



## Daily Report

Tuesday, 27 February 2024

This report shows written answers and statements provided on 27 February 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:31 P.M., 27 February 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: Software

**Dame Nia Griffith:**

[\[15425\]](#)

To ask the Attorney General, how much funding her Department has (a) budgeted for and (b) spent on software updates to legacy computer systems in each of the last three financial years.

**Robert Courts:**

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is responsible for the provision and management of up-to-date IT infrastructure and applications for the Attorney General's Office (AGO).

The CPS does not currently maintain any legacy IT infrastructure on behalf of the AGO.

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

#### ■ Arms Trade: Israel

**Chris Law:**

[\[14350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether she has sought legal advice on the implications for her policies on arms export licences to Israel of the International Court of Justice's decision on the request for provisional measures in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

**Greg Hands:**

All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the UK's Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, including with regard to international humanitarian law.

All licences are kept under careful and continual review and the Government is able to amend, suspend, refuse or revoke licences as circumstances require.

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade receives legal advice as appropriate, on all matters related to import and export licensing, as part of advice from officials.

Any legal advice received is subject to legal professional privilege and as such we do not comment on legal advice that may or may not have been sought or received.

**■ Exports: Canada****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[15144\]](#)

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

**Ms Nusrat Ghani:**

I refer the Honourable Member to the response provided to Question 12701 on 8 February.

**■ Horizon IT System****Marion Fellows:** [\[14898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many people who worked in the investigation unit of the Post Office during the period in which Horizon prosecutions took place were still employed by the Post Office as of 20 February 2024.

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

This is a HR matter for Post Office Ltd as the Department does not hold this information.

**■ Horizon IT System: Scotland****Michael Shanks:** [\[15394\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Written Statement of 22 February 2024 on Post Office Update, UIN HCWS283, what discussions she has had with the Scottish Government on legislation to overturn the wrongful convictions of postmasters.

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

The UK Government has engaged regularly with the Scottish Government concerning the legislation to overturn the wrongful convictions of postmasters, including at the Inter-Ministerial Group for Justice on 25 January and a regular official-level working group. I discussed the UK Government's approach to overturning convictions with the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Justice on 22 February. The UK Government will continue to work closely with the Scottish Government to enable them to progress their own approach for overturning convictions in their legal jurisdiction.

**CABINET OFFICE****■ 10 Downing Street: Digital Technology****Neil O'Brien:** [\[13811\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will list the (a) projects and (b) subjects worked on by the 10 Downing Street data science team since it was established.



**Alex Burghart:**

*[Holding answer 23 February 2024]:* The No10 Data Science Team has a remit to improve the way in which key decisions are informed by data, analysis, and evidence using cutting-edge data science techniques. This enables the Government to use the best available evidence, throughout the policy and decision-making process, to drive long-term systems change and enable staff to collectively solve the most pressing policy challenges. They also use data to track delivery of government priority programs, working closely with Delivery Unit. Notwithstanding, the Government would not normally comment on the details of policy development and formation, nor the process by which collective decisions are made across government.

The team also runs a transformation program including: (1) project rAPId, a free, open source, lightweight data sharing system; (2) the No10 Innovation Fellowships, bringing industry expertise in AI into central government on year-long secondments to improve public services; (3) Evidence House, a program to upskill civil servants in data science, AI and software engineering; and crowdsource technical solutions to wicked problems; and (4) creating and managing the new Incubator for Artificial Intelligence, a 30-strong team of AI experts who are working on rapid delivery of AI projects in line with the Prime Minister's priorities.

**■ General Elections: Subversion****Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[15228\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he is taking steps to counter the potential use of (a) AI and (b) other means to influence the (i) operation and (ii) outcome of the next general election.

**Alex Burghart:**

The Government is committed to safeguarding the UK's elections and already has established systems and processes in place, to protect the democratic integrity of the UK.

The Government has established the Defending Democracy Taskforce, which has a mandate to safeguard our democratic institutions and processes from the full range of threats, including digitally manipulated content. The Taskforce ensures we have a robust system in place to rapidly respond to any threats during election periods, including novel threats from AI.

The Online Safety Act places new requirements on social media platforms to swiftly remove illegal misinformation and disinformation - including artificial intelligence-generated deepfakes - as soon as they become aware of it.

The new digital imprints regime, introduced by the Elections Act 2022, will also increase the transparency of digital political advertising (including artificial intelligence-generated material).

The threat to democracy from artificial intelligence was discussed at the AI Safety Summit in November 2023, reinforcing the Government's commitment to international collaboration on this shared challenge.

Additionally, the Elections Act 2022 strengthened financial transparency and controls against foreign spending at elections. Since its introduction, the Government has restricted foreign campaign spending at elections and introduced a new requirement on political parties to declare their assets and liabilities when registering with the Electoral Commission. Foreign donations (and channelling foreign money) are already illegal.

Government passed the National Security Act in 2023 which creates a range of new tools and powers to tackle evolving state threats. Parts 1-3 of the Act came into force in December 2023. This includes a new foreign interference offence which will give our law enforcement and intelligence agencies significant new powers to detect, deter and prosecute those who seek to interfere in our democracy. Part 4 of the Act, containing the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme, will come into force later in 2024. This will require the registration of political influence activity conducted at the direction of foreign powers.

#### ■ Government Departments: Betting

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[14674\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what safeguards are in place to prevent government officials from betting on the (a) success and (b) timing of policy implementations.

**Alex Burghart:**

The Civil Service Code sets out the standards of behaviour expected of all civil servants to uphold the Civil Service's core values, which are integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

The Code makes clear that civil servants must not misuse their official position, for example by using information acquired in the course of their official duties to further their private interests or those of others.

The Code is part of the contractual relationship between civil servants and their employer. Breaches of the Code can result in disciplinary action with potential sanctions extending to dismissal.

#### ■ Infected Blood Inquiry

**Deidre Brock:**

[\[14602\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what factors determined the timing of his Department's announcement on the expert group to provide technical advice on compensation for the Government's response to the Infected Blood Inquiry on 18 December 2023.

**Deidre Brock:**

[\[14603\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when the decision was taken to set up an the expert group to provide technical advice on compensation for the Government's response to the Infected Blood Inquiry.

**Deidre Brock:** [\[14604\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what consultative appointment process he used to select the (a) chair and (b) members of the expert group to provide technical advice on compensation for the Government's response to the Infected Blood Inquiry.

**Deidre Brock:** [\[14605\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the terms of reference of the expert group to provide technical advice on compensation for the Government's response to the Infected Blood Inquiry include those of the (a) report entitled Compensation and redress for the victims of infected blood: recommendations for a framework, published in June 2022 and (b) Second Interim Report of the Infected Blood Inquiry, published in April 2023.

**Deidre Brock:** [\[14606\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he plans to publish the membership of the expert group on compensation for infected blood products.

**Deidre Brock:** [\[14607\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the expert group to provide technical advice on compensation for the Government's response to the Infected Blood Inquiry has met; and if he will publish the (a) agendas and (b) minutes of the meetings of that group.

**Deidre Brock:** [\[14608\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the expert group to provide technical advice on compensation for the Government's response to the Infected Blood Inquiry will include (a) a representative of the infected blood community and (b) an expert nominated by that community.

**Deidre Brock:** [\[14609\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the expert group to provide technical advice on compensation for the Government's response to the Infected Blood Inquiry has been given a deadline for their advice; and if his Department will make compensation payments immediately on receipt of that advice.

**Deidre Brock:** [\[14610\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he plans to publish the (a) advice of and (b) (i) evidence and (ii) methodologies used by the expert group to provide technical advice on compensation for the Government's response to the Infected Blood Inquiry.

**John Glen:**

I refer you to my response to PQ 14436 on the appointment process for the Chair. The same process was followed for appointing the clinical experts. Browne Jacobson LLP secured the contract to provide legal advice via Direct Award. Details of the legal firm contract award were published on Contracts Finder on 7 February.

The Government has moved as quickly as possible to ensure that it has access to the technical expertise necessary to inform its decision-making in relation to the Infected Blood Inquiry recommendations on compensation. The expert group formally began

work on 22 January. The names of the other members of the expert group will not be disclosed to safeguard their privacy and ability to continue their frontline work while advising on Government policy.

As their work relates to the formulation and development of Government policy, their advice, evidence and methodologies as well as the minutes and agendas of their meetings will not be published.

The Government is considering all recommendations of the Second Interim Report alongside the recommendations of Sir Robert Francis's Compensation Framework Study, and the advice from the expert group will inform this. The purpose of the expert group is to provide technical assistance in understanding how the Inquiry's recommendations could work in practice. The Government is committed to engaging with the community and updating Parliament on progress of the Government response to the Infected Blood Inquiry as appropriate.

The Government has committed to responding to the Infected Blood Inquiry's Final Report and this response will be informed by the advice of the expert group.

#### ■ Weather: Death

**Kate Osamor:** [\[14656\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many excess winter deaths there were in each month from November 2023 to February 2024.

**John Glen:**

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

A response to the Hon lady's Parliamentary Question of 19th February is attached.

**Attachments:**

1. UK Statistics Authority [PQ14656.pdf]

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

#### ■ Christianity: Asylum

**Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[13587\]](#)

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, whether the Church provides guidance on helping to determine that asylum seekers are genuine converts to Christianity.

**Andrew Selous:**

The document "Supporting Asylum Seekers – Guidance for Church of England Clergy", which has been publicly available on the Church of England website for around seven years, states that clergy should assess the faith of those claiming conversion to Christianity and should rely on evidence to do so. The guidance also refers to the need for discernment – to be "wise as serpents" – in recognising mixed motives and the potential for gaming the system.

## ■ Church of England: Staff

**Mr Ben Bradshaw:**

**[13865]**

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what processes there are for complaints against senior staff of the National Church Institutions.

**Andrew Selous:**

The National Church Institutions have an external NCIs Complaints Policy, which can be found on the Church of England website at: [National Church Institutions | The Church of England](#). A complaint is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction with the service offered by the NCIs to an individual or organisation, which could include an issue with the standard of service, a specific action taken (or not taken) or the behaviour of individuals working within or on behalf of the NCIs, in their interactions with the complainant. This could include the behaviour of NCI senior staff.

Complaints may come from any individual, volunteer or organisation directly involved with a specific matter being handled by the NCIs, including the general public, members of the clergy and staff in a church body.

## ■ Churches: Finance

**Mr Ben Bradshaw:**

**[13678]**

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what proportion of funds allocated to projects by the Strategic Investment Board have been assigned to supporting (a) new and (b) established churches which (i) belong to and (ii) are associated with the Church Revitalisation Trust since 2020.

**Andrew Selous:**

Strategic Development Funding (which ran from 2014-22) was awarded to dioceses. It is for dioceses to decide which churches, activities and networks they support, in line with their strategies. We do not routinely capture data on the proportion of funding directed to particular networks. Most projects work with a number of different parishes and Fresh Expressions of Church (e.g. across a town).

Out of a total of £285m of national Church funding awarded between 2020 and 2023 by the Strategic Investment Board or by its successor, the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board, we estimate that £13m (4%) of funding has been awarded to dioceses for projects where all churches worked with the Church Revitalisation Trust (now known as The Revitalise Trust) and £34m (12%) has been allocated to programmes where at least one church out of many include a Church Revitalisation Trust element.

This funding comprises support both for new and established churches.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw:**

**[13681]**

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what oversight is available to (a) the Strategic Investment Board and (b)

others to monitor the use of Strategic Development Funding once distributed at diocesan level.

**Andrew Selous:**

- a) The Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board reviews the progress of programmes supported by Strategic Development Funding at every meeting.
- b) The progress of all programmes supported by Strategic Development Funding is regularly monitored by national Church staff, including through attendance at Programme Boards and annual reviews. Monies for projects supported by Strategic Development Funding are released in instalments across the funding period, with payments authorised by national Church staff after rigorous checks and against evidence of spend.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw:**

[\[13682\]](#)

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what (a) investigative powers and (b) sanctions are available to the Strategic Investment Board to tackle any reported misuse of Strategic Development Funding.

**Andrew Selous:**

All awards of Strategic Development Funding are granted under a formal funding agreement made between the Archbishops' Council and the recipient of the funding. The Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board is able, on behalf of the Archbishops' Council, to commission any necessary investigations into reported misuse, or misuse identified through various accountability processes, of Strategic Development Funding. Under the funding agreement, the Archbishops' Council has the right to withhold a grant or require repayment if any part of the grant is misused. No report of misuse of funds has ever been received.

■ **Independent Safeguarding Board**

**Mr Ben Bradshaw:**

[\[13492\]](#)

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, with reference to paragraphs 577 to 579 of the Review of the Independent Safeguarding Board, dated 30 November 2023, whether the commissioners have had recent discussions with the Archbishops' Council on the potential for lessons to be learned from the handling of the announcement.

**Andrew Selous:**

The Church Commissioners have not held such discussions with the Archbishops' Council.

## ■ Religious Buildings: Entertainments

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[14537\]](#)

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, whether the Church has issued guidance on the use of places of worship for silent discos.

**Andrew Selous:**

No guidance has been issued by the National Church Institutions on the use of places of worship for silent discos.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### ■ BBC Scotland

**Kenny MacAskill:**

[\[15373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what representations she has received from the Scottish Government on the governance of BBC Scotland.

**Julia Lopez:**

Ministers and officials regularly receive representations from the Scottish Government on a range of issues.

The BBC Charter requires the BBC to represent, reflect and serve audiences, taking into account the needs of diverse communities of all the UK nations and regions, including Scotland. The BBC Board is responsible for ensuring the BBC delivers these Charter obligations.

### ■ Community News Project: Finance

**Alex Norris:**

[\[14677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of Meta ending funding for the Community News Project on local journalism.

**Alex Norris:**

[\[14678\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had discussions with Meta on funding for the Community News Project.

**Alex Norris:**

[\[14679\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the viability of local media.

**Alex Norris:**

[\[14680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what support her Department provides to local media.



**Julia Lopez:**

The government is committed to supporting local and regional newspapers as pillars of communities and local democracy. They play an essential role in holding power to account, keeping the public informed of local issues and providing reliable, high-quality information.

The government is disappointed to see that Meta is closing its Community News Project. We are working to support journalism and local newsrooms to ensure the sustainability of this vital industry.

We are introducing a new, pro-competition regime for digital markets. The regime, which aims to address the far-reaching power of the biggest tech firms, will help rebalance the relationship between publishers and the online platforms on which they increasingly rely. This will make an important contribution to the sustainability of the press.

Additionally, our support for the sector has included the delivery of a £2 million Future News Fund, the extension of a 2017 business rates relief on local newspaper office space until 2025; the publication of the Online Media Literacy Strategy; and the BBC also supports the sector directly, through the £8m it spends each year on the Local News Partnership, including the Local Democracy Reporting Scheme.

**■ Football: Scotland****Kenny MacAskill:**[\[15372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has (a) received representations from and (b) had discussions with her counterpart in the Scottish Government on ensuring that Scottish (i) men's and (ii) women's international football matches are shown on free-to-air TV.

**Julia Lopez:**

The Government believes that certain sporting events of national interest should be shown on free-to-air television rather than behind a paywall, so that they can be enjoyed by as wide an audience as possible. That is why we have the listed events regime.

The Government believes that the current list strikes an appropriate balance, and has no current plans to undertake a full review of the events on the list.

Sports policy is devolved, and it would be for the Scottish Government to comprehensively evaluate whether there is currently the right balance between Scottish rights holders' ability to generate sufficient income to reinvest in Scottish sport, and access for Scottish audiences to those sporting events. The UK Government would then take those considerations into account.

We have regular engagement with our Scottish counterparts on a range of issues.



## ■ Gambling: Advertising

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:**

[\[14450\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department will consider make an assessment of the potential merits of a precautionary approach to gambling advertising.

**Stuart Andrew:**

In our approach to gambling advertising, we have struck a balanced and evidence-led approach which tackles aggressive advertising that is most likely to appeal to children, while recognising that advertising is an entirely legitimate commercial practice for responsible gambling firms.

Earlier this year, HM Government published a White Paper on gambling which outlined a comprehensive package of reforms to make gambling safer following an exhaustive assessment of the evidence, including on gambling advertising. We concluded that further action on advertising was needed, which is why we and the Gambling Commission are introducing measures to tackle the most aggressive and harmful advertising practices by preventing bonuses being constructed and targeted in harmful ways, giving customers more control over the marketing they receive, and introducing messaging about the risks associated with gambling.

This supplements the already robust rules in place to ensure that gambling advertising is socially responsible and that it cannot be targeted at or strongly appeal to children. This includes specific licence conditions for operators, including the requirement to abide by the UK Advertising Codes, which further regulate how gambling operators advertise. The UK Advertising Codes were strengthened in 2022, with new protections for children and vulnerable adults.

**Ronnie Cowan:**

[\[14618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment the Government has made of the adequacy of (a) voluntary and (b) self-regulatory efforts to limit the number of gambling advertisements.

**Stuart Andrew:**

In our approach to gambling advertising, we have struck a balanced and evidence-led approach which tackles aggressive advertising that is most likely to appeal to children, while recognising that advertising is an entirely legitimate commercial practice for responsible gambling firms.

There are robust rules in place to ensure that gambling advertising is socially responsible and that it cannot be targeted at or strongly appeal to children. This includes specific licence conditions for operators, including the requirement to abide by the UK Advertising Codes, which further regulate how gambling operators advertise. The UK Advertising Codes were strengthened in 2022, with new protections for children and vulnerable adults.

Voluntary measures on advertising implemented through the IGRG Code (now in its [7th edition](#)) include a watershed ban on gambling adverts and ensuring operators'

advertising on social media platforms is targeted away from anyone below the age of 25.

We also welcomed the voluntary whistle-to-whistle ban on TV betting ads during live sports programmes, which was agreed by industry. According to figures from the Betting and Gaming Council, the ban reduced gambling advertisement views by children (age 4-17) by 70% over the full duration of live sporting programmes. We also welcomed the Premier League's announcement that it will ban gambling sponsors from the front of shirts by the end of the 2025/26 season, and are working with a wider group of sports governing bodies to introduce a Code of Conduct on responsible gambling sponsorship.

Earlier this year, HM Government published a White Paper on gambling which outlined a comprehensive package of reforms to make gambling safer. This included measures to tackle the most aggressive and harmful advertising practices by preventing bonuses being constructed and targeted in harmful ways, giving customers more control over the marketing they receive, and introducing messaging about the risks associated with gambling.

#### ■ National Lottery Community Fund and Voluntary Organisations: Finance

**Mr Barry Sheerman:**

[\[14465\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how much money from dormant funds has been transferred to (a) the National Lottery Community Fund and (b) non-profit organisations in the last 10 years.

**Mr Barry Sheerman:**

[\[14466\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what the value is of dormant funds transferred to (a) the National Lottery Community Fund and (b) other organisations in each of the last five years.

**Stuart Andrew:**

Since the Dormant Asset Scheme's inception in 2011, £982 million has been transferred to The National Lottery Community Fund to tackle financial exclusion and problem debt; break down barriers to work for young people; and invest in charities and social enterprises, particularly in more deprived areas. As of February 2024, £771 million has been apportioned to England.

Funding for the English portion is distributed through four independent organisations, to deliver the Scheme's initiatives. These organisations draw down from their allocations annually, according to need. Up to and including the 2023/24 financial year, the Secretary of State has allocated the following sums in England:

- Youth Futures Foundation has been allocated £125 million;
- Fair4All Finance has been allocated £145 million;
- Big Society Capital has been allocated £444 million; and
- Access - The Foundation for Social Investment has been allocated £73 million.

These allocations include support for initiatives such as £15 million to expand the No Interest Loan Scheme to reach 69,000 more people and £15 million for the Building Futures Programme, supporting young people at risk of becoming not in employment, education or training.

## DEFENCE

### ■ Afghanistan: Refugees

**Sarah Dyke:**

[\[14769\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many visas have been issued to members of the Afghan Special Police Commando Force under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy as of 19 February 2024.

**James Heappey:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to Question 11984.

The hon. Member should also note that the Home Office are responsible for issuing visas to ARAP eligible principal applicants and their family members, once further security checks have been conducted in line with existing immigration rules.

**Attachments:**

1. Afghanistan: Refugees [UIN 11984.docx]

### ■ Northern Ireland: National Security

**Sammy Wilson:**

[\[14524\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of Policy Exchange's report entitled Closing the Back Door: Rediscovering Northern Ireland's Role in British National Security, published on 5 February 2024.

**James Heappey:**

Defence is aware of the Policy Exchange report. Defence continues to work with our partners across Government to identify vulnerabilities and test how we would better secure and defend the UK in times of war.

As our nearest neighbour, we work closely with Ireland to counter security challenges which affect both our nations' security.

### ■ Puma Helicopters: Procurement

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**

[\[15025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2023 to Question 6993 on Puma Helicopters, when does he expect delivery to (a) commence and (b) be completed.

**James Cartlidge:**

As I outlined in my speech at the International Military Helicopters Conference earlier today, I am pleased to confirm that we have now launched the next stage of the New Medium Helicopter competition.

Industry's detailed responses to the Invitation to Negotiate will provide a clearer understanding of aspects, such as suppliers' production capacity, which will enable us to confirm the timelines for the programme, and we expect to proceed to contract award in 2025.

**EDUCATION**■ **Children in Care****Mr Laurence Robertson:****[15215]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to ensure that (a) receiving councils are (i) involved in and (ii) able to object to decisions relating to out of county placements of looked after children and (b) adequate handovers take place between relevant service providers when such a placement is made.

**David Johnston:**

The 'Care Planning, Placement and Care Review (England) Regulations 2010' and statutory guidance outline duties on local authorities regarding out of area placements, including to notify and consult other local authorities if they place a child in care within their area. A link to the regulations is available at:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/959/contents/made>. The statutory guidance is also available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60e6fb43d3bf7f56896127e5/The\\_Children\\_Act\\_1989\\_guidance\\_and\\_regulations\\_Volume\\_2\\_care\\_planning\\_placement\\_and\\_case\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60e6fb43d3bf7f56896127e5/The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_Volume_2_care_planning_placement_and_case_review.pdf).

The needs of the child are paramount when deciding the right care placement.

Though the department wants to reduce out of area placements, they will always be part of the care landscape and sometimes circumstances make it the right decision for a child to be placed elsewhere, for example when they are at risk from sexual exploitation, trafficking or gang violence.

The government recognises that there are challenges in the placements market and that is why the government is investing £259 million of capital funding to help local authorities create more beds in their local areas. The funding for open residential placements, match-funded equally by the department and local authority investment, is expected to create 95 new children's homes, providing 360 additional placements across England.

## ■ Higher Technical Qualifications

**Seema Malhotra:**

**[14880]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of (a) public and (b) employer awareness of higher technical (i) education and (ii) qualifications.

**Robert Halfon:**

The department has published the following data on awareness of Level 4 and 5 qualifications and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs):

- Awareness of Level 4 and 5 qualifications, and HTQs in the Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/639219408fa8f53baa1f3f5f/PPLP\\_report\\_rw4\\_june.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/639219408fa8f53baa1f3f5f/PPLP_report_rw4_june.pdf).
- Awareness of HTQs amongst employers as part of the Employer Skills Survey 2022:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65855506fc07f3000d8d46bd/Employer\\_skills\\_survey\\_2022\\_research\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65855506fc07f3000d8d46bd/Employer_skills_survey_2022_research_report.pdf).

Introducing HTQs is central to the department's drive to increase the profile, prestige, and uptake of higher technical education. HTQs were first available for teaching from September 2022 and are now offered by over 140 providers across the country in construction and build, digital, and health and science occupations. In the 2023/24 academic year, over 140 qualifications were available. More HTQs will be available to study from September 2024.

The department is promoting HTQs as part of the Skills for Life cross-government communications and engagement campaign for young people, adults and employers. This campaign aims to raise awareness of the various skills offers, help them to decide which one is right for them (or their workforce) and increase take-up.

The department is working with stakeholders, including the National Careers Service, Careers & Enterprise Company and UCAS, to improve the support that is available to young people and adults. The department is also working with employers and professional bodies to improve their recognition of HTQs.

Finally, the department is supporting providers to increase their HTQ provision and to promote it effectively and widely. The department has announced investment of around £115 million in funding to providers to support higher technical education provision.

## ■ Job Creation and Skilled Workers: Bury South

**Christian Wakeford:**

**[14743]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what fiscal steps she is taking to support (a) training programmes, (b) apprenticeships and (c) other efforts to promote (i) job creation and (ii) skills development in Bury South constituency.

**Robert Halfon:**

The government is committed to creating a world leading skills system which is employer-focused, high quality and fit for the future. The government's reforms are strengthening higher education (HE) and further education (FE) to help more people get good jobs and upskill and retrain throughout their lives, as well as to improve national productivity and economic growth. The government's reforms are backed with an additional investment of £3.8 billion over the course of this Parliament to strengthen HE and FE.

This additional funding will help providers such as those in Bury to deliver high quality education and training.

Bury College serves the Bury South constituency and received £25.3 million to deliver learning and skills training programmes in 2022/23 for 16 to 18 year olds and apprentices for local employers. Bury College has also received capital investment of over £12 million since 2019.

Bury College offers a wide range of post-16 education and training from pre-entry level qualifications, A levels, T Levels, vocational courses at Levels 1 to 3, and apprenticeships in health and public services, business administration, engineering, retail and commercial enterprise, and education and training. It also has a University Centre and works in partnership with several local universities to deliver a range of HE courses at Higher National Diploma, Foundation Degree and Degree level to the local community. Bury College also receives funding for adult education programmes via Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Bury College is a partner of the Greater Manchester Institute of Technology, led by The University of Salford, and has received £1.353 million of funding for refurbishments and specialist equipment in Health Innovation, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, Enterprise and Sports provision. Bury College will account for 25% of all learners at the Institute of Technology. This equates to approximately 200 learners in 2023/24.

The area is also served by Holy Cross College, a Catholic sixth form college, which received £12.89 million to deliver learning programmes for 16 to 18 year olds in 2022/23. It delivers a largely academic Level 3 programme and a small Level 2 cohort. Holy Cross College has a University Centre delivering HE both through a direct contract with Office for Students and in partnership with Liverpool Hope University.

The department is increasing investment in the apprenticeships system in England to £2.7 billion by 2024/25 to support employers of all sizes and in all areas of the country, including Bury South, to grow their businesses with the skilled apprentices they need. Since 2010, there have been 11,380 apprenticeship starts in Bury South.

The department has introduced the Free Courses for Jobs scheme which enables eligible adults to gain a qualification for free. Residents in Bury can access provision in a range of sector subject areas delivered through colleges and training providers in the area.

In addition, the department has also introduced Skills Bootcamps, which are free, flexible courses of up to 16 weeks, giving people the opportunity to build up sector-specific skills and fast track to an interview with an employer. In each of the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years, the department has allocated £7.5 million to Greater Manchester Combined Authority to deliver Skills Bootcamps in the Greater Manchester area, including in Bury South via grant funding.

T Levels will equip more young people with the skills, knowledge and experience to access skilled employment or further study. From September 2023, 18 T Levels will be available and will be delivered through nearly 300 providers across all regions of the country. Bury college is delivering T Levels in business administration, legal, financial, and accounting, education and childcare, and health and engineering in 2023/24. The college intends to introduce further T Levels in catering and hospitality, construction and the built environment, creative and digital, and hair and beauty in 2024/25.

#### ■ Music: Education

**Sir Chris Bryant:**

[15232]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many people are employed in Music Education Hubs in England.

**Sir Chris Bryant:**

[15233]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many teachers working in Music Education Hubs are on zero-hour contracts.

**Damian Hinds:**

Music Hubs cover every area of England and are made up of partnerships that support, deliver and enable children and young people to access music education within a local area. These partnerships are co-ordinated by a Hub Lead Organisation (HLOs) which is responsible for the funding and governance of the Hub. As the fundholder and accountable body for the Hub programme, Arts Council England (ACE) oversees the management of Music Hubs including payments, monitoring the risk to investment and monitoring the performance of Hubs. The department provides the funding for the grant award to HLOs each year.

The terms and conditions of staff is the responsibility of either the HLO or any other music service or equivalent organisation working in partnership with the HLO and for whom they hold grant funding. HLOs also need to apply ACE standard grant terms and conditions, including in relation to the workforce.

ACE collects and publishes workforce information on an annual basis and this is published on the ACE Hub Data Dashboard which is available on their website here: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/MusicEducationHubs/music-education-hubs-survey-and-data#t-in-page-nav-2>.

The workforce dashboard for 2021/22 shows that the number of permanent staff (full-time or part-time) across all areas of England is 6,588. The number of staff employed



on a contractual basis is 1,665 and the number of self-employed or freelance staff is 3,104. ACE does not collect information on the type of contract or average wage or income of staff, including teachers.

## ■ Schools: Buildings

**Bridget Phillipson:** [\[14042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many school buildings are operating past their intended design life by local authority area; and how many schools have one or more of those buildings by local authority area.

**Damian Hinds:**

Academy trusts, local authorities, and voluntary-aided school bodies are responsible for collecting and recording information about their buildings and for ensuring that they are safe, well-maintained and comply with relevant regulations.

The department does not hold data on the design life of school buildings.

**Bridget Phillipson:** [\[14043\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she last met with representatives of the (a) Roman Catholic Church, (b) Church of England, (c) Confederation of School Trusts and (d) Local Government Association to discuss the safety of school buildings that they manage.

**Bridget Phillipson:** [\[14044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she last met with representatives of (a) the Association of School and College Leaders, (b) the National Association of Head Teachers, (c) the National Association of Schoolmaster Union, (d) the National Education Union, (e) Unison, (f) GMB and (g) Unite to discuss the safety of school buildings in which they work.

**Bridget Phillipson:** [\[14045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had discussions with representatives of (a) the Roman Catholic Church and (b) Church of England on the safety of (i) block and beam concrete and (ii) high alumina cement constructions in schools managed by the dioceses of those Churches since 25 October 2022.

**Bridget Phillipson:** [\[14047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had discussions with the (a) Confederation of School Trusts, (b) Roman Catholic Church, (c) Church of England and (d) Local Government Association on the safety of (i) block and beam concrete and (ii) high alumina cement constructions in schools for which they and their member organisations are responsible since 25 October 2022.



**Bridget Phillipson:**

[14549]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had discussions with the Confederation of School Trusts on the safety of (a) block and beam concrete and (b) high alumina cement constructions since 25 October 2022.

**Bridget Phillipson:**

[14550]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had discussions with the Local Government Association on the safety of (a) block and beam concrete and (b) high alumina cement since 25 October 2022.

**Damian Hinds:**

Ministers and officials of the department meet regularly with unions and other stakeholder organisations to discuss a wide range of issues, including the safety of school buildings. There is a regular meeting on school buildings run by departmental officials which includes representatives of the Association of School and College Leaders, the National Education Union, the National Association of Headteachers, NASUWT, Unison, Unite, GMB, the Local Government Association, the Confederation of School Trusts, the Church of England, and the Catholic Education Service. This group has discussed issues around block and beam concrete and high alumina cement.

## ■ Schools: Concrete

**Bridget Phillipson:**

[14553]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what her planned timetable is for reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete remedial works to be completed (a) overall and (b) by school.

**Damian Hinds:**

The government is funding the removal of RAAC present in school and colleges either through grants, or through the School Rebuilding Programme. A list of education settings with confirmed RAAC and the funding route to remove RAAC was published on 8 February and is available here:

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

The longer-term requirements of each school or college will vary depending on the extent of the issue, as well as the nature and design of the buildings. Permanently removing RAAC may involve the refurbishment of existing buildings, such as replacing the roof or rebuilding affected buildings.

Schools joining the School Rebuilding Programme are prioritised for delivery according to the condition need of their buildings, readiness to proceed and efficiency of delivery. For schools and colleges receiving grants, the department will work with the responsible bodies to support them through the grants process as they undertake the buildings works to remove RAAC permanently. The department is working with responsible bodies to take forward this work as quickly as possible.

**Schools: Construction****Bridget Phillipson:** [\[14038\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had reason to revise her (a) assessment of the safety of High Alumina Cement (HAC), (b) assessment of the safe operating life of HAC and (c) advice to schools where HAC was used as part of the construction method for any part of the building since 25 October 2022.

**Bridget Phillipson:** [\[14039\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an estimate of the number of (a) elements of school estates currently in use and (b) open schools containing at least one such element which were constructed using High Alumina Cement in (i) each local authority area and (ii) England.

**Bridget Phillipson:** [\[14041\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether guidance is available to schools on the management of (a) buildings and (b) building elements made from high alumina cement.

**Damian Hinds:**

It is the responsibility of those running schools - academy trusts, local authorities, and voluntary-aided school bodies - to collect and record information about their buildings, as well as to ensure that they are safe, well-maintained and comply with relevant regulations. The department supports schools and colleges on how this should be done in the Good Estate Management for Schools guidance, which is available on GOV.UK.

Departmental officials have regular discussions with relevant professional bodies and leading material specialists to ensure they are aware of any emerging evidence regarding the safety of construction materials used in the education estate. The department does not hold a central register of construction types used in the education estate.

**Bridget Phillipson:** [\[14050\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the Condition Data Collection studies collected information on elements of the school estate made using (a) block and beam concrete and (b) high alumina cement.

**Damian Hinds:**

The department does not hold this information. The Condition Data Collection does collect data on the type of construction of each block.

**Schools: Mental Health Services****Munira Wilson:** [\[14767\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential (a) merits of implementing a mental health support team plus model in schools

and (b) impact of such an approach on the mental wellbeing of children and young people.

**David Johnston:**

In December 2017, the government published a consultation to gather views on the proposals set out in its publication, 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision'. The green paper is available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a823518e5274a2e87dc1b56/Transforming\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people\\_s\\_mental\\_health\\_provision.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a823518e5274a2e87dc1b56/Transforming_children_and_young_people_s_mental_health_provision.pdf).

The government response to the consultation was published in July 2018:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b583d30ed915d0b6985cc21/government-response-to-consultation-on-transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health.pdf>. It outlined a commitment to implement three core proposals that the

Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), NHS England, the Department for Education and Health Education England would jointly take forward, one of which was to establish new Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs), working in or near schools and colleges. MHSTs add value to support that settings already have in place, and more broadly are part of a wider programme of mental health transformation set out in the NHS Long Term Plan.

As of 31 March 2023, MHSTs covered 35% of pupils in schools and learners in further education settings in England. We are extending coverage of MHSTs to an estimated 44% of pupils and learners by the end of this financial year, and at least 50% by the end of March 2025.

The Early Evaluation of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Trailblazer programme, published by the National Institute for Health Research in February 2023, revealed substantial progress in MHST implementation, despite challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this was a process evaluation, early impacts include improved school and college staff knowledge and confidence in dealing with mental health issues, improved access to support for some groups, and improvements in partnership working. The study also found that the experiences of the majority of children and young people who had contact with an MHST were positive. The early evaluation is available here:

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/BRACE/trailblazer.pdf>.

Work is already underway with partners to ensure that learnings are used to inform current and future practice. Since the MHST Trailblazers became operational in 2018/19, the Education Mental Health Practitioner curriculum has been strengthened in response to feedback on needs such as learning disabilities and autism, challenging behaviour and support for parents. In addition, a new Senior Wellbeing Practitioner role was launched in 2023 to support widening the MHST skillset and career progression opportunities.

The department, together with partners, will continue to listen to feedback and a planned phase 2 longer-term outcome evaluation, to inform MHST roll out and drive

improvements in evidence-based mental health and emotional wellbeing support for children and young people.

### ■ Schools: Mobile Phones

**Munira Wilson:**

[\[14765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of her Department's guidance entitled Mobile phones in schools, published on 19 February 2024, on (a) schools, (b) pupils and (c) learning.

**Damian Hinds:**

During the development of the 'Mobile phones in schools' guidance, the department consulted headteachers from across the sector to learn from their experience of implementing effective policies that prohibited the use of mobile phones in their schools.

Headteachers and leaders, including those involved in the Behaviour Hubs programme, reported that after removing mobile phones from the school day, the whole culture of their school changed for the better. This feedback supports an assessment that the guidance is likely to support schools to create environments that are safer places for pupils, where the distraction caused by the use of mobile phones is reduced, and that have a positive impact on learning.

Stakeholder engagement with young people, parents and representative bodies ensured the department could make an assessment of the impact of the guidance on individual pupils. Stakeholder engagement informed the development of the guidance regarding adaptations and reasonable adjustments for specific pupils and the use of mobile phones on the way to and from school.

**Munira Wilson:**

[\[14766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what data she used to help inform her guidance entitled Mobile phones in schools, published on 19 February 2024.

**Damian Hinds:**

The 'Mobile phones in schools' guidance is informed by data from various sources. These include the department's 'National Behaviour Survey: Findings from Academic Year 2021/22' and the 'School Snapshot Survey: Winter 2019', Ofcom's 'Children's Media Use and Attitudes' and the Office for National Statistics' report 'Online bullying in England and Wales: year ending March 2020'.

The guidance was also informed by the 'UNESCO Global education monitoring report, 2023: technology in education: a tool on whose terms?' and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health's 'The health impacts of screen time – a guide for clinicians and parents'. A review of academic research relating to the use of mobile phones in education settings and amongst children and young people was also conducted to inform the development of the guidance.

## ■ Schools: Northumberland

**Bridget Phillipson:** [\[14048\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent (a) assessment she has made of and (b) steps she has taken to help ensure the safety of school buildings in Northumberland.

**Bridget Phillipson:** [\[14049\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent (a) assessment she has made of and (b) steps she has taken to help ensure the safety of school buildings in Somerset.

**Damian Hinds:**

It is the responsibility of those running schools, such as academy trusts and local authorities, to ensure that their schools are safe and well-maintained. The department has allocated over £15 billion since 2015 for keeping schools safe and operational, including £1.8 billion committed this financial year. Funding is informed by consistent data on the school estate. In addition, the School Rebuilding Programme will transform poor condition buildings at over 500 schools across England.

When the department is made aware of a significant issue with a building that cannot be managed locally, the department will provide additional support on a case-by-case basis.

## ■ STEM Subjects: Women

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[15231\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions she has had with the National Centre for Computing Education on its progress in ensuring greater female participation in STEM subjects in (a) further and (b) higher education.

**Robert Halfon:**

The department is committed to ensuring that anyone, regardless of their gender or background, can pursue an education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

The department's contract with the National Centre for Computing Education (NCCE) is managed by departmental officials who meet regularly with STEM Learning, the NCCE supplier, to discuss progress. The NCCE aims to improve the quality of computing education and drive up participation in computing at GCSE and A Level, particularly amongst girls. The NCCE is primarily focused on supporting schools and colleges across England, with the expectation that an increase in participation and interest from girls with computing would coincide with an increase in female participation at further education (FE) and higher education (HE).

As part of the procurement for the second NCCE contract, the department asked bidders to design a gender insights programme, aimed at improving schools' awareness of the barriers to girls' engagement with computing and to engage schools in a sustained course of action designed to improve the take up of computer science qualifications, where girls are underrepresented. In Autumn 2023, the NCCE

launched the 'I Belong' programme to schools and colleges, and early completers include a number of FE providers. The NCCE actively engages with industry, the public sector, and FE and HE institutions, to ensure that they have diverse role models, especially women, supporting the delivery of their work, including working with universities to run student outreach events and recruiting female volunteer Computing Ambassadors.

Last year, the Digital and Computing Skills Education Taskforce was established to deliver on the department's science and technology ambitions by bringing together experienced and well-respected leaders from priority digital sectors, FE and HE. The NCCE is one of the core members of the Taskforce, who are empowered to guide the group's work as well as working with other government departments and external partners to deliver on the key actions most likely to impact on the digital skills gap. One of the three priority workstreams identified by the taskforce was "increasing the gender diversity of those taking computing and digital qualifications". The NCCE has played an active role in the sponsorship of this workstream and the development.

The department funds the Isaac Physics programme to increase the numbers of students, particularly from typically underrepresented backgrounds, studying physics in higher education. The department also currently funds inclusion activities as part of the Science CPD contract, to increase the uptake of A Level physics from underrepresented students, including girls. Including the Stimulating Physics Network, a network of 50 schools offering specialist support to around 350 partner schools, which includes advice and guidance on how to improve progression from physics GCSE to A level, where girls are typically underrepresented.

For mathematics, the department funds the Advanced Mathematics Support Programme (AMSP) which provides support for teachers and students in state-funded schools and colleges in England. Additional support is offered in areas of low social mobility so that, whatever their location, background or gender, students can choose their best post-16 maths pathway and access high-quality teaching. The AMSP has a particular focus on supporting girls into mathematics and runs a variety of enrichment and engagement sessions specifically for girls, including Steps to University for Mathematical Students events, targeted at year 12 girls.

## ■ Teachers: Workplace Pensions

**Paul Blomfield:**

**[14554]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional financial support to higher education institutions to help meet the cost of the teachers' pension scheme.

**Robert Halfon:**

Higher education providers (HEPs) are autonomous bodies, and the government does not fund the cost of changes to the scheme for them in the same way as for schools and colleges. The department expects HEPs to continue to adapt to uncertainties and financial risks to protect their longer-term sustainability.

The government will continue to work with the higher education sector to explore how it can best support those providers affected, including planning effectively for implementation. The department is also keen to maintain an ongoing dialogue with HEPs.

#### ■ Universities: Finance

**Dr Matthew Offord:** [14540]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the financial sustainability of the university sector.

**Dr Matthew Offord:** [14541]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the financial sustainability of Middlesex University.

**Robert Halfon:**

The Office for Students (OfS), as the independent regulator of higher education (HE) in England, collects and analyses financial data from HE providers, as well as other intelligence, to ensure they have an up to date understanding of the sustainability of the sector. In their most recent report on the financial health of the HE sector, which was published in May 2023, the OfS stated that the overall aggregate financial position of the sector is sound.

The full report can be found here:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/0b7d9daa-d6c7-477e-a0b2-b90985d0f935/financial-sustainability-report-2023-updated-june-2023.pdf>.

The department continues to work closely with the OfS, HE representative bodies, as well as other government departments, where appropriate, to understand the ongoing financial sustainability in the sector.

Middlesex University's most recent financial statement can be found here:

[https://www.mdx.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/770102/MDX\\_Financial\\_Statements\\_2022-2023.pdf](https://www.mdx.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/770102/MDX_Financial_Statements_2022-2023.pdf).

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

#### ■ Carbon Budgets: Disclosure of Information

**Dan Carden:** [14921]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, for what reason her Department did not publish the risk assessments for the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan.

**Graham Stuart:**

These risk tables formed part of the advice provided to the Secretary of State in March 2023. This advice enabled the former Secretary of State to carry out his statutory duty under Section 13 of the Climate Change Act, through which he concluded that he had a package of proposals and policies in place to meet the UK's



carbon budget targets. At that time, the Department published the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan, which outlined in detail the UK's plans to meet its carbon budgets.

The Department was under no obligation to publish these detailed risk tables, which formed the basis of internal decision-making and advice. They have now been published in the context of ongoing litigation.

## ■ Carbon Emissions: Business

**Sam Tarry:** [\[901680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent discussions she has had with businesses on the Government's net zero targets.

**Andrew Bowie:**

My colleagues and I meet regularly with business leaders and chair several groups bringing together government and industry on strategic issues relating to net zero. This includes the Net Zero Council, with members representing leading global businesses. The Council last met just a few weeks ago.

## ■ Energy Intensive Industries: Carbon Emissions

**Dame Nia Griffith:** [\[901678\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps her Department is taking to help energy intensive industries to decarbonise.

**Graham Stuart:**

The Government has committed up to £20 billion to support early deployment of carbon capture, usage and storage, and up to £500 million for the Industrial Energy Transformation Fund to help industry decarbonise, for which phase 3 opened last month.

## ■ Energy: Prices

**Jamie Stone:** [\[901684\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of her Department's funding schemes providing support with the cost of energy.

**Amanda Solloway:**

The Government delivered over £40 billion in support last winter to households and businesses, covering half of a households' energy bill, between October 2022 and June 2023. This provided an average of £1,500 to households to support their energy bill costs.

## ■ Energy: Technology

**Dan Carden:** [\[14917\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what criteria her Department uses to support the development of new energy technologies.



**Amanda Solloway:**

The Government's Net Zero Research and Innovation Delivery Plan (2022-25) sets out the criteria for prioritising public sector investment in new energy technologies. This considers the technology's likely contribution to maximising UK strategic advantage, focussing on UK business opportunities and jobs and developing UK energy security; its expected contribution to delivering the UK's carbon budgets and major decarbonisation; and retaining optionality of different net zero pathways to ensure a cost-effective route to net zero.

**■ Great British Insulation Scheme****Dehenna Davison:**[\[14712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether her Department is taking steps to improve the access to funding for the installers of Great British Insulation Scheme Flex.

**Amanda Solloway:**

The Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS) is not a Government grant or loan but funded by obligated energy suppliers who then recoup the costs from their domestic customers.

The Government sets the overall target and rules for GBIS but does not intervene in how energy suppliers deliver their individual targets.

**■ Local Government: Carbon Emissions****Dr Matthew Offord:**[\[14538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if she will make it her policy to require local authorities to have net zero climate plans and targets.

**Graham Stuart:**

Many local authorities have already, or are developing, plans and strategies to make progress towards net zero. Local authorities have flexibility and discretion in how they take action, as they have very varied local opportunities, needs and circumstances. Government is supportive of this work and recognises that local authorities play an essential role in driving local climate action.

**■ Natural Gas: Lincolnshire****Sir John Hayes:**[\[14459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what data her department holds on the number of households off the gas grid in (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire.

**Andrew Bowie:**

The Department publishes estimates of the number of [domestic properties not connected to the gas network](#) for Great Britain by country, English regions and local authority (including those which form the County of Lincolnshire). This includes

properties where a gas grid connection is possible, but no connection has been made. Equivalent data is available at [Lower layer Super Output Area](#) (LSOA) and [Middle layer Super Output Area](#) (MSOA) levels, but data by constituency is not published.

## ■ Natural Gas: Storage

**Martyn Day:** [\[14642\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what progress her Department has made on launching a call for evidence to support an increase in gas storage in the UK.

**Graham Stuart:**

As per the Energy Security Plan Update, published on 6th December 2023, the Government will launch a call for evidence in the coming months. This will set out the findings from the current analysis and seek evidence on the different forms of flexibility and their role in the broader gas system, to support the work to meet decarbonisation and net zero ambitions.

## ■ Offshore Industry: Marine Environment

**Paul Blomfield:** [\[14555\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Government's target of protecting 30% of UK waters for nature by 2030 on her Department's criteria for oil and gas development permissions.

**Graham Stuart:**

A comprehensive framework of environmental protection measures has been developed in the UK to minimise the impact of offshore oil and gas activities and this is embodied in the relevant legislation. Development proposals for oil and gas are a matter for the relevant regulators - the North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) and the Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning (OPRED). As part of the regulatory process, OPRED considers the Environmental Impact Assessment for development proposals to ensure that the impact on the environment, including marine protected areas and relevant targets is taken into account.

## ■ Refineries: Carbon Emissions

**Martyn Day:** [\[14641\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether her Department is taking steps to support the refinery sector to invest in decarbonisation.

**Andrew Bowie:**

All UK refineries are eligible for a range of Government schemes aimed at supporting the development of low carbon solutions in the sector.

For example, the Industrial Energy Transformation Fund supports industrial sites including those in the refinery sector with high energy use to transition to a low carbon future. The Department manages the IETF for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, while the Scottish Government administers the SIETF. The two schemes have an allocation of over £500m of investment by 2028.

The spring window of Phase 3 of the IETF is open for applications now.

### ■ Supply Chains: Solar Power

**Alicia Kearns:**

[\[14971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that the supply chains of UK solar companies do not include Uyghur slave labour.

**Andrew Bowie:**

The Government is committed to tackling the issue of forced labour in supply chains, including the mining of polysilicon used in the manufacture of solar panels.

The Solar Taskforce is considering this issue as a priority, taking forward the actions needed to develop resilient and sustainable supply chains.

The solar industry has developed and implemented the Solar Stewardship Initiative which will ensure a responsible and transparent solar value chain.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### ■ Agriculture: Land

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[15509\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential impact of solar farms on the availability of agricultural land.

**Rebecca Pow:**

Solar and farming can be complementary, and the Government encourages deployment of solar technology that delivers environmental co-benefits, with consideration for ongoing food production.

The Government recognises the need to preserve our most productive farmland as far as possible. The recently published and updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. The availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered,

alongside the other policies in the NPPF, when deciding what sites are most appropriate for development.

#### ■ **Animal Welfare: EU Law**

**Andrew Bridgen:** [14083]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of the proposed EU regulation on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability on Northern Ireland; and whether he plans to legislate to extend that regulation to the UK.

**Mark Spencer:**

The Government will assess the impact of the proposed EU regulations on the welfare of dogs and cats in line with agreed frameworks and established conventions and fora.

#### ■ **Animal Welfare: Import Controls**

**Henry Smith:** [13999]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to ensure that the UK requires imports of (a) meat, (b) milk, (c) eggs and (d) fish to meet UK animal welfare standards.

**Mark Spencer:**

The Government is proud of the high food standards that underpin our high-quality Great British produce. We will never compromise on these.

All agri-food products, including those from countries we have trade agreements with, must comply with our import requirements in order to be placed on the UK market. This includes ensuring imported meat products have been slaughtered to animal welfare standards equivalent to our domestic standards.

The Government will use our expertise and influence to drive enhanced animal welfare and food safety standards globally.

#### ■ **Avian Influenza**

**Jim Shannon:** [15065]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many cases of avian flu have been detected in the UK in the last 12 months.

**Mark Spencer:**

As of 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024, there have been 41 cases of avian influenza confirmed in the UK within the last 12 months (22/02/23-21/02/24). The latest case figures and information on the disease and location of the cases, are available online: [Bird flu \(avian influenza\): latest situation in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/bird-flu-latest-situation-in-england).

## ■ Cats: Smuggling

**Patricia Gibson:**

[\[14252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to ban cat and kitten smuggling.

**Mark Spencer:**

As outlined in our 2021 Action Plan for Animal Welfare, the Government has an ambitious agenda for animal welfare and conservation reforms, which we are taking forward during this Parliamentary session. We will continue to introduce and support legislative and non-legislative reforms where possible.

We are aware that Selaine Saxby MP has introduced a Private Members' Bill on restricting the importation and non-commercial movement of dogs, cats and ferrets. In accordance with Parliamentary convention, the Government will set out its formal position on this Bill when it receives its Second Reading.

## ■ Dangerous Dogs

**Steve Reed:**

[\[13726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the number of exemption applications to keep an XL Bully dog his Department has (a) received and (b) processed since the XL Bully ban was announced.

**Mark Spencer:**

My Department will provide the total number of exemption applications received ahead of the deadline, as soon as possible. These applications are still being processed and may include duplicates, errors or ineligible applications. As of 19 February, we have issued over 54,000 Certificates of Exemption.

**Steve Reed:**

[\[15076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the cost to the public purse is of training dog legislation officers to enforce the addition of XL Bully type dogs to Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act.

**Mark Spencer:**

Defra has spent £102,320 to support the police to deliver additional training to Dog Legislation Officers to make sure the ban on XL Bully type dogs is effectively enforced.

**Steve Reed:**

[\[15077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with the National Police Chiefs Council on the (a) enforcement and (b) prioritisation of the addition of XL Bully type dogs to Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act.

**Mark Spencer:**

Defra worked closely with the National Police Chiefs Council in developing and delivering the ban on XL Bully type dogs. Representatives from the National Police

Chiefs Council formed part of the expert group that developed the conformation standard for the XL Bully, so the breed type could be banned in law. We have continued to engage regularly with their representatives on the enforcement of the XL Bully ban and have supported the police to deliver additional training to Dog Legislation Officers to make sure the ban is effectively enforced.

## ■ Dangerous Dogs: Registration

**Stephanie Peacock:**

[\[14673\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department plans to reopen registrations for XL bully dogs for owners who missed the deadline.

**Mark Spencer:**

Defra has no plans to reopen registrations for XL Bully dogs for owners who missed the deadline to apply for a Certificate of Exemption. Applications opened on 14 November 2023 and closed at midday on 31 January 2024. This date was set out in legislation and gave owners over two months to apply. It is now against the law to keep an XL Bully dog without a valid Certificate of Exemption, and new exemptions can only be authorised by a court order. If owners think they have an XL Bully dog and do not have a Certificate of Exemption, we advise that they should contact their local police force.

## ■ Deer

**Neil O'Brien:**

[\[14938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many deer have been culled under night licences issued in the last three years.

**Rebecca Pow:**

Each licence that Natural England Wildlife Licensing Service (NEWLS) issues comes with the condition that the licensee must provide a report of all action taken under that licence within 14 days of that licence ending.

Natural England have received 81% of all reports covering the deer licences to shoot at night which were active between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023.

These reports show that a total of 9,684 deer were shot at night under licence, of which:

- 608 are Red Deer
- 127 are Roe Deer
- 568 are Sika Deer
- 455 are Muntjac Deer
- 7,926 are Fallow Deer

Please note, due to the format we received some of these reports of action from customers, the above figures may contain some deer shot before 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021.

## ■ **Deer: Conservation**

**Neil O'Brien:**

[\[14937\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many night licences to cull deer were issued in the last three years.

**Rebecca Pow:**

Between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023, Natural England Wildlife Licensing Service have issued **204** licences for the purpose of shooting deer at night.

## ■ **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Information Officers**

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[14023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many posts there are for (a) press, (b) media and (c) other communications staff in his Department; and what the salary band is for each post.

**Mark Spencer:**

Defra Group Communications is the first single employer shared service communications team in Whitehall, working for six organisations.

Alongside the core department, the team provides communications support for the core Department and five of its largest Arm's Length Bodies including the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Animal and Plant Health Agency, the Forestry Commission and the Rural Payments Agency. The teams work across all communications disciplines in support of the policy and operational priorities within each of these organisations. This includes media, planning, stakeholder engagement, digital communications and internal communications across the six parts of the Defra group. This integrated function reduces duplication, improves performance and saves money.

As Defra Group Communications staff work in an agile way in multiple organisations, it is not possible to provide granular full-time equivalent figures for each part of the group, including the core department.

As announced by the Government last year, departments are submitting productivity plans to modernise the Civil Service and reduce the size of the state to pre-pandemic levels. These roles, as all other business units in the department, are considered as part of these plans.

## ■ **Dogs: Import Controls**

**Judith Cummins:**

[\[14093\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to ban the import of dogs with cropped ears.

**Mark Spencer:**

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is already an offence in England and Wales to carry out a non-exempted mutilation, including the cropping of a dog's ears or the

docking of their tails. The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 creates tougher penalties for anyone convicted of such an offence face, either being sent to prison for up to five years, or receiving an unlimited fine, or both.

We are aware that Selaine Saxby MP has introduced a Private Members' Bill on restricting the importation and non-commercial movement of pets. In accordance with Parliamentary convention, the Government will set out its formal position on this Bill when it receives its Second Reading.

## ■ Environment Agency: Equality

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[14460\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many people are employed by the Environment Agency in roles relating to diversity, equality and inclusion.

**Mark Spencer:**

There is a total of 9.66 full-time equivalents (FTE) currently employed by the Environment Agency in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). 8.66 are in the EDI national team (2 of which are on a temporary contract), and 1 FTE is employed as a local lead. The role of the EDI team is to implement Defra policies on EDI legislation, as the Environment Agency is bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force in April 2011, arising from section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. At the Environment Agency, EDI resources are a supporting function and are fully integrated within all work areas of the Strategic Workforce Plan, to enable better environmental outcomes and to achieve a better representation of the community the Environment Agency serves.

## ■ Foie Gras: Imports

**Giles Watling:**

[\[14733\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the total tonnage of foie gras imported in 2023; and whether he plans to ban its importation when produced via force-feeding.

**Mark Spencer:**

In 2023 the UK imported 628 tonnes of fatty livers of geese and ducks, valued at £3.3m (**source HMRC UK Trade Info; data for 2023 is provisional and subject to change**).

The Government shares the British public's high regard for animal welfare and has made clear that the production of foie gras from ducks or geese using force feeding raises serious welfare concerns.

We are committed to building a clear evidence base to inform future decisions. Any proposals would be informed by the evidence base and likely subject to consultation.



## ■ Food: UK Trade with EU

**Tom Hunt:** [\[14730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of reclassifying fresh (a) fruit and (b) root vegetables from the EU as medium risk on retailers.

**Mark Spencer:**

No assessment on impacts will be made as there has been no change to the risk category of fruit and vegetables. A temporary easement has been put in place for fruit and vegetables imported to GB.

**Tom Hunt:** [\[14731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of pausing proposals reclassifying (a) fruits and (b) root vegetables from the EU as medium risk on (i) retailers and (ii) consumers.

**Mark Spencer:**

Defra is not reclassifying fruit and vegetables. A temporary easement has been put in place for fruit and vegetables imported to GB.

## ■ Horses: Animal Welfare

**David Simmonds:** [\[14317\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps her Department has taken to tackle horse (a) fly-grazing and (b) abandonment.

**Mark Spencer:**

The Control of Horses Act 2015 provides powers for landowners, land occupiers and local authorities to deal with horses placed unlawfully on any land, public or private (including equine abandonments). The 2015 Act allows for action to be taken quickly where horses are placed on land without the land-owner's permission.

**David Simmonds:** [\[14318\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to help ensure that people who neglect their horses are prosecuted.

**Mark Spencer:**

The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 amends the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (the 2006 Act) to provide one of the toughest sanctions in Europe and strengthens the UK's position as a global leader on animal welfare. The 2006 Act, as amended in 2021, now means a maximum sentence of five years and/or an unlimited fine will apply to the most serious animal cruelty offences, including causing unnecessary suffering, and is a significant step forward in improving animal welfare.

Local authorities have powers under the 2006 Act to act where a horse is suspected to be suffering on any land, public or private. In such circumstances, the local authority may enter the land and take control of the animal.

**■ Imports: Disease Control****Stella Creasy:**[\[14058\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 8 February 2024 to Question 11101 on Imports: Disease Control, when he plans to (a) make a decision and (b) communicate to businesses the decision on the cost of the Common User Charge.

**Mark Spencer:**

The Common User Charge (CUC) consultation launched in July 2023, gathered stakeholder views on new charges required to recover the full operating costs of government-run Border Control Posts from April 2024. The Government response to the CUC consultation, which sets out the final policy and rates, will be published imminently. This will help commercial ports in setting charges for their own facilities and provide traders with time to make the necessary finance, accounting and operational arrangements.

**■ Rural Payments Agency: Assets****Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**[\[14500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to page 137 of his Department's annual report and accounts for 2022 to 2023, HC 1872, what the purpose was of the asset under development for the Rural Payments Agency; and for what reasons did it become obsolete before it became operational.

**Mark Spencer:**

The published text is reproduced below followed by a more detailed explanation.

The Core department has recognised a constructive loss (£2.5 million) relating to a project that was abandoned as no longer required. Defra had been developing the non-current asset for the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), but at some point, this was cancelled while the Assets Under Construction (AUC) was still held in Digital, Data and Technology Services (DDTS) and therefore the AUC became obsolete before it became operational.

The purpose of the asset was an IT system called MS Dax that RPA used for its running costs and HR. The HR functionality included holding staff personal data, booking annual leave for employees and extracting data for the annual leave accrual.

The amount related to enhancement work done for the upgrade to this IT platform, the Microsoft Dynamics Running Costs Solution Release 3 from Release 2.

The reason for the obsolescence was the asset was decommissioned in January 2023 as the RPA took a strategic decision to move the management of RPA's running costs and HR to the same IT system as other larger Defra bodies.

■ White Fish: Quotas

**Kenny MacAskill:** [\[14312\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the annually-negotiated cod quota tonnage was for UK fishing vessels in Norwegian waters for each year since 2016; and what proportion of that quota was allocated to Scottish-registered vessels.

**Mark Spencer:**

The cod quotas available to UK fishing vessels in Norwegian waters fall in two categories: first, quotas in the North Sea (or ICES Areas 4), and second, quotas in the Norwegian Exclusive Economic Zone & the Fisheries Protection Zone around Svalbard (relevant waters of ICES Areas 1, 2a and 2b). It is important to note that cod quotas can vary significantly from one year to the next, depending on fluctuations in the biological health of the stock.

Table 1 sets out the total North Sea cod quota available to the UK since 2016. In practice, the UK has been able to fish up to 100% of that quota in Norwegian waters, with the exception of 2021, when the UK had no access to Norwegian waters to fish that stock.

Table 1:

YEAR	TONNES
2016	13,107
2017	15,275
2018	16,808
2019	11,464
2020	5,732
2021	5,824
2022	5,934
2023	9,882
2024	11,613

Table 2 sets out the total cod quota available to the UK in the Norwegian Exclusive Economic Zone & the Fisheries Protection Zone around Svalbard since 2016. By definition, all of that quota must be fished in Norwegian waters.

Table 2:

YEAR	TONNES
2016	12,523
2017	15,158
2018	14,437
2019	13,280
2020	13,373
2021	5,500
2022	7,050
2023	5,964
2024	4,844

Scottish Producer Organisations hold approximately 65% of the Fixed Quota Allocation (FQA) units for the quota in Table 1, and no FQA units for the quota in Table 2.

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### ■ Alexei Navalny

**Mr Tobias Ellwood:**

[\[14820\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department plans to take to respond to the death of Alexei Navalny in Russian custody.

**Leo Docherty:**

The UK Government has publicly expressed our outrage and made clear that we hold the Russian state fully responsible for the death of Alexei Navalny. Russia must release Mr Navalny's body to his family and hold a full and transparent investigation into his death. On Friday 16 February, the day of Mr Navalny's death, we summoned the Russian Embassy to demand answers. The UK has now sanctioned six heads of the penal colony where Mr Navalny died following years of mistreatment at the hands of the Russian state. The UK is the first country to impose sanctions in response to Mr Navalny's death.

## ■ Armenia: Azerbaijan

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[15244]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the implications for his policies of changes in relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

**Leo Docherty:**

The UK welcomes the recent meeting between President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan in Munich on 17 February; meaningful direct dialogue is the only way to secure stability and security for the region. I [Minister Docherty] underlined the UK's support for negotiations to conclude a final peace settlement during my visit to Yerevan and Baku in November 2023. Officials are delivering this message in their ongoing engagements with Armenia and Azerbaijan. We urge Armenia and Azerbaijan to continue full negotiations as soon as possible.

**Stephen Doughty:**

[15289]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of recent discussions between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

**Leo Docherty:**

The UK welcomes the recent meeting between President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan in Munich on 17 February; meaningful direct dialogue is the only way to secure stability and security for the region. I [Minister Docherty] underlined the UK's support for negotiations to conclude a final peace settlement during my visit to Yerevan and Baku in November 2023. Officials are delivering this message in their ongoing engagements with Armenia and Azerbaijan. We urge Armenia and Azerbaijan to continue full negotiations as soon as possible.

## ■ China: Foreign Relations

**Jim Shannon:**

[14580]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will publish a transcript of his meeting with his Chinese counterpart at the Munich Security Conference in February 2024.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:**

A summary of the discussion was published on gov.uk in the usual way.  
[<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretarys-meeting-with-chinese-foreign-minister-wang-yi-february-2024>]

## ■ Cyprus: Politics and Government

**Stephen Doughty:**

[15288]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of (a) progress towards (i) a lasting

resolution of the Cyprus issue and (ii) the agreement of a bizonal, bicameral federation with political equality and (b) adherence to UN Security Council resolutions.

**Leo Docherty:**

The UK is committed to supporting the UN-led process to reach a Cyprus Settlement. We continue to believe that the existing UN parameters of a Bi-zonal, Bi-communal Federation with political equality are sufficiently flexible to facilitate an agreement which addresses the priorities of both sides. The appointment of Ms Holguín as the UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy on Cyprus is an important step and we welcome her engagement so far. In January, the UK led the drafting of a UN Security Council Resolution which reaffirmed existing resolutions and called upon the leaders to improve implementation where appropriate.

■ **Defence**

**Andy Slaughter:**

[\[15256\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 19 February 2024 to Question 13286 on Defence, if he will publish a list of the non-NATO countries with which the UK has (a) bilateral and (b) multilateral (i) agreements and (ii) arrangements to consult in the event of attack.

**Leo Docherty:**

Various bilateral and multilateral agreements and arrangements commit the UK to consulting with non-NATO countries in relation to international security matters. The precise language that triggers any consultation under these arrangements varies. The Five Power Defence Arrangements (1971) with Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore; the UK-Sweden Security Agreement (2022); and the UK-Ukraine Security Agreement (2024) all include reference to consultation in the event of attack.

Separate agreements with Australia (2013), Japan (2023), and the Republic of Korea (2023) refer to consultation on 'threats to international peace and security' (Australia) and 'important regional and global security issues' (Japan and Republic of Korea) respectively.

■ **Developing Countries: Solar Power**

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[14578\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to help developing countries adapt to the use of solar power.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

The UK is committed to supporting developing countries achieve their climate ambitions, including the transition to renewable energies. Between 2011 and 2023, the UK's International Climate Finance programmes have installed 3,600 megawatts of clean energy capacity, and improved clean energy access for 69 million people. Through the UK Partnering for Accelerated Climate Transitions programme (UK

PACT), the UK has provided technical assistance to support high-emitting ODA-eligible countries to set up and manage solar power.

## ■ **Egypt: Gaza**

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**

[\[14675\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the implications for his policies of reports of construction work on the border between Egypt and Gaza.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

Egypt is a key regional partner in supporting the Government's response to the crisis, and we welcome efforts by Egypt in getting aid into, and British Nationals out of, Gaza. The Government is deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah. Over half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensure aid can reach the people who so desperately need it.

The immediate priority must be a humanitarian pause, which is the best route to secure the safe release of hostages and significantly step up the aid reaching Gaza. We want that pause to lead to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to further fighting. That remains the focus of all our diplomatic effort.

## ■ **Ethiopia: Famine**

**Lisa Nandy:**

[\[14559\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential for famine in Ethiopia.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

Food shortages in Ethiopia are at a critical level. Conflict and climate change have damaged crop production and driven people off their lands, leading over 3 million people into a state of critical food insecurity. In February 2024, I visited Ethiopia and witnessed the worsening humanitarian situation in the region. In response, I announced £100 million in new aid for our Ending Preventable Deaths Programme, which will support over three million people in affected regions.

## ■ **Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Equality**

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[14545\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how much his Department spent on equality, diversity and inclusion (a) events and (b) training in the last 12 months.

**David Rutley:**

The Government is auditing the cost-effectiveness of all equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) activities, through the review of EDI spending announced last June.



As stated in the Autumn Statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Minister for Cabinet Office will be outlining the final proposals in response to the review in due course.

■ **Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Oliver Wyman**

**Emily Thornberry:** [\[14516\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the contract initiated by his Department with Oliver Wyman Ltd from 4 September 2023, tender reference 349331/1281857, what work was allocated under that contract at the most recent monthly meeting of his Department's Project Allocation Board.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:**

No work was allocated at the most recent Project Allocation Board using the Oliver Wyman Ltd contract of 4 September 2023.

■ **Gaza: Food Aid**

**Dan Carden:** [\[15157\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the decision of the UN World Food Programme to pause deliveries of food aid to northern Gaza.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

We are greatly concerned by the pause in aid distributions by the UN World Food Programme in Northern Gaza, and by the difficulties that are hindering relief delivery efforts. We have reiterated the need for Israel to support the UN to distribute aid effectively across the whole of Gaza. As we have said, Israel must take steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid into Gaza, including allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses, opening more routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity. The Prime Minister discussed this in his call with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 15 February.

■ **Gaza: Genocide Convention**

**Stephen Morgan:** [\[14689\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of Israel's compliance with the provisional measures set forth by the International Court of Justice in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

We respect the role and independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and we are clear the ICJ's ruling is binding.

We have stated, however, that we have considerable concerns about this case, which is not helpful in the goal of achieving a sustainable ceasefire. Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas in line with International Humanitarian Law, as we have said from the outset. Our view is that Israel's actions in Gaza cannot be described as a genocide, which is why we thought South Africa's decision to bring the case was wrong and provocative.

The Court's call for the immediate release of hostages and the need to get more aid into Gaza is a position we have long advocated.

We are clear that an immediate pause is necessary to get aid in and hostages out, and then we want to build towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to the fighting.

We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law to be respected and civilians to be protected. We have previously assessed that Israel is committed and capable of complying with IHL. We regularly review our assessment.

#### ■ **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

**Stephen Morgan:**

[\[14715\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what progress he has made with international partners on opening more land borders for aid to enter Gaza.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

The FCDO is actively engaging with international partners and those operating on the ground to do all we can to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We have trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings. The Foreign Secretary has discussed the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza to alleviate the desperate situation there with Prime Minister Netanyahu. He reiterated the need for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza, for Nitzana and Kerem Shalom to be open for longer, and for Israel to support the UN to distribute aid effectively across the whole of Gaza.

We have supported the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. 750 tonnes of life-saving food aid arrived in the first delivery in December and a second delivery of 315 tonnes was made in January. We are getting on with aid delivery through funding multiple implementing partners including other UN agencies and international and UK NGOs. This support is helping people in Gaza get food, water, shelter and medicines.

#### ■ **Gaza: Internally Displaced People**

**Dan Carden:**

[\[15325\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 21 February 2024 to Question 14355 on Gaza: Internally Displaced People, whether he has had discussions with Israeli counterparts on guaranteeing the right to return of Palestinians displaced from their homes in Gaza.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

The Prime Minister noted in his call on 15 February with Prime Minister Netanyahu the importance of continuing to abide by International Humanitarian Law and protecting civilian infrastructure, including shelters.

We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes.

We have also been clear that the international community will need to make a massive effort to deliver a reconstruction plan for Gaza.

We want the fighting to stop now. We are calling for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

**■ Gaza: Israel****Dan Carden:**[\[14372\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of an Israeli military incursion into Rafah.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

We are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah. Over half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensure aid can reach the people who so desperately need it.

The immediate priority must be a humanitarian pause in the fighting, which is the best route to secure the safe release of hostages and significantly step up the aid reaching Gaza. We want that pause to lead to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to further fighting.

That remains the focus of all our diplomatic effort.

**Dan Carden:**[\[14374\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the United Nations statement entitled Gaza: Rafah invasion would be a disaster 'beyond imagination', warn UN medics, published on 14 February 2024.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

We are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah. Over half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensure aid can reach the people who so desperately need it.

The immediate priority must be a humanitarian pause in the fighting, which is the best route to secure the safe release of hostages and significantly step up the aid reaching Gaza. We want that pause to lead to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to further fighting.

The Foreign Secretary has also underlined the need for Israel to ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, and to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities.

**Stephen Morgan:**

[\[14688\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the proposed Israeli military expansion into Rafah; and whether he has made representations to encourage Israel to comply with international law.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

We are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah. Over half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensure aid can reach the people who so desperately need it.

The immediate priority must be a humanitarian pause in the fighting, which is the best route to secure the safe release of hostages and significantly step up the aid reaching Gaza. We want that pause to lead to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to further fighting. That remains the focus of all our diplomatic effort.

There must be a reduction in civilian casualties. All parties must act within International Humanitarian Law. We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes.

The Government continues to press these points in engagement with Israeli counterparts, most recently when the Prime Minister spoke with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 15 February.

## ■ Gaza: Orphans

**Stephen Morgan:**

[\[14717\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has held discussions with his counterparts in the Middle East on the potential merits of developing a plan to support orphaned children in Gaza.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

From our £60 million of committed aid, we have provided targeted support for children through our £5.75 million contribution to UNICEF. Our funding is supporting their work to amongst other things, assist over 5,800 children with severe malnourishment and 853,000 children, adolescents and caregivers affected by the conflict, to receive emergency and child protection services, including mental health and psychosocial support.

The UK is a founding member and key donor to Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. ECW is supporting education preparedness work in Gaza. We continue to support the wider delivery of education in Gaza, including through NGOs, UN partners, the World Bank, and the Global Partnership for Education.

**■ Hong Kong: Foreign Relations****Andrew Rosindell:** [\[15245\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he met the Chief Executive of Hong Kong in the last 12 months.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:**

There have been no ministerial meetings with the Chief Executive of Hong Kong in the last 12 Months.

**■ Muhammad al-Araja****Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[14531\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment his Department has made of the potential implications for its policies of the killing of Muhammad al-Araja at the Rafah border crossing in Gaza on 16 February 2024.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

We are aware of these reports.

We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to be respected and civilians to be protected. Too many civilians have been killed.

Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

We are calling for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

Vital steps include the release of all hostages; the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel; Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza; and a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.

**■ Palestinians: Refugees****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[14676\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of Palestinian refugees on regional stability in the Middle East.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

The Government firmly rejects any suggestion of the resettlement of Palestinians outside of Gaza.

Gaza is Occupied Palestinian Territory and will be part of a future Palestinian state. We support a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people.

Our position is that settlements are illegal. No Palestinian should be threatened with forcible displacement or relocation.

## ■ Red Sea: Piracy

**Daniel Kawczynski:**

[\[13948\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his Egyptian counterpart on the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:**

We are working with allies and partners to safeguard maritime security and navigational rights and freedoms in the Red Sea.

In December, the Foreign Secretary visited Egypt with Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon. They discussed the Red Sea crisis with President Sisi. The Defence Secretary also spoke with his counterpart, General Zaki, in January.

Prior to strikes on Houthi targets, we engaged extensively with regional partners to deter Houthi threats, and to ensure freedom of navigation and safe passage in the Red Sea. We continue to work with our allies and partners to safeguard maritime security and navigation rights and freedoms in the Red Sea. It is in all our interests to work together to de-escalate tensions in the region. We continue to pursue all diplomatic routes.

**Daniel Kawczynski:**

[\[13949\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent assessment he has made of the impact of the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea on shipping through the Suez Canal.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:**

Overall, the volume of ships passing through the Suez Canal has significantly decreased because of the reckless actions of the Houthis in the Red Sea.

*PORTWATCH* report that the number of commercial ships passing through the Suez Canal has fallen by 45 per cent year-on-year this month (February 2024).

Larger commercial vessels have been more likely to divert around the Cape of Good Hope than smaller vessels and so the volume has fallen further. Diverting around the Cape of Good Hope adds at least 10 days to a journey from Asia to Europe, and over 15 per cent to shipping costs.

## ■ Russia: Overseas Trade

**Stephen Doughty:**

[\[15290\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the involvement of UK-based (a) insurers, (b) insurance markets and (c) shipping companies in the provision of services for the (i) export of goods to and (ii) import of goods from Russia.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:**

The UK has introduced a comprehensive set of import and export restrictions on Russia. This has led to a 94 per cent fall in Russian imports into the UK and a 74 per cent fall in UK exports to Russia. Over £20 billion of UK-Russia bilateral trade (from 2021 figures) is now under full or partial sanction.

As well as banning the import and export of goods and technology, UK nationals and companies are prohibited from providing ancillary services which enable their trade, including financial services and funds which includes insurance, brokering and technical assistance.

The UK, alongside the G7 and Australia, has also banned the import of Russian oil and oil products. This substantially reduces the size of the global market for Russian oil and oil product exports.

Importantly, we have also created the Oil Price Cap which operates globally by prohibiting UK and G7+ firms from providing services such as shipping, insurance, and finance to facilitate the maritime transport of Russian oil and oil products to third countries, unless the oil was purchased from Russia at or below the cap. By limiting the price of Russian oil and oil products exported to third countries rather than restricting maritime services altogether, we restrict the revenues flowing to the Russian state and undermine Putin's ability to fund his illegal war in Ukraine, while still enabling oil to flow in a tight market and ensuring that third countries can continue to secure affordable oil.

**■ Sanctions****Sir Iain Duncan Smith:****[14774]**

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of (a) enabling Parliament to exercise oversight of sanctions policy and (b) imposing a duty on His Majesty's Government to lay an annual report before Parliament on sanctions and other related measures adopted on the basis of a relevant human rights purpose as defined by the Sanctions and Money Laundering Act 2018 Section 1(f).

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:**

UK sanctions regimes are established through secondary legislation and are subject to Parliamentary oversight via the scrutiny processes set out in the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 ("SAML").

Ministers are also routinely held accountable for the UK's sanctions policy through select committees and Parliamentary Questions. The government will shortly publish a Post-Legislative Scrutiny Memorandum for SAML, following the publication of the UK's first sanctions strategy in February 2024.

In 2022, Parliament amended SAML to streamline some of the processes SAML originally established, including for reporting.



We have set out the UK government's approach to using sanctions as a foreign and security policy tool in our strategy published on 22 February (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/deter-disrupt-and-demonstrate-uk-sanctions-in-a-contested-world-uk-sanctions-strategy>). The strategy explains how we continue to strengthen our sanctions to deter and disrupt malign activity and to protect the UK.

## ■ **Serbia: Politics and Government**

**Stephen Doughty:**

**[15291]**

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of (a) democratic and (b) civil society rights in Serbia.

**Leo Docherty:**

The UK strongly supports the democratic rights of the people of Serbia. We share the concerns of international observers regarding the conduct of December's elections in Serbia. This includes media bias, pressure on public sector employees and misuse of public resources. Serbia should investigate swiftly and act effectively to address these issues. We encourage Serbia, as we do all Western Balkans countries, to work more closely with civil society organisations to strengthen democracy and rule of law. We were proud to support local election observers in December's elections, alongside our continuing efforts to develop the capacity of grass-root organisations.

## ■ **Sudan: Internet and Telecommunications**

**Ms Lyn Brown:**

**[14520]**

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to support efforts to restore telecommunications and internet connectivity in Sudan; what assessment he has made of the potential additional atrocity risks associated with recent disruptions to telecommunications and internet connectivity in that country; and whether he is taking any steps to increase satellite monitoring of areas of that country where atrocity risks may be higher.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

The UK strongly condemns the persistent blackouts occurring in Sudan and calls for an immediate resumption of telecommunications and internet connectivity. These cause immense harm by making it even more difficult for the world to see what is really happening in Sudan. They also exacerbate the humanitarian crisis, as millions of people rely on online payments for food and other essentials. Since the outbreak of conflict, we have enhanced our atrocity risk monitoring by funding open-source investigation experts to use satellite and social media to verify and preserve information relating to attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure.

**■ UNRWA: Finance****Kenny MacAskill:** [\[15371\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 21 February 2024 to Question 14107 on UNRWA: Finance, what the allegations were; and from whom those allegations were received.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:**

As the UN Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini, set out on 26 January, the Israeli Authorities provided the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) with information about the alleged involvement of UNRWA employees in the horrific attacks on Israel on 7 October. The UN quickly moved to set up two investigations.

As we have set out, we are pressing the UN Office of Internal Oversight and Catherine Colonna to produce a rapid interim report, and we want UNRWA to give detailed undertakings about changes in personnel, policy and precedents to ensure this can never happen again. We are working with allies to try to bring this situation to a rapid conclusion - not least because UNRWA have a vital role to play in providing aid and services in Gaza.

**■ Yemen: Food****Dr Neil Hudson:** [\[14234\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made a recent assessment of the scale of food shortages in Yemen.

**David Rutley:**

The UN's Humanitarian Response Plan for 2024 identifies that 17.6 million people continue to suffer from acute food insecurity in Yemen. The ongoing conflict, insecurity and economic crisis remain the main drivers.

Furthermore, the disruption to shipping in the Red Sea caused by Houthi attacks risks driving up costs of food and humanitarian aid supplies to Yemen. The Houthis have been attacking the very sea lanes that the Yemeni people depend on: 90 percent of food staples, such as wheat are, imported.

The UK is committed to provide continued humanitarian assistance to help alleviate the dire conditions faced by millions of Yemenis. This financial year (FY23/24), the UK's £88 million humanitarian pledge has contributed to providing food to at least 100,000 of the most vulnerable every month, providing lifesaving healthcare through 400 healthcare facilities and treating 22,000 of severely malnourished children.

The UK is committed to ensuring freedom of navigation and trade.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ Alzheimer's Disease

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[14582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment she has made of trends in the level of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's in the last 10 years.

**Helen Whately:**

Whilst no formal assessment has been made, we know that the number of people with dementia has increased. The latest dementia diagnosis rate reported by NHS England for the end of January 2024 was 64.4%.

A table showing the number of people with a primary diagnosis of Alzheimer's each year from 2016 to 2023, as data is not available before 2016, broken down by the type and stage of the diagnosis is attached.

**Attachments:**

1. PQ14582 - attached table [Table with the number of people with a primary diagnosis of Alzheimer 2016 to 2023 (2).docx]

### ■ Autism and Learning Disability: Community Care

**Barbara Keeley:**

[\[15039\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many times the Funding Flows Task and Finish Group has met since 20 January 2023.

**Maria Caulfield:**

*[Holding answer 26 February 2024]:* The Funding Flows task and finish group has met five times since its inception in September 2022. Two of those meetings took place after 20 January 2023.

**Barbara Keeley:**

[\[15040\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the findings in the Red Quadrant report entitled, Building the Right Support: An analysis of funding flows, published by her Department, in July 2022, whether she is taking steps to improve financial oversight of expenditure for the Building the Right Support programme.

**Maria Caulfield:**

*[Holding answer 26 February 2024]:* In our response to the Health and Social Care Committee's report, The Treatment of Autistic People and People with Learning Disabilities published 27 July 2022, we noted the wide range of capital and revenue funding sources, as well as the range of support that a person who is, or is at risk of being, admitted to a mental health hospital may draw on. This makes assessing the costs and expenditure associated with the Building the Right Support (BtRS) programme practically challenging. The response, which referenced RedQuadrant's report, set out that we are clear that there must be credible alternatives to inpatient care, so that people can live independent, fulfilled lives in their community, without financial incentives or disincentives which prevent this from happening.

We recognise the case for improving how data is collected, in order to better understand the specific costs related to BtRS. That is why the BtRS Delivery Board set up a Funding Flows task and finish group to look at improving national oversight of the National Health Service and local authority spend on services, and support for this group of people.

## ■ Autism and Learning Disability: Patients

**Barbara Keeley:**

[\[15042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) autistic people and (b) people with learning disabilities were placed in an inpatient unit rated as inadequate by the Care Quality Commission in the last 12 months.

**Maria Caulfield:**

*[Holding answer 26 February 2024]:* The Assuring Transformation data shows that there are 130 people with learning disabilities or autism reported in a mental health inpatient setting which the Care Quality Commission (CQC) rates as inadequate. This is based on inpatients at the end of November 2023, and CQC inspection ratings on 17 January 2024. These units may not have been rated as inadequate at the point of the person's admission.

## ■ Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder

**Lisa Nandy:**

[\[14560\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans her Department has to (a) establish and (b) fund an avoidant restrictive food intake disorder pathway.

**Maria Caulfield:**

*[Holding answer 22 February 2024]:* Commissioning pathways for avoidant restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID) are locally determined by integrated care boards. NHS England advises that all eating disorder teams should work collaboratively with other children and young people's community teams to address coexisting and co-occurring conditions as needed.

NHS England recognises the importance of patient-centred care, and that care is tailored to meet the needs of children and young people with varied presentations, including ARFID. The children and young people's eating disorder guidance is being updated to reflect this, with publication expected later in 2024.

## ■ Blood: Contamination

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

[\[15030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate her Department has made of the number of people who were (a) treated with contaminated blood products and (b) given contaminated blood transfusions by the NHS in Hull North.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

**[15031]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate her Department has made of the number of people who have died since being (a) treated with contaminated blood products and (b) given contaminated blood transfusions in Hull North.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

**[15032]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what psychological support is available for people infected and affected by contaminated blood and blood products in Hull North.

**Maria Caulfield:**

*[Holding answer 26 February 2024]:* The Department has not made an estimate of the number of people who were treated with contaminated blood products and given contaminated blood transfusions by the National Health Service in Hull North, nor has it made an estimate of the numbers of these people who have since died.

Psychological support is available for people across England who are beneficiaries of the England Infected Blood Support Scheme (EIBSS), and their families. EIBSS provides a grant of up to £900 a year for beneficiaries and family members for counselling and National Institute for Health and Care Excellence approved talking therapies. This offer was expanded in August 2022 to enable beneficiaries to access funding for ongoing or longer-term treatment. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/talking-therapy-support>.

A bespoke psychological support service for infected blood victims and their families, commissioned by NHS England, is currently being developed and is planned to go live in early summer 2024. This will be available in all regions of England.

## ■ **Cancer: Diagnosis**

**Rachael Maskell:**

**[14626]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps is she taking to help ensure that 75% of stageable cancers are diagnosed at stages 1 and 2.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

Improving early diagnosis of cancer remains a priority for the Government. We are working towards the NHS Long Term Plan's ambition of diagnosing 75% of stageable cancers at stage one and two, by 2028.

NHS England's comprehensive Early Diagnosis strategy 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.

To support this, NHS England introduced the Faster Diagnosis Standard (FDS) which sets a maximum target of a 28 day wait from urgent suspected general practitioner or

screening referral to patients being told they have, or do not have, cancer. The FDS also intends to reduce unwarranted variation in England by understanding how long it is taking people to receive a diagnosis or all clear for cancer.

In order to find and diagnose cancers earlier, NHS England is streamlining cancer pathways to support diagnosis within 28 days by implementing non-symptom specific pathways for patients who present with non-specific symptoms that can indicate several cancers, as well as implementing timed cancer pathways.

## ■ Cancer: Health Services

**Rachael Maskell:**

[\[14623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what criteria were used to determine the cancer types selected for the evaluation of treatment and services by the Royal College of Surgeons and NHS England; and whether an assessment was made of the potential merits of including liver cancer in that study.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The cancer clinical audit review undertaken in 2021 was based on the level of variation apparent, based on proxy indicators and the difference in outcomes we might expect that variation to result in. This led to five new cancer clinical audits being commissioned in 2022, with liver cancer being taken into consideration during the selection process, but not proposed for an audit at that time.

As part of NHS England's commitment to implementing wider NHS Long Term Plan actions relating to both cancer and liver disease detection and management, there have been discussions as to whether a review of adult liver services should be undertaken in the future. Should such a review take place, the Specialised Commissioning Hepatobiliary Clinical Reference Group will be a key contributor, working in collaboration with colleagues responsible for non-specialised aspects of the liver pathway, including the Hepatitis C and early diagnosis programmes, as well as integrated care boards. The case for a review of liver services will be considered in the context of available resources, taking into account the other priorities to be delivered by the NHS England specialised commissioning team, other related national programmes, and local commissioning teams.

## ■ Cancer: Medical Treatments

**Rachael Maskell:**

[\[14624\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when she plans that the 62-day waiting time target for cancer treatment will be met (a) nationally and (b) in York.

**Rachael Maskell:**

[\[14625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether her Department plans to provide additional support to ICBs to help them to (a) develop a strategy to achieve the 62-day waiting time target for cancer and (b) deliver that target.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The Elective Recovery Plan sets out the ambition of returning the number of people waiting more than 62 days from an urgent referral for cancer, back to pre-pandemic levels. The latest published data shows that the 62-day backlog stands at 23,756, and has fallen 30% since its peak in the pandemic. Whilst it is right to focus on those waiting the longest for cancer treatment, doing so means that it is more difficult to focus on those also waiting too long, but who are nonetheless below the 62-day maximum

In the 2023/24 Operational Planning Guidance, NHS England announced that it is providing over £390 million in cancer service development funding to Cancer Alliances, to support delivery of the strategy and the operational priorities for cancer, which includes increasing and prioritising diagnostic and treatment capacity

Despite the challenge of industrial action in particular, the National Health Service is making progress. Over 340,000 people received their first cancer treatment in the 12 months leading to December 2023, up by more than 28,000 compared to the same 12-month period pre-pandemic. The NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board's latest published performance against the 62-day referral to treatment waiting time standard was 62.1%, which is 1% higher than performance the previous year

The Government remains committed to continuing its recovery from the pandemic, and specifically, to reduce local and national waiting times for cancer treatment. NHS England has developed an intervention model called tiering, to target support towards the most challenged trusts, to maximise and expand capacity. This includes NHS England working with trusts to develop a support plan to improve performance, which is monitored by regular oversight calls.

**■ Cancer: Research****Ed Davey:**[\[12230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding her Department has provided for research into (a) prevention and (b) the treatment of cancer in each of the last 12 years.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The Department invests over £1 billion per year in health research through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). NIHR research expenditure for all cancers was £121.8 million in 2022/23.

When categorising prevention and treatment, the Department and NIHR uses the Health Research Classification System (HRCS) Health Category coding, which was developed by the UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC) Partners and was designed to produce a broad strategic overview of health research funding.

The NIHR have funded 127 projects on cancer prevention for the period April 2012 to date with a combined total funding value of approximately £90.3 million:



F/Y	FUNDED PROJECTS	FUNDING AMOUNT
2012/13	7	£3,735,044
2013/14	8	£2,858,223
2014/15	16	£7,281,782
2015/16	12	£9,206,926
2016/17	8	£3,503,717
2017/18	26	£25,467,753
2018/19	8	£5,428,968
2019/20	10	£12,099,536
2020/21	8	£4,346,694
2021/22	12	£8,892,741
2022/23	12	£7,529,430
total	127	£90,350,814

The NIHR have funded 685 projects on cancer treatment for the period April 2012 to date with a combined total funding value of approximately £302.4 million:

F/Y	FUNDED PROJECTS	FUNDING AMOUNT
2012/13	56	£23,937,981
2013/14	44	£19,765,569
2014/15	53	£27,226,212
2015/16	54	£26,887,042
2016/17	70	£19,930,361
2017/18	62	£22,760,373
2018/19	52	£18,283,962
2019/20	66	£18,683,770
2020/21	76	£35,330,181
2021/22	90	£55,518,331
2022/23	62	£34,115,891

F/Y	FUNDED PROJECTS	FUNDING AMOUNT
total	685	£302,439,673

The NIHR Infrastructure investment funds the world-class facilities, expertise, and skilled delivery workforce for research across the National Health Service and wider health and care system in England from early translational clinical research through to applied health and care research. It is difficult to attribute this funding to specific disease and therapy areas as the staff and facilities funded through the NIHR Infrastructure supports research across disciplines.

### ■ Cancer: Training

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[14871\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to train specialist staff in the timely (a) diagnosis and (b) treatment of cancer.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP) published by NHS England on 30 June 2023 sets out an aim to double the number of medical school places in England to 15,000 places a year by 2031/32, and to work towards this expansion by increasing places by a third, to 10,000 a year, by 2028/29.

The LTWP commits to an adequate growth in foundation placement capacity, as those taking up these new places begin to graduate, and a commensurate increase in specialty training places that meets the demands of the National Health Service in the future. This will substantially increase the potential pipeline for the cancer workforce. The Department is working closely with NHS England to make sure we have the right workforce with the right skills up and down the country.

There are more doctors working in clinical oncology and more radiology doctors. As of October 2023, there are almost 1,700 full time equivalent (FTE) doctors working on clinical oncology in NHS trusts and other core organisations in England. This is 5.2% more than last year, and 62.4% more than in 2010. Additionally, there are over 5,600 FTE doctors working in the speciality of clinical radiology in NHS trusts and other core organisations in England. This is over 300 5.7% more than last year, and 66.8% more than in 2010.

In 2023/24, NHS England is investing an additional £50 million to expand cancer and diagnostics specialists. On 10 January 2023, Health Education England announced that nearly 900 additional medical specialty training posts have been created for this year, including more than 500 in the key areas of mental health and cancer treatment.

## ■ Cancer: Young People

**Kim Johnson:**

[\[14706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of commissioning and independent review into the impact of cancer treatment on a young person's (a) cognitive function and (b) ability to learn effectively.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

Cancer is a priority for the Government, and the new Children and Young People Cancer Taskforce has been set up to progress our mission to deliver world-leading cancer services. This work will focus on cancers affecting children and young people, specifically recognising the long-term challenges that cancer and its treatment can have on children and young people.

Over the past five years, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) has invested approximately £14 million pounds into 38 research projects on childhood cancers. The James Lind Alliance (JLA), through a Priority Setting Partnership (PSP), facilitates patients, carers, and clinicians in working collaboratively to identify research priorities in particular areas of health and care. The impact of cancer and treatment on the lives of children and families after treatment, and ways to overcome these impacts in the long term, is one of the key priorities identified by the JLA PSP. The NIHR recognises the importance of the research priorities identified by the JLA PSP, and is looking to receive applications for research studies addressing these research priorities.

Furthermore, education and the support to learn effectively are important parts of National Health Service's specifications for cancer services for children and young people. These specifications require children's cancer services to take a multi-agency approach to support and address the wider social, educational, psychological, and emotional needs of the child and family. This includes providing ready access to a wide range of services and professionals, encompassing educational support, which includes teachers, health play specialists, speech and language support, and rehabilitative support. These services are vital in ensuring that children and families have the support to face the challenges cancer brings.

## ■ Cannabis: Medical Treatments

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[14583\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people aged under 18 have been prescribed medicinal cannabis as of 19 February 2024.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The Department does not hold details relating to the age of people prescribed medicinal cannabis.

## ■ Cardiovascular Diseases

**Jim Shannon:**

**[15066]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data her Department holds on the number of cases of (a) vascular and (b) venous disease.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

Cardiovascular disease affects approximately seven million people in the United Kingdom, and is a significant cause of disability and death. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/clinical-policy/cvd/>

## ■ Dementia: Finance

**Kate Osamor:**

**[14654]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Government is on target to double dementia funding by 2024/25.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The Government is dedicated to supporting research into dementia, and has committed to doubling the funding for dementia research to £160 million per year by the end of 2024/25. The Government's responsibility for delivering dementia research is shared between the Department of Health and Social Care, with research delivered by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), and the Department for Science Innovation and Technology, with research delivered via UK Research and Innovation.

In 2022/23, the most recent year we have data for, we estimate that total Government spend on dementia research was £96.9 million. Spend is dependent on the number and quality of applications received, as well as the volume of research that requires infrastructure support, therefore research spend can only be calculated retrospectively after the end of the financial year.

The Government is making significant progress towards meeting the commitment and has instigated momentous new programmes of work, for instance investing almost £50 million over five years into the NIHR's Dementia Translational Research Collaboration Trial Network, which will expand the United Kingdom's early phase clinical trial capabilities in dementia, speeding up the development of new treatments. A new Clinical Trials Delivery Accelerator focused on dementia was also announced in the Autumn Statement 2023, with up to £20 million of funding to help innovation reach National Health Service patients even faster. Many new initiatives and research projects will begin to spend in 2024/25.

**Kate Osamor:**

**[14655]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how the additional £95 million investment in dementia care has been allocated.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Mission was launched in August 2022 with £95 million of Government funding. There is now more than £120 million of committed funding to the mission, which will be invested into three key pillars. The first pillar centres on biomarkers and experimental medicine, and will receive £50 million of the funding for the mission, with the intention of securing match funding from industry partners. As part of this pillar, Innovate UK launched a Small Business Research Initiative competition, with the aim of accelerating innovations in clinical biomarker tools and technologies for dementia, where organisations could apply for a share of £6 million of funding out of the allocated £50 million. These technologies will enable the discovery, validation, and implementation of a suite of decision-enabling biomarkers to help transform clinical trials and precision therapies. The competition closed on 4 September 2023, and the recipients awarded a portion of the £6 million will be announced soon.

The second pillar will focus on clinical trial infrastructure and innovation, with two recently announced initiatives to support its delivery. The first of these initiatives is the National Institute for Health and Care Research's Dementia-Translational Research Collaboration Trials Network, with almost £50 million of funding over five years. This will expand the United Kingdom's early phase clinical trial capabilities for dementia, speeding up the development of new treatments. The second initiative is the Clinical Trials Delivery Accelerator, focused on dementia, also named the Dementia Accelerator. This was announced in the Autumn Statement 2023, in response to Lord O'Shaughnessy's independent review into commercial clinical trials in the UK, with up to £20 million of additional funding.

The third pillar will be focused on end-to-end implementation, specifically on aligning translational research, clinical practice, and regulatory frameworks to prepare health-systems for new dementia medicines. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, NHS England, the Department, the devolved administrations, and the Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Mission are already working closely together to plan for the implementation of new dementia medicines, should they gain approval in the UK.

**■ Dementia: Health Services****Julian Sturdy:****[12951]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to help support people with early onset dementia.

**Helen Whately:**

NHS England is committed to delivering high quality care and support for every person with dementia at every age, and central to this is the provision of personalised care. Provision of dementia health care services is the responsibility of local integrated care boards (ICBs). NHS England would expect ICBs to commission services based on local population needs.

The Dementia Well Pathway includes diagnosing well, living well, supporting well, and dying well, and highlights that services need to be integrated, commissioned, monitored, and aligned with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) standards for each component of the pathway. It makes it clear that individual needs, wishes and preferences should be taken into account in planning and providing care.

In January 2023 the Government announced that it will publish a Major Conditions Strategy early 2024. By bringing dementia and other conditions strategies together, we will be able to focus on where there are similarities in approach and ensure care is better centred around the patient.

## ■ Dental Health: Children

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

[\[15131\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the budget is for the Smile for Life programme, and if she will publish a breakdown of costs.

**Andrea Leadsom:**

*[Holding answer 26 February 2024]:* To improve prevention for our youngest children, we will roll out support education targeting one to three year olds in the new Smile for Life programme. We will work closely with local areas to ensure our national advice and educational materials are tailored appropriately for nurseries and other early years settings.

The Dentistry Recovery Plan is fully funded with £200 million, and will deliver new initiatives to address the challenges facing National Health Service dentistry, including an additional 2.5 million appointments.

Overall NHS spending totals will be set at budget in the usual way. We are committed to protecting funding for dentistry purposes and will ringfence dental funding in 2024/25. We will issue guidance to integrated care boards shortly, through NHS England's 2024/25 revenue finance and contracting guidance.

## ■ Dental Services: Contracts

**Sir Greg Knight:**

[\[15225\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether it remains her policy to continue reforms to the 2006 dental contract.

**Andrea Leadsom:**

As set out in Faster, simpler, fairer: our plan to recover and reform NHS dentistry, we are working on further reforms to the 2006 contract, in discussion with the dental profession, to properly reflect the care needed by different patients, and more fairly remunerate practices. We expect to develop options for consultation with the dental profession in advance of a further announcement later this year. Any changes would be phased in from 2025 onwards.

**■ Dentistry: NHS****Preet Kaur Gill:****[15134]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many dentists waited (a) less than three weeks, (b) more than three weeks and (c) more than six weeks to receive a response to an application to the Dental Performers List in each of the last 10 years.

**Andrea Leadsom:**

*[Holding answer 26 February 2024]:* Dentists must be listed on the Dental Performers List (DPL), to deliver National Health Service dental services in England. The DPL is managed by NHS England, which does not currently collect data on DPL application processing times in the format requested. NHS England is committed to working to ensure DPL applications are managed as quickly as possible to support the delivery of NHS dentistry.

**■ Department of Health and Social Care: Domicil****Jonathan Ashworth:****[15072]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether any non-executive directors employed in her Department are non-domiciled.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

*[Holding answer 26 February 2024]:* The personal data of non-executive directors, including those relating to personal taxation or status, are protected by the UK General Data Protection Regulation. Collection of personal data on non-domiciled status is not routinely collected and is generally not required for making public appointments. If any such data was held it could only be published if doing so followed data protection law. Non-executive board members are not employees of the Department and act in an advisory capacity. Data relating to public appointments are covered by the Public Appointments Privacy Statement, which is available at the following link:

<https://apply-for-public-appointment.service.gov.uk/privacy>

**■ Department of Health and Social Care: Equality****Dr Matthew Offord:****[14546]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much her Department spent on equality, diversity and inclusion (a) events and (b) training in the last 12 months.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The Government is auditing the cost-effectiveness of all equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) activities, through the review of EDI spending announced last June. As stated in the Autumn Statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Minister for the Cabinet Office will be outlining the final proposals in response to the review in due course.



In the last 12 months from February 2023, the Department has centrally delivered two training sessions on dealing with unacceptable behaviour at total a cost of £4080, inclusive of VAT.

There is no departmental register of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) training, and events that take place at a local level across the Department. Whilst our finance function holds invoices for any services delivered to the Department, we are unable to differentiate those specifically received for EDI training or events.

All Department staff are required to complete the Civil Service Expectations mandatory learning that includes aspects of EDI, and is delivered centrally through Civil Service Learning at no additional cost to the Department.

## ■ **Drugs: Shortages**

**Tonia Antoniazzi:**

[\[14113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what comparative assessment she has made of trends in the total number of medicine shortages recorded by her Department in January (a) 2021, (b) 2022, (c) 2023 and (d) 2024.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

There are around 14,000 licensed medicines, and the overwhelming majority are in good supply. However, the medicine supply chain is highly regulated, complex and global, and supply disruption is a common issue which affects countries all around the world.

The Department's medicine Discontinuations and Shortages portal has been collecting notifications from suppliers of potential supply issues since October 2020, and shows that there were approximately:

- 90 supply issue notifications in January 2021;
- 110 supply issue notifications in January 2022;
- 170 supply issue notifications in January 2023; and
- 160 supply issue notifications in January 2024.

Although reporting does vary each month, annual notifications have remained fairly stable at approximately 1,600 supply issue notifications in 2022 and 2023. It is important to note that not all supply issue notifications will lead to a medicine shortage.

## ■ **Eating Disorders: Devolution**

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[14869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of the potential merits of providing additional funding to the devolved Administrations to help support young people with (a) bulimia, (b) anorexia and (c) other eating disorders.

**Maria Caulfield:**

There are currently no plans for such an assessment. As health is a predominantly devolved matter, and funding through the Barnett formula is not ringfenced for specific uses, it is for the devolved administrations to determine how much of their funding they allocate to specific healthcare services, including eating disorder services, in their nations.

**■ General Medical Council and Health and Care Professions Council: Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy****Gareth Thomas:****[12892]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has had discussions with the (a) General Medical Council and (b) Health and Care Professions Council on signing the Hillsborough Charter.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

*[Holding answer 8 February 2024]:* There have been no discussions between the department's ministers and the General Medical Council or the Health and Care Professions Council on signing the Hillsborough Charter. As set out on 6 December 2023, in the Government's response to Bishop James Jones' independent report, many organisations, in addition to His Majesty's Government, have already signed the Hillsborough Charter, including the National Police Chiefs' Council, College of Policing, Crown Prosecution Service, Fire Service, and Kensington and Chelsea Council. This Government will encourage and work with other public bodies to adopt the Charter and commit to learn the lessons of the Hillsborough families disaster, to ensure that the failings we saw in the aftermath of the disaster are never repeated.

**■ GP Surgeries****Sir Alec Shelbrooke:****[14530]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to help support GP practices with the costs of recycling medical packaging.

**Andrea Leadsom:**

The Premises Costs Directions 2013 set out the reimbursement of certain costs, incurred by General Medical Services contractors, that can be claimed relating to their practice premises. This includes being able to claim reimbursement for clinical waste disposal. The costs of all other waste services are a general practice (GP) expense, covered by the payments GPs receive for delivery of services under their contracts. The Premises Costs Directions 2013 is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-general-medical-services-premises-costs-directions>

## ■ Health Professions: Emigration

**Alison Thewliss:** [\[13582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information her Department holds on the number of UK citizens who worked in the NHS that emigrated in each year since 2010.

**Alison Thewliss:** [\[13583\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information her Department holds on the number of Scottish citizens who worked in the NHS that emigrated in each year since 2010.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The Department does not hold the information requested.

## ■ Health Services: Payments

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:** [\[15257\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when her Department plans to publish the responses to the public consultation on the disclosure of industry payments to the healthcare sector.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:** [\[15258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to her Department's consultation on the disclosure of industry payments to the healthcare sector, which closed on 16 October 2023, whether she plans to bring forward regulations under section 92 of the Health and Social Care Act 2022.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The Department launched a United Kingdom-wide public consultation on 4 September 2023, on the disclosure of industry payments to the healthcare sector. The consultation sought views on the possible introduction of regulations through new secondary legislation, as well as views on alternative options to regulations. The English-language consultation closed on 16 October 2023, and the Welsh-language consultation closed on 16 November 2023.

The Department is analysing responses, and the Government's response will be published in due course. If a decision is made to regulate the sector, any regulations will be available six months before implementation.

## ■ Health Services: Standards

**Stephanie Peacock:** [\[14202\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of allowing NHS patients to seek a second opinion on their (a) condition and (b) treatment.

**Maria Caulfield:**

The guidance Good Medical Practice, from the General Medical Council (GMC), sets out the standards of care and behaviour expected of all medical doctors practising in the United Kingdom. It states that doctors must recognise a patient's right to choose whether to accept their advice, and respect a patient's right to seek a second opinion. The GMC is an independent regulator and is responsible for operational matters, including any assessment of its policies and guidance. Managing second opinion requests is the responsibility of local National Health Service organisations.

On 21 February 2024, the Government announced that Martha's Rule will be rolled out from April of this year, allowing at least 100 NHS trusts to introduce the rule during 2024/25, with the programme being evaluated throughout this year and next. This patient safety initiative will give NHS patients and families the right to obtain a rapid review outside of their immediate care team when a patient's condition is thought to be deteriorating. The escalation process will be available around-the-clock to patients, families and NHS staff, and will be advertised throughout hospitals, making it quickly and easily accessible. Martha's Rule will allow early intervention and rapid review, which may avoid harm to patients.

**Health Services: Waiting Lists****Wes Streeting:****[14907]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of patients on an NHS elective waiting list are waiting for (a) a diagnostic test, (b) an outpatient appointment and (c) an elective procedure or surgery in England.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

*[Holding answer 26 February 2024]:* The data requested is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/rtt-waiting-times/rtt-data-2023-24/#Dec23>

**Heart Diseases: Genetics****Mr Virendra Sharma:****[13968]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she plans to introduce self-referral forms for family members of people with genetic cardiac conditions.

**Mr Virendra Sharma:****[13970]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she is taking steps to raise awareness of inherited cardiac conditions among GPs.

**Mr Virendra Sharma:****[13971]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she plans to introduce a national leadership role for inherited cardiac conditions.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

We are not aware of plans to introduce a national leadership role for inherited cardiac conditions. However, NHS England, through the National Genomics Education Team, also deliver and advise on learning and development opportunities that prepare current and future National Health Service professionals to make the best use of genomics in their practice.

Furthermore, the National Genomic Test Directory sets out the eligibility criteria for patients to access testing as well as the genomic targets to be tested, the method that should be used, and the healthcare professional that can request the test, including when a general practice can request testing.

This includes the development of resources to support the workforce across the entire care continuum, for example, in the case of familial hypercholesterolaemia this would include the whole multi-professional team, inclusive of primary care.

Furthermore, the Genomic Training

Academy will begin offering education and training through virtual and in person learning for the specialist genomics workforce, including laboratory and clinical staff.

NHS Clinical Genomic Services deliver a comprehensive clinical genomic and counselling service that directs the diagnosis, risk assessment and lifelong clinical management of patients of all ages including families who have, or are at risk of having, a rare genetic or genomic condition. The Department does not have any direct plans to introduce self-referral forms for family members of people with genetic cardiac conditions.

**■ Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy****Mr Virendra Sharma:**[\[13961\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people were diagnosed with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy in (a) 2020, (b) 2021 and (c) 2022.

**Mr Virendra Sharma:**[\[13962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people have hypertrophic cardiomyopathy.

**Mr Virendra Sharma:**[\[13963\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether her Department is taking steps to raise awareness of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy in young people.

**Mr Virendra Sharma:**[\[13967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she is taking steps to increase the number of genetic counsellors for hypertrophic cardiomyopathy.

**Mr Virendra Sharma:**

**[13974]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she is taking steps to reduce regional variations in diagnosis rates of (a) hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and (b) other inherited cardiac conditions.

**Mr Virendra Sharma:**

**[13975]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she is taking steps to reduce regional variations in outcomes for patients with (a) hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and (b) other inherited cardiac conditions.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, along with other inherited cardiac conditions, is included on the National Genomic Test Directory. The directory sets out the eligibility criteria for patients to access testing, as well as the genomic targets to be tested, the method that should be used, and the healthcare professional that can request the test, including when a general practice can request testing. The directory also enables the testing of family members as part of cascade testing. A robust and evidence-based process and policy is in place to ensure that genomic testing continues to be available for all patients for whom it would be of clinical benefit. This is supported by a horizon scanning process and fast track application system to ensure the directory can respond quickly to emerging developments. Testing is available for all eligible patients across the whole of England. The National Genomic Test Directory is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/national-genomic-test-directories/>

On raising awareness, the seven NHS Genomic Medicine Service Alliances also play an important role in supporting the strategic and systematic embedding of genomic medicine in end-to-end clinical pathways and clinical specialities, supporting the achievement of equitable access to standardised end-to-end pathways of care, inclusive of genomic testing. They also support clinical genetics and genomic counselling services, as well as raising awareness among clinicians and the public of the genomic testing available through the National Health Service.

Furthermore, the 17 NHS Clinical Genomic Services, commissioned by NHS England, deliver a comprehensive clinical genomic and counselling service that directs the diagnosis, risk assessment, and lifelong clinical management of patients of all ages and their families who have, or are at risk of having, a rare genetic or genomic condition. The Department does not hold specific information on how many people were diagnosed with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy in 2020, 2021 or 2022, although hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is thought to affect 1 in 500 people in the United Kingdom. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cardiomyopathy/>

## ■ Junior Doctors: Greater London

**Feryal Clark:**

[\[14976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to help increase retention levels of junior doctors in (a) Enfield North constituency, (b) the London Borough of Enfield, and (c) London.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan sets out how to improve culture and leadership, to ensure that up to 130,000 fewer staff leave the National Health Service over the next 15 years. The plan includes: implementing actions from the NHS People Plan that have been shown to be successful; implementing plans to improve flexible opportunities for prospective retirees and delivering the actions needed to modernise the NHS pension scheme; and committing to ongoing national funding for continuing professional development for nurses, midwives, and allied health professionals, so NHS staff are supported to meet their full potential.

Additionally, for junior doctors, NHS England's Enhancing Junior Doctors' Working Lives programme continues to implement a number of measures aimed at supporting junior doctors, encouraging them to stay in training and the NHS, and reducing overall attrition. This includes measures such as Less than Full Time training options, to allow trainees to continue to work in the service and progress with their training on a reduced working pattern, where this is beneficial for their personal circumstances. These measures apply across England, including in the Enfield North constituency and all London boroughs.

## ■ Liver Cancer: Health Services

**Rachael Maskell:**

[\[14621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of (a) community liver health checks, (b) primary care pilots and (c) surveillance for hepatocellular carcinoma as part of NHS England's early detection of liver cancer programme.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The care of and treatment for patients with cancers, including liver cancer, is a priority for the Government. National Health Service cancer standards have been reformed with the support of clinicians to speed up diagnosis for patients, which means people will receive a diagnosis or have cancer ruled out within 28 days from urgent cancer referral from their general practice. NHS England's Early diagnosis of Liver Cancer Programme is contributing to deliver the NHS Long Term Plan's commitment to diagnose 75% of all cancers at stage one or two by 2028. Identifying those at risk and ensuring patients are tested and referred to a surveillance programme, where necessary, will lead to improved patient outcomes.



## ■ Liver Diseases: Screening

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

**[381]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the letter of 7 March 2023 from the then Minister for Social Care to the Chief Executive of the British Liver Trust, whether it remains his policy that fibroscans will be in use at 100 community diagnostic centres by March 2025; how many fibroscans have been delivered to community diagnostic centres since March 2023; and whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of setting a new target.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

*[Holding answer 15 November 2023]:* There is currently no national target specifically relating to the availability of FibroScan equipment, or testing for liver fibrosis, through Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs) in England by March 2025.

The CDC modality offer is based on the recommendations in the Sir Mike Richards Review, in which Fibroscans were included as a suitable optional additional test for use in CDCs. Decisions on what modalities are offered outside of the core requirements of CDCs will be based on local need and decisions.

I can confirm there are currently plans for 12 CDCs to offer FibroScan testing, of which seven are operational. A further five CDCs plan to offer this service by the end of March 2024.

However, the Government takes very seriously the importance of preventative action, and of identifying patients at risk of liver disease and diagnosing it earlier. It is a fast-growing cause of mortality and morbidity; and one we want to make progress in tackling.

The Government is working with the National Health Service to support earlier diagnosis of liver disease and identifying patients at risk. This includes plans agreed as part of the £2.3 billion diagnostics transformation programme, including upgrading laboratory digital capabilities to ensure that labs across the country have the capability required to offer Intelligent Liver Function Tests. This test is highly effective as a first line diagnostic test to identify patients at higher risk, who may benefit from a FibroScan, or enhanced Liver function test.

The Government is also working with the NHS to deliver and consider the result from the pilot of the community liver health check programme – which in its first year delivered over 17,000 FibroScans to individuals at particular risk of liver disease, through the use of 40 FibroScanners, 12 of which were located in mobile units, across 19 local areas. This is in addition to wider work on health prevention, including vaccination and alcohol awareness programmes.

The Government will continue to look at options to go further. Over the coming year, NHS England are due to pilot a new diagnostic pathway it has developed for liver disease, which will include Fibrosis scanning in CDCs – we look forward to seeing the results of that pilot.



## ■ Medical Equipment

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[14870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to replace aging equipment in the NHS.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

Individual National Health Service organisations are responsible for maintaining and replacing their existing assets. One source of funding for aging equipment is operational capital, which is issued to integrated care boards to prioritise the capital needs of the NHS, including renewal and replacement of plant, IT, and equipment. In order to facilitate the ongoing requirement for equipment, the Department has provided £4.2 billion in operational capital in 2023/24, amounting to over £12 billion over the spending review period of 2022/23 to 2024/25.

In addition to operational capital is the £2.3 billion which has been provided over the spending review period to transform diagnostic services, including replacing old equipment, and deliver 160 community diagnostic centres. One aim of this funding is to clear the current backlog of equipment over 10 years old by the end of the spending review period.

**Wes Streeting:**

[\[14906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate she has made of the average cost of a PET scanner.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

*[Holding answer 26 February 2024]:* In 2017/18, the Department implemented a new operating model and delivery body for National Health Service procurement, known as NHS Supply Chain. The NHS Supply Chain was created as a national body, through which NHS organisations could voluntarily make use of their collective purchasing power, and provide best value for money for the taxpayer.

Positron emission tomography scanners are available at a range of different prices in accordance with their level of specification. There are several ways for trusts to buy products, including through the NHS Supply Chain, supplier frameworks, and private sourcing companies or suppliers. Prices will vary according to purchase route, volumes purchased, and model type.

## ■ Mental Health

**Dan Carden:**

[\[14683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment she has made of (a) trends in levels of (i) stress and (ii) burnout and (b) the potential impact of these on mental health.

**Maria Caulfield:**

Whilst no such assessment has been made, we are investing at least an additional £2.3 billion a year as part of the NHS Long Term Plan, to expand and transform National Health Service mental health services by 2023/24, compared to 2018/19.

This will allow an extra two million people to get the NHS-funded mental health support they need.

NHS Talking Therapies, formerly the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme, began in 2008 and has been expanding ever since, with over one million people now accessing NHS Talking Therapies services each year, and national waiting time standards consistently being delivered. NHS Talking Therapies offer National Institute for Health and Care Excellence approved psychological and talking therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, to help with common mental health problems like stress, anxiety and depression. People can self-refer directly to an NHS Talking Therapies service, or their general practice can refer them.

The Spring Budget 2023 contained a package of over £400 million to support the long-term sick and disabled to remain in, or enter, employment. This includes approximately £200 million for digital mental health, to modernise NHS Talking Therapies services in England, provide free access to wellness and clinical mental health apps to the population, and pilot cutting edge digital therapies.

The Autumn Statement in 2023 announced £592 million of new funding to continue the expansion of NHS Talking Therapies over the next five years. The funding is intended to both increase the number of people who can access the service by 384,000 over the next five years, and increase the average number of therapy sessions each person can access, to improve quality and outcomes. This will be underpinned by recruitment and retention initiatives to ensure sufficient capacity and skills mix in the NHS Talking Therapies workforce.

Access to good occupational health services is incredibly important, and NHS England published a strategy to grow occupational health and wellbeing, setting out a roadmap for the NHS and partners over the next five years to develop and invest in occupational health and wellbeing services.

## ■ Motor Neurone Disease

**Julian Sturdy:**

[\[14853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to support people living with motor neurone disease.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has published a clinical guideline on the assessment and management of motor neurone disease (MND), to support its diagnosis. The guideline recommends coordinated care for people with MND, using a clinic based, MND specialist, multi-disciplinary team approach. The core multi-disciplinary team should consist of healthcare and other professionals with expertise in MND, and should include specialist nurses.

The Government has committed to delivering at least £50 million to support MND research over five years, from 2022 onwards, as part of a package of £375 million for research into neurodegenerative diseases. In June 2023, the Government announced that more than £35 million of the £50 million pledged to cutting-edge MND

research has now been allocated, just two years into a five-year funding commitment. Work continues at pace to support MND researchers in submitting high-quality bids for open funding calls. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-continues-delivering-on-50-million-funding-pledge-for-motor-neurone-disease-research>

NHS England commissions specialised services to support people living with MND, as set out in the published service specification for specialised neurology services. The support provided includes the provision of multi-disciplinary care from specialist clinicians, including neurologists, specialist nurses, speech and language therapists, dietetics and nutrition support, and physiotherapy, depending on individual clinical need. The service specification for specialised neurology services is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/d04-neurosci-spec-neuro.pdf>

In addition, NHS England commissions a specialised communication aid service known as Augmentative and Alternative Communication, as set out in the published service specification. This service supports and prioritises individuals with rapidly degenerative conditions, including MND. The service specification for Augmentative and Alternative Communication, is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2016/03/aac-serv-spec-jan-2016.pdf>

## ■ NHS: Buildings

**Vicky Foxcroft:** [14215]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent estimate she has made of the number and proportion of NHS buildings that contain asbestos.

**Vicky Foxcroft:** [14216]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to remove asbestos from NHS buildings.

### **Andrew Stephenson:**

Individual National Health Service organisations are legally responsible for maintaining their estates. NHS England continues to work with trusts to ensure their estates are a safe environment for patients and staff. Where asbestos may pose a safety risk, such as when disturbed during building works, experts are brought in to safely dispose of it.

The Government allocated £4.2 billion capital this financial year for the National Health Service to support local priorities, including where appropriate removing asbestos from buildings.

**■ NHS: Complaints****Rachael Maskell:**[\[14627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to reduce the number of NHS complaints.

**Maria Caulfield:**

The Department is committed to ensuring that the National Health Service listens to, learns from, and acts on feedback, including complaints, in order to improve the safety and quality of services.

We have worked closely with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman on his work to develop the NHS Complaint Standards, which set out how organisations providing services in the NHS should approach complaint handling. The standards place a strong focus on several aspects of complaint handling that are aimed at ensuring complaints are handled and resolved effectively by the NHS, reducing the need for the further escalation of complaints. This includes emphasising the importance of early resolution, actively listening and demonstrating a clear understanding of what the main issues are for the complainant as well as the outcomes they seek, being thorough and fair, and identifying suitable ways to put things right for people.

**■ Paramedical Staff: Sexual Offences****Charlotte Nichols:**[\[14970\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to tackle sexual abuse of female paramedics.

**Kim Johnson:**[\[14981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether her Department is taking steps to tackle sexual abuse of female paramedics.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

NHS England commissioned a review into the ambulance sector culture and has welcomed the recommendations of the recent independent review, which highlights the need to target bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment, and enable the freedom to speak up.

NHS England are setting up a Delivery Board alongside an implementation plan to deliver the recommendations from the Ambulance Sector Culture report. This will include actions related to stopping misogyny and improving sexual safety in the ambulance service by the Office of the Chief Allied Health Professions at NHS England and the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives.

Last year, NHS England launched the first-ever sexual safety charter in collaboration with healthcare systems, to provide staff with clear reporting mechanisms, training, and support, ensuring that a zero-tolerance approach to tackle sexual misconduct is taken.

The 2023 NHS Staff Survey included a new question specifically around unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature to enable National Health Service organisations to understand the prevalence of misconduct in their workplace, which will inform further action to protect and support staff across the NHS. The results of the 2023 NHS Staff Survey will be published on 7 March 2024.

## ■ Parkinson's Disease: Drugs

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** [\[14114\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions she has had with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency on the average licensing approval decision timelines for (a) generic and (b) biosimilar medicines to treat Parkinson's disease.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** [\[14115\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she is taking steps with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to reduce the time taken to license (a) generic and (b) biosimilar medicines to treat Parkinson's disease.

**Andrew Stephenson:**

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is taking urgent action to deliver improvements to decision timescales in established medicines, including those indicated to treat Parkinson's disease. Last week we approved additional licences for this critical area. Whilst no specific discussions have taken place between the MHRA and my Rt hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on this matter, we are taking significant steps to assess applications for medicine approval within statutory timeframes and will always prioritise applications according to public health need.

We are working to reduce timelines by bringing in additional resources and developing processes that will result in significantly improved response times, while protecting patient safety. The measures we are putting in place are already resulting in significant improvements, and we will continue to publish monthly updates providing applicants with transparent information on expected timescales. As an effective regulator, we are committed to the highest of standards of performance and delivering the right outcomes for patients and public health.

## ■ School Milk

**Mary Glendon:** [\[14577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of changing the provision of the Nursery Milk Scheme to finish at the end of the reception academic year rather than when individual children reach the age of five.

**Andrea Leadsom:**

The Nursery Milk Scheme allows early years childcare settings, such as childminders and nurseries, to reclaim the cost of providing one-third of a pint of milk to children

under five years old, who attend their childcare setting for at least two hours per day. Schools are also allowed to claim under this scheme, in respect of pupils under the age of five years old. There are no current plans to extend the scheme to cover other school pupils.

The School Food Standards require lower-fat or lactose free milk to be available in all schools. From the age of five years old onwards, pupils eligible for benefits-based free school meals are also eligible for free school milk. In addition, the school milk subsidy scheme subsidises the cost of milk and certain milk products for children in primary and secondary schools, including over five-year-olds. This means that participating schools can sell the products in schools at a lower price. More information on this scheme is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-milk-subsidy-scheme>

## ■ **Tourette's Syndrome: Health Services**

**Alex Sobel:**

**[14437]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to help ensure that specialist medical services for Tourette's Syndrome are accessible to people outside of London.

**Andrea Leadsom:**

Most services for people with Tourette's syndrome are commissioned locally by integrated care boards (ICBs) as they are best placed to plan and improve the provision of services subject to local prioritisation and funding. I know, for example, that there have been recent ICB discussions within the provider trust in Leeds related to strengthening the local offer for Tourette's syndrome.

Nationally, the government is taking steps to alleviate workforce demands to support services for Tourette's syndrome. This includes, increasing the number of trained clinical psychologists available. Health Education England, now merged with NHS England, supported a 60 per cent expansion in the clinical psychology training intake over the past two years.

Clinical psychologist trainees are able to undertake specialist placements focusing on Tourette's syndrome, in addition to Tourette's syndrome featuring as part of the broader neuropsychology curriculum.

## ■ **Visual Impairment**

**Mr Virendra Sharma:**

**[14525]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential economic benefits of reducing the prevalence of sight loss.

**Andrea Leadsom:**

The benefits of reducing sight loss for both the economy and an individual's quality of life are clear. That is why prevention, early detection, and timely treatment are

essential. In England, over 12 million free National Health Service sight tests are provided annually. Diabetic retinopathy screening is also offered annually to individuals aged 12 years old or over, with diabetes. The Government also has well established programmes on reducing smoking and obesity, both long terms risk factors for sight loss.

NHS England's transformation programme is considering how eye care services should be commissioned for the future, to improve access to care and patient outcomes. The National Institute for Health and Care Research also continues to invest to support research into the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of eye conditions.

## HOME OFFICE

### ■ Assessments: Fraud

**Stephen Morgan:**

**[14719]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a standardised compensation scheme for students who have been falsely accused of cheating in English language tests.

**Tom Pursglove:**

Where the courts have concluded that an individual was innocent of cheating in their English Language test, it is open to that individual to request compensation through established processes.

### ■ Asylum: Anti-social Behaviour

**Andrew Rosindell:**

**[14490]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has made an estimate of how many incidents of anti-social behaviour (a) on and (b) related to sites of temporary accommodation for asylum seekers there were in each of the last three years.

**Tom Pursglove:**

Our accommodation providers deliver induction briefings and information packs to all new arrivals. Asylum seekers are clearly advised of the expectations the Home Office and accommodation providers have for them to behave responsibly while they are accommodated in Home Office properties.

The Home Office expects the highest standards from its accommodation providers, and we have a robust governance framework in place to manage service delivery of the Asylum Accommodation Support Contracts (AASC). Further details can be found at: [http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2018-1112/AASC - Schedule 2 - Statement of Requirements.pdf](http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2018-1112/AASC_-_Schedule_2_-_Statement_of_Requirements.pdf).

The specific information you have requested is not held in a readily reportable format.



**■ Asylum: Housing**

**Sir John Hayes:** [14457]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many houses his Department (a) owns and (b) rents for housing asylum seekers.

**Sir John Hayes:** [14458]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many hotels are being used to house asylum seekers in England and Wales.

**Sir John Hayes:** [14461]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many hotels have been used for housing asylum seekers in Lincolnshire since 2020.

**Tom Pursglove:**

Data on the number of supported asylum seekers in accommodation (including in contingency hotels and other contingency accommodation) is published in table Asy\_D11 here: [Asylum and resettlement datasets - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/datasets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets).

**■ Asylum: Religion**

**Tim Loughton:** [13489]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what his Department's procedure is for the verification of religious conversion when cited as a reason for the validity of an application for asylum.

**Tim Loughton:** [13490]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the role of the Church of England is on advising on the validity of religious conversion claims where the threat of religious persecution is given as a material basis for the claim.

**Tom Pursglove:**

All asylum and human rights claims, including those based on religion or belief, are carefully considered on their individual merits in accordance with our international obligations, so that we do not remove anyone who faces persecution or serious harm on return to their country of origin.

Detailed Home Office policy guidance provides a framework for considering asylum claims, including those based on religious conversion, and all caseworkers receive extensive training and mentoring support before making such decisions.

Each individual assessment is made against the background of relevant case law and the latest available country of origin information. This is based on evidence taken from a wide range of reliable sources, including reputable media outlets; local, national, and international organisations, including human rights organisations; and information from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

The degree of weight to be given to evidence from church witnesses will depend on how much knowledge and experience a church witness has, and the individuals



concerned, and the way in which the claimant may have engaged in church activities. Evidence from a senior church member is not considered to be determinative.

In such cases, decision-makers must decide whether a conversion is genuine on the balance of probabilities. Decision-makers must consider all evidence in the round, including, where relevant, such factors as the claimant's participation in church activities, the timing of their conversion, their knowledge of the faith, and the opinions of other members of the congregation as to the genuineness of the conversion.

Protection is normally granted where a claimant has a well-founded fear of persecution under the Refugee Convention or a claimant faces a real risk of serious harm. Those found not to need protection are refused, and the decision can be subject to legal challenge where appropriate, either via appeal to the independent courts or through a judicial review, depending on the decision in question. Once appeal rights are exhausted, they are liable for removal and enforcement action pursued where necessary.

#### ■ **Biometric Residence Permits: Standards**

**Kate Osamor:**

[\[14657\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications for biometric residence permits were delayed as a result of technical issues in each month since January 2023.

**Tom Pursglove:**

At the point a decision is made to grant permission to remain, a BRP is automatically requested by the caseworking system and data is sent to the DVLA for the BRP to be produced. Any automatic requests that become "stuck" when sent to DVLA are targeted and proactive reporting is being developed to identify such cases earlier.

During 2023, DVLA produced 99.6% of BRPs within 24 hours of this automatic request process and 100% within 48 hours.

#### ■ **Biometric Residence Permits: Ukraine**

**Peter Kyle:**

[\[15313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what action his Department is taking to tackle potential discrepancies between UK Visas and Immigration requirements to provide a Border Force passport stamp as proof of entry to the UK for Ukrainians applying for a biometric residence permit card and Border Force practice in stamping passports.

**Tom Pursglove:**

We are aware of occasions where Ukrainians did not have their passport endorsed by an immigration official on arrival. Measures have been taken to prevent this from occurring in the future, and steps are being taken to progress those applications affected as soon as possible.

## ■ Burglary

**Alex Sobel:** [14723]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional resources to Police and Crime Commissioners to help tackle (a) the use of blowtorches in and (b) other methods of home burglaries.

**Alex Sobel:** [14724]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether his Department has made an estimate of changes in the level of home burglaries using blowtorches to gain access to properties.

**Chris Philp:**

The Crime Survey for England and Wales data shows a 56% fall in domestic burglaries when comparing the year ending September 2023 with year ending March 2010. This is clearly good news; however, we recognise the impact domestic burglary can have on individuals and communities and we are committed to tackling and preventing this crime.

The public rightly expects that the police will visit them when a home burglary has been committed, which is why we welcome the announcement made by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) on 8 June that all 43 police forces in England and Wales have been implementing this attendance policy since March 2023. We are working with police leaders to ensure forces are making their attendance data available to the public. <https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/police-now-attending-scene-of-every-home-burglary>.

The police attendance commitment, along with the commitment to pursue all reasonable lines of enquiry, is supported by College of Policing guidance on conducting residential burglary investigations:

<https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/residential-burglary>. This sets out the importance of the police accurately identifying the point and method of entry to a victim's property. Forces will share this information with Police Crime Prevention Initiatives (PCPI), which works with manufacturers, the construction industry and standards authorities to ensure security standards keep pace with emerging crime trends. <https://www.policecpi.com/about-us>.

We are putting in place record funding for the police in England and Wales with up to £18.4bn in 2024/25, and funding for Police and Crime Commissioners is increasing by up to £922 million in 2024/25.

The Home Office has not made a specific assessment of the use of blowtorches to gain access to properties.

## ■ Criminal Justice Bill: Homelessness

**Paula Barker:** [14983]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Criminal Justice Bill on people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping.

**Paula Barker:** [14984]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has had recent discussions with organisations that support people experiencing homelessness on the Criminal Justice Bill.

**Paula Barker:** [14985]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on implementation of the provisions in the Criminal Justice Bill to support people out of homelessness and rough sleeping.

**Chris Philp:**

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities lead on homelessness and rough sleeping and as such have regular meetings with stakeholders. They reviewed the Vagrancy Act and determined replacement legislation was needed. They published the response to their public consultation on replacement in 2023.

The Home Office has additionally engaged with police, local authorities, PCCs and other organisations including the homelessness sector on this topic. This has highlighted that more direct tools were needed to respond to begging and rough sleeping where it causes nuisance to others.

These provisions will be supported by guidance highlighting that local authority outreach and engagement remain at the heart of our approach here and that these civil tools support a staggered approach to enforcement where that is necessary.

I and my Rt Hon friend the Home Secretary have ongoing discussions with Ministerial colleagues, including in the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, about the provisions in the Criminal Justice Bill, including those relating to tackling nuisance rough sleeping.

Equality and Economic impact assessments for the Bill have been published and are available at: [Criminal Justice Bill 2023: impact assessments - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-justice-bill-2023-impact-assessments)

## ■ Crown Dependencies: Companies

**Andrew Rosindell:** [11012]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the decision by (a) Guernsey, (b) Jersey and (c) the Isle of Man to withdraw the commitment to allow public access to registers of company beneficial ownership.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

A Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) on 19 December 2023 provided a comprehensive update on this issue (HCWS151).

Publicly accessible registers of beneficial ownership are an essential tool for tackling illicit finance. That is why in 2016 the UK set up our own publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership, the People with Significant Control (PSCs) register, which was the first of its kind in the world. The UK Government is still committed to publicly accessible registers becoming the global norm, including in the Crown Dependencies (CDs) and Overseas Territories (OTs). Many other countries and jurisdictions around the world have joined us. We are still working with others to achieve this aim.

Regarding the 2022 CJEU judgment and other relevant rulings, the UK is satisfied with the lawfulness of our own publicly accessible registers and continues to believe that the CDs could legally implement public registers of their own. As set out in my WMS in December, according to Transparency International, currently 14 EU Member States allow public access to their beneficial ownership registers. Gibraltar has maintained a publicly accessible beneficial ownership register since 2020 and has not noted any negative economic impacts resulting from implementation of its public register.

On 13 December 2023, the CDs issued new public commitments on providing access to their beneficial ownership registers for obliged entities and those with a legitimate interest, including media and civil society organisations. While the Home Office broadly welcomed these commitments as a very significant step forward in beneficial ownership transparency, it is not the pace the UK Government expects, and the CDs have been urged to implement them as quickly as possible this year.

On 18 January 2024, the EU published proposals on their Sixth Anti-Money Laundering Directive (6AMLD), which the CDs stated in their public commitments will help inform the development of their own definitions of legitimate interest access. With this important development, and considering the time that has elapsed since their original 2019 commitments, and the importance these improvements will bring to the security of the UK and the wider British family, the Home Office is urging the CDs to make progress as quickly as possible this year.

The UK Government position remains that the CDs should be working towards publicly accessible registers in the longer term. Nevertheless, the Home Office looks forward to seeing these commitments on legitimate interest access being adopted by the appropriate CD parliaments. Parliament will wish to consider the CDs' commitments and will closely monitor the situation.

**■ Cybercrime: Greater London****Feryal Clark:****[14419]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help tackle cyber-related crime in (a) Enfield North constituency, (b) the London Borough of Enfield and (c) London.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

Tackling cyber crime is at the heart of the Government's [National Cyber Strategy](#) 2022-25, which is supported by £2.6 billion of investment through the National Cyber Fund.

Key to delivery is ensuring that local policing has the resources needed to deal with the cyber threats we face. In 2023/24, the Home Office is receiving £18 million from the National Cyber Fund to provide a range of capabilities and resource to tackle and respond to cyber crime. This funding is supplemented by a further £16 million of Home Office funding through the Police Settlement Programme.

This funding continues to build law enforcement capabilities at the national, regional, and local levels to ensure they have the capacity and expertise to deal with the perpetrators and victims of cyber crime.

There are a wide range of law enforcement and community outreach programmes addressing cyber crime in Greater London and Enfield, which include:

- The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) take part in a Junior Citizens Scheme across various boroughs in London. This includes information and presentations to young people around cyber crime.
- The MPS have been delivering presentations at Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) forums across London to raise awareness of how to refer individuals into the Cyber Choices programme, which aims to deter them from committing cyber crime in the first place. The MPS aims to deliver these presentations to all 32 boroughs. The presentation in Enfield took place on the 23 rd January 2024.
- In May 2023, officers from the MPS Protect Team attended Enfield School for Girls and carried out their Cyber Escape Room with 38 students.
- The MPS Cyber Crime Unit targets Organised Crime Networks (OCN) that utilise Dark Web marketplaces to supply large amounts of drugs. In the last 18 month period, three unconnected OCNs that were operating in the Enfield area were dismantled and convicted.

We continue to work with all of society to tackle cyber crime as we recognise it is an issue that requires collaboration from citizens, businesses and the public sector, keenly working with communities in Enfield to educate and inform as to the harms cyber crime can cause.

**■ Cybercrime: Wales****Jo Stevens:****[14614]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help tackle cyber-related crime in (a) Cardiff Central constituency, (b) Cardiff local authority area and (c) Wales.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

Tackling cyber crime is at the heart of the Government's National Cyber Strategy 2022-25, which is supported by £2.6 billion of investment through the National Cyber Fund.

Key to delivery is ensuring that local policing has the resources needed to deal with the cyber threats we face. In 2023/24, the Home Office is receiving £18 million from the National Cyber Fund to provide a range of capabilities and resource to tackle and respond to cyber crime. This funding is supplemented by a further £16 million of Home Office funding through the Police Settlement Programme.

This funding continues to build law enforcement capabilities at the national, regional, and local levels to ensure they have the capacity and expertise to deal with the perpetrators and victims of cyber crime. We directly fund a specialist Cyber Crime Unit at South Wales Police, and more specialist teams at the TARIAN Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU). This ROCU team is integral to our response to high-harm, high-impact crimes like cyber extortion, and is a multi-disciplinary team of police officers and police staff seconded from the three forces of South Wales, Gwent and Dyfed-Powys.

TARIAN ROCU works closely with South Wales Police Cyber Crime Unit and work to intervene if people are deemed at risk of becoming involved in cyber offending. This includes working with young and vulnerable individuals offering other intervention and diversion opportunities to young people outside of cyber education, such as life skills, and job interview skills. South Wales Police Cyber Crime Unit engage with all local authorities within the area to ensure effective delivery.

Businesses and organisations based in Wales work closely with ROCUs across the private and public sectors, and at community level. Additionally working collaboratively with the Welsh Government to support the offer of funding to Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) for Cyber Essential training, which is a government backed scheme that helps protect organisations against a range of cyber attacks.

We have also rolled out Regional Cyber Resilience Centres in Wales and in each of the other nine policing regions. The Centres are a collaboration between the police, public, private sector and academic partners to provide cyber security advice to SME's so that they can protect themselves better in a digital age. Details of the Cyber Resilience Centre for Wales can be found at [www.wcrcentre.co.uk](http://www.wcrcentre.co.uk)

All vulnerable victims of fraud and cyber crime in Wales receive contact and PROTECT advice from law enforcement, specifically aimed at helping them to protect themselves in future from revictimization.

**■ Economic Crime: Disclosure of Information****Peter Aldous:****[14557]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to mandate information sharing between (a) payment service providers, (b)

social media platforms and (c) telecommunications companies for the purposes of (i) investigating, (ii) detecting and (iii) preventing economic crime.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

The Government strongly supports the sharing of information across sectors to tackle economic crime and has legislated to make this easier.

The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act contains new measures to provide greater comfort for firms working in the Anti-Money Laundering (AML) regulated sector to share relevant information for the purposes of tackling economic crime. Further information on these measures can be found here: [Factsheet: information sharing measures - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/factsheet-information-sharing-measures)

The Act also includes the power for the Secretary of State to amend the offences covered, so that law enforcement and businesses can be responsive to future changes in the patterns of economic crime.

The Government is leading an ambitious Public-Private Economic Crime Data Strategy. This will build on the commitments in the Economic Crime Plan 2, Fraud Strategy, and from industry in the [Online Fraud](#) and [Telecoms Charters](#) to improve information sharing.

We are not currently considering further legislation.

■ **Elections: Indonesia and Pakistan**

**Sir Robert Buckland:**

**[14061]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment the Defending Democracy Taskforce has made of the implications for its work of the use of AI in election campaigns in (a) Pakistan and (b) Indonesia.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

The Defending Democracy Taskforce (DDTF) is committed to working with international partners to build collective democratic resilience and share best practice to tackle shared challenges including from dis/misinformation and AI.

In Indonesia, the UK is working with the government and civil society to strengthen their democratic processes against threats. We are also working with Indonesia to progress work on AI safety, following the AI Safety Summit in November 2023.

In Pakistan, the FCDO supported efforts to counter the influence of disinformation in the electoral process through the CSSF Hate Speech and Disinformation Programme, which supported the development of a fact-checking tool called iVerify.

The UK will continue to work with international partners holding elections this year to exchange best practice on shared threats to our election systems, including from AI. We will continue to monitor international electoral events to inform our work to protect the UK from interference in our democratic process, including elections.



## ■ Electronic Funds Transfer: Fraud

**Peter Aldous:**

**[14556]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate he has made of the number of authorised push payment scam cases that have originated online in the last five years.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

UK Finance analysis of nearly seven thousand authorised push payment (APP) scam cases shows that 70 per cent of scams originated on an online platform - highlighting the internet's significant role in enabling fraud. This includes data from UK Finance members only, for the whole of the UK. More details on this can be found here:

<https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/press/press-releases/over-two-thirds-of-all-app-scams-start-online-new-uk-finance-analysis>

To protect victims against APP scams, ten of the UK's largest banks are currently signed up to the voluntary Contingent Reimbursement Model (CRM) Code. In 2022, £248m of losses to APP scams were reimbursed to victims under the commitments of this code.

Recognising that more needed to be done to protect people from this devastating crime, through the Financial Services and Markets Act 2023, the government legislated to require the Payment Systems Regulator (PSR) to introduce mandatory reimbursement for APP scams within the Faster Payment System, where 98% of APP fraud takes place. This will come into force in October 2024.

The retail banking sector's primary fraud concern was the rise of Authorised Push Payment (APP) fraud (where someone is tricked into sending money to a criminal). The sector therefore committed to the following key deliverables in the charter:

- o Better utilise technology to share data to detect potential frauds.
- o Capture and analyse data reported to them from victims of APP fraud.
- o Provide customers with greater control over account features

The Online Safety Act (OSA) will mean that companies are held to account by an independent regulator if they fail to remove illegal content on their platforms.

Alongside the OSA, the Government has created the Online Fraud Charter: a voluntary agreement bringing together the largest companies in the tech sector, who have committed to a series of actions aimed at reducing fraud on their platforms and services. The Charter was signed on 30th November and will deliver a much quicker and more targeted response than regulation.

The OSA is an ambitious and forward-looking piece of legislation that will tackle online harms including fraud and fraudulent advertising.

## ■ Fraud: Greater London

**Feryal Clark:**

[\[14420\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help tackle fraud-related crime in (a) Enfield North constituency, (b) the London Borough of Enfield and (c) London.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

In May 2023, the Government published the Fraud Strategy which set out a national response to combat the threat. Fraud has since reduced 13% compared to last year (Sept 2022), including a 10% decrease in London. The rate has continued to decrease since the Fraud Strategy was launched in May 2023.

Through the new Online Safety Act and the Online Fraud Charter the Government is working to prevent the British public encountering fraud at source. The Fraud Strategy also committed £100m of investment in law enforcement, and created a new National Fraud Squad, to increase the disruption and prosecution of fraudsters. Furthermore, fraud will be made a priority for local police forces through the Strategic Policing Requirement.

We also launched the new national anti-fraud behaviour change campaign launched on 12<sup>th</sup> February, which will help people spot and take action to avoid fraud.

## ■ Fraud: Retail Trade

**Grahame Morris:**

[\[14528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will take steps to tackle fraud using gift cards.

**Grahame Morris:**

[\[14529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will have discussions with representatives of Apple on potential steps to tackle fraud relating to Apple Gift cards.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

Government is committed to tackling online fraud and holding those who profit from it to account by working closely with industry, regulators and consumer groups to consider legislative and non-legislative solutions.

This includes continuing work on digital identity and data protection and work with the telecommunications and other sectors to target harden systems and design out key online vulnerabilities.

We have launched Stop! Think Fraud, a new campaign led by the Home Office in collaboration with many organisations across government, law enforcement, banking, tech firms, and charities to give people the tools and information they need to stay ahead of scams, and help protect themselves against fraud.

## ■ Fraud: Wales

**Jo Stevens:**

[\[14613\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help tackle fraud-related crime in (a) Cardiff Central constituency, (b) Cardiff local authority area and (c) Wales.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

In May 2023, the Government published the Fraud Strategy which set out a national response to address the threat of fraud. This includes steps to block fraud, improve the law enforcement response and empower victims.

Through the Online Safety Act and the Online Fraud Charter, we are taking robust action to tackle online fraud. We have invested £100m in law enforcement, including the launch of the new National Fraud Squad - with 400 investigators now in post - and the replacement of the current Action Fraud reporting service. This new service, which covers Wales, will improve support and reporting for victims and allow great prevention and disruption of fraud.

On 12th February 2024, we launched 'Stop! Think Fraud' our new national campaign against fraud, which encourages the public to be aware of potential fraud. Impactful adverts will be prominent across the UK, on billboards, radio, TV and social media. The campaign is expected to reach over 95% of population in Wales.

## ■ Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority: Finance

**Stephen Kinnock:**

[\[15080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 13 February 2024 to Question 13119 on Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority: Finance, what the total budget for the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority is for the financial year 2024-25.

**Laura Farris:**

The total budget for the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority for the financial year of 2024/25 has been set and will be formally communicated to the public body via the annual delegation letter. This allocation for 2024/25 has already been provided to the GLAA for planning purposes and totals £6.265m.

## ■ Gender Based Violence

**Christian Wakeford:**

[\[14747\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what (a) support and (b) resources her Department provides to organisations to (i) address issues related to gender-based violence and (ii) support survivors.

**Laura Farris:**

The Home Office and wider government committed to over £230 million from 2022-2025 as part of the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, including £140 million for supporting victims. Funding for the National Domestic Abuse Helpline has been

doubled, and funding for all the other national helplines supported by the Home Office has also increased.

As part of this commitment, the joint Home Office-Ministry of Justice VAWG Support and Specialist Service Fund will provide up to £8.3 million (in total) from 2023-2025 to 'by and for' and specialist organisations to support victims often facing the greatest barriers to getting the help they need.

Activity funded by the Home Office also includes £10.3 million across three years for the Children Affected by Domestic Abuse Fund and up to £1.4 million per financial year for the Support for Migrant Victims Scheme until March 2025.

In May 2023, the Home Office also launched a £300,000 'flexible fund' trial in partnership with Women's Aid Federation for England to make direct cash payments of £250 to victims and survivors of domestic abuse (£500 to those with children and those who are pregnant) to help remove barriers to leaving an abusive relationship. In November 2023, the Government commitment to support victims was renewed with a further £2m investment into the Flexible Fund until March 2025.

## ■ Hate Crime: Greater London

**Feryal Clark:**

**[14421]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help tackle hate crime in (a) Enfield North constituency, (b) the London Borough of Enfield and (c) London.

**Laura Farris:**

Whilst the Government is pleased to see the overall reduction in police-recorded hate crime across forces in England and Wales in the year ending March 2023, we are clear that any instance is one too many and we remain committed to tackling these appalling offences. We are also committed to tackling the abhorrent crimes linked to the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict.

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

We are supporting the police by providing them with the resources they need. Part of this necessitates police recruitment and training – there are now over 149,000 officers in England and Wales, higher than the previous peak before the Police Uplift Programme, in March 2010. As of 30 September 2023, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has over 35,000 officers (35,006). This is higher than the pre-PUP peak in the MPS of 33,820 in March 2010. The MPS is working hard to attract and recruit new officers and replace officers that leave, for example through retirement or voluntary resignation. Ultimately, responsibility for recruiting and maintaining officers lies with the Mayor of London and the Commissioner who are accountable to the

people of London. The MPS's funding will be up to £3538.1million in 2024/25, an increase of up to £118.9million when compared to 2023/24.

### ■ Hate Crime: Transphobia

**Elliot Colburn:**

[\[14370\]](#)

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

**Laura Farris:**

Our absolute priority is to get more police onto our streets, cut crime, protect the public and bring more criminals to justice. We are supporting the police by providing them with the resources they need. Part of this necessitates police recruitment and training. We delivered our commitment to recruit an additional 20,000 officers by March 2023 and there are over 149,000 officers England and Wales, which is higher than the previous peak in March 2010 before the Police Uplift Programme.

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

### ■ Heathrow Airport: Immigration Controls

**Anneliese Dodds:**

[\[15335\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether an equality impact assessment was produced for the (a) Heathrow Changes project and (b) proposed roster system beginning on 29 April 2024 for the Heathrow Border Force.

**Tom Pursglove:**

Yes. An Equality Impact Assessment on the Heathrow Change Programme was completed and shared with trade unions.

An Equality Impact Assessment on the proposed roster was completed and shared with trade unions.

A further Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken in line with the implementation of the new roster.

### ■ Home Office: Equality

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[14544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much his Department spent on equality, diversity and inclusion (a) events and (b) training in the last 12 months.

**Chris Philp:**

The Government is auditing the cost-effectiveness of all equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) activities, through the review of EDI spending announced last June.

As stated in the Autumn Statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Minister for Cabinet Office will be outlining the final proposals in response to the review in due course.

■ **Home Office: ICT**

**Kate Osamor:** [\[14658\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people are awaiting decisions on applications to the Home Office as a result of technical issues in each month since January 2023.

**Tom Pursglove:**

The exact number of people awaiting decisions on applications to the Home Office as a result of technical issues in each month since January 2023 is not information currently held in a reportable format.

**Kate Osamor:** [\[14659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what is the cause of recent technical issues delaying home office applications.

**Kate Osamor:** [\[14660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an assessment of trends in the number of technical issues in relation to home office applications since January 2023.

**Kate Osamor:** [\[14661\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department is taking to tackle technical issues in relation to home office applications.

**Kate Osamor:** [\[14663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average time taken was to resolve technical issues in relation to processing home office applications in each month in 2023.

**Kate Osamor:** [\[14664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether his Department has raised concerns with third-party providers on technical issues impacting claims since January 2023.

**Tom Pursglove:**

Increasingly since 2023, applications to remain in the United Kingdom have been processed on the new caseworking system, Atlas.

It is a complex system that has many integrated services such as security checking, sending notifications to applicants, triggering the production of BRP cards or creation of digital status. Whilst there have been some issues encountered as Atlas has been developed, no systemic issues have been identified that have caused concerns to be raised with the third-party IT suppliers helping develop and support Atlas.

Most technical issues are resolved within days.

**Kate Osamor:**

[14662]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what his Department's policy is on informing applicants if the time taken to process their application is longer than the published service standard as a result of technical issues.

**Tom Pursglove:**

Where there is a technical issue which prevents caseworkers from taking action on a case, the department will seek to address these as quickly as possible and resolve these so the case can be completed within its service standard. Where the technical issue may cause the case to go out of service standard, caseworking teams will write to the customer to inform them of the delay and keep them informed of progress.

The latest published statistics which includes data on performance against Service Level Agreement for Standard, Priority and Super Priority visas up to the end of Q3 2023 can be found in this link (Data tab VSI\_02):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visas-and-citizenship-data-q3-2023>.

Q4 2023 stats are due to be published shortly.

#### ■ Immigration Controls: Greater London

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[14542]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many raids were carried out by Border Force in (a) the UK, (b) Greater London and (c) Hendon constituency in the last 12 months.

**Michael Tomlinson:**

Immigration have carried out the following intelligence led enforcement visits from 01/10/2022 to 30/09/2023 to:

1. The UK – 13,032
1. Greater London – 3,100
1. Hendon constituency - 92

#### ■ Internet: Children and Young People

**Vicky Ford:**

[14700]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help prevent young people being groomed via the internet to commit crime.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

We are committed to keeping children safe online and are delivering a number of initiatives that support that objective. For example, we are investing up to £145m over three years in our County Lines Programme to crack down on the county lines gangs exploiting our children and young people. Through this Programme we are developing a better understanding of how to disrupt online activity that is aimed at recruiting and exploiting children and young people.



The Online Safety Act 2023 is a key piece of legislation to keep children safe. There are a number of priority offences in the Act which relate to child criminal exploitation such as drug related offences, sexual exploitation and weapons and firearms supply offences. Technology companies must take proactive measures and use systems and processes to remove and limit people's exposure to related content.

## ■ Knives: Crime Prevention

**Wendy Morton:**

[\[14593\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether his Department has made a recent assessment of the effectiveness of knife arches operated by the police in ensuring safe night-time economies.

**Chris Philp:**

The Home Office has not conducted any recent assessments of the effectiveness of knife arches operated by the police. Whether or how to deploy knife arches remains a decision for police forces to take at a local level.

## ■ Members: Security

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[14532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make it his policy to extend section 128 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 so that it applies to the environs and up to 500m of the curtilage of hon. Members' residential properties.

**Chris Philp:**

The Government has been clear that for democracy to be conducted properly, those who participate must feel safe to express their views, and the views of their constituents, without fear of harm.

The right to peaceful protest is fundamental, but this right does not extend to behaviour which causes harassment, alarm or distress to individuals in their own home.

The police have a wide range of powers to tackle those who seek to cause harassment, alarm and distress by protesting outside MPs homes. This includes, but is not limited to, the power to direct individuals away from the vicinity of the property if they are present for the purpose of persuading someone not to do something within their rights or obligations, or to do something they are not obliged to do. The police can issue any direction as is necessary to prevent harassment, alarm or distress to the resident.

It is also unlawful for any person to trespass on another person's property, and aggravated trespass is a criminal offence.

### **Attachments:**

1. Policing and Sec Minister - Letter to Chief Con. [20240216 Sec Min Policing Min letter to Chief Constables - MP security\_FINAL.pdf]

**■ National Crime Agency: Northern Ireland****Claire Hanna:** [14391]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many (a) National Crime Agency officers and (b) civilian staff members based in Northern Ireland are (i) former Royal Ulster Constabulary, (ii) Police Service of Northern Ireland officers and (iii) civilian workers.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

The National Crime Agency does not hold this information.

**■ Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership****Mr Gregory Campbell:** [15230]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 15 November 2023 to Question 1309 on Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership, whether his Department is taking steps with the Northern Ireland Executive to agree a replacement for the Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership.

**Tom Pursglove:**

The Home Office continues to engage with Northern Ireland government departments to progress agreements to ensure continued delivery for service users in Northern Ireland. We have multiple agreements with varying Northern Ireland government departments in place to achieve this.

**■ Personation****Simon Lightwood:** [14256]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to his Department's policy paper entitled Fraud strategy, published on 3 May 2023, what progress his Department has made on introducing an identity checklist outlining the steps needed to (a) recover and (b) secure a stolen identity; and what his planned timeline is for the introduction of that identity checklist.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

The Home Office published the Identity theft checklist on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023. The checklist can be found on the Action Fraud website here: [Identity fraud and identity theft | Action Fraud](#).

**■ Police: First Aid****Wendy Morton:** [14594]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions his Department has had with local police forces on the use of bleed control kits.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

The use of bleed control kits is determined at the local level and the Home Office has not held discussions with police forces on their use.

## ■ Prevent Independent Review

**Neil Coyle:** [\[15292\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, which recommendations of the Independent Review of Prevent, published on 8 February 2023, have been implemented.

**Neil Coyle:** [\[15293\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what his planned timetable is for implementing the recommendations of the Independent Review of Prevent, published on 8 February 2023.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

The Independent Review of Prevent was published on 8 February 2023.

On 20 February 2024, the Government published the Independent Review of Prevent: One year on progress report. The report details full progress against the Review's recommendations. This report can be found at the following link:

[Independent Review of Prevent - One year on progress report.](#)

We have implemented 30 of the 34 recommendations and are making rapid progress on delivering the remaining four.

## ■ Slavery: Hendon

**Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[14543\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he has taken to tackle modern slavery in Hendon constituency in the last 12 months.

**Laura Farris:**

The UK response is underpinned by the Modern Slavery Strategy 2014 and the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which has given law enforcement agencies the tools to tackle modern slavery, including maximum life sentences for perpetrators and enhanced protection for victims.

In addition to core police funding, since 2016 we have invested £17.8 million in the Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Unit - a specialist police unit which supports all police forces in England and Wales, including the Metropolitan Police Service, to improve their response to modern slavery by increasing forces' capability to identify and prosecute modern slavery crimes.

The Metropolitan Police Service also operates a dedicated Modern Slavery and Child Exploitation Team staffed by specialist officers, which plays a vital role in tackling modern slavery across London.

## ■ Text Messaging: Fraud

**Dan Jarvis:** [\[13288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress he has made on tackling SIM farms since 3 May 2023.

**Tom Tugendhat:**

Last week, I joined a City of London Police operation which saw two men arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to defraud. The men were in possession of SIM farms which allow fraudulent texts to be sent to the public. We must deny criminals access to any tool that allows them to send bulk messages or make scam calls. This is why in May 2023, we consulted on proposals to ban SIM farms. The Government's response to the consultation is available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/preventing-the-use-of-sim-farms-for-fraud>

We are now taking legislative action to ban "SIM farms", technical devices that allow criminals to send scam texts to thousands of people at the same time.

The Criminal Justice Bill introduces a new offence of supplying or possessing SIM farms, without good reason or undertaking adequate due diligence. The measures will also allow the extension of the ban to other technologies that are exploited by criminals to scam the British public, subject to a high level of scrutiny and checks.

This new offence will make it more difficult for criminals to access and use these devices for the purpose of fraud and will give police the necessary tools to disrupt fraudsters.

**■ UK Border Force: Patrol Craft****Sir John Hayes:****[13867]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many Border Force vehicles have been used to patrol the English Channel in each year since 2015.

**Michael Tomlinson:**

Border Force Maritime Command secure the UK maritime border with a fleet of vessels including offshore Cutters, inshore Coastal Patrol Vessels (CPV), and a range of smaller craft equipped for individual operations.

**■ Undocumented Migrants****Andrew Rosindell:****[14489]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has made an assessment of the number of illegal migrants who arrived in the United Kingdom from the Republic of Ireland in each of the last three years.

**Michael Tomlinson:**

Operation Gull is an ongoing Home Office Immigration Enforcement intelligence led initiative that tackles Common Travel Area (CTA) immigration abuse in air and sea ports in Northern Ireland. Operation Gull and its outcomes are systematically monitored to ensure that threats and trends are continuously assessed.

To maintain the highest standards of accuracy, the Home Office prefers to refer to published data, as this has been subject to rigorous quality assurance under National Statistics protocols prior to publication.

Our published data is available at the following link: [Statistics relating to Illegal Migration - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-relating-to-illegal-migration).

## ■ Visas: Horticulture

**Stephen Kinnock:**

**[14595]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what guarantees are in place to ensure that workers on the horticultural Seasonal Worker visa are (a) transferred to a different Scheme Operator and (b) supported to access work in the event that the Scheme Operator who sponsored their UK visa has their sponsorship revoked.

**Tom Pursglove:**

Scheme Operators are required to have a clear employer transfer pathway in place as a condition of holding their sponsor licence, including transparent criteria for making a transfer request and a process for considering such requests. The Scheme Operators must not normally refuse requests to change employers and may only do so where there are significant reasons preventing a transfer, for example the imminent expiry of a worker's visa. This is set out in published Home Office guidance, available at: [Workers and Temporary Workers: guidance for sponsors: sponsor a seasonal worker - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/workers-and-temporary-workers-guidance-for-sponsors-sponsor-a-seasonal-worker).

In the event that a Scheme Operator for the Seasonal Worker routes became unlicensed for any reason, the Home Office will consider each case on its own merits and tailor its response accordingly.

## ■ Windrush Compensation Scheme

**Kate Osamor:**

**[14665]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, in each quarter since the Windrush Compensation scheme was launched, how many people who received an award applied (a) fewer than three months, (b) three to six months, (c) six to 12 months and (d) more than a year before the award.

**Tom Pursglove:**

The Windrush Compensation Scheme's priority is to ensure people receive the maximum compensation as quickly as possible.

The time taken to allocate a claim for a substantive casework consideration has been reduced from 18 months to under 4 months. The 4-month period includes all essential eligibility checks, together with a Preliminary Assessment to make an initial payment of £10,000 wherever possible.

Information on the time taken from a claim being received to a compensation payment is not published.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

## ■ House of Commons: Repairs and Maintenance

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[14484\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the House of Commons Commission, when lift HoP 85 is expected to be repaired.

**Sir Charles Walker:**

*[Holding answer 23 February 2024]:* A repair is scheduled in the week commencing 26 February 2024. A component in the lift needs replacing and it has been difficult to source. This lift is due for refurbishment in spring 2025 under the lift refurbishment programme.

## JUSTICE

## ■ Courts: Bury South

**Christian Wakeford:**[\[14744\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the backlog of court cases in Bury South constituency.

**Mike Freer:**

We are pursuing a number of measures at a national level that will contribute to the reduction of cases in the Bury South constituency, to tackle the outstanding caseload across all jurisdictions.

Over 90% of all criminal cases are heard at the magistrates' court, where we heard 100,000 cases a month on average across 2023. While the outstanding caseload in the magistrates' courts has slightly increased in recent months due to an increase in the number of cases coming to court, the caseload remains well below its pandemic peak and stood at 353,900 at the end of September 2023, and cases continue to be progressed quickly.

To aid our efforts in the magistrates' courts, we have invested over £1 million in a programme of work to support the recruitment of new magistrates, and launched a new marketing campaign to target a more diverse pool of potential magistrates and raise the overall profile of the magistracy.

At the Crown Court, we remain committed to reducing the outstanding caseload.

We have introduced a raft of measures to achieve this aim. We are on course to deliver over 100,000 sitting days this year for the third financial year running, alongside recruiting more than 1,000 judges across all jurisdictions.

Judges have worked tirelessly to complete more cases, with disposals up by 9% during Q3 in 2023 compared to Q4 in 2022 (25,700 compared to 23,700). However, an increase in cases coming before the Crown Court throughout 2023 has caused

the outstanding caseload to increase, and it stood at 66,500 at the end of September 2023.

Data on the outstanding caseload at Crown Court centre level is published by the Ministry of Justice on a quarterly basis. Receipts, disposals and the outstanding caseload for individual Crown Court centres can be found at: [Criminal court statistics quarterly: July to September 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-court-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2023).

We are also investing more in our criminal courts. In August 2023, we announced we are investing £220 million for essential modernisation and repair work of our court buildings across the next two years, up to March 2025.

In the Family Court, we are working closely with system partners to drive forward a cross-cutting programme of work to address delays and inefficiencies in the system and to ensure cases are ready to be heard when they reach court.

We are committed to meeting the 26-week statutory requirement for public law cases, and the Government is investing an extra £10 million to develop new initiatives to support this.

In addition, we remain committed to supporting more families to reach agreement on their children and finance arrangements earlier and, where appropriate, without court involvement. As of February 2024, over 25,400 families have successfully used the Family Mediation Voucher Scheme to attempt to resolve their disputes outside of court. We are investing up to £23.6 million, which we intend will allow for its continuation up to March 2025.

With regards to civil cases, we are taking action to ensure those that do need to go to trial are dealt with quickly. We have launched the biggest ever judicial recruitment drive for District Judges, are digitising court processes and holding more remote hearings, and are increasing the use of mediation.

We announced in July 2023 that we would introduce a requirement for small claims in the county court to attend a mediation session with the Small Claims Mediation Service, starting with specified money claims. This requirement will start in the spring and is expected to help parties resolve their dispute swiftly and consensually without the need for a judicial hearing.

With regards to tribunals, we continue to work with the Department for Business and Trade on further measures to address caseloads in the Employment Tribunal, where the deployment of legal officers, recruitment of additional judges and a new electronic case management system have already contributed to the caseload falling and remaining below its pandemic peak.

We are working on completing the programme of reform in the Immigration and Asylum Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal, and the judiciary have recently introduced a virtual region pilot to provide additional judicial capacity and flexibility in how appeals are heard and disposed of.



## ■ Espionage: Convictions

**Jim Shannon:**

**[14581]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people have been convicted of espionage offences in the last five years.

**Gareth Bacon:**

Espionage offences dealt with under the National Security Act 2023 received royal ascent in July 2023, and are therefore not yet available in the source data.

Convictions relating to espionage offences prior to the act (under the Official Secrets Acts 1911, 1920 and 1989), up to June 2023, will have been prosecuted under a range of offences, many of which are available in the Outcomes by [Offence data tool: June 2023](#).

They can be accessed by navigating to the ‘ *Prosecutions and convictions* ’ tab and using the *HO Offence Code* filter to select the below offences:

- 06629 - Unauthorised use of uniforms; falsification of reports, forgery, personation, and false documents. Interfering with officers of the police or members of His Majesty's forces. Duty of giving information as to commission of offences.
- 06630 - Committing an act prejudicial to the safety or the interest of the State
- 06631 - Knowingly harbouring spy
- 06632 - Serving or former member of Security or intelligence Services disclosing information relating to security or intelligence. Person notified as subject to security or intelligence provisions unlawfully disclosing secret
- 06633 - Former or current Crown Servant or Government Contractor making damaging disclosure relating to security or intelligence
- 06634 - Former or current Crown Servant or Government Contractor making damaging disclosure relating to defence matter
- 06635 - Former or current Crown Servant or Government Contractor making damaging disclosure of confidential matter from Foreign State or relating to international relations
- 06636 - Former or current Crown Servant or Government Contractor disclosing information resulting in commission of offence, facilitating escape from custody, facilitating act prejudicial to safekeeping of person in custody, impeding prevention or detection of offence or apprehension or prosecution of suspected offender etc.
- 06637 - Making damaging disclosure of protected information
- 06689 - Making damaging disclosure of information entrusted to other State or organisation.
- 06695 - Disclosing information which can be used to gain access to protected information

In addition to these, HO code 195/99 contains offences under s8 Official Secrets Act, which are not able to be disaggregated through published products. Bespoke analysis concluded that there was 1 person prosecuted for offences under this legislation between years ending June 2019 and 2023. There may be other prosecutions related to espionage that are prosecuted under other legislation but it is not possible to identify those from the data.

## ■ Landlords: Convictions

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[14462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many landlords have been convicted of renting properties to people without the right to reside in the country in the last five years.

**Gareth Bacon:**

Published data held by the Ministry of Justice shows that no landlords were prosecuted in relation to renting properties to individuals without the right to reside in the country in the last 5 years under the following offences in the Immigration Act 2016, and consequently there have been no convictions in criminal courts.

This act covers the following relevant offences:

1. Landlord of premises occupied under residential tenancy agreement by adult disqualified due to immigration status
2. Responsible landlord allows post-grant contravention in relation to residential tenancy agreement
3. Agent responsible for post-grant contravention in relation to residential tenancy agreement

Any cases heard at court as a result of prosecutions under the above offences are criminal offences. However, landlords can also be pursued via the civil jurisdiction, with Home Office holding the ability to hand down penalty notices as appropriate in individual cases.

## ■ Legal Profession: Accountability

**Mr Barry Sheerman:**

[\[14470\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will publish a rating of legal firms by their environmental social governance each year.

**Mike Freer:**

Under the Legal Services Act 2007, the legal services sector, together with its regulators, operate independently of government. The Ministry of Justice does not collect data on law firms' environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance. The department has no plans to publish ratings of law firms by their ESG performance.

## ■ Ministry of Justice: Domicil

**Jonathan Ashworth:** **[15283]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether any non-executive directors employed in his Department are non-domiciled.

**Mike Freer:**

Non-executives' personal data, including those relating to personal taxation or status, are protected by the UK General Data Protection Regulation. Collection of personal data on non-dom status is not routinely collected and is generally not required for making public appointments. If any such data was held, it could only be published if doing so was in compliance with data protection law.

Non-executive board members are not employees of the Ministry of Justice and act in an advisory capacity.

Data relating to public appointments are covered by the Public Appointments Privacy Statement found here: <https://apply-for-public-appointment.service.gov.uk/privacy>.

## ■ Ministry of Justice: Software

**Dame Nia Griffith:** **[15259]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much his Department has (a) budgeted for and (b) spent on software updates to legacy computer systems in each of the last three financial years.

**Mike Freer:**

Please see the figures for budget and spending by the Ministry of Justice and HMCTS.

The Ministry of Justice does not record its budgets and expenditure to a level of granularity that permits it to identify spend that is specifically for software updates to legacy computer systems.

The Ministry of Justice maintains a fund specifically for the reduction and eradication of technical debt – this fund focusses on improving and replacing legacy infrastructure and software applications; migrating business-critical applications from legacy hosting arrangements to the cloud, which is much more modern and secure; and bringing its digital and technology estate up to required standards.

The table below sets out the Ministry of Justice budget and expenditure of the Technical Debt fund for the past three full financial years – 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23.

	BUDGET	EXPENDITURE
FY 20/21	£15.08m	£19.17m
FY 21/22	£32.78m	£26.56m
FY 22/23	£67.64m	£60.32m

	BUDGET	EXPENDITURE
Total:	£115.5m	£106.05m

## ■ Prisoners

### Ruth Cadbury:

[\[14892\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of people serving sentences of less than 12 months were recorded as having (a) substance misuse issues, (b) a mental health issue, (c) been homeless before arrest, (d) been in the care system and (e) been excluded from school.

### Gareth Bacon:

Data on the identified needs of offenders serving custodial sentences is captured in the Offender Assessment System (OASys). In June 2023, of the prisoner serving a custodial sentence of less than 12 months:

- 11,600 (60%) had a drug misuse need
- 7,500 (39%) had an alcohol misuse need

Mental health prevalence is most closely captured in OASys as current psychological problems (including depression) or psychiatric problems. Of those serving a custodial sentence of less than 12 months:

- 6,400 (32%) were found to have a significant level or some level of psychiatric problems
- 13,700 (70%) were found to have a significant level or some level of psychological problems

We do not hold specific data on those homeless before arrest.

The MoJ does not hold data on the number of adults in custody who had previously been in care by sentence length.

We do not hold data on the number or proportion of adults in custody that were excluded from school.

## ■ Prisoners' Release

### Mrs Sharon Hodgson:

[\[10767\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many prisoners were on temporary release on 14 February 2023; and what the (a) maximum and (b) mean number of days was that each prisoner was on temporary release.

### Mrs Sharon Hodgson:

[\[10768\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many prisoners were on temporary release on 14 February 2023 by (a) prison and (b) offence.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:** [\[10769\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many prisoners were on temporary release by (a) prison and (b) sentence length on 14 February 2023.

**Edward Argar:**

The Prison Rules in England and Wales provide that a prisoner may be allowed to leave prison for short periods on temporary licence (ROTL). The main purpose of ROTL is to aid resettlement and suitable, risk assessed prisoners may be allowed out during the day to, for example, work, attend college, attend an interview or maintain/re-establish links with their family. They are also, once at the required stage of their sentence, allowed to apply for temporary release overnight for a maximum of four consecutive nights a month.

The decision to allow temporary release is taken by the prison governor, on behalf of the Secretary of State, who must always balance the needs of the prisoner and the purpose of the ROTL applied for, against the need to maintain public safety and the public’s confidence in the criminal justice system. Each decision is taken on a case-by-case basis to safeguard the public. Category A prisoners, remand prisoners, and prisoners subject to extradition proceedings are not eligible for ROTL under any circumstances. Any breaches can result in more time behind bars.

There is nothing unusual about 14 February and this long-established scheme runs steadily throughout the year.

Data on the number of individuals recorded as temporarily released from prison on 14 February 2023, broken down by (a) maximum and (b) mean number of days.

**TABLE 1: NUMBER OF PRISONERS ON TEMPORARY RELEASE (ROTL) ON 14 FEBRUARY 2023, IN ENGLAND AND WALES.**

Number of prisoners on ROTL	Maximum number of days on ROTL	Mean number of days on ROTL
1,738	6	1.43

**Data sources and quality**

The figures in this table have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

**Source: Prison NOMIS**

PQ-10767 (Ministry of Justice; Data and

**TABLE 1: NUMBER OF PRISONERS ON TEMPORARY RELEASE (ROTL) ON 14 FEBRUARY 2023, IN ENGLAND AND WALES.**

Analysis (Directorate))

Data on the number of individuals recorded as temporarily released from prison on 14 February 2023 broken down by (a) prison and (b) offence.

**TABLE 2A: NUMBER OF PRISONERS ON TEMPORARY RELEASE (ROTL) ON 14 FEBRUARY 2023, IN ENGLAND AND WALES, BROKEN DOWN BY ESTABLISHMENT**

Establishment	Number of prisoners on ROTL
Askham Grange	37
Berwyn	*
Cookham Wood	3
Downview	8
Drake Hall	10
East Sutton Park	39
Eastwood Park	6
Ford	163
Grendon/Spring Hill	119
Hatfield	125
Haverigg	38
Hollesley Bay	206
Huntercombe	11
Kirkham	129
Kirklevington Grange	93

**TABLE 2A: NUMBER OF PRISONERS ON TEMPORARY RELEASE (ROTL) ON 14 FEBRUARY 2023, IN ENGLAND AND WALES, BROKEN DOWN BY ESTABLISHMENT**


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Leyhill	87
Low Newton	4
North Sea Camp	63
Northumberland *	
Norwich	34
Oakwood	9
Peterborough (Female)	5
Peterborough (Male)	*
Prescoed	86
Send	3
Standford Hill (Sheppey Cluster)	197
Stoke Heath	5
Styal	13
Sudbury	138
Thorn Cross	103

**Table 2b: Number of prisoners on temporary release (ROTL) on 14 February 2023, in England and Wales, broken down by offence group**

<b>Main Offence Group</b>	<b>Number of prisoners on ROTL</b>
Violence against the person	485



**TABLE 2A: NUMBER OF PRISONERS ON TEMPORARY RELEASE (ROTL) ON 14 FEBRUARY 2023, IN ENGLAND AND WALES, BROKEN DOWN BY ESTABLISHMENT**

Sexual offences 108

Robbery 98

Theft Offences 97

Criminal 16  
damage and  
arson

Drug offences 754

Possession of 69  
weapons

Public order \*

offences

Miscellaneous 48  
crimes against  
society

Fraud Offences 60

Summary Non- \*

Motoring

Summary 0  
Motoring

Offence not 0  
recorded

### **Data sources and quality**

The figures in these tables have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

### **Disclosure control**

An asterisk (\*) has been used to suppress values of two or one. This is to prevent the disclosure of individual information. Further disclosure control may be completed where this alone is not sufficient.

TABLE 2A: NUMBER OF PRISONERS ON TEMPORARY RELEASE (ROTL) ON 14 FEBRUARY 2023, IN ENGLAND AND WALES, BROKEN DOWN BY ESTABLISHMENT

Source: Prison  
NOMIS

PQ-10768 (Ministry of Justice; Data  
and Analysis (Directorate))

Data on the number of individuals recorded as temporary released from prison on 14 February 2023 broken down by (a) prison and (b) sentence length:

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF PRISONERS ON TEMPORARY RELEASE (ROTL) ON 14 FEBRUARY 2023, IN ENGLAND AND WALES, BROKEN DOWN BY SENTENCE LENGTH

Sentence length	Number of prisoners on ROTL
Fine defaulter	*
Less than or equal to 6 months	*
More than 6 months to less than 12 months	*
12 months to less than 2 years	
2 years to less than 4 years	86
4 years to less than 5 years	149
5 years to less than 7	341

**TABLE 3: NUMBER OF PRISONERS ON TEMPORARY RELEASE (ROTL) ON 14 FEBRUARY 2023, IN ENGLAND AND WALES, BROKEN DOWN BY SENTENCE LENGTH**

years	
7 years to	359
less than 10	
years	
10 years to	280
less than 14	
years	
14 years or	173
more	
(excluding	
indeterminate	
sentences)	
Extended	71
determinate	
sentence	
IPP	41
Life	172
sentences	
Recalls	50
Sentence	9
length not	
recorded	

**Data  
sources and  
quality**

The figures in this table have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

**Disclosure  
control**

An asterisk (\*) has been used to suppress values of two or one. This is to prevent the disclosure of individual information. Further disclosure control may be completed where this alone is not sufficient.

**Source:**

**TABLE 3: NUMBER OF PRISONERS ON TEMPORARY RELEASE (ROTL) ON 14 FEBRUARY 2023, IN ENGLAND AND WALES, BROKEN DOWN BY SENTENCE LENGTH**

**Prison  
NOMIS**

PQ-10769 (Ministry of  
Justice; Data and  
Analysis (Directorate))

■ **Prisons: Education**

**Mary Kelly Foy:** [\[15369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 14 December 2023 to Question 5663 on Garth Prison: Education, how (a) many hours of teaching time were lost and (b) much money was recovered from education providers as a result of prison education classes not going ahead in HMP (i) Garth, (ii) Bristol, (iii) Pentonville and (iv) Ranby during the second quarter of the 2023-24 financial year.

**Edward Argar:**

We have introduced robust contractual levers into the current education contract which has seen a decrease in the teaching time lost through the education provider. The introduction at site level of Heads of Education, Skills and Work will increase the focus on ensure operational staff are able to ensure learners arrive in education.

The table below shows the number of planned learning hours lost in the second quarter of 2023-24 due teacher vacancy or sickness (Ed), or for operational reasons (Op), at HMP Bristol, HMP Garth, HMP Pentonville and HMP Ranby.

**Learning hours lost, 1 July – 30 September 2023**

HMP	HOURS LOST (Ed)	HOURS LOST (Op)
Bristol	263	134
Garth	183	140
Pentonville	53	507
Ranby	8	376
<b>Total</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>1157</b>

\*These are preliminary data and have not yet been reconciled with the provider

In total, 507 hours of teaching were lost owing to a failure by the provider to deliver against the commissioned provision. £60,047 has been recovered from the providers. The cost of hours lost for operational reasons is not recoverable from the provider.

## ■ Probation: Bury South

**Christian Wakeford:**

**[14745]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what (a) support and (b) funding his Department provides to local probation services in Bury South constituency to help ensure effective rehabilitation of people leaving the criminal justice system.

**Edward Argar:**

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) service delivery in Greater Manchester supports all Criminal Justice activity for the Bury Borough. This includes all aspects of Community and Custodial practice across public protection, sentencing, sentence management and delivery, resettlement and reintegration.

Greater Manchester Probation Service (GMPS) on behalf of HMPPS have a unique approach to commissioning rehabilitative services across the region. Services are co-commissioned with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). There is a Memorandum of Understanding which sets out the principles of our approach, signed by both parties. There are also grant agreements in place which enable the co-commissioning to proceed in a way that provides both flexibility and assurance. These arrangements have enabled procurement of services at locality level, and there is specific activity across the Bury Borough.

From a wider partnership aspect, Reducing Reoffending is one of the six priorities of the Bury Community Safety Partnership (CSP), with the priority led by the local probation manager who chairs a multiagency steering group for this priority.

GMPS is an active participant in the Bury Community Safety Partnership, which encompasses work to tackle drug & alcohol related harm; involvement in the Prevent Partnership and Channel Panel (as part of CONTEST Counter-terror duty); involvement in the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board; involvement in the Bury Serious Violence Duty Steering Group and is the lead agency for actions in emerging Serious Violence Duty Delivery Plan to reduce serious violence related harm (offending and related hospital admissions).

GMPS lead engagement with the Creating & Maintaining Safe Spaces subgroup on Community Payback opportunities to link into local environmental improvement works.

Bury CSP (through GMCA core grant to CSP) have funded the Gateway project to break the cycle of substance misuse and offending,

Through the Co-commission approach outlined, approximately 60 services across the GM Region have been procured in this financial year, all of which support reducing harm and reoffending activities.

There has been investment and collaboration where appropriate with local authorities to procure services and ensure alignment with local Criminal Justice Priorities.

HMPPS delegate 4 reducing reoffending budgets into the GM region which are for the specific purpose of reducing reoffending in the region. These are Community

Accommodation Service Tier 3, Community Rehabilitation Service, Integrated Offender Management and Regional Outcome and Innovation Fund. The Bury Borough are provided with services from each of these budgets, and this equates to roughly a 10% share.

Specifically, rehabilitative services in Bury cover the following: services for women; services for accommodation; services for training, education and access to employment; peer mentoring; drug and alcohol interventions; wellbeing support for improving physical and mental health.

The question specifies 'people leaving the criminal justice service'. GMPS has formal responsibility for those within the system and this answer details the offer in this context. However, given close integration with GMCA and local authorities, the intention is to provide a link to continuity of help in local areas like Bury, beyond the period someone is subject to probation supervision.

## LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

### ■ Absent Voting

**Caroline Lucas:**

[\[14836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what plans he has to monitor the potential impact of Royal Mail delays on the number of postal votes received after the deadline; and what information his Department holds on the number and proportion of voting packs that were received late in (a) local elections in May 2023 and (b) other elections in the last five years.

**Caroline Lucas:**

[\[14837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make it a requirement for the number of voting packs received after an election deadline to be published; and what steps he is taking to protect the postal voting system from Royal Mail delays.

**Simon Hoare:**

I refer the Hon Member to my answer to Question UIN [13601](#) on 22 February 2024.

The May local elections will be held on the same day as scheduled Police and Crime Commissioner Elections, and so the Government has taken the decision to fund a 'national' sweep on polling day this year. This will mean that Royal Mail can conduct 'sweeps' of their mail centres to ensure completed postal ballot packs are pulled out at mail centres on the evening of polling day and delivered directly to local Returning Officers.

Returning Officers are required at elections to record the number of postal ballot packs received after the close of poll and this information is available for public inspection after the election.

■ **Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: Precise Media Monitoring**

**Emily Thornberry:**

[\[14517\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to his Department's contract with Precise Media Monitoring Ltd of 24 January 2024, procurement reference CPD4124143, if he will publish the list of search words provided by his Department's press office to the supplier at the outset of that contract.

**Simon Hoare:**

The information requested is not held centrally.

■ **Electoral Register: Voting Rights**

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

[\[15004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he has made an assessment of the potential financial impact of exclusion from the electoral register on UK residents who are not eligible to vote in the UK.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

[\[15005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what recent estimate he has made of the number of UK residents who have no right to vote in any election.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

[\[15006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of extending the franchise for local elections in England and Northern Ireland in line with the voter eligibility criteria in Wales and Scotland.

**Simon Hoare:**

The Government's position on the franchise remains unchanged. The Government was elected on a manifesto promising to "maintain the voting age at 18 – the age at which one gains full citizenship rights". 18 has been the well-established age of majority for, for example, jury service, purchasing alcohol, getting married without parental permission, serving in front-line military roles, standing for election as an MP or councillor, and so on.

The purpose of the electoral register is to enable those who are eligible to vote to register and ensure that only people who are eligible to vote are permitted to do so. Data on those who are not eligible to vote in UK elections is not held centrally.

■ **Homelessness: Affordable Housing**

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[14750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to help homeless individuals access affordable housing.



**Felicity Buchan:**

Further to my answer to Question UIN [14752](#) on 26 February 2024, our £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme will deliver thousands of affordable homes for both rent and to buy right across the country. A large number of the new homes delivered through our Affordable Homes Programme will be for social rent. Since 2010, we have delivered over 696,100 new affordable homes, including over 482,000 affordable homes for rent, of which over 172,600 homes for social rent.

**■ Homelessness: Coronavirus****Mike Amesbury:**[\[14924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what data his Department holds on the number and proportion of individuals housed under the Everyone In initiative who continued to be provided with accommodation after covid-19 restrictions were lifted.

**Felicity Buchan:**

Rough sleeping data collections are available here: [Homelessness statistics](#).

**■ Private Rented Housing: Letting Agents****Neil Coyle:**[\[14885\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he has made an assessment of the impact of the Renters (Reform) Bill on relocation agents.

**Jacob Young:**

The Renters (Reform) Bill will deliver a fairer, more secure, and higher quality private rented sector that is fit for the 21st century. The Impact Assessment for the Bill considers the impact on letting agents (which includes relocation agents).

It estimates that as a result of familiarisation costs and more stable private rented sector tenancies, letting agents will face costs of £1,085 per agent per year over the ten-year appraisal period. The reforms may also create new opportunities for letting agents, such as services which support landlords to meet their new requirements.

**■ Property Management Companies: Fees and Charges****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[15151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of service charge regulations for property management companies.

**Lee Rowley:**

Service charges should be transparent, reasonable and there should be a clear route to challenge or redress if things go wrong.

The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill will ensure that all leaseholders receive minimum key financial and non-financial information to help them scrutinise and more effectively challenge their landlord if they consider their fees are unreasonable.

## ■ Property Management Companies: Standards

**Apsana Begum:**

[15201]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether his Department has had recent discussions with representatives of the property management industry on maintaining quality and standards of service.

**Lee Rowley:**

The Government continues to work with industry on improving best practice across the property agent sector. As part of this, and during development of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill, we have engaged with a range of stakeholders, including representatives from the property management industry. We will continue to do so.

## ■ Refugees: Ukraine

**Mike Amesbury:**

[14931]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make an estimate of the number of Ukrainian refugees presenting as homeless.

**Mike Amesbury:**

[14932]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what recent assessment he has made of adequacy of (a) funding and (b) support arrangements for Ukrainian refugees.

**Felicity Buchan:**

Local authorities will continue to receive the per person tariff payment to support our Ukrainian guests. Sponsors are eligible for an optional 'Thank You payment' of £350 per month per address, for the first 12 months of a Ukrainian guest's stay in the UK and £500 thereafter. A proportion of the tariff was always intended to fund homeless prevention for the small proportion of sponsorships that fail or Ukrainians who are unable to find housing. We also launched the Local Authority Housing Fund, details of which are available online.

On Homelessness, as of 15 February 2024, 820 households are in temporary accommodation. The data has been published on Gov.UK and can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-management-information-ukrainian-nationals-england>.

## ■ Regeneration: Bury South

**Christian Wakeford:**

[14742]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps he is taking to support community-led regeneration projects in (a) areas facing economic deprivation and (b) other areas in Bury South constituency.

**Jacob Young:**

So far, the £150 million Community Ownership Fund has awarded £71.4 million of funding to 257 projects across the UK. This includes £260k to rebuild the Whitefield

Bowling Club in Bury South so it can continue to host the club, serve as a hub and meeting space for community groups and provide much needed community services.

Bury Community Football Club Supporters Society was awarded £1 million in 2021 through the Community Ownership Fund, allowing the stadium to be purchased and brought back into use as a home for Bury FC and as a focal point for community life and events.

## ■ Rented Housing: Local Government

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[14488\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps he has taken to ensure that local councils return leased properties to private landlords when in receipt of proper notice.

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[15237\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what guidance his Department issues to local authorities on the sale by the owners of properties leased to local authorities; and what steps he is taking to support local authorities to rehouse the occupiers of those properties.

**Felicity Buchan:**

In cases in which a property owner seeks the return of a property leased to a local authority, the local authority should endeavour to return the property as soon as possible, whilst ensuring that the occupant is rehoused in line with any statutory duties.

Government supports local authorities to support homeless households into settled accommodation. We are investing over £1 billion in the Homelessness Prevention Grant over three years, including a £109 million top-up to the Homelessness Prevention Grant this year, and additional funding of £120 million to help councils address Ukraine and homelessness pressures in 2024/25. Further to this, the £1.2 billion Local Authority Housing Fund includes funding for local authorities to obtain better quality temporary accommodation which helps alleviate rough sleeping and homelessness.

## ■ Tenants' Associations

**Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[15046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will publish guidance to enable the recognition of residents associations by managing agents.

**Lee Rowley:**

Government published regulations in 2018 that make it easier for leaseholders to form Recognised Tenants' Associations (RTAs). These associations have legal standing and significant abilities to hold their landlord to account. Meanwhile, the Government continues to work with industry on improving best practice across the property agent sector. The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill will make it easier for

leaseholders to scrutinise costs and challenge the services provided by both landlords and property managing agents and to better protect and empower leaseholders, alongside existing protections and work undertaken by industry to raise professionalism and standards.

## ■ Travellers

**Nadia Whittome:**

[\[14297\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to tackle racism against Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities.

**Lee Rowley:**

All forms of discrimination are unacceptable, and they have no place in our communities.

No one should ever be a victim of discrimination because of their race, or their religion or belief, and the Government continues to work with police and community partners to monitor and combat it.

True Vision is an online reporting portal, maintained by the police and funded by the Government. We will continue to support the police to maintain this and reinforce their relationships with communities so that they feel confident to report any instances of illegal discrimination.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### ■ Import Controls: Northern Ireland

**Sammy Wilson:**

[\[14523\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what his planned timetable is to bring forward legislation to repeal section 10(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

**Chris Heaton-Harris:**

The Government is working actively to deliver commitments made in the *Safeguarding the Union* command paper, which was published on 31 January (CP 1021). This includes the passing into law on 20 February of two statutory instruments to give effect to legislative assurances contained within the command paper. Any required further legislation will be brought forward as soon as parliamentary time allows.

### ■ Northern Ireland Office: Domicil

**Jonathan Ashworth:**

[\[15284\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether any non-executive directors employed in his Department are non-domiciled.

**Mr Steve Baker:**

My Department has three non-executive directors who are not employees of the Northern Ireland Office and act in an advisory capacity. Non-executive's personal data, including those relating to personal taxation or status, are protected by the UK General Data Protection Regulation. Data on non-dom status is not routinely collected and is generally not required for making public appointments. If any such data was held it could only be published if doing so was in compliance with data protection law.

■ **Northern Ireland Office: Software****Dame Nia Griffith:**[\[15260\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how much his Department has (a) budgeted for and (b) spent on software updates to legacy computer systems in each of the last three financial years.

**Mr Steve Baker:**

The Northern Ireland Office does not have any legacy computer systems and therefore has not budgeted or spent anything relating to legacy computer systems in any of the last three financial years.

**SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ **Artificial Intelligence: Schools****Jim Shannon:**[\[14584\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education on the safe use of artificial intelligence in schools.

**Saqib Bhatti:**

The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology works closely with the Education Secretary on artificial intelligence (AI). We welcomed the Department for Education's call for evidence and hackathon on AI in education last year, which will support the UK to harness the potential of AI to revolutionise industries such as education. Our £150K joint public attitudes project, between the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's Responsible Technology Adoption Unit and the Department for Education, is being run with active sponsorship from Department for Education Minister, Baroness Barran, and is mid-way through delivery.

The Government is taking a proactive approach to ensuring that the education sector can capitalise on the benefits and mitigate risks of AI, publishing the first Call for Evidence on Artificial Intelligence in Education in November 2023.

We are also supporting young people to develop their understanding of technology and being safe online. This includes DSIT's Cyber Explorers programme for 11-14 year olds which educates students on how to be secure online alongside promoting

the career opportunities offered by cyber and tech more broadly. Over 60,000 students are registered across nearly 2,500 schools.

The Government's [AI Regulation White Paper](#) set out the first steps towards establishing a regulatory framework for AI, including working with UK regulators on how they might need to regulate the technology given its cross-cutting nature and impact on various sectors, including education.

## ■ Broadband

**Helen Morgan:**

**[14697]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure residents in (a) rural and (b) urban areas benefit equally from improved access to all broadband providers.

**Julia Lopez:**

The Government continues to remove barriers to broadband roll out, including making considerable legislative changes and publishing non-statutory guidance to encourage fibre deployment. As well as changes to the Electronic Communications Code, all new build homes are required to have gigabit-ready physical infrastructure installed, and gigabit-capable connections where these can be provided within a cost cap. The Department continues to work closely with both local authorities and operators to support the rollout of digital connectivity across the UK and has published the Digital Connectivity Portal, extensive guidance for local authorities and operators to help facilitate broadband deployment. We also continue to work with the Department for Transport to trial a more flexible street works permitting system.

Alongside this, Project Gigabit is the government's flagship £5 billion programme to enable hard-to-reach communities, left out of commercial delivery plans, to access lightning-fast gigabit-capable broadband.

Some of the hardest to reach parts of the UK are rural communities and therefore Project Gigabit will level-up mostly rural and remote communities across the UK. Most of our delivery volume will come through local and regional contracts and subsidies to suppliers to extend their gigabit-capable networks to premises that will not otherwise be reached by suppliers' commercial plans. These contracts require the supplier to offer wholesale access to their network for other internet service providers to use, facilitating fair, open access to the infrastructure government is subsidising.

Most urban and suburban areas are already well served or part of commercial rollout plans, however, to reach our ambition of nationwide gigabit coverage by 2030, we recognise that pockets of poor connectivity in urban areas left out of commercial plans need to be tackled.

Work is ongoing to find solutions and define an appropriate course of action to ensure these premises are not left behind, solutions for these premises may involve working with suppliers and local authorities to enable commercial delivery rather than using public subsidy.

## ■ Broadband: Social Tariffs

**Kenny MacAskil:**

[\[14701\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether she plans to bring forward legislative proposals to ensure that providers of broadband social tariffs apply the same (a) discount levels and (b) eligibility criteria to those tariffs.

**Julia Lopez:**

The Government recognises that this is a difficult time for households across the country who are struggling with their bills due to the rise in the cost of living.

Social tariffs are offered on a voluntary basis by 27 telecommunications providers and are available in 99% of the UK for the around 5 million eligible households on Universal Credit as well as other means-tested benefits. The design of broadband and mobile social tariffs, including pricing, speeds, and eligibility, are decided by individual operators, and this has resulted in a good range of offers for people to choose from.

The Government does not currently have plans to intervene in the telecommunications market to prescribe the make-up of social tariffs. We recognise that low-income households need help with their bills now and any legislative proposal will take time to design and deliver and may cause operators to withdraw their existing social offers. In December 2023, Ofcom's Pricing Trends report showed 380,000 households were taking up a social tariff. This is an increase of almost 160% since their September 2022 report. We continue to work closely with Ofcom to monitor market provision and stand ready to act if necessary.

## ■ Business

**Christian Wakeford:**

[\[14753\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department is taking to promote (a) innovation and (b) research and development in (i) technology, (ii) green energy, (iii) healthcare and (iv) other key sectors of the economy.

**Andrew Griffith:**

The Government is working to unleash the power of research & development and innovation across the economy - backed by the highest-ever levels of public spending on R&D, which will rise to £20 billion in 2024/25. As set out in our recent Science and Technology Framework update, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is removing barriers to success in technology-led sectors such as, telecoms, life sciences, and space.

## ■ Mobile Broadband

**Helen Morgan:**

[\[14690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department takes with local authorities to gather evidence on differences between the experience of mobile coverage and the data provided by operators.



**Julia Lopez:**

Ofcom is responsible for measuring and reporting on network coverage through its Connected Nations reports. Ofcom tests the actual coverage provided in various locations around the UK to validate the accuracy of the predictive data provided by mobile network operators.

The government recognises the value for everyone, including local authorities, of having access to accurate data. In the Wireless Infrastructure Strategy, published in April 2023, the government asked Ofcom to improve the accuracy of their reporting on mobile coverage and to keep under review what they consider to be “good” network performance.

Working alongside Ofcom, we are exploring a number of different options for improving the accuracy of mobile coverage reporting.

**■ Mobile Phones: Safety Measures****Mark Pritchard:**[\[14518\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if she will hold discussions with mobile phone manufacturers on encouraging the development of phones that are disabled when their users are driving motorised vehicles.

**Julia Lopez:**

We appreciate that phones deactivating when entering a motorised vehicle would ensure consumers' compliance with existing laws regarding the use of mobile phones while driving. However, the Government currently has no plans to discuss this issue with mobile phone manufacturers. It is important to recognise it is not possible to determine whether the owner of a mobile device is driving or a passenger within a vehicle, and so automatic disabling features are likely to be difficult to create with accuracy.

Most Android and iPhones already have ‘do not disturb’ or ‘drive mode’ features embedded within their operating systems, which can activate automatically once a device connects to a car’s Bluetooth network.

While mobile phones are a vital part of modern life and business, drivers must always use them safely and responsibly.

The Government amended the offence of using a hand-held mobile phone while driving in March 2022. The offence is now triggered by any use of a hand-held mobile phone while driving, reflecting the real world where smart phones or devices are used not only for calls and texting.

The change in the law in 2022 has made it easier for the police to enforce this offence as they no longer have to prove that any use they identified from the roadside involved calls and texting.

**■ Science: Research****Chi Onwurah:**[\[15398\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how many researchers from the UK applied for (a) alternative funding from the UK equivalent of the EU's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions scheme and (b) the EU's Marie Skłodowska-Curie scheme in the last five years; and what proportion of those applications were successful.

**Andrew Griffith:**

The Guarantee has provided comprehensive support to UK researchers and businesses. As of 31 January 2023 UKRI has issued 3,021 Grant Offer Letters for awards of £1.56 billion, including issuing 656 Grant offer letters for awards of £149.9m for the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions scheme.

**■ Telecommunications: Infrastructure****Helen Morgan:**[\[14691\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what guidance her Department issues to broadband providers on working with planning authorities when installing electronic communications apparatus.

**Julia Lopez:**

We believe that communities benefit enormously from the deployment of high quality digital infrastructure, with all the economic and social benefits it brings. We want to make sure that deployment happens efficiently, but at the same time, in ways that make sure the impact on communities and the environment is taken into account and broad support is maintained for the rollout of this critical infrastructure.

The Government is acutely aware of ongoing concerns about the installation of telegraph poles. On 20 February, the Secretary of State wrote to the Chief Executive of Ofcom regarding the 2003 Regulations, asking them how they could enforce greater infrastructure sharing.

We are actively considering a wide range of measures we can take to address these concerns, and to promote collaborative engagement between operators and communities. I will ensure that interested Members are made aware of any concrete steps my Department takes.

Telegraph poles play an important role in delivering efficient and cost effective coverage and connectivity to communities, particularly in hard to reach areas without costly and disruptive roadworks, or where existing infrastructure cannot be used.

Although permitted development rights allow telegraph poles and lines to be deployed without requiring case-by-case approval from the planning authority, these rights are still subject to certain restrictions and limitations set out in legislation. The Department issues no specific guidance on the permitted development rights for electronic communications.

However, we recognise that care must be taken when choosing where to site telegraph poles; ensuring that any potential disruption to communities is minimised.

That is why additional duties and obligations relating to telecommunications installations are included in the Electronic Communications Code (Conditions and Restrictions) Regulations 2003 ("the 2003 Regulations") which Code Operators are required to comply with, such as requirements for all operators to share apparatus where practicable, and also to use underground, rather than overground, lines where reasonably practicable, with certain exceptions.

The 2003 Regulations also require that in certain PDR cases, the operator must notify the local planning authority of its intention to deploy certain apparatus, provided that they have no pre-existing equipment in the area. The local planning authority may give written notice of conditions with which they wish the Operator to comply in respect of the installation of the apparatus.

In addition, there is a Code of Practice (The Cabinet Siting and Pole Siting Code of Practice 2016) in place relating to the siting of cabinet and pole installations. It provides guidance on ways operators can ensure these installations are placed appropriately, and that local authorities and communities are engaged with regarding proposed installations. For example, it sets out that where new poles are to be installed the operator should place a site notice to indicate to nearby residents the intention to install a pole, and the proposed location.

As well as the Cabinet Siting and Pole Siting Code of Practice, the Digital Connectivity Portal provides extensive guidance for local authorities and operators to help facilitate broadband deployment, including technical information, and examples of best practice such as early engagement with communities.

## SCOTLAND

### ■ Scotland Office: Domicil

**Jonathan Ashworth:**

**[15285]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, whether any non-executive directors employed in his Department are non-domiciled.

**Mr Alister Jack:**

Non-Executive Board Members' personal data, including those relating to personal taxation or status, are protected by the UK General Data Protection Regulation. Collection of personal data on non-dom status is not routinely collected, and is generally not required for making public appointments. If any such data was held, it could only be published if doing so was in compliance with data protection law.

Non-Executive Board Members are not employees of the Scotland Office and act in an advisory capacity.

Data relating to public appointments are covered by the Public Appointments Privacy Statement found here: <https://apply-for-public-appointment.service.gov.uk/privacy>.

**■ Scotland Office: Software****Dame Nia Griffith:** [\[15397\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, how much funding his Department has (a) budgeted for and (b) spent on software updates to legacy computer systems in each of the last three financial years.

**Mr Alister Jack:**

The Scotland Office has not had any funding budgeted for nor spent on software updates to legacy computer systems in the last three financial years. The Scotland Office does not have any legacy computer systems and the IT services for the department are provided by the Cabinet Office.

**TRANSPORT****■ Department for Transport: Social Media****Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[14534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much his Department has spent on marketing on digital media platforms in each of the last five years.

**Anthony Browne:**

The information requested is not readily available and could only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

**■ Department for Transport: Translation Services****Sir John Hayes:** [\[14463\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much his Department spent on translation services from English to (a) Urdu, (b) Polish, (c) Panjabi and (d) Arabic in the last five years.

**Anthony Browne:**

The Department for Transport does not centrally hold the cost and spend for translation services. We do use translation services on occasion and where necessary, however we do not record these broken down by language.

**■ Govia Thameslink Railway: Standards****Daisy Cooper:** [\[15192\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, for what reason his Department lowered seven performance targets for Thameslink for the 12 months to the end of March 2024.

**Daisy Cooper:** [\[15193\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he consulted any passenger and commuter groups before lowering performance targets for Thameslink for the 12 months to the end of March 2024.

**Daisy Cooper:**

[\[15194\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether any public consultation was conducted before his Department lowered performance targets for Thameslink for the 12 months to the end of March 2024.

**Daisy Cooper:**

[\[15195\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether a value for money assessment was conducted before his Department lowered performance targets for Thameslink for the 12 months to the end of March 2024.

**Huw Merriman:**

The contractual performance targets are agreed with the train operators on an annual basis and do not involve consultation with external bodies.

Targets are proportionate to the level of investment agreed within the Business Plan budget for that year and may vary year on year.

These plans setting out service performance measures are scrutinised by Departmental officials to ensure the agreed level of investment represents the best value for money and customer service quality possible.

■ **Roads: Bexley**

**Sir David Evennett:**

[\[15224\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much funding his Department has allocated to Bexley Council for (a) pothole and (b) other road repairs in each year since 2015.

**Guy Opperman:**

The Department has allocated a total of £1.333 million to the London Borough of Bexley for local highway maintenance since 2015, as part of one-off funding uplifts, as set out in the table below. Transport is a devolved matter in London, meaning that the Department for Transport does not routinely allocate highway maintenance funding to London boroughs.

YEAR	FUNDING STREAM	AMOUNT £
2017/18	Pothole Action Fund	80,000
2018/19	Budget 2018	703,000
2023/24	Roads Resurfacing Fund	275,000
2024/25	Roads Resurfacing Fund	275,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,333,000</b>	

Over the period between 2023/24 - 2033/34, the London Borough of Bexley will receive a minimum of £8.345 million funding through the national Roads Resurfacing Fund, as announced within the Prime Minister's Network North plan on 4 October 2023 and as set out on gov.uk.

### ■ **Speed Limits: Schools**

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[15280\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make it his policy to impose 20mph speed limits on school roads; and if he will provide funding to devolved Administrations to purchase speed limit signs for each (a) primary and (b) high school.

**Guy Opperman:**

In England, responsibility for setting local speed limits rests with the traffic authority. The Department for Transport advises that in specific and limited areas traffic authorities should consider the use of 20mph schemes, for example outside schools.

Speed limits in Northern Ireland are a matter for the Department for Infrastructure.

There are no plans to provide specific funding to devolved Administrations for the purchase of speed limit signs.

## TREASURY

### ■ **Banks: Closures**

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[14456\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has had recent discussions with banks on the closure of bank branches in rural areas.

**Bim Afolami:**

The Treasury regularly engages with the banking sector to discuss a range of policy matters. The Government believes that all customers, wherever they live, should have appropriate access to banking and cash services, and I would like to assure you that I am monitoring this issue closely.

Though the closure of bank or building society branches are commercial decisions, it is imperative that firms recognise the needs of all their customers, including those who need to use in-person services.

Guidance from the FCA sets out its expectation of firms when they are deciding to reduce their physical branches or the number of free-to-use ATMs. The FCA's guidance is clear that firms are expected to carefully consider the impact of planned branch closures on their customers' everyday banking and cash access needs, and put in place alternatives, where this is reasonable.

UK customers can access banking services through a number of different channels. This includes in branches, Post Offices or Banking Hubs, as well as via telephone banking and through digital means such as mobile or online banking.

The Post Office allows personal and business customers to carry out everyday banking services at 11,500 Post Office branches across the UK. The Post Office is required by the Department for Business & Trade to ensure that 95% of the total rural population across the UK is within 3 miles of their nearest Post Office.

Banking Hubs are an initiative which enable customers of participating banks to access cash and banking services in shared facilities. Over 100 Banking Hubs have been announced so far, and the Government hopes to see these Hubs open as soon as possible.

## ■ **Beer and Cider: Excise Duties**

**Caroline Lucas:**

**[14834]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy to reduce duty charged on draught beer and cider served in pubs and taprooms by 20%.

**Gareth Davies:**

Draught Relief, introduced under this Government's new alcohol duty system, provides a reduction in the duty on draught beer and cider by 9.2% and helps to level the playing field between pubs and supermarkets, allowing pubs and brewers to price their on-trade products more competitively. The Brexit Pubs Guarantee ensures that draught products will always be subject to lower duty than their supermarket equivalent.

The Government is unable to speculate on tax matters outside of fiscal events. As with all taxes, the Government keeps the alcohol duty system under review during its yearly Budget process.

## ■ **Belarus and Russia: Sanctions**

**Stephen Doughty:**

**[15287]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many enforcement proceedings have been instated relating to the (a) Russia and (b) Belarus sanctioned regimes since 24 February 2022.

**Bim Afolami:**

The Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI) published its Annual Review for the 2022-23 financial year on 14 December available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsi-annual-reviews>.

This contains details of the number of cases recorded and outcomes for the relevant financial year.

## ■ **British Nationals Abroad: Self-assessment**

**Ruth Jones:**

**[14711]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has had discussions with HMRC on the potential merits of allowing British citizens overseas to file tax returns online.

**Nigel Huddleston:**

HMRC provides free software that allows the vast majority of Self Assessment customers to file their returns online. Certain small groups, including UK citizens living overseas, cannot use this software. They need either to file on paper or to purchase and use commercial software in order to file their returns online. HMRC aims to make its free software available to this group in future but has no immediate plans to do so.

HMRC offers support and guidance to non-UK resident customers through its dedicated Self Assessment telephone helpline on +44 161 931 9070. More information can be found here - [Self Assessment: general enquiries - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/self-assessment-general-enquiries).

**■ Buildings: VAT****Kerry McCarthy:**[\[15252\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of the potential impact of the level of VAT applied to (a) building refurbishment and renovations and (b) new build projects on resource efficiency in the construction sector.

**Nigel Huddleston:**

The construction of certain new-build properties, including residential buildings, is subject to a VAT zero rate to encourage the construction of new homes. A reduced rate of VAT at five per cent is also maintained, subject to certain conditions, for residential renovations. This includes conversions of buildings from one residential use to another, conversions from commercial to residential use, and the renovation of properties that have been empty for two years or more.

**■ Capital Gains Tax: Reform****Dan Carden:**[\[14922\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the report by CAGE entitled Who would be affected by Capital Gains Tax reform, published in February 2024.

**Nigel Huddleston:**

Substantial reforms to CGT rates and allowances would involve a number of wider policy trade-offs and so careful thought must be given to the impact that they would have on taxpayers, as well as any additional administrative burden on HMRC.

The Government will continue to keep the tax system under review.

**■ Child Benefit****Angela Crawley:**[\[15299\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the high income child benefit charge on children's living standards.



**Nigel Huddleston:**

The High Income Child Benefit Charge (HICBC) only affects Child Benefit recipients who have, or whose partner has, and adjusted net income between £50,000 and £60,000.

Data on children living in low-income households is available in the public domain as part of the Households Below Average Income statistical release, published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) by the Department for Work and Pensions.

**Angela Crawley:****[15300]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of introducing changes to the child benefit system.

**Angela Crawley:****[15301]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the child benefit allowance to £50 a week for all children.

**Nigel Huddleston:**

Child Benefit ensures families receive support for the additional costs they face in raising a child. 7.7m million families across the UK claim Child Benefit.

To ensure that the Child Benefit payments retain their value, they will be increased in line with last September's CPI at 6.7% from April 2024.

Further support for children from low-income households is also provided through the child element of Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit, which will be uprated in line with CPI.

The Government also offers a broader range of support for parents to help with childcare, including financial support with childcare through Tax-Free Childcare.

As with all Government policy, Child Benefit is kept under regular review.

**■ Childcare: Greater London****Feryal Clark:****[14974]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many people receive tax free childcare in (a) Enfield North Constituency, (b) the London Borough of Enfield, and (c) London.

**Nigel Huddleston:**

Statistics relating to Tax-Free Childcare account use are published quarterly in "Tax-Free Childcare Statistics" on the gov.uk website. The latest publication, containing information up to September 2023 is here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tax-free-childcare-quarterly-statistics>

Number of Families and Children with Used Tax-Free Childcare accounts by local authority are published as tables 9 and 10. Number of Families and Children with Used Tax-Free Childcare accounts by Westminster parliamentary constituency are published as tables 11 and 12.

## ■ Community Development Finance Institutions

**Simon Fell:**

[\[15366\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether they plan to amend the £2.5 million lending cap for wholesale Community Development Finance Institutions lending to retail Community Development Finance Institutions using the Community Investment Tax Relief.

**Nigel Huddleston:**

At Spring Budget 2023, the government increased the amounts that Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs) can raise through the Community Investment Tax Relief (CITR) from £20 million to £100 million for wholesale CDFIs, and £10 million to £25 million for retail CDFIs. The amounts that CDFIs can lend to eligible businesses was also increased from £250,000 to £375,000 for non-profit distributing organisations and £100,000 to £250,000 for profit distributing organisations. The government keeps all tax reliefs under review and will monitor the impact of these changes.

## ■ Equitable Life Assurance Society: Compensation

**Fleur Anderson:**

[\[14967\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, What recent steps his Department has taken to ensure that Equitable Life policyholders are reimbursed.

**Bim Afolami:**

The Equitable Life Payment Scheme has been fully wound down and closed since 2016 and there are no plans to reopen any previous decisions relating to the Payment Scheme or review the £1.5 billion funding allocation previously made to it. Further guidance on the status of the Payment Scheme after closure is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equitable-life-payment-scheme#closure-of-the-scheme>.

## ■ Financial Institutions

**Mr Barry Sheerman:**

[\[14467\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking with (a) banks and (b) other financial institutions to improve the financial sustainability of those organisations.

**Bim Afolami:**

The Government is committed to retaining the UK's position as one of the most innovative and competitive financial centres in the world. The Chancellor recently set out an ambitious reform programme at Mansion House, building on the success of the Edinburgh Reforms, which will help to deliver the Government's vision for a financial sector that is open, sustainable, technologically innovative, and globally competitive. Additionally, the Financial Services and Markets Act 2023 introduced new secondary objectives for both the Financial Conduct Authority and Prudential Regulatory Authority to facilitate the international competitiveness of the UK economy (including the financial services sector), and its growth in the medium to long term.

Financial stability is a pre-requisite for economic growth and is crucial for the competitiveness of the financial services sector. The government, working closely with the financial regulators, has made major improvements to the resilience of the banking system since the financial crisis with capital requirements for banks now three times higher. The government has also considered it a priority to build resilience in the non-bank system and has been working closely with the regulators and international bodies to achieve this.

The Bank of England also undertakes regular stress tests on the UK's major banks to test their resilience to severe economic scenarios and for the first time will be undertaking a system wide exploratory scenario which aims to improve the understanding of how banks and non-banks behave during stress and how these behaviours might interact to amplify shocks.

## ■ Financial Institutions: Ethics

**Mr Barry Sheerman:**

[\[14468\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he is taking steps to encourage (a) banks and (b) other financial institutions to engage in corporate social responsibility.

**Bim Afolami:**

Corporate social responsibility, where such actions go beyond what is required in regulation, is a matter for banks and financial institutions to make individual decisions on.

## ■ Fraud: Social Media

**Peter Aldous:**

[\[14558\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential (a) merits of requiring social media platforms to contribute to the costs of reimbursing victims of fraud and (b) impact of such a requirement on tackling fraud.

**Bim Afolami:**

The government recognises that protecting the UK population from fraud, including is incredibly important. That is why we have agreed the [Online Fraud Charter](#) with the technology sector. Signatories, including some of the largest global tech companies, have committed to a number of actions to reduce fraud on their platforms and services including: blocking and reporting fraudulent activity, taking down fraudulent posts, and engaging with law enforcement.

More broadly, under the Online Safety Act, social media platforms will be required to establish systems and processes to remove both user generated fraudulent content and fraudulent advertising. If platforms do not comply, they may face fines of up to £18 million or 10% of their annual turnover, whichever is higher.

## ■ High Income Child Benefit Tax Charge

**Angela Crawley:** [\[15302\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the self-assessment process on individuals that receive child benefit and pay the high income child benefit charge; and whether he plans to simplify the self-assessment process.

**Nigel Huddleston:**

A Self Assessment tax return is currently the only means for HM Revenue and Customs to establish the correct HICBC liability.

The Government announced in July 2023 that steps will be taken to enable employed individuals to pay the HICBC through their tax code, removing the need to register for Self Assessment. This will make the process of paying the charge simpler for individuals who become liable to the charge, reaffirming the Government's commitment to a simpler and fairer tax system.

## ■ High Income Child Benefit Tax Charge: Women

**Angela Crawley:** [\[15303\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the high income child benefit charge on women.

**Nigel Huddleston:**

Child Benefit statistics (which include data on the High Income Child Benefit Charge) are published annually by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). They include information on Child Benefit claimants, and High Income Child Benefit Charge liability by gender.

## ■ Mileage Allowances

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[14933\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of raising the rates of travel mileage and fuel allowances; and what assessment he has made of the impact of those rates on the income of low-paid workers.

**Gareth Davies:**

Approved Mileage Allowance Payments (AMAPs) are used by employers to reimburse an employee's expenses for business mileage in their private vehicle. AMAPs are intended to create administrative simplicity and certainty by using an average rate.

As with all taxes and allowances, the Government keeps the AMAP rate under review. In considering changes to the AMAP rate, the Government has to balance the responsible management of public finances, which fund our essential public services, with support for individuals.

At Spring Budget 2023, the government announced continued support for households and businesses by maintaining the rates of fuel duty at the levels set on 23 March 2022 for an additional 12 months, by extending the temporary 5p fuel duty cut and cancelling the planned inflation increase for 2023-24. That represents a saving for all drivers this year of overall around £5bn and for the average car driver around £100.

## ■ Treasury: Childcare

**Bridget Phillipson:**

[14033]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether there were any meetings between senior officials in his Department and (a) the Early Years Alliance, (b) the National Day Nurseries Association, (c) Busy Bees, (d) Bright Horizons, (e) Koru Kids and (f) other individual private providers of childcare services subsequent to the release of transparency information for HM Treasury ministerial meetings between 1 January and 31 March 2023.

**Laura Trott:**

Treasury officials have regular meetings with external organisations, including in the childcare sector as part of the process for policy formulation.

Details of Ministerial and Permanent Secretary meetings are published on GOV.UK.

## WALES

## ■ Wales Office: Domicil

**Jonathan Ashworth:**

[15286]

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, whether any non-executive directors employed in his Department are non-domiciled.

**Fay Jones:**

Non-executive's personal data, including those relating to personal taxation or status, are protected by the UK General Data Protection Regulation. Collection of personal data on non-dom status is not routinely collected and is generally not required for making public appointments. If any such data was held it could only be published if doing so was in compliance with data protection law.

Non-executive board members are not employees of the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales and act in an advisory capacity.

Data relating to public appointments are covered by the Public Appointments Privacy Statement found here <https://apply-for-public-appointment.service.gov.uk/privacy>.

## ■ Wales Office: Software

**Dame Nia Griffith:**

[15261]

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how much his Department has (a) budgeted for and (b) spent on software updates to legacy computer systems in each of the last three financial years.

**Fay Jones:**

Nothing. The Office of the Secretary of State for Wales does not have any legacy computer systems.

**WOMEN AND EQUALITIES****■ Equal Pay****Christian Wakeford:**[\[14746\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps her Department is taking to (a) tackle the gender pay gap and (b) promote equal pay for equal work.

**Maria Caulfield:**

In 2017 we introduced mandatory gender pay gap reporting for large employers, building on the robust equal pay protections we already have in the Equality Act. This has motivated employers to look at their pay data and improve workplace equality; including routing out instances of unequal pay.

The national gender pay gap has fallen by approximately a quarter in the last decade; however, we are not complacent. To accelerate progress we are ensuring that people can balance their work and home lives. To this end we have supported legislation to: enhance flexible working, extend redundancy protection for those on maternity leave, and introduce carers leave. We have also announced the single biggest investment in childcare in England ever, in order to help working families with their childcare costs.

**■ Women: Directors****Christian Wakeford:**[\[14748\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what recent progress her Department has made on promoting women's representation in leadership positions within (a) Government, (b) local government and (c) business.

**Maria Caulfield:**

The Prime Minister has made clear his commitment to greater representation at the highest levels of Government, having appointed many talented women to his cabinet, and in ministerial positions. When it comes to local government, political parties are responsible for their candidate selection and should be leading the way in improving the diversity of representation. I am aware that most national parties provide additional support to women looking to become candidates.

Turning to business, almost 40% of UK FTSE 100 board positions are now held by women. To continue this progress, the Government supports the FTSE Women Leaders Review - which is independent, voluntary and business-led. The review uses data transparency to support talented, diverse leadership in the UK's top companies. Now in its third stage, it continues to set stretching targets for firms to ensure a diverse pipeline of talent.

This Government is fully committed to ensuring that everyone, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

## ■ **Women: Education and Employment**

**Christian Wakeford:**

**[14749]**

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps her Department is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help reduce barriers to (a) education and (b) employment for women and girls.

**Maria Caulfield:**

The Government has taken wide ranging action to ensure everyone, regardless of their sex, can take advantage of the same opportunities in both education and employment, some examples are outlined here.

To prevent girls from missing school due to the cost of period products the DfE funds a period product scheme which provides free period products to pupils and students. The scheme covers all state-funded schools with female learners in year 5 or above and DfE-funded 16-19 education organisations in England. Since the scheme's launch in January 2022, 99% of secondary schools, 94% of 16-19 education organisations and 75% of primary schools have placed an order for products.

To increase the take up of computer science qualifications the DfE have invested in the National Centre for Computing Education (NCCE), which supports the 'I Belong' programme, available to secondary schools. Focused on Key Stage 3, 'I Belong' aims to improve schools' awareness of the barriers to girls' engagement with computing so they are better able to remove them.

The Government also supports the STEM Ambassadors programme, a nationwide network of 30,000 registered volunteers from over 7,000 STEM and related employers. Approximately 48% of Ambassadors are women and 17% are from minority ethnic backgrounds, providing young people with a variety of role models, and encouraging increasing numbers of girls to take STEM subjects.

To make sure these gains are not lost as women move from education into employment, the Government has enhanced several legal protections which particularly benefit women, including; enhancing flexible working, extending redundancy protection for those on maternity leave, introducing carers leave, and strengthening the protections against harassment in the workplace.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

## ■ **Disability: Employment**

**Kwasi Kwarteng:**

**[14586]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to support people with disabilities that impact their ability to work.



**Mims Davies:**

The Government has a wide range of initiatives to support disabled people and people with health conditions to start, stay and succeed in work. These include:

- The Work and Health Programme providing tailored and personalised support for disabled people;
- Access to Work grants helping towards extra costs of working beyond standard reasonable adjustments;
- Disability Confident encouraging employers to think differently about disability and health, and to take positive action to address the issues disabled employees face in the workplace;
- A [digital](#) information service for employers providing better integrated and tailored guidance on supporting health and disability in the workplace;
- Increasing access to Occupational Health, including the testing of financial incentives for small and medium-sized enterprises and the self-employed;
- Increased Work Coach support in Jobcentres for disabled people and people with health conditions to help them move towards and in to work;
- Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentres offering advice and expertise on how to help disabled people and people with health conditions into work;
- Work in partnership between the DWP and health systems, including Employment Advice in NHS Talking Therapies, and the Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care programme, a Supported Employment model (place, train and maintain) delivered in health settings, aimed at people with physical or common mental health disabilities to support them to access paid jobs in the open labour market.

Building on existing provision and the £2 billion investment announced at the Spring Budget 2023, we announced a new package of support in Autumn Statement 2023. This includes:

- Doubling the number of places on the Universal Support employment programme, to provide support for 100,000 people per year when fully rolled out;
- Formally launching WorkWell, which will bring together the NHS, local authorities, and other partners, in collaboration with jobcentres, to provide light touch work and health support in approximately 15 pilot areas;
- Building on the extension of the certification of the fit notes to a wider range of healthcare professions, exploring new ways of providing individuals receiving a fit note with timely access to work and health support; and
- Establishing an expert group to support the development of the voluntary national baseline for Occupational Health provision.

From 2025, we are reforming the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to reflect new flexibilities in the labour market and greater employment opportunities for disabled



people and people with health conditions, whilst maintaining protections for those with the most significant conditions. Alongside these changes, a new Chance to Work Guarantee will effectively remove the WCA for most existing claimants who have already been assessed without work-related requirements removing the fear of reassessment and giving this group the confidence to try work.

People on low, or no income or earnings, who have a health condition or disability which restricts the amount of work they can do or prevents them from working altogether, and where they meet the entitlement criteria, can claim Universal Credit and/or New Style Employment and Support Allowance with medical evidence, usually a valid Statement of Fitness for work, commonly known as a 'fit note', from a clinician.

## ■ Employment and Support Allowance

**Neil O'Brien:**

[14253]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of transition of claimants from Incapacity Benefit to the Employment and Support Allowance; and what assessment he has made of the potential impact of that transition on claimants' accruals of National Insurance credits.

**Mims Davies:**

All Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants receive Class 1 National Insurance Credits as part of their award. If any claimants believe that an error has been made in the award of these credits they should contact the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

ESA was introduced in October 2008. From March 2011, the DWP began reassessing people on incapacity benefits (for example, Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) ahead of moving them onto ESA.

The DWP made an historic error with the reassessment of IB cases when they were transferred onto ESA. This arose because the Department converted some IB and SDA claimants to Contributory ESA but did not consider whether they may also have been entitled to Income-Related ESA. A Legal Entitlement and Administrative Practices (LEAP) exercise was concluded in June 2021, the exercise reviewed around 600,000 cases and made 118,000 arrears payments, totalling £613 million pounds. Those claimants who have received arrears payments would have been entitled to receive National Insurance credits from the date they were transferred onto contributory ESA. The then Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work made a statement about the completion of this LEAP to the house on 7th July 2021. This statement can be found [here](#).

## ■ Jobcentres

**Alison McGovern:**

[14565]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether he (a) has made recent changes to or (b) plans to change his Department's guidance to job centres on the information to be included on signposting slips.

**Jo Churchill:**

On 19 February we introduced a new food charity signposting slip. This does not change DWP signposting policy but improves the signposting slip to better comply with our obligations under GDPR. The new slip provides customers with information on where they might access emergency food locally and how to access wider support.

**■ Pension Credit and State Retirement Pensions: South Holland and the Deepings**

**Sir John Hayes:** [15012]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people receive (a) the state pension and (b) pension credit in South Holland and the Deepings constituency.

**Paul Maynard:**

There are currently 25,400 people in receipt of the State Pension in the quarter ending May 2023 in South Holland and the Deepings Constituency.

There are currently 2,376 people in receipt of Pension Credit in the quarter ending August 2023 in South Holland and the Deepings constituency.

Figures are published and available via [Stat-Xplore](#)

**■ Pensions: Gender**

**Charlotte Nichols:** [14968]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps he is taking to close the gender pension gap.

**Paul Maynard:**

The gender pension gap is a complex issue tied to the labour market, the private pensions system and demographic differences, but one the government takes very seriously. Addressing the gender pensions gap will only be possible through the collective effort of government, employers and industry.

The new State Pension was designed to correct some of the historic unfairness in the previous system, in particular for women. Our reforms are working, under the pre-2016 system women receive 85% of the amount received by men. This is currently 97% under the new State Pension.

Automatic enrolment (AE) has helped millions more women to save into a pension, with pension participation rates among eligible women in the private sector rising from 40% in 2012 to 86% in 2022. The government is committed to build on this success and is making progress on implementing the measures as set out in the 2017 review of AE. The Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Act 2023 was introduced into Parliament with government support and provides the necessary powers.

Once implemented, the measures will disproportionately increase the pension saving of lower earners; a woman working part-time earning National Living Wage could see her pension almost double as a result when saving over her career.

Our labour market policies will also help. Working parents will soon be even better supported through the extension of free childcare announced in the Spring budget in 2023. DWP also announced generous additional financial help to encourage and support lead carers of children who are receiving Universal Credit to move into or progress in work.

By 2027-28, the Government will expect to be spending in excess of £8bn every year on free childcare hours and early education, helping working families with their childcare costs. This represents the single biggest investment in childcare in England ever.

And we are working with stakeholders across government to better understand the challenge of the gender pension gap. In June, DWP published an official measure of this wealth gap, which is currently 35% between men and women shortly before they retire. The wealth gap between men and women who are eligible for automatic enrolment is lower, at 32%.

The publication of an official annual measure will help us track the collective efforts of government, industry and employers to reduce the Gender Pension Gap.

**Kim Johnson:**

**[14980]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to close the gender pension gap.

**Paul Maynard:**

The gender pension gap is a complex issue tied to the labour market, the private pensions system and demographic differences, but one the government takes very seriously.

Addressing the gender pensions gap will only be possible through the collective effort of government, employers and industry.

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The publication of an official annual measure will help us track the collective efforts of government, industry and employers to reduce the Gender Pension Gap.

#### ■ Sick Leave: Stress

**Dan Carden:**

[14684]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of (a) stress and (b) burnout on the rate of absence due to sickness.

**Mims Davies:**

We have not made an assessment of the potential impact of a) stress and b) burnout on the rate of absence due to sickness.

The ONS publish annual statistics on sickness absence in the UK labour market, which includes the reasons for sickness absence. However, neither stress or burnout are listed as reasons given for sickness absences in this data.

The latest statistics for sickness absence in the UK labour market can be found [here](#).

#### ■ Social Security Benefits: Disability

**Jim Shannon:**

[14872]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to help support disabled people financially whilst they await decisions on applications for the renewal of (a) Personal Independence Payments and (b) other benefits.

**Mims Davies:**

We are committed to ensuring people can access financial support through Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in a timely manner. We always aim to make an award decision as quickly as possible, considering the need to review all available evidence, including that from the claimant.

PIP can be awarded with a fixed term duration to the award without a review date. In these circumstances the Department issues a reminder to the claimant 6 months prior to the existing award coming to an end that if they claimant wants to continue with PIP they need to submit a new claim. These renewal claims are treated as new claims and where the current average end-to-end clearance period is 15 weeks from the point the claim is submitted.

Where a claimant delays making their renewal claim, but submits it shortly before their existing award ends, they could experience a break in payment, but the award can be backdated to the date of claim ensuring that claimants don't lose out in these circumstances.

Similar arrangements exist in both Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance and where awards can be made for a fixed term. For these benefits, a reminder is sent prior to the award ending.

#### ■ **Social Security Benefits: Fraud**

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[15275\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether he is taking steps to improve investigations into benefit fraud.

**Paul Maynard:**

In May 2022 the Department for Work and Pensions launched a robust plan to drive down fraud and error from the benefits system.

The "Fighting Fraud in the Welfare System" plan sits alongside additional investment of £900 million that will deliver £2.4 billion of savings by the end of 24/25.

#### ■ **Universal Credit: National Insurance Contributions**

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**

[\[15229\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2023 to Question 2787 on Universal Credit: National Insurance Contributions, whether he expects that all National Insurance records will be fully updated by HMRC by April 2024.

**Jo Churchill:**

DWP completed the work to send 22 million records of Universal Credit customers to HMRC in order for them to update their National Insurance records in 2023. There remain a small subset of cases that need to be worked through manually. This work is in progress and will be completed by summer 2024. Records of customers who are over, or close to state pension age that need manual work are being prioritised.

## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

#### ■ Children and Young People Mental Health Early Support Hubs

**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy) (Maria Caulfield):** [\[HCWS293\]](#)

I wish to inform the House that the government has provided additional funding so that 24 Early Support Hubs across England are able to help children and young people receive quicker mental health support.

The government is taking the long-term decisions needed to make our healthcare system faster, simpler and fairer. Mental health support for our young people is a key part of that.

We announced in October 2023 that £4.92 million from HM Treasury's Shared Outcomes Fund would be available to support hubs and an evaluation to build the evidence base underpinning these services.

Following evaluation of excellent commercial tenders from hubs across the country, I am very pleased to be able to let you know that the government is now providing an additional £3 million, meaning a total of 24 hubs will receive a share of almost £8 million in 2024/25. This is more than double our original target of funding 10 hubs, and organisations across the length of England – from Gateshead to Truro – will now benefit.

This investment in front-line services means that thousands of children and young people will receive earlier, open-access mental health interventions in local communities.

Crucially, alongside boosting 24 hubs, the funding will also enable us to evaluate the impact of the services and inform any potential expansion of the model in the future. The evaluation aims to report its findings by Summer 2025.

As this new investment shows, we want to intervene earlier to prevent children and young people from developing severe or enduring mental health conditions. That is why we are also continuing at pace with the roll-out of mental health support teams to schools and colleges in England. There are currently around 400 mental health support teams in place across England, covering over 3 million children or around 35% of pupils in schools and colleges, and we are extending coverage to at least 50% of pupils in England by the end of March 2025.

I know that we still have a long way to go to ensure that all young people struggling with their mental health get the support they need at the right time but today's new investment is a positive step to support children and young people's mental health and one that should be celebrated.

**Early Support Hubs receiving funding**

	<b>HUB NAME</b>	<b>CONSTITUENCY</b>
1	ABL Health	Bolton South East, Yasmin Qureshi
2	Base 25	Wolverhampton South West, Stuart Anderson
3	Brook Young People	Truro and Falmouth, Cherilyn Mackrory
4	Brent, Wandsworth and Westminster Mind	Cities of London and Westminster, Nickie Aiken
5	Centre 33	Cambridge, Daniel Zeichner
6	ChilyPep	Barnsley Central, Dan Jarvis
7	The Children's Society	Torbay, Kevin Foster
8	The Children's Society	Gateshead, Ian Mearns
9	CHUMS Charity	Mid Bedfordshire, Alistair Strathern
10	Family Action	Hackney South and Shoreditch, Meg Hillier
11	Isle of Wight Youth Trust	Isle of Wight, Bob Seely
12	Lancashire Mind	Chorley, Lindsay Hoyle
13	Mancroft Advice Project (MAP)	Norwich South, Clive Lewis
14	Noah's Ark Centre	Hallifax, Holly Lynch
15	No Limits South	Southampton, Test, Alan Whitehead
16	Onside	Worcester, Robin Walker
17	People Potential Possibilities	Erewash, Maggie Throup
18	Sheffield Futures	Sheffield Central, Paul Blomfield
19	Spring North	Blackburn, Kate Hollern
20	Warrington Youth Zone	Warrington South, Andy Carter

	HUB NAME	CONSTITUENCY
	Limited	
21	YMCA St Helens	St Helens South and Whiston, Marie Rimmer
22	Young Devon	North Devon, Selaine Saxby
23	Youth Enquiry Service	Wycombe, Steve Baker
24	YPAS	Liverpool, Riverside, Kim Johnson

## HOME OFFICE

### ■ Report of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation on the operation in 2021 of the Terrorism Acts

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (James Cleverly):** [\[HCWS294\]](#)

In accordance with section 36 of the Terrorism Act 2006, Jonathan Hall KC, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, has prepared a report on the operation in 2021 of the Terrorism Acts, which was laid before the House on 7 March 2023.

I am grateful to Mr Hall KC for his report and have carefully considered the recommendations and observations included within. I am today laying before the House the Government's response to the report (CP 1022). Copies will be available in the Vote Office and it will also be published on GOV.UK.