



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 25 January 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:30 P.M., 25 January 2024). 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

■ Attorney General: Equality

Neil O'Brien: [\[10261\]](#)

To ask the Attorney General, how many equalities impact assessments her Department completed in each of the last five years for which data is available.

Robert Courts:

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (the Duty), all public authorities, including Government departments, are required by law to ensure that they have due regard to certain equality considerations when carrying out their functions. While 'equality impact assessments' (EIAs) may be produced, there is no legal requirement for duty assessments to be recorded in a specific format.

The Government Legal Department (GLD) is the Attorney General's Office's (AGO) HR shared service provider and is therefore responsible for EIAs at the AGO. In the last five years, GLD has completed four EIAs when making substantive changes to HR policies and procedures (two EIAs in 2021 and two in 2023).

The AGO has completed no EIAs relating to policy changes. This aligns with its role as a department that does not hold policy in its own right.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Construction: Migrant Workers

Marion Fellows: [\[901154\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent assessment her Department has made of the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the EU on recruitment in the construction sector.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

As Chair of the Construction Leadership Council, our Skills Plan has enabled the construction sector to compete and attract new recruits. In fact, the number of apprenticeships increased to over 32,000 last year. The Government has also ensured the sector has the flexibility to recruit workers from overseas to supply demand.

Apprenticeships and traineeships are a matter for the Department for Education.

■ Employment: Leave

Angela Crawley: [\[10848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing paid fertility treatment leave.

Kevin Hollinrake:

The Government understands the importance of supporting people who are undergoing fertility treatment. We recognise the impact on women and couples of infertility and the importance of fertility treatment in helping them have long wished for families.

While there is no specific right to time off work for medical appointments, there are a number of ways through our existing policy and legal framework in which employees may be able to take time off to attend an appointment. Many employers are also willing to agree 'ad-hoc' or informal flexible working arrangements on a short-term basis.

■ Employment: Rother Valley**Alexander Stafford:**[\[10330\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps her Department is taking to help increase (a) levels of manufacturing and (b) the number of jobs in Rother Valley.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

Manufacturing plays an important role in the Rother Valley making up ~15% of jobs compared with ~10% for the UK as a whole, according to the ONS Business Registers and Employment Survey.

The Government recently published its Advanced Manufacturing Plan aiming to make the UK the best place in the world to start and scale up a manufacturing business – backed by £4.5 billion of funding and business environment measures.

The Plan expands our Made Smarter Adoption Programme – currently available in Rother Valley – supporting manufacturing SMEs to grow through digital technologies. Over 390 companies have already received the programme's support in the Yorkshire and the Humber region.

■ Exports: Germany**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[10237\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps her Department has taken to boost exports to Germany in the last two years.

Greg Hands:

The Government is committed to driving forward export growth, helping UK businesses export to markets across the globe including Germany, and achieving our ambition to reach £1 trillion of exports by 2030. In the year to June 2023, UK exports to Germany amounted to £61.1 billion, an increase of 15.8% or £8.3 billion in current prices, compared to the previous 12 months.

UK businesses can access DBT's wealth of export support via Great.gov.uk. This comprises a digital self-serve offer and our wider network of support, including trade

advisers, Export Champions, the Export Academy, our International Markets network and UK Export Finance.

■ Exports: Newport West

Ruth Jones: [\[10313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment has she made of the potential barriers to exporting for businesses based in Newport West constituency.

Kevin Hollinrake:

DBT has developed a Barriers to Exporting Framework that sets out the key barriers that businesses face across their exporting journey. DBT's free export support helps businesses in Newport West and across Wales overcome these barriers to expand their exporting activity.

Welsh businesses can access free export support through Great.gov.uk, including sector specialists and overseas trade advisers, the Export Support Service, the Export Academy and UK Export Finance.

My department recently announced that we will be appointing new International Trade Advisors (ITAs) in Wales, to provide tailored support for Welsh SME exporters to take advantage of new export opportunities.

■ Exports: Republic of Ireland

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[10513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps her Department has taken to help increase exports to Ireland in the last two years.

Greg Hands:

The Government is committed to helping UK businesses export across the globe including Ireland. UK exports to Ireland amounted to £57.7 billion in the 12 months to June 2023, an increase 18.2% or £8.9 billion in current prices compared to the previous 12 months, making Ireland the UK's 3rd largest export partner.

In the last 2 years, DBT has introduced UK suppliers across sectors including Construction and Infrastructure, Healthcare and Renewables/Offshore Wind to Irish public and private sector entities. We support UK businesses through advice on upcoming opportunities, market intelligence and direct help to support their export journey.

■ Groceries Code Adjudicator

Mr Alistair Carmichael: [\[901157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of strengthening the enforcement powers of the Groceries Code Adjudicator.

Kevin Hollinrake:

The Government's most recent review of the Groceries Code Adjudicator, which was published in July, found that the GCA continues to be a highly effective regulator. It did not identify the need for strengthening its enforcement powers.

As Minister for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business, I regularly meet the Adjudicator who agrees that his current powers provide the necessary tools to enforce the Code and change retailer behaviour.

■ Horizon IT System: Compensation**Jessica Morden:**[\[9475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether she has had discussions with the Board of the Post Office on the provision of financial evidence to claimants of the Horizon shortfall scheme to assist with their claims for redress.

Kevin Hollinrake:

The Government wants to ensure that all postmasters who experienced losses as a result of the Horizon scandal are provided with full and fair redress. It also recognises that given the significant time that has elapsed, it may be more difficult for claimants to provide evidence in support of their claim.

This was factored into the design of the Horizon Shortfall Scheme to ensure that postmasters will not be disadvantaged if there is a lack of records to support their claim.

There is an independent panel in place on the HSS, comprising of retail, legal and accountancy experts, which assesses each individual claim. The panel can exercise a degree of discretion to make fair awards where documentary evidence is lacking.

■ Horizon IT System: Dewsbury**Mark Eastwood:**[\[10293\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many people in Dewsbury constituency were victims of the Horizon programme failures; and what steps are being taken to compensate them.

Kevin Hollinrake:

The Government does not hold the data requested.

Government wants to see postmasters compensated as quickly as possible. Over £148 million has been paid to 2,700 victims, and we encourage anyone impacted to use the three compensation schemes available.

■ Overseas Trade**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[10040\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment she has made of the impact of (a) Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and (b) the redirection of ships around the Cape of Good Hope on UK trade.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

The UK is committed to ensuring the safety of shipping in the Red Sea and protecting international trade routes, as shown by our support for Operation Prosperity Guardian.

The Department (alongside other government departments who are leading the overall response to the Red Sea crisis) is closely monitoring the situation, working with key stakeholders and businesses to identify and mitigate supply chain issues. On 17 January the Department published the UK's first ever Critical Import and Supply Chains Strategy. This will help UK businesses, working in partnership with Government, build secure and reliable supply chains vital to the UK economy, national security, and the delivery of essential services.

Overseas Trade: Saudi Arabia**Scott Benton:**[\[901156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps she is taking to increase trade with Saudi Arabia.

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

The Government is currently negotiating an ambitious UK-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to boost trade with the region by cutting tariffs and removing red tape. The ongoing FTA negotiations with the GCC show our commitment to move towards a strengthened and more formalised trade relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Bilaterally, the UK and Saudi Arabia engage together as part of the Strategic Partnership Council to underpin bilateral relations, bolster mutually beneficial trade and investment, and develop partnerships between UK and Saudi giga-projects. I also recently travelled to Saudi Arabia to represent the UK at the Future Minerals Forum, one of the world's largest critical mineral events.

The Government is also supporting British businesses operating in Saudi Arabia through our extensive market access work, which aims to reduce or remove regulatory or administrative restrictions that can impede a business exporting or investing overseas.

Simon Blagden**John McDonnell:**[\[9996\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether Simon Blagden's status as a Conservative Party donor was taken into account as part of the appointment process for his roles at (a) Building Digital UK, (b) UK Health Security Agency and (c) the Trade Advisory Group for telecoms and technology.

John McDonnell:[\[9997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether Simon Blagden's role at Fujitsu UK was taken in account as part of the appointment process for his roles at (a)

Building Digital UK, (b) UK Health Security Agency and (c) the Trade Advisory Group on telecoms and technology.

Greg Hands:

For all appointments, a declaration of interests is recorded and due diligence conducted on appointees. These appointments will have been decided on the individual's experience against the essential criteria for the role.

■ **Zero Hours Contracts: Newport West**

Ruth Jones:

[\[10314\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what estimate she has made of the number of zero-hours contracts in Newport West constituency.

Kevin Hollinrake:

Zero hours contracts (ZHC's) are an important part of the UK's flexible labour market. They are useful where there is not a constant demand for staff, allowing flexibility for both employers and individuals.

Individuals on zero hours contracts represent a very small proportion of the workforce. The ONS publishes quarterly data for the number of individuals in work on ZHC's in the UK. The ONS figures are reported for Wales and estimates that between April – June 2023 47,000 people aged 16 or over in employment in Wales were on a ZHC. This is up from 46,000 between April – June 2017. Figures are not reported at constituency level.

CABINET OFFICE

■ **Peter Bone**

Emily Thornberry:

[\[8377\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, for what reason the former Deputy Leader of the House of Commons was awarded a payment on 27 September 2022, in the context of his age at the date he ceased to hold office.

Emily Thornberry:

[\[9462\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the severance payments for former ministers published on Page 132 of HM Treasury's Annual Report and Accounts for 2022/23, published on 20 July 2023, for what reason the former Lord Commissioner of the Treasury, the Rt hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford, was awarded a payment on 26 October 2022, in the context of his age at the date he ceased to hold office.

Emily Thornberry:

[\[9463\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to page 194 of his Department's Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23, published on 4 July 2023, for what reason the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in the Lords was

awarded a severance payment on 31 December 2022 in the context of her age at the date she ceased to hold office.

Alex Burghart:

[Holding answer 18 January 2024]: I thank the Rt Hon Member for bringing this to my attention. The Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991 sets out the entitlement for Ministers who leave office.

Such payments should not apply where a person has attained the age of sixty-five. If a former Minister was incorrectly given a severance payment, the relevant department will contact the individual to recover the over-payment.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Commonwealth Games

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[10042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department have made an assessment of the viability of the United Kingdom hosting the 2026 Commonwealth Games.

Stuart Andrew:

The UK is proud to have hosted the Commonwealth Games twice in the past decade. The record-breaking Birmingham Games in 2022 came in under budget and added at least £870 million of Gross Value Added to the UK economy, and hundreds of millions to the local economy in the West Midlands.

We are committed to working with the Commonwealth Games Federation and other Commonwealth countries to support a sustainable future for the Games. It is important that the Games remain a truly global event that gives athletes from around the world the chance to compete, and we continue to encourage the Commonwealth Games Federation to explore all hosting possibilities.

■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Aviation

Alistair Strathern:

[\[10971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the transparency data entitled DCMS: Ministerial travel, 1 July to 30 September 2023, published on 15 December 2023, how much and what proportion of the £8,046 cost of the trip to Sydney by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport, Gambling and Civil Society between 24 July and 2 August 2023 was spent on air travel.

Stuart Andrew:

I flew to Sydney to support the England team at the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023.

As well as attending the England vs. Denmark match, I promoted the Government's ongoing commitment to women and girls sport and physical activity. I championed the UK's leading reputation in equality and human rights by attending a Gender Equality Symposium, and met with LGBT+ organisations, such as Pride in Sport.

I also promoted the UK's expertise in hosting major sporting events ahead of the Brisbane 2032 Olympics by meeting with representatives from Brisbane 2032, alongside members of Brisbane's City Council.

The cost of my return flight from Manchester to Sydney was £6,777.97. As part of my ministerial duties during my trip, I also travelled to Brisbane from Sydney. The cost of the return internal flight from Sydney to Brisbane was £336.80.

■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Equality

Neil O'Brien: [\[10258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many equalities impact assessments her Department completed in each of the last five years for which data is available.

Julia Lopez:

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (the Duty) all public authorities, including Government departments, are required by law to ensure that they have due regard to certain equality considerations when carrying out their functions. While 'equality impact assessments' may be produced, there is no legal requirement for duty assessments to be recorded in a specific format.

We do not centrally collate equalities impact assessments in the department, but are confident that we are meeting the Duty in our decision-making processes.

■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Official Gifts

Alistair Strathern: [\[10972\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the transparency data entitled DCMS: Ministerial hospitality, 1 July to 30 September 2023, published on 15 December 2023, who gifted the tickets on 9 July 2023; and what the event was.

Julia Lopez:

The tickets were gifted from Silverstone, and the event was the British Grand Prix.

This information was provided in the Secretary of State's transparency return through the normal declaration process. However, due to a technical error it was not published on the GOV.UK website.

■ Loneliness

Tracey Crouch: [\[10083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what progress her Department has made on tackling loneliness.

Stuart Andrew:

Many people experience loneliness and social isolation, and the Government is committed to reducing the stigma associated with loneliness, and building a more

connected society. Government, local councils, health systems and voluntary and community sector organisations all have an important role to play in achieving this.

Since publishing the first ever government Strategy for Tackling Loneliness and appointing the world's first Minister for Loneliness in 2018, we have invested almost £80 million in tackling loneliness. These interventions include a national communications campaign that aims to reduce the stigma of loneliness, which has reached at least 25 million people across the country. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is also delivering the 'Know Your Neighbourhood Fund' to boost volunteering and reduce loneliness in 27 disadvantaged areas across England. We have also brought together over 750 people from across the public, private and charity sectors through our Tackling Loneliness Hub, where members can learn from events and workshops, share the latest research and collaborate on new initiatives.

Last March, we published the fourth annual report of our Tackling Loneliness Strategy. It contains over 60 new and ongoing commitments from 11 government departments. So far, we have made progress against at least 46 of these commitments and at least 7 have been completed. Due to the nature of the commitments many have now been incorporated into business as usual. The fifth annual report will provide a full update on commitments, and is due to be published in March.

DEFENCE

■ Afghanistan: Refugees

Steve McCabe:

[\[10367\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Afghans are accommodated in (a) camps and (b) other sites operated by his Department.

James Heapey:

As of 18 January 2024, our records show 775 Afghans eligible for the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme (principal applicants and family members) are accommodated in reception sites at Ministry of Defence (MOD) camps. A further 850 ARAP Eligible Afghans (principal applicants and family members) are in transitional Service Family Accommodation at other MOD sites.

These sites provide short-term accommodation for individuals and their families prior to onwards movement into settled accommodation.

■ Air Force: Military Bases

Nick Smith:

[\[10786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his Department's policy is on the use of RAF airfields by private planes.

James Cartlidge:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by Baroness Goldie to the Noble Lady Baroness Randerson on 13 December 2021 to Question HL4655 in the House of Lords.

Attachments:

1. Military Bases: Aviation [HL 4655.docx]

■ **Armed Forces: Housing**

Luke Pollard:[\[10530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the letter deposited in the House of Commons, committed on 27 December 2023, paper reference DEP2024-0002, for what reason the sum of figures in columns headed 2018 to 2023 do not equal the totals under each of those columns; and for what reason the number of grade two personnel in the column headed 2023, as at 29 Nov 2023 is significantly lower than previous years.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

I regret that the data provided in response to Parliamentary Questions 4252, 4253 and 4254 was incorrect and should read as highlighted below.

The below table details the number of service personnel living in SLA in each calendar year since 2018.

PERMANENT SLA	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 TO DATE
Below Grade 4	4,570	4,530	4,690	4,680	4,620	4,320
Grade 1	32,920	32,240	26,220	22,470	21,010	19,030
Grade 2	28,510	32,910	35,470	36,310	37,100	34,620
Grade 3	18,840	20,990	19,720	18,860	17,020	19,590
Grade 4	37,950	40,910	42,850	43,870	40,680	38,500
Other	5,820	6,410	5,940	6,220	6,780	5,700
Total	94,030	96,480	98,660	100,560	97,280	92,000

Military Personnel may have been in more than one category throughout the year. Therefore, the total column provides a distinct count of Military Personnel in each year and does not equal the sum of the column.

Luke Pollard:[\[10908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 January to Question 9933 on Armed Forces: Housing, if he will provide a regional breakdown for the figures provided.

James Cartlidge:

The table below shows the data the Department holds on the number of compensation payments that have been awarded to families living in Service Family Accommodation for each region during the last 12 months, and the total value for each month:

MONTH	NUMBER OF COMPENSATION PAYMENTS	VALUE	NORTH REGION NUMBER AND VALUE	CENTRAL REGION NUMBER AND VALUE	SE REGION NUMBER AND VALUE	SW REGION NUMBER AND VALUE	UNKNOWN
Jan 23	1,703	£186,031					
Feb 23	1,009	£211,228					
Mar 23	2,995	£285,314					
Apr 23	1,731	£165,560	1,000 £66,469	293 £23,010	125 £36,970	120 £30,291	193 £8,820
May 23	3,865	£225,907	507 £48,842	190 £11,160	1,742 £91,635	1,360 £68,715	66 £5,555
Jun 23	2,752	£175,502	858 £51,295	247 £10,510	864 £58,997	717 £45,656	66 £9,044
Jul 23	2,742	£159,832	567 £33,570	238 £14,725	1,120 £64,122	810 £46,735	7 £680
Aug 23	3,043	£164,797	328 £18,478	112 £17,065	982 £58,380	838 £43,004	783 £27,870
Sept 23	2,007	£134,234	107 £21,179	49 £13,254	560 £45,016	436 £24,825	855 £29,960
Oct 23	1,276	£112,567	105 £13,830	62 £21,662	166 £38,535	96 £11,110	847 £27,430
Nov 23	1,950	£236,170	396 £32,890	135 £22,720	340 £65,585	296 £85,650	783 £29,325
Dec 23	1,145	£102,193	298 £22,227	141 £16,700	433 £27,220	245 £34,285	28 £1,761

MONTH	NUMBER OF COMPENSATION PAYMENTS	VALUE	NORTH REGION NUMBER AND VALUE	CENTRAL	SE	SW	UNKNOWN
				REGION NUMBER AND VALUE	REGION NUMBER AND VALUE	REGION NUMBER AND VALUE	
1-17 Jan 24	794	£97,236	212 £22,910	67 £4,460	270 £19,489	111 £8,305	134 £42,072

Compensation payments are administered and funded by the suppliers at no cost to the Ministry of Defence.

Data for January 2023 – April 2023 can only be provided at disproportionate cost as each individual claim would need to be assessed against several systems.

In April 2023, Pinnacle introduced a new improved compensation system. As well as speeding up the processing of claims and issuing of payments, this enables the provision of more detailed data.

For some claims, Pinnacle are unable to attribute them to a region as they were not provided with complete address data. These are listed in the 'unknown column'.

Luke Pollard:

[\[10909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many complaints relating to single living accommodation were reported to his Department in each year since 2010; and how many complaints relating to service family accommodation were reported to his Department in 2023.

James Cartlidge:

The table below shows the number of reported complaints relating to Single Living Accommodation:

Year	NUMBER OF REPORTED COMPLAINTS	
	Future Defence Infrastructure Service (FDIS) Built Estate Contract Regions	Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Regions
2023	115	45
2022 (April onwards)	78	66
2021	Data not held	36
2020	Data not held	68
2019	Data not held	76

	NUMBER OF REPORTED COMPLAINTS	
2018	Data not held	91
2017	Data not held	60

Complaint data relating to the FDIS Built Estate Contract regions is only available from start of the contract in 1 April 2022. Data prior to this is not held. PFI region data pre-2017 is not held centrally and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

In 2023, a total of 9,222 complaints relating to Service Family Accommodation (SFA) were reported. This figure includes multiple or repeat complaints for the same SFA property.

Luke Pollard: [\[10910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 23 May 2022 to Question 1550 on Armed Forces: Housing, how many pest control requests in Service Family Accommodation there were in (a) 2022 and (b) 2023.

James Cartlidge:

Since the start of the Future Defence Infrastructure Services Accommodation contract on 1 April 2022, to 31 December 2022 inclusive, there were 2,184 pest control requests in Service Family Accommodation (SFA). Data prior to this, under the previous National Housing Prime contract, is not held.

In 2023, there were 2,939 pest control requests in SFA.

Luke Pollard: [\[10911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2023 to Question 4547 on Armed Forces: Housing, how many calls related to (a) damp and (b) mould in armed forces accommodation the National Service Centre received in December 2023.

James Cartlidge:

In December 2023, the National Service Centre received 417 calls relating to damp and/or mould.

The National Service Centre does not separately record calls reporting damp and mould.

Luke Pollard: [\[9934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many single living accommodation bed spaces his Department owns as of 16 January 2024; and of those, how many and what proportion are located in the UK.

James Cartlidge:

In the UK there are 154,000 single living bedspaces.

There are c.133,000 permanent and temporary bedspaces and a further 21,000 bedspaces in the UK training estate.

81,000 Service personnel occupy permanent Single Living Accommodation (SLA) across all Services meaning that 55.7% of Armed Forces Personnel are accommodated in SLA.

■ Armed Forces: Recruitment

Luke Pollard: [\[10666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 18 January 2024 to Question 9087 on Armed Forces: Recruitment. when the (a) Minister for Armed Forces and (b) Minister for Defence People and Families last met representatives of Capita to discuss armed forces recruitment.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The Minister for the Armed Forces last met with Capita representatives in July 2020. I have not met with Capita to discuss recruiting but officials are in regular contact.

■ Army

Alan Brown: [\[10473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Army personnel there have been on average in each year since 2000.

Alan Brown: [\[10474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Royal Navy personnel there have been on average in each year since 2000.

Alan Brown: [\[10475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Royal Air Force personnel there have been on average in each year since 2000.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

YEAR	BRITISH ARMY	ROYAL NAVY AND ROYAL MARINES	ROYAL AIR FORCE
2000	109,600	42,800	54,600
2001	109,200	42,100	53,600
2002	110,100	42,600	52,900
2003	112,000	41,400	53,100
2004	112,100	40,700	53,100
2005	108,800	39,800	51,400
2006	107,200	39,200	47,900

YEAR	BRITISH ARMY	ROYAL NAVY AND ROYAL MARINES	ROYAL AIR FORCE
2007	105,900	38,800	45,100
2008	104,610	38,410	43,300
2009	106,890	38,350	43,520
2010	107,740	38,650	43,800
2011	105,940	37,480	42,230
2012	103,820	35,500	39,710
2013	98,630	33,860	36,690
2014	90,390	33,160	35,050
2015	85,590	32,670	33,860
2016	84,700	32,480	33,410
2017	83,000	32,470	33,100
2018	80,590	32,460	32,850
2019	78,800	32,500	32,780
2020	79,290	32,960	32,860
2021	81,720	33,890	33,220
2022	80,060	33,750	33,130
2023	76,950	32,590	31,940

Notes/Caveats

1. The Average Strength of the UK Regular Forces was calculated on a yearly basis by taking the mean of the corresponding strengths reported on a quarterly basis - e.g for the year 2010, the average was calculated from the strengths as at 1 Jan 2010, 1 Apr 2010, 1 Jul 2010 and 1 Oct 2010.
2. UK Regulars comprise full time Service Personnel, including Nursing Services, but excluding Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS) personnel, Gurkhas, mobilised Reservists, Military Provost Guard Service (MPGS), Locally Engaged Personnel (LEP), Non Regular Permanent Staff (NRPS), High Readiness Reserve (HRR) and Expeditionary Forces Institute (EFI) personnel. Unless otherwise stated, figures include trained and untrained personnel.

3. Due to the lack of data available for the 1 Jan 2000 strengths, the strengths were estimated via linear interpolation between the known strengths as at 1 Apr 1999 and 1 Apr 2000. Essentially we assume the strengths change linearly from 1 Apr 1999 to 1 Apr 2000, to estimate the strength as at 1 Jan 2000. As such the averages calculated for the year 2000 include an estimated figure, making the calculated average an estimate.
4. UK Regular Forces strength figures used in the Average Strength calculations in the period 1 Apr 1999 - 1 Jan 2007 (apart from the 1 Jan 2000 strength discussed in caveat 3) were taken from historic "UK Armed Forces Quarterly Press Releases" which can be accessed here:
<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20140116145335/http://www.dasa.mod.uk/index.php/publications/personnel/military/quarterly-personnel-report>
5. UK Regular Forces strength figures used in the Average Strength calculations in the period 1 Apr 1999 – 1 Oct 2023 were taken from the Joint Personnel Administration system (JPA).
6. The Average Strength in the year 2000 has been rounded to the nearest 100 to reflect the fact that an estimate was used in the calculations (see caveat 3).
7. Figures from the years 2001 - 2007 have been rounded to the nearest 100. This is due to rounded figures being used to calculate the Average Strengths.
8. Figures from the year 2008 onwards have been rounded to the nearest 10 in line with disclosure control policy. Figures ending in 5 are rounded to the nearest 20 to avoid systematic bias.

■ Army Foundation College: Racially Aggravated Offences

Luke Pollard:

[10339]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many complaints of racially aggravated abuse at the Army Foundation College have been registered on the Army's JPA system in the last five years.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

There have been 12 cases involving allegations of racially aggravated abuse at the Army Foundation College recorded on Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) system between the years 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2023.

Please note that the figures provided are single Service estimates taken at a point in time, this data is not gathered for statistical purposes or subject to the same level of scrutiny as official statistics produced by Defence Statistics. The figures provided may therefore be subject to data quality issues affecting their accuracy.

■ Army: Training

Luke Pollard: [\[10337\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the (a) target and (b) actual intake of recruits at the (i) Army Foundation College, (ii) Infantry Training Centre and (iii) Army Training Centre was in each of the last five years.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The attached table shows the Regular Army Other Rank Untrained Intake by Training Establishment and Financial Year, 2018-19 to 2022-23.

Attachments:

1. Reg Army Other Rank Untrained Intake by Trg Est [Attachment to PQ10337.docx]

Luke Pollard: [\[10338\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what proportion of army recruits from (a) Black, (b) Asian and (c) minority ethnic backgrounds complete their Phase (i) 1 and (ii) 2 training.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The tables below show Regular Army Other Rank Untrained Intake actuals and proportion completing Phase 1 and Phase 2 Training by Financial Year and Ethnicity, 2018-19 to 2022-23.

Regular Army Other Rank Untrained Intake proportion completing Phase 1 Training by Financial Year and Ethnicity, 2018-19 to 2022-23

% OF UNTRAINED PHASE 1 INTAKE BY ETHNICITY	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Total Ethnic Minority Untrained Intake	92%	93%	88%	86%	82%
Asian Ethnicity Untrained Intake	94%	88%	91%	86%	79%
Black Ethnicity Untrained Intake	95%	95%	92%	89%	87%
Mixed	84%	86%	77%	78%	74%

**% OF
UNTRAINED
PHASE 1
INTAKE BY
ETHNICITY**

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
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**Ethnicity
Untrained
Intake**

Other Ethnic Minority Untrained Intake	96%	97%	92%	89%	90%
-----------------------------------------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Regular Army Other Rank Untrained Intake proportion completing Phase 2 Training by Financial Year and Ethnicity, 2018-19 to 2022-23

Phase 2 completion figures in the most recent Financial Years are subject to change due to personnel still in the training pipeline who may either complete Phase 2 training or leave the Regular Army during training.

**% OF
UNTRAINED
PHASE 2
INTAKE BY
ETHNICITY**

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
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Total Ethnic Minority Untrained Intake	89%	90%	82%	76%	36%
-----------------------------------------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Asian Ethnicity Untrained Intake	94%	87%	85%	80%	33%
-----------------------------------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Black Ethnicity Untrained Intake	94%	93%	87%	80%	39%
-----------------------------------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Mixed Ethnicity Untrained Intake	76%	82%	69%	63%	29%
-----------------------------------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

**% OF
UNTRAINED
PHASE 2
INTAKE BY
ETHNICITY**

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
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Intake

Other Ethnic Minority Untrained Intake	85%	95%	85%	79%	49%
-----------------------------------------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Notes/Caveats:

1. The figures are for the Regular Army only and therefore exclude Gurkhas, Full Time Reserve Service, Mobilised Reserves, Army Reserve and all other Reserves, but includes those personnel that have transferred from GURTAM to UKTAP.
1. All intake figures are for Untrained Intake which includes all Other Ranks joining the Army and starting Phase 1 Training. All intake figures exclude personnel who have joined Phase 1 Training from another Service.
1. These percentages include those still in the training pipeline. This refers to individuals who have not yet completed Phase 1 or 2 training and who have also not left the Regular Army. They are therefore still undertaking some elements of training, and could either still leave the Army as Untrained or become trained hence affecting the overall percentages.
1. These percentages include individuals who have left the Army without completing either Phase 1 or Phase 2 training as a Regular. This includes personnel who may have transferred to another population (e.g. Reserve FR20, etc.) but excludes individuals who have transferred to another Service.
1. Ethnicity is an individual's latest recorded Ethnicity on the Army's administrative systems. Mixed Ethnicity comprises Mixed Black African and White, Mixed Asian and White, Mixed Black Caribbean and White and other Mixed Ethnic Backgrounds. Asian comprises Asian Bangladeshi, Asian Pakistani, Asian Indian and other Asian Backgrounds, and reflecting changes made in the 2011 Census, now includes Chinese. Black comprises Black Caribbean, Black African and other Black Backgrounds. Other is defined as "Other Ethnic Background" and includes Arab. Ethnic Minority includes all of the previously mentioned Ethnicities.
1. Personnel with an unknown Ethnicity on Intake to the Regular Army have not been included in the above figures. Approximately 5% of all Total Other Rank Untrained Intake over the time period had an unknown Ethnicity. Some of these unknown values may be Ethnic Minorities.

1. Ethnicity intake figures will not match the published Biannual Diversity Statistics as figures above are only for untrained intake and exclude individuals joining the Army Phase 1 or Phase 2 Trained.

■ **BOWMAN Combat Radio System**

John Healey: [\[10014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what (a) was the original and (b) is the current out of service date for the BOWMAN tactical radio system as of 17 January 2023.

John Healey: [\[10015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department plans to upgrade the BOWMAN tactical radio system, in the context of the cancellation of the Morpheus programme.

James Cartlidge:

Bowman is a capable system having been upgraded several times (most recently between 2018-20). It will be updated again under the Bowman 5.7 project (commissioned last year as a result of the delay to MORPHEUS).

Bowman's Out of Service Date was 2026 and this has now been extended out to no later than 2035, and no earlier than 2031, to bridge the capability gap until MORPHEUS delivers.

■ **British Indian Ocean Territory**

Daniel Kawczynski: [\[10779\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of transferring sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius on the US contribution to the military balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region.

James Heappey:

The UK's priority is the long term continued effective operation of the joint UK/US military base on Diego Garcia and Mauritius has made clear publicly that it supports this goal. We continue to work in lockstep with the US to this end and have their full support. The Secretary of State for Defence and Secretary Austin discussed the British Indian Ocean Territory in Washington DC on 1 December 2023.

■ **D-Day Landings: Anniversaries**

Andrew Rosindell: [\[10413\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he plans to take to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The Ministry of Defence is working across Whitehall and with external stakeholders to put together an appropriate programme of events to mark the important occasion of the 80th anniversary of D-Day in the UK and in France.

The UK's National Commemorative Event in Portsmouth will once again highlight this nation's major contribution as a leading partner in the Western Alliance. The UK's main commemorative event in France will take place at the British Normandy Memorial at Ver-sur-Mer overlooking GOLD beach. It is the first time, during a major commemorative year, that this event will take place at the memorial following its official opening in 2021.

■ Defence: Buildings

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[10747\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the Answer of 3 October 2023 to Question 197591 on Defence: Buildings, when his Department commissioned surveys on buildings that may have been constructed using Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete.

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[10748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the Answer of 3 October 2023 to Question 197591 on Defence: Buildings, how many surveys have been completed.

James Cartlidge:

Surveys are ongoing on all buildings which may have been constructed using RAAC.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation determined what buildings on Ministry of Defence land might potentially contain Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) material based on the period in which they were constructed and their construction type.

■ HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark

John Healey: [\[10009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his planned out of service date is for (a) HMS Albion and (b) HMS Bulwark.

James Cartlidge:

I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave on 15 January 2024 to Question 8352 to the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois).

Attachments:

1. HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark [UIN 8352.docx]

■ HMS Bangor and HMS Chiddingfold

John Healey: [\[10716\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department has made an estimate of the cost of remedial works to (a) HMS Bangor and (b) HMS Chiddingfold.

John Healey: [\[10717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the seriousness of the damage sustained by (a) HMS Bangor and (b) HMS Chiddingfold.

John Healey: [\[10718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department made of the causes of the incident in which HMS Chiddingfold collided with HMS Bangor.

James Cartlidge:

Suitably qualified and experienced personnel have deployed to the UK Naval Support Facility in Bahrain and are conducting accident investigation and damage assessment work following the collision between HMS Bangor and HMS Chiddingfold.

It would not be appropriate to comment until the investigations have been completed and a full assessment of the damage is known.

■ King's Guards: Uniforms

Henry Smith: [\[10091\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department is taking steps to end the use of real bear fur for the King's Guards' caps.

Kirsten Oswald: [\[10148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department has taken recent steps to end the use of real bear fur for the King's Guard's caps.

Kirsten Oswald: [\[10149\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what progress his Department has made on the development of faux fur bearskin hats for use in the military.

Kerry McCarthy: [\[10427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the suitability of faux bear fur for the King's Guard's caps.

James Cartlidge:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is open to considering the use of using human-made materials to replace natural fur items where they provide a suitable, affordable and sustainable alternative. As such we are prepared to assess accredited testing results of material to establish whether a synthetic alternative could meet the Department's requirements for a replacement bearskin cap material.

However, to date, and to the Department's knowledge, an alternative has yet to meet the standards required to provide an effective replacement for the bearskin ceremonial caps.

■ Military Bases: Bahrain

Kenny MacAskill: [\[10933\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether UK assets in Bahrain have assisted (a) UK and (b) US airstrikes in Yemen since 11 January 2024.

James Heapey:

No.

■ Military Bases: Heating

Luke Pollard: [\[10663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 January 2024 to Question 9932 on Military Bases: Heating, how many and what proportion of those incidents were resolved within 12 hours.

Luke Pollard: [\[10664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 January 2024 to Question 9932 on Military Bases: Heating, if he will provide a breakdown of figures for each month.

Luke Pollard: [\[10665\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 January 2024 to Question 9932 on Military Bases: Heating, how many and what proportion of incidents were resolved within the requisite 12 hours.

James Cartlidge:

Please see the table below showing number and percentage of reported loss of heating issues resolved within 12 hours for the 12-month period to 16 January 2024.

		HOW MANY WERE COMPLETED WITHIN 12 HOURS	% COMPLETED WITHIN 12 HOURS
HMS RALEIGH	85	51%	
RM COMMANDO TRAINING CENTRE	48	37%	
HMS SULTAN	106	38%	
HMS COLLINGWOOD	150	37%	
RAF CRANWELL	18	46%	
RAF HALTON	62	34%	
CATTERICK GARRISON	213	32%	

	ESTABLISHMENT	HOW MANY WERE COMPLETED WITHIN 12 HOURS	% COMPLETED WITHIN 12 HOURS
DCAE COSFORD	208	44%	
STONEHOUSE BARRACKS	13	22%	

The table below shows the number of reported incidents per site for the 12-month period to 16 January 2024.

ESTABLISHMENT	JAN-23	FEB-23	MAR-23	APR-23	MAY-23	JUN-23	
HMS RALEIGH	15	17	17	8	6	3	
RM COMMANDO TRAINING CENTRE	20	13	17	5	3	0	
HMS SULTAN	39	33	25	15	4	3	
HMS COLLINGWOOD	70	36	37	15	5	1	
RAF CRANWELL	4	8	5	4	0	0	
RAF HALTON	27	16	16	13	3	3	
CATTERICK GARRISON	54	83	67	24	14	14	
DCAE COSFORD	43	64	81	25	16	3	
STONEHOUSE BARRACKS	2	4	7	6	4	0	
Establishment	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24
HMS RALEIGH	3	0	8	28	32	23	26
RM COMMANDO TRAINING	6	5	3	15	21	9	21

ESTABLISHMENT	JAN-23	FEB-23	MAR-23	APR-23	MAY-23	JUN-23	
CENTRE							
HMS SULTAN	1	5	3	66	58	17	27
HMS	2	4	2	48	95	29	76
COLLINGWOOD							
RAF	2	1	0	6	4	5	6
CRANWELL							
RAF HALTON	3	1	1	53	40	26	28
CATTERICK	15	3	30	125	168	55	93
GARRISON							
DCAE	7	2	3	73	86	65	60
COSFORD							
STONEHOUSE	3	5	0	5	16	5	5
BARRACKS							

Reported incidents include all repairs associated with heating and are not limited to total loss of heating.

Reactive maintenance for Single Living Accommodation (SLA) is delivered within the Future Defence Infrastructure Services Built Estate contract, with the response time being determined by the nature of the issue and the Operational Need of the asset. SLA falls under Enhanced Reactive Maintenance (ERM), which means functionality is typically returned within 12 hours and permanent resolution within ten working days.

■ Military Police and Service Prosecuting Authority: Inspections

Luke Pollard:

[\[10355\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when the next inspection of the (a) Service Police and (b) Service Prosecuting Authority by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate is.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The Service Police are inspected by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). HMICFRS are in routine consultation with each of the four Provost Marshals with a future inspection anticipated in 2024. HMICFRS' most recent inspection publication of the Service Police is dated 15 June 2022 and can be found at the following link:

<https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/publications/royal-military-police-rape-serious-sexual-assault-and-domestic-abuse-investigations/>

The Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) are in continuing discussions with His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate's (HMCPsi) lead inspector regarding initial scoping for the upcoming inspection of the SPA in March/April 2024. HMCPsi have included the planned visit to the SPA in their 2023-2024 Business Plan (page 14) which can be found at the following link:

<https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmcp/psi/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/04/2023-04-04-Business-Plan-2023-24-1.pdf>

■ Ministry of Defence: Consultants

John Healey: [\[10711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what estimate he has made of consultancy spending for his Department's Main Building for (a) 2023/24 and (b) 2024/25.

James Cartlidge:

The Department does not maintain records of consultancy contract numbers and expenditure by location. However, we can confirm that the value of expenditure on consultancy incurred by the Department's Head Office to the end of December 2023 and the full year 2023-24 estimate as follows:

HEAD OFFICE AND ENABLING ORGANISATIONS	2023-24 TO 31 DECEMBER £ MILLION	2023-24 FULL YEAR FORECAST £ MILLION
Consultancy	0.770	3.19

The full year spend will only be confirmed at the year-end and the final position will be available in the published annual accounts.

The budgets for 2024-25 are not yet finalised.

Head Office includes a number of different teams, for example the Directorate General Finance, Chief of Defence People, Secretariat, Policy and Operations as well as others.

■ Ministry of Defence: Equality

Neil O'Brien: [\[10253\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many equalities impact assessments his Department completed in each of the last five years for which data is available.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The Ministry of Defence does not record this data centrally and it could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Internal Departmental guidance is for those conducting Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) to retain them at a local level. There is no legal requirement to record EIAs centrally.

■ Ministry of Defence: P&O Ferries**Louise Haigh:** [\[6514\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2023 to Question 1933 on Ministry of Defence: P&O Ferries, if he will list the payments over £500 made from his Department to P&O Ferries in each financial year between 2018-19 and 2022-23.

James Cartlidge:

Please find the information requested attached.

The data provided from the Ministry of Defence's contracted travel management company (GBT) goes back to April 2019. The data prior to this has been archived and is no longer accessible by the Department.

Attachments:

1. GBT spend on PO Ferries [20231214-GBT PO Spend Apr19-Apr23.pdf]
2. Government Procurement Card spend on PO Ferries [20231214-GPC PO Spend Apr18-Apr23.pdf]

■ Peace Keeping Operations: Europe**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[10738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he plans to have with his European counterparts on preparing for potential Russian aggression in Europe in the next five years.

James Heappey:

The Secretary of State for Defence regularly holds discussions with our European allies, whether at NATO, through the Joint Expeditionary Force or bilaterally, on how we can ensure that we will continue to deter and defend against Russian aggression both in the short term and into the future.

■ RAF Akrotiri**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[10414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make it his policy to increase the presence of Royal Air Force assets at RAF Akrotiri.

James Heappey:

RAF Akrotiri is a key node supporting a range of current operations, enabling global reach and from which we will continue to provide a forward presence in the strategically important Eastern Mediterranean. We keep the numbers of RAF assets deployed to RAF Akrotiri under continuous review in line with Operational planning priorities. RAF Akrotiri provides the capability and flexibility to rapidly surge and reinforce RAF assets when required for emerging operational commitments.

■ Red Sea: Military Intervention

Sir Stephen Timms:

[\[10698\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 January 2024 to Question 9726 on Red Sea: Shipping, whether he had discussions with his international counterparts on the potential merits of countries other than (a) the UK and (b) the US taking part in military action in the Red Sea on 12 January 2024.

James Heapey:

The UK and United States' military action on 22 January 2023 against Houthi targets was taken with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands.

The Defence Secretary continues to engage counterparts to ensure a robust international response to the Red Sea situation.

On 23 January, the US and UK were joined by 23 countries in issuing another Joint Statement condemning the illegal and reckless Houthi attacks against vessels transiting the Red Sea and surrounding waterways. The Joint Statement noted that the latest US and UK led strikes were in accordance with the inherent right of individual and collective self-defence, consistent with the UN Charter. It also highlighted how the thirty-plus attacks that the Houthis have launched against commercial and naval vessels since mid-November constitute a threat to all countries that rely on international maritime shipping. It also underscored that those who supply the Houthis with weapons to conduct these attacks are violating UN Security Council Resolution 2216 and international law.

■ RFA Fort Victoria

John Healey:

[\[10715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 January 2024 to Question 9747 on RFA Fort Victoria, how long the planned maintenance period for RFA Fort Victoria is.

James Cartlidge:

It is our policy to not disclose the fine detail of forward availability forecasts of individual ships as this would, or would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the Armed Forces.

■ Royal Air Force: Recruitment

Sir John Hayes:

[\[10000\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much the Royal Air Force spent on recruitment (a) campaigns and (b) other initiatives to help increase the diversity of its workforce in (i) 2020 and (ii) 2021.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The RAF routinely extends an element of the Recruiting and Selection marketing budget to reach under-represented communities across the UK. In the previous recruitment years, Financial Years 2019-20; 2020-21 and 2021-22, the RAF spent

£473,690; £168,283 and £921,110.93 respectively, funding both Ethnic Minority and Women campaigns and initiatives.

■ **Type 45 Destroyers**

John Healey: [\[10714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the current status is of each of the Royal Navy's Type 45 destroyers.

James Cartlidge:

HMS Diamond, HMS Duncan and HMS Dauntless are all currently available for operations. HMS Daring, HMS Dragon and HMS Defender are all currently at various stages of the Power Improvement Project (PIP).

■ **Type 45 Destroyers: Decommissioning**

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[10750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the out-of-service date is for the Royal Navy's Type 45 destroyers.

James Cartlidge:

On current plans, the last Type 45 Destroyer will retire from service by the end of 2038.

EDUCATION

■ **Children: Hearing Impairment**

Andrew Rosindell: [\[10051\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to provide support for children with auditory impairments in schools.

David Johnston:

The department's ambition is for all children and young people, no matter what their Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), to receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life. The department is creating a new single national SEND and Alternative Provision system for how needs are identified and met across Education, Health and Care. This new single national system will set standards on what support should be made available in mainstream settings, including for children with hearing impairments, and when specialist provision may be more appropriate for meeting a child or young person's needs.

It is the responsibility of local authorities, schools, and further education settings to commission appropriately qualified staff to support the education of children and young people in their area.

To teach a class of pupils with sensory impairments, a teacher is required to hold the relevant mandatory qualification, which is a Mandatory Qualification in Sensory

Impairment (MQSI). Teachers working in an advisory role to support these pupils should also hold the appropriate qualification.

To offer MQSIs, providers must be approved by my right. hon Friend, the Secretary of State for Education. The department's aim is to ensure a steady supply of teachers for children with visual, hearing, and multi-sensory impairments, in both specialist and mainstream settings. There are currently six providers of the MQSI, with a seventh to begin in September 2024.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has also developed a Sensory Impairment apprenticeship and expects it to be available from 2025. This will open a paid, work-based route into teaching children and young people with sensory impairments by enabling people to undertake high-quality apprenticeships.

■ Department for Education: Equality

Neil O'Brien:

[\[10250\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many equalities impact assessments her Department completed in each of the last five years for which data is available.

Damian Hinds:

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, all public authorities, including government departments, are required by law to ensure that they have due regard to certain equality considerations when carrying out their functions. While equality impact assessments may be produced, there is no legal requirement for duty assessments to be recorded in a specific format.

The department promotes awareness of the requirements of the Duty and how to comply with them. The department does not collect statistics on the number of assessments made. Therefore, the information requested is not available.

■ Literacy and Numeracy: EU Countries

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[10737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what comparative estimate she has made of levels of (a) literacy and (b) numeracy with European countries in the last five years.

Damian Hinds:

England participates in several studies that compare reading and mathematics for school-aged pupils internationally. These studies are the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The department took part in the most recent iterations of all three studies: PISA 2022, PIRLS 2021, and TIMSS 2019.

The latest results from PISA show that, while the pandemic affected the study, England was among the highest performing European countries participating in the study and performed significantly above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average in both reading and mathematics.

The latest results from PIRLS showed that England achieved an average score of 558. This is statistically significantly higher than both the International Median score of 520, as well as the European Median score of 524, though not significantly different to England's scores in most previous PIRLS cycles. It is not possible to compare results to Northern Ireland because of differences in the assessment period, whilst Scotland and Wales did not participate in the study. England's PIRLS 2021 national report can be found: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pirls-2021-reading-literacy-performance-in-england>.

The latest results from TIMSS showed that between 1995 and 2019, the mathematics performance of Year 5 and Year 9 pupils in England has improved, with England achieving its highest ever score in mathematics at Year 5.

Further information on the studies can be found at the following links: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/>, <https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/>.

■ Pupil Exclusions: Behaviour Disorders

Seema Malhotra:

[9843]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of children prescribed Elvanse who are (a) currently without medication and (b) excluded from school due to behavioural issues.

Damian Hinds:

The information requested is not held by the department.

Creating school cultures with high expectations of behaviour is a priority for the government. The department supports head teachers in using exclusion where warranted as a part of creating calm, safe and supportive environments which bring out the best in every pupil.

The updated 'Statutory Suspension and Permanent Exclusion' guidance is clear that head teachers should consider any underlying causes of misbehaviour before issuing an exclusion, this may include where a pupil has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. More information on the guidance can be found here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1181584/Suspension_and_permanent_exclusion_guidance_september_23.pdf.

The department's guidance, 'Understanding your data: a guide for school governors and academy trustees' also makes clear governing boards should carefully consider the level and characteristics of pupils who are leaving the school and deploy maximum challenge to the school on any permanent exclusions to ensure it is only used as a last resort. More information on the guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-your-data-a-guide-for-school-governors-and-academy-trustees/understanding-your-data-a-guide-for-school-governors-and-academy-trustees>.

■ Special Educational Needs: Learning Disability**Sir Mike Penning:** [\[10059\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to assess pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities who are unable to respond to existing test measures but demonstrate language development by their use of sub vocal utterances.

Sir Mike Penning: [\[10060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to include pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities in their Education, Health and Care Plan Reviews by using sub-vocal communication methods for those who cannot access alternative and augmentative communication aids.

Sir Mike Penning: [\[10061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to tackle mismatches between the designation of profound and multiple learning disabilities for children and young people in special schools and evidence of sub vocal language identifying their comprehension as well beyond that attributed to pupils with such disabilities.

Sir Mike Penning: [\[10062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that pupils designated with profound and multiple learning disabilities who can demonstrate use of internal language and higher intellect are given access to appropriate alternative and augmentative communication devices and systems.

Sir Mike Penning: [\[10063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, to take steps to ensure that all pupils designated with profound and multiple learning disabilities in special education have access to (a) sub vocal phonation methods and (b) other alternative and augmentative communication devices and systems.

David Johnston:

The department recognises the importance of providing high-quality support for this group of children with very severe needs, and the work of special schools to provide these children and their parents with education and support that helps them prepare for adulthood. The department's ambition for Special Educational Needs policy is for all children and young people, no matter what their Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are, to receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life.

The department knows that the development of communication for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties is critical, which is why the department places a huge emphasis on its teaching in special schools. For those pupils with profound multiple learning difficulties in special schools who are working below the level of the national curriculum and who are therefore not engaged in subject-specific

study, the department has developed the 'engagement model' which is driven by a teacher assessment tool. This model has been designed to enable all pupils' achievements and progress to be identified and celebrated, including the area of communication and interaction which is one of the four areas of need in the SEND code of practice. The model uses a holistic approach which takes into account their preferred ways of communicating, in recognition of the different barriers that each individual child can face to their communication skills.

Assistive technology (AT) such as alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) devices can remove barriers to learning for students with SEND. The department is committed to building the evidence base around the effective use of AT to ensure it understands the needs of staff and pupils. Following the promising results of a pilot training programme to increase mainstream school staff confidence with AT, the department extended the training to capture more detailed data on the impact on teachers and learners. The department will publish the impact report in May. The department is exploring the AT support needs of staff at special schools, including those working with pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) and/or those using AAC.

All schools, including special schools, have duties under the Equality Act 2010 towards individual disabled children and young people. They must make reasonable adjustments, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services for disabled children, to prevent them being put at a substantial disadvantage. This is particularly important in ensuring that schools are providing tailored support for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties that help with their communication.

More widely, the department is creating a new single national SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) system for identifying and meeting needs. This new single national system will set standards on what support should be made available in mainstream settings, as well as guidance on when specialist provision may be more appropriate for meeting a child or young person's needs.

As part of this, the department is developing practitioner standards to provide advice to frontline professionals, including teachers and early years staff. The practitioner standards will set out evidence-based best practice in identifying and meeting individual needs. They will cover the areas of need in the SEND code of practice, including speech, language and communication needs.

Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) is a two year pathfinder programme being co-led by the department and NHS England, and is one of the reforms being tested in the SEND and AP Change Programme. The programme will fund innovative workforce models to identify and support children and young people with Speech, Language and Communication Needs at an early stage and support them through universal and targeted interventions, to reduce exacerbation of need that might lead to a specialist speech and language therapy and/or Education, Health and Care plan referral.

■ Students: Incomes

Claire Hanna:

[\[10299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of a Basic Student Income.

Robert Halfon:

The government does not have plans to introduce a non-means tested basic income for students in England.

Decisions on student finance have to be taken to ensure the system remains financially sustainable and the costs of higher education (HE) are shared fairly between students and taxpayers, not all of whom have benefited from going to university.

The devolved governments have responsibility for HE in their respective countries and determine the student finance arrangements and their sustainability for their students.

The partially means-tested loan for living costs is provided as a contribution towards a student's living costs while attending university rather than necessarily covering those costs in full, with the highest levels of support paid to students from the lowest income families who need it most. Financial support may be provided by the student's parents or partner, but there are several other sources of funding available for students such as part-time employment, university bursaries and scholarships and local authority support such as the HE bursary.

Students awarded a loan for living costs for the 2023/24 academic year that is lower than the maximum, and whose household income has dropped by at least 15% compared to the income provided for their original assessment can apply for their entitlement to be reassessed.

The government recognises the additional cost-of-living pressures that have arisen this year and that are impacting students. The department has increased loans for living costs each year for students in England, with a 2.8% increase for the current academic year, 2023/24 and further 2.5% increase announced for 2024/25.

The department has already made £276 million of student premium and mental health funding available for the 2023/24 academic year to support successful outcomes for students including disadvantaged students.

The department is now making a further £10 million of one-off support available to support student mental health and hardship funding. This funding will complement the help universities are providing through their own bursary, scholarship and hardship support schemes.

Over the 2022/23 to 2024/25 financial years, the government is providing support worth £104 billion, or £3,700 per household on average, to help families throughout the UK with the cost of living, including help to meet increased household energy costs. This will have eased the pressure on family budgets and so will in turn enabled

many families to provide additional support to their children in HE to help them meet increased living costs.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Boiler Upgrade Scheme

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[10421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what the cost to the public purse was of the boiler upgrade scheme in the last 12 months for which data is available.

Amanda Solloway:

In the 12 months up to the end of November 2023, over £68.3 million worth of Boiler Upgrade Scheme grants were paid (on a cash basis) towards the installation of eligible low carbon heating technologies.

■ Electricity Interconnectors: Costs

Dr Thérèse Coffey:

[\[10793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what is Ofgem's estimated cost of the Sealink HVDC project.

Graham Stuart:

National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) is developing proposals for Sea Link, a 2GW high voltage undersea electricity link between Suffolk and Kent. The project is forecast to cost NGET ~£1.1bn, as quantified by Ofgem in their '*Decision on accelerating onshore electricity transmission investment*' paper published in December 2022. This cost estimate is based on a 2018/19 price base and is subject to final engineering design, commodity prices, landowner agreements and mitigation.

■ Energy: Standing Orders

Alyn Smith:

[\[10669\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if she will encourage energy companies to reduce standing charges on (a) electricity and (b) gas.

Amanda Solloway:

Setting the level of standing charges falls within the remit of Ofgem. I regularly meet with Ofgem to discuss the energy retail market, including standing charges. Ofgem's recent Call for Input (Cfi) on standing charges closed on January 19th 2024. The Call for Input seeks to gain greater understanding on how standing charges are applied to energy bills and what alternatives could be considered. Government welcomes this and looks forward to Ofgem's conclusions.

Further information on the Cfi may be found online at:

www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/launch-review-standing-charges-energy-bills

■ Park Homes: Energy

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[10224\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps her Department is taking to support park home residents with energy costs.

Amanda Solloway:

Last winter, the Government delivered the Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding and the Alternative Fuel Payment Alternative Fund which many park homes were eligible for, delivering over £20 million in support to park home households. The Government is continuing to support those who need it the most, with millions of vulnerable and low-income households receiving £900 in further cost of living payments, including £150 to those on eligible disability benefits. This in addition to established support for vulnerable households such as the Winter Fuel Payment worth between £250 - £600.

■ Renewable Energy

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[10736\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether she plans to review the Contracts for Difference scheme.

Andrew Bowie:

The Contracts for Difference (CfD) scheme is continuously kept under review. The Government, for example, invites views on changes to the scheme before each allocation round to ensure the scheme remains fit-for-purpose as our electricity system evolves. The most recent of such reviews, a consultation on proposed changes to the CfD contract was launched on 19 December 2023. Additionally, on 11 January 2024, the Government published a consultation seeking views on proposed amendments for Allocation Round 7, as well as future rounds.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Ash Dieback Disease

Andrew Rosindell: [\[10422\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to tackle the spread of ash dieback.

Mark Spencer:

Since ash dieback was first detected in the UK, we have restricted the movement of ash trees from outside Europe to protect against other strains of the pathogen, and invested more than £8 million to advance our scientific understanding of this disease.

Hymenoscyphus fraxineus, the fungus responsible for ash dieback disease, is spread via spores in the air/wind. The spores are produced in the leaf litter and can spread for considerable distances before infecting another ash tree. It is not possible to limit the spread of the disease at a national level, and it is now present in all counties. The

severity and impact of the disease at a local level varies by tree age and condition, climate, the presence of secondary pathogens and other environmental factors. Removal of leaf litter may be an effective way to reduce the level of inoculum in certain conditions, for example around high value trees in urban environments.

We have conducted the world's largest screening trials for tolerant trees and have planted over 3000 trees of 1000 genotypes in the first UK archive of tolerant ash. They have been drawn from a wide geographic spread, and new trees will continue to be added, to maximise the genetic diversity in the collection and facilitate the possibility of a future breeding programme of resilient ash.

Guidance for landowners on managing diseased ash has also been published, including a toolkit for Local Authorities, which has been downloaded nearly 20,000 times. Defra also provides restoration grants, to support replanting with alternative species where ash dieback is present.

We continue to invest in research to enhance our understanding of the disease, improve management and identify resistant trees.

■ Beekeeping

Jim Shannon: [\[11116\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate his Department has made on the number of beekeepers.

Rebecca Pow:

Our annual Hive Count exercise indicates that as of October 2022 there were 48,130 beekeepers in England and Wales registered on [BeeBase](#) – the National Bee Unit's website.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Equality

Neil O'Brien: [\[10257\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many equalities impact assessments his Department completed in each of the last five years for which data is available.

Mark Spencer:

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (the Duty) all public authorities, including Government departments, are required by law to ensure that they have due regard to certain equality considerations when carrying out their functions. While 'equality impact assessments' may be produced, there is no legal requirement for duty assessments to be recorded in a specific format.

Until November 2023 Defra did not keep a central record of completed duty assessments.

In 2023 the Department reviewed its processes and procedures in relation to compliance with the Duty, and in November 2023 established a central repository of Equality Impact Assessments completed across Defra group organisations.

The Department promotes awareness of the Duty and provides tools to help ensure compliance with it.

■ Environmental Protection

Tracey Crouch: [\[10086\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent progress he has made on meeting his environmental targets.

Rebecca Pow:

Our 13 Environment Act 2021 targets were set in law by January 2023 and are included in our revised Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23). Interim targets were also set at this point and will help tackle some of the biggest environmental pressures and make tangible progress over the next five years of EIP23.

We have been making progress in delivery of our new environmental targets and are due to report on them, and other EIP commitments, in our EIP Annual Progress Report in the summer.

We will continue to monitor and adjust our delivery to reach the long-term environmental goals outlined in the EIP23, including on our wider statutory targets.

■ Horticulture: Peat

Caroline Lucas: [\[10077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the press release entitled Sale of horticultural peat to be banned in move to protect England's precious peatlands, published on 17 August 2022, on what date the commitment to ban the sale of peat for use in the amateur gardening sector will come into effect.

Rebecca Pow:

In August 2022 we announced that we would ban the sale of peat for use in amateur gardening; we remain committed to this and plan to legislate when Parliamentary time allows. It remains our policy that we intend to legislate to restrict, and ultimately ban, the sale of peat and peat containing products. We have seen a significant reduction in peat use, due to the demand for peat-free growing media from an increasingly environmentally aware public.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Africa: Development Aid

Lisa Nandy: [\[10106\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how many officials in (a) his Department and (b) the former Department for International Development worked on overseas development in Africa in each financial year since 2010.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

It is not possible to provide a precise figure for the total number of officials working on overseas development in Africa in any given year. A range of FCDO departments in the UK, and our network of posts around the world, contribute to our work on overseas development in Africa. This includes work on policy development, research and analysis, specialist expertise and advice, and programme delivery. Over the past decade, there have been around 300 officials in roles focusing predominantly on overseas development in Africa, supported by a large network of expert country-based staff, in addition to wider efforts across our missions in Africa, our multilateral missions, and our posts in key partner countries. The FCDO's country business planning process ensures joined-up policy and delivery, in support of HMG objectives in Africa, including those set out in the White Paper.

■ Armenia: Azerbaijan**Tim Loughton:**[\[10693\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in Azerbaijan on that country's dispute with Armenia; and whether he is taking steps to support peace in the region.

Leo Docherty:

I [Minister Docherty] underlined the UK's support for the sovereignty and security of the region during a visit to Armenia and Azerbaijan in November, and officials are delivering this message in their ongoing engagements with Armenia and Azerbaijan. The UK has urged the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to engage meaningfully in internationally mediated negotiations to conclude a final peace settlement. Direct dialogue is the only way to secure stability and security for the region. We urge Armenia and Azerbaijan to continue full negotiations as soon as possible.

■ Armenia: Peace Negotiations**Tim Loughton:**[\[10694\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent assessment he has made of the potential for international negotiations to support peace in Armenia.

Leo Docherty:

We are working with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and our international partners to encourage both parties to continue peace negotiations. An agreement on 7 December between Armenia and Azerbaijan for prisoner transfers and mutual support for hosting COP29 in Baku was a positive demonstration of what can be achieved through negotiations between Baku and Yerevan. The UK has urged the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to engage meaningfully in internationally mediated negotiations to conclude an historic final peace settlement, and we will continue to promote this where possible.

■ Australia: Antisemitism

Fleur Anderson:

[\[10555\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of changes in the level of antisemitism in Australia since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

We strongly condemn antisemitism and are concerned by the rising levels since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas conflict, in the UK and abroad. We welcome that the Australian government has similarly condemned this globally rising antisemitism. We will continue to monitor the situation in Australia, and elsewhere, and update our policies as appropriate. The UK is committed to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) globally.

■ China: Climate Change

Mr David Lammy:

[\[9379\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he has taken to collaborate with the People's Republic of China on climate change.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The UK is committed to working with China on climate change, as part of the "engage" pillar of our policy towards China. China is the largest emitter of carbon and the largest investor in sustainable energy. The choices that China makes will be critical to our collective ability to tackle climate change.

The UK and China have over a decade of engagement on climate and clean energy, including our bilateral Clean Energy Partnership and UK-China Energy Dialogue. Climate has been a regular subject on the agenda for high-level bilateral engagement, including when we hosted COP26 and when the former Foreign Secretary visited Beijing in August 2023.

■ Commonwealth Day

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[10052\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what his Department's plans are for promoting the celebration of Commonwealth Day 2024 across the United Kingdom.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

Commonwealth Day on 11 March will be marked by the traditional Commonwealth Day Service, organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society in cooperation with HMG, in Westminster Abbey. The event, which will be broadcast live on the BBC, is attended by Members of the Royal Family, Government Ministers, Commonwealth High Commissioners, civil society, and young people from around the country. Local authorities across the UK, as well as our diplomatic missions overseas, will be encouraged to host events and fly the Commonwealth flag to celebrate the

Commonwealth's 75th anniversary and underline the UK's ongoing commitment to this family of nations.

■ Conflict Prevention

Lisa Nandy: [\[10107\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how many officials in (a) his Department and (b) the former Department for International Development worked on conflict prevention in each financial year since 2010.

Leo Docherty:

It is not possible to provide a precise figure for the total number of officials working on conflict prevention in any given year. A range of FCDO departments in the UK, and our network of posts around the world, contribute to preventing conflict. This includes work on policy development, research and analysis, specialist expertise and advice, and programme delivery. The Conflict and Atrocity Prevention Department within FCDO's Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation, and our cadre of conflict advisors are supporting delivery of the commitments on conflict prevention set out in the recent International Development White Paper.

■ Deportation: India

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[10500\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether an Indian Research and Analysis Wing agent was expelled from London in 2023.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

It is longstanding government policy not to comment on intelligence matters.

■ Ethiopia: Somaliland

Andrew Rosindell: [\[10054\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the implications for his policies of (a) the Ethiopia-Somaliland memorandum of understanding, signed on 1 January 2024, and (b) Ethiopia's formal recognition of the Republic of Somaliland as an independent nation.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The FCDO has noted that the Memorandum of Understanding suggests that Ethiopia may recognise Somaliland's independence in return for the lease of territory. The UK's position remains that the settlement of Somaliland's status is an issue for Somalia and Somaliland to resolve through dialogue. We are engaging with all parties to call for dialogue to prevent any escalation that might affect regional stability and our peace, humanitarian and development work throughout the region.

■ Food and Agriculture Organization

Liz Twist: [\[10651\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 10 January 2024 to Question 7384 on Food and Agriculture Organisation, what steps his Department is taking to avoid conflicts of interest in the UK delegation; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of sending an official from his Department to the intergovernmental forum.

Liz Twist: [\[10652\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2024 to the Question 8096 on Tea: Production, how the mandate for the representatives the UK has selected to attend the UN FAO intergovernmental meeting on tea was developed; what their objectives will be for the meeting; and whether his Department has taken steps to incorporate the UK's commitments under (a) UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 and (b) other UN Sustainable Development Goals into these objectives.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Intergovernmental Group on Tea provides advice to the FAO's Governing Bodies composed of all Member States. Advice is reviewed by the UK and other member states before decision making.

Nearly all importing and exporting countries of tea are members of the Group and send industry and research expertise in line with the Group's rules of procedure. The Group facilitates dialogue between production and consumer bodies, including on meeting policy standards, in line with the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). The UK's Tea and Infusion Association representative is currently chair of the group and will hand over to a representative from India at the forthcoming session.

■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Somaliland

Andrew Rosindell: [\[10055\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he plans to visit Somaliland in the next 12 months.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

There are no current plans for Foreign Office Ministers to visit Somaliland. The UK is one of very few Western countries with a permanent diplomatic presence in Somaliland, and through our office there we engage closely with the Somaliland authorities on a range of issues.

■ India: Deportation

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[10219\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether an Indian Police Service officer was expelled from London in 2023.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

It is longstanding government policy not to comment on intelligence matters.

■ **India: Sikhs****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[10504\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his Indian counterpart on allegations of intimidation against British Sikhs by agents of the Indian government.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[10508\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of alleged foreign interventions targeting the British Sikh community on UK-India relations.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The UK Government takes the safety of individuals in the UK extremely seriously and we do everything we can to keep people safe and the country secure. Any attempts by foreign governments to coerce, intimidate, harass, or harm their critics overseas are unacceptable. We continually assess potential threats to individuals' rights, freedoms, and safety in the UK, and wherever we identify such threats, we use measures necessary to mitigate the risk to individuals. The UK Government has a broad and deep partnership with the Government of India. This enables us to discuss all elements of our relationship, including concerns where we have them.

■ **Indo-Pacific Region and Christianity****Andrew Bridgen:**[\[10455\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, when his Department plans to respond to the Eighth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee of Session 2022-23 on Tilting Horizons: the Integrated Review and the Indo-Pacific, HC 172, published on 30 August 2023; and if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the recommendations in the Open Doors 2024 World Watch List.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The Government will publish shortly its response to Foreign Affairs Committee report HC 172 on the Indo-Pacific. The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition of the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific to the UK's prosperity, security and development objectives.

We note the launch of the report by Open Doors entitled World Watch List 2024. Championing freedom of religion or belief for all remains a priority for the UK. We will continue to recognise, and seek to address, the issue of persecution of Christians globally on account of their faith, as well as the persecution of those of other religions or beliefs.

■ Iran: Baha'i Faith

Jim Shannon:

[\[10132\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his Iranian counterpart on the (a) displaced farmers and (b) seizure of farmland from Baha'is in that country.

David Rutley:

The UK condemns the continued persecution of religious minorities in Iran, and we are aware of recent reports of land expropriation discriminately targeting the Baha'i community. At the 78th UN General Assembly, we co-sponsored the Iran Human Rights Resolution, calling for Iran to eliminate, in law and in practice, all forms of discrimination on the basis of thought, conscience, religion or belief. We are committed to promoting religious freedom and will continue to work with partners to advocate for the rights of the Baha'i community in Iran.

■ Nigeria: Crimes of Violence

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[10097\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what estimate his Department has made of the number of people killed in attacks in the north-central Plateau state in Nigeria in December 2023.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The number of people killed in attacks in Plateau state, Nigeria, during December 2023, remains uncertain, particularly as not all attacks are reported to local authorities. The British High Commissioner has raised the recent attacks in Plateau with the Nigerian National Security Adviser, and the UK continues to monitor the situation closely. The UK is committed to supporting Nigeria to tackle the causes of intercommunal conflict, including through the Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria programme.

■ Somalia: Armed Conflict

Afzal Khan:

[\[10526\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his counterparts (a) in Somalia and (b) internationally on de-escalating tensions in Somalia.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The UK regularly engages with the Federal Government of Somalia and international partners to discuss how best to support Somalia's political, security and development objectives, including through our role as penholder in the UN Security Council. We consistently call for dialogue to resolve political tensions within Somalia and the region.

■ Somalia: Politics and Government

Afzal Khan: [\[10525\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the political situation in Somalia on peace in the region.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

As a close partner of Somalia, the UK is committed to help to build a safer, freer, and more secure country for all Somalis. We are working to support the Federal Government's ambitions to deliver political reform and combat al-Shabaab (AS) a top UK counter-terrorism priority that has significant implications for regional security. We believe that the stability of Somalia is dependent on political reconciliation and a sustainable, inclusive political settlement between the Government and the Federal Member states. This is in the interests of peace in the Horn of Africa.

■ Somaliland: Recognition of States

Tim Loughton: [\[9980\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will publish conditions for contact with the Government of the Republic of Somaliland on the formal recognition of that state.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The UK's position on Somaliland's independence is clear; the settlement of Somaliland's status is an issue for Somalia and Somaliland to resolve through dialogue, in which we encourage both sides to engage. It is not for the UK to pre-empt that process or determine its outcome.

■ Sudan: Armed Conflict

Afzal Khan: [\[10523\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the civil war in Sudan on regional stability.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The conflict in Sudan threatens regional stability. The UK is pursuing all diplomatic avenues with influential partner countries and institutions such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and African Union (AU), to help end the fighting, stop human rights violations and increase much-needed humanitarian assistance violence. Since 15 April, 1.6 million people have been displaced outside of Sudan, many fleeing to neighbouring countries. The UK recognises the significant pressure that the Sudan crisis is putting on neighbouring countries and commends them for the support they are providing. We are helping those fleeing to neighbouring countries as a result of the conflict, with £7.75 million to South Sudan. This includes a £3.5 million allocation for food security in the Maban refugee camps, and £15 million to Chad.

Afzal Khan:

[\[10524\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his counterparts (a) in Sudan and (b) internationally on de-escalating tensions in Sudan.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

Since my Written Ministerial Statement of 30 November 2023, the UK has continued to call upon the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces to effect a ceasefire, protect civilians and enable full humanitarian access to alleviate the Sudanese people's suffering. The UK has also continued to work with a wide range of countries and bodies, including traditional allies, Gulf and African partners, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the African Union and the UN, to achieve these goals and to take forward a sustained and meaningful peace process that leads to the resumption of civilian rule in Sudan.

■ **Yemen: Military Intervention**

Sir Mark Hendrick:

[\[9427\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what diplomatic steps he is taking to help prevent regional conflict following strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

We continue to work with our allies and partners to safeguard maritime security and navigation rights and freedoms in the Red Sea.

The Foreign Secretary has discussed developments in the Red Sea with key interlocutors from Saudi Arabia (14 December), United Arab Emirates (16 December & 12 January), Egypt (20 December), Iran (31 December and 17 January), Oman (31 December and 14 January), United States (2 January), the Palestinian Authority (5 January), Italy (8 January), Cyprus (12 and 24 January), Turkey (12 January), Saudi Arabia (17 January), Government of Yemen (17 January), United States (17 January), UN Secretary General (17 January), Poland (17 January), Sweden (21 January) and Greece (21 January). He also sent messages to United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain on 23 January providing an update on the 22 January strikes.

The UK, alongside international partners, condemned the Houthi attacks through a series of ministerial statements. This included a 1 December United Nations Security Council statement, a 19 December US led statement with 43 signatories, a 3 January statement clearly stating that continued attacks would have consequences, a 12 January statement after the first strikes signed by 10 countries and a 23 January statement after the second strikes signed by 24 countries. On 10 January the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 2722 affirming freedom of navigation and noting members states' right to defend their vessels.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**■ Dementia: Diagnosis**

Mark Eastwood: [\[10288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of diagnostic hubs in diagnosing dementia in West Yorkshire.

Helen Whately:

Community diagnostic centres (CDCs) offer a variety of tests, including several recommended for use in diagnosing of dementia. CDCs are an essential part of our plans to separate urgent and elective care and thereby reduce waits for diagnosis.

NHS England continues to monitor the monthly dementia diagnosis rate and analyse trends at national, regional and integrated care board (ICB) level. It has commissioned the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities to investigate the underlying variation in dementia diagnosis rates, including by rurality, ethnicity, and age. This work will provide context for variation and enable targeted investigation and provision of support at local level, and is available via the FutureNHS collaboration platform.

■ Health Professions

Rachael Maskell: [\[10490\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will undertake a review of consistency in the use of NHS protected job titles.

Andrew Stephenson:

Professions that are regulated in statute have titles that are protected by law, and professionals must be registered with a statutory regulator to use them. It is an offence for a person to use a title they are not legally permitted to use or to otherwise hold themselves out to be a regulated professional.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines set out that all healthcare professionals directly involved in a patient's care should introduce themselves and explain to the patient:

- who is responsible for their clinical care and treatment;
- the roles and responsibilities of the different members of the healthcare team; and
- the communication about their care that takes place between members of the healthcare team.

It is the responsibility of professionals and their employers to ensure professional titles are used appropriately and are not misleading to patients.

■ Health Services

Sir Stephen Timms: [\[10697\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to ensure that the Major Conditions Strategy provides a care and treatment pathway for patients living with (a) complex conditions and (b) dementia.

Andrew Stephenson:

In the development of the Major Conditions Strategy, we are considering how we improve outcomes for a population increasingly living with multiple conditions.

Alignment of work across the six major groups of conditions, including dementia, was announced as part of a Major Conditions Strategy and will allow us to focus on where there are similarities in approach and ensure care is better centred around the patient, maximising existing resources both within patient pathways and in integrating between pathways.

■ Loneliness

Tracey Crouch: [\[10084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Mental Health Bill will have provisions to help tackle loneliness.

Maria Caulfield:

The Government published a draft Mental Health Bill on 23 June 2023 and it remains our intention to bring forward a Mental Health Bill when Parliamentary time allows. The Bill is designed to reform the Mental Health Act 1983, which exists to be able to compel people to stay in hospital and be treated for a severe mental illness. The legislative reforms contained in the Bill aim to provide greater autonomy to individuals to inform their care and treatment, including children and young people. They also aim to ensure that inpatients, including those detained under the Mental Health Act, have improved support to access their rights under the Act. The Bill therefore does not include provisions to tackle loneliness.

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport launched the world's first government strategy on loneliness in October 2018. It set out a clear vision for this country to be a place where we can all have strong social relationships. The Government's work to tackle loneliness focuses on reducing the stigma associated with loneliness; supporting organisations across society to take action; and improving the evidence base on loneliness.

■ Mental Health Services: Private Sector

Fabian Hamilton: [\[10727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has had discussions with the General Medical Council on the provision of mental health support for patients who have sought a private diagnosis.

Maria Caulfield:

My Rt hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, has not had any discussions with the General Medical Council (GMC) on the provision of mental health support for patients who have sought a private diagnosis. The GMC is the independent regulator of all medical doctors practising in the United Kingdom, which sets and enforces the standards all doctors must adhere to.

To work in the UK, all doctors, including private doctors, must register with the General Medical Council (GMC), hold a licence to practise and meet the expected standards set out in the GMC's guidance, Good medical practice. The guidance states that doctors must check that the care or treatment they provide for each patient is compatible with any other treatments the patient is receiving.

■ Oral Cancer: North East**Grahame Morris:****[10788]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve the early detection of mouth cancer in the North East.

Andrew Stephenson:

Every dental check-up constitutes as an oral cancer screening. Dentists and other dental professionals, including hygienists, routinely check the soft tissues of a patient's mouth for signs of cancer during dental visits, and as part of the check-up, will make an assessment and record an individual's oral cancer risk. Dentists will prioritise patients at a higher risk of cancer for more frequent recall and review, in line with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's guidance.

In November 2022, the Government introduced a new package of measures across England, including the North East, to improve patient access to dental care. The measures include fairer pay for all National Health Service dentists to provide more complex dental care to those who need it most, and a requirement on dentists to update the NHS website regularly to make it clear which practices are taking on new patients and the services available, improving access.

To improve early detection of cancer, including oral cancer, we are implementing NHS England's comprehensive early diagnosis strategy, which is based on six core strands of activity, from raising awareness of cancer symptoms and encouraging people to come forward, to implementing targeted interventions for particular cancer types that we know have previously experienced later stages of diagnosis, including oral cancers. NHS England has published an NHS mouth cancer awareness leaflet for dental teams, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/mouth-cancer/>

■ Pregnancy: Epilepsy**Cat Smith:****[10469]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Written Statement of 17 January 2024 on Women's Health Strategy update, HCWS192, whether

the National Institute for Health and Care Research challenge fund will fund research into anti-epilepsy medicines safe for use in pregnancy.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Department commissions research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). In the Written Statement of 17 January 2024, the NIHR announced plans for a £50 million NIHR Challenge to tackle disparities within maternity. This initiative is a new five-year investment allocated from within NIHR's research budget. This funding is additional to the £53 million that the NIHR spent between April 2022 and July 2023 into research programmes to support women's sexual and reproductive health, with further funding for wider health and care research that benefits women.

The specific focus of this work is being developed and we expect that the NIHR will launch a call for applications in spring 2024. Further information will be available on the NIHR website in due course. The NIHR welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including anti-epilepsy medicines safe for use in pregnancy.

■ **Primary Health Care: Pharmacy**

Rachael Maskell:

[\[9873\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of enabling pharmacists to undertake (a) blood tests and (b) ECGs as part of the Pharmacy First service.

Andrea Leadsom:

No specific assessment has been made. At present, there are no plans to expand the seven conditions covered by Pharmacy First.

■ **Prostate Cancer: Diagnosis**

Nick Fletcher:

[\[10274\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department plans to take to improve early diagnosis rates for prostate cancer.

Nick Fletcher:

[\[10276\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to use (a) screening and (b) enhanced testing to increase early diagnosis rates for prostate cancer.

Andrew Stephenson:

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) does not currently recommend screening for prostate cancer as the current test, the Prostate Specific Antigen test, does not meet the required accuracy for use in a national screening programme. Current methods offer insufficient benefit in relation to harms caused by overdiagnosis, which may lead to invasive investigative procedures and unnecessary treatment, to warrant roll out as an organised screening programme. The UK NSC is

due to review prostate cancer again in 2024 and will consider new evidence published between the two reviews.

In November 2023 we announced we will be funding a £42 million screening trial with Prostate Cancer UK to find ways of detecting country's most common male cancer earlier. The first-of-its-kind trial, called TRANSFORM, will use innovative screening methods like magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanning to detect prostate cancer, and it will see hundreds of thousands of men across the country participating.

Steps have been taken to use enhanced testing to increase early diagnosis rates for prostate cancer; NHS England have streamlined cancer pathways, including implementing a best timed prostate cancer diagnostic pathway so that those suspected of prostate cancer receive a multi-parametric MRI scan first, which ensures only those men most at-risk undergo an invasive biopsy. Furthermore, to boost early diagnosis NHS England is supporting three pilots, including the Man Van as part of the COVID-19 catch up cancer initiative. The Man Van was launched in March 2022 to provide free health checks for men and boost early diagnosis of prostate cancer.

In addition, backed by £2.3 billion capital funding, the department is expanding diagnostic capacity across the National Health Service by rolling out more Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs), delivering vital tests, scans and checks. With 150 CDCs open already and up to 160 set to open by March 2025, these offer millions of patients the chance to access quicker, more convenient checks outside of hospitals, with capacity prioritised for cancer. This is contributing to the elective recovery delivery plan ambition for 75% of patients urgently referred by their general practice for suspected cancer to receive a diagnosis or have cancer ruled out within 28 days.

■ Shingles: Vaccination

Keir Mather:

[\[10577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she is taking steps to increase the availability of the shingles vaccine.

Maria Caulfield:

The shingles vaccine is readily available to those eligible for the shingles programme via their general practices. Eligibility includes anyone aged between 70 and 80 years old, and those who turned 65 years old on or after 1 September 2023. The shingles vaccine is also available for those aged 50 years old and over, who are at significant risk of severe complications. The eligibility criteria and the expansion of the programme is based on advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation and there are no plans to review the age criteria for the shingles programme.

■ Social Services: Labour Turnover and Recruitment

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[10440\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to increase staff (a) recruitment and (b) retention in the adult social care sector.

Helen Whately:

On 10 January 2024, the Department announced a package of social care workforce reforms, to help recruit and retain talent by providing new, accredited qualifications, digital training and funded apprenticeships. These plans include the launch of the care workforce pathway, which will provide, for the first time ever, a national career structure for the adult social care workforce, covering the breadth and complexity of care.

In addition, the latest phase of the Made with Care recruitment campaign launched at the start of October 2023, and is running until the end of March 2024. It consists of advertising appearing on catch-up television, social media, radio and online, to highlight the amazing work that staff across the adult social care sector do and motivating suitable candidates to apply.

■ Sunscreens: VAT

Catherine West:

[\[10499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment she has made with the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the potential impact of removing VAT from factor 30+ sunscreen on the level of incidence of skin cancer.

Andrew Stephenson:

Whilst the Department has not made a specific assessment, under the current VAT rules, sun protection products are subject to the standard rate of VAT. High-factor sunscreen is on the National Health Service prescription list for certain conditions and therefore is provided free of VAT when dispensed by a pharmacist. While HM Treasury keeps all taxes under review, there are no plans to make changes. Representations on changes to the VAT system will be considered through the normal fiscal event process.

■ Tourette's Syndrome: Research

Keir Mather:

[\[10687\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will take steps to increase funding for (a) research into the causes of and (b) treatments for Tourette's syndrome.

Keir Mather:

[\[10689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will take steps to improve the quality of training for service providers on (a) Tourette's syndrome and (b) other tic disorders.

Keir Mather:

[\[10690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will take steps to increase the number of specialist practitioners (a) researching and (b) treating Tourette's syndrome in (i) North Yorkshire and (ii) the north of England.

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 Tourette's syndrome, although it is not usual practice to ring-fence funds for particular topics or conditions. The NIHR has funded, or supported studies into, the causes of and treatments for Tourette's syndrome, including a study on deep brain stimulation in people with the condition and a mixed-methods study to co-design a service model for children and young people with tic disorders.

Individual employers are responsible for ensuring that staff are trained, competent and have the necessary skills to safely and effectively treat patients in their care, including those with Tourette's syndrome and other neurological disorders.

NHS England's e-learning for Healthcare has produced modular online learning resources in relation to Tourette's and other tic disorders, within its neurodevelopmental disorder and healthy schools programme domains, which are freely accessible to all, including service providers.

The Department has no specific plans to increase the number of specialist practitioners researching and treating Tourette's Syndrome. The majority of services for people with Tourette's syndrome are commissioned locally by integrated care boards, which are best placed to plan the provision of services subject to local prioritisation and need. In June 2023, NHS England published the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP), which sets out the steps the National Health Service and its partners need to take to deliver an NHS workforce that meets the changing needs of the population over the next 15 years. The LTWP is a high-level plan to support the NHS workforce as a whole, and is designed to identify the right supply of staff across all clinical pathways and specialisms rather than workforce plans for specific services.

■ Triamcinolone Hexacetonide

Alex Cunningham:

[\[10803\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to (a) increase stocks and (b) prevent shortages of triamcinolone hexacetonide injections.

Andrew Stephenson:

We are aware of a shortage of triamcinolone hexacetonide 20 milligram/1 millilitre suspension for injection ampoules, which has been caused by the supplier experiencing manufacturing issues. We are liaising with the supplier of this product to ensure that action is taken to resolve this issue, as quickly as possible.

We have issued communications to healthcare professionals, providing guidance and advice on how to manage patients during the shortage. We have also been liaising with the British Society of Rheumatology, to keep them updated on the supply position. We have well-established procedures and tools for managing medicine supply issues, whatever the cause, and we work closely with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, the pharmaceutical industry, the National Health Service and others operating in the supply chain to help prevent shortages and to ensure that the risks to patients are minimised when shortages do arise.

■ Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme

Helen Morgan:

[\[10570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average waiting time was between submissions and decisions by the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme for (a) general claims and (b) mandatory reversals in each year between 2019 and 2023.

Maria Caulfield:

The Department of Health and Social Care requested the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme (VDPS) transfer to the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) from the Department for Work and Pensions from 1 November 2021. The average claim waiting times before November 2021 has therefore been calculated based on the data transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions to NHSBSA.

Of the claims concluded in 2019, the average number of days for an outcome to be communicated to the claimant was 120. It was 159 days for claims concluded in 2020, 306 days in 2021, 288 days in 2022, and 298 days in 2023.

For mandatory reversals concluded in each year, the average number of days for an outcome to be communicated to the claimant was 75 in 2019, 67 in 2020, 103 in 2021, and 182 in 2023. There were no mandatory reversal requests that reached an outcome in 2022.

Helen Morgan:

[\[10571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme (a) claims and (b) mandatory reversals were successful in each year between 2019 and 2023.

Maria Caulfield:

The Department of Health and Social Care requested the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme (VDPS) transfer to the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) from the Department for Work and Pensions from 1 November 2021. Average claim waiting times before November 2021 has therefore been calculated based on the data transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions to NHSBSA.

Of the 27 VDPS claims concluded in 2019, none were successful. In 2020, of 26 claims concluded, none were successful. In 2021, of 41 claims concluded, none were successful. In 2022, of 480 claims concluded, 33 or 6.88% were successful. In 2023, of 4008 claims concluded, 128 or 3.19% were successful.

In 2019, of seven concluded requests for a mandatory reversal on a decision reached on a concluded VDPS claim, no claims were successful. In 2020, of two concluded mandatory reversals, one was successful. In 2021, of four concluded mandatory reversals, no claims were successful. In 2022, no mandatory reversals were concluded. In 2023, of 187 concluded mandatory reversals, seven claims or 3.74% were successful.

HOME OFFICE

■ Anti-social Behaviour: Dewsbury

Mark Eastwood: [\[10290\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent steps his Department has taken to help tackle anti-social behaviour in Dewsbury constituency.

Mark Eastwood: [\[10291\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of anti-social behaviour in (a) Dewsbury constituency, (b) West Yorkshire and (c) England in each of the last three years; and what steps his Department is taking to tackle anti-social behaviour in those areas.

Chris Philp:

On 27 March 2023, the Government launched the Anti-social Behaviour Action Plan <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/anti-social-behaviour-action-plan> ensuring the police, local authorities and other relevant agencies have the tools and powers they need to tackle anti-social behaviour.

The plan is backed by £160m of funding and includes supporting the provision of Immediate Justice, by issuing out of court disposals with conditions to swiftly repair any damage. This has started in 10 initial trailblazer police force areas, including West Yorkshire. In addition, we are funding a police and other uniformed presence to clamp down on anti-social behaviour, targeting hotspots. Initially we are working with 10 police force areas, but we will be rolling this enforcement approach across every police force area in England and Wales later this year.

The Office for National Statistics annually publishes anti-social behaviour incidents reported to the Police by Police Force Area and Community Safety Partnership. The latest available data covering year to March 2023 can be found here:

Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk) (Table P12 for England and West Yorkshire police force area figures).

Recorded crime data by Community Safety Partnership area - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk) (Tables C6 and C7 for Kirklees Community Safety Partnership (CSP) figures, which include the area of Dewsbury).

■ Anti-social Behaviour: Newport West

Ruth Jones:

[\[10312\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent steps his Department has taken to tackle antisocial behaviour in Newport West constituency.

Chris Philp:

On 27 March 2023, the Government launched the Anti-social Behaviour Action Plan <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/anti-social-behaviour-action-plan> ensuring the police, local authorities and other relevant agencies have the tools and powers they need to tackle anti-social behaviour.

The plan is backed by £160m of funding and includes supporting the provision of Immediate Justice, by issuing out of court disposals with conditions to swiftly repair any damage. This has started in 10 initial trailblazer police force areas. In addition, we are funding a police and other uniformed presence to clamp down on anti-social behaviour, targeting hotspots. Initially we are working with 10 police force areas, but we will be rolling this enforcement approach across every police force area in England and Wales later this year.

■ Asylum: LGBT+ People

Angela Crawley:

[\[10846\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has made an assessment of the conformity of adding India to the list of Safe States with the duties laid out in section 80AA(4) of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 on LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum.

Angela Crawley:

[\[10847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has made an assessment of the conformity of adding Georgia to the list of Safe States with the duties laid out in section 80AA(4) of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 on LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum.

Tom Pursglove:

In order to inform ministerial decision making on whether to add India and Georgia to the list of Safe States in section 80AA of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (NIAA 2002), we made an assessment of the general situation in both countries, using evidence from a wide range of reliable sources in order to do so. This was in line with the requirements at section 80AA(3) and 80AA(4) of the NIAA 2002 (as inserted by section 59(3)(3) and 59(3)(4) of the Illegal Migration Act 2023).

Through considering country information and each country's respect for the rule of law and human rights, we assessed that both countries met the criteria. Further information on the situation for LGBT people in Georgia and India is contained within our published Country Policy and Information Notes, available on [Gov.Uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/country-policy-and-information-notes).

■ Biometric Residence Permits: Uk Visas and Immigration

Angela Crawley: [\[10471\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many holders of physical biometric residence permits have been given access to an online UK Visas and Immigration account.

Tom Pursglove:

Over 5m customers currently hold a UKVI account which they use to view their status, update a variety of personal information and share their immigration status with checking parties. The majority of account holders have digital-only evidence of their immigration status, however a proportion also have a biometric residence permit or card.

Angela Crawley: [\[10472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what his target is for the number of online UK Visas and Immigration accounts to be registered for holders of physical biometric residence permits by the end of June 2024.

Tom Pursglove:

A number of our Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) application routes already provide customers with a UKVI account, through which they can view their immigration status, update a variety of personal information and share their status with checking parties.

We are delivering the ability for existing leave holders and new flow applicants to create a UKVI account from April 2024. From this point we will begin contacting customers directly via email where possible, and will utilise a range of additional communication channels to inform customers of the need to take action to create an account before their BRP cards expire at the end of 2024. We will closely monitor take up of account creation to assess the effectiveness of our communications.

■ Domestic Abuse: Newport West

Ruth Jones: [\[10309\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help protect victims of domestic abuse in Newport West.

Laura Farris:

Victims of domestic abuse in Wales, including Newport West, have access to a range of support and protections as a result of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and our Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan (2022).

The Plan invests over £230 million of cross-Government funding into tackling this crime. This includes up to £140 million for supporting victims, and over £81 million for tackling perpetrators and to support policing. Funding which may support victims in Newport West from this plan includes, but is not limited to:

- Welsh Women's Aid was awarded over £2.5 million from the Children Affected by Domestic Abuse Fund to directly support 2,645 children and young people across over a three-year period, providing one-to-one and trauma-informed support in refuges, schools and community settings.
- Services in receipt of funding from the £8.3 million VAWG Support and Specialist Services Fund such as Hourglass, who received over £793,000 until March 2025 to provide specialist support services to older victims of domestic abuse across England and Wales.
- Funding for helplines, such as the National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline, delivered by Galop.
- The Support for Migrant Victims Scheme which provides accommodation and wrap around support for migrant victims of domestic abuse with insecure immigration status.

From 31st January 2024, victims can benefit from direct payments to victims flee abuse or build a sustainable future due to an additional new £2 million investment into the [Flexible Fund](#).

This funding is alongside measures to protect victims and pursue perpetrators, such as adding violence against women crime types – including domestic abuse – to the revised Strategic Policing Requirement, elevating it to a national threat for police forces to respond to accordingly.

■ Hong Kong: Pensions

Andrew Rosindell:

[10409]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will hold discussions with (a) HSBC and (b) Standard Chartered on taking steps to publish all communications between their organisations and the Hong Kong Mandatory Provident Fund Authority in the last three years.

Tom Pursglove:

The publication of such communications is ultimately a decision for Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) trustees, who are regulated by the MPF Authority in Hong Kong. The Government firmly opposes the MPF's discrimination against British National (Overseas) status holders (BN(O)s) and we will continue to urge the Hong Kong authorities and all relevant bodies to facilitate early drawdown of funds for BN(O)s as is the case for other Hong Kong residents who move overseas permanently. The conduct of UK banking institutions is not a matter for the Home Office, but I have asked my officials to raise this matter with HM Treasury.

■ Knives: Crime**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[10044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he has taken to work with relevant authorities to tackle knife (a) possession and (b) crime among youth in (i) England and (ii) Romford constituency.

Chris Philp:

Tackling knife crime is a priority and the Government is determined to crack down on the scourge of violence devastating our communities.

We recently consulted on new legislative proposals to tackle knife crime and as a result, in the Criminal Justice Bill, we have introduced provisions to provide more powers for police to seize knives held in private that could be used in crimes, increase the maximum penalty for the offences of selling prohibited weapons and selling knives to under 18s. In the next few weeks, the Government intends to introduce a new ban on zombie-style machetes and knives.

As a result of the Government's Police Uplift Programme (PUP) the Metropolitan police service has recruited 3,468 additional uplift officers against a total three-year allocation of 4,557 officers. The Metropolitan Police's funding will be up to £3,581.1 million for 2024/25, an increase of up to £118.9 million when compared to 2023/24.

Under this Government, it has never been easier for the police to make legitimate use of stop and search powers. Every knife seized through stop and search is a potential life saved. In 2022-23, stop and search removed over 15,000 weapons and firearms from our streets and resulted over 74,000 arrests across England and Wales. In Essex there were over 2,000 resultant arrests following a stop and search and almost 4,600 searches resulted in a stolen or prohibited article being found in 2022-23.

The Home Office has invested over £160m since 2019 into the development of 20 Violence Reduction Units across England and Wales with a further £55m made available for 2023/24. Since 2019, we have provided over £43 million to develop and run the London Violence Reduction Unit, which covers Havering. This includes an investment of £9.5m in 2023/24. Violence Reduction Units deter people, particularly young people, from becoming involved in serious violence by bringing together partners from health, probation, policing, housing and beyond and investing in the best evidence-based interventions.

Through our Grip programme, we are providing additional funding to enable the Metropolitan police to boost patrols in specific streets and neighbourhoods most affected by violence, including Romford High Street. This programme is providing regular, visible patrols to deter violence and provide community reassurance as well as problem-oriented policing.

Problem-oriented policing is based on an analytical approach that seeks to identify and respond to the specific drivers of violence as they affect the particular location, so that working with partners, the police can take effective preventative action to tackle these. Since 2019, we have provided The Met Police with c.£51.8 million for

their delivery of the programme and have awarded them a further c.£8.9 million for this (23/24) financial year.

Violence Reduction Units, in combination with GRIP, have delivered a statistically significant reduction in hospital admissions for violent injuries since funding began in 2019 (an estimated 3,220 admissions have been prevented in areas where the programmes operate).

Over 10 years the Home Office is investing £200m in early intervention and prevention initiatives to help children and young people at risk of exploitation and involvement in serious violence, through the Youth Endowment Fund.

The YEF have funded the SW!TCH Lives project in Romford, which aimed to promote positive actions and emotions and reduce risky behaviour by providing young people with consistent, positive role models, weekly mentoring and positive peer networks. They have also funded 'You and Me Counselling' as part of the COVID-19 Learning Project, which aimed to provide targeted support to young people at risk of being involved in violence; and second, to learn fast about the best ways to reach young people during a period of social distancing.

■ **LGBT+ People: Hate Crime**

Dr Jamie Wallis:

[\[10267\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans he has to implement the recommendations of the Law Commission report Hate crime laws: Final report, HC 942, published in December 2021 on hate crime towards LGBTQ+ people.

Laura Farris:

We are grateful for the detailed consideration the Law Commission has given to its review of hate crime laws. In April 2023, the Government published a response to Recommendation 8 on misogyny as a hate crime. The Government will respond to the remaining recommendations in due course.

■ **Members: Correspondence**

Ruth Cadbury:

[\[10623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when he plans to respond to the letter sent by the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth to the Minister for Immigration on 7 November 2023 regarding a visa application.

Tom Pursglove:

The Home Office replied on 20 November 2023 under reference MPAM/1043109/23.

■ **Protective Security for Mosques Scheme**

Afzal Khan:

[\[10242\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications he has received under the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme as of 17 January 2024, by region.

Afzal Khan: [10243]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications have been approved under the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme as of 17 January 2024, by region.

Afzal Khan: [10244]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications have been denied under the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme as of 17 January 2024, by region.

Tom Tugendhat:

The Protective Security for Mosque Scheme is a new scheme in 2023/24 and opened on 21 June 2023.

As of 17 January 2024, the Home Office has received 269 applications to the scheme. By region, applications have been received from the East Midlands (32), East of England (24), Greater London (57), North East (21), North West (54), South East (22), South West (8), West Midlands (36), Northern Ireland (3) and Wales (12).

Decisions on applications will be communicated to applicant mosques and Muslim faith community centres in due course. The scheme remains open to applicants and information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/places-of-worship-security-funding-scheme>

Afzal Khan: [10245]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, which organisations his Department consulted when establishing the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme.

Afzal Khan: [10246]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether his Department plans to consult representatives of Muslim organisations on the effectiveness of the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme.

Tom Tugendhat:

The Home Office works with a number of stakeholders in relation to the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme and our wider work on protective security for faith communities, including the police, delivery partners, other government departments, devolved administrations and faith and community organisations.

We continue to work closely with these stakeholders to understand the safety and security issues affecting Muslim communities in the UK, to ensure that our protective security interventions remain effective and aligned with good practice.

■ Refugees: Afghanistan

Steve McCabe: [\[10368\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of Afghan refugees arrived in the UK (a) from Pakistan and (b) by other routes in each month since November 2023.

Tom Pursglove:

The UK made an ambitious and generous commitment to help resettle.

Afghans fleeing persecution and those who served the UK. The latest published [Immigration system statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)\(opens in a new tab\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics) show we have brought around 24,600 people to safety, including over 21,600 people eligible for the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) schemes, as of September 2023.

It is not possible to provide a breakdown or running commentary on Afghans who have arrived in the UK specifically from Pakistan or via other routes since November 2023. This is due to this being ongoing operational data. The next release of Afghan Operational Data is due around 22 February 2024.

The Government is committed to relocating all eligible persons who remain in Pakistan and third countries as soon as possible.

■ Retail Trade: Crimes of Violence

Andrew Rosindell: [\[10045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he has taken to work with relevant authorities to tackle violent crime against retail workers in (i) England and (ii) Romford constituency.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[10046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he has taken to work with relevant authorities to tackle shoplifting in (a) England and (b) Romford constituency.

Chris Philp:

The Government recognises the significant impact shoplifting has on businesses, communities and consumers. The Crime Survey for England and Wales shows neighbourhood crime is down 51% compared to findings from the year ending March 2010.

However, Police Recorded Crime figures show shoplifting offences increased by 25% in the 12 months to June 2023. Statistics also show the number of people charged with shoplifting offences has risen by 29% in the year ending June 2023.

We have recently made significant steps to improve the police response to retail crime, including shoplifting.

In October, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) published the [Retail Crime Action Plan](#). Through this Plan, all forces across England and Wales have committed

to prioritise police attendance at the scene where violence has been used towards shop staff, where an offender has been detained by store security, and where evidence needs to be secured and can only be done by police personnel. Additionally, where CCTV or other digital images are secured, police will run this through the Police National Database to aid efforts to identify prolific offenders or potentially dangerous individuals.

This builds on the NPCC commitment that police forces across England and Wales will follow up all crimes where there is actionable evidence and the chance of identifying an offender, including shoplifting.

October also saw the launch of Pegasus, a unique private-public partnership, which involves retailers providing data, intelligence and evidence to Opal, the national police intelligence unit on organised acquisitive crime, to develop a better strategic picture and help forces crack down on serious offenders.

The Government is clear that violent and abusive behaviour towards any worker, particularly those who provide a valuable service to the public, is never acceptable.

In 2022 we took the significant step to introduce a statutory aggravating factor for assault against those who are serving the public. Section 156 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 means the public facing nature of a victim's role will be considered an aggravating factor when it comes to sentencing for assault offences, allowing the court to give a longer sentence within the statutory maximum for the offence.

The Government also continues to work closely with retail businesses, security representatives, trade associations and policing through the National Retail Crime Steering Group (NRCSG) to ensure the response to retail crime is as robust as it can be.

■ Women: Public Sector

Rachael Maskell:

[\[10168\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State the Home Department, if his Department will (a) develop a definition of trauma-informed in relation to the delivery of public services to (i) women and (ii) girls and (b) publish a toolkit explaining the implications of that definition.

Laura Farris:

Trauma informed practice is an innovative intervention to help frontline workers recognise and respond to trauma in the people they work with. It encourages a public health approach and effective multi-agency working, addresses barriers to accessing support, and reduces the potential for re-traumatisation.

The Department of Health and Social Care published their Women's Health Strategy in July 2022, and committed to publishing a definition of trauma informed practice for use in the health and social care sector.

The Department of Health and Social Care published the working definition of trauma informed practice in November 2022, which provides the health and social care

sector with a consistent foundation on which to build trauma-informed practice into their services and systems.

To better understand the potential impact of taking a trauma informed approach, the Home Office is providing up to £4m towards the Youth Endowment Fund's (YEF) trauma informed practice grant round.

JUSTICE

■ Courts: Preston

Scott Benton:

[\[10316\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of helping people travelling from Blackpool to the court complex in Preston.

Mike Freer:

HMCTS has put in place temporary arrangements for hearings to take place at Preston and other locations in Lancashire, until the new state-of-the-art courthouse in Blackpool opens in 2026.

These arrangements will enable us to continue to offer effective access to justice, with the overwhelming majority of users being able to travel to Preston and other locations in Lancashire in accordance with our established definition of a reasonable journey. This includes being able to leave at 07:30 to attend court on time, using public transport if necessary.

Should court users anticipate difficulty in travelling to a site within these parameters they are advised to contact their legal representatives or the court at the earliest opportunity, so that the need for alternative arrangements can be considered. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and can include varying the start or end times of hearings, subject to judicial approval.

■ Divorce: Children

Sir Peter Bottomley:

[\[9984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, which Ministers are responsible for reviewing the (a) law and (b) practice relating to the provision of support for children whose parents separate or divorce.

Mike Freer:

Ministers work closely across government to support children, including those going through parental separation or divorce.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is responsible for private family law, which includes child arrangements upon separation, marriage and divorce. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the MoJ responsible for this is Lord Bellamy KC.

David Johnston MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children, Families and Wellbeing at the Department for Education, works closely with Lord Bellamy KC at the MoJ, including through jointly chairing the national Family Justice Board, which is focused on providing the best possible outcomes for the children and families that come into contact with the family justice system.

■ **First-tier Tribunal: Property**

Philip Dunne: [R] [10064]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many cases were (a) submitted to and (b) completed by the residential property division of the First-Tier Tribunal in each of the last five years.

Mike Freer:

HMCTS information about the annual number of appeals received and disposed in the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber), Residential Property Division, is published at: [Tribunals statistics quarterly: July to September 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunals-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2023).

■ **Ministry of Justice: Equality**

Neil O'Brien: [10249]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many equalities impact assessments his Department completed in each of the last five years for which data is available.

Mike Freer:

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, all public authorities, including Government departments, are required by law to ensure that they have due regard to certain equality considerations when carrying out their functions. While equality impact assessments may be produced, there is no legal requirement for duty assessments to be recorded in a specific format.

In accordance with section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) ensures that assessment of the equalities impacts of its policy proposals is integrated in the development, implementation and review of its policies. We do not keep central records of all our equality assessments undertaken over the last several years but publish our policy consultation equality assessments regularly on the MoJ consultation hub which is publicly available on GOV.UK: [Ministry of Justice - Citizen Space](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ministry-of-justice-citizen-space).

■ **Probation: Staff**

Ruth Cadbury: [10821]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will publish the number of probation officers per grade that left the probation service in (a) 2023 and (b) 2022.

Edward Argar:

The number of leavers from HMPPS by grade is published every quarter in Table 8c of the "HM Prison and Probation Service workforce statistics" publication. The main

publication can be accessed via this link:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-offender-management-service-workforce-statistics.

The latest accompanying tables are here: (

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6554ab3750475b000dc5b614/hmpps-workforce-statistics-tables-sep-2023.ods>).

Recruitment and retention remain a priority across the Probation Service. We have injected extra funding of more than £155 million a year to deliver more robust supervision, recruit thousands more staff and reduce caseloads to keep the public safer.

We have accelerated recruitment of trainee Probation Officers (PQiPs) to increase staffing levels, particularly in Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) with the most significant staffing challenges. As a result, over 4,000 PQiPs joined the service between 2020/21 and 2022/23 which will increase Probation Officer staffing numbers. We continue to run centralised recruitment campaigns in priority regions alongside regional recruitment to help bolster the number of applications and improve time to hire for key operational roles.

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

Ruth Cadbury:

[10822]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will publish the number of vacancies per region in the probation service at the end of 2023.

Edward Argar:

Table One: Vacancies across Probation Service Regions, September 2023, all Probation Service grades

PROBATION SERVICE REGION	VACANCIES (FTE)
PS East Midlands	28
PS East of England	274
PS Greater Manchester	0
PS Kent, Surrey & Sussex	77
PS London	457
PS North East	32
PS North West	77
PS South Central	176

PROBATION SERVICE REGION	VACANCIES (FTE)
PS South West	74
PS Wales	0
PS West Midlands	32
PS Yorkshire & the Humber	59
Approved Premises	0

Data shows average resource across the month, adjusted for joiners and leavers within the month. Data shown as of September 2023, aligning with the most recent HMPPS Workforce Quarterly publication. More recent data cannot be provided due to potentially pre-empting future statistical publications.

Recruitment and retention remain a priority across the Probation Service. We have injected extra funding of more than £155 million a year to deliver more robust supervision, recruit thousands more staff and reduce caseloads to keep the public safer.

We continue to focus efforts on enhanced, centralised recruitment campaigns in priority regions alongside regional recruitment to help bolster the number of applications and improve time to hire for key operational roles. We have also accelerated recruitment of trainee Probation Officers (PQiPs) to increase staffing levels, particularly in Probation Delivery Units with the most significant staffing challenges. As a result, over 4,000 PQiPs joined the service between 2020/21 and 2022/23 which will increase Probation Officer staffing numbers.

The Probation Service is in its second year of a multi-year pay deal for staff. Salary values of all pay bands will increase each year, targeted at key operational grades to improve a challenging recruitment and retention position. The Probation Service has also introduced a Prioritisation Framework to provide clarity on prioritisation of tasks and what can be reduced/paused when capacity issues begin to impact on operational delivery.

Notes

Vacancies have been calculated as Required Staffing (Full Time Equivalent - FTE) minus Staff in Post (FTE). Where the number of Staff in Post (FTE) in a region exceeds Required Staffing (FTE), the number of vacancies has been shown as 0 FTE. Summing the figures in the table will not give the overall number of vacancies across the Probation Service due the surpluses in some regions that haven't been shown in the table. Vacancies have been netted off between grades and business units. As a result, the overall vacancy figures presented mask the presence of vacancies at both grade and business unit level. Data have been taken from the Workforce Planning Tool and are subject to inaccuracy as a result of the manual nature with which returns are completed. This approach differs from the published statistics, which uses data from the Single Operating Platform (our departmental HR system). Staff in Post (FTE) has not been adjusted for long-term absences (e.g. Trainee Probation Officer training time). In addition, we have not factored in loans / temporary cover / agency and sessional. The actual resourced position will therefore differ as a result of these. Trainee Probation Officers are included in the data. Trainees spend a proportion of their time training and the remainder of their time carrying out work at a Band 3 PSO level. Both training time and time spent delivering caseload are included in the Staff in Post (FTE) calculations, which means that number of vacancies is lower than the actual gap between Required Staffing and frontline delivery.

Ruth Cadbury:

[10823]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what information his Department holds on the number of sick days taken by probation officers in 2023.

Edward Argar:

The number of working days lost by HMPPS staff by grade is published every quarter in Table 19 of the "HM Prison and Probation Service workforce statistics" publication. The main publication can be accessed via this link:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-offender-management-service-workforce-statistics. The latest accompanying tables are here: (<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6554ab3750475b000dc5b614/hmpps-workforce-statistics-tables-sep-2023.ods>).

HMPPS is focused on reducing its sickness absence rates through the support currently offered to staff and managers, including a comprehensive Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) that provides the workforce with access to confidential support & counselling services. This is in addition to the organisation's Occupational Health Service that supports staff & management with medical advice, and HMPPS' multitude of staff networks that are part of HMPPS' commitment to ensuring our staff feel supported in their roles.

HMPPS are actively reviewing their approach to staff wellbeing to strengthen the wellbeing offer. Managers support employees who are unwell, and are provided HR

casework support to appropriately manage employee absence in line with established policies & procedures.

Ruth Cadbury:

[\[10824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what information his Department holds on the number of probation officers with more than four years service that resigned from the probation service in 2023.

Edward Argar:

The quarterly HMPPS workforce statistics publication covers staffing information, including leavers, and the latest publication covers data up to 30 September 2023. Therefore, information after 30 September is unpublished and cannot be released.

In the 12 months to 30 September 2023, there were 135 probation officers (band 4) who resigned from the probation service with more than four years of service. This includes staff who had a length of service of at least 4 years and 1 day.

Recruitment and retention remain a priority across the Probation Service. We have injected extra funding of more than £155 million a year to deliver more robust supervision, recruit thousands more staff and reduce caseloads to keep the public safer. The Probation Service leaving rate decreased in the 12 months to 30 September 2023 compared to the 12 months prior.

We have accelerated recruitment of trainee Probation Officers (PQiPs) to increase staffing levels, particularly in Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) with the most significant staffing challenges. As a result, over 4,000 PQiPs joined the service between 2020/21 and 2022/23 which will increase Probation Officer staffing numbers. We continue to run centralised recruitment campaigns in priority regions alongside regional recruitment to help bolster the number of applications and improve time to hire for key operational roles.

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

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

■ Council Housing: Romford

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[10410\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he has had recent discussions with the London Borough of Havering on tackling mould in council accommodation in Romford constituency.

Jacob Young:

All landlords have legal obligations to remedy disrepair, ensure homes are fit for human habitation and to ensure that homes are free of serious 'category 1' hazards, as defined through the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. As a registered

provider of social housing, the London Borough of Havering is also required to ensure its homes meet the Decent Homes Standard.

Following the death of Awaab Ishak, the Secretary of State wrote to all providers of social housing, including the London Borough of Havering, setting out that he expected providers to go further than the letter of the Decent Homes Standard and have particular regard to damp and mould. He also wrote to local authority chief executives and council leaders setting out his expectation that they take action to resolve poor housing conditions in their area.

The Government is taking action on damp and mould. We have introduced 'Awaab's Law', which sets out new requirements for landlords to address hazards such as damp and mould in social homes within a fixed time period. We published our consultation on 9 January 2024. We have also, with the Department of Health and Social Care, developed new consolidated guidance for the housing sector on the health impacts of damp and mould in homes. This guidance was published in September 2023.

■ Disabled Facilities Grants

Mary Kelly Foy:

[10913]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he has made an assessment of the potential effectiveness of the Disabled Facilities Grant.

Felicity Buchan:

Since 2010 Government has invested £5.4 billion into the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) (2010-11 to 2023-24), delivering an estimated 550,000 home adaptations in England. Adaptations funded through the DFG include stairlifts, level-access showers and grab rails. These adaptations can reduce emergency admissions to hospital, speed up a return home following a hospital stay and delay, or even prevent, the need for costly residential care in future.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) annually collects voluntary local authority-level data returns on local DFG delivery. Raw data from local authorities is analysed by Foundations, the DLUHC funded national body for DFGs and home improvement agencies. The 2021-22 report on local DFG delivery is available online at the following [link](#).

There is good evidence of the impact and effectiveness of housing adaptations generically, and the DFG specifically. For example, Public Health England's falls prevention toolkit (2018) compared the impact of different interventions on preventing falls, including exercise classes and home adaptations. It found that adaptations produce significantly higher returns on investment with £1 of investment in home assessment and modification saving £3.17 on health and care costs. If quality of life gains for the individual are considered, savings rise to £7.34 per £1 spent.

■ Disadvantaged: North East**Chi Onwurah:**[\[10804\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to help reduce deprivation in the North East.

Jacob Young:

We have provided over £881 million to support local regeneration projects across the towns and cities of the North East.

This figure includes over £270 million provided through the three rounds of the Levelling Up Fund, over £276 million supporting high streets and Town Deals in eleven places across the North East, and £120 million for six towns included in the recently-announced Long Term Plan for Towns.

We are also giving people in the North East the tools needed to shape a better future. In May, the North East will become the first region in England fully covered by mayoral combined authorities. These mayors will take on leadership and responsibility for long-term investment funds totalling £1.85 billion, making a direct impact on economic growth and tackling deprivation.

■ Freeports: Security**Liam Byrne:**[\[10735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to his Department's online guidance on Freeports, last updated on 6 December 2023, whether (a) HMRC and (b) Border Force is responsible for conducting annual audits of security measures introduced by Freeport operators to mitigate physical, personnel and cyber security risks.

Jacob Young:

The annual audit which you reference has been superseded by a new approach, where the Freeport governing body will conduct the security audit and then report to the Freeport Security Forum (FSF) led by HMG. The FSF will be chaired by the Home Office and reviewed by experts within relevant departments, including HMT, Home Office and from Law Enforcement authorities. The Annual Freeport Security Audit (AFSA) complements but does not replace the standard UK customs and border security processes that apply to Freeports or similar facilities. Freeport Customs Site Operators are also required to obtain AEO(S) or equivalent authorisation from HMRC, an international gold standard for safety and security, and remain subject to robust ongoing oversight from HMRC.

For all English Freeports, the first AFSA is due to take place in the next couple of months. The online guidance on the Freeports webpage will be updated in line with the new process that is being followed in due course.

The report must be agreed and receive sign off by all local strategic security partners. If the FSF is not satisfied with a Freeport's AFSA, they will work with the Freeport to

agree improvement actions to be implemented. A Freeport will not pass annual review until the government is satisfied with the AFSA.

■ Grenfell Tower Inquiry

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[10232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to support the survivors and families of the Grenfell Tower fire throughout the inquiry process.

Jacob Young:

The Government supports the independent Grenfell Tower Inquiry, through which we may understand the truth about the circumstances leading to the tragedy.

We remain committed to ensuring bereaved, survivors and residents get the support they need for the long term, including throughout the Inquiry process. My department continues to work closely with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and health partners to ensure there are services available to support the evolving needs of the community; this includes physical and emotional wellbeing services.

In addition, the government has funded legal representation for all bereaved, survivors and residents who are core participants to the Inquiry to ensure they are not disadvantaged. Those who attended the Inquiry hearings have had their daily travel and subsistence costs covered. These costs are government funded and administered by the Inquiry.

The department has a dedicated community engagement team who are also available to meet families individually or in a small groups with other families – however they feel most comfortable - and will continue to support the recovery of those affected.

■ Homelessness: Refugees

Chi Onwurah:

[\[10117\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the potential impact of the change to the move-on period on levels of homelessness.

Felicity Buchan:

In line with the practice of successive administrations, details of internal discussions are not normally disclosed.

■ Homelessness: Young People

Tracey Crouch:

[\[10081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what plans his Department has to tackle youth homelessness.

Felicity Buchan:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [9917](#) on 24 January 2024.

■ **Housing: Construction**

Andrew Rosindell: [\[10048\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will take steps to work with relevant authorities to ensure that new housing developments prioritise domestic housing needs over those pertaining to asylum claims.

Jacob Young:

Asylum seekers are not eligible for social housing unless granted asylum by the Home Office and made eligible by the Secretary of State through s.160ZA(2) of the Housing Act 1996.

■ **Housing: Electricity and Renewable Energy**

Rachael Maskell: [\[10636\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make it his policy to require new developments to use (a) electric and (b) renewable energy.

Lee Rowley:

The Government is currently consulting out the Future Homes Standard - see [here](#).

■ **Housing: Keyworkers**

Rachael Maskell: [\[10634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of keyworker housing.

Lee Rowley:

Local authorities have discretion about the precise definition of “key worker” allowing individual circumstance and need to be taken into account. Centralised data is, therefore, not collected in the way requested.

■ **Investment Zones: South Yorkshire**

Alexander Stafford: [\[10327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make an assessment of the potential economic impact of the South Yorkshire Investment Zone on Rother Valley constituency.

Alexander Stafford: [\[10328\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make an assessment of the impact of the South Yorkshire Investment Zone on the creation of skilled jobs and businesses in Rother Valley Constituency.

Alexander Stafford:

[\[10334\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make an estimate of the economic impact of the South Yorkshire Investment Zone on the local economy of Rother Valley.

Jacob Young:

Communities across South Yorkshire, including your constituents in Rother Valley, all stand to benefit from the estimated 8,000 new jobs and £1.2 billion of private funding by 2030, this Investment Zone will help to deliver.

People from Rother Valley will see blockers to growth in their area, such as challenges attracting finance and investment, supporting business growth, and clear pathways to higher skilled jobs, reduced. This could be through potential support for specialist training programmes tailored to industry and support for local businesses in the sector's supply chains, helping drive more business activity and productivity.

This Government is continuing to work with South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and local partners to co-develop the plans for their Advanced Manufacturing Investment Zone, including agreeing priority development sites and specific interventions to drive cluster growth, ahead of final confirmation of plans.

■ **Levelling Up Fund**

Mark Eastwood:

[\[10296\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps he has taken to encourage local authorities to spend the levelling up funding that they have been allocated.

Jacob Young:

The UK Government is investing £15 billion in a suite of complementary Levelling Up projects for local people and local businesses across the country to help grow the economy, create jobs, improve transport and provide skills training and local business support, this includes the Towns Fund, Long Term Plan for Towns and Levelling Up Fund Projects in my Hon Friend's constituency .

We are working across government with places to support them to overcome any barriers to delivery, through increased flexibilities, as well as a comprehensive £65 million package of support.

■ **Overcrowding: Bolton South East**

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[10441\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps he is taking to tackle overcrowding in Bolton South East constituency.

Jacob Young:

We are committed to reducing overcrowding by increasing the supply of affordable housing and enabling councils and other social landlords to make better use of their existing stock.

Our £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme will deliver thousands of affordable homes for both rent and to buy right across the country.

■ Parking: Private Sector

Mark Eastwood: [\[10560\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that private car park operators (a) display clear signage, (b) impose proportionate fine costs and (c) do not impose additional hidden fees.

Jacob Young:

The Government is taking action to improve the regulation of the private parking industry. We are developing a new code of practice which will ensure the best possible protection for motorists and parking companies alike.

The code recognises the importance of clear signage and will outline new standards which industry must meet to be compliant.

Currently we are reviewing the levels of parking charges and debt recovery fees and have recently concluded a call for evidence regarding these elements. We intend to consult on the level of parking charges and debt recovery fees in due course.

■ Refugees: Afghanistan

Steve McCabe: [\[10366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, how many Afghan refugees are (a) registered as homeless and (b) accommodated in temporary local authority accommodation.

Felicity Buchan:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer given to Question [UIN 6726](#) on 20 December 2023.

■ Rents: Appeals

Philip Dunne: [R] [\[10065\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he has made an estimate of the number of applications under the Section 13 process in the Renters Reform Bill in each of the first 3 years after its passage.

Philip Dunne: [R] [\[10066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will publish the Justice Impact Test for the Renters Reform Bill.

Jacob Young:

We are working closely with the Ministry of Justice and the First-tier Tribunal so the courts and tribunals are fully prepared for the changes introduced by the Renters (Reform) Bill on the justice system.

Justice Impact Tests are internal Government documents and are not routinely published.

■ Shared Ownership Schemes

Rachael Maskell: [\[10633\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps he is taking to encourage uptake of shared ownership properties.

Jacob Young:

Demand for shared ownership remains high and our 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme will deliver thousands of new shared ownership homes right across the country.

■ Social Rented Housing: Construction

Rachael Maskell: [\[10632\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps he is taking to help improve the efficiency of social housing construction.

Jacob Young:

Government's £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme for 2021-26 funds the construction of tens of thousands of homes across the country. These include homes for rent, for low-cost home ownership, and specialist and supported housing.

■ UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Northern Ireland

Claire Hanna: [\[10683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether his Department plans to maintain funding for projects funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in Northern Ireland after March 2025.

Jacob Young:

Funding for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is confirmed for this Spending Review period, until the end of March 2025. As with all government funding, decisions regarding the future of UKSPF are a matter for the next Spending Review.

We nevertheless appreciate the case for certainty. We are committed to setting out further detail at the earliest opportunity.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Equality

Neil O'Brien: [\[10255\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how many equalities impact assessments her Department completed in each of the last five years for which data is available.

Andrew Griffith:

In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, all public authorities, including our Department, are required by law to have due regard to certain equality considerations when carrying out their functions. While 'equality impact assessments' are a tool utilised in this process, there is no legal requirement for these assessments to be recorded in a specific format or centrally monitored. Therefore, providing data for each year is currently not feasible.

■ **Digital Technology****Munira Wilson:**[\[10331\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether her Department plans to update the Digital Inclusion Strategy, published 4 December 2014.

Saqib Bhatti:

The Government is committed to ensuring no-one is left behind in this digital age. The 2022 UK Digital Strategy outlined work that will promote digital inclusion and help people to get online, including committing to at least 85% gigabit broadband coverage by 2025 and delivering legislation that will mitigate online harms through the Online Safety Bill (now Act).

Rather than write a standalone Digital Inclusion strategy, the Government is focused on delivering work that will address this issue. This is a cross-Government effort, with work being overseen by a new ministerial group, which will meet twice a year to drive progress.

■ **Innovation****Chi Onwurah:**[\[10128\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2023 to Question 3807 on Innovation, if he will provide a more precise date for the publication of the cluster map.

Andrew Griffith:

The Government expects to launch the interactive digital tool to map the UK's innovation clusters shortly.

TRANSPORT■ **A10: Ely****Louise Haigh:**[\[10189\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the A10 Ely-Cambridge improvement scheme has entered the Road Improvement Strategy (a) programme and (b) development stage; whether formal approvals have been granted; and whether it will progress into the next strategy phase.

Louise Haigh: [\[10190\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the (a) cost and (b) completion date of the proposed A10 Ely-Cambridge road project.

Guy Opperman:

The A10 Ely to Cambridge improvement scheme is being promoted by Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority for consideration for potential funding as part of the Department's Major Road Network / Large Local Majors (MRN / LLM) programme. It would not form part of the Government's Road Investment Strategy.

The promoters are currently developing an Outline Business Case (OBC) for the scheme which they expect to submit to the Department in August for a decision on whether to approve it and provide conditional support for the scheme as part of the MRN/ LLM programme.

The latest scheme cost estimate and completion date provided to the Department are £234 million and September 2030 respectively. Naturally, this cost estimate and completion date may be subject to change.

■ A38: Somerset**Louise Haigh:** [\[10187\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the (a) cost and (b) completion date of the proposed A38 Somerset road improvement scheme.

Guy Opperman:

The latest cost estimate provided to the Department for this scheme is £30.95 million. It has an expected completion date of January 2026.

However, whether the scheme progresses to the next phase will be dependant upon whether the Full Business Case is approved by Ministers, subsequent to an assessment and advice from officials.

■ A75: Repairs and Maintenance**Louise Haigh:** [\[10191\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the A75 upgrade programme has entered the Road Improvement Strategy (a) programme and (b) development stage; whether formal approvals have been granted; and whether it will progress into the next strategy phase.

Guy Opperman:

The A75 is in Scotland. The Road Investment Strategy relates to England.

Louise Haigh: [\[10192\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information his Department holds on the (a) total cost and (b) completion date of the proposed A75 upgrade programme.

Guy Opperman:

As you will appreciate, transport matters relating to the A75 in Scotland are devolved to the Scottish Government. Nevertheless, the UK Government's Transport Ministers and Department for Transport's officials regularly engage with their Scottish counterparts on the recommendations made by Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill's independent Union Connectivity Review. This has resulted in the UK Government committing to providing up to £8m funding support to the Scottish Government for a detailed study to identify options for the realignment of the A75 around Springholm and Crocketford. In addition, as part of its Network North announcement, the UK Government committed to funding targeted improvements to the A75 which will be subject to the Scottish Government's business cases at various stages throughout the process. Costs of any such scheme and associated delivery timescales will be explored as part of the Scottish Government's business cases development.

■ Avanti West Coast**Daniel Kawczynski:**[\[10774\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has had discussions with Avanti West Coast on the reported content of an internal presentation referencing (a) the receipt of funds from the public purse and (b) conditions for the receipt of performance-related payments; and whether his Department has paid fees to Avanti to deliver services for which third-party suppliers and inspections have already been provided to deliver.

Huw Merriman:

Officials have discussed this issue with senior managers at First Rail Holdings (Avanti West Coast Owing Group) and the Managing Director of Avanti West Coast. Further discussions will be taking place with Ministers.

The Department reimburses pre-agreed budgeted costs incurred by operators on a good and efficient basis.

Additionally, operators earn two types of fees. A fixed management fee and a performance-based fee. Payment of the performance-based fee is dependent on operators' performance against contractual criteria and target measures.

One element of that performance component is the SQR Regime, which was fully implemented for Avanti in April 2023. This regime is entirely separate from the operational performance regime which incentivise the operator to manage on-time running and cancellation levels. To date no fees have been paid to Avanti under the SQR regime. The first period to be assessed to determine the Performance Fee are the scores for April to October 2023. The evaluation process for this period is underway.

■ Avanti West Coast: Communication**Gavin Newlands:**[\[10462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has had discussions with Avanti West Coast on their internal communications strategy since 10 January 2024.

Huw Merriman:

Senior officials are having discussions with Avanti West Coast relating to recent issues following an internal presentation that was leaked which concerned its contractual Service Quality Regime. Ministers and senior officials are also speaking to First Rail Holdings (Avanti's parent company).

■ **Aviation: Fuels**

Louise Haigh: [\[10856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when his Department plans to publish a formal response to the Pathway to net zero aviation: Developing the UK sustainable aviation fuel mandate consultation.

Anthony Browne:

Following the close of the consultation in September 2023, the department has made significant progress in updating the evidence base and finalising the design of the Mandate. I can confirm that the government response will be published in spring 2024.

Louise Haigh: [\[10857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to his Department's press release entitled New measures to support sustainable aviation fuel industry, published 4 September 2023, how many commercial sustainable aviation fuel plants are under construction.

Anthony Browne:

There are currently two commercial-scale sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) plants operational or under construction in the UK. The Government's Advanced Fuels Fund has allocated £135m across 13 projects to support private investment in UK SAF projects by overcoming perceived technological and construction risks and will support our industry shared aim to have at least five commercial SAF plants under construction in the UK by 2025.

Louise Haigh: [\[10858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress his Department has made towards its aim of having at least five sustainable aviation fuel plants in production by 2025.

Anthony Browne:

Government and industry have a shared ambition to see at least five sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) plants under construction by 2025. There are currently two commercial-scale SAF plants operational or under construction in the UK, Phillips66 and Kew. We are supporting the development of the industry by driving demand through a SAF mandate which will be introduced in 2025, requiring at least 10% of jet fuel to be from sustainable sources by 2030. Government has awarded 13 potential SAF projects a share of £135m through the Advanced Fuels Fund (AFF), to support

them to reach commercial scale. Government has also committed to consult on a revenue certainty mechanism to further support the industry.

■ Department for Transport: Equality

Neil O'Brien: [\[10259\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many equalities impact assessments his Department completed in each of the last five years for which data is available.

Anthony Browne:

The Department does not hold a central record of Equality Impact Assessments that have been completed.

■ Driving Licences: Applications

Fleur Anderson: [\[10557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make it his policy to include (a) information on and (b) opt-in forms for (i) organ, (ii) stem cell and (iii) blood donation with DVLA application forms.

Guy Opperman:

Following a request from the National Health Blood and Transplant Service (NHSBT), the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) introduced a process to enable driving licence applicants to register their details on the NHS Organ Donor Register. This can be done when applying for a driving licence using DVLA's paper or online services. When an applicant notifies the DVLA that they wish to register as an organ donor, this is recorded on their driving licence and the NHS Organ Donor Register.

The Department remains happy to consider a similar process for stem cell and blood donation should such a request be received.

■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

Tracey Crouch: [\[10087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department plans to take to help increase accessibility of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Anthony Browne:

The Government is committed to ensuring that all electric vehicle drivers can easily find public chargepoints that they can use. The Government and industry have supported the installation of over 53,600 publicly available charging devices.

The Publicly Available Standard (PAS) 1899 provides specifications on designing and installing accessible chargepoints. It also considers chargepoints in the context of their wider built environment, to ensure that the needs of other road and pavement users are reflected.

The Government will continue to monitor progress to assess whether further intervention is required, including through a 24-month review into implementation of PAS 1899.

The Government is actively encouraging local authorities, and other relevant parties, to incorporate accessibility into their procurement models, including through the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund. This £381 million fund will support local authorities to work with industry to ensure that the transition to EVs takes place in every part of the country.

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[10558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that electric vehicle charging stations are accessible to disabled motorists.

Anthony Browne:

The Government is committed to ensuring that all electric vehicle drivers can easily use public chargepoints. There are now over 53,600 available.

The Publicly Available Standard (PAS) 1899 provides specifications on designing and installing accessible chargepoints. It also considers chargepoints in the context of their wider built environment to ensure that the needs of other road and pavement users are reflected.

The Government is actively encouraging local authorities, and other relevant parties, to incorporate accessibility into their procurement models, especially as part of applications for the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund.

The Government will continue to monitor progress to assess whether further intervention is required, including through a 24-month review into implementation of PAS 1899.

■ **Menston Station: Access**

Philip Davies:

[\[10071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when the Access For All works at Menston railway station will be completed.

Huw Merriman:

We are committed to delivering the Menston Access for All programme in full.

Network Rail currently expect work to start on site in late March 2024 and completion is planned for late February 2025.

■ **Motor Vehicles: Insurance**

Nadia Whittome:

[\[10962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with representatives of car insurers on the affordability of car insurance renewals for older drivers.

Guy Opperman:

Department for Transport officials regularly liaise with representatives of the motor insurance industry on a variety of issues such as the cost of insurance.

It is the responsibility of individual motor insurers to set their premiums and the terms and conditions of their policies. The Government does not intervene or seek to control the market.

However, the Government is determined that insurers should treat customers fairly. Firms are required to do so under the Financial Conduct Authority rules.

■ **Parking: Pedestrian Areas**

Ian Byrne:

[10685]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference his Department's consultation on Pavement parking: options for change, which closed on 22 November 2020, when he plans to publish his response to the consultation; and whether he plans to bring forward legislative proposals to prohibit pavement parking.

Guy Opperman:

The Department has been considering all the views expressed in response to our consultation and we are currently working through the policy options and the possible legislative opportunities for delivering them and as soon as those matters are certain we will publish our formal response.

The formal consultation response will be available to view at:

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/managing-pavement-parking.

■ **Public Transport**

Chi Onwurah:

[10115]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he is taking steps to help increase access to public transport for people who (a) unemployed, (b) have a low household income and (c) cannot drive.

Guy Opperman:

The government has taken many steps to ensure that public transport is affordable for people across the country. These include the recent announcement of a further £1 billion, redirected from HS2 by reason of the Prime Minister's Network North announcement, to deliver better bus services in the North and the Midlands. This funding will make services more frequent, more reliable, cheaper, and easier to use. This is part of over £4.5 billion announced by the government to support and improve bus services since 2020.

In addition, in January 2023 the Department introduced the £2 cap on single bus fares in England outside of London, since extended until the end of 2024, taking total government funding to deliver the cap to nearly £600 million.

Public Transport: Automation**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[10603\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if his Department will take steps to provide funding for the (a) development and (b) implementation of driverless (i) underground trains, (ii) overground trains, (iii) metro systems and (iv) other public transport.

Huw Merriman:

Whilst there are a number of automated light railway systems in the UK, such as the Docklands Light Railway in London, the implementation of such systems have not been deployed on the main line network due to their complexity.

The Department has no plans to provide specific funding for the development or implementation of driverless technology on existing light rail.

Railway Stations: Ferryhill**Louise Haigh:**[\[10193\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to page 25 of the policy paper entitled Network North, published on 4 October 2023, whether the reference to the reopening of Beeching lines will include the new Ferryhill railway station in County Durham that was listed in his Department's news story entitled Moving Ahead to Reopen Railway Lines and Stations, published June 2022.

Huw Merriman:

A new station will be built at Ferryhill under Network North. This is referred to at paragraph 52 of the Network North policy paper.

Railways: Burton and Leicester**Louise Haigh:**[\[10194\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to page 25 of the policy paper entitled Network North, published on 4 October 2023, whether the reference to the reopening of Beeching lines will include the Ivanhoe railway line between Leicester and Burton that was listed in his Department's news story entitled Moving Ahead to Reopen Railway Lines and Stations, published June 2022.

Huw Merriman:

The Ivanhoe Line will be reopened under Network North. This is referred to at paragraph 63 of the Network North policy paper.

Railways: Midlands**Louise Haigh:**[\[10196\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to page 25 paragraph G of the policy paper entitled Network North, published on 4 October 2023, whether he plans for Waverley to be a new railway station on the existing line between Sheffield and Worksop; and whether the reference to Waverley will include the Barrow Hill railway line between

Sheffield and Chesterfield hat was listed in his Department's news story entitled Moving Ahead to Reopen Railway Lines and Stations, published June 2022.

Huw Merriman:

The new Waverley station will be located on the existing Sheffield to Worksop line, between Darnall and Woodhouse stations. This station project will be developed separately from the wider Barrow Hill line reopening project. Should timetabling on the route permit, the new Barrow Hill service will call at Waverley to enable a higher frequency, all-day service.

■ **Railways: Postal Services**

Gavin Newlands:

[\[10464\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions have taken place between his Department, Royal Mail Group Ltd, and rolling stock leasing companies on future rail freight capacity for (a) parcels and (b) letter traffic.

Huw Merriman:

My officials have had general discussions with rail freight industry stakeholders, including a rolling stock leasing company, on various initiatives stakeholders are planning or undertaking for transporting parcels and letters by rail freight. Express Freight was identified as an emerging core market in our recently announced rail freight growth target and we are keen to support its development. In 2022 Varamis Ltd was awarded a grant through our 'First of a Kind' initiative to support its activities in developing express rail freight.

■ **Railways: Stocksbridge**

Louise Haigh:

[\[10195\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to page 25 paragraph G of the policy paper entitled Network North, published on 4 October 2023, whether the reference to Stocksbridge will include projects that were previously awarded funding to restore the Don Valley railway line between Sheffield and Stocksbridge in October 2021.

Huw Merriman:

The reference to Stocksbridge encompasses the commitment to deliver the Don Valley line, as detailed at paragraph 52 of the Network North policy paper.

■ **Railways: Stone (Staffordshire)**

Sir Gavin Williamson:

[\[10113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information his Department holds on the number of passengers that have passed through Stone, Staffordshire on trains since 2009.

Huw Merriman:

The Department holds entry/exit data for passengers using Stone train station on a financial year basis. The number of passengers entering/exiting Stone station grew

from 48,054 in 2009-10 to 214,040 in 2022-23. Whilst West Midlands Trains has been the operator since 2017, any data prior to this relates to London Midland.

■ Railways: Switzerland

Andrew Rosindell: [\[10043\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has met with his Swiss counterparts regarding the proposed train link between London St. Pancras and Basel.

Huw Merriman:

The Government fully supports the growth of international rail services and regularly engages with European partners to discuss the potential for new routes. In May 2023 the Secretary of State met his Swiss counterpart and discussed the potential for a future direct rail connection between the UK and Switzerland. My officials have subsequently met with and continue to work with Swiss counterparts to explore this further.

The potential for any new international services is subject to commercial appetite. My officials stand ready to engage with any prospective new operators where there are credible commercial proposals for new services.

■ Railways: West Yorkshire

Louise Haigh: [\[10197\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make an assessment of the extent to which plans for the new West Yorkshire mass transit system referenced on page 25 of the policy paper entitled Network North, published on 4 October 2023, differ to those set out in Appendix B of the Growth Plan 2022; and whether he has made a recent estimate of the expected timetable for the completion of that project.

Huw Merriman:

The plans set out as item 'c' on page 25 of the policy paper Network North, published 4 October 2023, and identified as number 104 in Appendix B of the Growth Plan 2022 are identical. Both refer to the same project ie. West Yorkshire Mass Transit. West Yorkshire Combined Authority aim to deliver a new mass transit system for West Yorkshire by 2040.

Louise Haigh: [\[10198\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to paragraph 40c of the policy paper entitled Network North, published on 4 October 2023, whether the new West Yorkshire mass transit system is guaranteed to progress into all subsequent stages of development; and whether further development of this project might be approved or declined.

Huw Merriman:

The Government is committed to the development of the West Yorkshire mass transit system and savings from HS2 have been set aside to fund its development and delivery. Government projects follow the Treasury's Green Book business case

model in order to ensure they deliver their intended outputs and benefits, and the cost is justified from the outset.

■ Roads: Ely

Louise Haigh: [\[10188\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the Ely Junction upgrade scheme has entered the Road Improvement Strategy (a) programme and (b) development stage; whether formal approvals have been granted; and whether it will progress into the next strategy phase.

Guy Opperman:

It is important to be clear that the Ely Junction upgrade scheme is a rail project and not a road project. The recently announced Network North programme of investment included confirmation of government's support for the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement (EACE) programme and the substantial benefits this will bring, including a doubling of passenger services on the Ely to Kings Lynn and Ipswich to Peterborough routes together with additional freight paths into the Port of Felixstowe.

Network Rail have developed the scheme to Outline Business Case stage; next steps will involve further investment case development and delivery planning.

■ Roads: Midlands

Louise Haigh: [\[10185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the policy paper entitled Network North, published on 4 October 2023, whether the 10 new smaller Midlands road projects have entered the Road Improvement Strategy (a) programme and (b) development stage; whether formal approvals have been granted; and whether it will progress into the next strategy phase.

Louise Haigh: [\[10186\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to page 32 of Network North, published on 4 October 2023, what estimate he has made of the (a) cost and (b) completion date of the 10 smaller road schemes in the Midlands.

Guy Opperman:

All of these schemes are being promoted for consideration for potential funding as part of the Department's Major Road Network/ Large Local Majors (MRN/ LLM) programme. None of the schemes will form part of the Government's Road Investment Strategy.

The position with each scheme is set out in the following table:

SCHEME NAME	COST	COMPLETION DATE	NEXT BUSINESS CASE STAGE
A511 Growth Corridor	£62.72m	January 2027	Full Business Case

SCHEME NAME	COST	COMPLETION DATE	NEXT BUSINESS CASE STAGE
A614/A6097 Corridor scheme	£34.44m	December 2026	Full Business Case
North Hykeham Relief Road	£193.71m	November 2028	Full Business Case
A509 Isham Bypass	£111.31m	December 2027	Outline Business Case
Chesterfield – Staveley Regeneration Route	£166.40m	November 2027	Outline Business Case
A43 Northampton – Kettering phase 3	£28.58m	June 2028	Strategic Outline Case
Shrewsbury North Western Relief Road	Tbc – subject to Shropshire Council’s procurement exercise	October 2026	Full Business Case
A4123 Birchley Island	£30.13m	December 2026	Full Business Case
A426/A4071 Avon Mill/Hunters Lane improvements	£24.28m	August 2026	Outline Business Case
A454 between Wolverhampton and East Park Gateway	£53.38m	September 2027	Outline Business Case

The table provides the latest cost estimate and completion date provided to the Department. These may be subject to change.

A conditional offer of funding for a scheme is made by the Department upon approval of an Outline Business Case. Final confirmation of funding is made upon approval of a Final Business Case.

■ Roads: Shrewsbury

Daniel Kawczynski:

[\[10775\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department holds information on external assessments made of the potential impact of the construction of the North West Relief Road on water supplies to Shrewsbury.

Guy Opperman:

The Department for Transport does not hold information on external assessments made of the potential impact of the construction of the North West Relief Road on

water supplies to Shrewsbury. Any information of this nature would be gathered by the local authority, Shropshire Council, not the Department for Transport.

■ **Shipping: Isle of Man**

Gavin Newlands: [\[10461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department has had discussions with the Isle of Man Government on employment practices on Isle of Man Steam Packet Company passenger ships that use UK ports.

Guy Opperman:

My Department has had no such discussions.

■ **Shipping: North Sea Oil**

Kenny MacAskill: [\[10550\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what (a) supervision there is and (b) checks there are of operators and vessels transporting North Sea oil for refining.

Guy Opperman:

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) is responsible for ensuring that UK Flagged ships are compliant with all the relevant international conventions and any other additional UK requirements. The ships would have appropriate certification with periodical surveys/audits being carried out by the MCA or one of the UK's recognised organisations. Companies operating these ships are subject to audits on an annual basis by the MCA or one of the UK's recognised organisations.

Foreign flagged ships would be subject to port state control inspections when they call at a UK port. This is to ensure that they are compliant with all applicable international conventions. The flag state of the vessel is responsible for the oversight of the operating companies.

This is applicable to all ships operating in the North Sea irrespective of whether or not they carry North Sea oil.

Kenny MacAskill: [\[10551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will publish data held by his Department on the ownership and flag status of ships transporting (a) Forties Pipeline oil and (b) UK North Sea oil generally for refining overseas.

Guy Opperman:

The Department for Transport does not hold data on ships transporting Forties Pipeline oil and UK North Sea oil generally for refining overseas.

■ **Train Operating Companies: Subsidies**

Alan Brown: [\[10478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much his Department provided in operating subsidies to each train operating company in each year since 2010.

Huw Merriman:

The Office of Rail and Road publish data on franchise payments made to, or received from, operators on their Rail Industry Finance data portal. The portal can be accessed on their website. The tables which answer the question are:

- Table 7273: Government subsidy by franchised passenger operator (up to 2018-19)
- Table 7226: Franchised Passenger Train Operator Finances since 2015-16 by Franchise

TREASURY**■ Cycle to Work Scheme: Fees and Charges**

Gavin Newlands: [\[10463\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 15 November 2023 to Question 260 on Cycle to Work Scheme: Fees and Charges, what assessment his Department has made of the impact of administration fees charged by providers of services operated under the Cycle to Work scheme on independent cycle shops.

Gareth Davies:

HM Treasury has not made any such assessment.

■ Economic Situation

Alexander Stafford: [\[10329\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what information his Department holds on the economic output of (a) Rother Valley constituency (b) South Yorkshire and (c) the UK in each year since 1994.

Gareth Davies:

The Office for National Statistics publishes estimates of Gross Value Added (GVA). GVA data for Rother Valley and South Yorkshire is published by the ONS from 1998 onwards, and can be found on the ONS website, as follows:

- Rother Valley Parliamentary Constituency [[Disaggregating UK annual subnational gross value added \(GVA\) to lower levels of geography - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)].

- South Yorkshire [[Regional economic activity by gross domestic product, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)].

The ONS publishes UK Gross Domestic Product. This is available from 1955 at: [[Gross Domestic Product: chained volume measures: Seasonally adjusted £m - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)]

■ Individual Savings Accounts: Help to Buy Scheme

Chi Onwurah: [\[10806\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he plans to introduce a new help-to-buy ISA.

Bim Afolami:

The Help to Buy: ISA (launched in 2015) allows prospective first-time buyers to obtain a government bonus of up to £3,000 towards their first home. This scheme closed to new accounts on 30 November 2019, but existing Help to Buy: ISA holders can continue saving into their account until 30 November 2029 and can claim the government bonus until November 2030.

Since April 2017, adults under 40 have been able to open a Lifetime ISA (LISA) and save up to £4,000 each year until they reach 50. The Government provides a 25 per cent bonus on all LISA contributions within these limits. Savings invested in a LISA can be withdrawn from the age of 60 but funds can be withdrawn at an earlier stage if used as a deposit for the account holder's first home on a property worth up to £450,000. Help to Buy: ISA account holders will be able to transfer their funds to a LISA within the LISA's £4,000 annual limit.

The Chancellor keeps all tax policy under review.

■ Members: Correspondence

Derek Twigg: [\[10733\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to his oral answer of 19 December 2023 on Reducing Taxes, Official Report, Column 1220, when he plans to write to the hon. Member for Halton.

Nigel Huddleston:

The Chancellor responded to the honourable Member on 23 January 2024.

■ Money laundering and terrorism

Dame Margaret Hodge: [\[9989\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what his Department's planned timescale is for publishing the outcome of its consultation entitled Reforming anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing supervision.

Bim Afolami:

Following the Treasury's consultation on reforming the UK's Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing supervisory regime which closed September 2023, the Government aims to respond in the coming months. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to respond to the consultation. The evidence we received reinforced the importance of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing supervision in reducing economic crime.

■ Motor Vehicles: Insurance

Nadia Whittome: [\[10963\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a price cap on insurance premiums for elderly drivers.

Bim Afolami:

Insurers make commercial decisions about the pricing of insurance based on their assessment of the likelihood and expected cost of a claim. The Government does not intervene in these commercial decisions by insurers as this could damage competition in the market.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) is the independent regulator and responsible for supervising the insurance industry. The FCA have introduced several reforms, including the Consumer Duty rules, to ensure consumers are treated fairly in regard to pricing.

In 2012, the Government agreed the Age Agreement with the insurance sector. This signposts older consumers struggling to access motor insurance to specialist providers.

■ Music and Theatre: Tickets

Thangam Debbonaire: [\[10163\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an estimate of the potential impact of increases in the cost of (a) live music and (b) theatre tickets in the last 12 months on inflation.

Bim Afolami:

The independent Office for National Statistics is responsible for producing and publishing inflation figures. Information on price changes for cultural services can be found here: [Consumer price inflation tables - Office for National Statistics](#)

■ National Insurance Contributions: Software

James Murray: [\[10946\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 18 December 2023 to Question 6933 on National Insurance Contributions: Software, whether an updated version of HMRC's Basic PAYE Tools was available to download from gov.uk by 6 January 2024.

James Murray: [\[10947\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 18 December 2023 to Question 6933 on National Insurance Contributions: Software, if he will make an estimate of (a) how many (i) payroll software developers and (ii) employers were unable to make the necessary changes to implement the changes to National Insurance contributions announced at the Autumn Statement 2023 on time and (b) how much resulting customer refunds will be.

James Murray:[\[10948\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 18 December 2023 to Question 6933 on National Insurance Contributions: Software, if he will make an estimate of how many and what proportion of employers have implemented the changes to National Insurance contributions announced in the Autumn Statement 2023.

Nigel Huddleston:

Following the changes to National Insurance contributions (NICs) which were announced in Autumn Statement 2023, HMRC's Basic PAYE Tool went live as planned on 3 January and is available for download on gov.uk.

HMRC provided its assessment of the impacts of the changes on businesses via a Tax Information and Impact Note published alongside the National Insurance Contributions (Reduction in Rates) Bill.

■ **Pensions: Hong Kong****Mr Alistair Carmichael:**[\[10751\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make representations to (a) HSBC and (b) other UK-based pension providers to accept early withdrawal requests from Hong Kongers on the British National (Overseas) visa scheme who intend to obtain an indefinite leave to remain in the UK.

Bim Afolami:

Ministers engage regularly with the UK financial sector on a range of issues. The root of the problem is the Chinese Government's decision not to recognise the BN(O) passport as a valid identity document in Hong Kong. The UK firmly opposes the discrimination of BN(O)s in this way. We continue to urge the Hong Kong authorities to facilitate early drawdown of funds as is the case for other Hong Kong residents who move overseas permanently.

■ **Plastics: Taxation****Ruth Jones:**[\[10667\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to HMRC's consultation on Plastic Packaging Tax - chemical recycling and adoption of a mass balance approach, published on 18 July 2023, when he plans to publish his response.

Gareth Davies:

The government's consultation on whether to accept a mass balance approach in relation to chemically recycled plastic for the purposes of the Plastic Packaging Tax closed on 10 October 2023. The government would like to thank respondents for their representations.

The government is currently analysing responses and will publish a summary of responses document and next steps in due course.

WALES**■ Tata Steel: Port Talbot****Jo Stevens:****[10841]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, whether the Tata Steel and Port Talbot Transition Board has met monthly.

David T C Davies:

The Tata Steel and Port Talbot Transition Board has been set up to support those affected by Tata Steel's decarbonisation Transition and will be supported by up to £100 million from UK Government and Tata Steel. From that funding, £80 million is provided by the UK Government and £20 million will be provided by Tata.

I chair the Board, and it had its inaugural meeting on 19 October 2023, and the Board reconvened for its second meeting on 30 November 2023. The third Board meeting will be held on 1 February 2024. The Board will continue to meet regularly, to help ensure that those who are affected are receiving the support that they need. Both of the sub-groups held their first official meetings the week commencing 22 January 2024.

Jo Stevens:**[10842]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will publish the minutes of the Tata Steel and Port Talbot Transition Board meetings in (a) October and (b) November 2023.

David T C Davies:

The Tata Steel and Port Talbot Transition Board has been set up to support those affected by Tata Steel's decarbonisation Transition and will be supported by up to £100 million from UK Government and Tata Steel. I chair the Board, with the Minister for the Economy of Wales and the Secretary of State for Levelling Up acting as deputy chairs. The Board's membership also consists of representatives from Neath Port Talbot Council, Tata Steel, the local Member of Parliament and Member of the Senedd. Trade Union representatives also attend as observers of the Board meetings.

In order to facilitate open dialogue on sensitive issues, the minutes are not published but Joint Statements are published after each meeting which summarise the topics discussed and who was in attendance.

The first joint statement is available here: [Statement on behalf of the Tata Steel/ Port Talbot Transition Board - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statements/2023/10/23-statement-on-behalf-of-the-tata-steel-port-talbot-transition-board).

The second joint statement is available here: [Tata Steel / Port Talbot Transition Board Statement - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statements/2023/11/23-tata-steel-port-talbot-transition-board-statement).

Jo Stevens:**[10843]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will publish the minutes of future meetings of the Tata Steel and Port Talbot Transition Board.

David T C Davies:

The Tata Steel and Port Talbot Transition Board has been set up to support those affected by Tata Steel's decarbonisation Transition and will be supported by up to £100 million from UK Government and Tata Steel. I chair the Board, with the Minister for the Economy of Wales and the Secretary of State for Levelling Up acting as deputy chairs. The Board's membership also consists of representatives from Neath Port Talbot Council, Tata Steel, the local Member of Parliament and Member of the Senedd. Trade Union representatives also attend as observers of the Board meetings.

In order to facilitate open dialogue on sensitive issues, the minutes of previous meetings have not been published but Joint Statements are published after each meeting which summarise the topics discussed and who was in attendance. This approach will be adopted for future meetings.

Jo Stevens:**[10844]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will publish the terms of reference of the Tata Steel and Port Talbot Transition Board.

David T C Davies:

The Tata Steel and Port Talbot Transition Board has been set up to support those affected by Tata Steel's decarbonisation Transition and will be supported by up to £100 million from UK Government and Tata Steel. The terms of reference of the Tata Steel and Port Talbot Transition Board have been published on the Neath Port Talbot Council website and are available here: [Tata Steel / Port Talbot Transition Board - Terms of reference – Neath Port Talbot Council \(npt.gov.uk\)](https://www.npt.gov.uk/terms-of-reference).

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES**■ Employment: Fertility****Angela Crawley:****[10849]**

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of fertility treatment on workplace rights for LGBT families.

Angela Crawley:**[10850]**

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether her Department has made an assessment of the effectiveness of the Equality Act 2010 at supporting working LGBT families accessing fertility treatment.

Stuart Andrew:

It is crucial that we ensure everyone is treated fairly in the workplace, so that they can thrive and reach their full potential, including LGBT people undergoing - or seeking to undergo - fertility treatment.

While no specific assessment has been made, the Government has set out in the Women's Health Strategy our commitment to remove the additional financial burdens

of self-funding artificial insemination on female same-sex couples, so that they are able to access NHS-funded fertility services in a more equitable way. It is for Integrated Care Boards to implement the commitment to improve access to NHS-funded fertility treatment for female same sex couples, taking account of the relevant equality legislation. Media coverage of, and stakeholder interest in, these developments should help raise awareness, including amongst employers, about the importance of fertility treatment for LGBT family formation.

As part of our Inclusive Britain strategy, published in March 2022, we launched an Inclusion at Work Panel last year aimed at helping employers achieve fairness and inclusion in the workplace.

If an individual feels that they have been unlawfully discriminated against in the workplace, they may wish to contact the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas). They may also wish to contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service which provides free bespoke advice and in-depth support to individuals with discrimination or equality concerns.

■ **Members: Correspondence**

John Penrose: [\[10073\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, when she plans to respond to the letters dated (a) 13 November and (b) 13 December 2023 from the hon. Member from Weston-super-Mare on behalf of a constituent on the conversion therapy ban.

Stuart Andrew:

I can confirm receipt of the letters my Hon. Friend refers to, having had them passed to me only this week. I have now responded to these letters, and I apologise for the delay in responding.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ **Department for Work and Pensions: Equality**

Neil O'Brien: [\[10252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many equalities impact assessments his Department completed in each of the last five years for which data is available.

Paul Maynard:

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (the Duty) all public authorities, including Government departments, are required by law to ensure that they have due regard to certain equality considerations when carrying out their functions. While 'equality impact assessments' may be produced, there is no legal requirement for duty assessments to be recorded in a specific format.

Notwithstanding this, the information requested is not held centrally in the Department and to provide what might be available would incur disproportionate cost.

The Department promotes awareness of the Duty and relevant analytical and other tools to help ensure compliance with it.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: India

Alistair Strathern:

[\[10969\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to his Department's publication, DWP's ministerial overseas travel, July to September 2023, published on 14 December 2023, how much of the £4,295.27 spent on his visit to India from 18 to 23 July 2023 was spent on air travel.

Paul Maynard:

The total spent on air travel during the Secretary of State's visit to India was £5,366.44 (this includes internal flights in India).

The Department has noticed an administrative error in the publication of the *Ministerial Overseas Travel, July to September 2023*. The Department has taken immediate action to update the publication to show that the total cost of Secretary of State's visit was £5,751.54.

■ Disability: Government Assistance

Virginia Crosbie:

[\[10960\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps he is taking to support people with hidden disabilities.

Mims Davies:

People with non-visible disabilities can experience difficulties or be disadvantaged in their ability to access services. Their difficulty can be exacerbated because service provider personnel, and the general public, are unaware of their disability and any different or additional needs they may have. Non-visible disabilities are varied, and can include mental health conditions, learning disabilities or different cognitive functions.

Some individuals prefer to make their non-visible disability known to others by wearing a visible indication of their disability - the Sunflower Lanyard scheme is one such option. During the pandemic, the green Sunflower Lanyard scheme gained popularity to indicate an individual's non-visible disability in relation to mask exemption. The Sunflower Lanyard scheme is recognised by some retailers and transport authorities as an indication that a customer or passenger may need additional help because of a non-visible disability. These measures are intended to increase accessibility to services whilst educating the public about people in their midst, increasing understanding and reducing the stigma of disability and long term health conditions.

However, this is a personal choice and it is not the government's intention to promote any one voluntary scheme nor to suggest that disabled people should feel that they have to make their disability known to others.

The Disability Unit's general work to improve inclusion in society and improve disabled people's lives through the **Disability Action Plan** and the **National Disability Strategy** is aimed at people with both visible and non-visible disabilities.

■ Employment Support Allowance and Universal Credit

Mary Kelly Foy:

[\[10285\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many claimants died after their claims were denied for (a) Employment Support Allowance and (b) Universal Credit in 2023.

Mims Davies:

This information is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Eligibility criteria for Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

■ Employment: Young People

Virginia Crosbie:

[\[10959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the (a) economic inactivity rate, (b) employment rate and (c) unemployment rate was for people aged 16 to 24 in the period between February and April 2010.

Jo Churchill:

The 16-24 UK economic inactivity rate was 36.2% between February and April 2010. The 16-24 employment rate was 50.9% between February and April 2010 and the 16-24 unemployment rate was 20.2%.

Employment and unemployment data is published and available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/summaryoflabourmarketstatistics>

■ Jobcentres: Gower

Tonia Antoniazzi:

[\[10502\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what data his Department holds on the number of job centre clients that have been assisted by an armed forces champion in the Gower constituency in the last 12 months.

Mims Davies:

Since July 2023, 30 members of the local Armed Forces community have been supported in the Gower constituency.

The Armed Forces Champions have specific responsibilities for supporting members of the Armed Forces community, including building staff capability within their districts, personally handling some claims, supporting veterans into work and helping resolve complex cases where necessary.

Every Work Coach is trained on how to provide tailored and personalised support to members of the Armed Forces community and their families, working in partnership with their Armed Forces Champions. In those areas where there are particularly high levels of demand, for example garrison towns, this will form a significant part of the work done in individual Jobcentres.

Please note that the data supplied is derived from unpublished management information, which was collected for internal departmental use only, and has not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard.

■ **Members: Correspondence**

Navendu Mishra: [\[10951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when he plans to respond to the letter of 4 August, 2023 from the hon. Member for Stockport on behalf of a constituent, reference NM21431, on his Department's criteria for the calculation of carers' allowance.

Paul Maynard:

DWP provided a telephone and email response to the office of Navendu Mishra MP on 23 August 2023 in relation to his constituent's enquiry, and a copy has also been issued today by email.

■ **Personal Independence Payment: Appeals**

Richard Burgon: [\[10200\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many appeals against Personal Independence Payment decisions were lapsed by her Department in each of the last five years.

Mims Davies:

A lapsed appeal is where DWP changed the decision in the customer's favour after an appeal was lodged but before it was heard at a tribunal hearing.

The table below provides information on Personal Independence Payment (PIP) appeal registrations and lapsed appeals. Data provided is for the last five financial years.

Table 1: Appeals registered for each financial year and how many were subsequently lapsed

FINANCIAL YEAR	APPEALS REGISTERED	APPEALS SUBSEQUENTLY LAPSED
2018-19	94,000	18,000
2019-20	82,000	27,000
2020-21	55,000	23,000
2021-22	50,000	17,000

FINANCIAL YEAR	APPEALS REGISTERED	APPEALS SUBSEQUENTLY LAPSED
2022-23	81,000	18,000

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 1,000.
2. Data provided is for England and Wales (excluding Scotland).
3. These figures include appeal registrations and decisions for PIP New Claims, Reassessments, Award Reviews and Change of Circumstances. These figures include appeals registered from April 2018 to March 2023 and any lapsed appeals related to these appeal registrations up to the 30 th September 2023, the latest date for which published data is available.
4. Appeals data has been taken from DWP PIP customer system's management information. Therefore, this appeal data may differ from that held by His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service for various reasons such as delays in data recording and other methodological differences in collating and preparing statistics.
5. This data is unpublished data. It should be used with caution, and it may be subject to future revision.

Richard Burgon:[\[10201\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether his Department has made an assessment of the reasons for Personal Independence Payment decisions being overturned at mandatory reconsideration in 2022-23.

Mims Davies:

The reasons for Personal Independence Payment decisions being overturned at Mandatory Reconsideration (MR) are evaluated locally on a case-by-case basis, and we continue to learn from this. The Department's overarching focus at the MR stage is on ensuring that each application is thoroughly reviewed, including considering all available evidence and contacting the claimant where necessary. Decisions will be changed at the MR stage where the evidence supports this, resolving disputes as early as possible and reducing the need to appeal.

■ **Personal Independence Payment: Syndactyly****Neil O'Brien:**[\[10247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people are claiming PIP for disability related to syndactyly.

Mims Davies:

The information requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost. Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is based on the needs

arising from a long-term health condition or disability, not the health condition or disability itself.

■ **Social Rented Housing: Tenants**

Sir Stephen Timms: [\[10700\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate he has made of the number of social housing tenants in rent arrears due to 53 rent payment weeks in 2024.

Mims Davies:

The Department does not hold the data requested.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Armed Forces**

Luke Pollard: [\[10335\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether his Department has made an estimate of the cost of disregarding in full compensation awarded to wounded service people and veterans under the War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation schemes as income under (a) Income Support, (b) Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, (c) Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, (d) Working Tax Credit and (d) Pension Credit.

Luke Pollard: [\[10336\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate he has made of the annual cost to the public purse of fully disregarding as income compensation awarded to wounded service people and veterans under the War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation schemes under Universal Credit.

Mims Davies:

Universal Credit replaced a number of benefits and tax credits. Within Universal Credit it was decided that War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Payments would not be taken into account as income in calculating the award.

Guaranteed Income Payments, Service Attributable Pensions and service-attributable, non-taxable Service Invalidity Pensions are also not taken into account in the Universal Credit award.

However, it has never been the intention that the rules around the treatment of income, or any other rules, should be changed across the legacy and other benefits to align them with Universal Credit.

Social care payments are the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Care.

■ State Retirement Pensions: Women

Alistair Strathern: [\[10968\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of compensating women born in the 1950s affected by changes to state pension age legislation.

Paul Maynard:

The Ombudsman is considering this matter, he has not completed his final report and has yet to make any recommendations. When the report is complete the Government will carefully consider it.

It would not be appropriate to comment on the investigation and section 7(2) of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 states that Ombudsman investigations "shall be conducted in private".

■ Universal Credit

Sir Stephen Timms: [\[10699\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to ensure that the payment of Universal Credit is adjusted in 2024 to take into account the 53-week rent year.

Sir Stephen Timms: [\[10701\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make it his policy that social housing tenants receiving universal credit have eligible housing costs paid for 53 rent weeks in 2024.

Mims Davies:

Universal Credit always converts weekly amounts to monthly sums using 52 weeks. This may lead to a slight advantage to the claimant when converting weekly incomes and to a slight disadvantage when dealing with outgoings. The system is used because it is simple to operate and understand.

Discretionary Housing Payments can be paid to those entitled to Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs. Since 2011, the government has provided nearly £1.7 billion in Discretionary Housing Payments to local authorities.

■ Universal Credit: Gower

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[10223\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 17 January 2024 to Question 9262 on Universal Credit: Gower, how many universal credit recipients were subject to sanctions in Gower constituency in the last 12 months.

Jo Churchill:

Statistics are published regularly showing the number of Universal Credit full service claimants with a payment that has been reduced due to a sanction. These can be

found in the UC sanction rates dataset on [Stat-Xplore](#) and are available by Westminster parliamentary constituency monthly from April 2019 to August 2023.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

EDUCATION

■ Higher Education Student Support

**Minister of State (Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education)
(Robert Halfon):**

[\[HCWS209\]](#)

I am announcing details of student fees and support arrangements for higher-education students undertaking a course of study in the 2024/25 academic year starting on 1 August 2024 together with further help to address cost-of-living pressures in 2023/24. Also, I am confirming that eligibility for student finance is being extended to children granted indefinite leave to remain (ILR) where their parent has been granted ILR as a victim of domestic abuse or as a bereaved partner.

The Government recognises the additional cost-of-living pressures that have arisen this year and that are impacting students. We have already made £276 million of student premium and mental health funding available for the 2023/24 academic year to support successful outcomes for students including disadvantaged students.

We are now making a further £10 million of one-off support available to support student mental health and hardship funding. This funding will complement the help universities are providing through their own bursary, scholarship and hardship support schemes.

In addition, we are investing hundreds of millions of pounds additional funding over the three year period from 2022-23 to 2024-25 to support high quality teaching and facilities including in science and engineering, subjects that support the NHS, and degree apprenticeships. This includes the largest increase in government funding for the HE sector to support students and teaching in over a decade.

I can confirm today that maximum tuition fees for undergraduate students for the 2024/25 academic year in England will be maintained at the levels that apply in the 2023/24 academic year, the seventh year in succession that fees have been frozen. This means that the maximum level of tuition fees for a standard full-time course will remain at £9,250 for the 2024/25 academic year to deliver better value for students and to keep the cost of higher education down.

Thanks to the progress we have made on the Prime Minister's five priorities, inflation has more than halved. Maximum undergraduate loans for living costs will be increased by forecast inflation, 2.5%, in 2024/25. And the same increase will apply to the maximum disabled students' allowance for students with disabilities undertaking full-time and part-time undergraduate courses in 2024/25. Maximum grants for students with child or adult dependants who are attending full-time undergraduate courses will also increase by 2.5% in 2024/25.

We are also increasing support for students undertaking postgraduate courses in 2024/25. Maximum loans for students starting master's degree and doctoral degree courses from 1 August 2024 onwards will be increased by 2.5% in 2024/25. And the

same increase will apply to the maximum disabled students' allowance for postgraduate students with disabilities in 2024/25.

The 2.5% increase follows standard procedure to base annual increases in support on forecasted inflation. We have continued to increase maximum loans and grants for living costs each year with the most support for students from the lowest income families. Decisions on student finance have had to be taken to ensure the system remains financially sustainable and the costs of higher education are shared fairly between students and taxpayers, not all of whom have benefited from going to university.

I am also announcing today a number of other changes to eligibility rules for student support and home-fee status that will benefit certain vulnerable groups of students.

Students who have been granted indefinite leave to enter (ILE) as a victim of domestic abuse and their children who are granted ILE will also qualify for student support and home fee status.

I am also confirming today that home fee status and tuition fee support is being extended to British citizens born in the Chagos Islands, and their direct descendants who are also British citizens.

In addition, students gaining settled status part-way through their course will qualify for student support and home-fee status for the remainder of their course.

Looking forward to the 2025/26 academic year, the new Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will create a single funding system to help students pay for college or university courses, and train, retrain and upskill flexibly over their working lives. In tandem, the Government will continue to recognise the importance of loans for living costs and targeted grants to support access and participation in higher education.

That is why, under the LLE, the Government will extend the scope of loans for living costs, and grants for students with adult and child dependants, making this support available for all designated full-time and part-time courses and modules that require in-person attendance. This will ensure that people will be able to develop new skills and gain new qualifications at a time that is right for them.

Further details of the student support package for 2024/25 are set out in the attached document.

I am laying regulations implementing changes to student finance support for undergraduates and postgraduates for 2024/25 today. These regulations will be subject to Parliamentary procedure.

Attachments:

1. Higher Education Fees and Student Support for 2024 [Higher Education Fees and Student Support for 2024-25 - Details.docx]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Correction to WPQ 182223**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Americas, Caribbean and the Overseas Territories (David Rutley): [\[HCWS208\]](#)

On 2 May 2023, the FCDO responded to WPQ 182223 in relation to how much the FCDO spent on staff training related to diversity and inclusion in 2022.

The figure provided (£25,412.96) was inaccurate and an error. The figure was incorrectly provided as that amount had been charged to the account code relating to training in the team that was responsible for diversity and inclusion work in 2022. Recent work has identified that none of the transactions put to this account code during this time period were actually diversity and inclusion training, and instead related to running costs of that team such as conference attendance.

The FCDO does not have a centrally organised diversity and inclusion training offer, instead we use courses provided via Civil Service Learning.

Directorates and posts have devolved training budgets which could have been used on training needs but information is not collected centrally on whether this spend relates to equality and diversity training.

The FCDO has contributed to the Cabinet Office led Civil Service Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Expenditure Review, which is assessing current spending on EDI activity across the Civil Service to ensure that spend is providing a return on investment and that activity is being carried out in the most efficient and cost effective way.

I am apologising for this error and clarifying the position in relation to diversity and inclusion training spend in 2022. We have learned from this situation. There has been a change in budget managers in that team and new financial procedures have been put in place to ensure greater accuracy. The department continues to take its responsibility for parliamentary accountability very seriously.

HOME OFFICE**■ Update on actions to improve police standards and culture**

The Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp): [\[HCWS212\]](#)

Last year, on 1 March, I issued a Written Ministerial Statement ([HCWS590](#)) setting out actions being undertaken by the Home Office and partners to improve police standards and culture. This statement provides an update on that work.

The vast majority of police officers and staff perform their vital duties with professionalism, skill and courage. We are fortunate to have so many brave people dedicated to protecting us. However, we must not be complacent, we know that confidence and trust in the police must never be taken for granted.

This is why the Government asked the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) to undertake a 'datawashing' exercise to ensure that all officers and staff employed within policing across the country were checked against the Police National Database (PND) for any new intelligence which forces were previously unaware of.

This week (22 January) the NPCC published the outcomes of this work that represented the largest single integrity screening project undertaken in any national workforce. It is a key step to identify information and intelligence around our workforce and take appropriate action to remove those not fit to work in policing.

Checks were made against 307,452 officers and staff in total.

In well over 99% of cases, no new adverse information was identified.

Of the 461 cases that were referred to a decision-making process, 97 required no further action. Criminal investigations were triggered in nine cases, 88 cases led to disciplinary investigations, 139 others led to a vetting review while 128 cases led to management advice.

The Government has committed to provide further funding to the NPCC to develop an automated and continuous vetting system, enabling the identification of new information on officers and staff to be sent directly, at pace, to the force concerned. The NPCC will continue to work closely with the Home Office to achieve this.

This month will also see the closure of the National Police Chiefs' Council's programme to coordinate and monitor the police service's progress against recommendations made by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in their November 2022 report into vetting, misconduct and misogyny. This follows evidence being submitted to HMICFRS on successful delivery of almost all of the 28 recommendations and 5 Areas for Improvement.

This work has driven significant improvements in force vetting processes and is underpinned by the new statutory Code of Practice for Vetting, strengthened by the College of Policing at the Home Office's request and published in July last year. The revised Code makes clear the expectation on Chief Officers to ensure vetting standards are maintained within their force.

The Vetting Code of Practice is supported by the College's Authorised Professional Practice guidance, or APP. The APP is regularly updated, and the College have now published a revised Vetting APP, currently out for consultation, that will further promote national consistency and the highest standards in police vetting.

To further support the Vetting Code of Practice, the Government is legislating to introduce a statutory requirement for officers to hold and maintain vetting clearance. Individuals who are unable to hold vetting clearance should face dismissal proceedings. Our new regulations will provide a stronger, clearer and more defined process to assist forces.

This is included, and will be delivered, as part of a wider package of reforms, announced as part of the Government's review of the police dismissals process, to strengthen the systems which deal with police misconduct and performance. These include:

- Enabling senior officers to chair misconduct hearings, giving them a greater role in decisions relating to the integrity of their workforce
- Creating a presumption of dismissal where gross misconduct is proven; and
- Prescribing that conviction of certain criminal offences automatically amounting to gross misconduct.

This package of measures is designed not only to improve standards, but efficiency and timeliness as well. The first tranche of these reforms is to be in place this Spring.

It is imperative for public confidence in the police that we have assurance that Professional Standards Departments are tackling misconduct and implementing these reforms. To ensure more rigorous scrutiny, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services has been developing a new inspection methodology looking at force professional standards departments. This will join the existing vetting and counter-corruption inspection arrangements to form a new Integrity Programme, which is due to commence in the new financial year.

Adhering to professional standards is just part of ensuring that those who work in policing deliver a service that is fair, ethical and can be trusted to make decisions in the interest of keeping people safe. Yesterday (24 January), the College of Policing launched the new Code of Ethics. This provides everyone in policing with clear principles and practical guidance for officers on making ethical decisions as they undertake their daily duties. This will complement provisions in the Criminal Justice Bill that require the College to set out a duty of candour in statutory guidance for Chief Constables, ensuring a culture of transparency and accountability.

The Government and our policing partners have made significant progress in delivering on our commitments to help rebuild confidence and trust in policing, and will continue to drive this work forward. This is what the public expect and the decent, hardworking majority of officers deserve. I will provide the House with further updates in due course.

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

■ Levelling Up Update

Minister for Levelling Up (Jacob Young):

[\[HCWS214\]](#)

Statement of Missions

In 2019 we set out the Government's commitment to level up and unite the country, making it our guiding mission to spread opportunity around the United Kingdom. The Levelling Up White Paper set out a broad prospectus on the long-term steps we would take to deliver on this ambition. On 26 October 2023, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 received Royal Assent. To cement the Government's commitment to levelling up, and meet the requirements of the Act, I am laying before each House a Statement of Levelling Up Missions, setting out the Government's levelling up missions and the metrics against which we will measure them.

As has always been our intention, this first Statement reaffirms the 12 long-term and ambitious missions set out in the Levelling Up White Paper. In the Statement, we detail the definitions and metrics we will use to assess the two missions that were exploratory in the White Paper, Well-being and Pride in Place. As this is the first time we have set out this detail, we have also published an accompanying narrative – setting out how we developed the definitions and metrics for the missions and the rationale behind some of the decisions we have taken during the exploratory phase.

In making our commitment to level up and unite the country across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we set ourselves deliberately stretching missions designed to drive all levels of government, the private sector and civil society to think innovatively about how to address these challenges. Since then we have continued to push new and innovative ways to transform communities and respond to the issues that people care most about. Whether that is transferring powers away from Whitehall, investing in local growth and pride through the Levelling Up Fund and Community Ownership Fund, or through our investment in cities through Investment Zones and Innovation Accelerators that are driving nationwide economic growth.

Our progress

Cross-government efforts to deliver Levelling Up mean we have made significant progress – but there is more to do. Starting with transport, over £36bn previously earmarked for extending HS2 will now be re-invested in transport improvements that will benefit far more people, in far more places, far more quickly. This will benefit towns, cities and rural areas through improvements to roads, rail, trams and buses. Every penny committed to the Northern leg will go to the North and every penny committed to the Midlands leg to the Midlands. This means £19.8bn and £9.6bn is reserved for transport investments in the North of England and Midlands respectively. This adds to the work already done by the Department for Transport to make sure that every local authority has a plan for improved bus services and the extension of the £2 bus fare cap until December 2024.

Digital connectivity is as important as transport. The 5G element of the mission, which commits to basic 5G coverage for the majority of the population, has been met. The Wireless Infrastructure Strategy, published in April 2023, commits to an ambition of spreading advanced 5G coverage to all populated areas. On R&D, the £100m Innovation Accelerators programme is empowering local areas by bringing together national and local government, industry, and R&D institutions in a long-term partnership. The programme is investing in 26 transformative R&D projects to harness innovation in support of regional economic growth. And the UK continues to lead the way in attracting significant foreign investment into the UK, with the latest data showing we delivered the highest jobs total in Europe with more jobs per project than our European partners and the most 'new' projects.

On education, we have put in place targeted support in our 55 Education Investment Areas across England to improve outcomes in the areas where attainment is weakest, including through the Levelling Up premium, giving teachers up to £3k annually, aimed at helping schools retain the best teachers in high-priority subjects. The Government is also

offering additional intensive investment in 24 Priority Education Investment Areas in England, including through the Local Needs Fund, providing up to £42m to support schools boost pupils' literacy, numeracy and attendance.

In October we launched the Long-Term Plan for Towns, a £1.1bn lifeline to drive ambitious plans to regenerate local towns across the UK over the next decade, recognising that it is both our towns and our cities that are the engines of delivering change. Through the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan, we are giving communities, police and local authorities the tools they need to protect the spaces and places they most care about. Our Levelling Up Partnerships have shown that central government, working alongside local leaders, MPs and the communities they represent, can support bringing about real long-lasting change in the places that need it most.

Our levelling up funds have continued to provide much needed capital to bring back into use or transform cultural and town-centre assets. Towns, cities and communities across the UK have benefited from significant funding through the Levelling Up Fund, Future High Streets Fund and the Towns Fund. Across the three rounds of the Levelling Up Fund, £4.8bn has been awarded to 271 projects across the UK, driving prosperity and boosting Pride in Place in communities. Investment zones are exemplifying our commitment to unlocking growth potential, and driving innovation in city regions across the UK. And all eight Freeports in England (East Midlands, Freeport East (Felixstowe and Harwich), Humber, Liverpool, Plymouth and South Devon, Solent, Teesside, and Thames) are now open for businesses, offering attractive tax incentives to companies looking to invest and create jobs. These incentives have recently been extended to 2031, giving businesses the long-term certainty to invest. In 2023 we also announced two new Green Freeports in Scotland (Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport and Firth of Forth Green Freeport), as well as two new Freeports in Wales (Celtic Freeport and Anglesey Freeport), which are currently working through government approvals and will be open for business later in 2024.

Finally, we have made significant progress against our local leadership mission. Today's devolution deal signing with Devon and Torbay means that government has agreed 10 devolution deals with 26 different local authorities since the Levelling Up White Paper was published in February 2022. Taken together these deals take the proportion of the English population living in a place with a devolution deal up from 41% when the White Paper was published, to 60% today, an increase of over 10 million people. Over 90% of the North of England, and 55% of the Midlands now stand to benefit from devolution, with over £5 billion of new long-term funding committed as part of devolution agreements in the last 18 months. In total these deals will see the election of seven new mayors or directly elected leaders in the next two years, with voters having their say on a new mayor in York and North Yorkshire, East Midlands, and an expanded North East, for the first time this May. As well as extending devolution, we have also deepened arrangements, with two trailblazer deals in Greater Manchester and West Midlands announced last year, and the offer of a deeper "level 4" to all eligible institutions. We continue to extend and deepen devolution in England with further live negotiations, including new trailblazing provisions for the North East.

We also committed to publishing a current analysis of geographical disparities in the UK and a document showing how we have had regard to the considerations of the devolved administrations in relation to the missions. These accompanying documents will be published on gov.uk in due course. We will also deposit all relevant documents in the Libraries of the House.

This is just the start, and there is more to do but we will continue to drive change across the United Kingdom.

TREASURY

■ HM Treasury and Bank of England consultation response

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Bim Afolami): [\[HCWS210\]](#)

The Government has today laid *The Response to the Bank of England and HM Treasury Consultation Paper: The digital pound: a new form of money for households and businesses?* [CP 970]

The Bank of England and HM Treasury have been exploring the concept of a UK retail central bank digital currency (CBDC) or 'digital pound', issued by the Bank of England. A digital pound would be a new form of digital money for use by households and businesses for their everyday payment needs, and a complement to physical cash and other means of payment. However, it is important to stress that no decision has yet been made to build or issue a digital pound, either for corporates or for the public.

Alongside cash, a digital pound would help to ensure that central bank money remains widely available and useful in an ever more digital economy, continuing to support UK monetary and financial stability. It would also provide a public platform for private-sector innovation, promoting further competition, efficiency and choice in payments. Many other countries are also exploring the issuance of CBDCs.

No decision has yet been made to build or issue a digital pound, but given changes in money and payments, as well as developments in other countries, we believe there is merit in further preparatory work. This work will allow us to build the necessary skills and put in place the technical capability to introduce a digital pound in a timely manner, were the decision made to do so in the future.

The Consultation Paper sought feedback from the public on a set of design proposals for the digital pound. The Government and the Bank of England are grateful to everyone who provided their feedback, which will be carefully considered during the ongoing design phase. Respondents from a range of industries and organisations were supportive of the design proposition set out in the Consultation Paper, while many other respondents raised concerns about the implications of a digital pound for access to cash, users' privacy, and control of their money. The Government and the Bank of England recognise the critical importance of building the public's trust in a digital pound.

The Consultation Response sets out commitments the Government and the Bank of England are making in response to the feedback received in the consultation, including

that primary legislation would be introduced before any launch of a digital pound. Today, the Government and the Bank of England are committing that this legislation would include measures to guarantee users' privacy and control over how to spend their money. The response also reiterates the Government and the Bank of England's commitment to protect access to cash. The digital pound, issued by the Bank of England, would be a complement to cash and not a replacement for it.

This Consultation Response sets out the steps we are taking to reinforce public trust in the design of a digital pound before any decision is made:

- Before any launch of a digital pound, the Government has committed to introducing primary legislation. This means that the digital pound would only be introduced once Parliament had passed the relevant legislation. A further consultation exercise would be held prior to the introduction of legislation.
- Privacy, and preventing government programmability, would be a core design feature of the digital pound issued by the Bank of England.
- The Government and the Bank of England would not access users' personal data – and legislation introduced by the Government for a digital pound would guarantee users' privacy. Today, the Bank of England is committing to exploring technological options that would prevent the Bank from accessing any personal data through the Bank's core infrastructure.
- The Government and the Bank of England would not program a digital pound – and legislation introduced by the Government for a digital pound would guarantee this.
- The Government has already legislated to safeguard access to cash, ensuring that it would remain available even if a digital pound was introduced.

The feedback to date will help to inform our work on the design of the digital pound. We will continue to engage with parliamentarians, the private sector, civil society, academia and the public to develop our proposals for a digital pound, so that we are prepared, should a decision to build a digital pound be taken in the future.

The document is published online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-digital-pound-a-new-form-of-money-for-households-and-businesses>

Copies of the document are also available in the Vote Office.

■ Public Service Pension Scheme Indexation and Revaluation 2024

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Laura Trott):

[HCWS211]

Public service pensions continue to be among the very best available.

Legislation governing public service pensions in payment requires them to be increased annually by the same percentage as additional pensions (State Earnings Related Pension and State Second Pension). Public service pensions will therefore be increased from 08 April 2024 by 6.7 per cent, in line with the annual increase in the Consumer Prices Index up to September 2023, except for those public service pensions which have been in payment for less than a year, which will receive a pro-rata increase.

Separately, in the career average revalued earnings public service pension schemes introduced in 2014 and 2015, pensions in accrual are revalued annually in relation to either prices or earnings depending on the terms specified in their scheme regulations. The Public Service Pensions Act 2013 requires HMT to specify a measure of prices and of earnings to be used for revaluation by these schemes.

The prices measure is the Consumer Prices Index up to September 2023. Public service schemes which rely on a measure of prices, therefore, will use the figure of 6.7 per cent for the prices element of revaluation.

The earnings measure is the Whole Economy year on year change in Average Weekly Earnings (non-seasonally adjusted and including bonuses and arrears) up to September 2023. Public service schemes which rely on a measure of earnings, therefore, will use the figure of 7.7 per cent for the earnings element of revaluation.

The effective date of revaluation listed in the order is 1 April 2024, but some schemes have chosen to move their effective revaluation date to 6 April 2024 in order to manage interactions with the annual tax allowance.

Revaluation is one part of the amount of pension that members earn in a year and needs to be considered in conjunction with the amount of in-year accrual. Typically, schemes with lower revaluation will have faster accrual and therefore members will earn more pension per year. The following list shows how the main public service schemes will be affected by revaluation:

SCHEME	CIVIL				ARMED			
	POLICE	FIREFIGHTERS	SERVICE	NHS	TEACHERS	LGPS	FORCES	JUDICIAL
Revaluation for active member	7.95%	7.7%	6.7%	8.2%	8.3%	6.7%	7.7%	6.7%

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Move to Universal Credit – Managed Migration from April 2024

Minister of State for Employment (Jo Churchill):

[\[HCWS213\]](#)

The Government is working to deliver a brighter future for Britain, with long-term economic security and opportunity: where hard work is always rewarded; where ambition and aspiration are celebrated; where people get the skills they need to succeed in life; where families are supported, where those who have worked hard all their lives have the retirement they deserve.

Universal Credit plays a vital role in providing financial support to households. For more than 10 years, Universal Credit has successfully delivered a tailored service to millions of people, adjusting each month to an individuals' needs and helping people progress in work.

The 'Move to Universal Credit' activity will bring those remaining on the older, legacy benefits onto Universal Credit, completing the implementation of this major welfare reform.

Throughout 2023/24 our activity has focused on notifying households that receive tax credits only. This activity is progressing well, and we remain on track to notify over 500,000 tax credit only households of the need to claim Universal Credit by the end of March 2024. Furthermore, by February 2024 a month earlier than originally anticipated, 'Move to Universal Credit' will be underway across all Jobcentre districts within Great Britain. The Department continues to listen to all feedback to continuously improve the service, but to date there have been very few complaints, and any issues have been swiftly resolved.

Looking ahead to 2024/25, we will be migrating the remaining groups of households receiving legacy benefits to Universal Credit, excluding Employment and Support Allowance only and Employment and Support Allowance with Housing Benefit.

Our plans for 2024/25 are to undertake the issuing of Migration Notices to in scope Working Age benefit households sequentially, starting with Income Support claimants and those claiming Tax Credits with Housing Benefit from April, Housing Benefit only claimants from June, Employment Support Allowance with Child Tax Credits from July and Jobseekers Allowance in September. Households may be in receipt of a combination of benefits, for example an Income Support recipient could also be claiming Housing Benefit and/or Child Tax Credits.

From August, we will also contact those claiming tax credits who are over state pension age, with households being asked to apply for either Universal Credit or Pension Credit, depending on their circumstances.

The Government recognises that some individuals may need additional support to move to Universal Credit. The Department is committed to providing such support through a range of channels for anyone who needs it. We will continue to review and revise this approach to ensure the success of 'Move to Universal Credit' for our customers.