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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS

WRITTEN STATEMENTS AND WRITTEN ANSWERS

Written Statements1
Written Answers.....9

[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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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, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Lord Caine	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office, Whip
Lord Callanan	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton	Secretary of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Lord Cameron of Lochiel	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scotland Office
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Lord Gascoigne	Whip
Lord Harlech	Whip
Lord Johnson of Lainston	Minister of State, Department for Business and Trade
Lord Markham	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care
Earl of Minto	Minister of State, Ministry of Defence
Baroness Neville-Rolfe	Minister of State, Cabinet Office
Lord Offord of Garvel	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business and Trade and Scotland Office
Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Lord Roborough	Whip
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
Lord Stewart of Dirleton	Advocate-General for Scotland
Baroness Swinburne	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Baroness Vere of Norbiton	Parliamentary Secretary, HM Treasury
Baroness Williams of Trafford	Chief Whip
Viscount Younger of Leckie	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions

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Written Statements

Thursday, 16 May 2024

Alcohol Licensing Consultation

[HLWS470]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: My right hon Friend the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

The Government is today launching a consultation on measures that would make it easier for licensed premises to sell alcohol for consumption in an adjacent licensed pavement area. This consultation aligns with the Government's commitment to support businesses and our broader work on smarter regulation.

The Licensing Act 2003 allows premises licence holders to sell alcohol for consumption on site ('on-sales'), off site ('off-sales') or both. The holder of an on-sales only licence can subsequently apply to their Licensing Authority for a variation if they wish to add off-sales to their licence.

To provide vital support to businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, temporary provisions in the Business and Planning Act 2020 (the 2020 Act) enabled on-sales only premises licence holders to automatically also do off-sales without any need to amend their licence, thus saving these businesses time and money.

The 2020 Act also introduced changes to the process for obtaining pavement licences, which are licences granted by the local authority that allow the licence-holder to place removable furniture over certain highways adjacent to the premises. The 2020 Act streamlined the process to allow businesses to secure pavement licences quickly.

The measures in the 2020 Act were designed to support businesses and the specific provisions referenced above, when taken together, meant that pubs and restaurants were able to serve alcohol outside in the area covered by any pavement licence that they held.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 has made permanent the provisions set out in the 2020 Act relating to pavement licensing, but the future of the off-sales element has not yet been decided and the provision is due to lapse in March 2025.

The Government remains committed to supporting the hospitality sector whilst it faces ongoing financial challenges. In September 2023, we made it clear that the Government's ultimate goal is to create a unified consent regime that includes licensing consent for the consumption and sale of alcohol in the outside pavement area before the provision lapses next year. As such, we have identified three options to consult on that would enable premises to continue to sell alcohol for consumption in a licensed pavement area with ease, whilst ensuring that licensing authorities and local residents continue to have a say about what happens in their area.

Alongside new options that would make it easier for business to do off-sales, we have also included the option of making the 2020 Act off-sales easement permanent. All three options would require an amendment to legislation. As these would represent deregulatory measures, we believe that a Legislative Reform Order - made under the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006 - would be a suitable vehicle for making such an amendment.

The consultation will run for eight weeks and the Government will publish its response afterwards. A copy of the consultation and related impact assessment will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and published on Gov.UK.

Energy Infrastructure Planning Projects

[HLWS466]

Lord Callanan: My Right Honourable Friend, the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Claire Coutinho MP) has today made the following statement:

This Statement concerns an application for development consent made under the Planning Act 2008 by Mallard Pass Solar Farm Limited for development consent for the construction and operation of a solar farm energy generating development on land in Lincolnshire, South Kesteven and Rutland.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make a decision on an application within three months of the receipt of the Examining Authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) of the Act to set a new deadline. Where a new deadline is set, the Secretary of State must make a Statement to Parliament to announce it. The current statutory deadline for the decision on Mallard Pass Solar Farm application is 16 May 2024.

I have decided to set a new deadline of no later than 13 June 2024 for deciding this application. This is to ensure there is sufficient time for the Department to consider the application.

The decision to set the new deadline for this application is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant or refuse development consent.

Fraud and Error in the Benefit System

[HLWS474]

Viscount Younger of Leckie: My honourable Friend, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Pensions (Paul Maynard MP) has made the following Written Statement:

The annual statistics for Fraud and Error in the Benefit System for the financial year ending 2024 were published earlier today.

Fraud and error is an ongoing challenge across government and beyond. In 2023 fraud was responsible for 37% of all crime against households and there has

been a rising trend in fraud against organisations. With welfare benefits paid to around 22.7 million people, the welfare system is a deliberate target for both organised crime groups and opportunistic individuals.

Today's figures confirm the overall rate of overpayments is now 3.7% (£9.7bn) for 2023-24, compared to 3.6% (£8.3bn) in 2022-23. Overpayments due to fraud were 2.8% compared to 2.7% last year while claimant error and official error remained at 0.6% and 0.3% respectively. The rate of overpayments in Universal Credit was 12.4% in 2023-24 compared to 12.7% in 2022-23.

It is vital that the Government continues to robustly tackle fraud to ensure support goes to those who need it most. We are taking further steps to minimise errors, ensuring the right people are paid the right amount at the right time. The total rate of benefit expenditure underpaid in 2023-24 was 0.4% (£1.1bn), compared with 0.5% (£1.2bn) in 2022-23.

This week the Government has published an update to DWP's Fraud Plan, "Fighting Fraud in the Welfare System: Going Further" highlighting measures we are taking to prevent and stop fraud.

- In 2023/24, we exceeded the £1.3bn savings target we set and expect our plan to deliver £9bn in total by 2027-28.
- Since 2022 we have delivered on commitments to invest in our front line, hiring over 4,400 people across our counter fraud and targeted case review programmes combined. We will continue to expand our targeted case review team to almost 6000 by March 2025.
- We are delivering new powers to improve our access to vital third-party data so we are better able to identify fraud and take action. The third-party data gathering measure is a strong, yet proportionate step to prevent exploitation of the benefit system and will save up to £600 million over the next 5 years.
- We are preparing a new fraud bill for the next Parliament which will align DWP with HMRC, provide new powers to make arrests and conduct search and seizures by warrant, and enable penalties to be applied to a wider set of fraudsters through a new civil penalty.

This is an ambitious package which we will deliver to protect the taxpayer and help uphold the principles of fairness that sits at the heart of the welfare system.

Today's publications also include changes to claimant error underpayments. These have been reclassified and reported as Unfulfilled Eligibility in the Benefit system Publication. This follows a planned review of the fraud and error statistics that determined that the estimates previously published as Claimant Error underpayments do not fit the legal definition of underpayments. The total unfulfilled eligibility rate in 2023-24 was 1.2% (£3.1bn) compared with 1.0% (£2.3bn) in 2022-23.

We will report more on both overpayments and underpayments by way of our Annual Report and Accounts, which are due to be published in July 2024.

Gambling Measures Consultation: Response

[HLWS469]

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay: I am repeating the following Written Ministerial Statement made today in the other place by my Right Honourable Friend, the Minister for Sport, Gambling and Civil Society, Stuart Andrew MP:

I wish to inform the House that His Majesty's Government will today publish its response to the consultation on measures relating to the land-based gambling sector. This will introduce a range of liberalising measures for venues like casinos, bingo halls and arcades, alongside other provisions to protect young people and children, as well as increasing the fees licensing authorities can charge for gambling premises licences.

Many of the current restrictions on venues like casinos and bingo halls derive from the assumption that restrictions on the supply of gambling, such as the number of gaming machines available in a venue, were an important protection. The legislation had not envisaged the rise of online gambling and the ability to gamble at any time, regardless of location. In light of this, restrictions on availability are now less important for protecting customers than factors such as the characteristics of the product and the quality of monitoring a customer's play in a venue. As set out in the [Gambling Act Review white paper](#), the measures we consulted on are therefore necessary to modernise the outdated and overly restrictive regulations that apply to the land-based gambling sector.

The consultation ran from 26 July to 4 October 2023 and invited views on the details of a range of proposals relating to casinos, arcades and bingo halls. Following consultation, the Government will introduce the following measures:

Casinos

We will make a number of adjustments to relax the existing rules that apply to casinos. There are currently two types of casino licence - those originating from the Gaming Act 1968 and those created by the Gambling Act 2005. 1968 Act casinos are generally allowed only 20 gaming machines regardless of their size, compared to up to 80 for Small and 150 for Large 2005 Act casinos. Following consultation, we will bring the regimes closer together so that 1968 Act casinos can offer more machines to meet customer demand where it is proportionate to their size and non-gambling space. We are also extending the ability to offer betting as a product in casinos, which will bring Britain's casino product offering more in line with international jurisdictions.

Machine allowance in arcades and bingo halls

We will adjust machine allowances for arcades and bingo halls to allow greater flexibility over their gaming machine offer. Currently, no more than 20% of gaming machines in adult gaming centres and bingo premises can be Category B machines (with a £2 maximum stake), with

the others required to be lower stake (Category C or D machines). The Gambling Act Review concluded that this rule is no longer required to offer customer protections, unnecessarily restricts operators and can lead to a number of machines being placed in venues that are not used by customers. Therefore, we will introduce a 2:1 ratio of Category B to Category C and D gaming machines. This measure will apply on a device type basis, meaning that the ratio applies to the three different types of device on which gaming machines content is currently offered in arcades and bingo halls, namely large cabinets (such as traditional fruit machines), smaller cabinets placed in between larger machines (in-fills) and tablets.

Cashless payments on gaming machines

We will remove the prohibition on direct debit card payments on gaming machines, alongside the introduction of appropriate player protections. The prohibition on the direct use of debit cards on gaming machines was intended to protect players. However, the use of non-cash payments has increased greatly across society since these rules were put in place and some sectors, particularly machines in pubs, are seeing business disappear because customers do not carry cash. We will help future-proof the industry by removing this prohibition subject to appropriate player protections being put in place. The Gambling Commission will also consult on a number of player protection measures that may be included in their Gaming Machine Technical Standards to ensure that appropriate frictions are in place when direct debit card payments are used. These protection measures may include minimum transaction times, cardholder verification, transaction limits, breaks in play and staff alerts when mandatory and voluntary limits are reached. This measure will only come into force when we are confident that the right player protections are in place. Existing limits on stakes and prizes for all categories of gaming machine will remain unchanged.

Age limits for certain gaming machines

We will introduce an age limit for certain Category D gaming machines. Category D machines are low-stake games that can be played by anyone regardless of age. The Gambling Act Review concluded machines which mirror adult slot machines and pay out cash should be made unavailable to children. These are also known as 'cash-out' slot-style Category D machines. Therefore, we will make it a criminal offence to invite, cause, or permit anyone under the age of 18 to play these particular types of machines. This builds on the existing voluntary commitment implemented in 2021 by Bacta, the amusement and gaming machine industry trade body, banning under-18s from playing this type of machine in their members' venues.

Licensing authority fees

We will increase the maximum cap on the premises fees that can be charged by a licensing authority. Licensing authorities (local authorities in England and Wales, licensing boards in Scotland) play an important role in regulating gambling through licensing premises and enforcing licence conditions. The cap for their licensing

fees has not been updated since 2007, while the costs associated with licensing have increased. We will therefore increase the maximum cap that licensing authorities can charge by 15%. The gambling fees payable in Scotland will continue to be set by Scottish Ministers.

Together we believe these measures will support the land-based gambling sector and modernise the current outdated restrictions, as well as helping to protect young people and supporting licensing authorities. These measures also complement the other changes that we are progressing relating to gambling regulation, including the introduction of a stake limit for online slots and a statutory levy to fund research, prevention and treatment. As outlined in the gambling white paper, we are making sure that we have the right balance between consumer freedoms and choice on the one hand, and protection from harm on the other.

Gambling policy is devolved in Northern Ireland but substantially reserved as regards Scotland and Wales. In some cases, the power to deregulate (e.g. to increase the number of gaming machines a casino may make available) is reserved, but the power to put appropriate protections in place to support that deregulation is devolved in Scotland. Where this is the case, our deregulation will extend only to England and Wales unless and until appropriate protections are in place in Scotland. It will be for Scottish Ministers to decide how to exercise the powers conferred on them by the Gambling Act 2005.

We will lay the necessary legislation to implement these measures in due course.

I will deposit a copy of the response to the consultation in the libraries of both Houses.

Managing Radioactive Substances and Nuclear Decommissioning

[HLWS473]

Lord Callanan: My Honourable friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Nuclear and Renewables) Andrew Bowie MP has today made the following statement:

Nuclear power, which uses radioactive nuclear fuel, continues to provide low carbon electricity to homes and businesses in the UK. The UK also uses radioactive substances in many different products and processes – to treat and diagnose serious illnesses, to deliver research and development and in industrial processes. Most uses of radioactive material create radioactive waste, which needs to be managed and the facilities that use this type of material, including nuclear power stations, will eventually need to be deconstructed safely and efficiently after they stop operating.

The UK Government and devolved administrations are today publishing an updated policy framework for nuclear decommissioning and managing radioactive substances following a consultation conducted during spring 2023.

The policy document published today replaces, *Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy: Final Conclusions* (Cm 2919) which was published in 1995. It updates, clarifies and consolidates a number of policies into a UK-wide policy framework. It sets out clearly those policies that are pursued jointly by the UK Government and devolved administrations and any separate policies that apply in different parts of the United Kingdom.

Nuclear power will continue to be an important source of low carbon electricity in England and Wales as we work towards reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Although the Scottish Government does not support building new nuclear plants under current technologies it places great importance on the need to address Scotland's radioactive waste legacy and is committed to the safe, secure and responsible management of waste with care for people and the environment. The UK Government and devolved administrations agree that it is vital that we have a policy framework for decommissioning and managing radioactive waste that is fit to deal with our legacy waste and fit for the future.

The waste can occur as gases, liquids or solids. Radioactive substances policy covers the management and use of radioactive materials and how any subsequent wastes are then managed to ensure people and the environment are protected.

Key updates to the UK-wide policy include enabling additional disposal capability in England and Wales to deliver faster, more cost effective and sustainable decommissioning and placing greater emphasis on including decommissioning by design into nuclear projects.

Overall, the revised policy framework creates clearer and more consistent policy objectives across the UK, which should unlock more innovative and sustainable ways of working realising significant savings for industry and the taxpayer, whilst maintaining high standards of safety, security and environmental protection.

The UK Government and devolved administrations are publishing alongside the final policy framework a summary of the responses to the consultation.

I will deposit a copy of the updated policy framework for nuclear decommissioning and managing radioactive substances in the Libraries of the House.

NHS Specialist, Associate Specialist and Specialty Doctors: Revised Pay Offer

[HLWS475]

Lord Markham: My Rt Hon Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Victoria Atkins) has made the following Written Statement:

I am pleased to inform the House that, earlier this week, I made a revised, reforming offer to the British Medical Association (BMA) Specialist, Associate Specialist, and Specialty (SAS) committee. The Committee have agreed to put this deal to their members for a vote with a recommendation that they accept.

SAS doctors are a vital part of the NHS. They focus predominantly on providing direct patient care by providing clinical expertise in their specialist area and taking responsibility for a full range of patients within their area of practice, making them essential to our efforts to cut waiting lists and deliver the highest quality service to patients.

During the course of the multi-year agreement for SAS doctors, pay for the pre-2021 contracts has been increasing at a faster rate than for the 2021 contracts. Therefore, the revised offer continues to address the unintended imbalance between the pre-2021 and the 2021 contracts to ensure consistency and fairness across the workforce, help speed up the delivery of elements of the new contracts introduced in 2021 and encourage more existing doctors to take up the new contract. This offer, if accepted, would mean that pay scales for those on the pre-2021 contracts would receive an uplift of £1,400. New pay scales would take effect from 1 April 2024. The offer also includes steps to support career progression opportunities for SAS doctors.

As in the original offer, the revised offer includes a joint piece of work to consider how Locally Employed Doctors – doctors who are employed on local terms and conditions as opposed to national – can be better supported to progress in their careers.

This offer is independent of the headline pay uplift SAS doctors received in 2023-24 and that they will receive in 2024-25 through the established pay review body process. The DDRB will still recommend a pay uplift for SAS doctors in 2024-25 and the Government will consider it in the usual way.

If this offer is accepted, the BMA will withdraw the rate card for SAS doctors in England with immediate effect and the dispute will come to an end, meaning no industrial action would be taken by BMA SAS doctors in England under their current mandate.

The BMA will recommend this offer to their members in a vote in the coming weeks.

I also want to inform the House that we have agreed with the BMA Junior Doctors Committee to explore a process of mediation, which I hope will move us towards a resolution. Both parties have mutually agreed a preferred mediator, and the BMA and my department will now begin the process of engaging with the selected mediator.

Post-16 Qualifications Reforms

[HLWS471]

Baroness Barran: My Honourable Friend, the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education (Luke Hall), has made the following statement:

Today we are publishing the list of new Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) and new Technical Qualifications (TQs) that will be publicly funded at level 3 from 1 August 2025. This follows the first cycle of our post-16 qualifications reform at level 3. We have

approved 74 new qualifications for public funding in Construction and the Built Environment, Digital, Education and Early Years, Engineering and Manufacturing and Health and Science. In assessing these qualifications, we looked at evidence from employers, higher education institutions and colleges about the value these qualifications would bring to young people, adults and our economy. Technical qualifications have also been approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) against the level 3 occupational standards.

The aim of the Post-16 Qualifications reform at level 3 and below is to streamline the qualifications landscape, simplify choices for students, and only fund qualifications that are high-quality and lead to good progression outcomes. By ensuring that approved qualifications meet new, more rigorous criteria for public funding, young people can be confident that they will be able to progress to university and higher technical education, and directly into apprenticeships and skilled employment. In future, students will be able to study technical qualifications based on occupational standards that have been codesigned with employers, enabling young people to develop skills needed for the future. New alternative academic qualifications must demonstrate clear progression to related higher education and will be approved in a range of subjects in areas where there are not A Levels.

Our reforms place world class A levels and T Levels at the heart of level 3 study programmes for 16- to 19-year-olds, paving the way for the introduction of the Advanced British Standard. We know that students who take A levels have better outcomes overall in terms of progressing into, and staying in, higher education (HE) than those who study Applied General Qualifications (AGQs). A 2022 Nuffield Foundation report found that students who enter higher education with BTECs are almost twice as likely to drop out before their second year when compared to A level students, even after controlling for differences in background characteristics.

T Levels will also ensure that young people can feel confident that they are studying technical qualifications which will prepare them for jobs in their chosen field. T Levels equip students with a thorough understanding of their chosen sector and the skills needed to work in specific occupations, with the 45-day industry placement providing valuable workplace experience.

Last summer's T Level results show students are succeeding in these new, high-quality qualifications. Over 90% of T Level students passed their T Level in summer 2023, with over two thirds of the cohort achieving a merit or above. Students have gone on from T Levels to outstanding destinations, including moving directly into employment, undertaking higher apprenticeships, or progressing into higher education. Almost a third of the first cohort of T Level students who completed their course and progressed into employment and apprenticeships, were employed by their industry placement organisation – proving the worth of T Levels to

both students and employers. Over 30,000 students have started a T Level since 2020, including over 16,000 students who started a T Level course in September 2023 – almost as many students as in the first 3 cohorts combined, and an increase of almost 60 per cent from September 2022.

We are pleased to see this growth and remain confident that numbers will continue to grow as more providers deliver T Levels. There are now 18 subjects available at over 250 providers across England, with a further 3 being rolled out this September. The latest T Level Action Plan sets out how we will continue to improve access to T Levels, ensure quality delivery, and support providers and employers as we move into the fourth year of delivery.

Alongside approving new qualifications for public funding at level 3, we have also published a list of 318 qualifications which will have public funding removed on 31 July 2025 due to being in the cycle 1 routes listed above and which have not been reformed. Where awarding organisations told my department that existing qualifications would be replaced with newly reformed alternative academic or technical qualifications, these qualifications do not appear on this list. They will also have a public funding end date of 31 July 2025. This will be reflected in DfE's database of qualifications approved for public funding on gov.uk.

The qualification reforms also include reforming level 2 qualifications to ensure they are high quality, have a clear purpose, and lead to better outcomes. Reformed level 2 qualifications will either support progression to reformed L3 study, for example via the T Level Foundation Year, or enable students to move directly into skilled employment in occupations at level 2, or via apprenticeships. The government is also investing around an additional £300m over two years to support those who need to retake their English and Maths. I will update the house on the outcomes of cycle 1 of the qualification reforms at level 2 in July, following a similar approvals and review exercise at that level for technical qualifications in Construction and the Built Environment, Education and Early Years, Engineering and Manufacturing and Health and Science routes.

This latest update builds on the work we have already done to streamline the qualifications landscape, including removing funding from 5,500 qualifications with low and no enrolments and the removal of funding from technical qualifications that overlap with T Levels from 31 July 2024 in Construction and the Built Environment, Digital, Education and Childcare, and Health and Science. It will ensure that learners studying level 3 qualifications can be confident that their studies are equipping them to progress into higher education and employment in the future.

The range of qualifications that will be available at level 3 for public funding from 2025 will shortly be updated on the DfE database of qualifications approved for public funding on gov.uk, to reflect these changes. It will be updated again in July, following the opportunity for awarding organisations to request a procedural review.

Copies of the associated documents have been placed in the libraries of both Houses.

Report of the Independent Reviewer for National Security Arrangements 2023

[HLWS472]

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

The role of the Independent Reviewer of National Security Arrangements in Northern Ireland is to monitor compliance with Annex E of the St. Andrews Agreement 2006, reviewing the relationship between MI5 and PSNI in handling national security matters.

Professor Marie Breen Smyth, the Independent Reviewer of National Security Arrangements in Northern Ireland, has sent me her report for 2023. What follows is a summary of the main findings of the report covering the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023. Professor Breen Smyth states:

“My contact with MI5 and the PSNI was again largely conducted in person. Policy directions remain consistent with those made in the review period in 2022.

For the first time since records began in 1969, there were no security related deaths in 2023. However, there was an increase in bombing and shooting incidents compared with the previous 12 months. Groups that are not assessed to be a National Security threat, such as loyalist paramilitary groupings, conducted some of these.

A review of the numbers of actual and attempted attacks from 2008 until 2023 shows that the highest number of attacks were conducted in 2010 when the security risk was SEVERE falling consistently through to 2022. The downward trend is apparent in all categories, with the exception of shooting and bombing incidents where there was a rise in the current period. There is a slight increase in the number of people arrested and a moderate decline in the number of people charged.

The year began with the Northern Ireland Related Terrorism (NIRT) threat at SUBSTANTIAL – an attack is likely - having been reduced to this level on 22 March 2022. Attacks by dissident republicans (DRs) have significantly declined since 2009. Nevertheless, dissident republican activity increased in early 2023, including the attempted murder of DCI John Caldwell in Omagh in February.

On 28 March 2023, the NIRT Threat Level was raised to SEVERE – an attack is highly likely. The threat level had been lowered from SEVERE to SUBSTANTIAL in March 2022. Before this, it had remained at SEVERE for over a decade.

The primary target for DR groups remains PSNI and prison officers. Thus, there is a risk of an attack as long as the level of DR activity remains significant. Such attacks are within the capability of DRs and constitute a risk not only to the intended targets such as PSNI officers, but

because of their actions they unintentionally place members of the public at risk.

The perceived and possibly the actual risk to PSNI officers was exacerbated by a data breach which took place on 8 August 2023 when the PSNI responded to a Freedom of Information request and inadvertently published officer details online.

The national security threat emanating from DR groups forms only part of the wider security picture. Paramilitary-style attacks, threats and intimidation directed at the wider community emanate from DRs and other republican and loyalist groups as well as serious and organised crime groups.

There has been no significant change within loyalist groupings in relation to the Northern Ireland Protocol/Windsor Framework. Concerns remain in relation to wider constitutional issues perceived to be affecting Northern Ireland. Armed loyalist organisations show no signs of resurgence on this or other issues.

In terms of prospects for the security of the immediate future, violent dissident republicans remain intent on conducting attacks against security targets and the security forces continue to work to disrupt those threats. Despite successful interdictions by them and an almost complete lack of community support for their activities, DRs remain committed to violence as a strategy. As a result, attacks and attempted attacks remain highly likely.

The implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol/Windsor Framework and perceived consequences for the constitutional position of Northern Ireland remains a significant issue for the Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) community. Discontent within this community has previously been linked with localised disorder as seen in 2021.

As IRNSA I believe that a formal process of paramilitary transition is needed to dismantle the remaining organisations, ending recruitment and taking weapons out of circulation. Whilst compiling the report I discussed recent initiatives in relation to paramilitary transition and how this can benefit the security picture. There will remain a significant organised crime problem, but Northern Ireland has this in common with the rest of the UK and beyond. Ending paramilitarism would clear the path to a focused law enforcement approach, devoid of any political overtones.

Although dissident republicans continue to pose the most significant threat to national security in Northern Ireland, efforts by security partners has meant that the vast majority of the population are able to go about their daily lives secure from the threat of terrorism. Despite this, risks to serving police officers and prison officers persist and constant vigilance remains necessary.”

My conclusions in relation to Annex E are as follows;

SUMMARY

Annex E to the St Andrews Agreement

Further to reinforce this comprehensive set of safeguards, the Government confirms that it accepts and

will ensure that effect is given to the five key principles which the Chief Constable has identified as crucial to the effective operation of the new arrangement.

a: All Security Service intelligence relating to terrorism in Northern Ireland will be visible to the PSNI	I am satisfied that the PSNI continue to have sight of all Security Service intelligence relating to NIRT. There is compliance.
b: PSNI will be informed of all Security Service counter terrorist activities relating to Northern Ireland	A number of processes ensure that PSNI are fully informed. There is compliance
c: Security Service intelligence will be disseminated within PSNI according to the current PSNI dissemination policy, and using police procedures	This continues to be organisational practice. There is compliance.
d: The great majority of national security CHIS in Northern Ireland will continue to be run by PSNI officers under existing handling protocol	The PSNI and Security Service continue to work jointly on cases. Arrangements for this continue to be jointly negotiated and agreed. There is compliance.
e: There will be no diminution the PSNI's responsibility to comply with the Human Rights Act or the Policing Board's ability to monitor HRA compliance	PSNI continues to operate within the National Security arena in strict compliance with ECHR. There is compliance.

Smarter Regulation Programme

[HLWS468]

Lord Johnson of Lainston: My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Department of Business and Trade (Kemi Badenoch MP) has today made the following statement:

A year ago, the Government established the Smarter Regulation Programme to focus on improving regulation across the UK economy to reduce burdens, push down the cost of living and drive economic growth.

Today, I am pleased to be able to update the House on our progress with the publication of two papers. Firstly, *Smarter Regulation: One Year On - May 2024* which details our progress so far outlining important reforms and a roadmap for further reform. Secondly, our White Paper *Smarter Regulation: Delivering a regulatory environment for innovation, investment and growth* sets out an ambitious plan to improve the UK's regulatory landscape and encourage innovation, investment and economic growth.

The UK's regulatory landscape is recognised internationally as a model of best practice in many respects. There is, however, strong evidence which suggests that our regulatory culture hinders our ability to stimulate economic activity, foster innovation and attract investment.

Over decades, successive governments have automatically defaulted to regulation as a preferred option, rather than a last resort. This has led to a myriad complex and burdensome regulations which cost the

economy an estimated £70 billion. Nearly half of all businesses tell us that regulation is an obstacle to growth.

My department set up the Smarter Regulation programme to re-energise regulatory reform, capitalise on the benefits of Brexit, and promote growth in every corner of the economy.

Smarter Regulation: One Year On – May 2024

So far, it is estimated that our reforms will reduce the burden on business by up to £1 billion or 50 million hours per year by cutting unnecessary bureaucracy and form filling. The overall benefits to society are estimated at £6.3 billion.

Our reforms include making changes to the EU's Working Time Directive reporting requirements, and improvements to price transparency and product information for consumers.

'Smarter Regulation: One Year On' includes 25 new policy announcements across almost every sector of the economy to reduce burdens on business. This includes in those announced today:

- a consultation containing proposals to deregulate the Commercial Agents Regulations, freeing businesses to negotiate contracts with one another without reference to outdated regulations that create legal ambiguity and confusion;
- a consultation on proposals to abolish the legal framework for European Works Councils – mandatory committees multinationals had to consult if they employed people in the EU. The reforms could save business in the region of £5 million per year;
- a consultation on new proposals on an alternative model for UK REACH, reducing the need for industry to access EU hazard data, improving data on 'use and exposure' and improving regulator powers, while ensuring high levels of protection of human health and the environment;
- proposals to modernise the outdated and overly restrictive rules on gaming machines in a boost for bingo halls, casinos and arcades;
- a consultation that builds on current covid easements to simplify how the sale of alcohol is licensed for consumption in pavement areas next to pubs and bars. This will support alfresco hospitality, including an option for providing take-away and delivery sales by default; and,
- an international vehicle standards vision which will set out the Government's strategy for opening our markets to new vehicles, such as autonomous vehicles, to drive change and support innovation.

We will also consult on raising the corporate reporting threshold for medium-sized companies from 250 to 500 employees, which will reclassify 2,000 companies from large to medium sized, and on exempting 41,000-43,000 medium-sized companies from producing a strategic report. This could save these companies around £150 million per year, offering a more proportionate set of requirements for SMEs, by cutting red tape and lowering

their costs so that they can focus on delivering for their customers. Meanwhile, we are consulting on reforms to the complex TUPE regulations, which protect employees' employment rights when the business or undertaking for which they work transfers to a new employer. These will save businesses time and money, while continuing to protect workers' rights.

Smarter Regulation: Delivering a regulatory environment for innovation, investment and growth – White Paper

Today, I am also pleased to publish a White Paper which aims to deliver a paradigm shift in the UK regulatory landscape: our goal is to instil a culture of 'world-class service' in how regulators and government operate to deliver the best outcomes for businesses, consumers and society. We are clear this is not about reducing regulatory safeguards: we are rightly proud of the standards and protections our regulatory regime offers.

The reform package in the White Paper includes:

- defining for the first time what constitutes a business regulator, and introducing a set of guiding principles of smarter regulation that we expect these regulators to apply in their day-to-day decision making;
- a new 'register of regulators', as part of our ambition for a "one-stop-shop" of regulatory information so that anyone can find out which regulators and regulations apply to their business;
- launching a new Regulators Council to improve the strategic dialogue between regulators and government, and monitor the effectiveness of policy and strategic guidance issued;
- a new Share Once Support Register which will mean vulnerable customers only need to register with energy, telecoms and water companies once, making sure they don't drop off the register and are safe in the knowledge that their access to utilities is protected; and
- a new Growth Duty Performance Framework to enhance transparency and accountability, by asking regulators to provide evidence on how they are supporting economic growth.

This is about establishing a high bar for regulation and avoiding unnecessary costs for UK businesses but it is fully consistent with acting where that bar is met and where we need to protect consumers, businesses and the environment – for example the government's steps to increase regulatory scrutiny in the water sector.

Our focus is to ensure that we are the best regulated economy in the world with a well-functioning landscape of regulators. The reforms we outline today will give entrepreneurial businesses more opportunity to innovate,

experiment, and capitalise on the UK's global leadership in areas like clean energy technologies, life sciences, and digital services. They will help regulators to provide companies with the service support they need to innovate and attract investment, minimising burdens and supporting economic growth.

The White Paper has been laid in Parliament and a copy of the *Smarter Regulation: One Year On - May 2024* paper has been deposited in the libraries of both Houses.

Vehicle Regulations

[HLWS467]

Lord Davies of Gower: My Right Honourable friend, the Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Mark Harper), has made the following Ministerial Statement:

I am pleased to inform the House that today I am publishing a strategy setting out our approach to the future regulation of road vehicles.

Following our departure from the EU, we have the freedom to rethink the "type approval" rules which apply to all cars, vans, motorcycles and other vehicles sold in the UK.

Whilst maintaining our high standards of safety and environmental protection, wherever possible we will reduce the administrative burden of demonstrating compliance with regulations.

We will build a framework based on three key principles:

- Use international standards wherever possible – making regulation cheaper to follow for importers and exporters.
- Deregulate low risk areas and accept alternative national standards where international standards do not exist or aren't suitable. If we don't need to regulate, we won't. If products can be proved safe in a comparable jurisdiction we won't impose the cost of unnecessary re-testing.
- Introduce UK-specific rules only where necessary, for example to introduce new technology more quickly, to simplify administrative requirements for industry or where we need to act for safety reasons.

In the short term, we will implement these principles with a three-year programme of reform to retained EU regulations. This will include options for future emission regulation and plans to introduce new safety technologies, such as automated lane keeping, and regulation to strengthen cyber security.

I will place a copy of *A Vision for GB Type Approval* in the libraries of both Houses.

Written Answers

Thursday, 16 May 2024

Agricultural Products and Food: Trade Barriers

Asked by *Viscount Waverley*

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to address the additional administrative burdens and costs imposed on farmers and producers due to the new import and export regulations being introduced on 30 April; and how they will ensure that international competitiveness is maintained. [[HL4186](#)]

Lord Douglas-Miller: The Border Target Operating Model strikes an appropriate balance between supporting business, by avoiding unnecessary regulatory burdens in the process of moving goods into Great Britain, while focusing controls on consignments proven to cause the most significant biosecurity risk.

The implementation of controls on EU goods reduces the risk of plant and animal pests and diseases reaching GB and potentially causing significant disruption to domestic production, as well as assuring the safety of all imported food.

No new export controls were introduced on 30 April.

To support British exporters, the Department for Business and Trade will continue our engagement with the 27 EU Member-States as well as the Rest-of-World to smooth trade flow and open new markets.

Animal Experiments: Animal Welfare

Asked by *Baroness Hayman of Ullock*

To ask His Majesty's Government, following the publication of the Animals in Science Regulation Unit's Annual Report 2022 on 25 April, what assessment they have made of the adequacy of sanctions such as inspector advice and compliance letters in response to animal welfare failings, including animals dying because of a lack of food or water. [[HL4279](#)]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: The Home Office takes non-compliance with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 very seriously. The Animals in Science Regulation Unit responds to and applies sanctions in cases of non-compliance in accordance with its compliance policy, which aims to reduce the risk of future non-compliance. More rigorous sanctions are used in cases where animal welfare is impacted or there are significant systems failures.

The Animals in Science Regulation Unit will continue to assess the proportionality of its responses to cases of non-compliance.

Asylum: EU Countries

Asked by *Lord Weir of Ballyholme*

To ask His Majesty's Government how many asylum applicants have been returned to the UK from the EU in the last 12 months. [[HL4312](#)]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: There have been no returns from the EU to the UK.

Asylum: Republic of Ireland

Asked by *Lord Taylor of Warwick*

To ask His Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the government of Ireland concerning asylum seekers returning from that country to the UK; and what impact this has on the Common Travel Area agreement. [[HL4308](#)]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: There is a high level of cooperation on migration and border security between the UK and Irish Government. The Home Office regularly discuss asylum trends and work to respond to these trends with our counterparts in the Department of Justice in order to protect the Common Travel Area.

In 2020, we agreed non-legally binding operational arrangements which allow for the return and readmission of asylum seekers where this is agreed by both participants.

Asked by *Lord Weir of Ballyholme*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have received any formal request or demand from the government of Ireland to send any asylum applicants back to the UK from the Republic of Ireland. [[HL4311](#)]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: The Home Office has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Irish Department of Justice for information sharing to preserve and enhance the operation of the Common Travel Area. This enables data sharing about asylum seekers.

In addition to this, in 2020 we agreed operational arrangements which allow for the return and readmission of asylum seekers where this is agreed by both participants. This is not a legally binding agreement and Ireland has not returned anyone to the UK under these arrangements.

Asylum: Rwanda

Asked by *Lord Scriven*

To ask His Majesty's Government how many full-time equivalent established posts there were in the Civil Service dealing with immigration issues related to the Rwanda scheme at (1) 30 September 2023, (2) 31 December 2023, and (3) 31 March 2024; and how many of these posts were filled on these dates. [[HL4306](#)]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: The Home Office publishes its accounts each year which sets out the FTE working in each of its systems, including on matters relating to Migration and Borders.

Avanti West Coast: Standards

Asked by Lord Blencathra

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of any correlation between (1) Avanti trains being awarded a performance bonus, and (2) subsequent train cancellations by Avanti. [HL4384]

Lord Davies of Gower: As part of National Rail Contracts, operators must meet challenging operational targets to earn performance-based fees. If performance falls below a pre-determined level, the Department can intervene to act in passengers' best interests.

Officials continue to closely monitor and review Avanti West Coast's (AWC) progress to a sustained recovery, restoring services reliably on the West Coast and delivering good value for the taxpayer. The Department will hold AWC responsible for matters within its control.

To date, AWC has not received operational performance fees related to periods since the commencement of its National Rail Contract on 15 October 2023.

Bangladesh: Rohingya

Asked by The Lord Bishop of St Albans

To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Bangladesh regarding reports of officials involved in beatings and forced returns of Rohingya refugees. [HL4300]

Asked by The Lord Bishop of St Albans

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of research by Fortify Rights, published on 26 April, that found Border Guard Bangladesh responsible for the assault and forced returns of Rohingya Refugees. [HL4301]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK Government is committed to supporting the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and working to address protection risks. We regularly discuss our concerns about the deteriorating security situation in the camps with the Government of Bangladesh and often engage with the UN and NGOs. UK humanitarian funding of over £391 million since 2017 includes ongoing support to protection services. We are aware of the Fortify Rights report published on 26 April. We have raised our concerns with the Government of Bangladesh about the reported refoulement incidents on 25 April of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar and continue to monitor the situation closely.

Cabinet Office and Prime Minister: Staff

Asked by The Earl of Sandwich

To ask His Majesty's Government, following the publication of the Institute for Government report Power with purpose: Final report of the Commission on the Centre of Government, on 10 March, whether (1) the staff at Number 10 have increased to 350 under the Conservative government, and (2) Cabinet Office staff have doubled to over 15,000 during the same period; and if so, what plans they have, if any, to reduce those numbers. [HL4304]

Baroness Neville-Rolfe: The Prime Minister's Office is an integral part of the Cabinet Office for both management and staffing purposes and is not a standalone department.

The total of c15,000 includes the UK Statistics Authority which is a non-ministerial department and is a government department in its own right, accountable to parliament through its sponsoring ministers and therefore should not be included in the total Cabinet Office FTE.

Since 2011 the role and remit of the Cabinet Office has expanded significantly. At that point in time, the Department's role was largely to support the Prime Minister and the operation of Government through the Prime Minister's Office, Ministers' Private Offices, Cabinet Secretariats and the Efficiency and Reform Group.

By 2021, the role of the Cabinet Office in managing the Civil Service had grown significantly to incorporate a number of new major delivery responsibilities, including responsibility for UK border plans, UK Security Vetting (UKSV) functions, and functions formerly overseen by the now-closed Department for Exiting the European Union (DEXEU). The creation of the Government Commercial Organisation and the move of the Fast Stream Government Recruitment Service from HMRC also saw a combined c2000+ FTE join the Cabinet Office between 2017 and 2018.

On 2 October 2023, the Chancellor announced an immediate cap on civil servant headcount, reducing the size of the Civil Service to pre-pandemic levels across Whitehall by stopping any further Civil Service expansion, increasing efficiencies and boosting productivity.

Carbon Budgets

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they intend to take in response to the ruling of the High Court on 3 May regarding their carbon budget delivery plan. [HL4431]

Lord Callanan: The Government is immensely proud of its record on climate change. The Carbon Budget Delivery Plan remains Government policy and sets out

over 300 policies and proposals that the Government has in place to reach its ambitious carbon budgets.

The judgment contains no criticism of these detailed plans nor the policies themselves, which will keep the UK on track to meet net zero by 2050.

Officials are now considering the best approach to comply with the court order and the Government will publish a new report within 12 months.

Conflict Resolution: Women

*Asked by **Baroness Hodgson of Abinger***

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the adequacy of personnel levels in relation to delivering their women, peace and security agenda. [HL4329]

Lord Benyon: The UK's fifth National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) recognises the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and includes tangible actions across government to promote their vital role in conflict prevention through to resolution.

The delivery of the WPS agenda is a cross government effort, with personnel across five Government departments and two devolved administrations delivering on specific commitments. One year since the WPS NAP's publication, 75 percent of the 117 commitments are in progress. As a joint FCDO-MOD strategy, both Departments are committed to driving forward NAP implementation over the next year, including getting 100 percent of commitments in progress.

Councillors: Harassment

*Asked by **Baroness Eaton***

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the merits of establishing a specific policing unit to support local councillors who are experiencing threats and intimidation. [HL4275]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: The safety of our elected representatives is essential to the security of our country. All elected representatives should be able to participate fully in our democracy, without fear for their safety and security. Instances of abuse, intimidation and criminal offences are unacceptable, and that is why the Government will take every possible step to safeguard the people, processes, and institutions upon which our democracy relies.

On 28th February the Prime Minister announced the Government was investing an additional £31 million in funding to protect the democratic process and our elected representatives. Through this funding we are enhancing police capabilities, increasing private sector security provision for those facing a higher risk, and expanding cyber security advice to elected representatives.

The investment also enables the expansion of the Operation BRIDGER network, which already provides

support to MPs, so that all elected representatives and candidates are given a dedicated, police contact to liaise with on security matters, where needed. Through this network elected representatives – including local councillors – will have access to security briefings from their local force.

The funding is accompanied by a new Defending Democracy Policing Protocol, agreed with police to enhance the safety of elected representatives, and protect the UK's democratic process from disruption. Further information about the Protocol is available on GOV.UK.

The Defending Democracy Taskforce will continue to review the effectiveness of arrangements for protective security of elected representatives.

Crewe Station

*Asked by **Lord Blencathra***

To ask His Majesty's Government what is the reason for removing the roof at Crewe Station and when they expect it to be reroofed, if at all. [HL4323]

Lord Davies of Gower: The canopies and main trainshed roof have limited asset remaining life and Network Rail expects replacement work to be complete by 2029. The Government has provided £44.1 billion to Network Rail for renewals work during this Control Period (2024-29) which will be used to fund the work.

Cycling: Speed Limits

*Asked by **Baroness McIntosh of Pickering***

To ask His Majesty's Government whether speed limits apply only to mechanically operated vehicles and not to cyclists; and if so, what plans they have to review this. [HL4418]

Lord Davies of Gower: While speed limits set under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 only apply to motor vehicles, cyclists can still be charged with careless or dangerous cycling offences depending on the circumstances.

Forced Marriage: British Nationality

*Asked by **Baroness Gohir***

To ask His Majesty's Government between 2018 and 2022 how many British citizens, if any, have reported being in a forced marriage to individuals in the UK who have students visas. [HL4278]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: Since April 2019, police forces in England and Wales have been required to provide quarterly data returns to the Home Office on so-called 'honour'-based abuse offences, including forced marriage. The most recent data show 172 forced marriage related offences recorded in the year ending March 2023.

In addition, the joint Home Office and Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) also publishes statistics on forced marriage

cases reported to the unit. The most recent statistics show the FMU provided support in 280 cases of forced marriage in 2023.

The Home Office does not hold data on forced marriages relating to individuals with student visas.

Gaza: Israel

Asked by Lord Wigley

To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel regarding bringing their military operations in Gaza to a conclusion as soon as possible. [HL4314]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The fastest way to end the conflict is to secure a deal which gets the hostages out and allows for a stop in the fighting in Gaza. The Prime Minister discussed the current hostage negotiations with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 30 April and expressed his hope that negotiations are concluded to allow hostages to return home as soon as possible.

We are clear that the vital elements for a lasting peace 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 and ensures Israelis and Palestinians can live in security and dignity.

International Seabed Authority

Asked by Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick

To ask His Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to nominating or supporting a specific candidate to be Secretary General of the International Seabed Authority. [HL4297]

Lord Benyon: FCDO Ministers are considering the UK position in advance of the upcoming election for the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority. The question of mineral-resources related activities in the seabed beyond the limits of national jurisdiction for the benefit of humankind is a critical one, and we are therefore giving full consideration of all candidates for the election.

Iran: Capital Punishment

Asked by Lord Wigley

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have made representations to the government of Iran regarding the death sentences imposed upon Toomaj Salehi, Abbas Deries, Reza Rasaei and Mojahed Kourkour. [HL4313]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK condemns the death sentence of prominent and fearless artist Toomaj

Salehi. Iran's deliberate attempts to silence dissenting voices are clear for all to see. We call for Mr Salehi's immediate release, and the release of all those who are unjustly detained by the Iranian regime. Mr Salehi's sentence is yet more evidence of unacceptable restrictions on freedom of expression in Iran. Nine people associated with the "Woman Life Freedom" protests have been executed.

The UK opposes the death penalty in all circumstances as a matter of principle. We condemn Iran's continued imposition of the death penalty on protesters and have sanctioned 94 Iranian individuals or entities for human rights violations since September 2022. We call on Iran to establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty.

Islands: Climate Change

Asked by Lord Naseby

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to work with other countries on ways to formally recognise the legal continuity of small island developing states under international law, notwithstanding the existential threat posed by human-caused sea level rise. [HL4349]

Asked by Lord Naseby

To ask His Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to following the example set in the Australia–Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty by recognising publicly that the formal statehood and sovereignty of small island states will not lapse under international law even in the event of catastrophic sea level rise. [HL4350]

Lord Benyon: Sea level rise is a matter of critical concern particularly for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), who are uniquely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. We have taken careful note of the Pacific Islands Forum 2023 Declaration on the continuity of statehood in the face of sea level rise and are considering its content in detail. The UK also welcomes the International Law Commission's ongoing work on these issues. We also continue to work with SIDS to drive global ambition of emissions reductions, and support adaptation and resilience in SIDS including through programmes such as the global £500 million Blue Planet.

Levelling Up Fund

Asked by Baroness Eaton

To ask His Majesty's Government how many Project Adjustment Requests were received in respect of Levelling Up Fund applications; and how many of these requests have been approved. [HL4274]

Baroness Swinburne: Recognising the challenging economic backdrop environment, we continue to work with local areas to find practical solutions to project delivery issues. We are working with projects to make

sensible adjustments to the scope and phasing of their Levelling Up Fund (LUF) projects where necessary to mitigate delivery challenges whilst maintaining value for money. To date the Levelling Up Fund has received 61 project adjustment requests – 37 have been approved, 1 has been rejected, 16 were withdrawn, and a further 7 are currently being considered.

Local Government: Cybersecurity

Asked by Baroness Eaton

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps are being taken to support local authorities with cyber security and the rise in related threats. [HL4273]

Baroness Swinburne: The Government has set out its approach to cyber resilience the Government Cyber Security Strategy (GCSS). Cabinet Office are the lead department for the implementation of the GCSS, local government are responsible for the resilience of their networks and systems, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) is assigned stewardship of local government, with responsibility for cyber policy and assurance.

Since 2020, DLUHC has provided £19.9 million of grant funding and technical support to 192 English local authorities to improve their cyber maturity. In collaboration with the Local Government Association and the National Cyber Security Centre, DLUHC have been raising the awareness of cyber risk and fostering cyber-first cultures and practices in local government.

To support councils to assess and improve their cyber security, DLUHC are introducing the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) for the English local government sector later this year, providing a clear cyber security standard and method for local authorities to assess their cyber health.

Manufacturing Industries

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask His Majesty's Government, following the S&P Global UK Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index survey published on 1 May, which showed contraction in the manufacturing sector in April, what support they are providing to this sector to boost growth. [HL4367]

Lord Offord of Garvel: The UK's manufacturing sector is showing resilience, despite challenges such as supply chain disruptions in the Red Sea.

According to the OECD, since 2010 the UK has had the fastest manufacturing productivity growth in the G7. Make UK's Q1 Manufacturing Outlook Report, published at the end of March, showed increased investment and recruitment intentions among manufacturers.

The Government has a strong track record of backing the sector. Our Advanced Manufacturing Plan published last November is underpinned by tax cuts, faster grid connections and a £4.5bn commitment to 2030, as well as

the expansion of our successful SME Made Smarter Adoption programme.

Mental Health Services: Children

Asked by Lord Sikka

To ask His Majesty's Government how many children under the age of 11 are currently being provided with help with their mental health. [HL4542]

Lord Markham: At the end of February 2024, there were 222,448 people aged under 11 years old who had an open referral, of which: 93,385 have had at least one direct care contact, with a direct contact being defined as a contact recorded in the MHS201 Care Contact table of the Mental Health Services Dataset (MHSDS); 90,942 have had at least one attended direct care contact, with an attended direct contact being defined as a contact recorded in the MHS201 Care Contact table of the MHSDS, where the person was either recorded as attending on time and being seen, or attending late but still being seen.

National Security Online Information Team

Asked by Lord Strathcarron

To ask His Majesty's Government what topics the National Security Online Information Team is currently monitoring. [HL4362]

Viscount Camrose: NSOIT's role is to tackle the greatest national security risks facing the UK from mis and disinformation. It specifically looks at threats posed by foreign states, risks to elections and risks arising from the use of AI and deepfakes. This remit is kept under regular review by DSIT's ministers.

Network Rail: Roads

Asked by Lord Blencathra

To ask His Majesty's Government for each of the past five years, how much money has been spent by Network Rail on footpaths and roads next to railway lines for use by rail staff and workers, and how many miles have been completed. [HL4380]

Lord Davies of Gower: Network Rail does not have a complete inventory of constructed pathways on its infrastructure. Network Rail is looking to tender a piece of work to use satellite imagery to identify the constructed pathways adjacent to the running railway.

Nuclear Power: Taxation

Asked by Lord Ravensdale

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the remarks by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Budget Statement on 15 March 2023 that "subject to consultation, nuclear power will be classed as environmentally sustainable in our green taxonomy"

(HC Deb col 841), when they will publish the associated consultation. [HL4296]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The Government reiterated its commitment in the 2023 Green Finance Strategy to delivering a UK Green Taxonomy and remains committed to implementing a UK Green Taxonomy, an important tool to increase transparency into the market to mobilise private investment into green activities and to tackle greenwashing.

Developing a usable and useful taxonomy is a complex and technical exercise. The government continues to work at pace and expects to publish in due course.

Pakistan: Development Aid

Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the reply by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 25 April (HL Deb cols 642GC–644GC), whether they plan to provide official development assistance to the government of Pakistan for the purposes of seizing assets of owners of brick kilns illegally using bonded labour so that those assets can be reused for the education and welfare of families trapped in bonded labour. [HL4260]

Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the reply by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 25 April (HL Deb cols 640GC–644GC), whether any development funding for Pakistan will be allocated to providing advice and assistance to the government of that country to create a national trust fund to support the education of children from the families of bonded labour. [HL4261]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is committed to eradicating all forms of modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking anywhere in the world. In Pakistan, our Aawaz II Accountability, Inclusion and Reducing Modern Slavery Programme and Asia Regional Child Labour Programme are working with partners, including the Government of Pakistan, to reduce child and bonded labour. Meanwhile, our Girls and Out of School Action for Learning programme is improving education outcomes for marginalised children from the most vulnerable sections of society. The UK is aiming to triple Official Development Assistance to Pakistan this financial year. We will continue to use our funding to support Pakistan's long-term development, focusing on improving human capital (health, education, gender equality), governance and human rights, macroeconomic stability and trade, and climate resilience.

Radiotherapy: Costs

Asked by Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the HERO (Health Economics in Radiation Oncology) study published by the UK

Radiotherapy Board, which is the first report to estimate the cost of radiotherapy services in England. [HL4474]

Asked by Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the current cost of radiotherapy services in England, following the publication of the HERO (Health Economics in Radiation Oncology) report by the UK Radiotherapy Board. [HL4475]

Lord Markham: Since 2016, there has been significant investment in radiotherapy equipment, so that every radiotherapy provider had access to modern, cutting-edge radiotherapy equipment, enabling the rollout of new techniques like stereotactic ablative radiotherapy. The total central investment made between 2016 and 2021 was £162 million, and enabled the replacement or upgrade of approximately 100 radiotherapy treatment machines. This is investment on top of that committed by National Health Service trusts, either from their own capital budgets or via donations. From April 2022, the responsibility for investing in new radiotherapy machines sits with local systems. This is supported by the 2021 spending review, which set aside £12 billion in operational capital for the NHS.

Railway Stations: Access

Asked by Lord Blencathra

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans if any they have to provide level access on to trains by (1) lowering the track bed, (2) raising platforms, or (3) purchasing trains with a lower central section between the wheel bogies; and if not, why none of these options is acceptable. [HL4381]

Lord Davies of Gower: The Government appreciates how frustrating the issue of the difference in platform-to-train gap can be for passengers with disabilities and we remain committed to ensuring that all passengers have the same opportunities to travel on the rail network.

Gaps can vary at stations across the network, due to both the design of the station and the platforms at the time of construction, sometimes more than a hundred years ago. It also has to vary according to the type of services which use the line, for example, high-speed, commuter and freight trains.

The rail industry takes several approaches to improving the stepping distance between platform and train, for example the Department for Transport has funded a number of raised sections of platforms across the country to provide level boarding on to trains e.g. Harrington, Whaley Bridge and Ty Croes. However, these may not be suitable for all locations.

There are also 378 carriages forming 58 trains currently in service with Greater Anglia that have lower floor sections with in-built ramps. Under delivery are a further 133 carriages forming 35 trains for Transport for Wales and 208 carriages forming 54 trains for Merseyrail, all of which have in-built ramps.

Railways: Disability

Asked by *Baroness Grey-Thompson*

To ask His Majesty's Government (1) how many, and (2) what proportion, of disabled people who travelled by train over the past 12 months used assistance (a) with, and (b) without, pre-booking. [HL4327]

Lord Davies of Gower: We do not hold data on the number and proportion of disabled people travelling by train over the past year who used assistance, with and without, pre-booking. Official statistics for booked assistance numbers published by the Office of Rail and Road are currently unavailable whilst data quality issues with the supplier are resolved. The Office of Rail and Road aim to publish the latest available full year and historic data for booked assistance in July.

Railways: Freight

Asked by *Baroness McIntosh of Pickering*

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to encourage more freight on to rail for efficiency and environmental reasons; and to improve Ely Junction to facilitate goods travelling by rail from east coast ports and elsewhere in the UK. [HL4471]

Lord Davies of Gower: The Government is committed to growing rail freight to unlock the economic and environmental benefits it can deliver. We are undertaking a number of initiatives including setting a long-term growth target of increasing freight moved by rail by at least 75% by 2050, which was announced in December 2023, and a review of the Mode Shift Revenue Support scheme. Network Rail also continues to work closely with freight operators to improve performance and efficient use of the network.

The October 2023 Network North announcement confirmed Government's support for the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement. The next stage of work for the scheme will involve detailed design work, development of a Full Business Case and beginning the process for securing delivery powers (for example, a Transport and Works Act Order).

Railways: Standards

Asked by *Lord Birt*

To ask His Majesty's Government how many signal failures there were on the rail system in the last year for which data are available; and how the rate of failure in the UK compares with rail systems in other leading countries. [HL4378]

Lord Davies of Gower: The Network Rail metric for signalling failures indicates there were 2,936 signal failures on the rail system in Great Britain for the period 2023 to 2024. Network Rail does not hold data on how the rate of signal failures compares with other countries.

Railways: Waste

Asked by *Lord Blencathra*

To ask His Majesty's Government what is the amount, to the nearest one million tons, of (1) steel railway lines, (2) sacks of rubble, and (3) concrete sleepers and other concrete items, which are unused and lying on or beside railway lines or in sidings; what estimate they have made of the number of railway items littering railway property; and what plans Network Rail have to remove, sell or dispose of these items. [HL4382]

Lord Davies of Gower: Network Rail needs to keep a supply of strategically placed rail on the network for track renewal and replacement, but it is also committed to removing excess scrap material from lineside, when commercially viable, to make the railway safer, higher performing and less visually impactful to customers and neighbours. Once routes have identified material for collection, it can either be recycled or reused on the infrastructure through three material handling depots, or it can be sold to wider markets.

Network Rail presently does not hold information on the amounts of these lineside materials.

Retail Trade

Asked by *Lord Taylor of Warwick*

To ask His Majesty's Government, following reports of non-food item deflation, what assessment they have made of the impact of this on (1) employment, and (2) business profitability, in the retail sector. [HL4307]

Lord Offord of Garvel: The government is continuing to pursue an ambitious policy agenda to increase sustainable economic growth and productivity across the economy. This includes making full expensing permanent, backing the UK's priority growth sectors and announcing measures to boost labour supply. Across Spring Budget 2023, Autumn Statement 2023 and Spring Budget 2024 tax and labour market measures increase total hours worked by the equivalent of more than 300,000 full-time workers by 2028-29.

Whilst consumers will undoubtedly welcome lower shop price inflation, government continues to provide the right environment to help retailers grow, such as by extending Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief for 2024-25, a tax cut worth nearly £2.4 billion.

Revenue and Customs: Pay

Asked by *Lord Sikka*

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to oral evidence by officials on the work of HMRC given to the Treasury Select Committee on 24 April, how many HMRC employees on 1 January had earnings at or below the national minimum wage. [HL4543]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: HMRC complies with the statutory requirement and all colleagues are paid the National Living Wage rate or above.

Smoking: Trading Standards

Asked by Baroness Eaton

To ask His Majesty's Government whether additional new burdens funding will be committed to local authorities who will require additional enforcement capacity within trading standards teams to enforce the policies included in the 2023 Department For Health and Social Care policy paper Stopping the Start. [HL4272]

Lord Markham: The Department published the command paper, Stopping the Start, in October 2023, which sets out our plans to create the first Smokefree Generation, to tackle youth vaping, and to strengthen tobacco and vape enforcement. These measures amount to the most significant public health intervention in a generation.

The policies announced in the command paper are being introduced through the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which is currently undertaking its passage through Parliament. The bill changes the age of sale of tobacco so that those born on or after 1 January 2009 will never be legally sold tobacco. It also prohibits the sale of non-nicotine vapes to under 18-year-olds, and the free distribution of vapes to under 18-year-olds, and introduces fixed penalty notices for breaches of the age of sale legislation.

To help tackle the rise in youth vaping, the bill provides powers to restrict vape flavours, point of sale displays, and packaging, and the Government has also confirmed that under environmental legislation, we will ban the sale and supply of disposable vapes. Any new burdens on local trading standards to enforce these new measures will be assessed ahead of any future regulations.

We are strengthening our enforcement activity through £30 million of new funding per year for enforcement agencies, including for trading standards, to boost the enforcement of underage tobacco and vape sales. In addition, fixed penalty notices introduced in the bill will support trading standards to take quicker action against irresponsible retailers, through using on-the-spot fines rather than going through lengthy magistrate's court processes. Local authorities will keep the proceeds, to invest back into their enforcement activity.

Transport: Finance

Asked by Baroness Smith of Llanfaes

To ask His Majesty's Government when they plan to launch the "local transport alternatives" to HS2 in England. [HL4359]

Lord Davies of Gower: The Government has made substantial progress on delivering new local transport investments, a core commitment of the Network North Command Paper. The £4.7bn Local Transport Fund and allocations by local authority was announced on 26 February 2024 and the £8.3bn uplifts for Highways Maintenance was announced on 17 November 2023, with local authorities now actively delivering on this record investment.

Visas: Married People and Overseas Students

Asked by Baroness Gohir

To ask His Majesty's Government how many applications were received for transitioning from a student visa to a spousal visa each year from 2018 to 2022, and what percentage of the applicants were male. [HL4276]

Asked by Baroness Gohir

To ask His Majesty's Government what was the success rate of applications for transitioning from a student visa to a spousal visa each year from 2018 to 2022. [HL4277]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: The Home Office publishes data on how people move through the immigration system in the *Migrant Journey* report. The report contains information on the number of people starting a journey each year broken down by immigration route (e.g. study) and how many extend into other categories (e.g. family) at the end of each year, following their initial leave. The latest report covers up to the end of 2022.

The Home Office publishes data on grants of extensions of stay in the UK, in the *Immigration system statistics quarterly release*.

Table Exe_D02 shows the number of grants of extensions of stay in the UK, by current and previous category of leave, available from *Immigration system statistics data tables*. Data on extensions by previous category is available for main applicants and calendar year 2020 only. This data will be updated for 2021 onwards in future Immigration system statistics publications.

Please note, the published statistics relate to the number of grants, not applications.

The Answer includes the following attached material:

extensions dataset [extensions-datasets-dec-2023.xlsx]

The material can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2024-05-01/HL4276>

Wales Office: Departmental Responsibilities

Asked by Baroness Kennedy of Cradley

To ask His Majesty's Government how many times since 1 January they have met Ministers of the Welsh Government. [[HL4467](#)]

Lord Harlech: My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales have met Ministers of the Welsh Government nine times since 1 January.

Index to Statements and Answers

Written Statements.....1	
Alcohol Licensing Consultation1	Mental Health Services: Children..... 13
Energy Infrastructure Planning Projects.....1	National Security Online Information Team 13
Fraud and Error in the Benefit System1	Network Rail: Roads 13
Gambling Measures Consultation: Response2	Nuclear Power: Taxation 13
Managing Radioactive Substances and Nuclear Decommissioning3	Pakistan: Development Aid 14
NHS Specialist, Associate Specialist and Specialty Doctors: Revised Pay Offer4	Radiotherapy: Costs..... 14
Post-16 Qualifications Reforms4	Railway Stations: Access..... 14
Report of the Independent Reviewer for National Security Arrangements 20236	Railways: Disability 15
Smarter Regulation Programme7	Railways: Freight..... 15
Vehicle Regulations.....8	Railways: Standards 15
Written Answers.....9	Railways: Waste 15
Agricultural Products and Food: Trade Barriers ..9	Retail Trade 15
Animal Experiments: Animal Welfare9	Revenue and Customs: Pay 15
Asylum: EU Countries9	Smoking: Trading Standards 16
Asylum: Republic of Ireland9	Transport: Finance 16
Asylum: Rwanda9	Visas: Married People and Overseas Students .. 16
Avanti West Coast: Standards10	Wales Office: Departmental Responsibilities.... 17
Bangladesh: Rohingya.....10	
Cabinet Office and Prime Minister: Staff.....10	
Carbon Budgets10	
Conflict Resolution: Women11	
Councillors: Harassment11	
Crewe Station11	
Cycling: Speed Limits11	
Forced Marriage: British Nationality11	
Gaza: Israel.....12	
International Seabed Authority.....12	
Iran: Capital Punishment12	
Islands: Climate Change.....12	
Levelling Up Fund.....12	
Local Government: Cybersecurity13	
Manufacturing Industries.....13	