is why the department has published a data and digital strategy for children's social care. This strategic approach will provide the opportunity to map and understand the data needs of the children's social care sector as a whole and seek to address this over time. This will enable a better understanding of the system and support the planning and delivery of services. A link to the strategy can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-data-and-digital-strategy>.

Existing statutory data is captured about the child and does not capture the complex nature of families such as, for example, where siblings do not live in the same family home. Addressing data gaps in children's social care will be a long-term endeavour due to the need to agree data definitions and standards, as well as redesign local authority and departmental systems before rolling out nationally.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Climate Change: Financial Services

Kerry McCarthy:

[7004]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to Q234 of the oral evidence given by her Department's Deputy Director of International Net Zero: Green Finance and Capability to the Environmental Audit Committee on 18 May 2023, HC 308, when she plans to launch the consultation on voluntary carbon markets.

Amanda Solloway:

We intend to publish our consultation on voluntary carbon and nature markets in Q1 2024.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Climate Change Convention

Dr Matthew Offord:

[6446]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many officials from her Department attended COP 28.

Amanda Solloway:

My Rt hon Friend the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, and my Rt hon Friend the Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero, attended COP28. A final list of confirmed UK participants, including officials from DESNZ, will be published by the UNFCCC in due course.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Power Failures

Sarah Olney:

[\[7080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether there have been any power cuts on their Department's property in each of the last three years.

Amanda Solloway:

The Department does not keep an official record of the occurrence of power cuts.

The Government Property Agency (GPA) is responsible for managing the Department's office estate, including the provision of utilities and maintenance of the building. The Department's Estates Team officials work closely with GPA to ensure that any power supply issues that do occur are quickly addressed.

■ Energy Company Obligation

Judith Cummins:

[\[6630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of including receipt of PIP as a qualifying requirement for the Energy Company Obligation scheme.

Amanda Solloway:

ECO4 includes flexible eligibility (ECO Flex), which allows local authorities and energy suppliers to refer households even if they do not meet the eligible benefits criteria. Households may qualify for support if they have a severe long-term health condition which could be affected by living in a cold home.

The Great British Insulation Scheme aims to drive delivery of the most cost-effective insulation to a wider pool of households.

■ Energy Supply: Emergencies

Olivia Blake:

[\[7152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment her Department has made of the implications of the Stannington gas flood in Sheffield Hallam constituency for her policies on (a) the potential impact of public infrastructure on households energy security and (b) levels of investment in the maintenance of infrastructure to prevent further crisis.

Andrew Bowie:

The Government works closely with industry to continually improve and maintain the resilience of old and new energy infrastructure, networks and assets, to reduce vulnerabilities and ensure an effective response to actual or potentially disruptive incidents. Ofgem ensures that Gas Distribution Networks have sufficient funding to invest in the resilience of their infrastructure, manage risk on their networks, and meet their statutory obligations, via their price control settlement.

■ UK Emissions Trading Scheme: Factories

Justin Madders:

[6201]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what her planned timetable is for completing the review of the (a) emission trading scheme and (b) sale of unused credits by companies that have closed down factories in the UK.

Amanda Solloway:

We have published the review of the UK Emissions Trading Scheme this week, available on gov.uk.

In the UK ETS, sites at risk of carbon leakage are given a proportion of their allowances for free, helping manage the risk that UK businesses' decarbonisation efforts could be undermined by higher-carbon imports.

The scheme sets out rules around free allowances, including on their reduction and return where sites' production and emissions levels decrease. We have published a consultation this week reviewing these rules, with proposals to ensure that surplus allowances are not retained by companies that have closed down in the UK.

■ Warm Home Discount Scheme

Justin Madders:

[6203]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to the Answer of 23 June 2023 to Question 189629 on Warm Home Discount Scheme, whether the evaluation of the reformed Warm Home Discount scheme included an impact assessment.

Amanda Solloway:

The evaluation of the scheme is ongoing and will span three years. It is due to conclude in Autumn 2026.

The Government produced impact assessments for the consultation in 2021 on expanding and reforming the Warm Home Discount scheme in England and Wales and for the publication of the Government Response in 2022, which are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/warm-home-discount-better-targeted-support-from-2022>

■ Warm Home Discount Scheme: Supported Housing

Kirsten Oswald:

[6274]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if she will make an estimate of how many people living in supported accommodation are unable to access the warm home discount because their landlord is the utility customer.

Amanda Solloway:

The Warm Home Discount scheme obligates participating energy suppliers to provide rebates to eligible customers. Under the scheme in Scotland, customers are eligible if

they are either in receipt of the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit or meet the eligibility criteria set by their energy supplier.

Energy suppliers can support households through the Industry Initiatives element of the scheme, through measures such as financial assistance, debt write-off, and energy efficiency. This support can be provided irrespective of whether a person is named on the electricity bill.

Kirsten Oswald:

[\[6275\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to the Park Homes Warm Home Discount scheme, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the warm home discount to people living in supported accommodation.

Amanda Solloway:

The Park Homes Warm Home Discount scheme is run by Charis Grants and is funded voluntarily by energy suppliers under the Industry Initiatives element of the Warm Home Discount scheme. The Park Homes scheme is intended to support fuel-poor households living in park homes who pay for their electricity to their site owner.

Energy suppliers can also provide additional support to households through Industry Initiatives, through measures such as financial assistance, debt write-off, and energy efficiency. This support can be provided to households, irrespective of whether a person is eligible for a rebate under the scheme.

Kirsten Oswald:

[\[6276\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps she is taking to help support people living in supported accommodation who do not have their own energy account with the cost of living.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government is continuing to support those most in need, including individuals in supported accommodation. Millions of vulnerable households will receive up to £900 in further Cost of Living Payments, with £300 to pensioner households, and £150 to those on eligible disability benefits. Low income and vulnerable households are also being supported this winter through the Winter Fuel Payment worth between £250 - £600 and the Cold Weather Payment providing £25 during very cold weather. Individuals in supported accommodation should visit the 'Help for Households' webpage on GOV.UK to see what support they are eligible for.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ Agriculture: Flood Control**

Tim Farron: [\[5957\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what funding his Department has provided to mitigate flooding on agricultural land in each year since 2018.

Robbie Moore:

As well as protecting more than 300,000 homes, the 2015-2021 £2.6bn flood investment programme worked with farmers to reduce the risk of flooding to nearly 600,000 acres of agricultural land.

Tim Farron: [\[5960\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if his Department will take steps to implement a comprehensive agricultural water management strategy.

Robbie Moore:

Defra recently published its Plan for Water to deliver a safe, reliable, resilient supply of clean and plentiful water – for our homes, businesses, for leisure and for wildlife that rely on.

We are working with the sector to put in place funding to encourage the establishment of Water Abstractor Groups for agriculture. These groups will conduct supply-demand balance assessments for Agricultural Water Resource Management Planning and conduct Local Resource Options studies to identify potential local infrastructure projects, to improve agricultural water supply resilience.

The Government and the Environment Agency also support the agricultural sector through the Water Management Grant, under the Farming Transformation Fund, for the construction of new irrigation reservoirs and the adoption of best practice irrigation application equipment, helping to ensure farmers have access to water when they need it most. Over the coming months, Defra will consider the option of launching a third round of the grant in the future.

To drive progress to reduce water pollution from agriculture, we have set a new legally binding target under the Environment Act 2012 to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment by 40% by 2038. We have published our Plan for Water, which sets out our commitment to implementing a suite of actions to tackle agricultural pollution including increasing the Environment Agency's farm inspection capacity, doubling the Catchment Sensitive Farming advice programme, investing in slurry management to help farmers improve practices and introducing Environmental Land Schemes to pay farmers for the delivery of environmental benefits.

■ Agriculture: Floods

Tim Farron:

[\[5961\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what financial support is available to farmers who have just lost their harvests due to flooding since 1 January 2023.

Robbie Moore:

The Government announced a significant package of support, via the Flood Recovery Framework, to areas in England that have experienced exceptional localised flooding as a result of Storm Babet. The Framework provides funding for eligible households and businesses and includes a £2,500 Business Recovery Grant for SMEs, including farm businesses, which have suffered severe impacts from flooding if unable to be recovered from their farming insurance, and Council Tax discounts. Farmers in eligible areas may also access grants up to £5,000 per property to install Property Flood Resilience measures where they have internal flooding to homes or business premises.

■ Algae: Dogs

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[3148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps with relevant authorities to help tackle the prevalence of toxic algae that is harmful to dogs in waterways.

Robbie Moore:

Algae grow naturally in water. When their growth conditions are good, such as periods of hot, calm weather - algal blooms can develop. Some algae, notably cyanobacteria or 'blue-green algae', can produce toxins which can kill, or make ill, pets, wild animals, and livestock. They can also harm people, producing rashes after skin contact and illnesses if swallowed. An excess of nutrients (like phosphorus) can increase frequencies and severities of blooms.

Reducing nutrient pollution is a priority for Defra and the Environment Agency. Phosphorus loadings to English rivers from water industry sewage treatment works were reduced between 1995 and 2020 at a cost of £2.1 billion capital, with a further £2.4 billion committed in the 2019 water industry price review for action in 2020 to 2025. Government has set legally binding targets for the reduction of nutrients from wastewater and agriculture in the Environment Act 2021.

The Environment Agency works with landowners and relevant authorities in analysing affected sites, warning the public and restricting access where blue green algae poses a risk to water users.

■ Animal Feed and Food: Insects

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[5255\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential risk of diseases spreading to wild (a) insects and (b) other animals from insects farmed for use as (i) food and (ii) animal feed.

Mark Spencer:

We remain vigilant to changes in production systems and continue to use our established systems to monitor for new and emerging animal health risks through our Veterinary Risk Group and Animal Disease Policy Group.

The Food Standards Agency has commissioned a comprehensive review of the safety of several currently non permitted substrates that could potentially be used to rear insect larvae for protein in animal feeds. The research project is gathering chemical and microbiological safety data relating to the substrates, the larvae and the residual rearing substrate material (frass).

■ Antibiotics: Drug Resistance

Daniel Zeichner:

[\[5541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps with Cabinet colleagues to help reduce the risk of antimicrobial resistance in humans arising from the overuse of antibiotics on farms.

Mark Spencer:

The Government takes a 'One-Health' approach to antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as set out in the 'UK 5-year action plan for antimicrobial resistance 2019 to 2024', which is underpinned by the UK's 20-year Vision to Contain and Control AMR by 2040. Defra is a co-signatory with the Department of Health and Social Care on the 5-year National Action Plan (NAP) and 20-year vision on AMR, and Defra leads on delivering the animal, plant and environment elements. The AMR NAP lays out the UK Government's commitment to reducing unnecessary use of antibiotics in animals to reduce the risk of development and spread of AMR in animals and humans, while safeguarding animal health and welfare. A key component of this plan is to reduce the need for antibiotics, which is achieved through good farm management, biosecurity and disease prevention.

In the UK, we have a well-established antimicrobial use and resistance surveillance programme, which includes monitoring of sales and use of antibiotics in animals as well as routine monitoring of AMR in major food-producing species, healthy pigs and poultry. These surveillance programmes allow us to monitor progress and results are published every year in the UK Veterinary Antibiotic Resistance Sales and Surveillance (UK-VARSS) report.

The recently published UK-VARSS report shows that sales of antibiotics in food-producing animals are at their lowest ever level, with a 59% reduction since 2014.

This highlights the success of the UK's voluntary and collaborative approach between the Government and the farming and veterinary sectors to make sustainable reductions in antibiotic use while ensuring high animal health and welfare. The report also highlights that sales of highest priority, critically important antibiotics have reduced by 82% since 2014 and account for less than half a percent of total sales. This is to ensure that these medically important antibiotics are protected for use in humans.

The newly published third edition of the UK's One Health report, a joint report from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the UK Health and Security Agency, brings together antibiotic use and resistance data for people and animals. Sales of antibiotics in 2019 show that approximately two thirds of antibiotics are used in people while one third are used in animals. This report demonstrates the Government's One Health approach to tackling AMR to keep antibiotics working in both people and animals.

The UK is now in the process of developing the second five-year NAP, which will run from 2024-2029. This will build on progress made in the 2019-2024 NAP and set out challenging ambitions and actions for the next five years, which will set us on course for achieving our long-term national and international ambitions.

■ Batteries: Recycling

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[7006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of battery recycling capacity; and if he will take steps to help increase the recyclability of batteries.

Robbie Moore:

Defra officials are currently reviewing the UK Batteries Regulations ahead of a consultation expected next year. The purpose of this review is to ensure as much waste battery material as possible is collected and managed efficiently, whether that be through reuse, repurposing or recycling routes.

■ Beverage Containers: Waste Disposal

Andrew Selous:

[\[6171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help reduce the number of non-recyclable disposable coffee cups being disposed of in a recycling bin.

Robbie Moore:

To increase the recycling of recyclable, fibre-based composite cups, the Government plans to introduce mandatory cup takeback and recycling obligations in 2025. Consumers will be able to use a dedicated cups recycling bin at any obligated premises.

Additionally, as part of the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging Regulations, we are introducing a single, UK-wide approach to packaging labelling.

Producers of packaging, including coffee cups, will be required to label primary and shipment packaging as either Recycle or Do Not Recycle. This will provide consumers with clear and consistent information on what packaging they can and cannot recycle.

Andrew Selous:

[\[6172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to page 12 of his Department's Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, what progress his Department has made on investigating the role of behavioural science in understanding how single-use coffee cups are used.

Robbie Moore:

Defra is looking further into single-use coffee cups and how to bring their use more in line with the waste hierarchy (reduce, reuse, and recycle). Further consideration of the behavioural aspect of the use of these cups will be undertaken in due course as part of this workstream.

■ **Bluetongue Virus: Kent**

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[5876\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent progress his Department has made on (a) its investigation into and (b) the management of the cases of bluetongue virus in cattle in Kent.

Mark Spencer:

After the finding of bluetongue in a single cow in Kent on 10 November, Defra and Animal and Plant Health Agency officials took immediate action, humanely culling the animal and putting in place a 10km Temporary Control Zone (TCZ) around the affected premises, whilst a veterinary investigation was carried out to understand the origin of the disease and check for potential spread.

Surveillance in the Kent TCZ has found another 8 cases, including two cases in animals that had been grazing outside of the zone. As a result, the TCZ has been extended as a precaution to prevent the potential spread of disease. Routine surveillance in higher risk counties has identified a further two cases of bluetongue in cattle on a farm in Norfolk - a 10km TCZ has been declared around the affected premises and both animals will be humanely culled to minimise the risk of onward transmission. This brings the total number of cases to 11 on six different holdings. There is currently no evidence that there is circulating virus in the GB midge population. Surveillance and our investigations are ongoing.

Within the TCZs, a range of controls are in place to prevent potential spread of disease, including restrictions on the movement of susceptible animals. Keepers of susceptible animals in the TCZs can apply for licences to move for most purposes including for welfare and to slaughter. We continue to work closely with industry representatives to ensure that keepers are kept up to date with developments and that issues and concerns are addressed promptly.

■ Cattle and Meat: Environment Protection

Sarah Owen: [\[5433\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the environmental impact of (a) meat and (b) dairy cows.

Mark Spencer:

Defra recognises the contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and other forms of pollution made by the livestock and dairy sectors. However, while food choices can have an impact on pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, well managed livestock also provide environmental benefits such as supporting biodiversity, protecting the character of the countryside and generating important income for rural communities. British farming helps provide for the nutritional needs of a growing population, and grazing livestock can produce food on land that would not be suitable for cropping.

■ Clean Air (Human Rights) Bill

Geraint Davies: [\[5441\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to e-petition 639320 entitled Find time to take the Clean Air (Human Rights) Bill through the House of Commons.

Robbie Moore:

A Government response is being prepared and will be published in due course.

■ Coastal Erosion: Lowestoft

Steve Reed: [\[6223\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of coastal erosion to the local (a) community and (b) economy in Lowestoft.

Robbie Moore:

Coastal erosion is a natural process that always has and will shape coastlines around the world.

Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) are developed and owned by the local councils and coastal protection authorities. These provide long-term strategic plans which identify approaches for managing the flood and coastal erosion risks at every stretch of coastline. The EA are supporting local authorities to update and strengthen the SMPs by 2024 through a technical refresh project to ensure they are up to date, using the best evidence in their recommendations and focus attention on priority areas for investment and adaptation. Over £2m will be used for this project and will include the development a new digital on-line tool to improve access, understanding and use of SMPs.

We are investing £5.2 billion between 2021 and 2027 to better protect communities across England from flooding and coastal erosion. In addition, we are investing £200 million as part of the Flood and Coastal Innovation Resilience Programme in 25 areas

across England to take forward wider innovative actions that improve resilience to flooding and coastal erosion.

As part of this programme, Defra has provided £8.4 million funding to East Suffolk Council and Great Yarmouth Borough Council. The Resilient Coasts Project will offer a complete suite of planning, engagement, technical and financial tools to support coastal transition for communities. The learning will be shared with other coastal authorities and could also be applied to the rest of the UK coast.

■ Domestic Waste and Recycling

Dr Thérèse Coffey: [\[6220\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much waste was collected in (a) household waste and (b) recycling centres in (i) 2019-20, (ii) 2020-21, (iii) 2021-22 and (iv) 2022-23 per waste authority.

Robbie Moore:

Figures for Total Household waste by Local Authority for 2019/20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 can be found in Table 1 of the dataset published [here](#).

Defra do not publish figures for total waste deposited at HWRC's by Local Authority.

This information can be derived from WasteDataFlow Question level data published on [Gov.uk](#) for 2019/20, 2020-21 and 2021-22.

Data for 2022-23 will be published in 2024.

■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

Luke Pollard: [\[6679\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the burdens funding announced in his Department's consultation outcome on consistency in household and business recycling in England, last updated on 21 November 2023, what assessment he has made of whether the level of funding proposed will be adequate to meet the cost of (a) electric vehicles and (b) related charging infrastructure.

Robbie Moore:

Any new financial burdens introduced through new statutory duties on local authorities will be assessed in accordance with the New Burdens Doctrine and the net reasonable cost covered by the government.

We are working to assess net additional costs to local authorities and will be engaging with local authorities on funding to be provided in due course.

■ Flood Control

Rachael Maskell: [\[6302\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to help improve resilience co-ordination across agencies when flooding occurs.

Robbie Moore:

There is close working with departments and agencies across Government, including partner agencies such as the Met Office and the Environment Agency (EA), to monitor the risk from flooding. The Government funds a Flood Forecasting Centre which provides a daily five-day flood forecast and informs National and Local operational flood readiness, allowing for multi-agency coordination to begin in advance of flooding.

Following a flood event, Government departments and agencies conduct reviews of their response and coordination arrangements.

Rachael Maskell:**[6305]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to promote awareness of the flood alerts scheme.

Robbie Moore:

The Environment Agency provides the [Check for flooding](#) service giving information on flood alerts and warnings as well as a five-day forecast. The Environment Agency uses its [flood warning system](#) to directly alert around 1.6 million people when flooding is expected in their area.

The Environment Agency provides practical information about what people can do before, after and during a flood on GOV.UK. Between April 2022 and March 2023, the Environment Agency sent over 4.7 million messages to the public, partners and the media. These messages informed them of flooding in their area and the flood warning service they can receive.

The Environment Agency's annual Flood Action Campaign launched in November 2023, with Flood Action Week. The campaign encourages people at risk of flooding to focus on what they need to do to prepare for a flood. Signing up to flood alerts forms part of the Environment Agency's "Prepare Act Survive" message.

■ Flood Control: Finance**Rachael Maskell:****[3287]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of increasing investment in flood defence schemes.

Robbie Moore:

The Government announced in March 2020 a record £5.2 billion investment over 6 years in flood and coastal erosion schemes across England, doubling the amount from the previous programme.

The Government is also investing £200 million in the flood and coastal resilience innovation programme and has invested £170 million of economic recovery funding in 23 shovel ready flood schemes.

Justin Madders:

[\[6619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has (a) carried out a recent review of the allocation of Flood Defence Grant in Aid funding which will be available for flood risk schemes and (b) made an assessment of the effectiveness of that funding.

Robbie Moore:

The Government announced in March 2020 the amount invested in flood and coastal erosion schemes would be doubled in England to £5.2 billion between 2021 and 2027. The Government keeps under review how funding is allocated to maximise its effectiveness.

Grant in Aid is allocated through the Government's Partnership Funding policy to create greater partnership working between authorities and communities. Defra undertook an independent evaluation of the policy in 2018 and found it enabled more schemes to be delivered.

■ Flood Control: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes:

[\[5151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent progress he has made on long-term strategic maintenance plans for flood defences in Lincolnshire.

Robbie Moore:

At the last spending review the government increased funding for maintenance of flood defences by £22 million per year. This results in an investment of £201 million for 2022/2023 and an allocation for 23-24 of over £220 million.

The EA has allocated £10.05m for the maintenance of flood defences in Lincolnshire for 2023/24. This funding covers routine maintenance such as the maintenance of water management control structures, riverbanks, and works to keep rivers flowing. The work is prioritised to the highest consequence watercourses first so that it benefits the most properties. The funding also covers intermittent works to repair failing flood defences and incident response activities when they arise.

Local Internal Drainage Boards and local authorities also have responsibilities for the management and maintenance of watercourses and their own flood risk assets.

■ Floods: Government Assistance

Rachael Maskell:

[\[6301\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to provide additional support to local authorities in areas that experience frequent flooding.

Robbie Moore:

The Government announced in March 2020 a record £5.2 billion investment between 2021 and 2027 in flood and coastal erosion schemes to better protect communities across England.

Communities suffering frequent flooding can benefit from Government's £100 million Frequently Flooded Allowance, ring-fenced from the £5.2 billion investment. This aims to boost schemes in areas that are impacted repeatedly from flooding. On 5 April 2023, Government announced the first 53 communities to benefit from the Allowance.

■ Floods: Insurance**Rachael Maskell:****[6303]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on access to the Flood:RE scheme by leaseholders.

Robbie Moore:

Defra works closely with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and with the insurance industry, to consider access to the Flood Re scheme. The Flood Re scheme allows for those living in properties of three units or less where the freeholder lives in one of the units to be offered discounted premiums. Blocks of four or more units are classified as a commercial business, the Flood Re scheme does not apply for buildings insurance. All tenants and leaseholders, regardless of the size of block, are able to obtain contents insurance supported by Flood Re.

■ Floods: York**Rachael Maskell:****[6300]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of trends in the frequency of flooding in York; and whether he has made an assessment of whether the flood defence barriers will be exceeded before 2039.

Robbie Moore:

Following flooding in York in December 2015, the Environment Agency (EA) received a £64 million booster funding to better protect 2,000 properties within the city and local communities, in addition to £38 million to upgrade the Foss Barrier.

The flood management projects delivered, mainly on the River Ouse, are designed to protect properties from a flood with a 1% probability of happening in any given year, considering the effects of climate change until 2039. Further climate change predictions indicate upper catchment flood alleviation measures will be required past 2039 to offer York the same standard of protection. Catchment-wide measures aim to 'slow the flow' of water and lower water levels through the city in times of flood. Opportunities include engineered storage areas and natural flood management.

The EA has undertaken preliminary modelling work to assess indicative locations for upstream flood storage, informing a long-term plan and future investment programme. The EA is also reviewing the operation of its existing flood management systems in the upper catchments on the Rivers Swale, Ure and Nidd to identify the potential for new approaches to managing flood risk and the environment, as well as the long-term investment requirement for these systems.

In addition, City of York Council is leading the £6 million 'York and North Yorkshire Natural Catchment Flood Risk Solutions Project', also called 'Ousewem'. The project aims to look at wider catchment opportunities and is part of Defra's £150 million Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme. The project will develop a range of incentivised natural flood risk management opportunities across the Rivers Swale, Ure, Nidd and Ouse catchments.

Any future work in the middle and upper catchments to 'slow the flow' and 'store' water will likely require changes to current land use. Significant areas of the catchment are agricultural, and any future changes to the use of land will be challenging.

■ Fly-tipping

Jim Shannon:

[\[6564\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made a comparative assessment of the level of fly-tipping in (a) England and (b) the rest of the UK.

Robbie Moore:

Local authorities in England are required to report fly-tipping incidents and enforcement actions data to Defra, which are published annually on Gov.uk. In August, we published new league tables, providing transparency on how councils are using their enforcement powers.

Defra has not made a comparison with data from other parts of the UK.

■ Food: Waste

Sir John Hayes:

[\[6072\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to work with supermarkets to help reduce food waste.

Robbie Moore:

The Government is investing over £2 million this year to combat food waste. That includes funding the Waste and Resources Action Plan (WRAP) and through them we work to address food waste in households and supply chains.

We support the Courtauld 2030 Commitment, managed by WRAP. Courtauld 2030 is a voluntary agreement with industry to tackle food waste, which includes a target of a 50% per capita reduction in food waste by 2030 against a 2007 baseline. Action through Courtauld includes working with businesses, including all the major retailers,

to measure and reduce food waste through the Food Waste Reduction Roadmap and the key tool to Target Measure and Act on waste. Courtauld signatories also play a key role in providing consumers with support in reducing food waste at home for instance through offering storage advice and appropriate labelling. [Recent data from WRAP](#) showed food waste for the retail sector was 26% lower in 2021 than in 2007.

■ Hornets: Mid Bedfordshire

Alistair Strathern:

[\[7157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the resources available to beekeepers to tackle the impact of Asian Hornets on (a) honey bees and (b) other wild pollinators in Mid Bedfordshire constituency.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government recognises that honey bees and wild pollinators are an essential part of our environment and play a crucial role in food production. All pollinators contribute the equivalent of more than £500 million a year to UK agriculture and food production, by improving crop quality and quantity. Pollinators are also beneficial to our wider, natural ecosystems.

Recognising the potential impact that Asian hornet would have on honey bees and wild pollinators, Defra, in collaboration with the Welsh Government, has developed the Asian hornet contingency plan which details the response to Asian hornet. The plan is regularly reviewed and was last updated in January 2023. The operational response is carried out by the National Bee Unit (NBU), part of the Animal and Plant Health Agency.

In 2023 the NBU has located and destroyed 72 nests in 56 locations. The NBU has now fine-tuned its response and enhanced its preparedness, and it can frequently find a nest within a day of an initial sighting being reported.

The Defra funding for the NBU is to deliver the Bee Health Programme and other agreed actions including responding to Asian hornet. This includes ensuring that NBU inspectors' expertise is maintained through training, and that they have the necessary equipment and support to work effectively.

NBU has the necessary skills and experience and is therefore best placed to deliver the operational response.

We appreciate the vital role that beekeepers take in the response through helping raise awareness of the threat of Asian hornet, educating people in identifying these insects, encouraging them to report any suspected sightings and monitoring traps. Accurate and timely reporting is critical to the response and helps the NBU to continue to respond quickly and effectively to any potential nests.

■ Packaging: Recycling**Alex Cunningham:**[\[4857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has created a final programme-wide business case for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), the Consistent Collections Project, and the Deposit Return Scheme for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Robbie Moore:

This is in progress. The Collection and Packaging Reforms Programme Business Case (PBC) is being prepared for Defra Investment Committee consideration early in the new year.

■ Recycling: Construction**Sir Gary Streeter:**[\[6706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when his Department intends to bring forward legislative proposals to abolish charges for DIY construction waste at recycling centres.

Robbie Moore:

Legislation was laid on 21 November to ensure householders do not face financial barriers to dispose of small-scale DIY waste at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs). The legislation will come into force from 31 December 2023, subject to parliamentary procedure.

■ River Severn: Sewage**Mike Amesbury:**[\[6348\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with United Utilities on the level of sewage released into the River Severn.

Robbie Moore:

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with representatives of the water industry to discuss a range of issues, including reducing sewage discharges. This Government will continue to take bold action to tackle sewage pollution and hold all water companies, including United Utilities, to account for delivery.

The Government is clear that the volume of sewage being discharged into our waters is unacceptable. This is why we launched the Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan, setting stringent targets to reduce discharges from storm overflows. This Plan will drive the largest infrastructure programme in water company history - £60 billion capital investment over 25 years.

The River Severn is not a catchment in which United Utilities operates.

■ Rural Payments Agency: Digital Mapping

Alistair Strathern: [\[6368\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many people in (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency and (b) England have outstanding field boundary correction cases with the Rural Payments Agency.

Mark Spencer:

As of 12 December 2023, there are 854 single business identifiers (individual farm business number) in England with customer notified land changes in our workstack. We do not break these figures down by constituency.

■ Sandeels: Fisheries

Emma Hardy: [\[6883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department plans to close English waters to industrial sand eel fishing before the start of the 2024 fishing season.

Mark Spencer:

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea has recently published its response to a technical request on ecosystem considerations in the provision of single stock advice for forage fish species. Defra is presently assessing that response, alongside other evidence, and responses to our public consultation on sandeel management. I will announce my decision in the new year.

■ Soil

Kerry McCarthy: [\[7005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the debate that took place in the House of Lords on 8 September 2021 on the Environment Bill, column 867HL and the Answer of 4 January 2023 to Question HL4404 on Soil, for what reason his Department has not published a soil health action plan.

Rebecca Pow:

The policies the Government had intended to put in a soil health action plan for England were included in the [2023 Environmental Improvement Plan](#) (EIP). The Government is required under the Environment Act 2021 to report on EIP commitments in the Annual Progress Report, which is independently monitored by the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP). The next report is due to be published by July 2024.

■ Storms: Flood Control

Daniel Kawczynski: [\[6135\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the flooding that followed Storm Babet.

Robbie Moore:

Storm Babet brought persistent and heavy rain to the north and midlands of England overnight on Thursday 19 October and through the following Friday and Saturday. There were around 2,150 properties flooded during Storm Babet and over 96,000 properties protected by existing flood defences. Defra opened its Emergency Operations Centre on 19 October, having led a series of preparedness meetings during the week, upgrading its response to activate the National Flood Response Centre as the forecast deteriorated.

Government recognises the impact flooding has on households, business and local authorities and has put in place a significant package of support for areas in England that experienced exceptional localised flooding as a result of Storm Babet. Following approval from Defra's Secretary of State, Defra has also activated the Property Flood Resilience (PFR) Grant scheme. The PFR Scheme is a package of funding for property owners directly flooded by a specific weather event that grants them up to £5,000 per property to install PFR measures.

We keep our policies under review, including factoring in experience from any flood events.

■ Supermarkets: Origin Marking**Sir John Hayes:**[\[6073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has had discussions with representatives of supermarkets on introducing Buy British sections.

Mark Spencer:

Defra officials regularly engage with major supermarkets to understand the work they are doing to promote British produce. We welcome their efforts to promote British food and the innovative ways to make it easier for consumers to pick British and back our farmers, who produce some of the best food in the world. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bosworth whose campaign on this matter has seen some supermarkets adding British sections to their websites. We encourage other supermarkets to follow suit with similar initiatives.

■ Swimming**Ian Lavery:**[\[6307\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many inland bathing water site applications were received in 2022; and how many and what proportion of those applications were accepted.

Robbie Moore:

In 2022 Defra received 16 bathing water applications for inland sites. Three of these sites were designated as bathing waters: Rutland Water Whitwell Creek, Rutland Water Sykes Lane and an area of the River Deben Estuary at Waldringfield, Suffolk.

■ Water Supply: Pilot Schemes

Jeremy Quin:

[\[3871\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department holds data on pilot schemes that have reduced water usage to 85 litres per person per day.

Robbie Moore:

In Cambridge, we are allocating £9 million – including £5 million of new funding – to improve the barrier of water scarcity and accelerate the new Cambridge Delivery Group. The Government is working closely with Cambridge and North Sussex local authorities to learn from their experiences and has committed to developing water positive guidance, working with Ofwat on its environmental incentives and reviewing the building regulations to support developers to be water efficient.

The Building Regulations 2010 allow for tighter standards to be adopted through locally led voluntary agreements between the Lead Planning Authority and developers. Examples of these include individual developments, such as Eddington in Cambridge, which has been designed to a much tighter standard (80l/p/d). The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has not conducted any pilot schemes and does not hold any data. In the Environmental Improvement Plan roadmap on water efficiency in new developments and retrofits, Defra committed to reviewing the aspects of Building Regulations 2010 pertaining to water efficiency (regulation 36 and Part G2, H1, H2, H3 of Schedule 1).

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Afghanistan: Civil Society

Catherine West:

[\[6856\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he has taken to facilitate regular engagement with Afghan civil society.

Leo Docherty:

UK ministers and officials engage regularly with a range of Afghan civil society organisations. This includes engagement with Afghan women's organisations, both in Afghanistan and in the UK and diaspora. For example, officials regularly engage with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Afghan Women and Girls led by Wendy Chamberlain MP and the Afghan Women Support Forum, established by Baroness Hodgson of Abinger. Both these forums comprise Afghan women activists including civil society representatives from Afghanistan and in the UK.

■ Afghanistan: Refugees

John Healey:

[\[6083\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how many (a) Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy and (b) Afghan Citizens

Resettlement Scheme eligible Afghan nationals classed as (i) principals and (ii) dependents are in Pakistan as of 11 December 2023.

Leo Docherty:

As of 12 December, the number of eligible persons in Pakistan who qualified via Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy was 232 principals and 1,147 dependents and the number of eligible persons who qualified via Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme Pathway 3 was 178 principals and 724 dependents.

Luke Pollard:

[\[6899\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential risk to Afghan refugees who are deported from Pakistan to Afghanistan.

Leo Docherty:

In Pakistan we are working with the UN Refugee Agency to ensure Pakistan, which has a long history of hosting vulnerable refugees, adheres to its international human rights obligations. In Afghanistan, there has been a significant scale up in the provision of emergency assistance to returnees at the border and we are following the humanitarian and human rights implications closely, including the work of the Taliban Refugee Commission to aid the resettlement of people returning. Since September, we have committed £18.5 million to the International Organisation for Migration in Afghanistan to support vulnerable undocumented people returning from Pakistan and Iran.

■ **Afghanistan: Taliban**

Catherine West:

[\[6857\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to use official engagement with the Taliban to engage with the Afghan people.

Leo Docherty:

FCDO officials regularly meet Taliban representatives to support HMG objectives on Afghanistan. This includes pressing on human rights, including the rights of women and girls and minorities. We are clear that Afghanistan needs more inclusive governance that is representative of its citizens. We have therefore encouraged the Taliban to engage with a diverse range of Afghans, particularly women and civil society representatives, and listen to their views. Ministers and officials also engage with other Afghans, based in the UK and elsewhere, including human rights activists and non-Taliban political figures.

■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Mauritius**

Daniel Kawczynski:

[\[6131\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his US counterpart on the proposed transfer of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius.

David Rutley:

The Foreign Secretary and Secretary Blinken discussed the BIOT negotiations in Washington DC on 7 December. The US, UK, and Mauritius have reiterated that protecting the continued effective operation of the base on Diego Garcia is a key priority. The UK is working in lockstep with the US on all elements of BIOT and will continue to do so.

British Overseas Territories: Penguins**Dr Thérèse Coffey:**[\[6790\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to help preserve penguin populations in the Overseas Territories.

David Rutley:

Many protections already exist for penguins in the Overseas Territories. These include the Marine Protected Area around South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands, and the Antarctic Treaty System. The Government also supports biodiversity through Darwin Plus which, since 2012, has invested over £47 million in over 260 projects. Projects have aimed to conserve northern rockhopper penguins on Tristan da Cunha, and improve native tussac grassland to improve breeding habitat for Magellanic penguins in the Falkland Islands. In the UK-OT Joint Declaration, we committed to strengthen our partnership to protect and sustainably manage our unique and globally significant environments.

Cyprus: Land Mines**Sammy Wilson:**[\[7009\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of the cooperation proposal by the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus entitled De-mining the Island of Cyprus, dated 1 July 2022; and what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Republic of Cyprus's rejection of that proposal.

Leo Docherty:

In accordance with the rest of the international community, with the sole exception of Turkey, the UK does not recognise the self-declared "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" as an independent state. The UK is unequivocal in its support for a mine-free Cyprus and, in line with the UN Security Council, continues to urge the leaders of both communities to agree a plan to achieve this. It remains for the leaders to determine the details of this cooperation.

Development Aid: Minority Groups**Ruth Jones:**[\[6332\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what systems his Department uses to (a) monitor and (b) evaluate (i) the potential impact of

the Government's funding on minorities and (ii) whether funding is being used effectively and equitably in Pakistan.

Leo Docherty:

We prioritise our aid to achieve maximum impact for the people of Pakistan, ensuring that any assistance we provide is inclusive and reaches those most at risk of being left behind, including religious and other minority groups. Aid is targeted using pre-defined criteria and in consultation with representatives of the most marginalised groups. All our programmes are subject to robust monitoring and evaluation processes.

■ **Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: British Overseas Territories**

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[6444\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how many Overseas Territories the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Americas, Caribbean and the Overseas Territories) has visited.

David Rutley:

The Overseas Territories are an important part of the British family. In addition to our ongoing support, visits by the UK Government reaffirms the unique bond between the UK and the Overseas Territories. After being appointed Minister responsible for the Overseas Territories in July 2023, I [Minister Rutley] have visited the Falkland Islands, Ascension Island and the Turks and Caicos Islands and have seen first-hand the positive impacts of the UK-Overseas Territories partnership.

Following a successful Joint Ministerial Council in November, we look forward to further engagement with the Territories, including future visits to the Territories.

■ **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

Alan Brown:

[\[6845\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what information his Department holds on the number of aid lorries that have been able to enter into Gaza since 7 October 2023.

Alan Brown:

[\[6846\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how much additional aid his Department has announced for Gaza since 7 October 2023; whether any aid provided by his Department has not been able to enter Gaza since 7 October 2023; and what value of aid goods is currently stockpiled and unable to enter Gaza.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

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 and we are exploring maritime options. As of the 13 December, 152 trucks carrying humanitarian supplies and four

tankers of fuel entered Gaza from Egypt. This is above the daily volume recorded since the resumption of hostilities on 1 December but remains well below the daily average of 500 truckloads (including fuel and private sector goods) that entered every working day prior to 7 October.

The UK was among the first to call on Israel to open up Kerem Shalom fully. Israel has now decided to use the Kerem Shalom checkpoint to pre-screen trucks ahead of crossing through the Rafah checkpoint, which is welcome. This should speed up the delivery of humanitarian aid and fuel into Gaza, levels of which reaching civilians remains wholly insufficient. However, we continue to call on Israel to open up Kerem Shalom fully so trucks carrying fuel and humanitarian assistance can enter directly into Gaza, as they did before the current conflict. This would be a much more significant step change.

■ **Gaza: Israel**

Kate Osamor:

[\[6184\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had discussions with his Israeli counterpart on reports of Israel's use of artificial intelligence to identify targets in Gaza.

David Rutley:

Both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have met with a range of senior Israeli officials, including the Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Herzog, to discuss Israel's approach to the campaign in Gaza. They have stressed the critical importance of abiding by International Humanitarian Law, minimising civilian casualties, and of acting in a way that delivers long-term security. It is the longstanding policy of successive UK Governments that we do not comment on military intelligence matters.

■ **Hamas: Sexual Offences**

Tulip Siddiq:

[\[6016\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that allegations of sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas are investigated.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The reports of sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas against Israeli women and girls and other civilians are horrifying. We unequivocally condemn sexual violence in Israel and wherever it occurs in the world. Conflict-related sexual violence is an abuse of human rights and when perpetrated in the context of an armed conflict, can constitute a violation of international humanitarian law such as a war crime. We call for these reports to be fully investigated to ensure justice for victims.

The UK is committed to strengthening the global response to conflict-related sexual violence. Our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) strategy,

launched in 2022, sets out the work we are leading globally to prevent Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and strengthen justice for all survivors.

■ **Israel: Palestinians**

Zarah Sultana: [\[7146\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the Answer of 13 July 2020 to Question 68798 on Yemen: Military Intervention, how many incidents of alleged international humanitarian law violations have been logged in relation to the conduct of Israel in Gaza since October 2023.

David Rutley:

Whether violations of International Humanitarian Law have occurred depends on numerous factors. We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law to be respected and civilians to be protected. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary continue to press these in engagements with Israeli counterparts.

■ **Members: Correspondence**

Gareth Thomas: [\[6705\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, when he plans to respond to the correspondence from the hon. Member for Harrow West of 1 December 2023 on the AlShaikh family.

David Rutley:

The FCDO recognises the importance of the effective and timely handling of correspondence, particularly on urgent matters. We are investigating the matters raised carefully and a response will be issued shortly.

■ **Somalia and Somaliland**

Tim Loughton: [\[6951\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what his policy is on the relationship between Somalia and Somaliland; and what account that policy takes of the positions of the (a) United States and (b) African Union.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The UK, alongside others in the international community, does not recognise Somaliland's unilateral declaration of independence. The constitutional settlement between Somaliland and Somalia is not for the UK to decide. It is for Somalia and Somaliland to come to an agreement about their future relationship and we encourage dialogue on this issue.

■ Somaliland: British Nationals Abroad

Tim Loughton:

[\[6952\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to monitor the number of UK citizens travelling to Somaliland for the purpose of fighting in the region.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The FCDO advises against all travel to the Somaliland regions of Toghddeer, Sanaag, and Sool. We advise British Nationals in Somaliland to leave any area of unrest quickly. Our ability to provide consular support in Somalia, including Somaliland, is very limited. Should any British Nationals travel to Somaliland to fight, or to assist others engaged in the conflict, their activities may amount to offences under UK legislation and they could be prosecuted upon return to the UK.

■ South America: Women

Lisa Nandy:

[\[6455\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent steps he has taken to support women and girls in South America.

David Rutley:

The FCDO's first International Women and Girls Strategy commits us to using the full weight of our diplomatic and development offer to stand up for women's and girls' rights. As I [Minister Rutley] outlined in my speech at Canning House in November, these rights are central to the "values" strategic pillar, one of four tenets that support the UK's approach to Latin America in the near future. The FCDO is providing funding through several initiatives including to end gender-based violence, to support grassroots women's organisations and to promote Women, Peace & Security. The FCDO is currently funding a Latin America gender equality, disability and social inclusion analysis which will be finalised in early 2024.

■ Sub-Saharan Africa: Women

Lisa Nandy:

[\[6453\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent steps he has taken to support women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The UK's new White Paper on International Development sets out our commitments on educating girls, empowering women and girls, and championing their health and rights and ending gender-based violence. The UK is working with African partners to tackle gender inequality and stand up for the rights of women and girls. The UK will also spend up to £200 million on a new women's sexual and reproductive health and rights programme, focused on sub-Saharan Africa, which will reach up to 10.4 million women.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Alcoholic Drinks: Misuse

Grahame Morris:[\[6480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many alcohol-specific deaths there were in each of the last five years, broken down by region.

Andrea Leadsom:

[Holding answer 18 December 2023]: Alcohol-specific deaths for 2022 will be published by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) in February 2024.

The following table shows the number of alcohol-specific deaths across all ages by region between 2017 and 2021, which is the latest available data:

REGION	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
North East	399	411	437	522	541
North West	1,052	993	1,013	1,211	1,344
Yorkshire and the Humber	707	610	730	800	876
East Midlands	516	555	523	612	706
West Midlands	739	732	671	895	897
East of England	492	461	543	570	641
London	551	561	579	737	792
South East	839	768	827	986	1,064
South West	546	606	496	651	695
England	5,841	5,697	5,819	6,984	7,556

Source: Local Alcohol Profiles for England, OHID

Notes:

1. Alcohol-specific deaths are those which have been wholly caused by alcohol consumption.
2. Data is based on year of death registration.

■ Anaesthesia Associates and Physician Associates

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[6864\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she is taking steps to integrate (a) physician associates and (b) anaesthesia associates into the NHS workforce.

Andrew Stephenson:

Physician associates (PA) and anaesthesia associates (AA) play an important role in multidisciplinary teams and complement the work of doctors. On 13 December 2023, the Department laid draft legislation in both Houses and in the Scottish Parliament that will empower the General Medical Council (GMC) to commence regulation for the two roles by the end of 2024.

Regulation will provide a standardised framework of governance and assurance for clinical practice and professional conduct, to enable these roles to make a greater contribution to patient care. Ahead of regulation, the GMC has published advice for PAs, AAs and doctors who supervise them.

The Faculty of PAs and the Royal College of Anaesthetists have developed guidance setting out the processes and considerations required for employers and supervisors of PAs and AAs respectively. In addition, NHS England has produced patient-facing materials that have been shared widely with general practices to support patient awareness and understanding of the PA role.

The NHS Long term workforce plan sets out plans to increase the number of PAs and AAs to establish a workforce of 10,000 and 2,000 respectively by 2036/37. NHS England is working with the relevant professional colleges and regulators, to ensure the PA and AA roles are expanded safely and effectively as part of multidisciplinary, integrated teams serving patients across the National Health Service.

■ Anaesthesia Associates and Physician Associates: Regulation

Catherine West:

[\[7073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of regulating NHS (a) physician and (b) anaesthesia associates through the Health and Care Professions Council.

Catherine West:

[\[7074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has had recent discussions with the Health and Care Professions Council on the regulation of NHS (a) physician and (b) anaesthesia associates.

Catherine West:

[\[7075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of regulating (a) anaesthesia and (b) physician associates through the General Medical Council on public perception of those roles.

Andrew Stephenson:

The assessment of the appropriate regulatory body for physician associate (PA) and anaesthesia associate (AA) regulation was completed in 2019. On 7 February 2019, the Government published its response to the consultation on the Regulation of Medical Associate Professions in the United Kingdom, confirming its decision to introduce statutory regulation for PAs and AAs. Most respondents to the consultation were in favour of the General Medical Council (GMC) taking on regulation.

Following further work by the Department, on 18 July 2019, the Government announced that it would be asking the GMC to regulate both roles. No further assessments have been made of the potential merits of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) regulating PAs and AAs and there have been no recent discussions with the HCPC on this matter.

Regulation by the GMC will mean that the organisation will have responsibility and oversight of all three professions allowing them to take a holistic approach to the education, training, and standards of the roles. This will enable a more coherent and co-ordinated approach to regulation and, by making it easier for employers, patients, and the public to understand the relationship between these roles and doctors, help to embed them in the workforce.

On 13 December 2023, the Department laid draft legislation in both Houses and in the Scottish Parliament that will empower the GMC to commence regulation for the two roles by the end of 2024.

■ Analgesics**Justin Madders:****[6621]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has had discussions with (a) the Home Office and (b) relevant stakeholders on the supply of Zapain.

Andrew Stephenson:

We are aware of a supply disruption affecting Zapain. The Department is working with the manufacturer to resolve this issue as soon as possible.

The Department works closely with the Home Office and relevant authorities on supply issues concerning drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. We, however, cannot comment on discussions relating to individual licence holders or prospective licensees about applications that may have been made to the Home Office.

We have well-established processes for managing and mitigating medicine supply issues, which involve working with the pharmaceutical industry, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, NHS England, the devolved governments and others operating in the supply chain to help ensure patients have access to the treatments they need.

■ **Audiology: Health Services**

Afzal Khan: [\[6355\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to NHS England's publication entitled 2023/24 priorities and operational planning guidance, what estimate her Department has made of the proportion of (a) NHS audiology departments and (b) private sector AQP audiology services that have successfully implemented a self-referral patient pathway.

Afzal Khan: [\[6356\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to NHS England's publication entitled 2023/24 priorities and operational planning guidance, whether her Department has provided further (a) guidance and (b) other support to relevant Integrated Care Boards to help support the delivery of a self-referral patient pathway for audiology services.

Afzal Khan: [\[6357\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to NHS England's publication entitled 2023/24 priorities and operational planning guidance, what information has been provided to NHS patients to enable them to (a) self-refer into audiology services and (b) identify whether their local service has a self-referral patient pathway.

Helen Whately:

NHS England conducted a national Integrated Care Board (ICB) service level self-assessment in September 2023 which reported 88 age related hearing loss audiology services offering Self-Referral routes into existing audiology pathways in England.

To raise awareness of self-referral into audiology services, NHS England is adding information on the relevant condition specific pages on the NHS.UK website. ICBs are responsible for ensuring patients have the information they need to make decisions about their care including if they have the option to self-refer to locally commissioned services.

NHS England has supported ICBs to introduce self-referral routes via a range of national measures including web based collaborative sharing and learning spaces where examples, case studies and answers to frequently asked questions are shared and ICBs can discuss implementation with other areas. NHS England is also delivering a series of national Communities of Practice webinars.

■ **Breast Cancer: Medical Treatments**

Taiwo Owatemi: [\[6927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to help improve the treatment of Invasive Lobular Breast Cancer.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Department, and NHS England have taken steps to improve the treatment of invasive lobular breast cancer (ILBC) but are aware that more needs to be done. In September 2022, the National Cancer Audit Collaborating Centre announced funding from NHS England and the Welsh Government of £5.4 million to support delivery of six new national cancer audits. Two of these focus on breast cancer, one on primary and one on metastatic, and include ILBC.

Additionally, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) supports breast cancer research funded by research partners in the charity and public sectors. For example, over the last five years, the NIHR Clinical Research Network has supported 10 ILBC-related studies.

The Department and NHS England continue to work closely with research funding partners such as Cancer Research UK, the Medical Research Council, and cancer charities who fund research into new scientific discoveries.

The Department urges researchers working on ILBC to submit bids for NIHR funding, including applications to fund the United Kingdom arms of international studies.

■ Carbamazepine: Shortages**Justin Madders:**[\[6200\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions she has had with relevant stakeholders on tackling shortages of Tegretol 100mg tablets.

Andrew Stephenson:

We were aware of a shortage of Tegretol (carbamazepine) 100mg tablets which has now been resolved. We issued communications to the National Health Service advising on use of alternative Tegretol preparations. We worked closely with the manufacturer to resolve the issue.

■ Community Diagnostic Centres: Staff**Grahame Morris:**[\[6159\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what her Department's plan is to ensure sufficient workforce capacity for the community diagnostic centre programme.

Andrew Stephenson:

The National Health Service has recently published a Long Term Workforce Plan which sets out long term workforce projections, including for the diagnostic workforce. The Government has backed the plan with over £2.4 billion to fund additional education and training places over five years.

NHS England is committed to ensuring that there is sufficient workforce capacity, including for community diagnostic centres, to enable workforce expansion with the right skills and roles, in the right locations and at the right time. This includes reliable recruitment routes to deliver the required uplift in staffing. Last year (2022/23) this

resulted in over 4,300 new starters across the training pipeline for cancer and diagnostics.

Digital diagnostic investment this spending review period is anticipated to deliver a c.10% uplift in workforce productivity, which will free up diagnostic workforce capacity further.

■ **Dental Health: Birmingham**

Tahir Ali:

[6914]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has made an estimate of the proportion of low-income families that attend yearly dental check-ups in Birmingham.

Andrea Leadsom:

National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance on recall intervals indicates that a healthy adult with good oral health need only see a dentist once every two years, and a child once every year. Data is therefore collected accordingly.

Under our reforms of July 2022 practices have been reminded that urgent dental care should be provided as part of their core service offer to patients, and that adherence to risk based recall intervals and other NICE guidance is a contractual requirement.

NHS Dental Statistics for England, 2022-23 Annual Report, brings together information on National Health Service dental activity in England for the 12-month period to 31 March 2023 and information on the number of patients seen by an NHS dentist up to 30 June 2023. This is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-dental-statistics/2022-23-annual-report>

The data shows that 58.5% of courses of treatments were delivered to patients exempt from paying patient charges in 2022/23 for Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board.

■ **Dental Health: Children**

Anna Firth:

[6374]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of mobile dental check-up vehicles on children's oral health.

Andrea Leadsom:

In England local authorities are responsible for assessing oral health needs, developing oral health strategies and commissioning oral health improvement programmes for children and adults in their local area.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) has published an evidence-based toolkit, 'Delivering better oral health - an evidence-based toolkit for prevention', for dental teams to support preventive advice and treatment for their

patients, including the prevention of tooth decay in children. This toolkit is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-better-oral-health-an-evidence-based-toolkit-for-prevention>

OHID has also published 'Improving oral health: an evidence-informed toolkit for local authorities', which has, as one of its recommendations, oral health training for the wider professional workforce. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-oral-health-an-evidence-informed-toolkit-for-local-authorities>

■ **Dental Services: Weaver Vale**

Mike Amesbury:

[6347]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she plans to take to increase the number of NHS dentists in Weaver Vale constituency.

Andrea Leadsom:

In July 2022 we announced a package of reforms to improve access to National Health Service dentistry, which outlined the steps we are taking to meet oral health needs and increase access to dental care, including in Weaver Vale. The changes that have been implemented include improvements to ensure dentists are remunerated more fairly for more complex work and the introduction of a minimum Units of Dental Activity value.

From 1 April 2023, responsibility for commissioning primary care dentistry to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to all integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. ICBs are responsible for having local processes in place to identify areas of need and determine the priorities for investment.

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, published on 30 June 2023, sets out the steps the NHS and its partners need to take to deliver an NHS workforce that meets the changing needs of the population over the next 15 years. These include a 40% increase to dentistry undergraduate training places by 2031/32.

But we know we need to do more, and that there are some areas where access is particularly problematic. We are working on our Dentistry Recovery Plan which will address how we continue to improve access, particularly for new patients, and how we make NHS work more attractive to ensure NHS dentists are incentivised to deliver more NHS care.

■ **Department of Health and Social Care: Power Failures**

Sarah Olney:

[7079]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether there have been any power cuts on their Department's property in each of the last three years.

Andrew Stephenson:

There have been no power cuts on the Department's property in the last three years.

■ **Dermatitis: Medical Treatments****Peter Dowd:**[\[6281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will have discussions with NICE on developing (a) national guidelines and (b) quality standards for the management of severe eczema in adults.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Department regularly holds discussions with colleagues in the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) about its guidelines programme. NICE has reviewed its guideline portfolio to identify topics that it thinks will add the most value to the health and care system, considering key factors such as clinical benefit, cost effectiveness, the potential to increase productivity and support workforce issues and the potential to address health inequalities.

Atopic dermatitis (eczema) in young people and adults is one of the topics on which NICE will stop work for the time being to allow them to focus on key priorities. Topics that have been stopped will be reconsidered by NICE's prioritisation board which is being established in Spring 2024 by its chief medical officer.

■ **Disease Control****Rachael Maskell:**[\[7054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to consult people who shielded during the covid-19 pandemic on the preparation of pandemic preparedness plans.

Rachael Maskell:[\[7055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies on future pandemic preparedness planning of the report entitled Covid Shielding Voices published by the Centre for Epidemiology, Versus Arthritis: University of Manchester in October 2023.

Rachael Maskell:[\[7056\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will have discussions with the UK Health Security Agency on the adequacy of NHS preparedness for rapidly producing a shielded patient list in the event of a pandemic.

Maria Caulfield:

We cannot perfectly predict the characteristics of a future pandemic or know precisely which groups will be most affected by it, and we are therefore strengthening our pandemic preparedness by considering the flexible and scalable response capabilities that can be adapted to any threat that the health and social care system may need to respond to. We continue to review our pandemic planning, in close collaboration with system partners including the UK Health Security Agency, in

response to new information and lessons learned from COVID-19 and other disease outbreaks. We continue to draw on a wide range of evidence, both from government research organisations and expert committees, as well as the wider research community

We understand that Versus Arthritis has submitted the recommendations of the Covid Shielding Voices report to the United Kingdom COVID-19 Inquiry. We are committed to learning from the Inquiry's findings, which will play a key role in informing the Government's planning and preparations for the future.

■ DNA: Databases

Henry Smith:

[\[7190\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to ensure the security of DNA data held by (a) the NHS Genomic Medicine Service and (b) private providers of NHS healthcare; and whether she has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential for cyber attacks by foreign state-linked companies.

Andrew Stephenson:

Organisations which hold sensitive biological data are subject to the UK General Data Protection Regulation. In addition, organisations such as Genomics England, UK Biobank and NIHR BioResource actively consider national security in decision making about partnerships with companies overseas.

As part of the new UK Biological Security Strategy, the Government is undertaking a programme of work to assess how we can minimise the risks from biological data to protect our burgeoning bioeconomy, without stifling innovation, and build confidence in sharing personal data to improve health outcomes in the United Kingdom and across the world. The Office for Life Sciences has begun this work, in consultation with relevant Departments and Agencies across Government, and key partners such as Genomics England and UK Biobank.

■ Electronic Cigarettes: Young People

Christian Wakeford:

[\[4301\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to help reduce the number of young people who are vaping.

Andrea Leadsom:

The Government is concerned about the rise in vaping among children - youth vaping has tripled in the last three years. Vaping is never recommended for children and carries significant risk. The active ingredient in most vapes is nicotine which, when inhaled, is a highly addictive drug. Evidence suggests that in adolescence, the brain is more sensitive to the effects of nicotine, so there could be additional risks for young people.

The Government is fully committed to bringing forward legislative proposals to tackle youth vaping as part of the Tobacco and Vapes bill which was announced in the King's Speech on 7 November. The Bill will restrict the sale and marketing of vapes

to children – and we have consulted UK-wide on regulating vape flavours, packaging and shop displays. We have also consulted on restricting the sale and supply of disposable vapes.

The Government will respond to the consultation on these policies shortly.

■ Elexacaftor/tezacaftor/ivacaftor

Ruth Cadbury:

[7053]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2023 to Question 3472 on Cystic Fibrosis: Drugs, when she expects the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to publish their final guidance on the use of ivacaftor–tezacaftor–elexacaftor.

Andrew Stephenson:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published draft guidance on 3 November 2023 which does not recommend Orkambi (lumacaftor-ivacaftor), Symkevi (ivacaftor-tezacaftor) and Kaftrio (ivacaftor–tezacaftor–elexacaftor) for the treatment of cystic fibrosis.

The draft guidance has recently been subject to a public consultation and NICE's Appraisal Committee met on 14 December 2023 to consider the comments received in response to the consultation.

NICE will be liaising with key stakeholders to determine the most appropriate next steps for its appraisal, which will include exploring potential commercial solutions, and will provide a further update to stakeholders outlining next steps and timelines in the week commencing 22 January 2024.

■ General Practitioners and Hospitals: Standards

Mrs Sharon Hodgson:

[6489]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether her Department plans to remove certain targets for (a) hospitals and (b) general practices.

Andrew Stephenson:

[Holding answer 18 December 2023]: Targets for hospitals and general practices (GPs) are regularly reviewed. Existing targets for the National Health Service are set out in several places, including in legislation, in the Government's mandate to NHS England and in the '2023/24 priorities and operational planning guidance'. Targets for hospitals and GPs are further set out within the 'Delivery plan for tackling the COVID-19 backlog of elective care', the 'Delivery plan for recovering urgent and emergency care' and the 'Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care'.

■ General Practitioners: Greater London

Feryal Clark: [\[571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent estimate he has made of the number of people on waiting lists for GP appointments in (a) Enfield North constituency, (b) the London Borough of Enfield and (c) London.

Alistair Strathern: [\[649\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent estimate he has made of the number of people on waiting lists for GP appointments as of November 2023 in Mid Bedfordshire constituency.

Andrea Leadsom:

[Holding answer 15 November 2023]: General practice does not operate with waiting lists. NHS England publishes monthly data on General Practice Appointments, including the approximate length of time between appointments being booked and taking place, but this is not a proxy for a “waiting list”.

There are several factors which can influence the timing of appointments, and it is not possible to estimate the time between the patient’s first attempt to contact their surgery and an appointment. For example, routine appointments such as screening tests or regular injections may be booked further in advance.

■ Health Services: Migrants

Dr Rupa Huq: [\[6625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average time taken for eligible applicants to receive an immigration healthcare surcharge refund was in each of the past six months.

Andrew Stephenson:

The reimbursement scheme covers those working in the health and care sector and those eligible under certain of the United Kingdom’s reciprocal healthcare arrangements. The following table shows the average mean time taken for eligible applicants to receive an Immigration Health Surcharge refund for the last six months, noting that December 2023 data is incomplete accounting for claims up to 13 December 2023:

MONTH	AVERAGE MEAN TIME (DAYS)
June 2023	32
July 2023	34
August 2023	39
September 2023	50
October 2023	30

MONTH	AVERAGE MEAN TIME (DAYS)
November 2023	19
December 2023	13

■ Health Services: Staff

Catherine West:

[4721]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to her Department's publication entitled Major conditions strategy: case for change and our strategic framework published on 21 August 2023, what steps she is taking to ensure NHS non-clinical staff employed through the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme have awareness of the six major health conditions in the strategy.

Andrea Leadsom:

The Major Conditions Strategy will focus on tackling the six major conditions groups – cancers, mental ill-health, cardiovascular disease (including stroke and diabetes), dementia, chronic respiratory diseases, and musculoskeletal disorders – that account for around 60% of ill-health and early death in England.

General practices are self-employed contractors to the National Health Service and it is largely up to employers to determine how best to staff their Primary Care Networks or GPs to best meet the needs of their population. The demands each patient places on their GPs are different and can be affected by many different factors, including rurality and patient demographics.

Individual employers are responsible for ensuring their staff are trained and competent to carry out their role, and for investing in the future of their staff through providing continuing professional development funding.

As part of the Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care, published in May 2023, we will invest in care navigation training to help teams direct patients to the right person.

■ Health Services: Trade Competitiveness

Henry Smith:

[7019]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she is taking steps to protect (a) Bupa, (b) HCA Healthcare and (c) other major private healthcare providers from (i) BGI Group and (ii) MGI Tech.

Andrew Stephenson:

Organisations which hold sensitive biological data are subject to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In addition, organisations such as Genomics England, UK Biobank and NIHR BioResource actively consider national security in decision making about partnerships with companies overseas.

As part of the new UK Biological Security Strategy, the Government is undertaking a programme of work to assess how we can minimise the risks from biological data to protect our burgeoning bioeconomy, without stifling innovation, and build confidence in sharing personal data to improve health outcomes in the United Kingdom and across the world. The Office for Life Sciences has begun this work, in consultation with relevant Departments and Agencies across Government, and key partners such as Genomics England and UK Biobank.

■ Health: Screening

Grahame Morris: [\[6441\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Monthly Diagnostic Data published by NHS England includes data on (a) pathology and (b) phlebotomy.

Andrew Stephenson:

NHS England does not currently include pathology and phlebotomy in their monthly published diagnostic datasets.

■ Healthy Start Scheme: Expenditure

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck: [\[6810\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2023 to Question 4438 on Healthy Start Scheme: Expenditure, whether Healthy Start costs have now been published.

Andrea Leadsom:

The Department's Annual Report and Accounts for 2021/22 are due to be published by the end of January 2024. Healthy Start costs will be available following this publication.

■ Hospitals: Concrete

James Wild: [\[1258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the Mott MacDonald report commissioned by his Department on RAAC.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Government does not plan to publish the full Mott MacDonald report on reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) dated April 2022 on GOV.UK. A redacted copy of the report is attached to this answer. These redactions have been approved by the Information Commissioner, with personal data and commercially sensitive information having been redacted. Some of the information contained in the report has also been superseded by data that National Health Service trusts have subsequently published on RAAC.

The Government confirmed on 25 May 2023 that the hospitals considered in the report will be rebuilt by 2030 as part of the New Hospital Programme.

Attachments:

1. Mott MacDonald report [Requestor copy-redacted-Mott-Report - ICO_Redacted.pdf]

Hospitals: Waiting Lists**Colleen Fletcher:**[\[6812\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to reduce waiting times for NHS treatment in (a) Coventry North East constituency, (b) Coventry, (c) the West Midlands and (d) England.

Andrew Stephenson:

[Holding answer 18 December 2023]: Cutting National Health Service waiting lists is one of the Government's top priorities.

To facilitate this across elective services in England, we are increasing activity, with plans to spend more than £8 billion from 2022/23 to 2024/25, expanding capacity through creating a network of community diagnostic centres (CDCs), and maximising all available independent sector capacity. We are managing demand through specialised advice in primary care and giving patients more control over where they receive their care, and we are increasing productivity through: transforming outpatient services; developing new surgical hubs to increase theatre productivity, funded by part of £1.5 billion; and working actively with trusts to support and challenge on their performance.

We recognise that local areas were affected by COVID-19 differently, resulting in variation in elective waiting times across different parts of the country. Tackling inequalities in access to elective care has therefore been a key component of the Department's and NHS England's approach to recovery. This is supported by the creation and expansion of CDCs and surgical hubs. There are currently 94 surgical hubs and 136 CDCs operational across England.

In the West Midlands there are 16 surgical hubs and six operational CDCs. In Coventry North East Constituency there is one surgical hub and one CDC.

Loneliness and Social Prescribing**Rachael Maskell:**[\[5677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will take steps to require healthcare professionals to (a) assess the potential (i) loneliness and (ii) social isolation when interacting with patients who may be vulnerable to those challenges and (b) signpost those patients to (A) social prescribing services and (B) other civil society engagement opportunities.

Andrea Leadsom:

Healthcare professionals have welcomed the support from social prescribers. Social prescribing is a key component of the NHS's Universal Personalised Care and can work well for those who are lonely or socially isolated. Social prescribing link workers take a holistic approach to health and wellbeing. They connect people to community groups and statutory services for practical and emotional support, such as sports and

exercise projects, arts or nature-based activities. Social prescribing activities are commissioned locally, utilising community assets often in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

■ Neurology: Greater Manchester

Navendu Mishra:

[\[6936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 12 December 2023 to Question 5708 on Neurology: Greater Manchester, what the average wait time for a neurology appointment is in (a) Stockport constituency, (b) the Metropolitan Borough of Stockport and (c) Greater Manchester in the latest period for which data is available.

Andrew Stephenson:

The data is not held in the format requested for parts (a) and (b), as data is not held at constituency and borough level. For Greater Manchester ICB, the average (median) wait for patients on incomplete neurology services pathways was 14.2 weeks at the end of October 2023, for referral to definitive treatment.

■ NHS: Drugs

Matt Vickers:

[\[6358\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to help reduce the time taken for clinically-proven drugs to be considered for use on the NHS once they are off-patent.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Medicines Repurposing Programme was established in March 2021 by the Department, NHS England, the National Institute for Health Research and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). This seeks to identify new uses for medicines that are outside of the scope of the existing licence for the medicine. This typically involves taking an existing medicine that already has a marketing authorisation or licence for human use for a particular condition, and then using it to treat another condition. It provides a tailored package of support to priority repurposed medicines, potentially including support for research, licensing and implementation.

NICE makes recommendations on whether the benefits of licensed medicines justify their costs and maintains surveillance of new developments that may affect its published guidance, including the latest evidence and any significant changes in the prices of medicines. NICE would consult on proposed changes to its guidance with stakeholders if significant new evidence relating to the clinical- and cost-effectiveness of a medicine were to emerge.

■ NHS: Length of Service

Anna Firth:

[\[6375\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing an NHS long term service medal.

Andrew Stephenson:

There has been no such assessment and there is no national system in place for recognising long service in the National Health Service. It is the responsibility of individual employing NHS organisations to recognise any long service by staff members, with most NHS organisations already having their own internal processes in place to do this.

For NHS employees with long term service and who have made an outstanding contribution, the honours system celebrates those who go above and beyond to change the world around them for the better. Nominations can be made online via the Cabinet Office website.

■ NHS: Managers

Simon Jupp:

[\[6938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an estimate of the cost to the public purse of establishing a college of clinical leadership to train NHS managers in leadership skills.

Andrew Stephenson:

There has been no such estimate made. The NHS Leadership Academy, which is part of NHS England, provides a wide range of tools, programmes and expertise to help National Health Service organisations develop their leaders and embed best practice.

The Messenger review, Leadership for a collaborative and inclusive future, was published in June 2022. It focussed on ways to strengthen leadership and management across health and adult social care. The review set out seven recommendations which were accepted by the government. The recommendations are aimed at fostering and replicating the best examples of leadership through improved training, career development and talent management.

NHS England is leading on implementation of all seven recommendations and is working in partnership with Skills for Care where they apply to the social care workforce.

■ NHS: Medical Treatments Abroad and Private Sector

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[6519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate she has made of (a) the number of patients and (b) the cost to the NHS of (i) follow-up and (ii) corrective treatment for patients that have received (A) cosmetic surgery, (B) knee and/or hip

replacements and (C) catheter ablation in hospitals (1) in the independent sector and (2) overseas in each of the last ten years.

Andrew Stephenson:

[Holding answer 18 December 2023]: The information is not held in the format requested.

■ **Pancreatic Cancer**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[6406\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to improve survival rates for people with pancreatic cancer.

Andrew Stephenson:

NHS England is already delivering a range of interventions that are expected to increase early diagnosis and improve outcomes for those with pancreatic cancer, therefore no additional steps are being taken by the Department. NHS England's work includes providing a route into pancreatic cancer surveillance for those at inherited high-risk to identify lesions before they develop into cancer and diagnose cancers sooner. This creates new pathways to support faster referral routes for people with non-specific symptoms that could be linked to a range of cancer types, and increasing general practitioner direct access to diagnostic tests. NHS England have formed an expert group to consider a pathway for Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary cancers, including pancreatic cancer.

NHS England is also funding a new audit into pancreatic cancer to provide regular and timely evidence to cancer service providers of where patterns of care in England may vary, to increase the consistency of access to treatments and to stimulate improvements in cancer treatment and outcomes for patients. In addition to this, the Getting it Right First-Time team in NHS England is undertaking a deep dive into pancreatic cancer, which will highlight actions NHS providers need to take to improve services, as well as gathering examples of good practice to share.

■ **Physician Associates**

Catherine West:

[\[7076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make it her policy to require physician associates working in the NHS to state their job title during telephone and in-person appointments.

Andrew Stephenson:

As set out in National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines, all healthcare professionals directly involved in a patient's care should introduce themselves and explain to their role to the patient.

Ahead of regulation by the General Medical Council (GMC), the Faculty of Physician Associates has issued guidance for Physician Associates (PAs), supervisors, employers, and organisations, which helps to provide a structured and standardised way of using the title. The GMC has also published interim standards for PAs in

advance of regulation which make it clear that professionals should always introduce their role to patients and set out their responsibilities in the team.

In implementing the NHS Long term Workforce Plan, NHS England is working with the relevant professional colleges and regulators, to ensure the PA role is expanded safely and effectively. In addition, NHS England has produced patient-facing materials that have been shared widely with general practices to support patient awareness and understanding of the role.

The introduction of regulation by the GMC will provide a standardised framework of governance and assurance for the clinical practice and professional conduct of PAs and make it easier for employers, patients, and the public to understand the relationship between this role and that of doctors.

■ Prescriptions: Fees and Charges

Emma Hardy:

[\[6576\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2023 to Question 3921 on Prescriptions: Fees and Charges, whether her Department has considered the potential merits of reviewing the list of conditions that entitle a person to apply for a medical exemption certificate.

Andrea Leadsom:

[Holding answer 18 December 2023]: While the Government's policy remains that there are no plans to review the list of medical conditions that entitle someone to apply for a medical exemption certificate, there are extensive arrangements currently in place in England to ensure that prescriptions are affordable for everyone. Approximately 89% of prescriptions are dispensed free of charge in the community in England and extensive arrangements are already in place to help those with the greatest need. Eligibility depends on the patient's age, whether they are in qualifying full-time education, whether they are pregnant or have recently given birth, or whether they are in receipt of certain benefits or a war pension.

■ Primary Health Care

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[6813\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to improve patient access to primary care in (a) Coventry North East constituency, (b) Coventry, (c) the West Midlands and (d) England.

Andrea Leadsom:

[Holding answer 18 December 2023]: We recognise that despite the hard work of general practice teams, some patients are still struggling to access care in a timely way. That is why we have published our Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care. The plan has two central ambitions to improve access both nationally and in Coventry and West Midlands, namely to tackle the 8am rush and reduce the number of people struggling to contact their practice, and for patients to know on the day they contact their practice how their request will be managed.

We will achieve this by modernising telephone systems which can help practices to better match their capacity to patient demand, backed by £240 million in retargeted funding. All practices have now signed up to transition to new digital systems. The plan will empower patients to do more themselves, cutting bureaucracy for general practitioners and building capacity to deliver more appointments. We have invested £1.5 billion and created an additional 50 million general practice appointments by increasing and diversifying the workforce.

■ Prostate Cancer

Sir George Howarth:

[6090]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to (a) increase awareness of the (i) signs and (ii) risks of prostate cancer amongst at-risk groups and (b) ensure that national public awareness campaigns are tailored to underserved communities.

Andrew Stephenson:

NHS England takes steps to raise awareness of prostate cancer where there are opportunities to do so. For example, NHS England partners with Cancer Alliances, charities and local representatives to reach people through projects in the heart of their communities. Cancer Alliances have also been undertaking action to alert at-risk groups about prostate cancer. This is determined at a local level and so will vary depending on local needs and priorities.

Most NHS England campaigns aim to reach people aged 50 years and over and those from more deprived communities, where there is higher cancer incidence, as well as those more likely to experience health inequalities, such as those from Black and South Asian backgrounds. Campaign messages are shared across a range of channels used by people of all ages and demographics.

■ Prostate Cancer: Disadvantaged

Sir George Howarth:

[6071]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help tackle inequalities in prostate cancer outcomes.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Department is not currently taking specific steps with Cabinet colleagues to help tackle inequalities in prostate cancer outcomes, but is tackling inequalities for all cancer outcomes. Experience and access is a key focus for everyone as part of the NHS Long Term Plan. The NHS Long Term Plan states that 'where appropriate every person diagnosed with cancer will have access to personalised care, including needs assessment, a care plan and health and wellbeing information and support'.

A pancreatic cancer clinical audit, led by the Royal College of Surgeons, began in 2021, with the first outcomes expected in 2024. A key aim of the audit is to support National Health Service services to stimulate improvements in cancer detection, treatment and outcomes for patients, including improving survival rates.

■ Prostate Cancer: Screening**Sir George Howarth:**[\[6091\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the press notice entitled Biggest prostate cancer screening trial in decades to start in UK published on 19 November 2023, in which areas will the trial be carried out; and what steps her Department is taking to (a) ensure there is sufficient diagnostics capacity to deliver the additional screening in the trial areas in local areas to deliver increased screening and (b) encourage participation amongst (i) at-risk groups and (ii) black men.

Sir George Howarth:[\[6092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the press notice entitled Biggest prostate cancer screening trial in decades to start in UK published on 19 November 2023, what assessment her Department has made of the additional workforce capacity that will be required to deliver the trial.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Department funds research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). NIHR invests in the research delivery workforce, the facilities and capacity to support clinical trials. The NIHR Clinical Research Facilities and Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres support the delivery of early phase trials and the NIHR Clinical Research Network and Patient Recruitment Centres support delivery and participation in later phase clinical trials. The prostate cancer trial announced on 19 November will be run by Prostate Cancer UK with the Government contributing alongside others.

To maximise research participation, the NIHR provides the online platform 'Be Part of Research', which allows users to search for and register their interest in participating in the clinical trials of most interest and relevance to them. NIHR has also supported initiatives to increase diagnosis rates and participation in prostate cancer research by men from black and minority ethnic groups.

The recently announced TRANSFORM trial aims to save thousands of men each year by finding the best way to screen for prostate cancer. The trial will be United Kingdom-wide, although final decisions on specific locations are yet to be taken. Men will be invited to participate via their general practices. This study will also aim to address some of the inequalities that exist in prostate cancer diagnosis today by ensuring that one in 10 of the trial participants will be black men, who are three times overrepresented compared to the population of men aged 45 to 75 as based on 2021 census data.

The UK National Screening Committee will be reviewing the evidence that is published by this study. This will help to inform any future recommendation on creating a national screening programme for prostate cancer.

■ Skin Diseases: Health Services

Peter Dowd: [\[6277\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to help reduce the time taken for patients with inflammatory skin conditions to access (a) specialist care and support and (b) treatment.

Peter Dowd: [\[6278\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the time taken for patients with inflammatory skin conditions to be referred for specialist care on the cost of treatment for such conditions.

Peter Dowd: [\[6279\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of implementing NHS England's Referral optimisation for people with skin conditions on (i) the cost of treatment and (ii) number of referrals for people with skin conditions in (a) England, (b) Cheshire and Merseyside integrated care system and (c) Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust.

Andrew Stephenson:

Cutting waiting lists is one of the Government's top priorities. We are making good progress on tackling the longest waits, to ensure that patients get the care they need when they need it.

We are taking action to recover elective services, including for patients waiting for National Health Service dermatology services, by working towards the targets set out in the Elective Recovery Plan and providing the NHS with record levels of staffing and funding. To facilitate this across the NHS in England, we are: increasing activity, with plans to spend more than £8 billion from 2022/23 to 2024/25; expanding capacity though creating a new network of community diagnostic centres; and maximising all available independent sector capacity. We are managing demand through specialised advice in primary care and giving patients more control over where they receive their care, and we are increasing productivity through transforming outpatient services, developing new surgical hubs to increase theatre productivity and working actively with trusts to support and challenge on their performance.

No specific assessment has been made of the potential impact of implementing NHS England's referral optimisation for people with skin conditions on the cost of treatment and the number of referrals for people with skin conditions in England, Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System or Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust.

The aim of referral optimisation is to triage referrals using electronic means, so that those with less serious problems can be offered rapid advice by their general practitioner (GP). This has the potential to create efficiencies by offering people with disabling skin problems rapid treatment to get them back to work and functioning at home quickly. Ensuring only those patients with the most serious conditions are sent to hospital will help to reduce waiting lists and ensure NHS hospital resources are used for those most likely to benefit most.

It is important that integrated care systems work with both GPs and hospitals to monitor referral numbers and ensure that the benefits of electronic triage are not outweighed by increased demand.

■ Skin Diseases: Medical Treatments

Peter Dowd:

[6280]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps NHS England is taking to increase access to NICE-approved treatments for patients with inflammatory skin conditions.

Andrew Stephenson:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) evaluates all new licensed medicines and licence extensions for existing medicines including any treatments for inflammatory skin conditions and aims to issue guidance on their use close to the time of licensing wherever possible. The National Health Service in England is legally required to fund medicines recommended by NICE, normally within 90 days of the publication of its final guidance. NICE has recommended a number of treatments for inflammatory skin conditions such as eczema, hidradenitis suppurativa and psoriasis that are now routinely available for NHS patients.

■ Social Prescribing

Rachael Maskell:

[4467]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has made an assessment of the economic impact of social prescribing.

Rachael Maskell:

[4468]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to access whether social prescribing can assist people with (a) physical and (b) mental health optimisation for patients on clinical waiting lists.

Andrea Leadsom:

Social prescribing is a whole population and universal approach that can work particularly well for those managing conditions, which a non-clinical intervention can support.

Whilst no quantitative evaluation has yet been carried out, the National Academy of Social Prescribing has recently released an evidence summary, which is available at the following link:

<https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/read-the-evidence/the-economic-impact-of-social-prescribing/>

The Department as part of its commitment with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs led Green Social Prescribing Programme commissioned and funded four research studies through the National Institute for Health and Care Research, which has initially shown positive impact on mental health outcomes.

We do not hold data on social prescribing for patients on clinical waiting lists.

■ Social Services

Dr Matthew Offord:

[1106]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to take steps to increase the levels of English language proficiency required to provide social care services.

Helen Whately:

Care providers have a responsibility to ensure their chosen candidates have the right skills to work in care. As part of this, they should assess a candidate's English language proficiency at the interview stage of the recruitment process. This applies to both candidates from overseas who they will be offering sponsorship to, and candidates already in the UK, if English is not their first language.

For staff who are recruited from overseas, English language proficiency requirements are set by the Home Office, as a condition to qualifying for a Skilled worker visa, including care workers and senior care workers on the Health and Care Worker visa. Individuals from overseas must be able to prove they can speak, read, write and understand English to at least level B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale. The framework can be found at the following link:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>

■ Tobacco: Sales

Sir John Hayes:

[5749]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions her Department has had with relevant stakeholders on the proposed generational ban on tobacco products.

Andrea Leadsom:

Smoking is responsible for around 80,000 deaths a year in the United Kingdom and causes around one in four cancer deaths in the UK. It also costs our country £17 billion a year and puts a huge burden on the National Health Service.

This is why the Government is planning to create a smokefree generation by bringing forward legislation so that children turning 14 years old this year or younger will never be legally sold tobacco products.

In development of this policy, we have, and will continue to, speak to a broad range of local and regional stakeholders. In line with the UK's obligations under the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, we will not engage with stakeholders who have links to the tobacco industry when developing this policy.

A public consultation on the Smokefree Generation policies closed on 6 December and received contributions from a broad range of stakeholders. The Department of Health and Social Care will respond to the consultation in the coming weeks.

■ Tomography

Simon Jupp:

[\[6643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make it her policy to double (a) MRI and (b) CT scanning capacity; and if she will make an estimate of the (i) revenue and (ii) capital cost of doing so over each of the next five years.

Andrew Stephenson:

£2.3 billion was awarded at SR21 to transform diagnostic services over three years. Most of this will help deliver our ambition to increase the number of Community Diagnostic Centres up to 160 by March 2025, expanding and protecting elective planned diagnostic services. Funding will also provide additional diagnostic equipment to increase imaging capacity in acute settings, as well as increasing capacity for endoscopy and mammography screening, and improving digital diagnostics.

■ Vaccination: Side Effects

Fleur Anderson:

[\[6337\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Government has recently taken steps to (a) expand and (b) strengthen research into the treatment of people negatively affected by vaccines.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Department commissions research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The NIHR welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including vaccine side effects.

The NIHR has allocated over £110 million in funding for COVID-19 vaccine research that has included consideration of vaccine safety, including intensive monitoring of adverse reactions to COVID-19 vaccines. It is also funding a specific study to understand thrombosis and thrombocytopenia in COVID-19 and with COVID-19 vaccines.

■ Viral Diseases: Medical Treatments

Debbie Abrahams:

[\[6628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of people have (a) been referred for and (b) received antiviral treatments as of 12 December 2023.

Andrew Stephenson:

This data, relating to COVID-19 therapeutics, was published by NHS England up to 26 June 2023. Following that date, and the publication of the National Institute for

Health and Care Excellence guidelines, responsibility for arranging access to treatment transferred to integrated care boards and all national reporting requirements ended. The data is no longer collected centrally and nationally.

The published data and further information are available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/covid-therapeutics-antivirals-and-neutralising-monoclonal-antibodies/>

HOME OFFICE

■ Animal Experiments: Cosmetics

Yasmin Qureshi:

[6486]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2023 to Question 2844 on Animal Experiments: Cosmetics, whether animal testing of chemicals used exclusively as cosmetics ingredients is being conducted in Northern Ireland.

Tom Tugendhat:

The regulation of animals in science under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 is a transferred matter under the Northern Ireland devolution settlement.

■ Animal Experiments: Dogs

Steve Reed:

[7045]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate he has made of how many dogs were experimented on in Great Britain in each year since 2010.

Tom Tugendhat:

Statistics of scientific procedures on living animals in Great Britain are published annually and are available at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/animals-in-science-statistics

■ Antisemitism

Andrew Rosindell:

[5972]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will issue guidance to the police on (a) identifying and (b) tackling anti-Semitic hate crime; and what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that Jewish communities are protected during Hanukkah celebrations.

Laura Farris:

The police are operationally independent and work in line with the College of Policing's operational guidance to respond to hate crime; we expect them to enforce the law where appropriate to protect communities and maintain public order. We are supporting the police by providing them with the resources they need, including having recruited 20,000 additional police officers by March 2023.

Since 7 October, police with Jewish and Muslim populations have increased community engagement and neighbourhood patrols to provide reassurance. Forces – including the Metropolitan Police Service – have dedicated plans in place for Hanukkah celebrations.

The Jewish Community Protective Security (JCPS) Grant provides protective security measures at Jewish community sites including education facilities and many synagogues.

In response to increased incidents of antisemitism in the UK, as a result of the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, the Prime Minister has announced additional funding of £3 million to provide additional security at Jewish schools, synagogues and other Jewish community sites. This brings total protective security funding for the Jewish Community to £18 million in 2023/24. This level will be maintained at £18 million for 2024/25.

The Government is also providing £7 million over the next three years to ensure that more support is in place for schools and universities to tackle antisemitism.

■ Asylum: Applications

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[6496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make it his policy to refuse multiple asylum applications when the initial application has been refused.

Tom Tugendhat:

The Government values our longstanding and effective cooperation with European allies on shared counter terrorism objectives, including tackling the threat posed by Hamas and from other terrorist organisations.

HMG continues to work closely with our international partners on issues of national security including through engagement by ministers and senior officials with their international counterparts to strengthen our collective response to the threats we face.

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[6497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make it his policy to require that all asylum seekers must have a personal interview as part of the application process.

Tom Pursglove:

The criteria for when a substantive asylum interview can be omitted are contained in Paragraph 339NA of the Immigration Rules and include cases where we are able to take a positive decision on the basis of evidence available, or if the claimant is unfit or unable to be interviewed owing to enduring circumstances beyond their control. All asylum claimants are subject to a screening interview and mandatory security checks to confirm their identity and to link it to their biometric details for the purpose of immigration, security and criminality checks. These checks are critical to the delivery of a safe and secure immigration system.

The Home Office currently assesses it appropriate to generally omit personal interviews from nationals of Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria and Yemen, as well as from Sudan, specifically in relation to claims made on or after 28th June 2022, where sufficient evidence is available to confirm nationality and there are no other factors that would mean a personal interview was required, for example security or criminality concerns. Instead, an asylum questionnaire is provided to claimants to allow them to explain why they require protection status in the UK. Where further information is required after the questionnaire is returned, we will, where possible, conduct a targeted or shorter interview to obtain the necessary information from the claimant as quickly as possible.

Omitting personal interviews is not limited to the nationalities noted and can be done in-line with [paragraph 339NA of the Immigration Rules](#) on a case-by-case basis.

■ Asylum: Deportation and Temporary Accommodation

Alison Thewliss: [\[6837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the Written Statement of 6 December 2023 on Signing of the Rwanda Treaty [HCWS101], what his timescale is for beginning relocation of asylum seekers to Rwanda; and what plans he has for accommodating asylum seekers who are not relocated to Rwanda in the next five years.

Michael Tomlinson:

The process of relocating asylum seekers to Rwanda will begin after the Treaty and the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill comes into force after having progressed through Parliament. The Treaty has been laid before Parliament under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 and the procedures under that Act must be complied with before the Treaty can be ratified and come into force.

Individuals whose asylum claims are declared inadmissible may be able to obtain support under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 if they would otherwise be destitute. Certain individuals may also be able to obtain support under sections 98 and 95 of this Act. Such support may include accommodation.

■ Asylum: Employment

Sir John Hayes: [\[6710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many asylum seekers have been granted permission to work since 2019.

Sir John Hayes: [\[6711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many asylum seekers have been refused permission to work since 2019.

Tom Pursglove:

The Home office is unable to state how many asylum seekers have been granted and refused permission to work since 2019 as they do not record data on the number of asylum seekers who have been permitted to work in a reportable format.

Those who have claimed asylum in the UK and have had their asylum claim outstanding for 12 months or more, through no fault of their own, are able to apply for permission to work. Those permitted to work are restricted to jobs on the Shortage Occupation List, which is based on expert advice from the independent Migration Advisory Committee.

■ Bibby Stockholm**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:**[\[6871\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the Maritime Coastguard Agency has made an assessment of the (a) accommodation standards and (b) staff accreditation on the Bibby Stockholm barge.

Tom Pursglove:

The Bibby Stockholm has been subject to certification and regulatory inspection by the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency in order to fulfil its permitted purpose.

Accommodation providers ensure that guidance and training provided to staff regarding the identification and management of vulnerable asylum seekers with specific needs, or at risk asylum seekers, is kept up to date and aligns with best practice.

■ Biometric Residence Permits: Standards**Justin Madders:**[\[6622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what is the average length of time taken for a production request for a Biometric Residence Permit to be made after a decision to grant leave to remain has been made.

Tom Pursglove:

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 Licensing 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 (Royal Mail Group) 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.

In November, DVLA produced all BRPs within 24 hours of the production request. In November RMG attempted to deliver 99.1% of BRPs within 48 hours.

■ Counter-terrorism: Finance

Dawn Butler: [\[6164\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what his Department's budget for non-police led aspects of Prevent was in (a) 2019/20, (b) 2020/21, (c) 2012/22 and (d) 2022/23.

Dawn Butler: [\[6165\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what his Department's budget for delivery of Prevent by local authorities was in (a) 2019/20, (b) 2020/21, (c) 2012/22 and (d) 2022/23.

Dawn Butler: [\[6166\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what his Department's budget for delivery of Prevent by local authorities in London was in (a) 2019/20, (b) 2020/21, (c) 2012/22 and (d) 2022/23.

Dawn Butler: [\[6167\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much his Department spent on non-police led aspects of Prevent in (a) 2019/20, (b) 2020/21, (c) 2012/22 and (d) 2022/23.

Dawn Butler: [\[6169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much his Department spent on delivery of Prevent by local authorities in London in (a) 2019/20, (b) 2020/21, (c) 2012/22 and (d) 2022/23.

Tom Tugendhat:

The Home Office spent the below on local authority Prevent delivery in London between financial years (19-20)-(22-23):

19/20 - £6,151,499m

20/21 – £5,394,112m

21/22 – £4,927,145m

22/23 – £4,461,433m

The Home Office spent the below on non-police led aspects of Prevent:

19/20 - £50,642,350

20/21 - £36,328,208

21/22 - £46,408,802

23/23 - £35,686,580

The Home Office has an annual budget for Prevent local delivery which is set nationally, not by region.

The Home Office has an annual budget for Prevent local delivery which is set nationally. The annual budget for financial years (2019-20)-(2022-23) are set out below:

19/20 - £12,4m

20/21 - £11,622,500m

21/22 - £10,940m

22/23 - £11m

The Home Office allocated the below funding on non-police led aspects of Prevent:

19/20 - £51,816,427

20/21 - £50,330,318

21/22 - £52,778,437

22/23 - £48,744,261

Dawn Butler:

[\[6168\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much his Department spent on delivery of Prevent by local authorities in (a) 2019/20, (b) 2020/21, (c) 2012/22 and (d) 2022/23.

Tom Tugendhat:

The Home Office spent the on local authority Prevent delivery between financial years (19-20)-(22-23):

2019-20- £12,097,816m

2020/21- £11,422,510m

21/22- £11,897,738m

22/23 – £10,072m

■ Disclosure and Barring Service

Tahir Ali:

[\[5287\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he plans to take to improve the performance of the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Laura Farris:

The DBS publishes its KPIs in the annual business plan. By the end of Quarter 3 2023/24, DBS expects to have met the 85% target for Basic and Standard checks. For Enhanced checks, the DBS aims to issue 80% of checks within 14 days. In quarter 2 2023/24, the average attainment was 77.2% (noting the 80% target was met on day 17).

An Enhanced check requires the DBS to send applications to the police for local data searches and local intelligence checks. Currently some police forces' turnaround times have been affected by increased volumes of disclosure applications against

original forecasts. To improve performance, extra funding has been provided to police forces to recruit more staff to service the additional demand for Enhanced DBS checks that is being seen across the regulated employment sector. The DBS is also working in collaboration with policing partners to enhance the quality of an enhanced criminal record check referral to improve turnaround times.

The DBS continues to modernise its services through the replacement of legacy IT systems and is working to deliver further digitisation of its disclosure products to further enhance performance outcomes.

■ Embassies: China

Neil Coyle:

[\[6252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether his Department is taking steps to help protect people from Hong Kong who want to protest near the Chinese (a) Embassy and (b) Consulate in advance of the national security trial of Jimmy Lai in December 2023.

Chris Philp:

Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights set out that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association. This government will always fully support these rights, including the right of individuals to engage in peaceful protest.

It is a long-standing tradition in this country that people are free to gather together and to demonstrate their views, provided that they do so within the law.

The management of demonstrations is an operational matter for the police. In certain circumstances, the police have a duty to take reasonable steps to protect those who want to exercise their rights peacefully.

■ Fraud: Criminal Investigation

Justin Madders:

[\[6830\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has had recent discussions with relevant stakeholders on the case criteria implemented by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau to determine whether an investigation should take place.

Tom Tugendhat:

We are working with City of London Police to replace Action Fraud with a new system that will improve support and reporting tools for victims and intelligence provided to forces.

This includes improvements to the process that the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) uses to determine whether a report should be considered for investigation. Reports submitted to Action Fraud are analysed to identify vulnerable victims so their cases can be prioritised for immediate assessment and one-to-one support.

The improvements have been tested across the victim support landscape, law enforcement agencies, and other relevant bodies.

■ Hate Crime: Research

Caroline Lucas:

[\[5245\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 1 December 2023 to Question 3174 on Hate crime: research, what the cost was of the external research commissioned from (a) IPSOS UK and (b) RAND Europe.

Laura Farris:

We keep our approach to hate crime under review and commission external research when necessary to supplement internal research and the international evidence base. The total cost of the different research projects commissioned from IPSOS UK and RAND Europe in relation to the relevant PQ across a number of contracts was £566,060.

■ Home Office: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

Grahame Morris:

[\[6469\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to transactions (a) 126-DG - Delivery-500 and (b) 127-DG - Delivery-65121 in Home Office procurement card spend over £500: March 2023, updated 30 November 2023, what the purpose of the delegation received from Vietnam was; and the number of attendees.

Grahame Morris:

[\[7022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to his Department's transparency release Home Office Procurement card spend over £500: 2003, published in March 2023, what the purpose was of the visit by a Vietnamese delegation; and how many (a) UK and (b) Vietnamese officials attended the lunch paid for in transactions 127-DG - Delivery-65121 and 126-DG - Delivery-500.

Chris Philp:

Senior Vietnamese Officials from the Ministry of Public Security attended the Home Office on 21 February to review progress against commitments made at the inaugural UK-Vietnam Migration Dialogue in 2022.

After the meeting, the delegation attended a working lunch with the Permanent Under Secretary, which was paid for by the Home Office. At this lunch, a number of confidential matters were discussed including enhancing cooperation to tackle illegal migration, a key HMG priority. Seven senior officials from the Vietnamese Government, alongside six UK delegates attended the working lunch.

■ Home Office: Training

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[6089\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people participated in the free e-learning course created by his Department's FGM team in the last 12 months.

Laura Farris:

Our most recent statistics show that in 2022, 51,299 individuals have accessed our free e-learning training on FGM.

Alongside the free e-learning for frontline staff, the Home Office has issued a diverse range of materials aimed at professionals to improve their understanding and response to FGM, which includes statutory multi-agency guidance. The training helps professionals to recognise the warning signs of forced marriage and ensure that the right action is taken to help protect those at risk.

■ Human Trafficking: Eastern Europe**Dan Jarvis:**[\[6796\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an estimate of the number of (a) women and (b) girls from Eastern Europe who were trafficked to the UK and subsequently (i) compelled and (ii) forced to commit criminal acts in each of the last five years.

Laura Farris:

We do not routinely collect the required data to estimate the number of women and girls from Eastern Europe who were trafficked to the UK and were subsequently compelled or forced to commit criminal acts.

In 2022, 479 females were referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) who reported criminal exploitation, either partly or wholly.

For adult victims of modern slavery who enter the NRM, the Home Office funds the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC), contracted to spend £379 million over 5 years, to provide specialist support through the provision of safehouse accommodation, support-worker contact and financial assistance.

In addition, between 2016 and March 2023, the Home Office has spent over £37 million through the Modern Slavery Fund to combat modern slavery overseas and reduce the threat of human trafficking to the UK.

■ Immigration: Personal Savings**Deidre Brock:**[\[6828\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if his Department will issue further guidance on how what level of savings will be required to meet the Minimum Income Requirement for those below the salary threshold.

Tom Pursglove:

The revised minimum income requirement (MIR) will be implemented in spring 2024

The Government will set out any transitional provisions associated with the increase in the MIR, and further policy details, in due course.

Any applications already submitted will be considered in line with the existing policy.

■ Israel Defense Forces: British Nationals Abroad**Afzal Khan:** [7109]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he considers British nationals fighting for the Israel Defence Force to be a risk to national security.

Tom Tugendhat:

The UK recognises the right of British nationals with additional nationalities to serve in the legitimately recognised armed forces of the country of their other nationalities.

■ Marriage**John McNally:** [5595]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether his Department has made a recent assessment of the prevalence of arranged marriages in the UK.

Laura Farris:

The Government has not made a recent assessment on the prevalence of arranged marriages in the UK.

In an arranged marriage the families take a leading role in choosing the marriage partner, but the marriage is entered into freely by both parties.

This is in contrast to a forced marriage, where one or both people do not or cannot consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used to force them into the marriage.

It is also a forced marriage when anything is done to make someone marry before they turn 18, even if there is no pressure or abuse.

More information on forced marriage can be found here -

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage>

■ Members: Correspondence**John Penrose:** [6124]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when he plans to respond to the letters of 3 October and 6 November 2023 from the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare sent on behalf of a constituent regarding Minister Kitutu's visit.

Tom Tugendhat:

The Security Minister has responded on behalf of the Home Secretary to the letters of 3rd October and 6th November from the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare on 18th December 2023.

■ Prisoners: Foreign Nationals**Grahame Morris:** [6464]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of foreign national offender inductions to immigration prison teams were made within 10 days in each year since 2015.

Michael Tomlinson:

The information requested about how many and what proportion of foreign national offender inductions to immigration prison teams were made within 10 days in each year since 2015 is not available from published statistics.

The Home Office publishes information on FNOs in [Immigration system statistics quarterly release - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) and [Migration transparency data - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

■ Quad Bikes: Theft**Sir Bill Wiggin:****[6099]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many stolen quadbikes have been recovered due to forensic marking.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office does not hold figures on the number of quadbikes recovered due to forensic marking.

This Government is committed to driving down rural crime. We are working closely with the police, industry and others to ensure we are collectively doing everything we can to drive down acquisitive crime, including the theft of quadbikes, agricultural machinery and vehicles.

The Government supported the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023, which gained Royal Assent on 20 July. The Act will require immobilisers and forensic marking to be fitted as standard to new agricultural equipment such as All-Terrain Vehicles and quad bikes, to help prevent theft of this equipment and identify the owners of stolen equipment when it is recovered.

As part of the Government's Unleashing Rural Opportunity commitments, the Home Office is providing £200,000 funding to help set up the National Rural Crime Unit (NRCU). This will enable the Unit to support forces nationally in their response to rural crimes, such as the theft of farming or construction machinery. Since January 2023, the NRCU has recovered over £5.5m worth of stolen agricultural and construction equipment and vehicles.

■ Refugees: Afghanistan**John Healey:****[6725]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of (a) principals and (b) dependents have been relocated under Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme pathway (i) one and (ii) two each month since July 2022.

Tom Pursglove:

The UK has made an ambitious and generous commitment to help at-risk people in Afghanistan and, so far, we have brought around 24,600 people to safety, including thousands of people eligible for our Afghan schemes. We continue to honour our commitments to bring eligible Afghans to the UK.

The data published within the immigration system statistics release (month ending September 2023, published 23 November 2023) provides a breakdown of arrivals by quarter. The number of individuals resettled under the schemes is as follows: 9,699 individuals under ACRS Pathway 1, 70 individuals under ACRS Pathway 2 and 70 individuals under ACRS Pathway 3.

Afghan operational data is viewable at: Afghan Resettlement Programme: operational data - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)(opens in a new tab).

Afghan operational data is released quarterly with the next publication due around the 22 February 2024.

John Healey: [\[6727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the Oral Statement from the Minister for Veteran Affairs of 13 December 2023 on Afghan Resettlement Update, Official Report, column 911, how many and what proportion of hotels will the Government extend contracts with to house Afghans beyond 31 December 2023.

John Healey: [\[6730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to Oral Statement from the Minister for Veteran Affairs of 13 December 2023 on Afghan Resettlement Update, Official Report, column 911, what estimate he has made of the potential cost of extending contracts for temporary hotel accommodation beyond 31 December 2023.

Tom Pursglove:

The Government remains committed to ending the systemic use of hotels, and we do not plan to open new hotels to meet this increased demand.

The information requested on hotel contracts is not publicly available, however, a small number of hotels with existing contracts will be extended for a limited time period to help accommodate ACRS arrivals who have yet to be matched to settled housing solutions in the United Kingdom.

The latest published statistics on Afghan resettlement, up until the end of September, may be viewed at: [immigration system statistics quarterly release - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://immigration.system.statistics.quarterly.release.gov.uk). The next publication of Afghan resettlement data sets is due to be published around 22 February 2024.

■ Refugees: Homelessness

Rebecca Long Bailey: [\[6818\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the risk of homelessness for new refugees; and whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of extending the move-on period before the withdrawal of Section 95 support.

Tom Pursglove:

Where an individual is given notice that their asylum claim has been granted, their appeal has been allowed or their asylum claim has been refused but they have been given leave to enter or remain, the prescribed period in legislation (or 'move on' period') is 28 days. There has been no change to the prescribed period. Individuals remain on asylum support, including accommodation, until the end of the 28 day period.

During this period, the Home Office provides individuals who have received a positive decision to their asylum claim with support through Migrant Help and/or their partner organisations. This includes providing advice on accessing the labour market, on applying for Universal Credit and signposting to local authorities for assistance with housing. Individuals do not need to wait for their Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) to make a claim for Universal Credit and are encouraged to do so as early as possible if they require it. Messaging to individuals is being reviewed to encourage them to plan to move on from asylum support as soon as they have received their decision.

The Home Office are ensuring our cross government partners, such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) are sighted on data to enable them to consider the impacts of increased decision making and effectively plan. Additionally, the Home Office are working with DLUHC to ensure the right asylum decision data is being shared with local authorities to enable effective planning and to lessen the impact on existing homelessness and rough sleeping pressures. Accommodation providers are also working directly with local authorities to notify them when an individual is due to have their asylum support ended.

The asylum accommodation estate is under huge strain and increasing the 'move on' period would exacerbate these pressures. There are no current plans to extend the period (of 28 days) for how long individuals remain on asylum support once they have had a grant of asylum. We are engaging the DWP and DLUHC to ensure individuals can move on from asylum support as smoothly as possible.

■ Terrorism: Europe**Nicola Richards:**[\[6946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Europe on the shared security threat posed by Hamas and other proscribed terrorist organisations.

Tom Tugendhat:

The Government values our longstanding and effective cooperation with European allies on shared counter terrorism objectives, including tackling the threat posed by Hamas and from other terrorist organisations.

HMG continues to work closely with our international partners on issues of national security including through engagement by ministers and senior officials with their

international counterparts to strengthen our collective response to the threats we face.

■ UK Border Force: Finance

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[6768\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the budget for Small Boats Operational Command is for 2023-24.

Michael Tomlinson:

The latest published figures for Border Force can be found in the Home Office Annual Report for 2022-2023 Home Office annual report and accounts - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 2023-2024 figures will be published in future reports.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Repatriation

Justin Madders: [\[6609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average time to receive a response to an application to the voluntary return scheme is.

Justin Madders: [\[6612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications to the voluntary return scheme have been (a) received and (b) concluded since 1 January 2023.

Michael Tomlinson:

We do not routinely publish the information requested.

The Home Office publishes statistics on all types of removals from the UK which includes voluntary departures. The latest statistics are available at: [Immigration system statistics quarterly release - GOV.UK \(\[www.gov.uk\]\(http://www.gov.uk\)\)](#)

Published datasets for Voluntary Returns are available at: [Returns and detention datasets - GOV.UK \(\[www.gov.uk\]\(http://www.gov.uk\)\)](#)

■ Visas

Alison Thewliss: [\[6839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of introducing a humanitarian travel visa on the level of small boat crossings.

Tom Pursglove:

There is no provision within our Immigration Rules for someone to be allowed to travel to the UK to seek asylum or temporary refuge. Whilst we sympathise with people in many difficult situations around the world, we are not bound to consider asylum claims from individuals overseas who might like to come here.

Those in need of immediate protection should take the fastest route to safety and claim asylum in the first safe country they reach. Individuals should not put their lives

at risk by leaving manifestly safe countries with well-functioning asylum systems and make unnecessary and dangerous onward journeys to the UK.

The UK has a proud record of providing protection for those who need it. Our focus is on helping people directly from regions of conflict and instability, and we believe that our resettlement programmes are the best way to provide much needed support.

Between 2015 and September 2023, over half a million people were offered safe and legal routes into the UK.

■ Visas: Families

Alyn Smith: [\[6900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, on what evidential basis he has proposed a minimum income threshold of £38,700 for family and spousal visas.

Tom Pursglove:

The Government has proposed a minimum income requirement of £38,700 to align with the updated skilled worker salary threshold, to ensure fairness and consistency across immigration routes.

Analytical work has been undertaken across Government to support decision making in this process, and an Impact Assessment will be developed in due course.

JUSTICE

■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

Janet Daby: [\[7116\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 13 December 2023 to Question 5303 on Wetherby Young Offender Institution: Females, what steps he is taking to reduce the number of girls who are accommodated in all-male young offender institutions.

Edward Argar:

Females within the Youth Estate can be placed at Oakhill Secure Training Centre and seven out of the eight available Secure Children's Homes, as well as HMYOI Wetherby. Females will also be placed at the new Oasis Restore Secure School that is set to open in Spring 2024. Whilst all of these sites accommodate both males and females, they are contained within their own units and only mix with each other in supervised education and social settings.

The Youth Custody Service is considering future provision for all children via an internal assessment of the role and purpose of each sector to ensure sufficient capacity and suitable environments. This will inform the longer-term, strategic direction of provision for children in the YCS.

■ Community Orders

Ruth Cadbury: [6549]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many community work supervisors his Department has recruited since 2021.

Edward Argar:

Between 1 January 2021 and 30 September 2023 inclusive, circa 382 community work supervisors have been recruited into the MoJ.

■ Offenders: Foreign Nationals

Grahame Morris: [7023]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of foreign national offenders were categorised as non-criminal prisoners in each of the last years.

Edward Argar:

Information on the number of Foreign National prisoners by custody type (including 'non-criminal') is routinely published in the department's Offender Management Statistics Quarterly release. This data can be found in Table A1.11 at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64c045751e10bf000e17ce89/Population_30June2023_Annual.ods.

The proportion of 'non-criminals' as a percentage of the total Foreign National prison population can be calculated from the figures in the linked table.

■ Prisoners: Repatriation

Grahame Morris: [7024]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many foreign national offenders were removed from the country through a prison transfer agreement each year since 2010; and if he will list which countries were they removed to.

Edward Argar:

Any foreign national who is convicted of a crime and given a prison sentence is considered for deportation at the earliest opportunity. Where appropriate, the Government will also seek to permanently remove foreign criminals from the UK via the Early Removal Scheme once they have served the minimum required of their sentence. This is our best performing removal scheme with 5,262 Foreign National Offenders (FNOs) having been removed between January 2019 and June 2022.

The Home Office removed 16,676 foreign national offenders since January 2019 to September 2023. Published figures show that FNO returns have increased in the latest 12-month period (ending September 2023) by 19% when compared to previous 12-month period.

Our new Prisoner Transfer Agreement with Albania entered into force in May 2023 and we have signed a new Prisoner Transfer Agreement with the Philippines. We are

looking to negotiate new Prisoner Transfer Agreements with key EU Member States and wider-world countries

Foreign national offender removals via Prisoner Transfer Agreements since 2010:

YEAR:	REMOVALS:
2010	46
2011	33
2012	41
2013	44
2014	34
2015	57
2016	99
2017	107
2018	111
2019	136
2020	81
2021	73
2022	50
2023	23

Countries or Territories we have removed foreign national offenders to via Prisoner Transfer Agreements since 2010:

ALBANIA	DENMARK	LATVIA	SLOVAKIA
Austria	Ecuador	Lithuania	Slovenia
Belgium	Estonia	Macedonia	Spain
Bermuda	France	Malta	Sri Lanka
Bolivia	Germany	Montenegro	St Helena
Brazil	Ghana	Netherlands	Sweden
Bulgaria	Gibraltar	Nigeria	Switzerland
Canada	Greece	Norway	Turkey

ALBANIA	DENMARK	LATVIA	SLOVAKIA
Cayman	Hungary	Pakistan	Ukraine
Chile	India	Poland	Vietnam
Croatia	Ireland	Portugal	
Cyprus	Israel	Romania	
Czech Republic	Italy	Saudi	

■ Wandsworth Prison: Health Services

Ruth Cadbury:

[\[7049\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 13 December 2023 to Question 5546 what the (a) original projected cost and (b) final cost of the new medical centre at HMP Wandsworth was.

Edward Argar:

The construction cost for the new healthcare centre at HMP Wandsworth was projected to be £9.8m plus VAT in April 2020. The final outturn cost is £10.4m plus VAT. The 6% increase in outturn costs was a result of inflation and some risk items materialising during delivery, though these were within the 10% risk contingency allowed for in the original business case.

■ Wandsworth Prison: Repairs and Maintenance

Ruth Cadbury:

[\[7050\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what maintenance work is required at HMP Wandsworth as of 14 December 2023.

Edward Argar:

A project to replace CCTV across the whole prison is due to complete in April 2025. A site-wide programme of fire safety improvements and refurbishment of showers is due to commence in January 2024. A further programme of window replacements is planned to commence in April 2024. Two further projects are currently in development in HMP Wandsworth: one to replace the chapel roof and another to refurbish or replace the recycling centre. Those will be considered for funding in future financial years.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE■ **Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton**

Mary Kelly Foy: [\[7134\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, if she will bring forward proposals to enable Members to directly scrutinise the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs.

Penny Mordaunt:

The Procedure Committee is conducting an inquiry into this issue and it would not be appropriate for me to pre-empt the conclusions of that inquiry. The Government will respond to the Committee's recommendations in the usual way once they have published their report.

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES■ **Elections: Finance**

Mr Ben Bradshaw: [\[6390\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of enforcement of electoral finance laws.

Simon Hoare:

The Electoral Commission are the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. In accordance with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, the Commission have a range of supervisory and investigatory powers which enable them to monitor compliance with electoral finance laws proactively and enforce suspected offences.

The Government considers the existing enforcement framework suitable to ensure that the regime is effective but does not cause a chilling effect on electoral participation and campaigning.

■ **Freeports and Investment Zones**

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[6992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pursuant to the Answer of 16 November 2023 to Question 1461 on Enterprise Zones, when he expects to receive the results of the next monitoring and evaluation of Freeports and Investment Zones.

Jacob Young:

The [Monitoring and Evaluation strategy](#), available on gov.uk, sets out how we will monitor and evaluate the impact of the UK Freeports programme. We will publish a report of our findings to date early next year in the UK Freeports annual report.

■ Housing: Insulation

Steve McCabe:

[6389]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to help support leaseholders affected by dangerous cladding.

Lee Rowley:

This government has delivered the most substantive reforms to building safety in nearly 40 years and leaseholders have been given significant legal protections from unfair remediation bills. All residential buildings above 11 metres in England now have a pathway to fix unsafe cladding, either through a taxpayer-funded scheme or through a developer-funded scheme. Following intensive talks with the home-building sector, we have a solution that is seeing industry take responsibility for fixing fire safety defects. Where developers or building owners are not currently funding cladding remediation, the Government has committed £5.1 billion of taxpayer money to ensure that people are safe in their homes.

The Building Safety Act 2022 created extensive new financial protections for leaseholders in buildings above 11 metres or five storeys with historical safety defects. Responsibility for undertaking remedial works and paying for the works in the majority of cases will rest with the building owner. In turn they can seek to secure funding for required works from those responsible for the defects. Where this is not possible, we expect the freeholders to meet the costs. I refer the Hon Member to my statement of 16 November entitled Building Safety Update ([Official Report HC, Volume 740, Column 56WS](#)) for further information on the progress made to fix residential buildings over 11 metres with unsafe cladding in England.

■ Levelling Up Fund: Culture

Stephanie Peacock:

[6949]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to his Department's guidance entitled Levelling Up Fund Round 3: explanatory and methodology note on the decision-making process, published on 20 November 2023, whether it is his Department which will allocate the £100 million which has been set aside for culture projects; and what is his planned timetable for the allocation of this funding.

Jacob Young:

Further announcements will be set out in the usual way.

■ Social Rented Housing: Mould

Justin Madders:

[6615]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to the Answer of 25 October 2023 to Question 203012 on Social Rented Housing: Mould, what recent assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the funds raised from rent settlement to cover damp and mould repairs.

Jacob Young:

Registered providers are spending record amounts on improving their tenants' homes. This is funded primarily by rental income, alongside capital funding from government to help meet the costs of building safety remediation and improved energy efficiency.

If a Registered Provider is no longer able to do this without jeopardising its financial viability, it has the option of applying for an exemption from (or disapplication of) the Regulator of Social Housing's Rent Standard. The Registered Provider will be expected to have considered all possible options to ensure its continued viability before such an exemption or disapplication is granted.

■ Social Rented Housing: Standards**Justin Madders:**[\[6209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, what recent discussions his Department has had with the Social Housing regulator on the timetable for setting the regulatory standards relating to (a) competence and conduct and (b) information and transparency; and whether his Department has made an estimate of the potential cost to the public purse of providing assistance to (i) local authorities and (ii) social housing providers to meet those standards.

Jacob Young:

In the coming months, the Government intends to consult on directions to the Regulator of Social Housing to set standards relating to the competence and conduct of social housing staff and information and transparency. Following this, Government will direct the Regulator, who will conduct their own consultations before the standards come into force.

We will carry out full impact assessments on implementing the standards. Social landlords are responsible for providing safe and decent homes for their tenants and meeting the regulatory standards. Landlords should not be looking to Government to fund meeting these requirements.

Geraint Davies:[\[6955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of social housing stock to meet the standards set out in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, known as Awaab's law; and what it will cost to achieve those standards.

Jacob Young:

Social landlords are responsible for remedying disrepair and ensuring homes are fit for human habitation. They must also ensure homes meet the Decent Homes Standard and are free of category 1 hazards. 10% of homes in the social rented sector do not meet these standards and continue to be non-decent. The tragic and avoidable death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak highlighted the need for government to take proactive action to make clear to social landlords the timescales in which they

must respond to hazards. That's why powers for Awaab's Law were introduced through the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

The details of the requirements to be introduced under Awaab's Law, including time limits for action, will be settled through the government's upcoming consultation. Alongside that consultation we will publish an impact assessment setting out the estimated costs of Awaab's Law and we will seek further views and evidence on that assessment.

■ Teesworks Joint Venture Independent Review

Liam Byrne:

[\[6988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, when he plans to publish the Independent Review of the Teesworks Joint Venture.

Simon Hoare:

I refer the Rt Hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [HL572](#) on 7 December 2023.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Northern Ireland Office: Menopause and Periods

Jim Shannon:

[\[6794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of his Department adopting the British Standard on Menstruation, menstrual health, and menopause in the workplace (BS 30416:2023), published in June 2023.

Mr Steve Baker:

The Northern Ireland Office follows the Ministry of Justice Corporate policies which adhere to the Civil Service HR's wider model.

This Department is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment where all employees are treated fairly, with dignity, respect and understanding, and their health and wellbeing is fully supported.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ BGI Group and MGI Tech

Henry Smith:

[\[7020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister of State, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, during the debate on Genomics and national security of 8 March 2023, Official Report column 120WH, what steps she is taking to investigate the national security risks associated with (i) BGI Group and (ii) MGI Tech.

Andrew Griffith:

Organisations which hold sensitive biological data are subject to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In addition, organisations such as Genomics England, UK Biobank and NIHR BioResource actively consider national security in decision making about partnerships with companies overseas.

As part of the new UK Biological Security Strategy, the Government is undertaking a programme of work to assess how we can minimise the risks from biological data to protect our burgeoning bioeconomy, without stifling innovation, and build confidence in sharing personal data to improve health outcomes in the UK and across the world. The Office for Life Sciences has begun this work, in consultation with relevant Departments and Agencies across Government, and key partners such as Genomics England and UK Biobank.

■ Broadband: Rural Areas**Dr Kieran Mullan:**[\[7150\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department is taking to improve rural connectivity.

Sir John Whittingdale:

The Government is committed to improve digital connectivity in rural areas. Project Gigabit is the Government's £5 billion programme to deliver gigabit-capable broadband to rural and hard-to-reach communities across the UK. Alongside suppliers' commercial rollout plans, our target is to achieve 85% gigabit coverage of the UK by 2025, and then nationwide coverage by 2030. Over 79% of UK premises can now access gigabit-capable broadband, which represents significant progress since January 2019, when coverage was just 6%.

We now have 16 contracts in place, and combined with our procurements running across the country, we have made over £2 billion of funding available to support the deployment of gigabit-capable broadband to over 1.1 million premises in hard-to-reach areas across the UK.

Support is also available for homes and businesses in some rural areas through the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme. Over 108,00 vouchers have been used to connect rural homes and businesses with fast, reliable broadband.

For very hard to reach premises, in April 2023, the Government announced a capital grants scheme to provide up to 35,000 premises with help to access Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite equipment to improve their connectivity. More information on this scheme will be announced in the new year.

To improve 4G coverage in rural areas, the government is working with the UK's four mobile network operators (EE, Three, VMO2 and Vodafone) to deliver the Shared Rural Network. This agreement will see the Government and industry jointly invest over £1 billion to increase outdoor 4G mobile coverage across the UK to 95% by the end of 2025. The programme targets areas of the country with partial or no 4G coverage, and will significantly improve mobile coverage for an extra 280,000

premises and 16,000km of roads. 4G coverage across the UK is approaching 93%, which is up from 91% when the Shared Rural Network deal was signed in March 2020.

Alongside the Shared Rural Network, the Government's Wireless Infrastructure Strategy, published in April 2023, set out further steps to improve connectivity across the UK, including a new ambition for nationwide coverage of standalone 5G in all populated areas by 2030.

Finally, Simon Fell MP has been appointed as the Government's Rural Connectivity Champion. His role will be to ensure that rural communities and businesses can access and adopt the connectivity that they need.

■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Aviation

Emily Thornberry:

[\[6155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's publication entitled BEIS ministerial overseas travel, January to March 2022, published on 7 October 2022, how much of the (a) £73 spent on the visit of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Research and Innovation to France from 15 to 16 February 2022, and (b) £171 spent on his visit to Switzerland from 6 to 8 March 2022, was spent on air travel.

Andrew Griffith:

The Department's ministerial travel, January – March 2022 publication has been republished to amend previous errors.

The visit by the Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation to France was from 15 to 16 May 2022. Of the £76.14 spent on the visit, £76.14 was spent on air travel. Of the £308.53 spent on the visit to Switzerland from 06 to 08 February, £308.53 was spent on air travel.

■ Life Sciences

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[\[7151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what recent progress her Department has made on strengthening the life sciences sector.

Andrew Griffith:

Recent progress to strengthen the life sciences sector includes a raft of new initiatives and funding announced at the Autumn Statement. These include £520 million for life sciences manufacturing; £51 million for Our Future Health; the launch of a Rare Therapies Launch Pad; and £10 million of investment in a Centre of Excellence in Oligonucleotide Manufacturing Innovation. Additionally, the government has recently published the full response to the Commercial Clinical Trials Review. These announcements build on the £650 million growth package announced in May and reaffirm the government's commitment to supporting a thriving life sciences sector.

■ Project Gigabit: Older People**Mark Pritchard:****[6149]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps she is taking to (a) make older people aware of Gigabit vouchers and (b) enable older people to access Gigabit vouchers.

Sir John Whittingdale:

The UK's Digital Strategy published in 2022 is clear that HMG has a "vision to enable everyone, from every industry and across the UK, to benefit from all that digital innovation can offer".

The Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme is led by broadband suppliers, who are encouraged to communicate directly with communities to increase local awareness of the voucher scheme and develop potential projects. Suppliers are then responsible for communicating with beneficiaries as any project progresses.

An address checker is available for all consumers to find out whether they are eligible for a voucher at: <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>.

■ Telecare**Mr Alistair Carmichael:****[6771]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what guidance she has issued with the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities to local authorities on the costs of moving to digital telecare.

Sir John Whittingdale:

The Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) both regularly provide information to local authorities about the PSTN migration. Officials from both departments also attend a Digital Switchover Working Group, hosted by the Local Government Authority.

DSIT is shortly looking to publish further guidance to local authorities about how the switch-off of analogue landlines may impact them. Among several other issues, this guidance will cover aspects of the provision of adult social care.

■ Telecommunications Cables: Copper**Mr Alistair Carmichael:****[6772]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether her Department plans to launch a nation-wide public awareness campaign on the withdrawal of copper wire telecommunications.

Sir John Whittingdale:

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave on 18th December to Question 6770

TRANSPORT**■ Active Travel: Slough****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[6879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much and what proportion of the active travel budget has been allocated to Slough over the next two years.

Guy Opperman:

Slough Borough Council has received £11,370,077 of dedicated active travel capital funding in total from 2020 to 2023. It also received £296,996 of revenue funding for capability building and engagement, from 2021 to 2023.

Local authority allocations from dedicated active travel budgets for 23/24 will be announced in due course. Allocations for 24/25 and 25/26 are dependent on future business planning and Spending Review decisions.

■ Cycling: Slough**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[7103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has plans to increase the number of cycle routes in Slough.

Guy Opperman:

The Government remains committed to the vision that by 2030 half of all journeys in towns and cities are walked or cycled. Over £11 million has been provided to Slough Borough Council to construct new cycling and walking routes through the Active Travel Fund since 2020.

Active travel capital grant funding is awarded to authorities on the understanding that scheme designs will be appropriately reviewed and inspected by Active Travel England (ATE). Authorities are required to work with ATE to resolve any critical safety issues that are identified. Future funding may be reduced if an authority fails to rectify identified design issues.

■ Department for Transport: Climate Change Convention**Dr Matthew Offord:**[\[6445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many officials from his Department attended COP 28.

Anthony Browne:

18 officials from the Department for Transport attended COP28.

■ Department for Transport: Finance**Olivia Blake:**[\[7155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will publish his Department's approved budget for the 2023-24 financial year.

Anthony Browne:

HM Treasury will publish the Supplementary Estimates for 2023-24 by the end of the current financial year. This will include the Department for Transport's final, approved budget for the 2023-24 financial year.

■ Department for Transport: Power Failures

Sarah Olney: [\[7081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether there have been any power cuts on their Department's property in each of the last three years.

Anthony Browne:

There have been 3 power cuts recorded in the central department. We do not regularly record the details across all the sites of the Executive Agencies.

■ Driving Tests: Standards

Grahame Morris: [\[7021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department has made an equality impact assessment of the Driver Services Recovery Programme.

Guy Opperman:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) takes its Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) responsibilities seriously. The DVSA has advised Ministers about the steps it is taking to reduce car practical driving test waiting times. Ministers have agreed a package of measures that the DVSA is implementing, and the average waiting time for a practical driving test is reducing as a result.

As part of the advice it presented to Ministers, the DVSA included a PSED assessment, as it does with all ministerial advice. The agency did not identify any PSED issues that required action at the time, but the agency keeps the PSED situation under review and would take action if necessary.

■ Electric Vehicles: Infrastructure

Justin Madders: [\[6204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what his Department's timetable is for making an assessment of the extent to which the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund has achieved its funding objectives.

Anthony Browne:

The Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund has plans in place to track progress and ensure that the Fund is achieving its objectives, both during delivery and after completion of the programme. Local authorities that receive funding from the LEVI Fund are required to provide quarterly progress reporting. Two evaluations of the fund are also planned to assess whether it has achieved its funding objectives. One will take place in 2024, with the second expected to take place later in the decade, once the majority of local authorities have completed their projects.

■ Equality Act 2010 (Work on Ships and Hovercraft) Regulations 2011**Angela Rayner:**[\[7046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent progress his department has made on the Post Implementation Review of the Equality Act 2010 (Work on Ships and Hovercraft) Regulations 2011; and whether that review has covered the matter of nationality-based pay discrimination against seafarers employed on UK-registered ships.

Guy Opperman:

The Department plans to publish a Call for Evidence. It will cover the regulations under review including those relating specifically to seafarer pay on UK-Registered ships.

■ Fisheries: Medical Certificates**Wendy Chamberlain:**[\[7135\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department has taken to communicate to the fishing community the (a) requirements to hold a medical certificate and (b) deadlines for applications for such certificates.

Guy Opperman:

The requirement to hold a medical certificate has formed part of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) ongoing communication and engagement with the fishing community since the regulations were made in 2018. Over the last year, as the deadline approached, the MCA has intensified its communication to raise awareness of the requirements and the deadlines for applications for medical certificates. This included MCA officials attending 36 roadshows in locations around the UK coast to engage with individual fishers. The MCA has also utilised social media, the fishing press, local and national radio to ensure the message was put out to a wide audience. Additionally, the MCA has met regularly with fishing industry representatives to discuss the medical certification requirements and update them on the progress of implementation.

■ Fisheries: Northern Ireland**Wendy Chamberlain:**[\[7136\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has had discussions with his Irish counterpart on that country's decision to exempt fishermen who go out to sea for less than 72 hours from medical certificate requirements; and if he will consider alignment with this policy.

Guy Opperman:

The Secretary of State for Transport has not had discussions with his Irish counterpart about their approach to medical standards for fishermen. The UK's requirements have been subject to careful consideration, and public consultation, to ensure that they support the safety and wellbeing of those working on our UK fishing fleet.

■ Freight: Finance

Grahame Morris:

[\[7025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to Table 1 of the Mode shift grants review call for evidence, published on 4 December 2023, if he will list the operators that received grants through the Mode shift revenue support scheme for intermodal freight transport (a) to and (b) from ports in 2022-23.

Guy Opperman:

The following operators have received freight grants for flows to and from ports for 2022/23:

Freightliner

DB Cargo

GB Railfreight

PD Intermodal

Newell and Wright Transport

Maritime Transport

Grahame Morris:

[\[7027\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will list the total value of mode shift revenue support granted to operators of intermodal freight transport services (a) to and (b) from ports in each financial year from 2014-15 to 2022-23.

Guy Opperman:

The total value of Mode Shift Revenue Support grant awarded to operators for intermodal flows to and from ports (for years data is currently available) is as follows:

FINANCIAL YEAR	TOTAL VALUE
2019/20	14,465,869
2020/21	18,734,640
2021/22	18,259,533
2022/23	16,422,410

The table above contains total grant awarded for each financial year. Please note that the actual grant paid out may differ as not all awards are claimed by grantees due to variations in the movement of freight. Grants are awarded for volumes moved to and from ports and the DfT does not differentiate claims for payments based on the direction of the journey.

Details of previous Mode Shift Revenue Support awards are publicly available in the "Grants Awarded" section at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-transport-delivers-more-grant-funding-to-transport-freight-by-rail/mode-shift-revenue-support-and-waterborne-freight-grant-applications-and-background-information>

Please note that the published data does not distinguish ports from domestic flows.

Grahame Morris:

[\[7028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what proportion of the 2023-24 budget for (a) mode shift revenue support and (b) waterborne freight grant had been allocated as of 14 December 2023.

Guy Opperman:

The total freight grant budget for 2023/24 is £20m. As of 14 December 2023, the Department has allocated £19,841,891 for Mode Shift Revenue Support. A Waterborne Freight Grant award of £16,524 has also been made for 1 October 2023 to 30 April 2024. The proportion of the budget awarded is about 99%.

Grahame Morris:

[\[7029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many applications his Department received for (a) mode shift revenue support and (b) waterborne freight grant in each financial year from 2014-15 to 2022-23; and what proportion of those applications were successful in each year.

Guy Opperman:

The Department does not hold the information in the form requested. Applications for these schemes may be subject to iteration and resubmission throughout a financial year as part of the grant management process, due to variations in anticipated and actual freight flows. Some applications are not initially successful, but then are successful when revised or resubmitted.

■ Luton Airport: Noise

Daisy Cooper:

[\[7138\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of London Luton Airport's Community Noise Monitoring Programme.

Daisy Cooper:

[\[7139\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of London Luton Airport's plans to monitor noise from its flight paths in Hertfordshire in 2024.

Anthony Browne:

The Government does not set noise controls at London Luton Airport, as these are set by Luton Borough Council. We will be assessing the airport's Noise Action Plan for 2024-2028 as per statutory requirements.

The Government encourages all airports to be transparent with communities about their noise impacts. Effective noise monitoring, both by mobile and fixed monitoring equipment, plays a key role in helping to understand such impacts. The Government

also expects airports to help local communities understand these noise impacts and the performance against relevant targets.

■ **Motor Vehicles: Accidents**

Angus Brendan MacNeil: [\[6775\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information his Department holds on the number of accidents caused by (a) electric and (b) other vehicles.

Guy Opperman:

DfT reported road casualty statistics reports numbers of personal injury road traffic collisions in Great Britain that were reported to the police using the STATS19 reporting system.

STATS19 does not assign blame in a collision. DfT therefore does not hold data on whether it was an electric or other vehicle type that was at fault in a collision. STATS19 does though report the vehicle types involved in a collision.

In 2022, there were 2,195 road collisions involving vehicles with an electric battery, and 93,636 road collisions involving motor vehicles recorded as powered by other non-electric fuel propulsion methods (including petrol, diesel and hybrid vehicles).

■ **Railways: Birmingham and Greater Manchester**

Tahir Ali: [\[6913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to improve rail services between Birmingham and Manchester.

Huw Merriman:

In May 2023, CrossCountry increased service frequency to two trains per hour from Birmingham to both Manchester and Bristol.

A new CrossCountry National Rail Contract commenced in October 2023. This will deliver improvements for passengers travelling on CrossCountry services, including between the West Midlands and Manchester. Cascaded additional carriages will be introduced and the entire CrossCountry train fleet is due to be refurbished over the next few years.

■ **Rolling Stock: Manufacturing Industries**

Stephen Morgan: [\[7107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the Minister of State for Rail and HS2 has held discussions with Alstom on factory in Derby since August 2023.

Stephen Morgan: [\[7108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether (a) he and (b) the Minister of State for Rail and HS2 have held discussions with Hitachi on their Newton Aycliffe plant since August 2023.

Huw Merriman:

The Secretary of State and Department for Transport officials have held a number of meetings with Hitachi and Alstom to discuss a range of rolling stock matters since August 2023. HS2 Ltd has also met regularly with the Hitachi-Alstom Joint Venture to discuss the HS2 rolling stock procurement.

Stephen Morgan: [\[7218\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the impact of the cancellation of Phase 2 of HS2 on existing rolling stock contracts for high-speed trains at the (a) Hitachi Newton Aycliffe, (b) Alstom Derby and (c) Alstom Crewe factories.

Huw Merriman:

The Hitachi-Alstom joint venture is contracted to manufacture and maintain the HS2 rolling stock for Phase 1 of HS2 alone. We will complete Phase 1 of HS2 between Birmingham and London, with a rescoped Euston station.

■ Shipping: Crew**Karl Turner:** [\[6779\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information his Department holds on the number of seafarers that are employed on (a) cargo and (b) passenger ships over 5,000 gross tonnage that provide regularly-scheduled services between UK ports and ports in EU member states.

Guy Opperman:

The Department of Transport does not hold data on how many seafarers are employed on different ship types or the number who provide regular scheduled services between UK ports and ports in EU member states.

■ Shipping: EU Countries**Karl Turner:** [\[6781\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many (a) cargo and (b) roll-on roll-off passenger ship movements there were between UK ports and ports in EU member states in each financial year between 2016-17 and 2022-23.

Guy Opperman:

The Department does not hold this data for the entire period of the question.

■ Shipping: Irish Sea**Geraint Davies:** [\[6379\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the Answer of 8 February 2023 to Question 139130 on Shipping: Irish Sea, what progress he has made on launching a call for evidence on Emission Control Areas around the UK coast.

Guy Opperman:

We plan to publish the call for evidence in due course.

TREASURY■ **[Subject Heading to be Assigned]****Mr Virendra Sharma:****[900752]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of changes in mortgage interest rates over the course of this Parliament on household income.

Bim Afolami:

The path to lower interest rates is through low inflation, and the independent Bank of England has the Government's full support as it takes action to return inflation to target. The Government's Mortgage Charter is providing support to mortgagor households. Living standards have also proven more resilient than anticipated as real disposable income per person was around £800 higher than the OBR expected in their March forecast.

■ **Alcoholic Drinks: Finance****Rachael Maskell:****[7068]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Government makes funding available to support businesses producing alcoholic beverages.

Gareth Davies:

The Government values the important contribution that the alcohol industry makes to our economy and society, and the new duty system, introduced on 1 August 2023, contains many benefits for alcohol producers, including two new reliefs.

The new Small Producers Relief means that small producers now see reduced duty rates on all products below 8.5 per cent alcohol by volume (ABV) up to a production threshold.

The new Draught Relief means that all alcoholic products under 8.5 per cent ABV which are sold in containers of 20 litres or more and are sold to connect to a dispense system qualify for reduced duty rates. This relief provides a reduction in the duty on draught beer and cider products by 9.2 per cent, and by 23 per cent on qualifying draught wine-based, spirits-based and other fermented products.

■ **Alcoholic Drinks: Industry****Rachael Maskell:****[7069]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many meetings were held between (a) Ministers and (b) officials in his Department and representatives of the alcoholic drink industry in the last 12 months; and if he will publish a list of those meetings.

Gareth Davies:

Treasury ministers have meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery.

Details of ministerial meetings with external organisations on departmental business are published on a quarterly basis and are available at the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmt-ministers-meetings-hospitality-gifts-and-overseas-travel>

■ Alcoholic Drinks: Minimum Unit Prices

Rachael Maskell: [7066]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an estimate of the potential impact of minimum pricing of alcoholic products on tax revenues.

Gareth Davies:

No assessment has been made of the potential impact on tax revenues of minimum pricing of alcoholic products.

■ Alcoholic Drinks: Overseas Trade

Rachael Maskell: [7067]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an estimate of the (a) volume and (b) value of alcohol that has been (i) imported to and (ii) exported from the UK in each of the last five years.

Nigel Huddleston:

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) is responsible for the collection and publication of data on imports and exports of goods to and from the UK. HMRC releases this information monthly, as a National Statistic called the Overseas Trade in Goods Statistics (OTS), which is available via their dedicated website (www.uktradeinfo.com). Classification codes (according to the Harmonised System) are available to assist you in accessing published trade statistics data in the UK Global Tariff. Goods moving to and from the UK are identified by an eight-digit commodity code. These are publicly available from the [UK Trade Tariff](#).

Alcohol falls within commodity code chapter headings 2203-2208. The full commodity code would depend on the specific type of alcohol. By searching with these codes on uktradeinfo.com you can determine the volume and value of alcohol imported into and exported from the UK.

If you need help or support in constructing a table from the data on [uktradeinfo](http://uktradeinfo.com), please contact uktradeinfo@hmrc.gov.uk.

■ Alcoholic Drinks: Taxation

Rachael Maskell: [7065]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much was paid in tax on alcohol in the 2022-23 financial year.

Gareth Davies:

Total Alcohol Duty receipts data by financial year can be found in the [Alcohol Bulletin](#) publication, in column M of table 1a.

The Alcohol Bulletin can also be found by following this link:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/alcohol-bulletin>.

■ Cash Dispensing: Fees and Charges

Sir John Hayes:

[6077]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to protect free-to-use ATMs.

Bim Afolami:

The government recognises that cash continues to be used by millions of people across the UK, including those who may be in vulnerable groups.

The government legislated through the Financial Services and Markets Act 2023 to establish a new legislative framework to protect access to cash. This establishes the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) as the lead regulator for access to cash and provides it with responsibility and powers to seek to ensure reasonable provision of cash withdrawal and deposit facilities. Importantly, in relation to personal current accounts the FCA is required to seek to ensure reasonable provision of free cash access services.

The FCA is currently holding a consultation on its proposed regulatory approach ahead of this coming into effect by Q3 2024: [FCA Access to Cash Consultation](#)

LINK (the scheme that runs the UK's largest ATM network) has commitments to protect the broad geographic spread of free-to-use ATMs and is held to account against these commitments by the Payment Systems Regulator. LINK has committed to protect free-to-use ATMs more than one kilometre away from the next nearest free ATM or Post Office, and free access to cash on high streets (where there is a cluster of five or more retailers) that do not have a free-to-use ATM or a Post Office counter within one kilometre.

■ Tax Evasion

Julian Sturdy:

[6786]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to tackle tax evasion.

Nigel Huddleston:

Tax evasion is always illegal and HMRC's aim is for everyone to pay the tax that is legally due, no matter who they are. HMRC's role is to make it easy to get tax right for the compliant majority and make it hard for the dishonest minority to cheat the system.

HMRC has achieved a long-term reduction in the UK's tax gap from 7.5% in 2005-06 to 4.8% (£35.8 billion) in 2021-22 (the latest estimate). The tax gap is composed of a range of customer behaviours: non-payment, use of avoidance schemes, legal interpretation, error, failure to take reasonable care, evasion, the hidden economy and criminal attacks on the tax system.

Evasion is when people or businesses deliberately do not declare or account for what they owe. It made up 0.6% or £4.7 billion of the £35.8 billion.

HMRC works to prevent fraud, tackle avoidance and evasion by designing policies and processes which minimise risk, by promoting good compliance with the tax system through education initiatives and responding with a range of interventions, capabilities and sanctions given to them by Parliament, including the exercising of strong civil and criminal investigation powers.

Since 2010, the Government has introduced over 200 measures to tackle tax avoidance and evasion, including 21 measures introduced since 2021 that are forecast to raise over £7 billion. Of these measures, 4 measures were announced at the Autumn Statement 2022 and are forecast to raise £5 billion in tax revenues over the next five years.

HMRC will continue to work hard, putting in place measures which mean we can go even further in reducing the tax gap, and making sure taxpayers and businesses meet their obligations and pay the tax they owe.

Published information: 'Measuring tax gaps tables 2023' (Table 7.1) at gov.uk.

■ **Tourism: VAT**

Henry Smith:

[\[6494\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a new tax-free shopping incentive for international visitors.

Nigel Huddleston:

Tax-free shopping continues to be available for all non-UK visitors who purchase items in store if they have them sent directly to their overseas address. This also applies to overseas shoppers who buy from British businesses online and have items delivered to their overseas address.

The independent Office of Budget Responsibility published their assessment of the withdrawal of the previous VAT-free shopping schemes in November 2020. At the time, this showed that the withdrawal of VAT-free shopping would raise a significant amount of revenue and have a limited effect on decisions to visit, or spend, in Great Britain.

The government is accepting representations from industry on VAT-free shopping and considering these, alongside broader data.

Henry Smith:

[\[6495\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with the retail and travel industries on the effect of the withdrawal of tax-free shopping for international visitors on those sectors.

Nigel Huddleston:

As the UK's economic and finance ministry, HM Treasury has regular discussions with representatives from a wide range of industries including travel and retail as well as business representative organisations covering many sectors.

As announced in the Autumn Statement, the government is continuing to accept representations from industry on the impact of this policy decision and considering this evidence alongside broader data.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES■ **Disability****Dr Rupa Huq:**[\[7070\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether she has had recent discussions with the Prime Minister on the potential merits of appointing a Minister for Disabled People.

Stuart Andrew:

My Hon. Friend, the Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies MP) has been appointed as the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, and will build on the government's strong track record of supporting disabled people, having delivered millions of cost of living payments and helping over one million more disabled people into work five years earlier than planned. The Minister will help ensure there is always a strong safety net for the most vulnerable in our society, while tearing down barriers so that every disabled person can realise their potential and thrive.

WORK AND PENSIONS■ **Carers: Payments****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[6259\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional financial support to unpaid carers.

Mims Davies:

This Government recognises and values the vital contribution made by carers in supporting some of the most vulnerable in society, including pensioners and those with disabilities.

The social security system in Great Britain provides financial support for unpaid carers on low incomes through Universal Credit and the DWP benefits it replaces; through Pension Credit; and through pensioner Housing Benefit. In England and Wales, it also provides non-means-tested support through Carer's Allowance.

The rate of Carer's Allowance will increase from £76.75 to £81.90 from April 2024, in line with the increase in the Consumer Prices Index in the year to September 2023.

As of May 2023, it was being paid to nearly 830,000 carers in England and Wales. Between 2022/23 and 2027/28, real-terms expenditure on Carer's Allowance in England and Wales is forecast to rise by around 40% to just over £4.7 billion a year.

Universal Credit, Pension Credit and other means-tested benefits can be paid to carers at a higher rate than to those without caring responsibilities. The Universal Credit carer element is currently £185.86 per monthly assessment period, rising to £198.31 in April 2024. It is payable in addition to the standard allowance and was being paid to around 560,000 carers as of May 2023. The additional amount for carers in Pension Credit is currently £42.75 a week, rising to £45.60 from April 2024. It is paid as an additional amount in the Guarantee Credit and was being paid to around 100,000 carers as of May 2023.

■ Children: Maintenance

Kirsten Oswald:

[6825]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average wait time is to receive a response to a Child Maintenance application.

Paul Maynard:

Between 75 and 80% of child maintenance applications are cleared within 6 weeks and a written response is issued by letter to both customers with details of the application. This is based on the last 4 quarters performance with the average at 77%.

An application for child maintenance will be recorded as having been made on the day it is received by the Child Maintenance Service:

1. for written applications this will mean the date shown on the office date stamp
2. for telephone applications this will mean the date that the telephone conversation takes place
3. for online applications this will mean the date the client pressed the "send application" button

Applications are considered 'cleared' when one of the following occurs:

- a) the amount of child maintenance to be paid has been calculated and an arrangement to pay maintenance between the two parents has been agreed.
- b) the amount of child maintenance to be paid has been calculated as zero; or
- c) the child maintenance application has been closed.

The length of time to complete an application is most impacted by the service's ability to trace and confirm the identity of the non-resident parent from the information provided within the application.

■ Data Protection and Digital Information Bill

Sir Chris Bryant:

[6994]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will publish a further equalities impact assessment for the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill relating to third party data gathering.

Paul Maynard:

The department has assessed the impact of the third-party data measure in the regulatory impact assessment scrutinised and green-rated by the Regulatory Policy Committee. This was published on the 27th November 2023 as part of the supporting documentation for the Data Protection and Information Bill and is available here: [Data Protection and Digital Information Bill: supporting documents - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/124444/Data-Protection-and-Digital-Information-Bill-supporting-documents-2023-11-27.pdf).

The department has fulfilled all the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and in line with our statutory duty keeps the impact of this measure on groups with protected characteristics under continuous review.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Disability

Liz Twist:

[6286]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps he is taking to help support disabled employees in his Department.

Paul Maynard:

- DWP is recognised as a Level 3 Disability Confident Leader, which demonstrates the departmental commitment to attracting, recruiting, retaining, and supporting career progression of disabled people. This assessment has recently been validated by Business Disability Forum.
- Annually we update the [DWP voluntary reporting on disability, mental health and wellbeing - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/124444/DWP-voluntary-reporting-on-disability-mental-health-and-wellbeing-2023-11-27.pdf) voluntary report on Gov UK which provides updated information on the activity on our support for disabled employees.
- Our DWP Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Approach has a long-term strategic intent that our products, services, and environment are 'inclusive by design' to ensure that as many people as possible, particularly groups who are traditionally excluded from being able to use an interface or navigate an environment, can access these. We use this to support our Disability Inclusion Action Plan that prioritises building capability, raising awareness, streamlining processes and improving policies.
- In June 2023, 22% of DWP staff indicated that they had a disability (an increase of 3.7% compared to June 2021) and 13.6% of Senior Civil Servants in the department declared a disability (an increase of 1.6% compared to June 2021).
- Workplace adjustments are considered as a matter of course for any colleague who experiences a barrier and/or difficulty at work including those with a health condition; enabling them to develop and fulfil their potential. We have a programme

of activity in place to ensure that both line managers and employees understand the requirement to consider adjustments and the process for putting them in place.

- DWP have a strong relationship and remains well connected to staff diversity and inclusion networks, such as Mental Health First Aiders, Ambassadors for Fair Treatment, and our disability network - THRIVE. It utilises them to raise awareness and provide education on the importance of diversity in the workplace. Additionally, they can be used as recruitment panel volunteers and the wider sharing of vacancies across communities of disabled colleagues. We also learn and utilise lived experiences throughout our decision making.
- DWP's internal and external communications team collaborate with our Disability Network colleagues (THRIVE) to deliver whole DWP communications throughout the year – linking to specific events such as Neurodiversity Week or International Day of Persons with Disabilities.
- Our Disability and Mental Health Champion works closely with our disability networks and sponsors the Civil Service Deaf and Hard of Hearing Network, spearheading communication campaigns, publishing blogs and working with her Senior Civil Service colleagues to highlight challenges and promote learning.
- DWP has established a Centre of Expertise for resourcing, within it, is a team focused on diversity and inclusion in recruitment. The team leads on ensuring our recruitment processes are inclusive and enable our drive for equitable representation across the workforce, thus supporting DWP's equality objectives.
- DWP have been awarded the RNIB Visibly Better Employer (VBE) status. We are proudly promoting our status; including within our adverts and candidate pack, profile on diverse jobs boards, social media, and Civil Service Careers websites; including the badge to show that we are a Visibly Better Employer.
- We have worked with Government Recruitment Service (GRS) to develop a Recruitment Adjustment Passport, to lead the way for the Civil Service. The Passport will gather a candidate's adjustment requests for the end-to-end recruitment process to alleviate difficulties, repetition, and inconsistencies throughout.
- DWP has been leading activity in trialling new recruitment practices that better support a broader range of candidates. Using improving branding to encourage Disabled people to apply for our roles – as well as acting as a role model to all other employers.
- DWP ensures digital environments, as well as physical environments, are inclusive and accessible. A new Accessibility Practice SharePoint site was launched on 24th July 2023. which provides guidance on various aspects of accessibility. We have Accessibility Standard Leads throughout our corporate functions.
- A new DWP Digital Accessibility Policy was approved and published in June 2023. This sets out the responsibilities of product teams and individuals in creating accessible products and internal communications. It explains in detail how to

comply with the Equality Act (2010), the Public Sector Equality Duty (2011) and the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations (2018/2022).

- During 2022 DWP introduced a structured approach to improving accessibility and inclusion in the design of DWP buildings.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Pay

Vicky Foxcroft: [\[6544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what proportion of his Department's employees are paid (a) at and (b) above the Real Living Wage.

Paul Maynard:

This following is based on the Real Living Wage rates of UK £12.00 per hour and £13.15 per hour for London as of 13 December 2023.

In response to the question raised the proportion of DWP colleagues in relation to the Real Living Wage is as follows:

- a) No DWP employees are paid at the Real Living Wage.
- b) 99.93% of employees are paid above the Real Living Wage.

This Government is committed to paying people a decent living wage, which is being addressed through the statutory National Living Wage. The Real Living Wage is not a statutory requirement unlike the National Living Wage, which applies to those aged 23 and over. From 1 April 2023, the National Living Wage increased to £10.42 an hour. All DWP employees are paid above this rate.

Vicky Foxcroft: [\[6545\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of his Department's staff have (a) applied for and (b) been given reasonable adjustments in the most recent period for which data is available.

Paul Maynard:

We are unable to answer this question within costs as currently it is not compulsory to enter this information onto the HR System. Each request is decided on its own merits locally and records are held by individual Line Managers.

DWP is running pilots to see whether this information can be recorded for the future however currently only start dates are visible.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Staff

Vicky Foxcroft: [\[6546\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps he is taking to help improve (a) the quality of recruitment and (b) staff retention levels within his Department.

Paul Maynard:

DWP is committed to improving its recruitment processes and improving candidate experience. The Resourcing Centre of Expertise has an ongoing work programme to

ensure policy, guidance and tools support the business to fill high volumes of vacancies across a wide range of professions, grades, functions and locations. DWP work closely with recruitment suppliers, candidates and vacancy holders to identify ways to improve our processes and the quality of our recruitment outcomes.

DWP actively takes steps to promote and raise awareness of careers opportunities to increase attraction of diverse talent from the widest possible range of geographical, social, diversity and career backgrounds by:

- Developing and launching corporate branding materials to support external recruitment activity and promote career opportunities in DWP to appeal to a broad range of applicants from entry level through to career changers and returners to the labour market. The branding provides consistent corporate attraction materials for DWP recruitment and is used on a range of social media, digital platforms and in outreach activities.
- Promoting the DWP Employee Value Proposition (EVP) to the external labour market and widen the reach of DWP recruitment campaigns by promoting opportunities and employee stories on LinkedIn and the Civil Service Careers website.
- Piloting use of diverse jobs boards which targets applicants with protected characteristics.
- Delivering national communications campaigns for volume recruitment of critical Work Coach and Universal Credit Review roles.

Within the Civil Service Success Profiles framework, DWP use high quality selection tools which are centrally evaluated such as Civil Service online tests and video interviewing. Processes have been developed to increase the diversity of panel members and tested different approaches to evaluate their impact on diverse outcomes, inclusive candidate experience, and quality of hire.

The DWP People Strategy specifically sets out to ensure we offer fulfilling, rewarding careers that attract and retain motivated people. Most recently DWP have been implementing measures to increase retention by:

- Using our people performance one to ones to increase awareness of partial retirement options, promoting options for part time employees to change their working pattern and using survey data to understand what is driving attrition trends and continue to create an environment where colleagues are highly motivated and retained.
- By directly targeting all colleagues noted as leaving we have successfully increased the response rate to our leavers survey. We have revised the questions to provide more relevant insight and spoken to other Government Departments to learn from best practice.
- Currently running a 3 month exit interview pilot in part of our operations to further build understanding of the reasons people are leaving the Department. As this will only be a proportion of the leavers that notify us during this period we will

triangulate this data with other sources and additional business insight to ensure that we have a holistic picture upon which further action can be taken.

■ **Disability and Chronic Illnesses: Employment**

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[6360]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to encourage people who are economically inactive due to long-term sickness and disability into work.

Mims Davies:

The Government delivers an extensive programme of initiatives to support disabled people and those with health conditions, including those with long-term sickness, to start, stay, and succeed in work.

These initiatives include: the Work and Health Programme, Access to Work grants, Disability Confident, a digital information service for employers, Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentres, Employment Advice in NHS Talking Therapies and Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care.

Building on existing provision and the £2 billion investment announced at the Spring Budget, we announced a new package of support in Autumn Statement 2023 to: double the number of places on the Universal Support employment programme, launch WorkWell in approximately 15 pilot areas to provide light touch work and health support, explore new ways of providing individuals receiving a fit note with timely access to support, and establish an expert group to advise on a voluntary national baseline for Occupational Health provision.

Alongside this, the Health and Disability White Paper announced plans to abolish the WCA. This reform will ensure those who are able to can progress in or towards work, without the worry of being reassessed and losing their benefits, giving claimants confidence they will receive support, for as long as it is needed, regardless of whether they are working.

Ahead of the White Paper reform, we have announced changes to the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) from 2025, that will continue to protect those with the most severe conditions while ensuring those that can work are supported in doing so. Alongside this, a new 'Chance to Work Guarantee', will effectively abolish the WCA for most existing claimants who have already been assessed and are not expected to look for or prepare for work. This will remove the fear of reassessments and give people the confidence to try work, while providing continuity of service for vulnerable claimants.

■ **Disability Living Allowance**

Justin Madders:

[6829]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the 27.5 week timescale for completing change in circumstance requests for child Disability Living Allowance claims on those children and their families.

Mims Davies:

The average journey time for change in circumstances for child Disability Living Allowance is 13 weeks. In certain cases, we are experiencing delays in the gathering of further evidence from the NHS, however, where possible, we are looking to expedite this by obtaining it from the parent/guardian of the child instead.

We have seen a significant increase in child Disability Living Allowance claims and therefore need to deploy our people accordingly to ensure we balance workloads to manage the entire service.

Disability: Lone Parents**Dr Rupa Huq:**[\[7071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to his Department's press release entitled, Employment boost for thousands of parents on Universal Credit, published on 25 October 2023, and the proposals announced in the Written Statement of 22 November 2023 on Work Capability Assessment Consultation, HCW64, whether his Department will take steps to support disabled single parents who have been deemed fit to work but are unable to work for 30 hours a week; and whether he has considered the potential merits of introducing accommodations for that group.

Mims Davies:

Disabled single parents in the Intensive Work Search conditionality group will continue to have their expected hours set at an appropriate level for their personal circumstances. The measures introduced on 25th October 2023 will ensure that lead carers of children aged 3-12 will be in a much better position to look for and prepare for work, increase their earnings and take full advantage of the increased childcare provision.

Work Coaches tailor the amount of hours any claimant is required to be available for work, search for work and undertake other work-related requirements to reflect the individual's health condition, disability, caring responsibilities and wider circumstances.

Jobcentres: Staff**Vicky Foxcroft:**[\[6547\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure the wellbeing of Jobcentre staff.

Paul Maynard:

DWP continues to review and refine its wellbeing offer to ensure it remains up-to-date, relevant, and accessible to all. We have a DWP Colleague 'My Wellbeing button'. The button enables quick, easy access to our DWP Wellbeing support offer from everyone's desktop and takes colleagues to a newly designed wellbeing triage page where colleagues can quickly access the right information and support based on their needs. For example, 'I need support today' through to 'I am looking for guidance as a line manager'. The purpose of this button is to raise the visibility of our

wellbeing offer and provide a quick and streamlined journey to the service required, strengthening our culture of putting colleague wellbeing at the heart of everything we do.

Within the Wellbeing button, the below support can be found:

▶ **Employee Assistance Provision** which includes:

- Telephone counselling via PAM Assist is available to all colleagues at any time of the day or night, 365 days a year for anyone needing immediate support.
- The PAM Assist service enables colleagues, where clinically appropriate, to access counselling by telephone or face-to-face.
- A free app with access to online coaches, offering Food Coach/Fitness Coach/Mind Coach/Lifestyle Coach/Health Coach.
- Managers can also contact PAM for advice on sensitive conversations, bereavement support and much more.
- Physiotherapy provision.
- PAM wellbeing workshops which colleagues can book onto and cover things such as SAD and winter wellness, mindfulness, mental health, stress.

▶ **Flu vaccinations** : Information for all DWP colleagues who are not able to access, or are not eligible for, the NHS flu vaccine can claim a refund if they choose to have a flu vaccination in 2023/24.

▶ Details of **key wellbeing dates** across the year which includes events/webinars to promote the day along with helpful tips for staff.

▶ A network of over 1,000 **wellbeing advocates**. Colleagues who have been given permission to give 5% of their time to support employee wellbeing. Colleagues can call them to discuss the wellbeing support offer and they actively promote the offer through giving presentations locally. We also have a **Buddy Network** who are volunteers that colleagues can call if they ever feel lonely and simply want a chat and have a wellbeing check-in.

▶ **Mental Health First Aiders** (MHFA) who are specially trained colleagues who offer immediate support to others experiencing mental ill health or emotional distress. They also look out for early signs of developing issues and promote mental health awareness across the Department.

▶ **Community Networks**, these range from networks offering support with the Menopause, Cancer, alcohol, religion and more. They offer peer to peer support and regularly run events.

▶ **Eye test** – colleagues can access a free eye test once every two years or more frequently if advised by an optician or medical advisor, or if they are having visual problems whilst working at a workstation.

▶ **Sanitary provision** - DWP provide free sanitary products across the DWP Estate for anyone with an immediate need, to support colleague health and wellbeing.

- ▶ **Charity for Civil Servants** who offer Independent, impartial financial and emotional support to all Civil Servants. Assistance includes help for carers, financial support and advice, wellbeing support, mindfulness, anxiety support, nutrition, sleep, menopause, bereavement and Podcasts and Webinars
- ▶ **Wellbeing and Resilience Toolbox** which can be accessed by Line managers to lead their own team training on resilience, slide packs and facilitator packs are available to talk their team through sessions.
- ▶ **5 step Wellbeing Conversation Tools** - a tool to help colleagues discuss how they are feeling, identify early warning signs of emotional distress, and explore a way forward.
- ▶ **Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP)** – This document is to aid employee and line manager discussions (related to mental health/wellbeing). The WRAP is designed to help employees to reflect on the causes and symptoms of their own workplace mental health and wellbeing challenges, and to take practical steps to manage these.
- ▶ **Stress evaluation tool** – this tool is designed to assist staff to concentrate on proactive and preventative measures to good stress management.

Annually we update the [DWP voluntary reporting on disability, mental health and wellbeing - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118421/dwp-voluntary-reporting-on-disability-mental-health-and-wellbeing-2022.pdf) voluntary report on Gov UK.

Alison McGovern:

[7034]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2023 to Question 2865 on Jobcentres: Staff, which job centres were part of the Additional Jobcentre Support pilot.

Jo Churchill:

The Additional Jobcentre Support pilot is being tested over two phases. The following Jobcentres were part of the first phase, that ran until end of August 2023:

BARRHEAD	GUILDFORD	NEWHAVEN
Bexhill	Guiseley	Newlands
Bognor Regis	Halifax	Northampton
Bradford Eastbrook Court	Hastings	Park Place – Leeds
Bradford Westfield House	Haywards Heath	Partick
Camberley	Hemsworth	Pontefract
Castleford	Hinckley	Pudsey
Castlemilk	Horsham	Rushden
Chichester	Huddersfield	Seacroft

BARRHEAD	GUILDFORD	NEWHAVEN
Coalville	Keighley	Shettleston
Corby	Kettering	Southern House - Leeds
Crawley	Laurieston	Spen Valley
Crawley Forest Gate	Leicester Charles Street	Springburn
Daventry	Leicester Wellington Street	Staines
Dewsbury	Lewes	Todmorden
Drumchapel	Littlehampton	Wakefield
Eastbourne	Loughborough	Wellingborough
Epsom	Market Harborough	Weybridge
Glasgow City Central	Melton Mowbray	Woking
Govan	Morley	Worthing

From 4 September 2023 the following Jobcentres are part of the second phase of the Additional Jobcentre pilot that is ongoing:

ALDERSHOT	GLOUCESTER	PAISLEY
Ashton under Lyne (Tameside)	Gosport	Partick
Barrhead	Govan	Pontefract
Bath	Guildford	Poole
Bexhill	Guiseley	Pudsey
Bognor	Havant	Redhill
Bordon	Halifax Crossfield House	Renfrew
Bradford Eastbrook Court	Hastings	Rushden
Bradford Westfield House	Haywards Heath	Rusholme
Brighton	Hemsworth	Seacroft
Cambeltown	Hinckley	Shettleston
Camberley	Horsham	Shirehampton
Castleford	Huddersfield	Southern House

ALDERSHOT	GLOUCESTER	PAISLEY
Castlemilk	Keighley	Spenn Valley
Cheetham	Kettering	Springburn
Chichester	Kirkintilloch	Staines
Chippenham	Laurieston	Stockport
Coalville	Leicester Charles St	Stretford
Corby	Leicester Wellington St	Swindon
Cosham	Lewes Medwyn House	Todmorden
Crawley	Littlehampton	Wakefield
Daventry	Loughborough	Wellingborough
Dewsbury	Market Harborough	Weston Super Mare
Didsbury	Melton Mowbray	Weybridge
Drumchapel	Minehead	Weymouth
Eastbourne	Morley	Wigan
Eccles	Newhaven	Woking
Epsom	Newlands	Worthing
Frome	Newport Isle of Wight	Wythenshawe
Glasgow Renfield Street	Northampton	Yeovil

■ **Jobcentres: Training**

Alison McGovern:

[\[7035\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 16 November 2023 to Question 1120 on Jobcentres: Training, when the modules were last updated.

Jo Churchill:

The module for Claimant Commitment learning was last updated August 2023 and the learning for lead carers was updated October 2023.

Alison McGovern:

[\[7036\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 16 November 2023 to Question 1120 on Jobcentres: Training, how frequently the learning materials are updated.

Jo Churchill:

DWP regularly review and update our learning catalogue in line with Policy changes, operational demand, and improvements in technology.

■ Long Term Unemployed People**Dr Kieran Mullan:**[\[6361\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to support the long-term unemployed into work.

Jo Churchill:

The Government recently announced further steps to stem flows into long term unemployment and inactivity through the Back to Work Plan.

As part of the Plan, the Restart Scheme will be extended for two years, and eligibility will be expanded to those who have been on Universal Credit in the IWS regime for more than 6 months rather than 9 months (as is the case currently). Restart provides customers with up to 12 months of intensive, tailored employment support.

The expansion of the Restart Scheme means that people will be able to benefit from the support offered by Restart earlier in their customer journey. The extended Restart Scheme will provide support for around 500,000 UC customers in the IWS regime.

The Back to Work Plan also set out that UC customers who remain unemployed after support from the Jobcentre and from the 12-month Restart scheme will take part in a claimant review point. This is a new process where a Work Coach will thoroughly review why the customer remains out of work, and what barriers continue to persist. Work Coaches will update Claimant Commitments to reflect what further support is needed to break this cycle of long-term unemployment, considering individual circumstances. Customers will be required to accept a job, undertake time-limited work experience or other intensive support.

From late 2024, these pathways will be tested on a small scale for claimants completing Restart without earnings.

■ NHS: Radiation**Emma Hardy:**[\[6602\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what information his Department holds on the incidence of cancer in NHS staff exposed to radiation as part of their duties.

Paul Maynard:

We do not hold information on the incidence of cancer in NHS staff working with radiation as part of their duties. Exposure to ionising radiation is acknowledged as increasing the risk of developing cancers, and the UK has robust arrangements in place for protecting against the health risks. Because cancer is unfortunately a common disease with many causes, it is extremely difficult to measure directly the minimal contribution from ionising radiation when the doses are very low, such as for workers and members of the public.

Emma Hardy:

[\[6607\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of protection for NHS staff exposed to radiation as part of their duties.

Paul Maynard:

There is a robust regulatory framework for protecting NHS staff from workplace exposure to ionising radiation, which is enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The Ionising Radiations Regulations 2017 place detailed duties on employers to control exposure to ionising radiation, within a general duty on all employers to assess and control risks to their workers under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

■ Pensions: Disclosure of Information

Dave Doogan:

[\[7127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether clause 128 and schedule 11 of the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill would apply (a) only to recipients of Pension Credit and (b) to all recipients of the State Pension.

Paul Maynard:

Fraud is a growing problem across the economy, accounting for over 40% of all crime and the welfare system is not immune to this. Although down by 10% in 2022-23, £8.3bn was overpaid in fraud and error last year in the benefit system and it is vital that the Government takes measures to see that fall further so the right support is provided to the right people.

The DWP third-party data gathering measure, contained in the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill, will give the department better access to relevant data which will help us identify fraud and error in the system. We expect this to save up to £600m in the next five years.

The proposed powers cover all DWP benefits, grants and other DWP payments as set out in paragraph 16 of the schedule. This is to ensure that, where fraud and error arises, the Department has the power to address it. The power does not, however, give DWP access to millions of pensioners' bank accounts, either those claiming the State Pension or Pension Credit. What this power does is require third parties to look within their own data and provide relevant information to DWP that may signal where some DWP claimants may not meet the eligibility criteria for the benefit they are receiving. This data may signal fraud or error and require a further review by DWP – through business-as-usual processes - to determine whether wrongful payments are being made. No personal information will be shared by DWP with third parties and only the minimum amount of information on those in receipt of DWP payments will be provided by banks to the Department to enable us to make further enquiries.

In 2022/23, £100m was overpaid in the State Pension and £330m was overpaid in the Pension Credit. This compares to over £5,540m that was overpaid in Universal Credit. Only those people flagged as potentially being ineligible for the support they are receiving would be flagged through this measure and we are clear we will focus

the powers in areas where there is a significant and pressing fraud and error challenge. In the first instance, we will be focusing the use of this power within Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance and Pension Credit

■ Personal Independence Payment

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[6262\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff his Department employs to determine the outcome of PIP claims as of 8 November 2023.

Mims Davies:

The latest information of the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff who are in paid employment and undertake decisions on Personal Independence Claims is in the table below:

BENEFIT	ABM FTE
Personal Independence Payment	3,100

Source: Derived from the Department's Activity Based Model (ABM)

Beth Winter: [\[6316\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will take steps to allow (a) applicants and (b) appointees acting on behalf of an applicant to (i) request and (ii) receive an assessment report from the assessment provider before his Department makes a decision on an application.

Mims Davies:

The Health Transformation Programme will transform the entire Personal Independence Payment (PIP) service, from finding out about benefits through to decisions, eligibility, and payments.

We are working closely with key stakeholders such as charities and support organisations to make it easier for claimants and appointees to access our services and build greater trust in our decisions.

As part of this, we will test a number of approaches regarding the feasibility of sharing assessment reports with people by default rather than on request.

Beth Winter: [\[6317\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will take steps to allow (a) applicants and (b) appointees acting on behalf of an applicant for the personal independence payment to (i) request and (ii) receive an assessment report from the assessment provider before a further assessment on that application is carried out.

Mims Davies:

Where a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment has been undertaken by a healthcare professional on behalf of DWP a copy of the assessment report can

be requested from the Assessment Provider and sent to the claimant or their appointee.

Assessment reports can be requested as soon as the DWP decision has been made, and so claimants will have a copy before any subsequent reviews take place.

Beth Winter:

[6318]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will set a requirement for (a) his Department's assessors and (b) external assessment providers for personal independence payments to respond to applicant queries within a specified timeframe.

Mims Davies:

We have interpreted your question to refer to general enquiries made by Personal Independence Payment (PIP) applicants to Independent Assessment Service and Capita and can confirm that there is no specified timeframe for them to respond to queries from applicants.

Beth Winter:

[6319]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will take steps to allow (a) applicants and (b) appointees acting on behalf of an applicant can request that his Department consider multiple assessment reports under each application.

Mims Davies:

The Health Transformation Programme will transform the entire Personal Independence Payment (PIP) service, from finding out about benefits through to decisions, eligibility, and payments.

We are working closely with key stakeholders such as charities and support organisations to make it easier for claimants and appointees access our services and build greater trust in our decisions.

In the Health Assessment Service, we are exploring a number of ways to transform the claimant experience of health assessments, including by making use of previous assessment reports to ensure claimants don't have to repeat information to the department.

Beth Winter:

[6320]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will take steps to require (a) his Department's assessors and (b) external assessment providers for personal independence payment applications to receive the same (i) initial training and (ii) continued professional development.

Mims Davies:

All health professionals (HPs) receive comprehensive training in assessing functional capability relating to physical and mental health conditions. As referred to in [PQ6000](#), both Personal Independence Payment assessment providers (APs), Independent Assessment Services and Capita, are required to supply the department with a training plan. This must set out in detail, the manner in which their training programme, both initial training and refresher training/continuing professional

development (CPD), will be delivered. The plan should be developed in co-operation with the department and will be subject to departmental approval.

APs must also evaluate the effectiveness of their training and CPD programmes. The format and timescales of the evaluation should be agreed with the department.

This year's Health & Disability White Paper committed to developing the skills of HPs. In addition to their professional experience, HPs will take part in training to enable them to be matched to the functional impacts of specific health conditions.

Beth Winter:

[\[6665\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to monitor the quality of the (a) customer service and (b) assessments provided by (i) Capita and (ii) other external assessors for Personal Independence Payment applications.

Mims Davies:

Quality is a priority for both the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment providers (APs), Capita and Independent Assessment Services, and the department. There is a comprehensive performance regime which drives APs to meet stringent quality standards. Through robust contract management processes, we continually monitor and work with APs to manage performance and obtain maximum value. If they are unable to meet our expectations, we will work with them to address any issues, whilst seeking any financial compensation as appropriate under the terms of the contract.

Customer satisfaction is one of the service level agreements within the PIP contracts. Each providers' customer satisfaction survey is undertaken by an independent third party, in line with the requirements of their individual contract. They have consistently exceeded their customer satisfaction target of 90%.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has an independent audit function that continually monitors performance and provides feedback to its providers. DWP works extensively with providers to make improvements to guidance, training and audit procedures to ensure a quality service. Quality performance is regularly reviewed through DWP and provider senior governance meetings at a national level and in each of the provider areas

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[6877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the backlog in (a) Personal Independence Payment new claims and (b) Personal Independence Payment reviews.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[6878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the time taken by his Department to process Personal Independence Payment claims.

Mims Davies:

We have seen a decrease in PIP clearance times for new claimants since August 2021 with the latest statistics showing that the average end-to-end journey has reduced from 26 weeks in August 2021 to 15 weeks at the end of July. This means that we're clearing claims faster than we were prior to the pandemic.

This is because we:

- Are using a blend of phone, video and face-to-face assessments to support customers and deliver a more efficient and user-centred service.
- Have increased case manager and Assessment Provider health professional resource; and
- Are prioritising new claims, whilst safeguarding claimants awaiting award reviews, who have returned their information as required, to ensure their payments continue until their review can be completed.

In addition, the Health Transformation Programme (HTP) is creating a more efficient service and a vastly improved claimant experience, reducing journey times and improving trust in our services and decisions. This transformation includes introducing the option to claim for PIP online.

Our actions to ensure new claimants receive their decision as quickly as possible, when we are receiving unprecedented volumes of new claims, has had an impact on our capacity to process award reviews. To handle any delays, we have introduced processes which allow a certain proportion of award reviews with sufficient and robust evidence to be conducted by Case Managers without referral to an Assessment Provider. In addition, where a claimant reports a change in their needs, whether at any point during their award or at award review, we are prioritising these.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Medical Examinations**Beth Winter:****[6663]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what information his Department holds on the number of complaints received by (a) Capita and (b) other external assessors for Personal Independence Payment applications in each of the last five years.

Beth Winter:**[6664]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to monitor the (a) number and (b) nature of complaints made to (i) Capita and (ii) other external assessors for Personal Independence Payment applications.

Mims Davies:

The department manages the PIP contracts robustly and has a full set of service level agreements setting out our expectations for service delivery.

It is important for providers to have their own complaints process to deal with dissatisfaction about the service they provide. This process signposts complainants

to the Independent Case Examiner (ICE) if they are dissatisfied with the provider's final response to their complaint.

The process is designed to ensure that those complaining about third party provision have access to the same complaint escalation route as those who complain about services provided by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This encourages providers to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity. It also gives providers the right incentives to offer good customer service and to comply with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's Principles of Good Complaint Handling.

In each of the last five calendar years (2019 to date), the total number of cases where Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment providers (APs), Capita and Independent Assessment Services (IAS), received a complaint, are shown in the table below.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 TO DATE
Capita	2800	1390	1380	1380	1580
IAS	6140	2800	2390	1760	1830

Please note:

- All volumes have been rounded to the nearest 10.
- All above data is derived from contractual management information produced by the APs.
- The above data is derived from unpublished management information, which is collected for internal departmental use only, and has not been quality assured to Official Statistics Publication standards.

All APs strive to provide an excellent service to claimants and are held to account for their performance. To put the above figures into context, the total number of complaints shown as a percentage of all completed assessments for the same period, are as follows:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 TO DATE
Capita	1.24%	0.74%	0.76%	0.56%	0.57%
IAS	0.87%	0.51%	0.41%	0.24%	0.23%

Please note:

The above percentages have been derived from the unrounded totals.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Slough

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[6263\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what data his Department holds on the average actual clearance times for (a) personal independence payment (PIP) normal rules new claims and (b) Disability Living Allowance to PIP reassessments in Slough constituency in each of the last 5 financial years.

Mims Davies:

Table (a) shows the average actual clearance times for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) normal rules new claims in Slough constituency and across England and Wales in each of the last 5 financial years (from 2018/19 to 2022/23), calculated as the median number of weeks from registration to DWP decision.

FINANCIAL YEAR	SLOUGH NEW CLAIMS (MEDIAN NUMBER OF WEEKS)	ENGLAND AND WALES NEW CLAIMS (MEDIAN NUMBER OF WEEKS)
2018/19	16	14
2019/20	17	16
2020/21	21	19
2021/22	23	22
2022/23	18	16

Table (b) shows the average actual clearance times for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to PIP reassessments in Slough constituency and across England and Wales in each of the last 5 financial years (from 2018/19 to 2022/23), calculated as the median number of weeks from registration to DWP decision.

FINANCIAL YEAR	SLOUGH REASSESSMENT (MEDIAN NUMBER OF WEEKS)	ENGLAND AND WALES REASSESSMENT (MEDIAN NUMBER OF WEEKS)
2018/19	16	16
2019/20	17	18
2020/21	26	24
2021/22	26	26
2022/23	18	18

Source: PIP Atomic Data Store (ADS)

■ Personal Independence Payment: Terminal Illnesses

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[6264\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what data his Department holds on the average actual clearance times for personal independence payment special rules for end of life claims in Slough constituency in each of the last five financial years.

Mims Davies:

Table (a) shows the average actual clearance times for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) Special Rule for End of Life (SREL) claims in Slough constituency and England and Wales in each of the last 5 financial years (from 2018/19 to 2022/23), calculated as the median number of working days from registration to DWP decision.

FINANCIAL YEAR	SLOUGH NEW CLAIMS (MEDIAN NUMBER OF WORKING DAYS)	ENGLAND AND WALES NEW CLAIMS (MEDIAN NUMBER OF WORKING DAYS)
2018/19	7	6
2019/20	6	6
2020/21	5	4
2021/22	5	3
2022/23	2	3

Source: PIP Atomic Data Store (ADS)

Notes:

- Reassessment figures have not been included as the volumes are too small and potentially disclosive.
- The median processing time is the middle value if you were to order all the times within the distribution from lowest value to highest value. The median is presented here instead of the mean because the mean can be unduly affected by outlying cases (e.g. cases where the person has been hard to reach due to being in prison, hospital, failed to attend the assessment on numerous occasions etc.)
- The processing time from registration to DWP decision is measured as the median time between the date of registration of the claim and the date of the DWP decision to either award or disallow the claim. It does not include claims that were withdrawn by the claimant or claims that were disallowed by DWP pre-referral to the Assessment Providers (e.g. for failure to meet basic eligibility criteria).
- The status of claims as 'normal rules/SREL' and 'new claim/reassessment' is shown as at the point of DWP decision, in accordance with the measure. It is

possible for claims to transition between normal/special rules and new claims/reassessments during the claimant journey.

- DLA to PIP reassessments include claimants who were on child DLA and have been invited to claim PIP when they turned 16; claimants who have had a change of circumstances while on DLA that has triggered a claim to PIP; and claimants who have been invited to move to PIP from DLA.
- This is unpublished data. It should be used with caution, and it may be subject to future revision.

■ Social Security Benefits: Debts

Kirsten Oswald:

[\[6565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of cases were categorised as in debt (a) in 2018, (b) in 2022 and (c) now.

Paul Maynard:

We do not have the number of case groups with child maintenance debt as of 2018 and the latest data we can supply is for September 2023 which will match the most recently published Child Maintenance Service Statistics.

It should be noted that that we have interpreted your question as asking how many paying parents had child maintenance debt. We do not have data on if the parents have other types of debt.

	Mar-18	Mar-22	Sep-23
Paying Parents*	390,435	544,591	633,768
Case groups with child maintenance debt	Not available	204,190	233,270
** (rounded to the nearest 10)			
Percentage		37%	37%

* Please note this will include paying parents with collect & pay cases, direct pay cases and collect & pay cases who have no ongoing child maintenance liability.

** The case groups with child maintenance debt are sourced from administrative data and therefore has not undergone the same rigorous quality assurance as officially published statistics.

■ Social Security Benefits: Disqualification

Vicky Foxcroft: [\[6852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2023 to Question 5084 on Social Security Benefits: Disqualification, if his Department will start capturing this data.

Jo Churchill:

There are no current plans to make this information available as it would incur disproportionate costs to link the necessary data

■ State Retirement Pensions: Age

Charlotte Nichols: [\[6935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make it his policy to reduce the state pension age to 63 for people with long-term disabilities.

Paul Maynard:

The principle of having a State Pension age that is the same for everybody is fundamental in the UK. Unlike a personal or workplace pension, which can potentially be drawn earlier, it has always been the case that nobody can claim their State Pension early, before they reach their State Pension age. We have no current plans to change this principle.

This Government is committed to providing a financial safety net for those who need it, including when they near or reach retirement. Support is available through the welfare system to those who are unable to work, are on a low income or have additional costs as a consequence of a long-term health condition or disability but are not eligible to pensioner benefits because of their age.

■ State Retirement Pensions: Underpayments

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan: [\[6859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people have been affected by underpayment errors in state pensions in each of the last 10 years.

Paul Maynard:

The information requested is not held by the Department.

The overall rate of State Pension underpayment due to official error remains low as a proportion of expenditure (0.5% in 2022/2023).

Information on the broad categories where State Pension underpayments are most often identified was set out in the DWP Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23.

[DWP annual report and accounts 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/117111/dwp-annual-report-and-accounts-2022-23.pdf)

DWP is taking action to rectify historic errors in the State Pensions caseload. Our priority is to ensure that everyone receives their correct State Pension entitlement.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:

[6860]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing full compensation to people affected by underpayment errors in state pensions.

Paul Maynard:

The Government is fully committed to rectifying any historical errors resulting in State Pension underpayments to ensure individuals receive the State Pension they are due in law, with any arrears payments paid as quickly as possible.

The Department for Work and Pensions is currently addressing, through Legal Entitlement and Administrative Practices (LEAP) exercises, two areas where we know there are State Pension underpayment errors. The Department does not routinely make special payments in such exercises.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:

[6861]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what progress his Department has made on rectifying errors in state pensions.

Paul Maynard:

The overall rate of State Pension underpayment due to official error remains low as a proportion of expenditure (0.5% in 2022/2023). Where errors do occur, we are committed to fixing them as quickly as possible.

The Department of Work and Pensions is currently progressing Legal Entitlement and Administrative Practice (LEAP) exercises to rectify errors in the State Pensions caseload. Our priority is to ensure that everyone receives the State Pension payments to which they are entitled.

The latest update on the progress activity for the State Pension LEAP activity was published on 30 November and shows that between 11 January 2021 and 31 October 2023:

- o 593,964 cases were reviewed
- o 82,323 underpayments were identified
- o £497 million was paid in arrears.

DWP is on track to complete the exercise for Category BL and Category D cases by the end of 2023.

The Home Responsibilities Protection (HRP) corrections activity started in Autumn 2023 with HMRC sending letters to potentially affected customers, who are invited to make a claim for missing HRP. Once a customer's national insurance record has been corrected, DWP will process any state pension changes to ensure ongoing payments are correct and any arrears are paid as quickly as possible. Updates on progress will be communicated as the exercise progresses.

■ Unemployed People: Broadband**Alison McGovern:** [7038]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the cost to the public purse has been of his Department's programme with TalkTalk to provide free broadband for six months to unemployed people.

Jo Churchill:

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

■ Unemployment: Chronic Illnesses**John McDonnell:** [6066]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2023 to Question 4331 on Unemployment: Chronic Illnesses, what assessment he has made of the impact of NHS waiting lists on long-term sickness in the labour market.

Mims Davies:

The department monitors trends in economic inactivity and works closely with other departments and organisations to understand the relationship between [health and economic inactivity](#). In addition, organisations, such as the [Office for Budget Responsibility](#), [Health Foundation](#), [Bank of England](#) and the [Office for National Statistics](#), have all published analysis on the relationship between health and economic inactivity. However, there is currently no consensus, and further work is needed to establish the nature and extent, if any, of the relationship between NHS waiting lists and long-term sickness.

The [ONS reported in February 2023](#) that 33% of those who were economically inactive (excluding retired) were waiting for NHS treatment, of which 42% said it had “strongly impacted” their lives. The [ONS also reported in July 2023](#) that for those individuals suffering with long-term health conditions who were in employment, the sickness absence rate in 2022 was 4.9%, the highest it has been since 2008, compared with 1.5% for those in employment without a long-term health condition. However, [analysis published by the Office for Budget Responsibility \(OBR\)](#) in July 2023 states that “the rising NHS waiting list itself looks unlikely to have been a significant causal driver of rising long-term sick inactivity in recent years”, one reason being that “there appears to be limited correlation in waiting list trends by age and ‘treatment function’ between mid-2021 and the end of 2022 and concurrent changes in inactivity due to long-term sickness.”

■ Unemployment: Young People**Catherine West:** [6573]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to help reduce youth unemployment in Hornsey and Wood Green constituency.

Mims Davies:

The Department of Work and Pensions Youth Offer provides individually tailored Work Coach support to young people aged 16 to 24 who are claiming Universal Credit. This support includes the Youth Employment Programme, Youth Employability Coaches for young people with additional barriers to finding work, and Youth Hubs across Great Britain.

Within the Haringey and Wood Green constituency, we have a dedicated Youth Work Coach Team across our Jobcentres. This team spends two days a week co-located within the Rising Green Youth Hub, based in Wood Green, to dedicate extra support to young people within the borough to address barriers and move them closer to employment. We also hold regular 'Young People Jobs fairs' focused on the sectors and employers young people are interested in. To do this we involve a variety of employers and partners into the Jobcentres and Youth Hub to engage and support this group.

Catherine West:**[6574]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate he has made of levels of youth unemployment in Hornsey & Wood Green constituency in each of the last 5 years.

Mims Davies:

Due to small samples, reliable estimates of youth unemployment for Hornsey and Wood Green cannot be produced from the available survey data.

The claimant count for various age groups is published and available [here](#).

Guidance for users can be found [here](#).

■ Universal Credit: Administration**John McDonnell:****[6065]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether there is (a) a minimum, (b) a maximum and (c) an optimal number of universal credit cases overseen by each case manager.

Jo Churchill:

There is no set minimum/maximum or optimum caseload size. We do look to equalise pressures/caseloads in the network via recruitment in or pivoting work out of a site

■ Work Capability Assessment**Alison McGovern:****[6477]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of people in the Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity group have flowed off in each year since 2015.

Jo Churchill:

The information requested is not readily available and to provide this would incur disproportionate costs.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ **.India Trade Negotiations Update**

Minister of State for Trade Policy (Greg Hands):

[\[HCWS160\]](#)

The thirteenth round of UK-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations began on 18 September and concluded on 15 December. During the round, negotiations took place in both London and Delhi in a hybrid fashion. As with Round 12, negotiations in this round were focussed on issues including goods, services, and investment.

The UK-India trade relationship was worth £38.3 billion in the 12 months to June 2023. A balanced deal which respects the domestic sensitives of both sides will strengthen the economic links between the UK and India, can boost the UK economy and bring benefits to UK businesses, families and consumers.

We will not compromise on our high environmental and labour protections, public health, animal welfare and food standards, and we will maintain our right to regulate in the public interest. We are also clear that in this negotiation, as with all our FTA negotiations, the NHS and the services it provides are not on the table. Any agreement will be consistent with the points-based immigration system, and there are no plans to change our immigration policy..

The UK and India will continue to negotiate towards a comprehensive and ambitious Free Trade Agreement. The fourteenth round of negotiations will take place in January 2024.

The Government will continue to keep Parliament updated as these negotiations progress.

■ **Post Office Limited: Additional Funding Update**

Minister for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business (Kevin Hollinrake):

[\[HCWS155\]](#)

In October, I announced that the Government intends to provide additional funding to Post Office to meet the costs of participating in the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry and delivering compensation to postmasters. These activities are part of Post Office's response to the Horizon IT Scandal, which arose following the installation of the Horizon software in the late 1990s. I also announced that the Government intends to provide additional funding to help with the development of the replacement for the Horizon IT system and to ensure Horizon is maintained while that replacement is rolled out.

In accordance with the Subsidy Control Act 2022, the Department for Business and Trade's assessment of the funding's compliance with the subsidy control principles was subject to referral to the Subsidy Advice Unit. A report for each referral was published by the Subsidy Advice Unit, which concluded that the Department had "conducted an assessment which considers the subsidy's compliance with the subsidy control principles

in line with the Statutory Guidance". The reports for both the Inquiry and compensation delivery subsidy and the IT subsidy can be found [here](#) and [here](#), respectively.

In October, I committed to confirm final levels of funding to the House at the earliest opportunity. Following the publication of the reports by the Subsidy Advice Unit and the conclusion of the subsequent 'cooling-off' period, I can now confirm that the Department for Business and Trade has agreed to provide £150m to Post Office for Inquiry and compensation delivery costs and £103m for IT costs in the 2023/34 and 2024/25 financial years.

DEFENCE

■ Maritime Update

Secretary of State for Defence (Grant Shapps):

[\[HCWS163\]](#)

I would like to provide an update on the maritime security situation in the Red Sea.

Global trade relies on the free flow of commerce around the world, free from intimidation and malice. The UK has been at the forefront of ensuring freedom of navigation around the world; this is rooted in our history and our belief in the rules-based order that provides opportunity for all.

In recent weeks we have seen an escalation in attacks against innocent maritime shipping in the Red Sea, with 14 ships being attacked so far. These not only pose a risk to life of the merchant sailors onboard, but are also a clear menace to global commerce. It must not be the case that small groups hold international trade hostage through their hostile acts. Houthi capabilities include anti-ship ballistic missiles, capable of sinking ships and killing crew.

This has international ramifications and we should be clear-eyed about the risks to life, regional economics and global prosperity. Unprovoked Houthi attacks are having a major impact, with a number of shipping companies already announcing a pause on passage through the Red Sea.

More than 10% of the world's merchant vessels pass through the narrow Bab al-Mandab Strait in the Red Sea, including tankers carrying much of the UK's supply of liquefied natural gas. Around 50 large merchant ships each day pass through this channel. This is a critical artery for the world's trade. These Houthi attacks could result in rising oil prices, a stranglehold on international commerce and increasing costs that will affect the whole international community, as well as the flagrant and intolerable risk to human life. The recent attack on the Red Ensign 'MV Swan Atlantic' demonstrates the seriousness of the issue.

This an international problem that requires an international solution. Houthi maritime attacks will continue without a clear international response. It is in the interests of the global economy that we work with allies and partners to address this unacceptable situation.

I am proud that the UK has joined with key international allies in Operation PROSPERITY GUARDIAN, a US led international operation established to protect freedom of navigation throughout the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Following my instructions, HMS DIAMOND has deployed to the area and has already shot down a UAV as part of this endeavour. This is the first surface-to-air engagement by a UK Royal Navy vessel since 1991. We will not stand idly by when the prosperity of us all is at risk. HMS LANCASTER is also in the region to assist.

EDUCATION

■ Education Funding Update

Minister of State (Minister of State for Schools) (Damian Hinds): [\[HCWS157\]](#)

Today the Department for Education has published local authorities' Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations for schools, high needs and early years revenue funding for 2024-25, as well as confirming schools' pupil premium funding rates for 2024-25.

Core schools funding in England will increase by over £1.8 billion in 2024-25 compared to the previous financial year. This follows the 16% increase (over £7.9 billion) in funding from 2021-22 to 2023-24. School funding will be at its highest ever level in real terms per pupil by 2024-25, totalling over £59.6 billion.

Together, these publications confirm the funding increases that each local authority will see next financial year, reflecting the investment made in our education system in the 2021 Spending Review and the subsequent additional funding announced in last year's Autumn Statement.

Mainstream school funding in the DSG will increase nationally by 2% per pupil in 2024-25, compared to 2023-24. Including the additional funding for teachers' pay, overall mainstream schools funding will increase by 2.6%. This follows the 5.6% year-on-year per pupil increase we delivered in 2023-24.

The extra funding we announced in July to support mainstream and special schools with the costs of the 2023 teachers' pay award will continue to be provided alongside, and in addition to, the DSG in 2024-25.

High needs funding will increase to over £10.5 billion in 2024-25, a 4.3% increase compared to this year, and an increase of over 60% over the past 5 years. Every local authority will receive an increase in funding of at least 3% per head (of their population aged 2-18). This will help local authorities and schools with the costs of supporting children and young people with complex special educational needs and disabilities.

Pupil premium funding will rise to over £2.9 billion in 2024-25, an increase of £80 million from 2023-24. This represents a 10% increase in per pupil rates from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

The indicative allocations for early years revenue funding in 2024-25 total £6.1 billion. These include funding for the expanded offers for eligible children aged two and under.

The Dedicated Schools Grant allocations will be made available today at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2024-to-2025>

■ Schools and Colleges Update

Secretary of State for Education (Gillian Keegan):

[[HCWS154](#)]

I have been working closely with my Right Honourable Friend, the Minister for Women and Equalities, on guidance for schools and colleges where a child is questioning their gender. Schools and colleges have been left in a position where they are having to navigate this highly sensitive, complex issue, which is still not properly understood. We appreciate how daunting this is for school and college staff and for parents and children too. The aim of the guidance is to provide clarity for schools and colleges, and reassurance for parents. We will be today publishing the draft guidance for consultation.

The guidance covers how schools and colleges should respond when parents and children ask them to accommodate a child who is questioning their gender. This has been linked to gender identity ideology, the belief that a person can have a 'gender', whether male (or 'man'), female (or 'woman'), or 'other', that is different to their biological sex. Such accommodation may mean a request to take actions such as changing names, uniforms, or using different facilities to help a child appear more like they are the opposite sex, with the expectation that they will be treated as if they are. This is often referred to as social transitioning.

This guidance is based on a set of five general principles that schools and colleges can use to frame their response to such requests.

1. Schools and colleges have statutory duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children. They should consider how best to fulfil that duty towards the child who is making such a request and their peers, ensuring that any agreed course of action is in all of their best interests. This may or may not be the same as a child's wishes. Knowing a child's sex is critical to a school's or college's safeguarding duties.
1. Schools and colleges should be respectful and tolerant places where bullying is never tolerated. Staff and children should treat each other with compassion and consideration, in accordance with the ethos of the school or college.
1. Parents should not be excluded from decisions taken by a school or college relating to requests for a child to 'socially transition'. Where a child requests action from a school or college in relation to any degree of social transition, schools and colleges should engage parents as a matter of priority, and encourage the child to speak to their parents, other than in the exceptionally rare circumstances where involving parents would constitute a significant risk of harm to the child.
1. Schools and colleges have specific legal duties that are framed by a child's biological sex. While legislation exists that allows adults to go through a process to change their legal sex, children's legal sex is always the same as their biological sex.

1. There is no general duty to allow a child to 'social transition'. The Cass Review's interim report is clear that social transition is not a neutral act, and that better information is needed about the outcomes for children who undertake degrees of social transition. If a school decides to accommodate a request, a cautious approach should be taken that complies with legal duties. Some forms of social transition will not be compatible with a school's statutory responsibilities.

Dr Cass is clear that social transition is not a neutral act, and that better information is needed about the outcomes for children who undertake degrees of social transition. This means that schools and colleges should take a cautious approach and that decisions should not be taken in haste or without the involvement of parents.

We are now consulting on this guidance and welcome responses from the likes of parents, teachers, headteachers, pupils and clinicians. Nothing is more important than keeping children safe and I am grateful to all those who will help us to get this right.

We are also aware that many schools and colleges have commenced their Christmas break this week and so there is no immediate action to be taken now. We welcome your engagement and responses to the consultation from the New Year. The consultation will run for 12 weeks and will close on March 12th 2024.

A copy of the guidance will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ **Update on the Implementation of Publicly Accessible Registers of Beneficial Ownership in the Overseas Territories**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Americas, Caribbean and the Overseas Territories (David Rutley): [\[HCWS150\]](#)

Illicit finance is an active and growing threat to the UK family, and can undermine our national security, prosperity, and democracy. It is more important than ever that we work together to tackle the emerging challenges. Publicly accessible registers of beneficial ownership are an essential tool in the fight against illicit finance and corruption and provide substantial wider benefits to public trust in institutions and transparency in the business environment.

We welcomed the commitments made by all inhabited Overseas Territories to implement publicly accessible registers of beneficial ownership in line with the draft Order in Council issued in response to the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2018. In 2020, we set out in a Written Ministerial Statement our expectation that the Territories would implement registers by the end of 2023.

In November 2022, the Court of Justice of the European Union found that an EU requirement to implement publicly accessible registers was contrary to the EU 'Charter of Fundamental Rights'. This ruling does not apply to the UK or its Overseas Territories. However, several Overseas Territories have noted concerns about the legal implications of implementing a publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership if human rights

provisions applicable to them were to be interpreted in a similar way. The UK remains satisfied with the lawfulness of our own register and the ability of Territories to meet the requirements of the draft Order in Council.

Given our differing views on this ruling with several Overseas Territories, we have worked with them to find a way to make positive progress through the delivery of an interim step, which would involve the implementation of publicly accessible registers of beneficial ownership, with a legitimate interest access filter, next year. This would allow access to beneficial ownership information by members of the public who have a legitimate interest in doing so, including media and civil society organisations who are involved in the fight against illicit finance and money laundering.

Following intensive discussions with each of the Overseas Territories at the Joint Ministerial Council and across a series of bilateral conversations, we have made significant progress in the delivery of greater corporate transparency. I set out below the progress individual Overseas Territories expect to make over the next year to deliver against their commitments for greater corporate transparency. We will collectively review progress and discuss broader issues related to the combatting illicit finance with the Overseas Territories in March 2024 during the Ministerial Illicit Finance Dialogue.

The following Territories have either already implemented a publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership or remain committed to delivering one as soon as possible in line with the parameters set out in the draft Order in Council. In recognition of the capacity constraints faced by these territories, the UK will continue to provide both technical and financial assistance.

Falkland Islands

The Government of the Falkland Islands is committed to having a full Publicly Accessible Register of Beneficial Ownership, in line with the parameters set out in the draft Order in Council. Due to capacity issues, implementation is likely to be during the summer of 2024.

Gibraltar

The Government of Gibraltar successfully implemented a publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership in 2020.

Montserrat

The Government of Montserrat is committed to implementing a publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership, in line with the parameters set out in the draft Order in Council. Legislation is currently going through the Montserrat Legislative Assembly and has had its first reading. It is expected to be passed in the new year and implemented during the summer of 2024.

Pitcairn Islands

The Government of the Pitcairn Islands is committed to implementing a publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership, in line with the parameters set out in the draft

Order in Council. Due to capacity issues, implementation is likely to be during the summer of 2024.

St Helena

The Government of St Helena is committed to implementing a publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership, in line with the parameters set out in the draft Order in Council. The draft legislation is currently undergoing its final review with the intention for implementation in the first half of 2024.

The following Territories have committed to strengthening their respective levels of corporate transparency through the delivery of publicly accessible registers of beneficial ownership with a legitimate interest access filter in 2024. The UK Government will provide technical assistance as required to expedite and support delivery.

Anguilla

The Government of Anguilla has committed to moving forward with the implementation of a publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership where a person or organisation / entity can access specific information by demonstrating a legitimate interest that is consistent with the constitutional framework. Anguilla aspires to having this register operational by the end of 2024.

Cayman Islands

The Government of Cayman Islands is committed to implementing a publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership with a legitimate interest access filter no later than Q4 2024. This will include access to parties seeking to prevent or combat money laundering and terrorist financing (for instance media and civil society organisations under specific circumstances.)

Turks and Caicos Islands

The Government of Turks and Caicos Islands is committed to implementing a publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership with a legitimate interest access filter by Q4 of 2024. This will include access for media and civil society organisations with a legitimate interest.

The following Territories have set out a commitment to delivering greater corporate transparency contingent on external developments. As a result, the parameters of their proposed registers, and the precise timelines associated with implementation, remain unclear. The UK maintains that the Overseas Territories should deliver greater corporate transparency, independently of action being taken in the European Union or other jurisdictions. The UK Government continues engagement with these Territories in order to confirm that they will enable access at least to those with a legitimate interest, such as media and civil society organisations, and to do so as soon as possible. The UK will make available technical assistance to expedite delivery.

British Virgin Islands

The British Virgin Islands Government has confirmed that they will implement a publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership consistent with the standards to be identified

in the implementation review of the European Union's Fifth Anti-Money Laundering Directive. This directive does not apply to the Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies, or the United Kingdom. The British Virgin Islands Government anticipates the introduction of appropriate frameworks will occur in Q4 2024, but no later than Q2 2025.

Bermuda

The Government of Bermuda expressed their own commitment to make their register of beneficial ownership information accessible to the public within 12 months of the publication of the implementation review of the European Union's Fifth Anti-Money-Laundering Directive. This directive does not apply to the Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies, or the United Kingdom.

The UK Government welcomes the continued cooperation of Overseas Territory Governments in this matter. Our long-standing commitments to meet the highest standards in beneficial ownership transparency sets out our collective desire to be at the forefront of the fight against illicit finance. The commitments outlined above will represent a significant step forward in the Overseas Territories delivering their commitments to improve corporate transparency. We expect this interim step to be a part of the journey towards the implementation of fully publicly accessible registers of beneficial ownership in due course. The UK Government remains committed to publicly accessible registers becoming the global norm.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ **NHS Workforce Update**

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Victoria Atkins): [\[HCWS162\]](#)

After seven weeks of constructive negotiations with the British Medical Association (BMA) Specialist, Associate Specialist, and Specialty (SAS) Committee, I am pleased to inform the House that, on Saturday 16 December, I made a formal reform-based offer that the BMA SAS Committee have agreed to put to their members for a vote.

No strikes will be called by these doctors whilst the deal is being put to members.

SAS doctors are a vital part of the NHS. They focus predominantly on providing direct patient care by providing clinical expertise in their specialist area and taking responsibility for a full range of patients within their area of practice, making them essential to our efforts to cut waiting lists and deliver the highest quality service to patients.

In 2021, the Government agreed a multi-year deal with the BMA SAS Committee. If accepted, this offer will address the unintended imbalances in the pay scales for these doctors on the 2021 contract and pre-2021 contracts to ensure consistency and fairness across the workforce, speed up the delivery of some of the key objectives of the 2021 deal – such as the rollout of the new specialist grade – and encourage more existing doctors to take up the new contracts which offer modernised terms and conditions.

The offer includes plans to set up a £5 million funding pot to encourage and support NHS employers to create more permanent specialist roles where there is a need. This will fund

a significant increase in the number of specialist doctors, improving patient care and access, and create further opportunities for doctors to progress in their careers.

A joint piece of work will also be undertaken to consider how Locally Employed Doctors (LEDs) – doctors who are employed on local terms and conditions as opposed to national – can be better supported to progress in their careers, including the development of a potential process whereby such doctors operating at specialty level for 24 months could be transferred to a specialty contract.

The Government has made further commitments on career development, including the promotion of job planning for all such doctors, developing guidance to support the career development of SAS doctors, developing guidance for employers to encourage, establish and embed Specialist roles in their organisation, and a research project to understand why Specialist roles are not being created.

Both the Government and the BMA SAS Committee engaged constructively and in good faith to identify fixes and reforms that address important concerns for SAS doctors. This offer is independent of the headline pay uplift SAS doctors have already been awarded in 2023-24 through the Government's acceptance of the independent pay review body recommendations.

The BMA SAS Committee will now make arrangements to put this offer to a vote of their members in the coming weeks. I encourage them to accept this offer, and I will update the House in due course.

HOME OFFICE

■ **UK-US Data Access Agreement: first year of use**

The Minister of State for Security (Tom Tugendhat):

[\[HCWS152\]](#)

The first duty of any government is to keep the United Kingdom and its people safe. As the department responsible for public safety and national security, one of our key priorities is ensuring our law enforcement and intelligence agencies have access to the tools, capabilities and data they need to ensure public safety. The ground-breaking UK-US Data Access Agreement (“the Agreement”) is one of these tools.

The Agreement allows UK agencies to submit requests for content of communications directly to communications service providers, including social media platforms and messaging services, located in the United States. This must be for the purpose of investigating, preventing, detecting, and prosecuting serious crime. This has allowed our agencies access to more data, more quickly than ever before.

Since the Agreement entered into force in October 2022, the UK has made more than 10,000 requests to these US companies. All of these requests have provided UK Law Enforcement and Intelligence Agencies with critical data to tackle the most serious crimes facing UK citizens including terrorism; child sexual exploitation; drug trafficking; and organised crime.

The direct benefits derived from data provided under the Agreement to UK agencies have been across the full spectrum of serious crime. This has included:

- identifying the location of illegal firearms suppliers and their locations for storing weapons. This led to arrests and also the seizure of cash and heroin found at the same site;
- supporting high priority child sexual exploitation investigations, which has resulted in the safeguarding of vulnerable children from harm and the arrest of those suspected of committing offences against children;
- providing UK law enforcement with the information to locate and arrest an individual suspected of murder who had been attempting to abscond from the UK;
- identifying a boat being used to traffic Class A drugs, leading to the seizure of over 1.5 tonnes of Class A drugs;
- enabling the investigation of an Organised Crime Group engaged in the laundering of cash obtained through the sale of non-duty paid alcohol in the UK; and
- advancing broader law enforcement operations linked to preventing gang violence and the purchase and supply of illegal firearms.

These outcomes would not have been possible without the critical data provided under the Agreement.

It is clear that the access to data the Agreement provides is crucial in protecting our children and the wider public from harm. My officials will continue to work closely with operational partners over the coming years to maximise the benefits the Agreement provides and ensure HMG is able to continue to protect the public and keep the country safe. I also welcome continued engagement and support from the communications service providers on this important issue.

■ **Update on beneficial ownership transparency in the Crown Dependencies (CDs)**

The Minister of State for Security (Tom Tugendhat):

[\[HCWS151\]](#)

Illicit finance is an active and growing threat to the national security of the UK family. As set out earlier this year in the UK's second Economic Crime Plan, illicit finance fuels serious and organised crime, threatens our institutions, and enables kleptocrats to establish a financial foothold. That is why in 2016 the UK set up our own publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership, the People with Significant Control (PSCs) register, which was the first of its kind in the world. Seven years later many other countries and jurisdictions around the world have joined us.

We are still working with others to achieve this aim. The UK and Crown Dependencies (CDs) have a history of working together as partners to strengthen our economic defences against illicit finance. Publicly accessible registers of beneficial ownership are an essential tool in this fight.

In 2019, the Bailiwick of Jersey, Bailiwick of Guernsey and Isle of Man (the Crown Dependencies) committed to implement publicly accessible registers of beneficial ownership in line with the principles adopted by the European Union.

In December 2022, following the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), the CDs issued a statement announcing that they were pausing work on their public commitments while they sought legal advice.

According to Transparency International, we understand 14 EU Member States have maintained public access to their beneficial ownership registers. Gibraltar has also maintained a publicly accessible beneficial ownership register since 2020 and has not noted any negative economic impacts resulting from implementation of its public register. The UK is satisfied with the lawfulness of our own publicly accessible registers and continues to believe that the CDs could legally implement public registers of their own.

The Home Office has been actively engaging the CDs to understand their position. As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Americas, Caribbean and the Overseas Territories (David Rutley), set out in the backbench business debate on 7 December, there have been discussions with the CDs on providing access to beneficial ownership information to those with a legitimate interest, such as media and civil society organisations who are involved in the fight against illicit finance and money laundering.

Legitimate interest access would bring the CDs into line with the EU, where the CJEU judgment notes that EU Member States must continue to enable access to those with 'legitimate interest'. For the CDs to implement legitimate interest access would be a very significant step forward in beneficial ownership transparency and improve the security of the UK and the wider British family. Nevertheless, the UK Government is still committed to publicly accessible registers becoming the global norm.

The Home Office has made our expectations clear that the CDs should implement registers with legitimate interest access in the coming year. On 13 December, the CDs published their commitments on beneficial ownership transparency.

The CDs state they will deliver obliged entity access (such as financial services business and certain other businesses in their jurisdictions who are required to conduct due diligence) during 2024. I consider delivering obliged entity access across the CDs has been slower than it should be given the need to protect our financial institutions from use by hostile states, terrorists and criminals. This recognition of commitment is still welcome.

I welcome the CDs' press release, stating their commitment to developing and delivering legitimate interest access to their beneficial ownership registers, confirming that access to the information on their registers 'will be extended to include those media and civil society organisations who can demonstrate a legitimate interest in accessing relevant information in order to combat financial crime'. I look forward to seeing this commitment being adopted by the appropriate CD parliaments.

The CDs have said their definition of legitimate interest access will be developed having due regard to international good practice, including finalisation of the EU's Sixth Anti-Money Laundering Directive (6AMLD) which is anticipated in early 2024, as well as in line

with relevant European judgments such as the 2022 CJEU ruling. The CDs also note that the EU negotiating text for 6AMLD recognises groups who may have a legitimate interest as being those ‘conducting business transactions, civil society, journalists, law enforcement and higher education’.

The CDs state they will present proposals to their parliaments for agreement on the definition and implementation of legitimate interest by Q4 2024 at the latest. Given the original commitments were made in 2019 and the increasing use of finance to coordinate action against the interests of the British people and the wider British family, this is not the pace that I expect, and I urge the CDs to work as quickly as possible next year to implement these commitments. Parliament will wish to consider these commitments and closely monitor the situation.

JUSTICE

■ Chief Coroner’s eighth and ninth annual reports to the Lord Chancellor

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice (Mike Freer): [\[HCWS158\]](#)

I am pleased to lay and publish the Chief Coroner’s combined eighth and ninth annual reports to the Lord Chancellor on the operation of coroner services under section 36 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (‘the 2009 Act’). The joint report covers both 2021 and 2022.

The joint report has been produced to cover the crucial work being done across the coroner service, and by the Chief Coroner himself, during the latter part of the pandemic period and, thereafter, to support recovery plans. It also provides an opportunity to align the reporting cycle with the preceding calendar year and, therefore, with related reporting processes such as the annual Coroner Statistics publication.

In particular, the Chief Coroner’s report sets out:

- The work that he, as well as coroners, their officers and their staff have undertaken to manage the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- The continuing work to promote consistency in the resourcing of, and practices in, coroner’s offices across England and Wales;
- The training and guidance that coroners and their officers have received and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders; and
- Recommendations to improve coroner services further.

The Annex to the report sets out, for 2021 and 2022, the number of cases by coroner area that have lasted over 12 months.

I am very grateful to His Honour Judge Thomas Teague KC for the work he has done over the reporting period in guiding and supporting coroners through the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, building upon the work of his predecessor, His Honour Judge Mark Lucraft KC. I am particularly grateful for his work with local coroner areas on the post-pandemic recovery of the coroner system.

I am grateful, too, to all coroners and their officers and other staff, for supporting the Chief Coroner and HM Government to improve services for the bereaved, and for their valued frontline work.

The report will be available online, at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chief-coroners-combined-annual-reports-2021-to-2022>.

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

■ Freeports Update

Minister for Levelling Up (Jacob Young):

[\[HCWS159\]](#)

Today, I am pleased to announce the publication of the Freeports Delivery Roadmap, a cross-Government blueprint for accelerating and amplifying the delivery of our flagship Freeports programme.

Building on recent successes for the Freeports programme – including the announcement that nearly £3 billion has already been invested in Freeports, creating over 6,000 jobs – the Roadmap sets out a range of areas in which Departments will go further in supporting Freeports to create investable sites, land investment, and build clusters and durable local economic growth. It therefore focuses on all stages of Freeport delivery, from securing investment to translating this into tangible, positive impacts for local communities.

This is on top of the recent announcement of an extension of the window to claim tax reliefs in English Freeports, from five to ten years (subject to the agreement of delivery plans with each Freeport), and a new £150 million Investment Opportunity Fund to support Investment Zones and Freeports across the UK to secure business investment opportunities.

The Government will also work with the devolved administrations to agree how the ten year window to claim reliefs can be extended to Freeports in Scotland and Wales.

In sum, the Government is backing Freeports: we are doing everything in our power to deliver these new clusters in sectors of the future, thereby creating sustainable, high-quality jobs for communities across the UK.

I will place a copy of the Freeports Delivery Roadmap in the Libraries of the House.

■ Intergovernmental Relations Quarterly Transparency Report: 1 July - 30 September 2023

Minister for Housing and Homelessness (Felicity Buchan):

[\[HCWS156\]](#)

Today, the Government published the third Quarterly Report for 2023 of our engagement with the devolved administrations on GOV.UK.

This Report covers the engagement between the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government, and Northern Ireland Executive between 1 July - 30 September 2023. During this reporting period the administrations worked together on a number of key areas such as energy security, preparations for COP28, and continued support for

the NHS. This reporting continues to highlight how, through our collective work, we demonstrate a stronger ability to face and tackle the big challenges.

The Report is part of the Government's ongoing commitment to transparency of intergovernmental relations to Parliament and the public. The Government will continue with publications to demonstrate transparency in intergovernmental relations.

A copy of the Report will be placed in the Libraries of each House.

■ The Next Stage in Our Long Term Plan for Housing Update

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations (Michael Gove): [\[HCWS161\]](#)

This Government is committed to building more homes; more quickly, more beautifully and more sustainably. The best way to deliver is through a reformed planning system. Today we lay out our plan for reform. It is only through up-to-date local plans that local authorities can deliver for communities, protect the land and assets that matter most, and create the conditions for more homes to be delivered. Having plans in place unlocks land for homes, hospitals and GP centres, schools, power grid connections and more – laying foundations for the country's economic growth and the levelling up of communities for decades to come.

Too many local authorities have no up-to date plan, too many take too long to get their plan in place and too many plans do not deliver as they should. Even when plans are in place, too many local authorities take too long to determine applications, too many reject proposals which are in line with their policies, and officers' recommendations, and too many fail to ensure a proper pipeline of housing delivery.

Where plans are not in place, or not working effectively, communities are unprotected from speculative development. Houses still get built. But too often in inappropriate locations. Too slowly. And without the right infrastructure or community assets in place.

That serves no-one well. Communities do not have control. Developers do not have certainty. Homes for the next generation do not get built at the rate, or in the locations, we need.

This Government has a coherent, holistic, long-term reform programme to ensure the planning system at last delivers as it should.

Today's update to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) addresses the concerns expressed by local elected representatives about weaknesses in the planning system which led to frustrations about the nature of development. It provides clearer protection for the Green Belt, clarity on how future housing supply should be assessed in plans, certainty on the responsibility of urban authorities to play their full part in meeting housing need and protections for the character of precious neighbourhoods, safeguarding the gentle density of suburbs and ensuring family homes are there for the next generation.

These changes meet the clearly expressed, and wholly understandable, wishes of elected politicians of all parties to deliver for their communities. Taken alongside other

changes in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, they entrench the importance of beauty in new development, facilitate the delivery of improved infrastructure, respect the democratic voice of local communities, secure enhancements to our natural environment and deliver quality new neighbourhoods.

With these changes secure, there is now an added responsibility on local government to deliver. The reasons sometimes cited for resisting new development and expediting its delivery have been clearly addressed. So I am setting new expectations for faster delivery, strengthening accountability so poor performers can be better identified, taking further steps to enforce effective delivery of new housing where local authorities have failed most egregiously and putting other, failing, local authorities on notice of my intention to intervene if performance does not improve significantly.

With this higher level of expectation comes additional resource. We need excellent planners, well funded and well supported, to deliver the many more beautiful new homes we need. Planning is a noble profession and its role in making our communities work for every citizen is vital. That work has not always been recognised and respected as it should. So I will provide funds to support and reward planners in local government and dedicate the very best in central government to work with them to deliver.

Our approach to planning is of a piece with the broader approach my department has taken to local government. We have listened sensitively to elected representatives, we have given them more of the powers and freedom they have requested. But with that greater freedom comes greater accountability. Where failure occurs, we intervene more quickly and decisively. Where failure risks compromising the national interest, we intervene more comprehensively. We will provide additional resource to support vital professional leaders on the front line. We will champion their good practice, not least through our new watchdog Oflog, but we will also demand that all aspire to reach the standard of the best.

With both the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act and the new NPPF now in place, alongside the additional resources for planning departments I am announcing today, our planning reforms will accelerate the delivery of new homes. We are on track to deliver one million homes this Parliament, in line with our manifesto commitment. Our reforms will also strengthen our ability to meet our target of 300,000 additional homes a year. The next generation need those homes built. Future generations need to know the developments we build for them will be beautiful and will endure. And they want the natural environment enhanced to match a better built environment. That is what we will deliver.

National Planning Policy Framework

The NPPF is the backbone of the planning system – it sets the Framework within which local authorities, the planning inspectorate and applicants to the system must operate. Plans must take the Framework into account, and it is a material consideration for decisions. This makes it fundamental to the delivery of new housing in the right places, while also protecting and enhancing the things we care most about: our environment, heritage assets, our high streets and beyond.

In December 2022, I launched a consultation on changes to the NPPF. We received 26,000 responses and have considered them carefully. In summary, the new NPPF will: facilitate flexibility for local authorities in relation to local housing need; clarify a local lock on any changes to Green Belt boundaries; safeguard local plans from densities that would be wholly out of character; free local authorities with up-to-date local plans from annual updates to their five-year housing land supply; limit the practice of housing need being exported to neighbouring authorities without mutual agreement; bolster protections from speculative development for neighbourhoods that develop their own plans; support self-build, custom-build and community-led housing; and cement the role of beauty and placemaking in the planning system.

There is now no excuse for local authorities not rapidly adopting ambitious plans. The more plans adopted quickly, the more homes delivered quickly - and we have created the right incentives for rapid plan adoption.

The updated NPPF published today contains and should be referred to for the policy changes described in this statement. The full suite of changes are detailed in the Government's consultation response, but the principal changes are set out here.

The Purpose of Planning

The opening chapters of the NPPF have been updated to provide clarity on a core purpose of the planning system: planning for homes and other development that our communities need. It is also clear that having up-to-date plans in place is a priority in meeting this objective. All the following changes in the Framework reflect this fundamental purpose and priority.

Local Housing Need

The standard method for assessing Local Housing Need ensures that plan-making is informed by an unconstrained assessment of the number of homes needed, in a way which addresses projected household growth and affordability pressures; alongside an efficient process for establishing housing requirement figures in local plans.

These figures have, however, sometimes been difficult to achieve in some areas and blind to the exceptional characteristics of a local community. That is why the new NPPF makes clear that the outcome of the standard method is an advisory starting point in plan making for establishing the housing requirements for an area. Some local authorities may wish to deliver more homes. Where a local authority considers the number unachievable, it must provide robust evidence for that judgement. The revised NPPF provides clarity on what may constitute such exceptional circumstances for using an alternative method to assess housing need, including the particular demographic characteristics of an area, which could include those that may result from the unique nature of islands. Any assessment will be subject to examination as usual.

The Government also considered allowing authorities to take account of past 'over-delivery' when preparing new plans. Having considered responses to the consultation, which raised questions over needing to also consider 'under-delivery' and the risk of

double counting homes via the standard method, we are not proceeding with this change at this time.

Green Belt

This Government is committed to protecting the Green Belt. Planning policy already includes strong protections to safeguard Green Belt for future generations. The Green Belt is vital for preventing urban sprawl and encroachment on valued countryside. England's cities are already less dense than those of most of our European neighbours. That is environmentally wasteful and economically inefficient. We seek to support the gentle densification of urban areas in preference to the erosion of Green Belt land. That is why the Government is ensuring it is clear there is generally no requirement on local authorities to review or alter Green Belt boundaries if this would be the only way to meet housing need. Where a relevant local planning authority chooses to conduct a review, existing national policy will continue to expect that Green Belt boundaries are only altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, and this should only be through the preparation or updating of plans.

The Government is making no changes to the rules that govern what can and cannot be built on land that is Green Belt, but we are clarifying in guidance where brownfield development in the Green Belt can occur provided the openness of Green Belt is not harmed. I understand that the Opposition has advocated this as if it would be a new approach, suggesting a misunderstanding of existing policy, which the Government is therefore happy to make even clearer in practice guidance.

Character

This Government believes in heritage, beauty and community. It is important that the character of an existing area is respected by new development, particularly in the historic suburbs of our great towns and cities. The new NPPF therefore recognises that there may be situations where significant uplifts in residential densities would be inappropriate as they would be wholly out of character with the existing area, and that this may in turn affect how much development can be planned for in the area concerned. This will apply where there is a design code which is adopted or will be adopted as part of the local plan.

Exporting Housing Need

The standard method was amended in 2020 to include an uplift in need for the 20 most populated English cities and urban centres. This urban uplift supports the Government's objectives, as outlined above, to make the best use of previously developed land and locate more homes in our larger towns and cities, where development can help to reduce the need to travel and contribute to productivity, regeneration and levelling up. The updated NPPF now makes clear that this uplift should, be accommodated within those cities and urban centres concerned rather than exported to surrounding areas – except where there is a voluntary cross-boundary agreement to do so, or where this would conflict with other policies in the NPPF. This complements the repeal of the duty to cooperate through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act which will shortly come into effect.

Five-year Housing Land Supply

Up-to-date local plans ensure local communities are in control of where and what development happens in their area. They are key to getting more homes built in the right places. Where such plans are in place, the Government is committed to protecting local authorities from unwarranted speculative development.

The Government considers an up-to-date plan to be a plan that is less than five years old, and which contained a deliverable five-year supply of land at conclusion of its examination. All planning authorities are required to maintain a five-year supply of land to ensure homes and wider developments are built in the right places. However, authorities have previously been required to update this supply annually in a process that was burdensome and provided too many opportunities for speculative development.

We are now changing this and removing the requirement for planning authorities that have done the right thing and put an up-to-date plan in place to update annually their five-year supply of land. This change provides these authorities with additional protection from the presumption in favour of sustainable development. I am also fully removing the 5% and 10% buffers that could be applied to an authority's housing land supply. A transitional arrangement will ensure that decision making on live applications is not affected, avoiding disruption to applications in the system.

We are also rewarding local authorities at an advanced stage of plan making. Some local authorities have paused plan making in recent months. That is not good policy, lets communities down and we have warned of the consequences. Local plans at examination, Regulation 18, or Regulation 19 stage with a policy map and proposed allocations towards meeting housing need only have to demonstrate a four-year housing land supply (as opposed to five years) for a period of two years for decision making purposes. That protection is not afforded those who have dragged their feet.

And tough measures will bite where local authorities do not have an up-to-date local plan. They will be required to update their supply annually, and if they fail to do so, they will therefore be subject to the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Local authorities will have a clearer than ever incentive to get plans in place. Without them, authorities will not be able to control development as their community might wish. There are clear consequences to failing to get a plan in place which delivers a pipeline of new housing.

Another way in which consequences are applied in the planning system is through the Housing Delivery Test. This Test is an assessment of an authority's previous three years of housing delivery, and where there has been under-delivery, consequences follow. Today I am making some changes to these consequences. The 20% buffer an authority needs to add to its housing land supply where housing delivery falls below 85% of its requirement will now only apply to those authorities that do not have an up-to-date plan in place.

All authorities will however continue to be subject to the other consequences: producing an Action Plan identifying the reasons for under-delivery and the measures the authority

will take to correct it where delivery falls below 95%; and becoming subject to the presumption in favour of sustainable development where delivery falls below 75%.

In summary, we want to make life easier for those authorities who are doing the right thing, getting their plans in place and delivering housing. But also ensure that authorities that continue to fail their communities on housing delivery are held to account.

When it comes to calculating a five-year housing land supply, the Government is clear that we want to bring the position on past oversupply in line with that of past undersupply. We have amended the NPPF to formalise existing planning practice guidance on this topic and will in due course update this guidance to bring the over-supply position in line with under-supply. We will also give further consideration to the proposal to take permissions granted by a local authority into account in the application of the Housing Delivery Test, in particular the operational challenges with doing so identified in the consultation.

Neighbourhood Plans

The poor performance of local planning authorities will lead to consequences. But local communities that have worked hard to put neighbourhood plans in place should not be penalised for the failure of their council to ensure an up-to-date local plan. The new NPPF therefore protects neighbourhood plans from speculative development from two to five years, where those plans allocate at least one housing site.

Community-Led Housing and Self and Custom Build

The best councils know that driving faster housing delivery requires supporting diversity in the number and type of builders. Councils which support small and medium sized enterprises in the housing market, and which enable custom and self-build homes, drive the necessary increase we need in supply and better ensure the right homes are provided in the right places. The updated NPPF now emphasises the importance of community-led housing development, including by introducing an exception site policy for community-led housing development. Our policy changes also ensure that local authorities should seek opportunities to support small sites to come forward for community-led housing, and self-build and custom build housing. They also encourage 'permission in principle' alongside other routes to permission (such as local development orders) to remove barriers for smaller and medium site builders in the planning system.

The Government will also encourage the delivery of older people's housing, including retirement housing, housing-with-care and care homes by requiring these to be specifically considered in establishing need.

The Role of Beauty

Building beautifully and refusing ugliness has been central to the Government's planning reforms, as the right aesthetic form makes development more likely to be welcomed by the community. From today, the NPPF goes further to cement the role of beauty and placemaking in the planning system by expressly using the word 'beautiful' in relation to 'well-designed places'. It also now requires greater 'visual clarity' on design requirements set out in planning conditions to provide certainty for those implementing planning

permissions and supports gentle density through mansard roof development where appropriate.

Environment and energy

The new NPPF also strengthens protections for agricultural land, by being clear that consideration should be given to the availability of agricultural land for food production in development decisions; and supports the Government's Energy Security Strategy by giving significant weight to the importance of energy efficiency in the adaptation of existing buildings, while protecting heritage. These amendments will not impose any costs on home or building owners.

Wider reforms beyond the NPPF

In addition to those policies we have now updated in the NPPF, in December 2022 I also set out ambitions for other housing policies in relation to short-term lets regulations and the character of developers, noting the importance of these issues to communities.

On the character of developers, I also set out concerns about examples of how the planning system is undermined by irresponsible developers and landowners who persistently ignore planning rules and fail to deliver legal commitments to the community. I consulted to explore whether an applicant's past behaviour should be taken into account in decision making either through making irresponsible behaviour a material consideration or allowing local planning authorities to decline applications from applicants with a bad track record. Both options would require primary legislation and therefore are beyond the scope of this NPPF update. I welcome views expressed in the consultation and will consider these carefully in further policy development. To address the concerns and frustrations expressed by communities about breaches of planning control more immediately, I am now implementing the planning enforcement package in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act. This includes extending the time limits to take enforcement action, increasing maximum fines and reducing loopholes to appeal against enforcement action.

Finally, I am committed to tackling slow build out rates, recognising that it remains a major concern. I will do so through a consultation on measures to improve build out rates once the Competition and Markets Authority has published its final report as part of their housebuilding market study in 2024.

Planning Performance

With the updated NPPF now reforming the planning system to take account of the concerns and hopes expressed by locally elected representatives of all parties, it is now up to those who make it work – local authorities, the Planning Inspectorate and statutory consultees – to expedite delivery.

My expectations are simple: planning decisions must be taken on time, should be robust in their reasoning, and all authorities must have an up-to-date local plan. After a period of review and reform, local authorities now have certainty, and with that certainty I now expect a higher level of performance.

As I said in a letter to all local authorities in September, that means: development should proceed on sites that are allocated in an adopted local plan with full input from the local community unless there are strong reasons why it cannot; councils should be open and pragmatic in agreeing changes to developments where conditions mean that the original plan may no longer be viable, rather than losing the development wholesale or seeing development mothballed; and better use should be made of small pockets of brownfield land by being more permissive, so more homes can be built more quickly, where and how it makes sense, giving more confidence and certainty to SME builders.

Today I am going further still, taking steps to improve planning performance on four fronts.

Greater Transparency

Being transparent about data improves understanding of relative good and poor performance, and sparks action. That is why we will publish a new local authority performance dashboard in 2024.

As part of that reporting, we will expose the way in which some local authorities drag their feet. We will strip out the use of Extension of Time agreements, which currently mask poor performance. While I recognise that there will be instances where such agreements are necessary, I am concerned by the increase in their use – in particular for non-major applications, where the figure has jumped from 9% during the two years to March 2016 to 38% during the two years to March 2022. I therefore intend to consult on constraining their use, including banning them for householder applications, limiting when in the process they can apply, and prohibiting repeat agreements.

Additional Financial Support

In recognition that we are expecting better performance from local authorities, we are providing additional resource to help meet those expectations through a range of new funding streams.

First, as of 6 December, planning fees have increased by 35% for major applications and 25% for other applications. Local authorities are obliged to spend these fees on planning services, and I am clear there should be no decrease in authorities' spend on planning from their general fund.

Second, following the Chancellor's boost to the Planning Skills Delivery Fund at the Autumn Statement to a total £29 million, 180 local authorities have today been awarded a share of £14.3 million from the first round of funding. This will better enable them to clear their planning application backlogs and invest in the skills needed to deliver the changes set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act.

Third, we are establishing our Planning Super Squad members – the new team of leading planners and specialists whose talents will be used to unblock major developments, with £13.5 million to fund their work.

Fourth, the Autumn Statement allocated £5 million to support Local Development Orders. These are a powerful way for local authorities to grant planning permission upfront where development meets pre-determined rules, but have been underused. The Government

recognises both the different nature of the process for developing a Local Development Order and the loss of fee income could disincentivise take up, and will therefore use this £5 million to support a small number of authorities with exciting proposals to get such Orders in place – and if successful, look to expand this kind of support more widely.

Fifth, and demonstrating that we will act to support development where the Opposition seems determined to block it, we are today allocating up-to £57 million to the eight successful bids in the first round of the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund. At the same time, we are confirming that the second round will open for bids in January 2024, and providing a further round of Nutrient Support Funding in the form of £100,000 to the lead local authority for large, affected catchments. The Environment Secretary and I are determined to do more in the new year to unblock these stalled homes, while enhancing public access to nature and leaving our environment in a better state than we found it.

Faster Processes

Today we also address wider causes of delay in the planning system, with action on statutory consultees, customised arrangements for major applications, and support to prioritise the work of planning committees.

On statutory consultees, while the statistics suggest that most do respond within the 21-day limit, the use of holding responses is disguising a process that is too slow. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act makes sure statutory consultees can charge for pre-application advice, which should tackle problems upstream for developers and reduces downstream requests from local authorities.

I am however convinced there is more we can do. I am asking Sam Richards to lead a rapid, three-month review into the wider statutory consultee system to understand how best to direct their advice and resources to support speedy and effective decision making. I also expect to see greater discretion and judgement applied by both local authorities and statutory consultees on where advice is sought and where it needs to be offered.

On accelerated planning services, which were confirmed in the Autumn Statement, these will build on the existing model of Planning Performance Agreements, which are struck between local authorities and developers, detailing how an application will be handled and what timescales will apply. While we know these agreements work well in some areas, it is also clear that they are used inconsistently – with many developers finding that the payments charged and the level of service offered vary significantly between authorities.

We will now look to regularise these arrangements – making sure that they are offered across England, that clear milestones have to be agreed, that fees are set at an appropriate level, and that those fees have to be refunded where milestones are missed. Given the complexity and necessary flexibility that comes with such applications, we will work closely with the sector as we design these arrangements before consulting in the new year.

On planning committees, we rightly see elected representatives judge the merits of significant applications – and it is vital that they focus their time on applications that truly

merit such scrutiny, and arrive at decisions following legitimate reasoning. On this basis, I have asked the Planning Inspectorate to start reporting to the department about cases where a successful appeal is made against a planning committee decision, and the final decision is the same as the original officer's recommendation. The overturning of a recommendation made by a professional and specialist officer should be rare and infrequent – such that I have reminded the inspectorate that where it cannot find reasonable grounds for the committee having overturned the officer's recommendation, it should consider awarding costs to the appellant.

I intend to consider what more we can do to support planning officers and the committees they serve to focus on the right applications. This might be about providing more training, or using guidance to share best practice on the tools that can help to prioritise a committee's time – including the schemes of delegation that authorities adopt to determine which applications get determined by officers and which warrant committee airing.

Direct Action

Where these expectations for the planning system are not met, I will intervene.

I support transferring power to local areas so decisions are taken as close as possible to the areas and people most affected by them. With sharper power, authority and flexibility, however, comes sharper accountability. Where there is failure, and communities are in danger of being let down, the Secretary of State must act.

In this spirit, I am issuing a direction to seven of the worst authorities in terms of plan-making, requiring them to publish a plan timetable within 12 weeks of the publication of the new NPPF – and should they fail, I will consider further intervention to ensure a plan is put in place. This does not mean I am not prepared to act elsewhere, and I expect all other authorities to make sure that they have an up-to-date plan timetable in place within the same timeframe, with a copy provided to my department.

I have also designated two additional authorities for their poor-decision making performance and intend to review the thresholds for designation to make sure to make sure we are not letting off the hook authorities that should be doing better. The 2022 Housing Delivery Test results will be published today too, with 20 new authorities becoming liable to the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Finally, as the results of the Housing Delivery Test show us, action is required in London, where the homes we need are simply not being built and opportunities for urban brownfield regeneration go begging. The average of 38,000 net additional dwellings over the past three years has considerably undershot the Mayor's own target in the London Plan.

I made clear previously that I want to work with the Mayor, and I still do. But it has become evident that changes to the Plan itself may be needed if our capital is to get the homes its people need to flourish and thrive. Therefore, I am today asking Christopher Katkowski KC, Cllr James Jamieson, Paul Monaghan and Dr Wei Yang to review the

London Plan, and identify where changes to policy could speed up the delivery of much needed homes in urban city sites in the heart of the Capital.

Reflecting the sincere spirit of partnership that I emphasised in the summer and repeat now, their recommendations will come to me early in the New Year and I will share their report with the Mayor of London. But recognising my responsibilities to the citizens of London, and London's role in driving growth that benefits the whole country, I stand by what I said in July – that if directing changes becomes necessary, I will do so.

Cambridge

Finally, I want to provide an update on the Government's vision for Cambridge 2040. In July, I outlined plans for a new urban quarter – one adjacent to the existing city – with beautiful Neo-classical buildings, rich parkland, concert halls and museums providing homes for thousands. This would be accompanied by further, ambitious, development around and in the city to liberate its potential with tens of thousands of new homes.

In the intervening months, Peter Freeman, the Chair of the Cambridge Delivery Group, has been developing our vision for the city, in collaboration with a whole host of local leaders and representatives. I am clear that delivering our vision means laying the groundwork for the long-term, and that starts now.

We plan to establish a new development corporation for Cambridge, which we will arm with the right leadership and full range of powers necessary to marshal this huge project over the next two decades, regardless of the shifting sands of Westminster.

We recognise the scale of development we are talking about will require support from across the public and private sectors, to realise our level of ambition.

And we must also ensure we have an approach towards water that reflects the nature of Cambridge's geography. So today I am also announcing that we will review building regulations in Spring next year to allow local planning authorities to introduce tighter water efficiency standards in new homes. In the meantime, in areas of serious water stress, where water scarcity is inhibiting the adoption of Local Plans or the granting of planning permission for homes, I encourage local planning authorities to work with the Environment Agency and delivery partners to agree standards tighter than the 110 litres per day that is set out in current guidance.

A copy of the updated National Planning Policy Framework and associated documents have been placed in the libraries of both houses. Following the judgment in the Court of Appeal in the case of *Smith v SSLUHC & Ors*, the Government is reverting the definition of Gypsies and Travellers used in the Planning Policy for Travellers Sites to that adopted in 2012, with this change applying from today for plan and decision making. The Government intends to review this area of policy and case law in 2024. The revised definition has been published on gov.uk.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ The 2022 Government Chemist Review

Minister for Science, Research and Innovation (Andrew Griffith): [\[HCWS153\]](#)

The twenty-sixth Annual Review of the Government Chemist has been received. The Review will be placed in the Libraries of the House plus those of the Devolved Administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland. The Review will also be laid before the Scottish Parliament.

The Government Chemist is the Referee Analyst named in Acts of Parliament. The Government Chemist's team carry out metrology analysis in legally disputed cases. A range of referee analysis work was carried out during 2022, which included evaluations of kitchen utensils for primary aromatic amines, scrutinising pesticide protection measurements for tea and flaxseed imports, and detection of aflatoxin in in-shell peanuts and curry powder. The Government Chemist continues to work closely with government departments, their governance group, Devolved Administrations, Non-Governmental Organisations, and industry to identify tools, standards, and guidance to facilitate effective testing for food fraud and to grow knowledge transfer activities.