



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 21 February 2017 and the information is correct at the time of publication (11:29 A.M., 23 February 2017). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

Questions marked thus **[R]** indicate that a relevant interest has been declared.

Questions with identification numbers of **900000 or greater** indicate that the question was originally tabled as an oral question and has since been unstarred.

ANSWERS

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Council Housing: Older People

Catherine McKinnell:

[\[58722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, what safeguards he plans to put in place to prevent older people from having to relocate at the end of a fixed-term local authority tenancy.

Gavin Barwell:

I refer the hon Member to my answer to Question UIN 58708.

■ Parking

Sir Greg Knight:

[\[63589\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, if he will issue advice to local authorities on increasing the minimum size of car parking spaces in their car parks to take account of the increasing average size of new cars; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Marcus Jones:

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's policies for promoting sustainable transport, including on parking provision. The Framework explains that local authorities should seek to improve the quality of parking in town centres so that it is convenient, safe and secure. We believe that local authorities are best placed to determine the parking needs of their local communities, having regard to national planning policy.

DEFENCE

■ Armed Forces: Communication

Robert Courts:

[\[63576\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans his Department has put in place to ensure the continuation of secure personal correspondence between armed forces personnel deployed in remote locations and their families after the e-bluey system ends on 31 March 2017.

Mark Lancaster:

Personnel deployed on operations enjoy access to a variety of methods for contacting their friends and family, including via internet access or mail services. Therefore the cessation of the e-bluey service will not impact on the provision of secure personal correspondence for deployed personnel.

■ Kentigern House

Alison Thewliss: [\[63722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the leasing arrangements are for the Army Personnel Centre at Kentigern House in Glasgow; and when such arrangements are due for renewal.

Mark Lancaster:

There are no leasing arrangements in place for the Army Personnel Centre at Kentigern House.

Alison Thewliss: [\[63723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many staff are employed at the Army Personnel Centre at Kentigern House in Glasgow.

Alison Thewliss: [\[63856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the staff headcount was at the Army Personnel Centre at Kentigern House in Glasgow in each year from 2006 to 2016.

Mark Lancaster:

As at 14 February 2017, there were 666 staff employed by the Army Personnel Centre at Kentigern House (155 Military and 511 Civilian).

The table below shows establishment figures for the Army Personnel Centre, split by Military (Regular, Reserves and Full-Time Reserve Service posts) and Civilian (Full Time Equivalent) posts. Figures of actual staff employed for these years are not held.

YEAR	2006-2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Military	181	177	177	172	172	160	166
Civilian	617	625	625	569	569	551	553
Total	798	802	802	741	741	711	719

All figures represent Army Personnel Centre staff only, and therefore exclude staff from other Ministry of Defence organisations based at Kentigern House.

■ Yemen: Military Intervention

Margaret Ferrier: [\[62242\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 5 July 2016 to Question 41410, when his Department last carried out an assessment of (a) whether the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen were targeting civilians and (b) that coalition's level of respect for and compliance with international humanitarian law; and if he will place in the Library copies of documentation used in such assessments.

Sir Michael Fallon:

[Holding answer 7 February 2017]: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) analyses allegations of International Humanitarian Law violations arising from air strikes in Yemen conducted by the Saudi-led Coalition. The MOD has not assessed that the Coalition is deliberately targeting civilians.

EDUCATION

■ Academies: Football

John Mann:

[63804]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what funding her Department has provided to football academies in the last three years; and (a) what projects have been funded and (b) how many participants there have been in (i) those projects and (ii) each academy.

Robert Halfon:

I refer the MP to the answer given on 5 December 2016 to question 55137, which provided the following answer:

The Department for Education funds sports provision in a wide range of schools, colleges and other providers. The Department does not directly fund any football or other sport academies, but it does fund League Football Education and the FA Premier League Limited for delivery of education and training in association with football clubs.

Some education and training linked to football clubs is also delivered through sub-contracting arrangements with funded institutions. The Department does not hold information on the numbers of students who drop out from sports academies.

The Department currently funds 16 to 19 provision in 36 schools and academies that have sports as a specialism and are identified as such in their title. The allocations to those schools and academies, along with the allocations for all other 16 to 19 provision, are published online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-allocation-data-2016-to-2017-academic-year> and:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sfa-funding-allocations-to-training-providers-2016-to-2017>

Most students enrolled on sports provision are enrolled on general qualifications that are not specific to any particular sport.

■ Secondary Education

Lucy Powell:

[63744]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many times (a) Ministers and (b) officials of her Department have met the (i) Grammar School Heads' Association and (ii) National Association of Secondary Moderns in each of the last three years.

Nick Gibb:

We do not keep a central record of all the meetings the Grammar School Heads' Association (GSHA) and the National Association of Secondary Moderns (NASM) may have had with DfE ministers or officials. A search of records, however, indicates that since February 2014, the GSHA met Ministers twice, first in December 2016 at a roundtable event to discuss academic selection, and once in February 2017 to discuss the National Funding Formula. Ministers also spoke at the GSHA Annual Conference in June 2014 and June 2016. On two occasions since February 2014, in April 2014 and April 2016, Ministers have attended and spoken at NASM events. Officials routinely meet with a wide range of stakeholders in the course of policy development, and have met the GSHA on a number of occasions since February 2014, including discussions following the publication of the 'Schools That Work for Everyone' consultation. We have no record of any meetings between officials and the NASM, or requests by the NASM to meet officials, during this period.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Badgers: Bovine Tuberculosis

Sir Greg Knight:

[\[63417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the badger vaccination programme in Ireland, what plans she has to introduce trials of oral bacillus calmette-guerin badger vaccinations in the UK.

George Eustice:

We work in partnership with the Irish and French governments, as well as the devolved administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland, on the development of an oral bovine TB vaccine for badgers.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Security

Jon Trickett:

[\[63870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 7 February 2017 to Question 62534, what the number of security passes issued by her Department to people not employed by her Department is; what business needs suffice for such a security pass to be granted; and what the number of passes issued to people who work for private companies which have currently or previously been awarded government contracts or which are bidding for such contracts is.

George Eustice:

I refer the hon. Member to the previous reply given on 14 February 2017, Written Question 63262.

■ Dogs: Imports

Neil Carmichael:

[\[63358\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, from what countries dogs were imported into the UK for (a) non-commercial reasons under the Pet Travel Scheme and (b) commercial reasons in 2016.

George Eustice:

The countries from which dogs were imported into the UK in 2016 for non-commercial reasons under the Pet Travel Scheme, as indicated in data provided by carriers, are listed in part (a) of the attached Annex. Countries from which dogs were imported into the UK for commercial reasons are listed in part (b).

Attachments:

1. annex PQ 63358 [Annex PQ 63358 16.doc]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

■ Africa: Foreign Relations

Adam Afriyie:

[\[908818\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) support democracy in and (b) strengthen UK relations with countries in Africa.

Mr Tobias Ellwood:

The UK's links with Africa are profound. We spend almost £5 billion a year supporting Africa's stability and prosperity. My Rt. Hon Friend the Foreign Secretary (Mr Johnson) last week visited The Gambia which recently saw its first democratic transfer of power, and in May my Rt. Hon Friend the Prime Minister (Mrs May) will host a major conference to agree a new international partnership for Somalia, demonstrating UK leadership and commitment to democracy and stability in Africa.

Oliver Colvile:

[\[908822\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) support democracy in and (b) strengthen UK relations with countries in Africa.

Mr Tobias Ellwood:

The UK's links with Africa are profound. We spend almost £5 billion a year supporting Africa's stability and prosperity. My Rt. Hon Friend the Foreign Secretary (Mr Johnson) last week visited The Gambia which recently saw its first democratic transfer of power, and in May my Rt. Hon Friend the Prime Minister (Mrs May) will host a major conference to agree a new international partnership for Somalia, demonstrating UK leadership and commitment to democracy and stability in Africa.

■ China: Human Rights

Marion Fellows: [\[908826\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to his Chinese counterpart on the treatment of human rights activists in that country.

Alok Sharma:

We regularly raise human rights in interactions with Chinese counterparts. During my visit to China last week I raised the case of the '709' lawyers with Assistant Foreign Minister Liu. We held the China-UK human rights dialogue last October and will be holding another such discussion in April this year.

■ Gambia: Politics and Government

John Cryer: [\[908816\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the political and security situation in the Gambia.

Boris Johnson:

Last week I made the first visit by a British Foreign Secretary to The Gambia. I congratulated President Barrow on winning free and fair elections and on the peaceful transition. After 22 years of brutal, oppressive rule, The Gambia faces many serious economic and institutional problems. The UK is ready to help the political transition, championing The Gambia as a new international partner and friend in West Africa.

■ Israel: Palestinians

Mrs Flick Drummond: [\[908821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of progress towards a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine.

Boris Johnson:

We continue to believe the two-state solution is the only viable long-term solution to the Arab Israeli conflict. We are concerned that ongoing settlement construction, incitement and terrorist attacks are undermining prospects for peace. We will work with the parties and our international partners to arrest these trends and encourage a return to negotiations.

■ Republic of Congo: Politics and Government

Jessica Morden: [\[908827\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the political situation in the Republic of Congo.

Mr Tobias Ellwood:

Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo, has been relatively calm since the political protests of April 2016. I visited the Republic of Congo in August 2016. In my

meeting with President Sassou I emphasised that the Presidential elections had been a missed opportunity to conduct a democratic transition of power and set an example to the region.

■ Syria: Military Intervention

Ms Margaret Ritchie: [\[908817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what estimate he has made of the number of civilian casualties in Syria as a result of UK air strikes.

Boris Johnson:

To date there have been no known cases of civilian casualties resulting from UK strikes in Syria. All strikes take place in accordance with UK Rules of Engagement.

HEALTH

■ Blood: Contamination

Diana Johnson: [\[63914\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will make it his policy to disallow the current infected blood scheme administrators from bidding in the tender to be the new Infected Blood Scheme Administrator.

Nicola Blackwood:

No procurement exercise for a new Infected Blood Scheme Administrator has been launched.

■ Organs: Donors

Rehman Chishti: [\[63912\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what plans his Department has to increase the number of people registered as organ donors in the UK.

Nicola Blackwood:

A seven year United Kingdom-wide organ donation and transplantation strategy was jointly published by the four UK health ministers and NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) in July 2013. The strategy aims to increase consent rates, encourage people to be proud to donate and to make the UK system comparable with the best of the world. 2015/16 saw the highest ever deceased donor rate in the UK with 1,364 deceased donors resulting in 3,529 transplants. A further 3,779 patients had their sight restored through a cornea transplant and there were 1,075 living donors, most donating a kidney.

NHSBT run regular awareness raising campaigns and introduced a new Organ Donation Register (ODR) system making it easier for people to record their wishes about donation. NHSBT works collaboratively with a number of partners in the private, public and third sectors to promote organ donation. People can add their

name to the ODR via Government owned channels such as applying for a driving licence and paying car tax online.

On 1 December 2015, Wales introduced deemed consent (opt-out) for organ and tissue donation. We will monitor closely how these changes in legislation in Wales affect donation rates.

HOME OFFICE

■ Action Fraud: Staff

Lyn Brown: [\[63934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many call-handling staff are employed by Action Fraud.

Mr Ben Wallace:

As of January 2017, there were approximately 75 Full Time Employee call handling staff.

■ Asylum

Mrs Anne Main: [\[63970\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that its initial decisions on granting asylum are made accurately and fairly.

Mr Robert Goodwill:

All asylum claims lodged in the UK are carefully considered on their individual merits against a background of relevant case law and up to date country information. We ensure that claimants are given every opportunity to disclose information relevant to their claim before a decision is taken, even where that information may be sensitive or difficult to disclose

We continually work to improve the quality of decision-making to ensure that we properly consider all the evidence provided and get decisions right the first time. UK Visas and Immigration has an internal audit process, consisting of reviews by senior case workers and independent auditors, which assesses whether Home Office policy has been followed.

■ Furs: Imports

Mrs Anne Main: [\[63964\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what audits her Department conducts on imported fur originating from (a) China, (b) Denmark, (c) the US and (d) other countries.

Mr Robert Goodwill:

Border Force is responsible for enforcing controls at the border on imports of fur products protected by the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species

(CITES), Council Regulation (EEC) No 3254/91 and Council Regulation (EC) No 1523/2007 which prohibit the import of fur and fur products from certain animals.

A National Co-operation Agreement between Border Force and DEFRA (who has lead policy responsibility for controls on furs and fur skin products) provides a clear framework of co-operation to ensure the effective enforcement of legislation governing the import of plants, animals and products of plant and animal origin at the border.

■ Migrant Workers: Scotland

Stuart C. McDonald:

[63159]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many (a) certificates of sponsorship and (b) extensions of stay were issued for people working for Scottish employers for Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 5 visas, by industry, in each year from 2011 to 2015.

Mr Robert Goodwill:

Published information/data relating to the issuance of Certificates of Sponsorship can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-july-to-september-2016-data-tables>

■ Refugees: Children

Caroline Lucas:

[63693]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (a) how many and (b) which local authorities offered no spaces for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children under the Dubs amendment.

Mr Robert Goodwill:

On 8 September, I wrote to all local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland asking them to confirm how many places they could offer to accommodate unaccompanied asylum seeking children. This is a voluntary scheme whereby local authorities sign up to accept unaccompanied asylum seeking children. We ask local authorities to consider carefully whether they have the infrastructure and support networks needed to ensure the appropriate care of these unaccompanied children before participating in the National Transfer Scheme.

Local authorities reported they have capacity for an additional 400 unaccompanied asylum seeking children. This is in addition to the unaccompanied children already in local authority care. We estimate that at least 50 of the family reunion cases will require a local authority placement in circumstances where the reunion does not work out.

We estimate that at least 50 of the family reunion cases transferred from France as part of the Calais clearance will require a local authority placement in cases where the family reunion does not work out. We estimate that at least 50 of the family reunion cases transferred from France as part of the Calais clearance will require a local authority placement in cases where the family reunion does not work out.

Every region in England is participating in the National Transfer Scheme and we are working very closely with local authorities in Scotland and Wales who have also responded positively.

It is for individual local authorities to decide the number of children they are able to accommodate but we continue to work with those not currently participating in the National Transfer Scheme to support them to do so at the earliest opportunity.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Exports

Tom Brake:

[\[63832\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what the value is of total exports from each UK region to (a) the EU, (b) the US and (c) China.

Greg Hands:

Figures on the value of UK exports of goods from each UK region to the EU, the US and China for 2015 are given in Table 1 below. Data on regional exports of services by partner country are not available.

Table 1: UK exports of goods to the EU, USA and China, by UK region, in 2015 (£million)

REGION	GOODS EXPORTS TO THE EU, £MILLION	GOODS EXPORTS TO THE USA, £MILLION	GOODS EXPORTS TO CHINA, £MILLION
East	11,504	3,032	637
East Midlands	8,699	2,816	796
London	12,603	5,245	903
North East	7,006	1,237	454
North West	11,654	3,792	1,378
South East	19,070	7,938	1,501
South West	9,722	1,560	318
West Midlands	12,036	5,417	3,690
Yorkshire and the Humber	7,792	3,720	411
Northern Ireland	3,476	1,116	91
Scotland	6,746	2,620	480
Wales	5,023	2,798	224

REGION	GOODS EXPORTS TO THE EU, £MILLION	GOODS EXPORTS TO THE USA, £MILLION	GOODS EXPORTS TO CHINA, £MILLION
Unknown	18,113	3,968	508
Total UK	133,444	45,259	11,391

Source: HMRC Regional Trade Statistics database,

<https://www.uktradeinfo.com/Statistics/BuildYourOwnTables/Pages/Home.aspx>

Note: HMRC figures are on a customs ('physical movement') basis: goods are recorded as UK exports if they physically leave the economic territory of the UK. These figures are slightly different than the ONS data which are based on the 'change of ownership' (Balance of Payments) principle: goods leaving the economic territory of the UK are recorded as exports only if they change ownership between UK residents and non-residents.

JUSTICE

■ Prisoners on Remand: Police Custody

Richard Burgon: [\[63714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many remand prisoners have been held in police stations until a prison place became available rather than returned to prison following a court appearance in the last 12 months.

Mr Sam Gyimah:

Prisoners are only held in police custody following a court appearance in exceptional circumstances. For example, when a court is sitting late and there is not enough time to return to their establishment. This practice has been in place since 2004.

In order to establish how many are held on remand we would need to contact Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) contractors to review all prisoner records for those locked out to establish which ones were on remand as this is not held centrally and this could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

■ UN Human Rights Council

Ann Clwyd: [\[63905\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, who will lead the UK delegation at the UN Human Rights Council for the UK's Universal Periodic Review on 4 May 2017.

Sir Oliver Heald:

I shall lead the UK delegation myself.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

■ Polling Stations: Internet

Cat Smith:

[\[64335\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, with reference to the Electoral Commission's Electoral Administration Bulletin Issue 173, published in December 2016, for what reasons the Commission does not provide an online polling station finder service directly; and if the Commission will publish the minutes of meetings held which resulted in the decision not to collate that information internally.

Bridget Phillipson:

The Electoral Commission continually monitors technological developments in order to provide the best possible service to voters. When the Commission started to explore the possibility of providing polling station locations on its website, Democracy Club had already done a lot of work in this area and had already amassed significant expertise on how best to collate and provide this data. The Commission took the view that it would represent better value for money for the taxpayer to work with and further support Democracy Club rather than restart the work they had already commenced.

Items that are discussed at the Commission Board are formally minuted and these are placed on the Commission's website. The decision to work with Democracy Club was not made at Board level, but by a member of the Commission's executive team as a matter of ongoing business. The decision was not minuted.

The Commission continues to work with Democracy Club ahead of the polls in May 2017. It is taking an active role in encouraging local authorities to provide their data to Democracy Club so that as many voters as possible can benefit from the service.

Cat Smith:

[\[64336\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, with reference to the Electoral Commission's Electoral Administration Bulletin Issue 173, published in December 2016, what discussions the Commission has had with the Minister for the Cabinet Office on providing Democracy Club's online polling station information to political parties in a usable format.

Bridget Phillipson:

The Electoral Commission has had no discussions with the Minister on the issue of providing online polling station information to political parties. The Commission has briefed the Minister for the Constitution about its partnership with Democracy Club; the Minister is supportive of the initiative, as noted in his recent speech to the conference of the Association of Electoral Administrators on 6 February 2017.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Gambling: Licensing

Jim Shannon:

[\[63925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many times payment providers (a) were asked by the Gambling Commission to block payments to online gambling websites not licenced in the UK and (b) blocked such payments between the Gambling (Licensing and Advertising) Act 2014 coming into force and 31 December 2016.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 20 February 2017. The correct answer should have been:

Tracey Crouch:

Between 1 November 2014 and 31 December 2016, there have been ~~approximately~~ 13 occasions where the Gambling Commission has asked payment providers to prevent payments to online gambling website operators not licensed in the Great Britain but believed to be transacting with consumers in Great Britain.

On 12 of those occasions the payment provider either terminated their relationship with the unlicensed operator or took steps to ensure that the unlicensed gambling website was no longer available to consumers in Great Britain. In the other case, enforcement activity is currently ongoing.

HOME OFFICE

■ Slavery

Charlotte Leslie:

[\[62209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of proposals by the Anti-Slavery Commissioners to establish a central repository for modern slavery statements; and if she will make a statement.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 2 February 2017. The correct answer should have been:

Sarah Newton:

We have not received a proposal from the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner regarding the establishment of a central repository for modern slavery statements. We have not endorsed a particular repository for such statements. So far, two repository websites have been set up to collect the 'slavery and human trafficking statements' published by businesses in one place. ~~These are being run by Unseen and the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre.~~ **These are being run by Semantrica and the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre.**

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

TREASURY

■ ECOFIN: 21 February 2017

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):

[\[HCWS484\]](#)

A meeting of The Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) will be held in Brussels on 21 February 2017. EU Finance Ministers are due to discuss the following items:

Early morning session

Ministers will be briefed on the outcomes of the 20 February meeting of the Eurogroup, and the European Commission will present an update on the current economic situation following the publication of the Commission's Winter Forecasts on 13 February. Ministers are also expected to discuss points of clarification in relation to the intergovernmental agreement on the Single Resolution Fund.

Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive

Ministers will be invited to reach a general approach to the second Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive (ATAD2).

Current financial service legislative proposals

The Council Presidency will provide an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

Criteria and process leading to the establishment of the EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes

Council will take stock of further work that has taken place following the Council conclusions agreed at ECOFIN on 8 November 2016.

Preparation of the G20 Meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors on 17-18 March 2017 in Baden-Baden

Ministers will be asked to mandate the Economic and Finance Committee (EFC) to finalise the EU Terms of Reference for the next meeting G20 of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors.

Discharge to be given to the Commission in respect of the implementation of the budget for 2015

On the basis of a report from the European Court of Auditors, Ministers will be asked to approve a recommendation - to be forwarded to the European Parliament.

Budget guidelines for 2018

Ministers will be asked to adopt Council conclusions on the guidelines for the 2018 budget, which will serve as a point of reference in the forthcoming budgetary cycle.

European Defence Fund

The Commission will provide information on its European Defence Action Plan, focusing in particular on the proposed launch of a European Defence Fund.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Local Government Finance

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):

[\[HCWS482\]](#)

Local Government Finance

I have today laid before the House, the 'Report on Local Government Finance (England) 2017–18', which represents the annual local government finance settlement for local authorities in England.

I would like to thank all colleagues in the House, and council leaders and officials, who contributed to the consultation after the provisional settlement was published before Christmas. Representations from nearly 200 organisations or individuals have been carefully considered before finalising the settlement.

In 2010 we inherited the largest deficit in our peacetime history. As we continue to bring that down, local government, which still accounts for nearly a quarter of public spending despite the savings delivered since 2010, must continue to play its part.

At the same time, local residents rightly continue to expect excellent public services. I commend all councils for how they are getting on with the job. Public satisfaction with local services has been maintained, and councils are engaged in substantial efforts to modernise, transform local services, and reduce waste so that frontline services can be protected.

The 2017-18 local government finance settlement supports councils to continue in that regard, and progresses funding reforms to make councils more self-sufficient.

We remain committed to increasing funding certainty for local government. In total, local government spends more than £120 billion a year and the 2015 Spending Review and 2016-17 settlement delivered a flat-cash settlement for local government, providing four year funding allocations for the first time. The settlement being published today is the second year of the four year offer which was accepted by 97% of councils. To enshrine this commitment to stability in law the Local Government Finance Bill establishes a legal framework for multi-year settlements.

Councils are able to use this increased funding certainty to continue reforming the way they work and become more efficient, both in back-office functions and front line service delivery. Building on the £508 million savings already delivered from shared service arrangements, councils are using improved digital technology, new delivery models and innovative partnerships to deliver savings across local government.

We listened to the unanimous view that we must prioritise spending on adult social care services that councils provide to our elderly and vulnerable citizens. The Spending Review put in place up to £3.5 billion of additional funding for adult social care by 2019-20. Recognising the immediate challenges in the care market facing many councils next year, this settlement repurposes £240 million of money which was previously directed to local authorities via the New Homes Bonus to create a new adult social care support grant next year. It also grants councils extra flexibility to raise the adult social care precept by up to 3% next year and the year after.

These measures make available almost £900 million of additional funding for adult social care over the next two years, bringing the total dedicated funding available for adult social care to £7.6 billion over the four year settlement period.

But more money is not the only answer. We will bring forward reforms to provide a sustainable market that works for everyone who needs social care. And I welcome the consensus across both sides of the House that every area should move towards the integration of health and social care services by 2020, so that it feels like one service.

Council Tax Referendum Principles

We are committed to keeping council tax down, and will maintain referendum principles to protect hard-working tax-payers from rising bills. Council tax in England has fallen by 9% in real terms from the levels left behind by Labour in 2010, and is expected to be lower in real terms in 2019-20 than it was in 2010-11.

This year, in addition to the further flexibility on the Adult Social Care Precept, we are proposing a core council tax principle of 2% for principal authorities, or £5 – whichever is greater – for all shire district councils, and for Police and Crime Commissioners in the lowest quartile.

100% Business Rates Retention

To reduce local government's dependence on central government for funding – long campaigned for by councils – we have announced that by the end of this Parliament, local government will keep 100% of the income raised locally through business rates. Councils will take on new responsibilities to be funded from this additional income – estimated to be around £12.5 billion – as central government grants are phased out. And to ensure councils with less business rates do not lose out, there will continue to be redistributions between authorities.

The Local Government Finance Bill, currently before Parliament, provides the legislative framework for these reforms. This will allow us to continue to work closely with interested parties over the coming months on the more detailed aspects of reforms.

A consultation has already been conducted. The Government response to that announced that, in the reformed system, Revenue Support Grant, Rural Services Delivery Grant, the Public Health Grant and the Greater London Authority Transport Grant will be funded through retained business rates (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/self-sufficient-local-government-100-business-rates-retention>). Taken together these account for around half of the additional

retained business rates that we estimate will be available to councils. We will continue to engage with local government on the remaining responsibilities to be devolved as part of these reforms but it has already been confirmed that the devolution of Attendance Allowance funding is no longer being considered as part of the Business Rates Retention reforms.

A further consultation has been published seeking views on many of the important aspects of the new system (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/100-business-rates-retention-further-consultation-on-the-design-of-the-reformed-system>) – for example, how growth in business rates can best be rewarded, and how the system can help authorities to manage and share risk. Responses to that consultation are invited by 3 May.

Pilots of these reforms will take place from April 2017 in Liverpool, Greater Manchester, West Midlands, West of England, Cornwall and Greater London. We have also confirmed that we are interested in building on the existing pilot scheme and will be inviting all councils to apply to participate in piloting aspects of 100% Business Rates Retention from April 2018. We will be publishing more information about this process shortly.

Conclusion

Reforms to Local Government Finance, based around 100% business rates retention offer a bold and innovative response to the twin challenges of promoting economic growth and securing more self-sufficient and sustainable local government. They will help determine the role, purpose and means of delivery for local government in the years ahead. The 2017-18 Local Government Finance Settlement provides the financial stability authorities need as they transition towards the reformed system in 2019-20; these longer-term reforms will ensure the councils people rely on for their local services are both sustainable, and more self-sufficient.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ January Agriculture and Fisheries Council

The Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):

[\[HCWS483\]](#)

I represented the United Kingdom at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 23 January in Brussels.

Council opened with a presentation by the Maltese Presidency on their work programme for the next six months.

This was followed by an update from Commissioner Hogan on the progress of EU trade talks, including a discussion of the findings of the Commission's report on the cumulative economic impact of future trade agreements on EU agriculture. The UK intervened to point out the benefits of an ambitious approach to future EU free trade agreements.

The Council then discussed the dairy market situation and the recent report on the EU Milk Package, along with ongoing outbreaks of Avian Influenza. Member States including

the UK welcomed the fragile recovery of the dairy market. Commissioner Hogan stressed that the release of supplies of skimmed milk powder held in public intervention would be handled carefully to avoid any negative impact on the market. On Avian Influenza, the UK joined with several other Member States to raise concerns about the impact of necessary disease control measures on free-range egg producers. Commissioner Hogan agreed that the Commission would examine policy options and report back quickly.

A number of other items were discussed under 'any other business':

- The Slovakian delegation provided information on the conclusions of the 40th Conference of Directors of Paying Agencies;
- The Commission responded to a request for information regarding the scope of the Commission's powers to adopt delegated acts for exceptions from the rules on protected designations of origin for wines.

Until exit negotiations are concluded, the UK remains a full member of the European Union and all the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force. The outcome of these negotiations will determine what arrangements apply in relation to EU legislation in future once the UK has left the EU.