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Wednesday
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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS

WRITTEN STATEMENTS AND WRITTEN ANSWERS

Written Statements1

Written Answers.....5

[I] indicates that the member concerned has a relevant registered interest. The full register of interests can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/register-of-lords-interests/>

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<i>Minister</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>
Lord True	Leader of the House of Lords and Lord Privy Seal
Earl Howe	Deputy Leader of the House of Lords
Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon	Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Baroness Barran	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education
Lord Bellamy	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice
Lord Benyon	Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist	Spokesperson, Wales Office, Whip
Lord Caine	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
Lord Callanan	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Earl of Courtown	Deputy Chief Whip
Lord Davies of Gower	Whip
Baroness Goldie	Minister of State, Ministry of Defence
Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park	Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
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Lord Johnson of Lainston	Minister of State, Department for International Trade
Lord Markham	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care
Lord Murray of Blidworth	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Baroness Neville-Rolfe	Minister of State, Cabinet Office
Lord Offord of Garvel	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scotland Office
Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Baroness Penn	Parliamentary Secretary, HM Treasury
Baroness Scott of Bybrook	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Lord Sharpe of Epsom	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Baroness Stedman-Scott	Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions
Lord Stewart of Dirleton	Advocate-General for Scotland
Baroness Vere of Norbiton	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport
Baroness Williams of Trafford	Chief Whip
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Written Statements

Wednesday, 7 December 2022

Electoral Commission: Performance Standards for Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers

[HLWS411]

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My Honourable friend the Minister for Local Government and Building Safety (Lee Rowley MP) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

In accordance with section 9A of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (“PPERA”), I am laying before Parliament the Electoral Commission’s new performance standards for Returning Officers and updated performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers.

The Electoral Administration Act 2006, through amendments to PERA, gave the Electoral Commission powers to set and monitor performance standards for electoral services. Under these provisions, the commission can determine and publish standards of performance for relevant electoral officers in Great Britain.

Following a consultation, the Electoral Commission has established a new set of standards for Returning Officers and made updates to the existing standards for Electoral Registration Officers. The new standards reflect changes made by the Elections Act 2022 which include measures to strengthen electoral integrity and prevent electoral fraud and ensuring the accessibility of voting in polling stations.

I welcome the Electoral Commission’s updates to the performance standards to reflect the current legislative requirements, which will support the delivery of well-run electoral services and elections, and effective and consistent implementation of measures in the Elections Act 2022.

A copy of the performance standards will be deposited in the library of each House.

The attachments can be viewed online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/electoral-commission-performance-standards>.

English Freeports: Final Government Approval

[HLWS408]

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My Hon. Friend the Minister for Levelling Up (Dehenna Davison MP) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

Today I am announcing a major milestone for the flagship UK Freeports programme, with the first English Freeports – in Plymouth, Solent, and Teesside – now fully up and running after receiving final government approval.

Each of these Freeports will now receive £25 million of seed funding and potentially hundreds of millions in locally retained business rates to upgrade local infrastructure and stimulate regeneration. This is alongside a generous package of trade and innovation support for businesses locating there.

This significant milestone is an important step on the Freeports journey and sends a clear message: the UK Government is backing these places as a key part of its economic strategy.

Freeports are at the heart of the Government’s Levelling Up agenda. They will unlock much-needed investment into port communities and their hinterlands. This in turn will help these areas overcome the barriers holding them back and bring jobs and opportunity to some of the UK’s historically overlooked communities.

Freeports catalyse investment through a combination of tax reliefs on new economic activity, a special streamlined customs procedure, an ambitious programme of public investment, and wide-ranging support from the UK Government to help businesses trade, invest, and innovate.

Excellent progress has been made with delivery: investors can now take advantage of tax reliefs in all eight English Freeports and are starting to do so, and we expect the remaining five English Freeports to join Plymouth, Solent, and Teesside in receiving final approvals shortly.

This Government also remains committed to ensuring that all four corners of the UK can reap the benefits of our Freeports programme. We have recently concluded competitions for two Green Freeports in Scotland and a Freeport in Wales, and we will announce the winning locations in due course. We also continue discussions with stakeholders in Northern Ireland about how best to deliver the benefits associated with Freeports there.

Government Contingency Planning for Strike Action: Defence Support

[HLWS407]

Baroness Goldie: My right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has today released the following written ministerial statement:

The provision of Defence support to civil authorities in the UK is governed by through the Military Aid to the Civil Authority (MACA) process which is driven by a robust and well-defined set of principles, set out in a publicly available Joint Doctrine Publication. These are that MACA may be authorised when:

- there is a definite need to act and the tasks our Armed Forces are being asked to perform are clear;
- other options, including mutual aid and commercial alternatives, have been discounted; and
- either:
 - the civil authority lacks the necessary capability to fulfil the task and it is unreasonable or prohibitively expensive to expect it to develop one; or

- the civil authority has all or some capability, but it may not be available immediately, or to the required scale, and the urgency of the task requires rapid external support from the MOD.

Granting Accredited Financial Investigation Powers to Additional Agencies: Consultation

[HLWS410]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: My rt hon Friend the Minister of State for Security (Tom Tugendhat) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

I intend to lay a statutory instrument before the House next year which will amend the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (References to Financial Investigators) (England and Wales and Northern Ireland) Order 2021/640 to ensure that the new powers introduced in the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill are operational and able to be used by accredited financial investigators.

This SI will also grant Accredited Financial Investigator powers to an additional 5 agencies. This will bring the total number of agencies with access to these powers to 41 in addition to all police forces and local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Accredited Financial Investigator powers grant civilians working for that agency access to certain Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 powers, which assist in the effective recovery of proceeds of a crime that falls under that agency's jurisdiction.

The following organisations have sought access to Accredited Financial Investigator powers:

- Security Industry Authority.
- Food Standards Agency.
- Environment Agency.
- Public Sector Fraud Authority.
- Department for Work and Pensions.

I have assessed the value of extending the powers to each of these agencies—in particular whether effective criminal justice outcomes could be reached in their jurisdictions without access to these powers—and I have provisionally concluded that we should seek to grant the powers to all five. However, I intend to seek the views of the wider public as to whether these organisations should be granted these powers.

As such, I am today publishing a consultation for twelve weeks. This consultation will seek to establish the views from the public on whether or not these organisations should be granted the financial investigator powers.

A copy of the consultation document will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and also made available on GOV.UK.

Post Office Horizon Scandal: Compensation

[HLWS409]

Lord Callanan: My Right Honourable friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has today made the following statement:

The Post Office Horizon scandal, which began over 20 years ago, has had a devastating impact on the lives of many postmasters. Starting in the late 1990s, the Post Office began installing Horizon accounting software, but faults in the software led to shortfalls in branches' accounts. The Post Office demanded sub-postmasters cover the shortfalls, and in many cases wrongfully prosecuted them between 1999 and 2015 for false accounting or theft.

The High Court Group Litigation Order case against the Post Office brought by 555 postmasters exposed the Horizon IT scandal, which had seen many postmasters forced to “repay” to Post Office sums that they had never received. In March 2022, the then Chancellor announced that further funding would be made available to ensure that members of the Group Litigation Order will receive similar levels of compensation to that which is available to their non - Group Litigation Order peers.

On 2 September my predecessor wrote to all postmasters in the Group Litigation Order group to ask for their views about whether BEIS or the Post Office should deliver the compensation scheme, and whether it should be organised along the lines of the Historical Shortfall Scheme or based on an Alternative Dispute Resolution approach. There was very strong support for the Alternative Dispute Resolution scheme, to be delivered by BEIS. Today I am announcing that this is the route that we will follow.

The informal consultation also requested views on other issues related to the scheme. Unsurprisingly, there was considerable concern among postmasters that the scheme should be subject to properly independent input. In the light of this, we have decided to create an independent advisory Board chaired by Professor Chris Hodges, an expert in alternative dispute resolution. The membership of that Board will include Lord Arbuthnot and Rt Hon Kevan Jones MP who are recognised by colleagues across Parliament for many years of outstanding campaigning for the wronged postmasters. The advisory Board will be supported by a BEIS secretariat.

Since the consultation closed a great deal of work has been done to develop the details of the scheme, drawing on the detailed comments made in response to the consultation. I am today writing to members of the Group Litigation Order with further information about how the scheme will work.

We are now asking claimants to prepare preliminary information about their claims. In parallel, we are working to engage Alternative Dispute Resolution specialists and lawyers to deliver it. Those experts should

be on board in early Spring, and at that point full claims will be submitted. I hope that compensation will start to flow before the summer, and that most cases can be resolved before the end of 2023.

We have already announced that we will meet postmasters' reasonable legal costs in claiming under the scheme. To enable lawyers to get to work on preparing claims, we are today announcing details of the costs tariff for the early phases of the scheme, which have been set by independent costs draftsmen. We will shortly be inviting claimants' lawyers to make proposals for the expert evidence which they will need. I am also pleased to say that the compensation payments will be disregarded for benefits purposes (once secondary legislation is in place).

I will deposit a copy of my letter to Group Litigation Order postmasters dated 7 December, the Group Litigation Order Consultation report, the Group Litigation Order Process map and the draft Group Litigation Order claim form in the Libraries of the House.

Overtured Historical Convictions

I am also pleased to provide an update on Post Office's progress in delivering compensation to those with overturned historical convictions.

Lord Dyson considered the awards available for non-pecuniary damages, which are personal damages such as mental distress and loss of liberty, in an Early Neutral Evaluation process earlier this year. Since then, the Government has supported Post Office's approach to deliver compensation more swiftly by settling non-pecuniary claims first using the framework established by Lord Dyson. As of 1 December, 51 claims for non-pecuniary damages have been received and 37 offers made, worth £4.7m in addition to interim payments already paid.

Regarding pecuniary damages, which are financial damages such as loss of earnings, only 8 claims have been received to date, 2 of which have been settled in full and final settlement alongside their non-pecuniary damages. Government continues to encourage Post Office to process these claims as fast as possible.

As of 1 December, 82 claims for interim compensation have been received and 77 payments made, worth £7.7m. Post Office has also identified potential cases of hardship and offered and paid further hardship payments of £100,000 to 3 postmasters. Furthermore, following the recent statutory tax exemption and Early Neutral Evaluation, Post Office decided to increase the upper limit of interim payments for all future applicants to £163,000 (from the original upper level of £100,000). For those claimants who received the original interim payment amount of up to £100,000, Post Office have rightly been focussing on progressing and settling their non-pecuniary claims. However, where claimants who had received the original interim payment amount of up to £100,000 and were not able to submit a non-pecuniary claim by early December – and it is therefore unlikely that their non-pecuniary claim would be settled by the end of

the year – Post Office has offered top-up payments of £63,000.

Historical Shortfall Scheme

I am also pleased to see the progress that the Post Office has made in delivering compensation to postmasters through the Historical Shortfall Scheme. As of 30 November, 93% of eligible claimants have been issued offers of compensation, totalling £70.8 million.

The cases that remain are some of the most complex and the Post Office is working to process these claims as soon as possible. However, the Government recognises the fact that those claimants who are yet to receive offers or payments may have been waiting for a considerable period of time for their cases to be settled. For these reasons, the Government is pleased that the Post Office will introduce interim payments for those who have yet to receive an offer or who have chosen to dispute their offer. This will be in addition to the existing hardship payments that the Post Office has already been providing to claimants in particularly difficult circumstances.

The Government announced in October that it is providing funding to Post Office to enable eligible late applications to be accepted into the Historical Shortfall Scheme. Post Office is beginning to process the late claims it has received to date, and I would encourage anyone else who thinks they might be eligible to get in touch with the Post Office at the earliest opportunity to discuss their claim.

Benefit Disregard

The Government is aware of the impact of the Horizon scandal on affected postmasters, resulting in significant financial hardship, including bankruptcy for some. Many postmasters have now received compensation payments which would take them over the £16,000 capital limit, rendering them ineligible to receive means-tested benefits and reducing pension credit entitlement. This risks prolonging the impacts of the Horizon scandal on these postmasters by affecting their eligibility to apply for benefits.

We are therefore introducing a benefits disregard for all Post Office and Horizon-related compensation. Once the secondary legislation for this disregard is in place, payments received by postmasters will no longer count towards the capital limit for means-tested benefits and pension credits and will therefore not affect their eligibility to claim for these.

The Government will legislate to put this disregard in place at the earliest possible opportunity.

Independent Reporting Commission: Fifth Substantive Report

[HLWS412]

Lord Caine: My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Chris Heaton-Harris) has today made the following statement:

I have received the fifth substantive report from the Independent Reporting Commission.

The Commission was established following the Fresh Start Agreement of November 2015 to report on progress towards ending paramilitary activity. That Agreement set out the Northern Ireland Executive's commitments around tackling paramilitary activity and associated criminality, and led to a programme of work to deliver a Northern Ireland Executive Action Plan. It also provided the framework for the UK Government, the Executive and law enforcement agencies, working with partners in Ireland, to work together to tackle the challenges of organised crime, paramilitarism and terrorism. In the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) Agreement in January 2020, a commitment was made to ongoing work to tackle paramilitarism, and this work continues, including through a second phase of the NI Executive programme.

This fifth substantive report builds on the work already undertaken by the Commissioners. I welcome the progress it highlights in a number of areas including disruptions to paramilitary groups as a result of operations by the Paramilitary Crime Task Force, the downward trend in some aspects of paramilitary activity demonstrated by PSNI security statistics, and the reduction in the Northern Ireland-related Terrorism threat level from SEVERE to SUBSTANTIAL. I also welcome the success and positive impact, noted by the Commissioners, that the Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme is having through its focus on the development of a whole of government approach, and joined up and integrated working across the public and community and voluntary sectors, and through its emphasis on interventions informed by strong evidence and data.

Yet the report also notes that the problem of paramilitarism is enduring. The criminal activity and coercive control exercised by paramilitary groups continue to cause harm to communities and individuals across Northern Ireland. A number of incidents in recent weeks have demonstrated the callous disregard that paramilitary groups, or those who claim affiliation with them, have for public safety, and the harm and disruption

they continue to cause to the communities they often claim to represent.

The Commissioners have set out a number of recommendations on how the effort to tackle paramilitarism can be enhanced, including a recommendation for the UK Government, and others, on the need for a formal process of engagement with paramilitary groups aimed at facilitating their transition towards disbandment. We will continue to consider this recommendation through engagement with representatives of NI political parties, the NI Executive, the Irish Government, with civic society and community representatives in Northern Ireland, and with the Independent Reporting Commission.

Paramilitarism was never justified in the past, and cannot be justified today. As we approach the 25th anniversary of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, it is important that we remind ourselves of the extraordinary progress that has been made since then on peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland. Yet it's clear that a sustained effort is required here over the long term to tackle the enduring problem of paramilitarism. We remain committed to delivering our vision of a safer Northern Ireland and to working with partners to support efforts against the enduring threat and harms posed to communities by terrorist and paramilitary groups.

Political leadership from across the political spectrum in Northern Ireland is essential to ensure it remains clear there is no place for paramilitarism, or the division it stems from, in Northern Ireland. It is a matter of profound disappointment that the local political parties have been unable to restore fully functioning devolved institutions. The lack of a functioning Executive inhibits Northern Ireland Departments from taking a strategic, cross-cutting approach to tackling paramilitarism in partnership with the PSNI and the wider public sector. It remains my top priority to rectify the present situation.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to the Commissioners for their continued work reporting on progress towards ending paramilitarism.

Written Answers

Wednesday, 7 December 2022

Agriculture: Flood Control

Asked by *Lord Randall of Uxbridge*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support farmers who (1) improve water quality, and (2) reduce flooding. [HL3715]

Lord Benyon: Farmers and land managers have an important role to play in reducing the risk of flooding and coastal erosion to both rural and urban areas. As well as protecting more than 300,000 homes, the 2015-2021 £2.6bn flood investment programme reduced the risk of flooding to nearly 600,000 acres of agricultural land. The 2021-27 capital programme will offer increased protection to approximately 370,000 acres of agricultural land.

Current offers to support farmers include the Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme, which supports farmers to improve water quality and manage flood risk through a range of grants and advice from Catchment Sensitive Farming. Grants to improve water quality include buffer strips that help reduce the risk of pollutants being transported to watercourses and capital grants to reduce run off of dirty water. Support to manage flood risk include grants to control runoff and make space for water.

We are also introducing our new Environmental Land Management schemes, that reward environmental benefits, including water quality and protection from environmental hazards like flooding.

Asylum: Applications

Asked by *Lord Kamall*

To ask His Majesty's Government what is the (1) shortest, and (2) longest, time taken to process applications for asylum. [HL3706]

Lord Murray of Blidworth: The Home Office is unable to state what the shortest and longest processing time is for asylum applications as this information is not published and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost because it would require a manual search through individual records.

However, the Home Office does publish data on the number asylum applications awaiting an initial decision by duration, for main applicants only. This data can be found at Asy_04 of the published Immigration Statistics: List of tables - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

The Home Office also publish data on the percentage of asylum applications processed within 6 months of the date of claim. Data showing the number of asylum claims received from 2014 – 2022 that were processed within 6 months can be found at Asy_01 of the Asylum

Transparency Data: Immigration and protection data: Q3 2022 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Asked by *Lord Kamall*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to speed up the processing of applications for asylum. [HL3707]

Lord Murray of Blidworth: The Home Office are currently dealing with a sustained high level of new asylum claims, including from those who have recently arrived on small boats, which is creating additional pressures on the asylum system.

We are, nevertheless, committed to ensuring asylum claims are considered without unnecessary delay and ensuring that those who need protection are granted as soon as possible so that they can start to integrate and rebuild their lives.

The Home Office have an asylum transformation programme that will speed up and simplify decision making, reduce the time people spend in the asylum system and decrease the number of people who are awaiting an interview or decision. These initiatives include conducting shorter, more focused interviews or omitting interviews where it is appropriate to do so, streamlining decision templates for grants and refusals and focusing on improving quality to ensure decisions are right first time.

We are also increasing the use of technology, improving screening so that more information is captured as early as possible, and have extensive recruitment and training plans in place, including career progression options that will aid the retention of staff.

Clothing: Manufacturing Industries

Asked by *Lord Alton of Liverpool*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to end unfair purchasing practices in fashion, including the exploitation of suppliers and their workers by brands selling into the UK market; and what consideration they have given to introducing (1) a fashion watchdog, and (2) a fashion supply code adjudicator, for this industry. [HL3681]

Lord Callanan: Since October 2020, a wide group of stakeholders comprising retailers, manufacturers and non-profit organisations have been working with the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) under the Apparel and General Merchandise Public Private Protocol to address poor working, pay, and purchasing practices in the UK supply chain.

In response to the single enforcement body consultation published last year, the government reaffirmed its commitment to continue engaging with the enforcement bodies and industry partners to strengthen our understanding of the garment trade. We will continue to review this issue and consider options to drive up standards across the sector.

Council Tax: Debts

Asked by *Lord Taylor of Warwick*

To ask His Majesty's Government, given the increases in council tax, (1) whether they are monitoring the level of council tax debt, and (2) what support they are providing to people in arrears. [HL3729]

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: Data on council tax arrears is collected for England by local authorities and the latest data for 2021-22 can be found [here](#).

Councils are required to have locally designed council tax support schemes to help low income households to pay their council tax bills. The Government is providing a significant package of support to help households with the rising cost of living. Further information on this package of support can be found [here](#).

The Answer includes the following attached material:

Help for Households [Help for Households.docx]

Quarterly return of Council Tax etc.
[Quarterly_return_of_Council_Tax_and_non-domestic_rates_QRC4_2021_to_2022.xlsx]

The material can be viewed online at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2022-11-23/HL3729>

Eggs: Costs

Asked by *Baroness Jones of Whitchurch*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment the Grocery Code Adjudicator has made of egg production, and in particular whether rising costs of egg farms are being met by retailers; and what plans they have to intervene in the event of an assessment that these costs are not being met. [HL3704]

Lord Callanan: The Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) enforces the Groceries Supply Code of Practice (the Code) which does not regulate the price agreed between retailers and suppliers. The GCA has no role in determining what a retailer should pay for a product.

The GCA has, however, published seven golden rules to ensure that the 14 largest grocery retailers who are designated under the Code handle price negotiations lawfully and fairly.

The GCA is monitoring adherence to the golden rules and any direct supplier to one of the designated retailers that is having issues with a negotiation should contact the GCA whose details are available on the GOV.UK website.

Eggs: Marketing

Asked by *The Lord Bishop of St Albans*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the 16-week grace period during which eggs from birds that were intended to be free-

range may be marketed as such despite the introduction of mandatory housing measures on 7 November. [HL3618]

Lord Benyon: Egg Marketing Standards provides a 16-week derogation period during which the free-range description can be retained on eggs even if hens have been housed.

Defra currently has no plans to review this derogation period. However, in recognition of the pressures the egg sector is currently facing, particularly rising input costs alongside the impacts of Avian Influenza, Defra has granted a concession which will apply if the housing orders that are currently in place in England exceed the 16-week derogation period. This concession will allow producers and packers, on a one-off basis, the option to use either direct print to pack or an affixed label on free-range boxes. Accompanying clear and transparent point of sale signage should also be in place to ensure consumers are not misled and to avoid undermining consumer confidence in the free-range industry.

Elections: Local Government

Asked by *Lord Browne of Belmont*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they intend to give the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland the power to change the date of the local elections in that country to avoid the counting of votes clashing with Coronation Day. [HL3840]

Lord Caine: The Government already has the power to change the date of local elections by order under section 84 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is considering options to ensure people in Northern Ireland can celebrate the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III while ensuring the smooth running of the democratic process.

Asked by *Lord McCrea of Magherafelt and Cookstown*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of King Charles's coronation coinciding with the continuation of the count for the Northern Ireland Local Government Elections; and what steps they will take to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland can fully participate in the coronation celebrations. [HL3846]

Lord Caine: The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is considering the options available to ensure people in Northern Ireland can celebrate the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III while ensuring the smooth running of the democratic process.

Electronic Cigarettes: Young People

Asked by *Baroness Redfern*

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to review the powers held by Trading Standards to tackle the illegal sale of disposable vape products to underage young people. [HL3719]

Lord Callanan: Trading Standards already have powers to tackle underage sales of products. Where there is evidence of shops selling age restricted products to underage people, this should be reported to Citizens Advice on 0808 223 1133 or through its website in the first instance.

Employment: Young People

Asked by Lord Storey

To ask His Majesty's Government what qualifications coaches at the Department for Work and Pensions must obtain when working with young people seeking employment. [HL3726]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Work Coaches are not required to hold qualifications that are specific to the work they do with young people seeking employment. They undergo a comprehensive learning journey designed to equip them with the tools, skills and behaviours required to provide a high quality, efficient service to all claimants. Work Coaches receive on-going learning in their roles and access to guidance which is refreshed at regular intervals.

Asked by Lord Storey

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the letter from Baroness Stedman-Scott to all members of the House of Lords on 22 November, what additional measures they are putting in place to help young people find employment during the "economic challenges we are facing". [HL3727]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: The Department for Work and Pensions' Youth Offer is providing individually tailored work coach support to young people aged 16-24 who are in the Universal Credit Intensive Work Search group.

This includes intensive support during the first 13 weeks of a claim through the Youth Employment Programme and a network of Youth Hubs across Great Britain that provide place-based support in partnerships with local providers to help young people into work. The Youth Offer also provides Youth Employability Coaches who support young people facing additional barriers (such as homelessness, addiction, and other complex needs) as well as offering 6 weeks of in-work support once the young person secures a job or an apprenticeship. Youth Employability Coaches also work closely with Disability Employment Advisors to support those with disabilities and health conditions, and partner organisations who can provide specialist advice.

Departments are aligning their support across Government to help young people access high quality training and apprenticeship opportunities, as well as preparing them to take advantage of new jobs created in existing and growing sectors.

For example, DWP and DfE officials continue to work together on the key areas of improving local skills provision and maximising awareness of skills

opportunities in England. This includes taking steps to enhance the quality and joining up of services through Work Coaches and National Careers Service Advisors.

To help young people who are already in work and on low incomes to progress, we are extending the support Jobcentres provide to help them increase their earnings and move into better paid, quality jobs. As mentioned in the letter, the nationwide roll-out of the In-Work Progression offer will focus on removing barriers to progression, such as addressing skills gaps.

Housing: Insulation

Asked by Lord Foster of Bath

To ask His Majesty's Government what research they have carried out in the last 12 months into (1) the propensity of (a) homeowners, (b) private residential landlords, or (c) social landlords, to carry out energy efficiency improvements to their properties, (2) the barriers to making such improvements, and (3) how any such barriers might be overcome; and what were the results of that research. [HL3697]

Lord Callanan: The Department continually gathers information on the propensity to install measures as it delivers energy efficiency policies. The potential issues these schemes address include financial barriers, information on what measures to install, concerns about the quality of installations and access to installers. Independent evaluation reports are published that summarise key lessons.

Israeli Settlements

Asked by The Marquess of Lothian

To ask His Majesty's Government whether the Prime Minister has spoken to Prime Minister-designate of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, about the UK's position regarding any recognition of illegal West Bank settlements; and in particular, any retroactive legalisation of such settlements, including the Homesh Yeshiva. [HL3761]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We congratulate Benjamin Netanyahu on his election victory. As one of Israel's closest partners, the UK looks forward to working with Israel to ensure our relationship continues to flourish. We are clear that settlements are illegal under international law and threaten the viability of a two-state solution. The UK urges the Government of Israel to permanently end its settlement expansion and settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israeli outposts in the West Bank are also illegal under international and Israeli law, and should be removed entirely.

Libyan Money Recovery Office

Asked by Lord Empey

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the visit of representatives of the

Libyan Money Recovery Office to (1) the UK, and (2) other countries. [HL3694]

Asked by Lord Empey

To ask His Majesty's Government which UK officials held meetings with representatives of the Libyan Money Recovery Office; what was the purpose of such meetings; and what agreements or understandings were entered into as an outcome of those meetings. [HL3695]

Asked by Lord Empey

To ask His Majesty's Government whether the future of frozen Libyan assets held in London was discussed by UK officials and representatives from the Libyan Money Recovery Office at any recent meetings. [HL3696]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Libyan Asset Recovery and Management Office (LARMO) is working to repossess Libyan assets that were stolen by the Qadhafi regime before and during the 2011 revolution. A LARMO representative met with officials from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on 26 October to discuss potential options for the future of any recovered assets, with reference to the ongoing assets freeze. FCDO officials reminded LARMO that UN Security Council Resolution 1970 (2011) makes clear that the aim of the Libya asset freeze is to ensure that the frozen funds are preserved until such a time as they can be made available to, and for the benefit of, the people of Libya. Any amendments to the asset freeze will require consensus at the UN Security Council and will be judged against this goal.

Planning: Northern Ireland

Asked by Viscount Waverley

To ask His Majesty's Government how planning reform will be progressed in the absence of ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive. [HL3866]

Lord Caine: In the absence of Northern Ireland Executive ministers, the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act will provide Northern Ireland civil servants with the clarity they require to take the limited but necessary decisions to maintain delivery of public services and operate in the public interest. The Act does not give the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland direction powers on specific policies, other than in relation to pressing public appointments and the requirement to set the regional rate.

The accompanying guidance to this legislation, published in draft on 29 November 2022, will help NI civil servants take into account whether taking a decision is in the public interest and recognises that there will be some decisions that should rightly wait for a Minister to be in place.

Prison Accommodation

Asked by Lord Hylton

To ask His Majesty's Government how many prisoners are currently being confined to their cells for 23 hours a day; what assessment they have made of the impact of this practice on prisoner (1) self-harm, (2) assaults, and (3) suicides; and what plans they have to reduce the current level of confinement to address any such impacts. [HL3702]

Lord Bellamy: No prisons are routinely operating a 23 hour per day or similar lockdown and I refer the noble Lord to the answer I gave to question HL3355 on 29 November 2022.

Maintaining safety continues to be a priority, and where regimes are limited, we continue to prioritise the implementation of key safety interventions. This includes our case management approaches to manage the risk of self-harm and suicide (Assessment, Care in Custody, and Teamwork) and of violent behaviour (Challenge, Support and Intervention Plan), and the delivery of key work, through which prison officers provide one-to-one support for prisoners.

Prison and Probation Service: Equality

Asked by Lord Blencathra

To ask His Majesty's Government which minister, if any, was responsible for approving the guidance entitled Recognising transphobic coded language which the HM Prison and Probation Service diversity and inclusion team was reported to have sent to staff employed by the Ministry of Justice. [HL3687]

Lord Bellamy: The guidebook was not approved by ministers and was published by a staff network, rather than as a corporate HM Prison and Probation Service document.

To prevent this happening again, the Ministry of Justice is reviewing the rules around communications to staff from network groups, to ensure that all information and materials comply with our policies and legal responsibilities.

Prison Service: Staff

Asked by Lord Hylton

To ask His Majesty's Government whether the number of prison staff declined between 2009 and 2017; if so, by what percentage the number declined; and whether any such decline has since been redressed. [HL3701]

Lord Bellamy: The number of public sector prison staff declined from 46,889 FTE as of 31 March 2009 to 31,232 FTE as of 31 March 2017. This was a decline of 15,657 (33%).

Since then, the number of public sector prison staff has increased to stand at 35,575 FTE as of 30 September 2022; an increase of 14% since March 2017.

Over the last few years, the MoJ has invested in a number of initiatives to improve the recruitment and retention of operational and non-Operational staff across the prison estate. Whilst we face some difficulties in areas of the country where labour markets are particularly challenging, we continue to deliver recruitment marketing campaigns on a variety of channels for all prisons.

The recent pay award has been seen as a positive move to help retain and recruit new staff. We will be monitoring the impact of the 2022/23 pay award which reflects a significant investment to uplift and reform the prison pay structure. We are continuing to use localised market supplements to increase prison officer pay in 18 sites.

Renewable Energy: Supply Chains

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask His Majesty's Government what further support they are giving to the renewable energy supply chain. [HL3728]

Lord Callanan: The Government has made £160m available to support investment in major port and manufacturing infrastructure through the Offshore Wind Manufacturing Investment Support Scheme. The Government is also offering a further £31m, to be matched by industry funding, for research and development in floating offshore wind projects.

Reptiles: Animal Housing

Asked by Lord Randall of Uxbridge

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to legislate to make provision for snakes in captivity to be kept in containers of at least one snake length. [HL3711]

Lord Benyon: Snakes are provided protection under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. This means that it is an offence to cause them any unnecessary suffering or to fail to provide for their welfare needs.

In England, the keeping of snakes in captivity, outside of zoos, is currently regulated by the Animal Welfare (Licencing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 (LAIA). These Regulations require any business selling animals as pets - including snakes - to be licensed. Local authorities are responsible for granting these licences, and the licences must include a general condition requiring licensees to keep all animals in an environment suitable to their species and condition. The statutory guidance to local authorities contains details in relation to the minimum welfare standards that are considered appropriate for snakes, including minimum requirements relating to vivarium size.

The statutory five-year LAIA Post-Implementation Review (PIR) is due by October 2023. As part of this review, we will be seeking views and considering

evidence on the minimum standards for the size of temporary vivaria for snakes in pet selling establishments.

Sewers: Waste Disposal

Asked by Lord Randall of Uxbridge

To ask His Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to introducing improved product labelling to stop items that are unable to be flushed from blocking sewers. [HL3713]

Lord Benyon: We are considering various options to tackle the issues from commonly littered items, following our call for evidence. These options include a ban on the sale of wet wipes containing plastic, a mandatory 'flushability' standard, mandatory labelling on packaging, and an extended producer responsibility scheme for wipes containing plastic. We will publish an update on the responses to this call for evidence in due course.

State Retirement Pensions: British Nationals Abroad

Asked by Lord Blencathra

To ask His Majesty's Government what estimate they have made, if any, of the number of UK citizens living abroad whose pensions are frozen at a level of £100 per week or below. [HL3688]

Asked by Lord Blencathra

To ask His Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the cost of uprating the pensions of UK citizens living abroad to £100 per week. [HL3689]

Asked by Lord Blencathra

To ask His Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the cost of uprating the pensions of all UK citizens living abroad to the current level of the state pension. [HL3690]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: The information requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

As of February 2019, the estimated cost of uprating State Pension in frozen rate countries was around £0.6 billion for 2022 to 2023. This information is published at [Estimated costs of uprating State Pension in frozen rate countries - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

The total number of people in receipt of a frozen State Pension abroad at a level under £100 per week was 428,830 as of November 2020. 'UK citizenship' is not defined/identifiable in this data. This information is published on Stat-Xplore: [Stat-Xplore - Home \(dwp.gov.uk\)](#)

Figure rounded to the nearest 10.

The policy on uprating UK State Pensions overseas is long-standing and has been supported by successive post-war Government for over 70 years. We continue to uprate

UK State Pensions abroad where there is a legal requirement to do so – for example where there is a reciprocal agreement that provides for uprating. There are no plans to change this policy.

Swimming

Asked by Lord Randall of Uxbridge

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to designate more inland bathing water sites. [HL3716]

Lord Benyon: Bathing waters are designated through an application process, as set out in the regulations. Local authorities, groups and individuals can apply for sites to be designated.

Defra has written to the Chief Executive of every local authority in England and other key stakeholders such as swimming associations to signpost the application process.

Vacancies

Asked by Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made, if any, of the shortage of workers in key sectors of the economy; and what steps they are taking to address such shortages. [HL3691]

Lord Callanan: The Government continually monitors the status of the labour market, which is strong by historical standards and is close to record levels of (high) employment, (low) unemployment, and (low) inactivity rates.

The Government is investing an additional £3.8 billion into skills and further education over this Parliament to ensure workers can develop the skills businesses need.

Where low pay is a barrier, the Government is supporting better pay by ensuring that all tips go to staff and increasing the National Living Wage to £10.42 an hour.

The 2019 manifesto pledged changes to enhance workers' rights and support people to stay in work. The Government is backing five Private Members' Bills which will deliver on these commitments - helping new parents, unpaid carers, hospitality workers, and giving employees better access to flexible working.

Veterans: Hong Kong

Asked by Lord Craig of Radley

To ask His Majesty's Government when the decision whether to grant Hong Kong military service veterans

entitlement to British citizens passports and right of abode in the UK is to be announced. [HL3693]

Lord Murray of Blidworth: The Government remains committed to implementing a policy to ensure Hong Kong military service veterans are treated in a similar way to other non-UK service personnel who were based in Hong Kong prior to the handover.

We will update Parliament with more details once collective agreement on this policy has been reached.

Water Companies: Fines

Asked by Lord Randall of Uxbridge

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of investing water company fines into improving waterways. [HL3712]

Lord Benyon: On Wednesday 30th November we announced we will be channelling money from water company fines into schemes to improve the environment. The announcement is available on .gov.uk at the webpage here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/water-company-fines-to-be-channelled-into-environmental-improvements>.

Yazidis: Missing Persons

Asked by Lord Hylton

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to determine the (1) fate, and (2) whereabouts, of Yazidi women and children who are missing from Iraq and Syria. [HL3700]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Yazidi community has suffered immense pain and loss as a result of the abhorrent crimes inflicted by Daesh. The UK advocated strongly for the passing of the Yazidi Survivors' Law in March 2021 and the establishment of the Directorate of Yazidi Affairs. The Directorate is responsible for searching for survivors and supporting judicial and investigative bodies on holding perpetrators to account. In parallel, we have also provided £2 million to the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh (UNITAD). The UK joined likeminded partners in committing to support Yazidis displaced or abducted by Daesh in a Joint alliance statement issued in October 2021. We will continue to press the newly formed government on the importance of these issues, including searching for those missing Yazidi women and children abducted by Daesh.

Index to Statements and Answers

Written Statements.....	1	Water Companies: Fines.....	10
Electoral Commission: Performance Standards for Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers	1	Yazidis: Missing Persons.....	10
English Freeports: Final Government Approval ..	1		
Government Contingency Planning for Strike Action: Defence Support	1		
Granting Accredited Financial Investigation Powers to Additional Agencies: Consultation.....	2		
Post Office Horizon Scandal: Compensation	2		
Independent Reporting Commission: Fifth Substantive Report.....	3		
Written Answers.....	5		
Agriculture: Flood Control	5		
Asylum: Applications	5		
Clothing: Manufacturing Industries.....	5		
Council Tax: Debts.....	6		
Eggs: Costs	6		
Eggs: Marketing	6		
Elections: Local Government	6		
Electronic Cigarettes: Young People.....	6		
Employment: Young People.....	7		
Housing: Insulation	7		
Israeli Settlements	7		
Libyan Money Recovery Office.....	7		
Planning: Northern Ireland.....	8		
Prison Accommodation	8		
Prison and Probation Service: Equality	8		
Prison Service: Staff	8		
Renewable Energy: Supply Chains	9		
Reptiles: Animal Housing	9		
Sewers: Waste Disposal	9		
State Retirement Pensions: British Nationals Abroad.....	9		
Swimming	10		
Vacancies.....	10		
Veterans: Hong Kong.....	10		