



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 25 March 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:51 P.M., 25 March 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Horizon IT System: Compensation

Rebecca Long Bailey:

[\[19079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will publish the evidential basis on which the value of the fixed sum award for the Horizon Shortfall Scheme claimants was set at £75,000.

Rebecca Long Bailey:

[\[19080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will publish the evidential basis on which the value of the fixed and final offer for Horizon Convictions Redress Scheme claimants was set at £600,000.

Kevin Hollinrake:

The Government is regularly publishing data on the redress paid out across the Horizon work-streams. The fixed sum awards for the Group Litigation Order (GLO) scheme and for overturned convictions have been set at a level that is likely to be generous for a significant proportion of claims, allowing them to be resolved promptly. However, it will not suit everyone and anyone who wishes to pursue the full claims process is able to do so.

The Horizon Shortfall Scheme fixed sum is set at the same level as the GLO to ensure consistency between the two schemes.

■ INEOS: Belgium

Kenny MacAskil:

[\[19719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 13 March 2024 to Question 17476 on INEOS: Belgium, what exports that funding will support.

Greg Hands:

UK Export Finance (UKEF) does not provide direct funding. It issued a guarantee to commercial lenders to help secure new export opportunities for the UK.

UKEF's support is conditional on the inclusion of UK goods and services in the project and therefore secures export opportunities that might not otherwise have happened, both from businesses directly contracted by INEOS, and others in their supply chains.

■ Living Wage

Dame Siobhain McDonagh:

[\[18959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether she (a) is taking and (b) plans to take steps to encourage businesses to pay the real living wage.

Kevin Hollinrake:

The National Living Wage (NLW) will increase to £11.44 on 1 April and be extended to workers over 21. It is reaching two-thirds of median earnings, meeting our commitment to end low hourly pay for those eligible.

The Government commends employers who are able to go beyond the legal minimum. However, the ability to do so varies across sector and region.

Unlike other voluntary rates of pay, the statutory NLW is based on the advice of the Low Pay Commission, which takes into account the impact on business and the wider economy, as well as the living standards of workers.

■ Post Offices: Closures

Naz Shah: [\[18890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to prevent the closure of local post offices.

Kevin Hollinrake:

Government is committed to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Post Office network and has provided over £2.5 billion in funding to support the Post Office network over the past decade and is providing a further £628 million for the Post Office between 2022 and 2025.

The Post Office network is not in decline. As CEO Nick Read confirmed recently, the network is as large as it has been for about five years with around 11,700 branches. Government continues to monitor Post Office's network numbers and performance, and Post Office publishes an annual network report.

CABINET OFFICE**■ Unpaid Work: Equality and Social Mobility**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[18768\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he has made a recent assessment of the potential impact of unpaid internships on (a) social mobility and (b) equality of opportunity.

John Glen:

The Cabinet Office is only responsible for the Civil Service Summer Internship Programmes and the Autism Exchange Internship Programme. It does not oversee any unpaid internships. Both programmes pay the National Living Wage. Internships provide a fantastic opportunity for individuals at the beginning of their career to gain valuable experience in their field regardless of background. Last year, we offered over 500 internships to undergraduates through our Fast Stream Summer Internship Programme and 21.5% of these were to students from Lower Socio-Economic backgrounds.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT■ **Arts****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[18927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking with creative industry leaders to help ensure (a) growth and (b) sustainability in that sector.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[18928\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will take steps to publish a strategy for the arts and creative industries.

Julia Lopez:

The UK Government has a clear plan to grow the creative industries by a further £50 billion and support another 1 million jobs by 2030. As set out in the Creative Industries Sector Vision, we are committed to working with industry and the devolved administrations to ensure our creative industries continue to be the best in the world. The Sector Vision sets out our 2030 goals and objectives for supporting the creative industries.

As part of the Growth goal, we outline how we are supporting creative businesses to grow and scale-up through investment, innovation and export support - including through programmes like the Create Growth Programme and the Creative Clusters.

As part of the Maximising Impact goal, we set out an objective specifically for the environment: 'Creative industries play a growing role in tackling environmental challenges, helping the UK reach the targets set out in the Powering Up Britain plan'. As part of this, the Creative Industries Council, which represents industry and worked with government to develop the Sector Vision, have published their Creative Climate Charter, which sets out key environmental principles for creative companies to aspire to. We will continue to work with industry and across government to address this objective.

■ **Arts: Competition****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[18764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department has a long-term strategy to support the (a) expansion and (b) global competitiveness of creative industries.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[18766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to help (a) support and (b) increase (i) creative and (ii) cultural exports.

Julia Lopez:

In June 2023, the Government and the Creative Industries Council launched the Creative Industries Sector Vision, which sets out our long term strategy for supporting

and growing the creative industries. The Sector Vision can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-sector-vision>

The Government is delivering on its plan to grow the creative industries by a further £50 billion and add another 1 million jobs by 2030.

Since 2010, the Government has introduced a range of tax reliefs across the creative industries, from film and television, to animation, video games, orchestras, theatres and more. The Chancellor announced further support at the Spring Budget, with £1 billion of additional tax relief over the next five years. This has led to significant growth in the creative industries over the last 14 years, helping to double the economic value of the creative industries and create more than one million new jobs since 2010.

Our tax reliefs are driving inward investment, helping unleash job creation and economic growth across the country. The Government's generous screen sector tax reliefs have driven a record breaking spend of £6.3 billion on film and high-end TV production in 2022, of which £5.4 billion - 86% - was inward investment.

Our tax reliefs have also helped drive an increase in cultural and creative service exports. DCMS works with other departments including FCDO and DBT, industry bodies and trade associations to promote the creative industries overseas, from delivering creative trade missions to HMG-backed funding schemes. Examples include the £28 million UK Global Screen Fund, delivered by the British Film Institute, which provides grants to develop, distribute and promote independent UK and UK co-produced screen content in international markets and the Music Export Growth Scheme, which provides grant funding to support UK-based independent music SMEs to develop export campaigns to grow their international business and export revenue. My department is also committed to ensuring that the interests of the creative industries are pursued in the UK's ambitious programme of Free Trade Agreements, including on audiovisual services, intellectual property rights and supporting the movement of creative professionals.

■ ByteDance

Liam Byrne:

[19002]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether Bytedance would be required to divest ownership of TikTok under the terms of the provision on Foreign power acquisition of news media organisations added by the Government to the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill.

Julia Lopez:

The new terms introduced in our amendments to the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill (DMCC) are based on the Enterprise Act 2002, and will therefore only apply to newspapers and news magazines given the unique role these publications play in contributing to the health of our democracy by providing accurate news and information, helping to shape opinions and contributing to political debate.

These changes would not cover online news providers or online intermediaries, including social media platforms such as TikTok.

■ Musicians: Immigration Controls

Barbara Keeley: [19583]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what information her Department holds on the number of (a) musicians and (b) music groups that were scheduled to play in the UK that were refused entry due to immigration rules in the last 12 months.

Barbara Keeley: [19584]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, on what dates her Department's working group on creative and cultural touring has met since June 2022; and how many times a Minister has attended those meetings.

Julia Lopez:

Border Force does not hold the data requested.

The UK's rules for touring creative professionals are comparatively more generous than in many EU Member States. The UK's domestic rules allow musicians, entertainers and artists from non-visa national countries, such as EU Member States and the US, to perform in the UK without requiring a visa, and the UK does not have work permits.

The Government is committed to supporting the UK's creative industries, including musicians, to adapt to new arrangements with the EU.

Sector specific guidance on creative professionals from non-visa national countries, including the EU and the US, visiting the UK for performance and work has been published by DCMS on GOV.UK can be found in the '[Visiting the UK as a creative professional from a non-visa national country guidance](#)' on GOV.UK.

DCMS has worked across government and in collaboration with the music and wider creative industries to support working and touring with confidence in the EU. Ongoing industry engagement continues at ministerial and official level. This includes several recent events with the sector focused on touring and export support, hosted in partnership with the Department for Business and Trade. These events help to provide tailored guidance to stakeholders within the music sector, alongside an opportunity for the sector to discuss with Ministers and officials touring challenges and opportunities.

DEFENCE

■ Armed Forces

Sarah Jones:[\[18550\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 30 January 2024 to Question 10758 on Armed Forces, if he will name the regiments in the (a) Army and (b) Royal Marines which have been (i) disbanded and (ii) merged since 2010.

James Heappey:

Further to the table provided to you in my letter of 7 February, the British Army regiments which have been disbanded since 2010 have been listed below.

As noted in that letter, this information represents single Service estimates based on management information which is not gathered for statistical purposes or subject to the same level of scrutiny as official statistics produced by Defence Statistics. I have attached an updated table to reflect minor discrepancies in the original which were observed during further analysis.

Within the Royal Armoured Corps, the 1st and 2nd Royal Tank Regiments were merged to become The Royal Tank Regiment in 2014. The Queen's Royal Lancers merged with the 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's) to become the Royal Lancers in 2015. For the Reserves, the Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry was placed in suspended animation in 2014. The Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry was created in the same year.

Within the Army Air Corps, 9th Regiment Army Air Corps was disbanded as a front-line regiment in 2016 and re-established as a flying regiment in 2018.

Within the Royal Artillery, 40th Regiment Royal Artillery was placed into suspended animation in 2012 as was 39th Regiment in 2015. For the Reserves, 100 (Yeomanry) Regiment Royal Artillery was placed in suspended animation in 2014.

The table below has been updated for the Royal Engineers. Within this Corps, 25 Engineer Regiment was disbanded in 2012 as was 38 Engineer Regiment in 2013. 28 Engineer Regiment was disbanded in 2014 but re-established in 2018. For the Reserves, both 72 and 73 Engineer Regiments disbanded in 2014. There were also two hybridised regiments; 101 Engineer Regiment and 33 Engineer Regiment. 101 Engineer Regiment became a Reserve regiment in 2018 and 33 Engineer Regiment became Regular regiment.

Within the Royal Signals, 7 Signal Regiment disbanded in 2012. 15 Signal Regiment was re-formed in 2015 and 13 Signal Regiment in 2020. For the Reserves, 38 Signal Regiment disbanded in 2015.

The table below has been updated for the Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers (REME). Within this Regiment, 5 Battalion REME was formed in 2013. In 2015, 10 Battalion REME and 11 Battalion REME merged to become 8 Battalion REME. For the Reserves, 104 Battalion REME was disbanded in 2013. This was then re-established in 2015 along with 105 and 106 Battalions. However, in 2018, 104

Battalion merged with 103, 105 Battalion merged with 101, and 106 Battalion merged with 102.

The table below has been updated for the Royal Logistic Corps (RLC). Within this Corps, 8 Regiment RLC was disbanded in 2012. 12 Logistic Support Regiment was disbanded in 2013. 2 Logistic Support Regiment, 23 and 24 Regiment RLC were disbanded in 2014. 5 Training Regiment RLC disbanded in 2016 and 3 Regiment RLC in 2023. For the Reserves, 88 Postal and Courier Regiment, 155 and 160 Transport Regiments, 166 Supply Regiment and 168 Pioneer Regiment were disbanded in 2014.

Within the Royal Army Medical Corps, 2 Medical Regiment and 33 Field Hospital were disbanded in 2018. 3 Medical Regiment disbanded in 2022 when a number of re-designations took place. For the Reserves, in 2023, 225 (Scottish) Medical Regiment merged with 205 (Scottish) Field Hospital, 253 (Northern Ireland) Medical Regiment merged with 204 (Northern Ireland) Field Hospital, 201 Field Hospital merged with 212 Field Hospital and 207 Field Hospital merged with 208 Field Hospital.

Within the Royal Military Police, 4 and 5 Regiments Royal Military Police disbanded in 2020 and the Special Operations Regiment was formed. The Special Investigations Branch Regiment was subsumed into the Defence Serious Crimes Unit[1] on its formation in 2023.

No Regiments within the Army's Infantry, Intelligence Corps or Veterinary Corps have been disbanded or merged since 2010.

The Royal Marines is organised into Commando Units rather than Regiments and none have been disbanded since 2010.

British Army Regiments (2010-2023)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Regular	126	126	122	121	117	115	113	113	114	114	114	115	115	113
Total Reserve	73	73	73	72	67	69	69	69	67	67	67	67	67	63
Combat Forces														
Infantry														
Regular Regiments	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	18	18	18
Reserve Regiments	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Royal Armoured Corps														

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Intelligence Corps														
Regular Army Regiments	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Army Reserves Regiments	2	2	2	2	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Royal Army Veterinary Corps														
Regular Army Regiments	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Army Reserve Regiments	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Combat Service Support														
Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers[3][4]														
Regular Army Battalions	8	8	8	9	9	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	9
Army Reserves Battalions	4	4	4	3	3	6	6	6	3	3	3	3	3	3
Royal Logistic Corps[5]														
Regular Army Regiments	19	19	18	17	14	14	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	12
Army Reserves Regiments	17	17	17	17	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Royal Army Medical Corps														
Regular Army Regiments	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	9	9	9	9	8	8

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Army Reserves Regiments	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	12
Royal Military Police														
Regular Army Regiments	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	3
Army Reserves Regiments	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1] The Defence Serious Crimes Unit does not belong to the Army, it is part of the Defence Serious Crime Command (DSCC) within the Ministry of Defence.

[2] RE data for years 2010-2011 and 2014-2017 for Regulars, 2014-2018 for Reserves and additional hybrid regiments has changed since the original answer of 7 Feb.

[3] The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) are organised at unit level into Battalions, rather than Regiments. This represents a distinction in naming convention rather than difference in workforce requirement or operational outputs.

[4] REME data for years 2013, 2015 and 2018 for the Reserves has changed since the original answer of 7 Feb.

[5] RLC data for years 2012-2015 for the Regulars has changed since the original answer of 7 Feb.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[18933]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of trends in the level of his Department's budget on the operational capability of the armed forces.

James Heappey:

Since 2020 UK defence spending has seen several substantial increases, starting with a £20 billion cash increase in SR20, additional funding for munitions and wider resilience, as well as an additional £11 billion as part of the 2023 Spring Statement

Over the next decade we have increased the budget for our Equipment Plan to £288.6 billion to ensure that the Armed Forces have the next generation equipment they need to defend Britain and maintain a strategic advantage.

During this time we have continued to meet all operational commitments, including participating in every single NATO mission, as well as supporting the Granting in Kind of equipment, and training to Ukraine.

We recognise the world is more uncertain and volatile than it has been for several years, and we have set out our longer-term aspiration to invest 2.5% of GDP on defence when the fiscal and economic circumstances allow.

Stephen Crabb:

[\[902184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to recruit armed forces personnel.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

In a challenging labour market, we continue to apply an array of measures to support recruitment and retention and refine the Armed Forces' offer including last year with the largest pay increase for more than two decades. Haythornthwaite Review teams have been stood up across Defence to implement all of Rick Haythornthwaite's 67 recommendations, working to establish a reward and incentivisation architecture that will attract and retain the skills we need in the years ahead.

■ Armed Forces and Veterans

Andrew Selous:

[\[902185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to ensure parity of support provided to (a) armed forces families and (b) veterans.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Much of the policy that impacts Service families and veterans within the UK is not owned by Defence. We work with Other Government Departments and the Devolved Administrations to ensure that, wherever possible, disadvantage associated with Service life is mitigated and effective support is provided; the Armed Forces Covenant is an especially important tool in this.

■ Armed Forces: Applications

John Healey:

[\[19531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many applications to join the (a) British Army, (b) Royal Navy and (c) Royal Air Force have been voluntarily withdrawn within (i) three, (ii) six, (iii) 12 and (iv) 18 months of the initial application being made in the last five years.

John Healey:

[\[19532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many and what proportion of applications to join the (a) British Army, (b) Royal Navy and (c) Royal Air Force took more than (i) three, (ii) six, (iii) 12 and (iv) 18 months to process before a potential recruit began basic training over the last five years.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

It is taking time to collate the required information to answer the right hon. Member's Questions. I will write to him when the information is available, and a copy of this letter will be placed in the Library of The House.

■ Armed Forces: Asbestos

John Healey:

[19534]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what data his Department holds on the number of personnel who (a) were exposed to asbestos and (b) sought medical assistance as a result of asbestos exposure in the last 12 months.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Information regarding personnel exposed to asbestos is not held centrally and the number of personnel who were exposed to asbestos in the last 12 months could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Between 1 February 2023 and 31 January 2024, 127 UK Armed Forces personnel had at least one read code related to asbestos exposure entered into their electronic medical record. Of these personnel:

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the report entitled Investigation into the alleged exposure of UK Defence Personnel to asbestos during overseas exercises and training since 2018, published on 18 August 2022, how many Armed Forces personnel have been exposed to asbestos during overseas exercises in each year since 2018.

- 114 had at least one read code for history of asbestos exposure.
- 17 had at least one read code for Control of Substances Hazardous to Health: asbestos.
- Fewer than five had at least one read code for asbestosis.

The figures provided by read code do not sum to the total, as some personnel have more than one of the above read codes recorded.

The presence of a read code within the last year does not indicate that the medical appointment was directly related to asbestos exposure. It also does not indicate that the asbestos exposure occurred during the last year, or that exposure occurred whilst in Service.

■ Armed Forces: Housing

Maria Eagle:

[18057]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many complaints his Department has received from service personnel and their dependents on service accommodation issues each year since 2019.

James Cartlidge:

The MOD currently provides circa 47,800 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties across 500 locations in the UK.

The table below shows the number of reported complaints relating to both Single Living Accommodation (SLA) and SFA:

NUMBER OF REPORTED COMPLAINTS

Year	SLA	SLA - Private Finance Initiative (PFI)	SFA
2024 (up to 29 Feb)	30	4	1,577
2023	115	45	9,222
2022	157 (Data prior to April 66 is not held)		10,261 (Data prior to April is not held)
2021	Data not held	36	Data not held
2020	Data not held	68	Data not held
2019	Data not held	76	Data not held

Complaint data relating to the Future Defence Infrastructure Services (FDIS) Built Estate Contracts and Accommodation Contracts is only available from the 1 April 2022 contract start. Data prior to this date is not held.

SFA complaint data includes multiple or repeat complaints for the same SFA property.

■ **Armed Forces: Mental Health Services**

Maria Eagle: [\[18999\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many phone calls were made to the 24 hour Military Mental Health Helpline in each year since 2019.

Maria Eagle: [\[19000\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the annual budget for the Military Mental Health Helpline was in each financial year since 2019-20.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The requested information is provided in the following tables:

Number of phone calls made to the Military Mental Health Helpline in each year since 2019

YEAR	TOTAL PHONE CALLS
2024 (Jan – Feb)	182
2023	1,220
2022	1,153
2021	888

YEAR	TOTAL PHONE CALLS
2020	240
2019	453

Annual budget for the Military Mental Health Helpline in each Financial Year (FY) since 2019-20

YEAR (FY)	ANNUAL BUDGET*
2023-24	£137,666
2022-23	£56,621.16
2021-22	£30,600
2020-21	£30,600
2019-20	£30,600

* Exclusive of VAT

■ **Armed Forces: Vehicles**

Maria Eagle: [\[18381\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department has spent on vehicle support in each financial year since 2019-20.

James Cartlidge:

The Vehicle Support (VS) delivery team total equipment and support spend by financial year is as follows:

FY	VS TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2019-20	£357.218
2020-21	£326.028
2021-22	£367.746
2022-23	£404.137

The VS total spend on operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	VS TOTAL SPEND ON OPERATING COSTS £MILLION
2019-20	£22.879
2020-21	£25.568
2021-22	£23.903
2022-23	£29.060

VS is a specific delivery team in DE&S and the figures above represent the total spend of that team. The figures do not represent the total spend on all vehicle support across Defence which would not be held centrally and would not be answerable without a disproportionate cost.

■ **Armed Forces: Workplace Pensions**

Martyn Day:

[\[902183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of pension inequality among armed forces veterans.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Pension schemes develop over time in response to changing circumstances, but the Armed Forces Pension Schemes are designed to be generous, fair and equitable. It is a principle of public service pensions policy, upheld by successive Governments, that improvements to public service pension schemes should not be applied retrospectively.

■ **Defence: Procurement**

Stephen Morgan:

[\[18934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the defence procurement system.

James Cartlidge:

The Department uses a range of measures to assess the effectiveness of defence acquisition. We have reduced the average time taken to deliver our projects and programmes. But we must go further to drive pace. I therefore announced plans for a new Integrated Procurement Model in my oral statement of 28 February 2024 on Defence Acquisition Reform.

A guidance note setting out the key features of the new model was placed in the Library and is available at Integrated Procurement Model: driving pace in the delivery of military capability - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

■ F-35 Aircraft: Expenditure

Maria Eagle: [\[18388\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department spent on Lightning II in each financial year since 2019-20.

James Cartlidge:

The Space total spend on equipment costs by financial year (FY) is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND (£MILLION)
2021-22	8.511
2022-23	13.786

The Space delivery team total spend on operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND (MILLION)
2021-22	£2.421
2022-23	£4.683

The Space team, which was stood up in March 2021, is a specific project team in DE&S and the figures above represent the total spend of that team. The figure does not represent the total spend on all space projects across Defence.

■ Middle East: Humanitarian Aid

Stephen Morgan: [\[18935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking with the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs to increase the number of aid shipments to the Middle East.

James Heappey:

Defence works very closely with and to support the FCDO, who lead on humanitarian support, to make sure that aid shipments are delivered as rapidly, efficiently and safely as possible. We have supported the delivery of hundreds of tonnes of life-saving aid for Gaza, including by air, land and maritime routes. We are doing everything we can to get far more aid in, exploring new routes and pressing Israel to open more crossings and lift restrictions. The Secretaries of State regularly engage on this matter.

■ Military Aircraft: Expenditure**Maria Eagle:**[\[18391\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department has spent on Air ISTAR in each financial year since 2019-20.

James Cartlidge:

The Air ISTAR total spend on equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND (£MILLION)
2019-20	302.925
2020-21	319.208
2021-22	246.961
2022-23	183.014

The Air ISTAR total spend on operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND (£MILLION)
2019-20	30.236
2020-21	25.847
2021-22	18.070
2022-23	16.099

The Air ISTAR team is a specific project team in DE&S and the figures above represent the total spend of that team. The figure does not represent the total spend on all Air ISTAR projects across Defence.

■ Military Bases: Bedbugs**John Healey:**[\[19533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether bed bugs have been found at army barracks in the last 12 months.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

There have been two recorded incidents of bed bugs in the last 12 months, both of which have been treated.

■ Ministry of Defence: Finance**Maria Eagle:**[\[18670\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the projected annual budget is for the Land Combat Vehicles Team in (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26.

James Cartlidge:

The figures presented in these tables represent the projected annual operating expenditure forecast costs for the Land Combat Vehicles (LCV) delivery team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

The LCV delivery team forecast equipment costs by financial year are as follows:

FINANCIAL YEAR	CONTRACT SPEND £MILLION
FY23/24	266.87
FY24/25	642.60
FY25/26	1,124.47

The LCV delivery team forecast operating costs by financial year are as follows:

FINANCIAL YEAR	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
FY23/24	15.25

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual operating expenditure budget for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle:[\[18672\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the projected annual budget is for the Vehicle Support Team in (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26.

James Cartlidge:

The figures presented in this table represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the Vehicle Support Team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

The Vehicle Support Team forecast equipment costs by financial year are as follows:

FINANCIAL YEAR	CONTRACT SPEND £MILLION
FY2023-24	£683.16
FY2024-25	£503.50
FY2025-26	£351.38

The Vehicle Support Team forecast operating costs by financial year are as follows:

FINANCIAL YEAR	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
FY2023-24	£31.35

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual operating costs budget for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle:

[\[18847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the helicopters team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The figures below represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the Helicopters Operating Centre (Hels OC) at Defence Equipment and Support.

The Hels OC budget and forecast costs on equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FINANCIAL YEAR	CONTRACT SPEND £MILLION
FY2023-24	1,155.64
FY2024-25	1,258.51
FY2025-26	1,312.06

The Hels OC budget and forecast costs on operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FINANCIAL YEAR	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
FY2023-24	95.57

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual budget for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle: [\[18848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the helicopters team at weapons support team is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The Ministry of Defence does not have a helicopters team at a weapons support team for which I can provide any budgetary figures.

Maria Eagle: [\[18849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the complex weapons team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The figures presented in this table represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the complex weapons delivery team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

The complex weapons delivery team budget and forecast costs on equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FINANCIAL YEAR	CONTRACT SPEND £MILLION
FY2023-24	348.27
FY2024-25	542.81
FY2025-26	573.72

The complex weapons delivery team budget and forecast costs on operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FINANCIAL YEAR	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
FY2023-24	25.98

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual budget for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle: [\[18850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the weapons engineering team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The figures below represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the weapons engineering delivery team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

The weapons engineering delivery team budget and forecast costs on equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FINANCIAL YEAR	CONTRACT SPEND £MILLION
FY2023-24	225.50
FY2024-25	320.61
FY2025-26	259.79

The weapons engineering delivery team budget and forecast costs on operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FINANCIAL YEAR	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
FY2023-24	27.97

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual budget for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle:[\[18851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the weapons support future enterprise team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The Weapons Support Future Enterprise team was formed recently as part of the wider Weapons Operating Centre in Defence Equipment and Support and has no separate centrally recorded budget. For this reason, the budget information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Maria Eagle:[\[18852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the Typhoon team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The figures presented in this table represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the Typhoon team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

The Typhoon team forecast equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	881.70
2024-25	957.32
2025-26	893.91

The Typhoon team forecast operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	60.56

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual operating costs for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle:[\[18853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the Lightning II team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The figures presented in this table represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the Lightning II team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

The Lightning II team forecast equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	514.45
2024-25	643.50
2025-26	566.55

The Lightning II team forecast operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	25.30

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual operating costs for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle:

[\[18856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the Air ISTAR team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The figures presented in this table represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the Air ISTAR team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

The Air ISTAR team forecast equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	139.96
2024-25	129.50
2025-26	126.25

The Air ISTAR team forecast operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	13.23

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual operating costs for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle: [\[18857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the Air Systems Equipment and Training team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:
The figures presented in this table represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the Air Systems Equipment and Training team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).
The Air Systems Equipment and Training team forecast equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	51.25
2024-25	66.61
2025-26	93.41

The Air Systems Equipment and Training team forecast operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	6.90

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual operating costs for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.

Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle: [\[18858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the Multi Mission Aircraft team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:
The figures presented in this table represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the Multi Mission Aircraft team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).
The Multi Mission Aircraft team forecast equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	327.82
2024-25	318.38
2025-26	259.10

The Multi Mission Aircraft team forecast operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023/-4	17.43

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual operating costs for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle:

[\[18859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the A400M and Voyager team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The figures presented in this table represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the A400 and Voyager team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

The A400 and Voyager team forecast equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	745.60
2024-25	902.79
2025-26	934.79

The A400 and Voyager team forecast operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	25.58

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual operating costs for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle: **[18860]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the Electronic Warfare and Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The figures presented in this table represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the Electronic Warfare and Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

The Electronic Warfare and Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear team forecast equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	236.64
2024-25	314.77
2025-26	354.27

The Electronic Warfare and Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear team forecast operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND £MILLION
2023-24	21.62

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual operating costs for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.

Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle:

[\[18861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the Air, Space, Command, Control and Defence team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The figures presented in this table represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the Air, Space, Command, Control and Defence delivery team at Defence Equipment and Support.

The Air, Space, Command, Control and Defence delivery team budget and forecast costs on equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND (£MILLION)
2023-24	223.30
2024-25	271.18
2025-26	328.54

The Air, Space, Command, Control and Defence delivery team budget and forecast costs on operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND (MILLION)
2023-24 Budget	11.98
2023-24 Forecast	31.00

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual budget for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Maria Eagle:

[\[18862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the budget for the special projects team at Defence Equipment and Support is in the (a) 2023-24, (b) 2024-25 and (c) 2025-26 financial year.

James Cartlidge:

The figures presented in this table represent the projected annual operating expenditure budget and forecast costs for the Special Projects team at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

The Special Projects team forecast equipment costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND (£MILLION)
2023-24	159.22
2024-25	179.52
2025-26	211.10

The Special Projects team forecast operating costs by financial year is as follows:

FY	TOTAL SPEND (£MILLION)
2023-24	17.26

Notes:

- It should be noted that the annual operating costs for 2024-25 and beyond is not available.
- Due to the Operating Model work currently underway in DE&S, the current team structure is likely to change significantly, and we anticipate that the way that budgets are apportioned will also change.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[18932]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the funding allocated to his Department in the Spring Budget 2024 on (a) national security and (b) the UK's commitments to its international allies.

James Heappey:

UK defence spending is at its highest level in history and is increasing in real terms. We were one of the first countries to support Ukraine following Russia's illegal invasion. The Integrated Review Refresh recognised the implications of the invasion on our own security and wellbeing, providing extra investment and strengthening our alliances via partnerships (AUKUS and GCAP).

In a volatile, complex and ambiguous security environment we are a proud leading contributor to NATO, contributing to every NATO mission and operation. The UK was the first large European country to commit to 2% of GDP for defence and we have consistently met or exceeded the NATO target.

We also remain committed to increasing our overall spending to 2.5% of GDP as soon as fiscal and economic conditions allow. The Prime Minister has been clear that the target and path towards 2.5% will be set out at the next Spending Review.

The hon. Member will be concerned to note that his own party has thus far declined to match the Government's commitments on defence spending, saying only that a Labour Government would meet the 2% NATO minimum. Such a policy would mean an immediate £7 billion cut to the defence budget, with profound consequences for both our national security and our relationship with international allies.

■ Ministry of Defence: Legal Costs

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

[\[19111\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the total cost to the public purse was of legal (a) support and (b) representation to Ministers in his Department in relation to their official conduct in each of the last three years.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

Such information is not centrally recorded or collated in the format requested. More generally, I would refer the hon. Member to the long-standing policies on legal expenditure, as set out recently by Cabinet Office Ministers on 12 March 2004, Official Report, 17709 and 12 March 2024, Official Report, House of Lords, column 1901-1904.

■ Ministry of Defence: Procurement

Sarah Atherton:

[\[17697\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he is taking steps to ensure that the social value model is applied (a) correctly and (b) consistently in his Department's procurement processes.

Sarah Atherton:

[\[17699\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department's assessment of companies against its social value criteria gives equal weighting to benefits that are brought (a) direct to the UK and (b) overseas.

James Cartlidge:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) applies the Social Value Model to all of its in-scope competitive procurements, in accordance with the Cabinet Office Social Value Policy. The MOD ensures correct and consistent application of the Social Value Model through additional policy, guidance, training and through engagement with industry through the Defence Supplier Forum. Its application is monitored through appropriate governance, reporting and reviews.

Weightings are applied to the award criteria, and supplier proposals are assessed qualitatively not quantitatively in tender evaluation. The Social Value Model does not discriminate based on where social value is delivered. However where appropriate, and having due regard to UK market access obligations to our international fair-trade agreements (FTAs), procurements may specify, within their social value requirement, the social value to be delivered in specific geographical locations.

MOD currently applies Cabinet Office Social Value rules, and further, Defence specific values. For example, the New Medium Helicopter procurement has a strong weighting for UK workshare and exportability. To ensure the maximum impact of the Integrated Procurement Model, particular in supporting the development of sovereign capability, I will be undertaking a rapid review of how MOD applies social content rules on Defence Procurement.

■ NATO

Kenny MacAskill: [19726]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the (a) location is of and (b) deployment levels are at each NATO (i) owned and (ii) operated sites.

James Heappey:

The UK is one of the largest contributors of personnel to NATO, underlining our commitment to deterrence and defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area.

The table below shows the number of UK personnel posted to NATO Peacetime Establishment locations, with personnel in 39 NATO locations in 19 countries all over Europe and the Continental US, and the UK has proportional workforce equity at all locations.

COUNTRY LOCATION		UK FILL	COUNTRY	LOCATION	UK FILL
Belgium	Brussels	50	Netherlands	Brunssum	110
	Mons	170	Norway	Stavanger	30
Bulgaria	Sofia	~		Bydgoszcz	~
Estonia	Tallin	~	Poland	Elblag	~
France	Lille	10		Szczecin	~
	Geilenkirchen	10	Portugal	Lisbon	10
	Munster	10		Oeiras	~
	Oberammergau	~	Romania	Bucharest	~
Germany	Ramstein	70	Slovakia	Bratislava	~
	Uedem	20	Spain	Torrejon	20
	Ulm	20		Valencia	~
	Wesel	30	Türkiye	Istanbul	10
Greece	Thessaloniki	~		Izmir	30
	Milan	20		Blandford	50
Italy	Naples	120	UK	Molesworth	10
	Poggio	20		Northwood	60
	Sigonella	~		Yeovilton	~
Latvia	Adazi	~	USA	Norfolk	50
	Riga	~		Tampa	~

"~" denotes a number less than or equal to 5.

Data have been rounded to 10 and therefore totals may not always equal the sum of the parts.

■ OCCAR

Richard Foord:

[\[902174\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has had discussions with his European counterparts on the scope of work of the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation.

James Cartlidge:

As a founding member, the Ministry of Defence has valued the opportunities for close collaboration and interoperability with our allies which the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR) presents since 1996. We take our obligations under the OCCAR Convention seriously.

Our Board of Supervisors member Vice Admiral Sir Rick Thompson meets with his counterparts biannually to discuss both strategic and programmatic matters.

■ Special Forces: Standards

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[18930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to maintain standards of (a) conduct and (b) accountability for Special Forces personnel during overseas operations.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[18931\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what (a) training and (b) guidance is given to Special Forces personnel on the lawful use of force in conflict zones.

James Heappey:

All UK military personnel are held to the highest standards of conduct and accountable to the Secretary of State for Defence. UK military operations are conducted in accordance with the Law of Armed Conflict, and military personnel are bound by the laws of England and Wales for their actions under the Armed Forces Act 2006.

The Government has a long-standing position of neither confirming nor denying information relating to the UK Special Forces, as to do so may put personnel and operations at risk.

■ Syria: Armed Forces

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[18929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent guidance his Department has issued to armed forces deployed in Syria on (a) international law and (b) rules of engagement.

James Heappey:

All aspects of military activity are bound by the relevant law of England and Wales, and international law. All UK personnel also receive annual training on both international law and rules of engagement.

■ Ukraine: Military Aid

Stephen Morgan: [\[18936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent steps he has taken to increase military support to Ukraine.

James Heappey:

The UK continues to be at the forefront of international efforts to end Russia's illegal war in Ukraine. We will be providing £2.5 billion of military support to Ukraine in financial year 2024-25. This includes a £325 million package of cutting-edge drones and £245 million to procure and invigorate supply chains, to produce artillery shells to help fight Putin's illegal invasion.

We will train an additional 10,000 Ukrainians in the first half of this year as well as co-leading new maritime and drone capability coalitions alongside Norway and Latvia respectively.

■ Veterans: Cost of Living

Stephen Morgan: [\[18937\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent steps Veterans UK has taken to support veterans and their families with the cost of living.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The Ministry of Defence delivers a range of services to Veterans and their families. This includes the administration and payment of Armed Forces pensions and compensation, the provision of tailored advice and assistance through the Veterans Welfare Service, Defence Transition Services and the Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans.

EDUCATION

■ Arts: Education

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[18926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking with schools to (a) promote creativity and (b) make pupils aware of career opportunities in the arts and creative industries.

Damian Hinds:

The department is clear that all pupils should be taught a broad and balanced curriculum, and all state-funded schools are required to promote pupils' cultural development. The best schools combine creative subjects with core subjects, and the department is committed to ensuring that all pupils have access to both.

Cultural education is integral to a high-quality education. Alongside drama as part of the English curriculum, and dance as part of the physical education curriculum,

music, art and design, remain important pillars of the knowledge-rich national curriculum.

The department has committed over £714 million of funding from 2016/22 into a diverse portfolio of music and arts education programmes to ensure all children, whatever their background, have access to a high-quality education in music and arts. Over and above core school funding, the department will continue to invest around £115 million per year in cultural education up to 2025.

The department funds The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) to support schools and colleges to deliver high-quality careers programmes that help make young people aware of a range of career opportunities, including in the arts and creative industries.

CEC has supported the Discover Creative Careers programme from its inception in 2019. Over 1,000 creative sector employers have engaged with the programme, leading to 92,000 student interactions with the industry. Supported by funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Discover Creative Careers Programme will continue to run until March 2025. Discover Creative Careers Week 2023 saw nearly 5,000 in-person industry encounters and over 9,000 virtual encounters for young people.

CEC connects business and sector bodies with schools and colleges through a national network of Careers Hubs, Enterprise Advisors and Cornerstone Employers, including Creative UK, Pinewood Studios and Creative Assembly. The Berkshire Careers Hub works closely with Resource Productions. A recent example of their work involved facilitating a networking event to support Enterprise Advisers (employer volunteers) to work with local schools and colleges throughout the area. Their website can be found here: <https://www.resource-productions.co.uk/>.

Young people can access information on a range of digital tools and resources through the National Careers Service website. More than 800 profiles include jobs such as editorial assistant, music therapist and screenwriter within the creative and media sectors. The National Careers Service website can be found here: <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/explore-careers>.

■ Department for Education: Defamation

Bridget Phillipson:

[17568]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to paragraphs 7.16 and 7.17 of the Ministerial Code, on how many occasions Ministers in her Department have informed the Law Officers that they are the defendants in a libel action in (a) their personal capacity, (b) their official position and (c) both since 19 December 2019.

Damian Hinds:

I am unable to confirm the details asked for, as this would contravene paragraph 2.13 of the Ministerial Code, which prevents disclosure of the fact that the Law Officers have advised or have not advised and the content of their advice without their authority.

■ Education: Autism

Daisy Cooper:

[\[18946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of average waiting times for autism assessments on educational attainment.

David Johnston:

The government recognises that there can be long waits for autism assessments. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is taking steps to improve access to assessments for autism. In 2023/24 DHSC allocated £4.2 million to improve services for autistic children and young people including assessments, pre-and post-diagnostic support, and the continuation of the Autism in Schools programme. Additionally, in April 2023, NHS England published a national framework to support the local NHS to commission and deliver autism assessment services for children, young people, and adults.

The Department for Education wants all children and young people to be able to reach their full potential and receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life. The SEND Code of Practice is clear that meeting the needs of a child with SEND does not require a diagnostic label or assessment. Instead, the department expects teachers to monitor the progress of all children and young people and put support in place where needed, including arranging diagnostic tests where appropriate.

The 2023 SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan set out the department's vision to improve mainstream education through setting standards for early and accurate identification of need, and timely access to support to meet those needs. The standards will clarify the types of support that should be ordinarily available in mainstream settings and practitioner standards will be developed to support frontline professionals, including one on autism.

The department's Universal Services contract brings together SEND-specific continuing professional development and support for the school and further education workforce to improve outcomes for children and young people, including those with autism, through one programme, which aims to reach 70% of schools and colleges in England per year.

The contract offers autism awareness training and resources: over 135,000 professionals have undertaken autism awareness training provided by the Autism Education Trust through the programme's train the trainer model.

■ Internet: Young People

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[19141\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she plans to take to help (a) educate young people about the dangers of internet use and (b) prevent engagement in harmful online activities by young people.

Damian Hinds:

As part of the statutory relationships and health education in primary schools and relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) in secondary schools, pupils are taught about online safety and harms. This includes being taught about what positive, healthy and respectful online relationships look like, the effects of their online actions on others, how to recognise and display respectful behaviour online, and where to get help and support for issues that occur online. The government's guidance for primary and secondary school teaching on relationships, sex and health education can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/relationships-education-primary> and: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/relationships-and-sex-education-rse-secondary>.

The department has updated the Teaching Online Safety in Schools non-statutory guidance (2023), on how to teach about all aspects of internet safety in a coordinated and coherent way across their curriculum. Teaching about online safety also complements the computing curriculum, which covers the principles of online safety at all key stages, with progression in the content to reflect the different and escalating risks that pupils face. The computing curriculum can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-computing-programmes-of-study>.

The statutory 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' guidance, which all schools and colleges must have regard to when drawing up and implementing their own safeguarding policies, has been strengthened with regards to online safety in recent years. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure online safety is a running and interrelated theme whilst devising and implementing their whole school or college approach to safeguarding and related policies and procedures. This includes doing all that they reasonably can to limit children's exposure to the harmful online content on the school's or college's IT system.

The department has brought forward the review of the RSHE curriculum and statutory guidance. Stakeholders will have the opportunity to feed into the process through a thorough consultation. Following the consultation, the department will make a decision about any new content to be included in the RSHE curriculum. The department expects to publish the revised guidance soon after.

■ Job Creation and Skilled Workers: South Holland and the Deepings**Sir John Hayes:****[18840]**

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

Robert Halfon:

Funding allocations are not available broken down to the level of individual constituencies.

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

In the 2023/24 academic year, the department is investing nearly £7 billion for education and training places for 16 to 19 year olds, and up to 25 for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This funding is allocated to education providers to deliver study programmes and T Levels to young people.

The department is continuing to invest in education and skills training for adults through the Adult Education Budget (AEB), which totalled £1.34 billion in the 2023/24 Funding Year. The AEB fully funds or co-funds skills provision for eligible adults aged 19 and above from pre-entry to Level 3, to support adults to gain the skills they need for work, an apprenticeship or further learning. This includes funding going to Boston College, which includes the Spalding Campus in the South Holland and the Deepings Constituency.

The Free Courses for Jobs offer gives eligible adults the chance to access high value Level 3 qualification for free, which can support them to gain higher wages or a better job. Around 400 qualifications are available on the offer, chosen specifically as they offer good wage outcomes and address skills needs in the economy. There have been over 61,000 enrolments since April 2021.

Skills Bootcamps are free, flexible courses of up to 16 weeks in priority skills areas, with a guaranteed interview upon completion. The department is expanding Skills Bootcamps through increased national procurement and grant funding to 30 Mayoral Combined Authorities and local areas to meet national and local skills needs in the 2024/25 financial year. The department granted Great Lincolnshire LEP, in partnership with Lincolnshire County Council, £2 million for Skills Bootcamps across Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland in 2023, and a further £3 million for courses starting after April 2024.

The department is increasing investment in the apprenticeships system in England to over £2.7 billion by the 2024/25 financial year to support more high quality apprenticeship opportunities across the country, including in South Holland and the Deepings. There have been over 11,000 apprenticeship starts in South Holland and the Deepings since 2010.

The department has introduced employer-designed T levels, which are equipping thousands of young people with the skills, knowledge, and experience to access employment or further study in some of the most in-demand skills areas. 18 T Levels

are now available, being delivered through over 250 providers across all regions of the country. University Academy Holbeach in South Holland and the Deepings currently offers seven T Levels and is planning to offer three more from September 2024.

Multiply is the government's programme for improving adult numeracy. Multiply is funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which is the government's flagship fund for supporting people and places across the UK. Up to £270 million is directly available for local areas in England to deliver innovative interventions to improve adult numeracy. Lincolnshire County Council has been allocated £4.02 million of Multiply funding from the 2022/23 to 2024/25 financial years to improve adult numeracy in their area.

■ Languages: GCE A-level

Conor McGinn:

[19388]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of schools in (a) St Helens North constituency and (b) the North West she expects to offer A-Levels in modern foreign languages in the next five years.

Damian Hinds:

The department does not produce projections of future trends of the number of students taking specific qualifications or future trends in the number of schools or colleges offering specific qualifications.

The department recognises the importance of the study of languages in Britain and is taking steps to increase the number of pupils studying languages at GCSE level and beyond. This is particularly important given that languages became non-mandatory at GCSE in 2004. The recently launched Language Hubs programme is comprised of 15 lead hub schools from across England, including a hub based in the North West. The lead hub schools will work with other schools in their areas to improve standards of language teaching, in line with recommendations of the Teaching Schools Council's 2016 'Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review'.

Managed by the National Consortium for Languages Education, the programme provides high-quality teacher Continuing Professional Development and includes improving transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3, increasing opportunities among disadvantaged pupils to study languages, and increasing the access to home, heritage, and community languages.

■ Music: Education

Barbara Keeley:

[19581]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many times the national plan for music education monitoring board has met since it was established; and on how many occasions a Minister attended a meeting of the board.

Barbara Keeley:

[19582]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department plans to publish minutes for the meetings of the national plan for music education monitoring board.

Damian Hinds:

The National Plan for Music Education Monitoring Board has met three times since the announcement of the Board in June 2023. The second meeting was attended by the former Minister of State for Schools. The terms of reference of the Board are published on GOV.UK and there are no plans to publish the minutes of these meetings. The 'National plan for music education monitoring board terms of reference' can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1162481/National_plan_for_music_education_monitoring_board_terms_of_reference_-_June_2023.pdf.

■ **Pupils: Per Capita Costs**

Catherine McKinnell:

[18153]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will publish the average condition funding required per pupil by local authority.

Damian Hinds:

Responsibility for keeping buildings safe and well-maintained lies with schools and their responsible bodies, such as local authorities, academy trusts and voluntary-aided bodies. The department supports these bodies by providing capital funding, delivering major rebuilding programmes, and offering guidance and support.

The department has allocated over £15 billion since 2015 for keeping schools safe and operational, including £1.8 billion in the 2023/24 financial year. The department's aim for condition funding is that responsible bodies receive a fair share of the available budget that takes account of their relative condition need. The department uses consistent data on the condition of the school estate to inform the allocation of funding. This means that the department targets more funding to where it is needed most, with schools in relatively poorer condition attracting more funding for their responsible body. It is then up to responsible bodies to use their local knowledge of priorities to target this investment.

This government introduced the Condition Data Collection (CDC), the first ever comprehensive survey of the school estate and one of the largest data collection programmes of its kind in Europe. Thanks to the department's evidence led approach, following the James Review of Capital in 2011, this government has been able to allocate capital funding based on consistent data on condition need. Almost all government funded schools in England were visited as part of CDC during 2017 to 2019. As part of this, surveyors and engineers assessed the condition of multiple building and land components. This data was then used to estimate the remediation cost to bring all building components back to new or performing as intended. More information is available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60af7cbb90e071b54214c82/Condition_of_School_Buildings_Survey_CDC1_-_key_findings_report.pdf. This includes a regional breakdown of condition need.

CDC uses floor area of buildings rather than pupil numbers as a consistent approach to assessing buildings, alongside data on the condition of buildings. This is the approach also used in CDC2, the successor programme to CDC, which is underway and is due to complete in 2026. The average floor area per pupil varies depending on several factors, including the phase of education and type of school. Therefore, this is not an estimate that the department makes.

■ Schools: Buildings

Catherine McKinnell:

[18440]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will have discussions with (a) responsible bodies and (b) local authorities on their school estate management capability.

Damian Hinds:

Responsibility for keeping buildings safe and well-maintained lies with schools and their responsible bodies, such as local authorities, academy trusts and voluntary-aided bodies. The department supports these bodies by providing capital funding, delivering major rebuilding programmes, and offering guidance and support.

Ministers have regular conversations with schools and their responsible bodies about school buildings and the management of their estates. Departmental officials also have regular conversations about estate management capability with organisations representing responsible bodies, as well as school estate management professionals with day-to-day experience managing their school estates to develop and improve the support the department offers.

The department regularly reminds responsible bodies of their legal duty to keep their buildings safe and maintain them in good order. Last year, the department updated the Academy Trust Handbook, adding a requirement for accounting officers to confirm that they are managing their estates in line with their existing responsibilities, as well as signposting to further guidance.

The department provides guidance, tools and support to help schools and responsible bodies effectively manage their school buildings and keep them safe, including the good estate management for schools (GEMS) guidance, which is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools>. In addition, the Capital Advisers Programme is providing direct support to help academy trusts improve their estate management, by offering best practice recommendations from experienced technical advisers, in line with GEMS.

■ Schools: Finance**Derek Thomas:** [\[18913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of allocating a portion of the savings in direct schools grants from home education to local authorities to provide exam centres.

Damian Hinds:

The department allocates school funding to local authorities through the dedicated schools grant, on the basis of pupil numbers in the preceding autumn census. That some children are home educated does not, therefore, lead to unallocated funding. The department does not have current plans to fund exam centres for children who are home educated, but all funding is kept under careful review. Local authorities do have some flexibility to support children and young people who are home educated.

■ Schools: Governing Bodies**Mike Amesbury:** [\[19168\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of measures available to school governing bodies to investigate complaints.

Damian Hinds:

In academy trusts, trust boards must ensure there is a procedure to deal with complaints from parents and carers and other individuals to meet their legal duties. In maintained schools, governing bodies must establish procedures to deal with all complaints about the school and any community facilities or services it provides, unless alternate statutory procedures apply as outlined in Section 29(1) of the Education Act 2002.

■ Special Educational Needs**Rachael Maskell:** [\[18903\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that her Department works with (a) local authorities and (b) the Department of Health and Social Care to provide joined up services for children with SEND.

Rachael Maskell: [\[18904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that local authorities are more involved in the delivery of (a) education and (b) health services for children with SEND.

David Johnston:

Local authorities already have existing statutory responsibilities to develop, publish and review the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) local offer, to ensure that the range of provision and services available in their local area are sufficient and well suited to the needs of children with SEND.

In the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan, the department have committed to establishing new local SEND and AP partnerships, convened by the local authority, that will bring together local partners to strategically plan and commission support for children and young people with SEND and AP. SEND and AP partnerships are a collaborative network of individuals, including health commissioners and education providers, who are working together to strategically plan SEND services. They will be underpinned by strengthened accountabilities and improved use of data for all those responsible for local delivery.

Moreover, the department has established a steering group to oversee a joint Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care approach to SEND workforce planning. This feeds into the National SEND and AP Implementation Board and aims to be complete by 2025. The work will build on the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan published in June 2023, which sets out the steps the NHS and its partners need to take to deliver an NHS workforce that meets the changing needs of the population over the next 15 years.

The Improvement Plan also committed to the Change Programme which was launched in September 2023, and is testing key SEND and AP reforms with 32 local authorities in each of the 9 regions. The department, working with its Delivery Partner, Reaching Excellence and Ambition for all Children (REACH), are providing these local authorities with 'boots on the ground' support for the testing of these reforms. We are also running a live feedback loop that is providing early insights into how the reforms and supporting documents are working and identifying required changes.

■ Teachers: Workplace Pensions

Barbara Keeley:

[19580]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact of ending funding for employers' contributions to the teachers' pension scheme for music teachers employed by music hubs unattached to schools on costs to the public purse.

Damian Hinds:

In March 2024, the department announced an additional £1.1 billion in the 2024/25 financial year to support schools and local authorities with the increased Teachers' Pension Scheme employer contribution rate. This additional funding will be distributed in 2024/25 via the new teachers' pension employer contribution grant (TPECG) 2024.

The department is providing additional funding through the TPECG 2024 to local authorities in respect of teachers categorised as centrally employed on the schools' workforce census 2023. The department expects local authority-based Music Hub teachers to be recorded on the schools' workforce census, and so to be in scope for this grant.

The department has also committed to providing funding to cover the increase in employer contribution rates for existing non-local authority hubs for the current academic year, until August 2024, and officials are working to agree the precise amount. Further details, including funding rates and allocations, will be provided soon.

■ Teaching Methods

Rachael Maskell:

[19646]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of using nurture teaching methods in classrooms.

Damian Hinds:

Every state-funded school must offer a broad and balanced curriculum which supports every child to fulfil their potential. The department encourages schools to deliver this using effective and evidence-based teaching practices, drawing on resources such as the Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit.

The department does not endorse any one approach to behaviour management over another and it trusts school leaders to develop policies which reflect their school's individual needs. The department's 'Behaviour in Schools' guidance focuses on helping schools to establish calm, safe and supportive environments by creating positive cultures which work for everyone.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Energy: Conservation

Alan Brown:

[19396]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether her Department has plans to roll out a national energy efficiency advice service.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government has launched several digital services aimed at improving people's access to energy efficiency information and advice. The 'Find Ways to Save Energy in Your Home' service provides tailored and independent recommendations for home improvement and retrofit. This can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/improve-energy-efficiency>

Additionally, consumers can check their eligibility for either the Great British Insulation Scheme or the Home Upgrade Grant scheme. These services are supported by a phoneline, to help those needing more bespoke support or those digitally excluded. The Government will continue to improve and expand these services based on user insight and feedback.

■ Energy: Prices

Kenny MacAskil:

[19760]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of increasing the energy price cap on household default tariffs on (a) the average annual energy bill for households and (b) trends in the level of profits of energy companies.

Amanda Solloway:

Decisions on the price cap are for independent regulator Ofgem. Average energy bills are published online at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65c65524cc433b0011a90ba8/table_21.xlsx

A break down of the components of the price cap, including the earnings allowance, may be found at www.ofgem.gov.uk/energy-price-cap.

■ Energy: Standing Charges

Mick Whitley:

[19181]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether she has made an assessment of the level of daily standing charges for (a) gas and (b) electricity in (i) North Wales and (ii) Merseyside.

Amanda Solloway:

Standing charges are regulated by Ofgem. Regional standing charges may be found online at www.ofgem.gov.uk/information-consumers/energy-advice-households/get-energy-price-cap-standing-charges-and-unit-rates-region.

The main factor determining differences in standing charges is the cost of operating and maintaining the gas and electricity networks in each region.

Mick Whitley:

[19182]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of regional variations in (a) energy costs and (b) daily standing charges for (i) electricity and (ii) gas on regional economic inequalities.

Amanda Solloway:

Standing charges are a commercial matter for suppliers, although Ofgem regulates standing charges as they do with other elements of billing. This includes setting a cap on standing charges as part of the overall default tariff cap.

The variance in standing charges is partially due to regional differences in energy distribution costs. These costs reflect the expenses of maintaining and upgrading the distribution network in a specific area, and the number of consumers those costs are spread across.

Ofgem launched a call for input on standing charges, which closed on Friday 19 January 2024, looking at how it is applied to energy bills and what alternatives could be considered.

Mick Whitley:

[19183]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether her Department has had discussions with energy suppliers on taking steps to reduce the daily standing charges for gas and electricity in (a) North Wales and (b) Merseyside to at least the national average.

Amanda Solloway:

The regulation of standing charges is a matter for Ofgem. The cost of distributing electricity varies regionally, mirroring differences in distribution expenses across the country. These disparities stem from maintaining and upgrading distribution networks in specific areas and the number of consumers sharing these costs. Consequently, less densely populated and remote regions incur higher operational expenses.

Ofgem launched a call for input on standing charges, which closed in January 2024, looking at how they are applied to energy bills and what alternatives could be considered. I am supportive of Ofgem's decision to gather information and evidence on the current standing charge model. Ofgem are currently assessing the responses received and will publish a decision in due course here:

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

Mick Whitley:

[19184]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the Answer of 12 February 2024 to Question 13068 on Energy: Standing Charges, whether her Department has had discussions with Ofgem on the equitability of daily standing charges for gas and electricity in (a) North Wales and (b) Merseyside.

Amanda Solloway:

I regularly meet with Ofgem to discuss the energy retail market, including standing charges. Ofgem's recent Call for Input (Cfi) on standing charges closed on January 19th 2024. Ofgem are considering the responses they received and are thinking about next steps.

Network charges vary by region to reflect the different costs of supplying consumers in each region. In 2015, Ofgem carried out an assessment of moving away from regional charging and the assessment showed that it would risk an increase in overall costs and reduce accountability to the customers being served.

■ Fuel Poverty

Alan Brown:

[19394]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of including (a) LED lighting, (b) water efficiency devices and (c) other bill-saving technologies in the scope of (i) the Energy Company Obligation and (ii) other fuel poverty schemes.

Amanda Solloway:

Under current assessments, Government energy efficiency schemes prioritise measures that have beneficial long-term effects on lowering bills and making homes more comfortable and affordable to live in.

Current schemes allow the installation of measures which improve the energy performance of a dwelling within the scope of the “Standard Assessment Procedure” (SAP) – which assesses the energy performance of dwellings.

This can include measures such as solid wall insulation, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, underfloor insulation, draught-proofing, air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps, high heat retention storage heating, low energy lighting, solar PV, solar thermal and heating controls.

■ Heat Pumps: Social Rented Housing**Derek Thomas:**[\[18921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps her Department is taking to support clean heat installations in Wave 3 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

Amanda Solloway:

The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) is a 10-year, £3.8bn 2019 manifesto commitment. To date, total committed grant funding for SHDF and the associated demonstrator is over £1bn. The £6bn energy efficiency support package announced in December 2023 allocated £1.25bn towards the SHDF between 2025 and 2028. This funding will provide long-term certainty, support supply chain growth, and ensure we can scale up our delivery over time. SHDF Wave 3 is still being designed but it will continue to provide incentives and funding for the installation of low carbon heating technologies in social housing.

■ Heating: Carbon Emissions**Derek Thomas:**[\[18919\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if she will make an assessment of the role of shared ground loops in decarbonising heat for properties without the space for individual heat pumps.

Amanda Solloway:

Heat pumps connected to shared ground loops have a role to play in decarbonising heat, particularly in properties, like blocks of flats, that might otherwise be less well suited to individual heat pumps. To support their installation, the Government has announced that it will increase the capacity limit for shared ground loops under the Boiler Upgrade Scheme from 45kW to 300kW. Additionally, we have supported the installation of shared ground loops under schemes like the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

■ Offshore Industry: Employment**Caroline Lucas:**[\[18876\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the Answer of 7 March 2024 to Question 16114 on Offshore Industry: Employment, whether Offshore Energies UK has provided her Department with the methodology it uses to estimate the number of (a) direct, (b) indirect and (c) induced jobs supported by the oil and gas sector.

Graham Stuart:

The workforce estimates developed by OEUK come from statistics provided by the data analysis company Experian, who in turn use government jobs data and track expenditure as it flows through the economy. OEUK have previously shared some underlying data with the department, but OEUK produce these figures independently of Government.

These workforce figures have been collected and published since 2007.

■ Offshore Industry: Licensing**Caroline Lucas:**[\[19307\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to the judgement of the Oslo District Court in case number 23-099330TVI-TOSL/05 on 18 January 2024, if she will make it her policy to take account of the impact of scope 3 emissions on global temperatures when licencing new oil and gas projects.

Graham Stuart:

Under the Climate Change Act 2008 we are required to follow international guidelines on emissions reporting, which require emissions from the burning of oil and gas to be accounted for in the country in which they are used. This is in line with guidance from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Emissions from UK oil and gas extraction are accounted for in our legally-binding carbon budgets. This includes projected future emissions from new licensing rounds. The judgment of the Oslo District Court does not change this.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ Climate Change: Marine Environment****Afzal Khan:**[\[19453\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential connection between global ocean protection and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government recognises that climate change and biodiversity loss, alongside other human pressures, are having a detrimental impact on ocean health. Ocean action can be part of our response to both challenges; protecting and restoring

coastal and marine habitats can provide a wide array of benefits, including flood protection, improving biodiversity, carbon sequestration and supporting ecosystems to be more resilient to climate impacts.

The UK plays a leading role in advocating for nature and ocean to be embedded in global climate action. The annual UNFCCC Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue was established under our COP26 Presidency. At COP28, we worked with international partners to secure a negotiated decision for the first Global Stocktake which encouraged the strengthening of ocean-based climate action.

As Chair of the Global Ocean Alliance, the UK successfully led calls for ambitious and meaningful outcomes for the ocean from the Convention on Biological Diversity COP15. As agreed at that COP, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework includes commitments to protect at least 30% of the global ocean by 2030, restore degraded ecosystems and to tackle the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification, with Parties noting the interlinkage between these targets.

The UK played a significant and proactive role in securing The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement which will mean much greater protection for the two-thirds of the global ocean that lies beyond national jurisdiction. The Agreement will play a key role supporting the delivery of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including helping to achieve the target to effectively conserve and manage at least 30% of the ocean by 2030.

Financed from the UK aid budget, the £500 million Blue Planet Fund supports developing countries to reduce poverty, protect and sustainably manage their marine resources and address human-generated threats across four interlinked key themes, one of which is climate change.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Legal Costs

Jonathan Ashworth:

[\[19062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the total cost to the public purse was of legal (a) support and (b) representation to Ministers in his Department in relation to their official conduct in each of the last three years.

Mark Spencer:

Such information is not centrally recorded or collated in the form requested. More generally, I would refer the hon. Member to the long-standing policies on legal expenditure, as set out recently by Cabinet Office Ministers on 12 March 2004, Official Report, PQ 17709 and 12 March 2024, Official Report, House of Lords, Cols. 1901-1904.

■ Droughts and Water Supply

Caroline Lucas:

[\[19038\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to tackle the risk of (a) drought and (b) water scarcity.

Robbie Moore:

(a) Defra published its Plan for Water 2023 which set out the importance of ensuring a clean and plentiful water supply in England. The Plan sets out our commitment to a twin track approach to improving water supply resilience, with action to reduce water company leaks and improve water efficiency, alongside investing in new supply infrastructure.

Last year, regional water resources groups and water companies consulted on their draft water resources plans. These statutory plans set out how each company will secure water supplies sustainably for at least the next 25 years and how drought resilience will be improved. The plans contain proposals for multiple new water resources schemes, including new reservoirs. Water companies also maintain statutory drought plans, which show the actions taken to maintain secure supplies during droughts.

(b) To address water scarcity, the Government has set a new legally binding target under the Environment Act 2021 to reduce the use of our public water supply in England by 20% per person by 2038. To achieve this, we will reduce household water use to 122 litres per person per day, reduce leakage by 37%, and reduce non-household (for example, businesses) water use by 9% by 31 March 2038. This is part of the trajectory to achieving 110 litres per person per day household water use, a 50% reduction in leakage and a 15% reduction in non-household water use by 2050. Our Plan for Water and Environmental Improvement Plan have set out our roadmap to water efficiency in new developments and retrofits, to be delivered over the next decade. This includes developing clear guidance on 'water positive' or 'net zero water' developments and roles for developers and water companies, including water company incentives. We are also working closely with water companies to increase the supply of water.

In December 2023, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities issued a Written Ministerial Statement which set out that in areas of serious water stress, where water scarcity is inhibiting the adoption of Local Plans or the granting of planning permission for homes, we are encouraging local planning authorities to work with the Environment Agency and delivery partners to agree standards tighter than the 110 litres per day set out in current guidance. Defra will also be reviewing building regulations in spring 2024 to allow local planning authorities to introduce tighter water efficiency standards in new homes. Defra is also reviewing the evidence base for water reuse systems with a view to consulting on changes to the water supply regulations to enable greywater reuse and rainwater harvesting to be managed by water companies.

At Spring Budget 2024, the Government published a policy paper setting out its ambition to address water scarcity in Greater Cambridge and measures to achieve this. It builds on significant interventions and investment of nearly £9 million - including £5.8 million of new funding - announced last July and at Autumn Statement 2023.

■ Environmental Protection

Anthony Mangnall:

[\[17637\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Environment Agency's feedback to members of the public who report environmental incidents.

Robbie Moore:

An Environment Agency local team can choose to give feedback or request further information regarding an incident if needed, but the Environment Agency Information Communications Service (ICS) who receive reports of environmental incidents from the public, will not provide feedback.

■ Fisheries

Daniel Zeichner:

[\[18720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish the scientific (a) findings and (b) advice submitted by the Government to the International Centre for the Exploration of the Seas in respect of pollack in area VI(6) and area VII(7) in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Mark Spencer:

You asked if the Department will publish the scientific findings and advice submitted by the Government to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) in respect of pollack in area 6 and area 7 in 2022 and 2023. The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and the Department do not submit advice to ICES but rather collaborate with the ICES community to generate advice using the available evidence. ICES publish the information used in stock assessments on their website. Scientific findings from projects, such as the forthcoming pollack population size study in the western English Channel, are shared with ICES and published on the Department's website.

Daniel Zeichner:

[\[18721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to his Department's press release entitled Government announces next steps to support pollack fishermen, published on 23 February 2024, and the Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science's invitation to commercial fishers to register an interest in the forthcoming pollack population size study in the western English Channel, published on 12 March 2024, what the (a) estimated cost and (b) planned timetable for the study is; and what plans he has to publish (i) analysis and (ii) a report of this work for the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea.

Mark Spencer:

You asked for details (cost, timeline and publication plans) of the forthcoming pollack population size study in the western English Channel, published on 12 March 2024. The Department is not able to release the estimated cost of the study at this point in time. The indicative timeline of the study is as follows:

- 12 March 2024 – Opening date to register interest
- 26 March 2024 – Closing date to register interest
- 27-28 March 2024 – Application pack issued to those registered
- 10 April 2024 – Closing date for submitting applications
- End of April 2024 – Vessels selected and feedback provided to all applicants
- Mid-May (dates TBC) 2024 – Training for successful applicants
- Late May 2024 to February 2025 - Sampling programme duration

Once the data analysis is complete, the results will be shared with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and published on the Department's website.

■ Flood Control

Emma Hardy:

[18569]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to page 13 of the the National Audit Office report entitled Resilience to flooding, published on 15 November 2023, how many (a) projects have been cancelled and (b) homes will no longer be better protected; and where those homes are located, by local authority area.

Robbie Moore:

In March 2020, the Government doubled its investment in flood defences to a record £5.2 billion between 2021 and 2027 to better protect communities across England from flooding and coastal erosion. Since April 2021, over £1.5 billion has been invested in over 200 flood protection schemes, better protecting over 71,000 properties.

The capital investment programme is annually reviewed and updated to accommodate changes, including the introduction of new schemes or urgent works.

The Government is aware of the challenges and delays caused by inflation and the availability of skills and labour across the sector. The start of the programme was also impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, which resulted in fewer people to develop projects and delayed mobilisation of construction activity.

As stated in the NAO report, the Environment Agency forecast that 1,500 projects will provide better protection to 200,000 properties by the end of the programme in March 2027.

Delivery is the Government's key priority, and we are working with the Environment Agency to review the programme in the light of the impacts of inflation and the pandemic. More information will be available in due course.

■ Flood Control: Lowestoft

Emma Hardy:

[\[18570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the status of the Lowestoft Tidal Barrier following the reduction in the number of projects to be completed by the Environment Agency as part of its programme of flood and coastal erosion risk management schemes to 2027.

Robbie Moore:

In March 2020, the government doubled its investment in flood defences to a record £5.2 billion between 2021 and 2027 to better protect communities across England from flooding and coastal erosion. Since April 2021, over £1.5 billion has been invested in over 200 flood protection schemes, better protecting over 71,000 properties.

Defra has allocated over £80 million to the Lowestoft Flood Risk Management Scheme. The first two of three phases have been completed successfully.

Like many other infrastructure projects, cost have increased significantly over the last years. Defra is aware that East Suffolk Council halted the scheme in January due to a significant funding shortfall.

Defra would encourage the council to work with EA and other potential partners to explore additional funding in line with Government's Partnership Funding principles.

The EA and Defra are continuing to engage with East Suffolk Council to identify options for developing a viable proposal.

■ Fluorinated Gases: Regulation

Steven Bonnar:

[\[19472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking with industry to develop policies on fluorinated gas regulation.

Steven Bonnar:

[\[19473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his department is taking to work with industry on fluorinated gas regulation.

Steven Bonnar:

[\[19474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of regulations on fluorinated gas in helping to reduce emissions leakage.

Robbie Moore:

We are in the process of reviewing the GB F-gas Regulation and have engaged with industry throughout this process. As part of this work, we undertook a comprehensive review of the GB F-gas Regulation and published an assessment report in December 2022, which included assessing measures related to leakage of F-gases. We intend to consult on proposals for change to the GB F-gas Regulation in due course.

■ Gardens: Waste Disposal

Mr Toby Perkins: [\[19043\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which local authorities (a) charged for collection of garden waste and b) provided a free garden waste service in 2023/24.

Robbie Moore:

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs does not hold this data.

Under section 45(3) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 waste collection authorities are permitted to charge a reasonable amount for the collection of garden waste.

Local Authorities are best placed to determine the effective delivery of local services.

Mr Toby Perkins: [\[19044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what information his Department holds on the number of local authorities that charged an annual fee of (a) less than £30, (b) £30.01- £40, (c) £40.01- £50, (d) £50.01- £75, (e) £75.01- £100.00 and (f) £100.01 or more for the collection of garden waste in the 2023-24 financial year.

Robbie Moore:

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs does not hold this data.

■ Microplastics: Pollution

Kerry McCarthy: [\[18683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to help tackle microplastic pollution originating from textiles.

Robbie Moore:

Microplastics can enter the environment from several sources such as vehicle tyre wear, machine-washing clothes and from textiles themselves.

Defra funded a rapid evidence assessment in 2022 to better understand the costs, benefits, and efficiencies of installing filters in washing machines to trap textile microfibres during the laundry cycle and before discharge to wastewater treatment works. Evidence gaps were identified from the review and the conclusion was made that further information is required to meet the legal framework to drive action. For example, there is a need to better understand how to avert additional costs incurred by consumers of new washing machines with filters, and the consumer's sustainable disposal of used filters. We need to ensure all evidence to support the introduction of filters is robust and fully reviewed. We have conveyed this to the industry, and we look forward to any proposals they are able to share when they are able to do so.

We are also working with the UK water industry to understand the effectiveness of other interventions in the wastewater system to tackle microplastic pollution and to characterise and quantify microplastics and fibres entering wastewater treatment works. Research to-date shows that wastewater treatment plants are effective at

removing microplastics and -fibres from wastewater from the home environment, with up to 99% of microplastic particles removed throughout the wastewater treatment process.

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[19564\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the extent of the impact of the (a) design and (b) manufacture of textiles on microplastic pollution.

Robbie Moore:

The Department has not made (actual) assessments of the impact of the design and manufacture of textiles on environmental microplastic pollution. Defra recently funded a project to develop and validate methods to detect, quantify and characterise microplastics and microplastic fibres from textiles used in clothing in rivers and their sediments. The techniques were tested on urban and rural rivers, and it was found higher levels of microplastics were present in the urban river.

Defra provided grant funding of £860000 to WRAP's Textiles 2030, which began in 2021. The programme brings together brands & retailers representing more than 62% of all clothing placed on the UK market to drive industry collaboration on circular design, circular business models, (resale, rental, subscription, repair, recycling) and closing the loop on materials (recycling).

■ Sewage: Pollution

Stephen Morgan:

[\[18260\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing an independent reporting mechanism for assessing sewage pollution by water companies.

Robbie Moore:

We have increased the number of storm overflows monitored across the network in England from approximately 7% in 2010, to 100% coverage before the end of 2023. These event duration monitors will provide a complete picture of when, and for how long, each storm overflow operates.

Under our landmark Environment Act, we made it a legal requirement for companies to provide discharge data to the Environment Agency and to make it available in near real time to the public. By bringing in this comprehensive monitoring, this government and its regulators have enabled the extent of sewage discharges to be revealed, so we are better equipped to tackle this challenge.

In April 2023, we also launched our consultation on Continuous Water Quality Monitoring and Event Duration Monitoring. This outlines the government's proposals to enhance the monitoring of storm overflow and final effluent discharges.

Government's response to this consultation was issued on 14 September 2023, and water companies are now taking forward plans to implement this programme from 2025.

Stephen Morgan:

[\[18261\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with water companies on (a) preventative measures to stop sewage dumping and (b) improving infrastructure.

Robbie Moore:

The Secretary of State has regular engagement with water companies to discuss a range of issues including preventative measures to reduce sewage discharges, and improvements to water company infrastructure.

For example, in December 2023, he wrote to all water company Chief Executives, requesting that they improve sewer maintenance programmes over the next twelve months to help prevent storm overflow discharges. This programme will support the stringent targets set out in the government's Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan, which will drive the largest infrastructure programme in water company history of £60 billion over 25 years.

On 11 March, the Government announced the additional fast-tracked investment of £180 million over the next 12 months to help reduce sewage spills. This is expected to prevent more than 8000 sewage spills polluting English waterways.

■ Sewage: Rivers

Rachael Maskell:

[\[18739\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of infrastructure in preventing sewage releases into rivers.

Robbie Moore:

Through the Government's Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan, we have set stringent targets for water companies to reduce the use of storm overflows, driving the largest infrastructure programme in water company history of £60 billion over 25 years. We expect water companies to utilise a natural capital approach, considering carbon reduction and biodiversity net gain, as well as catchment level and nature-based solutions in their planning where possible.

Water company investment in environmental improvements has been scaled up to £7.1 billion over the period 2020 – 25. This includes £3.1 billion invested in storm overflow improvements specifically. Moreover, we expect water companies to use the next five-year Price Review period (2025-2030) to set bold and ambitious plans that deliver for people and the environment.

On 11 March, the Government announced additional fast-tracked investment of £180m over the next 12 months into improving sewer infrastructure. This is expected to prevent more than 8000 sewage spills polluting English waterways.

Rachael Maskell:

[18740]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to move water companies that do not restrict sewage spills under an operator of last resort.

Robbie Moore:

There is no operator of last resort for water companies. Ofwat monitors the performance and financial position of all water companies and publishes results on these annually. Ofwat will take action when water company performance is not at the level Government expect, or if their investors need to strengthen their long-term financial resilience.

This Government is holding the water industry to account on a scale never seen before. We have legislated to introduce unlimited penalties on water companies who breach their environmental permits and expand the range of offences to which penalties can be applied. Furthermore, on 20 February, the Government and Environment Agency (EA) announced that they will quadruple the number of water company inspections to crack down on poor performing companies.

We will continue to hold water companies to account and if there are illegal breaches of permits, the regulators will not hesitate to take robust action.

Rachael Maskell:

[18742]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to provide public health warnings over the risk to (a) people and (b) animals of entering rivers into which sewage has been released.

Robbie Moore:

The Government directed water companies to increase their storm overflow monitoring in 2013 and achieved 100% event duration monitoring (EDM) coverage before the end of 2023. EDM data shows when storm overflows are discharging, and how long discharges have lasted for. The wealth of data collected from these monitors will ensure that we know the full extent of the problem – increasing transparency, revealing the worst-offending overflows, and enabling regulators to hold polluters to account.

In addition, the Environment Agency takes over 7,000 samples each year at England's 424 designated bathing waters, which are used to determine the annual bathing water classifications. These classifications are displayed on signage at bathing waters and online on the Environment Agency's Swimfo website, to allow bathers to make informed decisions before entering the water. If there is a pollution incident, a notification is posted on the Swimfo website and on signage at the bathing water. Throughout the bathing season, the Environment Agency makes daily pollution risk forecasts for a number of bathing waters, where water quality may be temporarily reduced due to factors such as heavy rainfall, wind or the tide. When a temporary reduction in water quality is forecast, the Environment Agency issues a pollution risk warning and advice against bathing, enabling bathers to avoid times or locations

where the risk of pollution is higher than normal and health risks from bathing may be higher than the annual classification suggests. To reduce risk to health from bathing waters, the UK Health Security Agency and the Environment Agency offer advice in their 'Swim Healthy' guidance, which is available to read before making any decision on swimming.

■ Water Supply

Derek Twigg:

[\[18377\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of trends in the number of (a) data centres and (b) AI infrastructure on demand for water in the next 10 years.

Robbie Moore:

The Environment Agency will be publishing its updated National Framework for Water Resources in 2025. This will reflect the expectation that regional water resources plans explore opportunities to deliver cross sector mutual benefits, as set out in a joint letter from Government and water regulators to regional water resources groups in January 2023.

This will include the need to work with data centre and AI industries to establish and understand their potential water demands, seeking to identify potential mutually beneficial solutions.

In some parts of England which are designated as water stressed, water companies may not be able to supply the required volume of water. The data centre and AI industry will need to investigate and plan for alternative sources of water, including on site water storage and water recycling.

■ Water Treatment: Plastics

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[19009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of wastewater treatment networks in filtering out microplastics.

Robbie Moore:

Government recently funded an external rapid evidence assessment to better understand the costs, benefits, and efficiencies of installing filters in washing machines. The filters aim to trap textile microplastic fibres during the laundry cycle and before discharge to sewer networks and wastewater treatment works. The assessment concluded further evidence was needed to determine how to avert additional costs incurred by consumers of new washing machines with filters, and the consumer's sustainable disposal of used filters.

A water industry investigation of the levels and types of microplastics entering a range of UK wastewater treatment works reported that conventional treatment can remove 99% of microplastics by number and 99.5% by mass.

■ Zane Gbangbola

Ellie Reeves:

[19662]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of opening an independent public inquiry into the death of Zane Gbangbola during flooding in 2014.

Robbie Moore:

The Surrey Senior Coroner has already carried out a full investigation into the circumstances surrounding Zane Gbangbola's death, taking into account a considerable amount of evidence. The Coroner, as an independent judicial office holder, drew his own conclusions based on this evidence.

If there is a belief that the evidence was not considered properly during the original inquest, or that there is new evidence available, the correct process is for an application to be made to the Attorney General asking her to apply to the High Court to quash the inquest and order a fresh investigation. The High Court would take this course of action if it believed that it would be in the interests of justice.

I believe that this remains the proper process to follow. An assessment of the merits of an inquiry should be made at the appropriate time if, and when, the legal processes have been exhausted.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Colombia: Ceasefires

Ian Byrne:

[R] [19502]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Colombia on the recent ceasefire with the ELN.

David Rutley:

As penholder at the UN Security Council, the UK helped coordinate international support to expand the mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia to verify the implementation of the ceasefire between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN). The ceasefire agreed between the Colombian Government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) and its extension following recent talks in Havana is a welcome step. During my visit to Colombia earlier this month, I [Minister Rutley] was able to convey our hope that the ceasefire will contribute to improving security and alleviate the suffering of conflict-affected communities.

■ Colombia: Peace Negotiations**Anna McMorris:** [\[19675\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help prevent delays in the implementation of the 2016 Columbia peace agreement.

David Rutley:

I [Minister Rutley] met with Colombian ministers in Bogota earlier this month where I stressed the importance of making progress on the 2016 Peace Agreement. During the most recent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting on 11 January, the UK and various Council members reiterated their commitment to support implementation of the 2016 peace agreement as the central peace policy in Colombia. As the second largest UN Trust Fund donor, the UK continues to be a leading advocate in support of Colombia's peace process and supports the work of the UN Verification Mission.

■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Legal Costs**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** [\[19108\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what the total cost to the public purse was of legal (a) support and (b) representation to Ministers in his Department in relation to their official conduct in each of the last three years.

David Rutley:

Such information is not centrally recorded or collated in the form requested. More generally, I would refer the hon. Member to the long-standing policies on legal expenditure, as set out recently by Cabinet Office Ministers on 12 March 2024, Official Report, PQ 17709 and 12 March 2024, Official Report, House of Lords, Cols. 1901-1904.

■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Publications**Kenny MacAskil:** [\[19725\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 20 March 2024 to Question 18297 on Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Publications, whether the media team monitors DeclassifiedUK.

David Rutley:

The media team monitor outlets for any stories relevant to the brief of the FCDO.

■ Gaza: Food Supply**Dan Carden:** [\[19695\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification report entitled Famine Review Committee: Gaza Strip, published in March 2024, if he will make an assessment

of the potential implications for his policies of the analysis in that report on the likelihood of imminent famine in Gaza.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

Palestinians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis. The UK and our partners are stepping up our efforts to get aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air.

Israel must take action to allow more aid into Gaza, including scaling up the Jordan corridor, opening a crossing in northern Gaza (Karni, Erez or a new crossing point), fully opening Ashdod Port for aid delivery and increasing screening capacity at Kerem Shalom and Nitzana to seven days a week and extended hours.

The UK is doing all it can to get as much food into Gaza as possible. We recently announced that more than 2,000 tonnes of UK-funded food aid are being distributed by the World Food Programme on the ground. This is our largest delivery of aid to Gaza in this crisis. This follows 750 tonnes of UK funded food aid arriving in Gaza in December, delivered through the World Food Programme, followed by a second delivery of 315 tonnes in January. Last month the UK and Jordan also air-dropped life-saving food and medicines directly to the Tal Al-Hawa hospital in northern Gaza.

■ **Gaza: Health Services**

Emma Hardy:

[\[18771\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent steps he has taken to help ensure the safety of health workers in Gaza.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

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

We need a humanitarian pause now to allow humanitarian actors and Gazans to operate and move safely, and enable hostages to be released.

We need Israel to ensure effective systems to guarantee the safety of aid convoys, humanitarian operations and IDP returns, and facilitate access.

■ **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

Alan Brown:

[\[19633\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on Israel's (a) policy on determining what aid is allowed into Gaza and (b) compliance with international humanitarian law on the entry of goods for the civilian population in Gaza.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have pressed the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza to alleviate the desperate situation with Israeli counterparts.

We are calling on Israel to increase access for aid through land routes, scale up the Jordan corridor with a streamlined screening and delivery process, open a crossing in northern Gaza (Karni, Erez or a new crossing point), fully open Ashdod Port for aid delivery and increase screening capacity at Kerem Shalom and Nitzana to seven days a week and extended hours.

■ Gaza: Humanitarian Pauses

Stephen Morgan:

[\[18262\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his US counterpart on the prospect of an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

We engage closely with the US on both this and wider aspects of the conflict. On 13 March, the UK, US, and regional partners took part in ministerial consultations to advance a maritime corridor to deliver humanitarian assistance to Gaza. On 7 March the Foreign Secretary spoke with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock about the situation in Gaza. The Foreign Secretary also met and raised this with Foreign Ministers of international partner countries, including the US, at the Munich Security Conference in February.

■ Gaza: Israel

Richard Burgon:

[\[19408\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the investigation by the UN into an Israeli military airstrike on a residential compound in Al Mawasi in Gaza on 18 January 2024.

Richard Burgon:

[\[19409\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has investigated whether UK arms were used in the Israeli military airstrike on a residential compound in Al Mawasi in Gaza on 18 January 2024.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The Foreign Secretary has underlined the need for Israel to ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, and ensure effective systems to guarantee the safety of humanitarian operations. It must take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities.

We continue to raise this with Israel at the highest levels.

■ Gaza: Ports

Rachael Maskell:

[\[18211\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his US counterpart on visa controls at the US temporary sea port into Gaza.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

I have not discussed the specific issue of visa controls at the planned temporary pier with my US counterpart. The UK Government is in regular contact with partners, including Cyprus, the US, UAE and others, about a range of operational matters with regard to the proposed maritime corridor, including planning efforts to establish the temporary pier.

■ Gaza: Ramadan

Emma Hardy:

[\[18772\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to help support (a) civilians and (b) faith groups observe Ramadan in Gaza.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The UK is a strong supporter of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and calls for places of worship to be respected. We want Israel to use all possible measures to protect the sanctity of holy sites. We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets.

Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We are working with partners to help get aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air. We also continue to call for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

■ Gibraltar: Economic Situation and Overseas Trade

Stephen Morgan:

[\[18939\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help (a) support the economy of and (b) increase trade between the UK and Gibraltar.

Leo Docherty:

The UK is committed to supporting Gibraltar, its people and its economy. We are working side-by-side with the Government of Gibraltar to conclude a UK-EU treaty which can secure the future prosperity of Gibraltar and the region. We continue to collaborate on shared prosperity goals. For example, the UK's £500 million Loan Guarantee to support Gibraltar's economy was extended in 2023 for a further three years and the implementation of the Gibraltar Authorisation Regime will facilitate financial services business between the two jurisdictions on a permanent basis.

■ Gibraltar: Spain**Stephen Morgan:** [\[18938\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that there is continued mobility across the border between Spain and Gibraltar during negotiations with the EU in respect of Gibraltar.

Leo Docherty:

The UK, working side-by-side with the Government of Gibraltar, is committed to concluding a UK-EU treaty as soon as possible. A key objective is to ensure that people and goods can move easily between Gibraltar and the surrounding communities. Together with the Government of Gibraltar we continue to monitor the functioning of the border and raise issues with the Spanish authorities, including at Ministerial level, when required.

■ Hamas: UNRWA**Alan Brown:** [\[19634\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 1 March 2024 to Question 15935 on Hamas: UNRWA, whether he received evidence from (a) the Israeli government, (b) other governments and (c) third parties that workers for the UN Relief and Works Agency were (i) complicit and (ii) participants in the Hamas terrorist attacks on 7 October 2023.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The UN Secretary-General has commissioned two independent investigations; one by the Office for Internal Oversight Services, and one on UNRWA neutrality policies and systems, which is being led by Catherine Colonna. We are following these investigations closely. We continue to urge Israel and all parties with relevant information to cooperate fully.

■ Israel: Travel Information**Theresa Villiers:** [\[R\]](#) [\[18874\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make it his policy to change the travel advisory guidance on Israel so that areas not directly affected by the Gaza conflict are no longer classified as essential travel only.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

Travel advice is constantly under review and regularly updated. How the FCDO determines travel advice can be found at the dedicated gov.uk site:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/about-foreign-commonwealth-development-office-travel-advice#how-we-compile-travel-advice>

Specific advice for travelling to Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories can be found at the dedicated Gov.uk site: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

■ Israel: West Bank

Stephen Morgan:

[18265]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help de-escalate tensions in the West Bank; and whether he has had discussions with his counterparts in Israel on their (a) withholding of work permits and (b) blocking of travel by Palestinians from the West Bank.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The Government maintains a regular dialogue with Israeli counterparts and partners on a range of issues relating to the conflict, including steps Israel must take to deescalate tensions in the West Bank. This includes halting settlement expansion, holding to account those responsible for extremist settler violence and releasing frozen funds.

On 12 February, the UK announced new sanctions against extremist Israeli settlers who have violently attacked Palestinians in the West Bank. These sanctions follow the announcement by the Foreign Secretary in December that the UK plans to ban those responsible for settler violence from entering the UK.

■ Kosovo: Council of Europe

Dr Matthew Offord:

[19325]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make it his policy to support Kosovo becoming a member of the Council of Europe.

Leo Docherty:

The UK supports Kosovo's current application to join the Council of Europe.

Membership of the Council of Europe would bring practical benefits and protections for all Kosovo citizens, including minority communities. The Foreign Secretary made our support clear during his visit to Kosovo in January this year.

■ Kosovo: Foreign Relations

Dr Matthew Offord:

[19326]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will publish a summary of the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs' recent visit to Kosovo.

Leo Docherty:

The Foreign Secretary reflected on his recent visit to Kosovo at the Foreign Affairs Committee session on 9 January (<https://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/44138eb7-41b6-47eb-9c61-e9ac76acc233>), sharing his views on the severity of the attack in Banjska in September 2023 and the need for the West to ensure its approach to the Western Balkans fully accounts for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Government issued a press release in advance of his visit (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-to-visit-kosovo-to-underline-uk-support>), and the Foreign Secretary himself gave an overview of his meeting with

UK troops deployed to Kosovo as part of NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) during the visit (<https://twitter.com/FCDOGovUK/status/1742992750079770754?s=20>).

■ Kosovo: Recognition of States

Dr Matthew Offord:

[19324]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what diplomatic steps his Department is taking to encourage European Union nations to recognise Kosovo as an independent sovereign state.

Leo Docherty:

We welcome the fact that the vast majority of EU members states recognise Kosovo's statehood. In line with our longstanding support for Kosovo's international integration as a sovereign independent state, the UK continues to use suitable opportunities to reinforce the case for recognition with the five remaining EU members states which have yet to recognise Kosovo's statehood.

■ Ludivia Galindez

Anna McMorris:

[19676]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of reports of the murder of women's rights and peace activist Ludivia Galindez in Colombia on 23 February 2024.

David Rutley:

Colombia is a Human Rights Priority Country for the UK and the British Government remains concerned at the worrying rate of murders of, and threats against, human rights defenders and social leaders in Colombia. We will continue to support the Colombian Government in its commitment to implement the 2016 Peace Agreement and ensure the protection and safety of peace activists and women's rights campaigners. During my visit to Colombia earlier this month, I [Minister Rutley] raised the human rights situation with Vice Foreign Minister Coy. At the UN Security Council on 11 January, we set out our concern over attacks on human rights defenders, communities, women and social leaders, and reiterated our commitment to supporting efforts to tackle the root causes of violence in Colombia.

■ Nagorno Karabakh: Churches and Cultural Heritage

Andrew Bridgen:

[19361]

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Azerbaijan on the (a) condition and (b) security of Armenian Christian (i) churches and (ii) other heritage sites in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Leo Docherty:

The UK Government is clear that the preservation of religious and cultural sites in the region is an important issue and we take seriously reports of the destruction of churches or other sites of religious significance. We are aware of allegations from

both Armenia and Azerbaijan that cultural and religious sites have been deliberately damaged over the course of the conflict. UK Ministers and the British Embassy in Baku have raised the topic of religious and cultural destruction with the Azerbaijani government consistently and at the most senior levels.

■ **Nagorno Karabakh: Cultural Heritage**

Andrew Bridgen:

[\[19618\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will hold discussions with his Armenian counterpart on the protection of Armenian Christian cultural heritage sites in Nagorno-Karabakh; and whether he has made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh in Open Door UK's World Watch List, published on 17 January 2024.

Leo Docherty:

We are clear that the preservation of religious and cultural sites in the region is an important issue and we take seriously reports of the destruction of churches and other sites of religious significance in both Armenia and Azerbaijan as a result of their long-running conflict. Ministers and the British Embassies in Yerevan and Baku have raised the need to protect such sites with the Armenian and Azerbaijani Governments consistently and at the most senior levels. Open Door UK's World Watch List provides a sobering account of the extreme difficulties faced by many Christians around the world. We note the report's comments regarding Azerbaijan and regularly raise human rights issues with the Azerbaijani Government.

■ **Nagorno Karabakh: Refugees**

Andrew Bridgen:

[\[19362\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department is taking diplomatic steps to help ensure the right of return to Nagorno-Karabakh of Christian Armenians.

Leo Docherty:

The UK Government is clear that Azerbaijan must create the conditions for a safe and secure return of ethnic Armenians who were displaced during September's military operation and want to return. We welcomed Azerbaijan's provision of a registration portal, though more work is needed to assist those considering a return. Ministers and officials have discussed these issues with the Azerbaijani Government and encourage Azerbaijan to be proactive in enabling the return of those who wish to do so.

■ **Nigeria: Pollution Control**

Caroline Lucas:

[\[18877\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 29 February 2024 to Question 15265 on Shell: Nigeria, what steps his

Department is taking to support the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project; and whether his Department has provided any financial support to the project.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

HMG does not provide direct financial support to the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP). We have previously made recommendations to HYPREP around improved governance and transparency. Officials have encouraged HYPREP to ensure it is thorough, well managed and delivers for local communities.

Caroline Lucas:

[\[18878\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 29 February 2024 to Question 15265 on Shell: Nigeria, what initiatives his Department is supporting to help tackle oil pollution in the Niger Delta in areas not covered by the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The UK continues to encourage a coordinated effort between the Nigerian Government, oil and gas companies, and communities to bring an end to all forms of oil contamination in Nigeria. The UK has also supported Nigeria to improve their ability to monitor greenhouse gas emissions, including with use of satellite data, and to strengthen the regulations governing oil and gas facilities and infrastructure that will help reduce emissions. The UK government is supporting Nigeria in meeting its ambitious climate change objectives set by its Nationally Determined Contributions and commitment to net-zero by 2060.

■ Nuclear Disarmament

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[18558\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking with international partners (a) through the UN and (b) in other fora to (i) tackle the use of nuclear rhetoric and (ii) promote disarmament.

Leo Docherty:

Alongside our NATO Allies and G7 partners, we have consistently condemned Russia's irresponsible nuclear rhetoric. In February 2024, G7 Foreign Ministers "condemned Russia's irresponsible nuclear rhetoric, its posture of strategic intimidation, its announcement that it has deployed nuclear weapons in Belarus, at an increasingly unstable and dangerous moment, and its undermining of arms control regimes". Our nuclear deterrent has protected the UK and our Allies from the most extreme acts of aggression and will continue to protect us for as long as it is needed. We remain committed to full implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

In 2023 G7 Leaders issued the Hiroshima Vision on Nuclear Disarmament, which reaffirms our commitment to achieving a world without nuclear weapons with undiminished security for all. The UK has also funded over £1.8 million worth of projects on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, including our annual conference to address the diplomatic, political and strategic challenges for the global

non-proliferation regime. This sits alongside our work on verification and irreversibility of nuclear disarmament that uniquely connects key government representatives with non-government policy, scientific and technical experts.

■ **Peru: Forests**

Alex Sobel:

[\[19165\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his Peruvian counterpart on the potential impact of that country's Forestry Law on (a) deforestation and (b) human rights.

David Rutley:

I [Minister Rutley] visited Peru in October 2023 and held discussions with senior representatives of the Peruvian Government on a range of priorities, such as the importance of protecting human rights and the environment. We are working with the Peruvian Government to drive sustainable development that protects human rights and delivers climate objectives. Our Embassy in Lima has regularly discussed with the Peruvian Government the potential impacts of changes to the Forestry and Wildlife Law and raised concerns about how these could affect achievement of Peru's international commitments.

■ **South Sudan and Sudan: Oil**

Ms Lyn Brown:

[\[19578\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the impact of the halting of oil exports from South Sudan via Sudan on (a) security and the humanitarian situation in South Sudan and (b) prospects for (i) escalation and (ii) de-escalation of the conflict in Sudan; and whether he is taking steps to engage (A) other countries affected and (B) China in discussion of the potential impact of the halting of such oil exports.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

There has been recent damage to the oil pipeline that carries oil from South Sudan to Sudan, which has significantly reduced the South Sudanese government's oil production capabilities and subsequently their income. This economic deterioration is exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation in South Sudan, as food prices and the cost of humanitarian assistance delivery have increased. We are continuing to monitor the impacts of this closely, including on the security and humanitarian situation in both Sudan and South Sudan.

■ **UNRWA: Finance**

Steve McCabe:

[\[18833\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what funds his Department contributed to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in each of the last five years.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The UK provided the following funding to UNRWA in each of the last five financial years:

FY 2019 - 20: £65.5 million

FY 2020 - 21: £65 million

FY 2021 - 22: £11 million

FY 2022 - 23: £18.7 million

FY 2023 - 24: £35 million

The UK provided £35 million to UNRWA this financial year, including an uplift of £16 million for the Gaza humanitarian response, all of which was disbursed before the recent allegations came to light. No more British funding is due this financial year. We are pausing any future funding of UNRWA.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**■ Autism: Children****Derek Thomas:**[\[18916\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many children are waiting for (a) an assessment and (b) a diagnosis for autism spectrum disorder.

Maria Caulfield:

The latest autism assessment waiting times data drawn from the Mental Health Services Dataset was published on 14 March 2024. This data showed that the number of people aged zero to 17 years old with an open referral for suspected autism was 102,024 in December 2023. The data also showed that, in December 2023, 6.3% of patients, or 5,443 patients, aged zero to 17 years old received a first contact appointment within 13 weeks.

Data on children and young people in this dataset is expected to be an underestimate. Caution should be used when interpreting these statistics since they are experimental rather than official statistics. The majority of children assessed for autism in the United Kingdom are seen in child development services, which are out of the scope of this dataset. This means the published figures will underestimate the volume of referrals or diagnoses and the associated impact on health services. NHS England continue to conduct exploratory analysis into the Community Services Dataset, with a view to include autism waiting times data from this dataset. This should improve the coverage of this data.

Derek Thomas:[\[18917\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to help reduce waiting times for autism spectrum disorder assessments for children.

Maria Caulfield:

We expect integrated care boards (ICBs) to have due regard to National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines on autism, when commissioning services. It is the responsibility of ICBs to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, in line with these NICE guidelines.

In 2023 NHS England published a national framework and operational guidance for all age autism diagnostic assessment services. This guidance will help the National Health Service improve all age autism assessment services and improve the experience for people referred to an autism assessment service.

We have invested in improving autism assessment services over recent years, including £2.5 million in 2022/23 to support local areas with improvements in autism assessment pathways. For 2023/2024, £4.2 million of funding is available across England to improve services for autistic children and young people, including autism assessment services.

NHS England publishes quarterly data on how many people are waiting for an autism assessment and for how long. While these are experimental statistics, the data does provide useful information nationally and locally, to support local areas in improving their performance and reducing assessment waiting times.

Each ICB in England is expected to have an Executive Lead for learning disability and autism, supporting the board in planning to meet the needs of its local population of people with a learning disability and autism, including in relation to appropriate autism assessment pathways. NHS England has published guidance on these roles.

■ Autism: Diagnosis**Daisy Cooper:**[\[18945\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of average waiting times for autism assessments on other health and care services.

Maria Caulfield:

There are no current plans to make this specific assessment. We recognise the importance of early identification of autism so that an individual's needs can be identified sooner, and support put in place earlier in life.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) guidelines on autism highlight the importance of conducting an autism assessment as soon as possible so that appropriate health and social care interventions, and advice and support, can be offered. It is the responsibility of integrated care boards (ICBs) to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, in line with the NICE's guidelines.

In April 2023, NHS England published a national framework and operational guidance for autism assessment services. This guidance will help the National Health Service

to deliver improved outcomes for children, young people, and adults. The operational guidance makes it clear that people should be able to access support and care from other services for needs that appear linked to physical and mental health, including while they are waiting for an autism assessment. This year, the Department is updating the Statutory Guidance on Autism to support the NHS and local authorities in delivering improved outcomes for autistic people.

■ Blood: Contamination

Dame Andrea Jenkyns: [19113]

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

Maria Caulfield:

The Department has not made an estimate of the number of people who have died since being treated with contaminated blood products and given contaminated blood transfusions, in the Morley and Outwood constituency.

Dame Andrea Jenkyns: [19114]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what psychological support is available for people (a) infected and (b) affected by contaminated blood and blood products in Morley and Outwood constituency.

Maria Caulfield:

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

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

A bespoke psychological support service for infected blood victims, commissioned by NHS England, is currently being developed, intended to go live in early Summer 2024.

■ Cancer: Children and Young People

Helen Morgan: [19747]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she is taking steps to help ensure that healthcare providers inform the carers of children and young people with cancer of the financial support available to them.

Andrew Stephenson:

NHS England and the integrated care boards are responsible for commissioning and ensuring the healthcare needs of local communities in England are met. This includes taking steps to ensure that healthcare providers inform all patients and carers, including the carers of children and young people with cancer, of the financial support available to them.

The National Health Service in England runs schemes to provide financial assistance for travel to a hospital or other NHS premises, for specialist NHS treatment or diagnostics tests, when referred by a doctor or other primary healthcare professional.

Care Workers: Visas**Andrew Gwynne:****[19011]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of the removal of (a) overseas and (b) senior care workers' rights to bring dependants on main applicant flows for the health and social care visa.

Helen Whately:

We expect social care visa volumes will remain resilient to removing the eligibility for new care and senior care workers to bring dependants. This is in the context of a strong global labour supply, possible changes in migrant behaviour in response, and that a proportion of recruits are estimated to already come without dependants. The Home Office has published estimates of the impact these changes might have on the number of people applying to work in the sector from outside the United Kingdom, which are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/legal-migration-statement-estimated-immigration-impacts>

Congenital Abnormalities: Health Services**Rachael Maskell:****[19400]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to ensure effective collaboration between early intervention services for babies with neurodevelopmental conditions.

Andrea Leadsom:

The Healthy Child Programme is the national public prevention and early intervention health framework for babies, children, and young people. Health visitors are specialist community public health nurses who lead the Healthy Child Programme from preconception to five years old. They deliver evidence-based interventions, which include five mandated reviews: antenatal; approximately two weeks after birth; six to eight weeks after birth; at one years old; and at two to two and a half years old. These include reviews of development and growth. Where a baby or child has special education needs or vulnerabilities, health visitors work in partnership with other professionals and families, to respond to health and care needs.

The Government is also investing approximately £300 million to improve support for families through the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. The programme is implementing many elements of the Government's Best Start for Life Vision which was published in March 2021, and is delivering a step change in outcomes for babies, children, and their parents and carers in 75 local authorities in England, including those with high levels of deprivation. Many local authorities without funding have also chosen to implement elements of the vision.

Family hubs offer support to families from conception to two years old, and provide services for children of all ages, from zero to 19 years old, or zero to 25 years old for families with children who have special educational needs and disabilities. Family hubs are a way of joining up locally to improve access to services, the connections between families, professionals, services, and providers, and prioritise strengthening the relationships that carry us all through life. They bring together services for children of all ages, with a great Start for Life offer at their core.

■ Dental Services

Dr Thérèse Coffey:

[\[19343\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 5 March 2024 to Question 16340 on Dental Services, whether column H in the spreadsheet link provided is the (a) monthly or (b) annual unit of dental activity performance target.

Andrea Leadsom:

The answer of 5 March 2024 to Question 16340 provided a link to data published by the NHS Business Services Authority on English Contractor Monthly General Dental Activity. Column H of the data spreadsheet is the annual Units of Dental Activity performance target.

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[19421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will publish the modelling produced by NHS England which shows that the NHS Dental Recovery Plan will deliver 2.5 million NHS dentistry appointments.

Andrea Leadsom:

On 7 February 2024, we published *Faster, simpler and fairer: our plan to recover and reform NHS dentistry*, which is backed by £200 million and will fund approximately 2.5 million additional appointments, or more than 1.5 million additional courses of dental treatment. The plan sets out our actions to improve dental access for patients by helping the sector to recover from the pandemic, as well as actions needed for long-term reform.

Further information on the modelling for the number of additional appointments being delivered under the plan will be shared with the Health and Social Care Select Committee shortly, and also to be placed in the Library.

■ Dental Services: Wellingborough

Gen Kitchen: [19755]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of provision of NHS dentists in Wellingborough constituency.

Gen Kitchen: [19756]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of NHS dental provision in Wellingborough constituency.

Andrea Leadsom:

On 7 February 2024, we published *Faster, simpler and fairer: our plan to recover and reform NHS dentistry*, which is backed by £200 million and will fund approximately 2.5 million additional appointments, or more than 1.5 million additional courses of dental treatment. The plan sets out our actions to improve dental access for patients across the country and to address the challenges facing National Health Service dentistry, including in Northamptonshire.

From 1 April 2023, the responsibility for commissioning primary care dentistry to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to all integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. Northamptonshire Integrated Care Board is responsible for having local processes in place to identify areas of need and determine the priorities for investment across the ICB area. NHS Dental Statistics, published by NHS Digital, provides data on dental activity in England. The latest annual report is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-dental-statistics>

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Written Questions

Navendu Mishra: [19733]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when she plans to provide an Answer to Question 17965 tabled by the hon. Member for Stockport on 11 March 2024.

Andrew Stephenson:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to Question [17965](#) on 21 March 2024.

■ Disease Control

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [19147]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the impact of ending government support for the UK Recovery programme on the UK's preparedness for future pandemics.

Maria Caulfield:

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funded the RECOVERY trial in March 2020, initially for 18 months, before progressively extending the study to March 2024. It was a highly successful trial that, by recruiting patients at a faster rate than any previous trial, was able to

rapidly identify the first drugs that reduce COVID-19 mortality. At the end of an NIHR award, including any extensions, researchers can apply through a competitive process for new funding.

The NIHR continues to fund research into infectious diseases, which could be utilised in the event of another pandemic. For example, the NIHR has allocated £2.9 million to Imperial College London and Imperial Healthcare NHS Trust to adapt their COVID-19 trial for severe flu patients. The NIHR is open to applications on any health and care-related topic.

More widely, the UK Biological Security Strategy, published in June 2023, reaffirms our ambition to scale up discovery, development, and manufacturing of therapeutics and vaccines within 100 days of a pandemic being declared. This aligns with our ongoing work to ensure a flexible and capabilities-based approach to pandemic preparedness, which will see emergency planners develop and maintain a generic suite of adaptable response capabilities across the Government. This will enable an approach that can be flexibly deployed to meet the demands of any future pandemic, and support a whole-system response.

■ Disease Control: Staff

Chi Onwurah:

[\[17599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many full-time equivalent members of staff work on pandemic preparedness in (a) her Department and (b) the UK Health Security Agency.

Maria Caulfield:

The Government continues to plan and prepare for a range of pandemic and emerging infectious disease scenarios, including those caused by respiratory contact, both influenza and non-influenza, and vector-borne pathogens, building on lessons learned from exercises and incidents, including the COVID-19 pandemic. There are currently 21.35 full time equivalent (FTE) staff working on pandemic preparedness within the Global and Public Health Group of the Department.

Every team across the United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is playing a critical role in the nation's pandemic preparedness and is committing significant resource and effort to meet our remit. As a result, it is not possible to provide an FTE figure of all staff whose work forms part of pandemic preparedness. The UKHSA's Centre for Pandemic Preparedness (CPP) holds some members of staff who are focused primarily on pandemic preparedness policy and coordination. There currently are 18.4 FTEs working in CPP.

■ Food: Labelling

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[19237\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure retail food businesses comply with measures in the Food Information Regulations 2014 on providing written allergen information for labels.

Andrea Leadsom:

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is responsible for food safety related labelling, including allergens. Local authorities are responsible for enforcing food law in the vast majority of food businesses, including those in the retail and catering sector. As central competent authority, the FSA monitors the delivery of official controls by local authorities.

The FSA produces the statutory Food Law Code of Practice and associated Practice Guidance establishing a set of expectations for the activities local authorities are responsible for under food law, and how these are to be delivered. This is supported by a range of training, advice, and guidance to help food officers discharge their functions. Recent changes to the Food Law Code of Practice will enable a more risk-based and intelligence-driven approach to targeting premises for food standards inspections and carrying out interventions, and includes specific consideration of the risk factor for compliance with providing allergen information.

The FSA also provides support for food businesses, for example through guidance and training, on providing allergen information in line with the requirements of the 2014 Food Information to Consumer Regulations to help drive up compliance and make it easier for people with a food allergy, intolerance, and coeliac disease to make safe choices when eating out.

■ **Gender Dysphoria: Children**

Sir John Hayes: [\[18647\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many children in England have been issued puberty blockers since 2019.

Maria Caulfield:

We have always been clear that children’s safety and well-being is paramount, so we welcomed NHS England’s landmark decision to ban routine use puberty blockers to children experiencing gender dysphoria. This decision was based on the available evidence and expert clinical opinion.

Gonadotropin-releasing hormone agonists or puberty blockers are used to treat several medical conditions in children and young people. These can include precocious puberty, some forms of cancer, endometriosis, and gender dysphoria.

Information on the clinical indication for which these medications have been prescribed is not held centrally. The following table shows the number of identifiable patients prescribed and dispensed gonadotropin-releasing hormone agonists for all purposes, in primary and secondary care in England from 2019 to September 2022:

FINANCIAL YEAR	PATIENTS IDENTIFIED
2018/19	1,072
2019/20	1,048

FINANCIAL YEAR	PATIENTS IDENTIFIED
2020/21	936
2021/22	864
April to September 2022	693

Source: NHS Business Services Authority

Note: Prescriptions have only been included where a National Health Service number has been identified during processing, and an age has been recorded. The same patients may appear in multiple years.

■ Health Services: Full Sutton Prison

Sir Greg Knight:

[19003]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many requests for healthcare treatment for prisoners at HMP Full Sutton were made in each of the last five years; and what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of healthcare treatment for prisoners at that prison.

Maria Caulfield:

Information on the number of individual requests for healthcare services for prisoners at HMP Full Sutton is not collected centrally. Healthcare services for the prison population at HMP Full Sutton are commissioned by NHS England, to ensure they are of an equivalent quality and standard to National Health Service care and treatment provided in the community. The range of services available to all 600 male prisoners at the facility includes general practitioner services, dental services, ophthalmic services, mental health services, and public health services, including substance misuse services.

The frequency and capacity of healthcare sessions commissioned at HMP Full Sutton is informed by the contracting and performance management process. Quarterly quality and performance reports are provided to commissioners, highlighting any service pressures and actions being taken to address workforce or access issues. New provider contracts will come into effect from 1 June 2024, with services being further strengthened to meet the needs of the prisoner population.

■ Health Services: Veterans

Steve McCabe:

[19522]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many veterans in garrison towns have used Op Courage since its inception.

Steve McCabe:

[\[19523\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the answer of 15 March 2024 to Question 17714 on Health Services: Veterans, how many veterans used Op Restore services in 2022 and 2023.

Steve McCabe:

[\[19524\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the answer of 15 March 2024 to Question 17714 on Health Services: Veterans, how many veterans in the West Midlands used Op Restore services in 2022 and 2023.

Maria Caulfield:

Data on Op COURAGE is collated by the integrated care board where a patient is registered. Between 2017 and December 2023, there have been 22,371 referrals to Op COURAGE for veterans who are registered with a general practice, located in areas with military presence. In 2022 and 2023, there were 581 referrals for Op RESTORE. 78 of these were from the Midlands region. Data was collated at a regional level only, and is not available for West Midlands.

■ Health Services: Women

Anneliese Dodds:

[\[18793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many women's health hubs were open on 29 February 2024.

Anneliese Dodds:

[\[18794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the number of women's health hubs open on 29 February 2024.

Maria Caulfield:

The expansion of women's health hubs is a priority ambition within the Women's Health Strategy for England. In October 2022 the Birmingham, RAND and Cambridge Evaluation (BRACE) Centre's early evaluation of women's health hubs identified 13 women's health hubs in England. This evaluation is available at the following link:

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/brace/whh-interim-summary-paper-final.pdf>

We are investing £25 million into women's health hubs to enable the establishment of at least one women's health hub in every integrated care system. The funding is being distributed to every integrated care board (ICB), with each ICB receiving £595,000 in total over two years, 2023/24 and 2024/25. ICB plans received in September 2023 indicate that the funding is supporting at least 49 women's health hubs, which includes the creation of 38 new hubs and the expansion of 11 existing hub models. This funding is intended to show proof of concept to enable ICBs to assess the benefit of hubs and roll out more widely.

■ Healthy Start Scheme

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck: [\[19623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will have discussions with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the potential merits of automatically enrolling eligible people in the Healthy Start scheme.

Andrea Leadsom:

There are no plans for specific discussions on this point. The NHS Business Services Authority operates the Healthy Start scheme on behalf of the Department. The Healthy Start scheme has recently transitioned from paper vouchers to a prepaid card. All applicants to the Healthy Start scheme, where they meet the eligibility criteria set out in the Healthy Start legislation, must accept the terms and conditions of the prepaid card at the point of application. As the prepaid card is a financial product and cannot be issued without the applicant accepting these terms, the NHS Business Services Authority is not able to automatically provide eligible families with a prepaid card.

■ Intensive Care: Disease Control

Rachael Maskell: [\[19398\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment she has made of the preparedness of intensive care services for a future pandemic.

Maria Caulfield:

The Department continues to plan and prepare for a range of pandemic and emerging infectious disease scenarios, including those caused by respiratory contact, both influenza and non-influenza, and vector-borne pathogens, building on lessons learned from exercises and incidents, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department working with health and care partners is strengthening pandemic preparedness by considering the flexible and scalable response capabilities that can be adapted to any threat that the health and social care system needs.

This includes intensive care capacity that will continue to be an integral part of National Health Service resilience and pandemic planning. The urgent and emergency care recovery plan this year sought to strengthen capacity within the acute bed base, with 5,000 additional permanent staffed core general and acute beds delivered, compared to planned 2022/23 levels. Our preparedness also includes considering the medicines and other supporting products for intensive care services in a pandemic.

■ Isebrook Hospital

Gen Kitchen: [\[19757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing an urgent care centre at Isebrook Hospital in Wellingborough constituency.

Helen Whately:

The commissioning of local health services is a matter for local National Health Service commissioners and providers. The Northamptonshire Integrated Care Board has no current plans to develop an urgent care centre at Isebrook Hospital.

■ Mental Health Services: Veterans**Steve McCabe:**[\[19247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many veterans with OCD have used Op COURAGE since its inception.

Steve McCabe:[\[19248\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many veterans with drug and alcohol addictions have used Op COURAGE since its inception.

Steve McCabe:[\[19249\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether bespoke wellbeing support is provided by the NHS to veterans who are full-time carers.

Maria Caulfield:

Prior to April 2023, Op COURAGE was formed from the three separate services of the Transition, Intervention and Liaison service, the Complex Treatment Service, and the High Intensity Service. Performance data for these services did not collect uniquely identifiable information on individual veterans, so it would not be possible to identify instances where a veteran had attended Op COURAGE for more than one course of treatment.

No data is held on the numbers of veterans with gambling additions that have used Op COURAGE. Data analysed includes the primary mental health reason for referral to Op COURAGE. From April 2023, there have been no referrals to Op COURAGE with a primary mental health reason of gambling addiction. Since April 2023, less than 1.5% of referrals to Op COURAGE have been with a primary mental health reason of either obsessive-compulsive disorder or drug or alcohol difficulties.

Between August 2021 and September 2024, £339,000 has been allocated across the three social prescribing pilot projects which are in Cornwall, Durham, and Dorset. The National Health Service provides wellbeing support to all full-time carers. Veterans who identify as a carer are offered a Carer's Assessment, which is undertaken by local authorities. The outcome of the Carer's Assessment will inform a care and support plan, which is bespoke to the needs of the carer.

The Better Care Fund in 2023/24 includes £327 million for carers support, including short breaks and respite services for carers. It also funds advice and support to carers and a small number of additional local authority duties. There is no data on how much of that funding may have been used for veterans.

■ **Mental Health: Debt Collection**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: **[19140]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of debt collection practices on the (a) mental and (b) physical health of individuals in financial difficulty.

Maria Caulfield:

No specific assessment has been made, but we work with HM Treasury to support people with mental ill health facing debt collection. We have been working with HM Treasury and the Money and Pensions Service to promote the mental health Breathing Space scheme, which gives those with mental ill health who are facing financial difficulties, the space to receive debt advice without pressure from creditors or mounting debts. The scheme has protected over 100,000 people who are unable to afford their debt repayments by pausing enforcement action, creditor contact and most interest, fees, and charges for a 60-day period, giving them time to find a debt solution that works for them.

Those receiving mental health crisis treatment can also access a Mental Health Crisis Breathing Space, where the protections last as long as their mental health crisis treatment lasts, plus a further 30 days.

The Government is also delivering a package of cost-of-living support totalling over £104 billion, or £3,700 per household on average, between 2022 to 2025. The Government is continuing to support millions of households most in need, with up to £900 in further cost of living payments in the past year.

Over six million people across the United Kingdom on eligible extra-costs disability benefits have received a £150 Disability Cost of Living Payment, to help with the additional costs they face. More than eight million pensioner households across the UK have received an additional £300 Cost of Living Payment during the winter of 2023/24, paid as a top-up to the winter fuel payment.

■ **Social Services: Pay**

Matt Warman: **[14881]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an estimate of the cost to (a) the public purse and (b) social care providers of increasing pay for staff in the social care sector by 65p per hour.

Helen Whately:

The Department has previously estimated that the cost to the public purse of raising minimum pay in adult social care to the National Living Wage plus 65p is approximately £600 million per year. This includes direct care staff only and excludes ancillary staff.

This estimate does not include the additional costs of higher pay which would be borne by the group of at least 221,000 'self-funders' in care homes and using community care who pay for their own care.

■ Social Services: South Holland and the Deepings

Sir John Hayes:

[\[18837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to increase adult social care capacity in South Holland and the Deepings constituency.

Helen Whately:

The Government has made up to £8.6 billion available in additional funding over this financial year and next, to support adult social care and discharge. This includes nearly £2 billion being made available to local authorities over two years through the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund, which is specifically designed to support increased adult social care capacity. Local authorities can choose to use the funding to increase fee rates paid to adult social care providers, increase adult social care workforce capacity and retention, and reduce adult social care waiting times. Lincolnshire County Council received a total of just over £13 million through this fund in 2023/24, and are set to receive nearly £15 million in 2024/25. This is in addition to the broader funding that is available to Lincolnshire to spend on adult social care.

HOME OFFICE

■ Brook House Immigration Removal Centre: Domestic Visits

Dame Diana Johnson:

[\[19575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, on (a) how many occasions and (b) which dates (i) he and (ii) Ministers in his Department have visited Brook House Immigration Removal Centre since 9 September 2017.

Michael Tomlinson:

Brook House Immigration Removal Centre has been visited by four Home Office Ministers from 2018-24.

18 January 2018 – Immigration Minister

30 June 2022 – Lords Minister of State

28 August 2022 – Minister for Illegal Migration

5 February 2024 – Minister for Countering Illegal Migration

■ Crime: Pharmacy

Rachael Maskell:

[\[18906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information his Department holds on the most common crimes that take place at community pharmacies.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office holds data on the number of offences recorded by the police in England and Wales, and collects and publishes data on crime affecting commercial business premises, including retail premises, in England and Wales as part of the Commercial Victimisation Survey.

Neither data source provides the level of detail necessary to identify crimes that take place in community pharmacies.

The Commercial Victimisation Survey provides the most reliable estimate of crime impacting wholesale and retail premises in England and Wales. The most recent available data, for the year 2022, is available online:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/crime-against-businesses-findings-from-the-2022-commercial-victimisation-survey>.

The National Business Crime Centre has published guidance containing practical advice to help pharmacies identify risks and prevent crime, the guidance is published here: [Pharmacies October 22.pdf \(nbcc.police.uk\)](#).

■ Fire and Rescue Services

Dame Diana Johnson: [19572]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, on (a) how many occasions and (b) what dates he has intervened in a fire and rescue authority under section 22 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 since 2010.

Chris Philp:

Fire policy transferred from the Department for Communities and Local Government to the Home Office on 5 January 2016. Since then, there have been no formal interventions in the operations of a fire and rescue authority by the Secretary of State in England under section 22 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. We do not hold any information for the period prior to the machinery of government changes.

Dame Diana Johnson: [19574]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of updating the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

Chris Philp:

We are revising the Fire National Framework for England to embed the reforms set out in the Government Response to the White Paper. The Framework sets priorities and objectives for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England in connection with the discharge of their functions. We are engaging partners to shape our proposals and key themes.

We intend to launch a public consultation on the revisions later this year.

■ Fire and Rescue Services: Staff

Dame Diana Johnson: [19573]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many times since 26 October 2022 the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire has met (a) current and (b) former firefighters who have experienced bullying, discrimination or sexual harassment at work.

Chris Philp:

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire has prioritised engagement with the sector on integrity matters. This has included Chief Fire Officers, Fire and Rescue Authority Chairs, His Majesty's Inspectorate, the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Local Government Association and representative groups such as the Fire Brigades Union. In addition to regularly meeting frontline firefighters and police officers when visiting fire and police stations.

He will continue to meet with sector leaders to hear first-hand on these issues.

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire has corresponded with both current and former staff in fire and rescue services, who have raised concerns regarding bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

The Home Office will continue to call for action to ensure fire and rescue services are welcoming, respectful workplaces that enable all individuals who work in them to thrive.

■ Fire Prevention: Departmental Coordination**Caroline Lucas:**[\[19041\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to coordinate activity across Government in order to improve the UK's preparedness for extreme wildfire events.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office are the lead Government Department for Wildfire Response and own the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA) wildfire risk.

This [Wildfire Framework](#) outlines the work being undertaken to improve the UK's preparedness for wildfires in England. The Home Office works closely with other departments and key stakeholders including Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities to mitigate the risk of wildfire.

The Home Office have committed to scoping a wildfire strategy and action plan by mid 2024, with support from Defra and its agencies. This commitment is outlined in the third National Adaptation Plan.

The Home Office maintains regular engagement with National Bodies including the National Fire Chiefs Council and England and Wales Wildfire Forum to monitor and review sector led improvements to wildfire response and mitigation.

■ Fire Regulations: Holiday Accommodation**Derek Thomas:**[\[18914\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of (a) compliance with fire regulations by providers of small paying guest accommodation and (b) the numbers of fire assessors to ensure that compliance.

Chris Philp:

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) is the main piece of fire safety legislation that applies to all non-domestic premises in England and Wales. The FSO places a legal duty on Responsible Persons (RPs) to undertake a fire risk assessment and put in place a suitable set of fire safety precautions to ensure the safety of those who use the premises.

Fire and Rescue Authorities are the main enforcement body for the FSO. Each FRA is required to deliver an independent annual risk-based inspection programme to check the compliance of premises in their area.

■ Home Office: Legal Costs**Nick Thomas-Symonds:**[\[19110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the total cost to the public purse was of legal (a) support and (b) representation to Ministers in his Department in relation to their official conduct in each of the last three years.

Chris Philp:

Such information is not centrally recorded or collated in the form requested. More generally, I would refer the honourable Member to the long-standing policies on legal expenditure, as set out recently by Cabinet Office Ministers on 12 March 2024, Official Report, PQ 17709 Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament and 12 March 2024, Official Report, House of Lords, Cols. 1901-1904. Ministers: Legal Costs - Hansard - UK Parliament.

■ Immigration: Databases**Kevin Brennan:**[\[19004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent estimate he has made of the number of individuals misidentified by the Home Office Person Centric Data Platform in the last 12 months.

Kevin Brennan:[\[19005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to rectify the misidentification of individuals by the Home Office Person Centric Data Platform.

Tom Pursglove:

The Person Centric Data Platform (PCDP) holds millions of identities that have been submitted or otherwise provided in support of immigration applications. Individuals have not been 'misidentified' by the PCDP. Rather, the Home Office has for some time been aware of issues around 'merged identity' - where a single 'identity island' has been formed with data belonging to two or more individuals.

The 'merged identities' issue affects around 0.02% of PCDP customer records - over 99.98% of records are not impacted by this issue. We have identified around 46,000 records with an identity issue, of which over 13,000 have already been resolved and we have a dedicated team working on the remainder.

The Home Office takes data security and accuracy very seriously. We continue detailed analysis to identify erroneous PCDP records so that appropriate remedial work can be undertaken as quickly, and as carefully, as possible.

Where customers identify an issue with their data, we encourage them to contact the UK Visas and Immigration Contact Centre to enable this to be investigated and resolved.

■ Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

Dame Diana Johnson:

[19576]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what functions the office of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders is able to undertake while the post of Independent Chief Inspector is vacant.

Michael Tomlinson:

The office of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration has a clear plan of work, comprising of inspection activity, pre-inspection scoping activity, and non-inspection/corporate work that can continue whilst the post remains vacant.

A new Chief Inspector will be appointed in accordance with the Cabinet Office's Governance Code on Public Appointments. A recruitment campaign is underway, and an appointment will be made as soon as practically possible.

■ Muslims: Safety

Sarah Owen:

[19480]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to his Department's news story of 11 March 2024 entitled Government commits more funding to protect UK Muslims, what the eligibility criteria for applications for that funding will be; how bids for funding will be (a) assessed and (b) decided upon; and which Government department will be responsible for providing that funding.

Tom Tugendhat:

In light of increased reports of anti-Muslim hatred following the start of the Israel/Hamas conflict, an additional £4.9 million was made available in October for protective security at mosques and Muslim faith schools, bringing total funding available for 2023/24 to £29.4 million. The Government has confirmed that this level of funding will now be maintained annually through to 2027/28.

Mosques and Muslim faith community centres can register for protective security measures through the Home Office's Protective Security for Mosques Scheme on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). The scheme provides physical protective security measures, such as CCTV, intruder alarms and secure perimeter fencing. Due diligence checks are carried out by the Home Office; for example, to confirm that applicants are eligible registered charities. Following approval, applicants receive a site survey to assess the most suitable security measures for their site, which are funded by the Home Office and installed by the Department's delivery partner. Security officer services will also become available through the scheme later this year.

■ Police Stations: Chesterfield

Mr Toby Perkins: [\[19042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what improvements he plans to make to the Police estate in Chesterfield constituency until 2029.

Chris Philp:

Derbyshire's funding will be up to £244.8m in 2024/25, an increase of up to £15.4m when compared to 2023/24.

It is up to Chief Constables and directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners to make decisions on local resourcing and estates, including police stations. They are best placed to make these decisions based on their local knowledge and experience.

■ Theft: Retail Trade

Stephen Morgan: [\[18941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to tackle retail theft.

Chris Philp:

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

However, Police Recorded Crime figures show shoplifting offences increased by 32% in the 12 months to September 2023. Statistics also show the number of people charged with shoplifting offences has risen by 34% in the year ending September 2023, showing that police are taking action.

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

In October 2023, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) published the [Retail Crime Action Plan](#). Through this Plan, all forces across England and Wales have committed to prioritise police attendance at the scene where violence has been used towards shop staff, where an offender has been detained by store security, and where evidence needs to be secured and can only be done by police personnel. Additionally, where CCTV or other digital images are secured, police will run this through the Police National Database to aid efforts to identify prolific offenders or potentially dangerous individuals.

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

October also saw the launch of Pegasus, a unique private-public partnership, which involves retailers providing data, intelligence and evidence to Opal, the national

police intelligence unit on organised acquisitive crime, to develop a better strategic picture and help forces crack down on serious offenders.

We are continuing to work closely with retail businesses, security representatives, trade associations and policing through the National Retail Crime Steering Group (NRCSG), which meets on a quarterly basis, to ensure the response to retail crime, including shoplifting, is as robust as it can be.

■ Visas: Ethnic Groups and Women

Deidre Brock:

[\[19084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to his Oral Statement of 4 December 2023 on Legal Migration, Official Report, column 41, and the report by the Migration Observatory entitled Family fortunes: The UK's new income requirement for partner visas, published on 1 February 2024, whether he has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential impact of the increased Minimum Income Requirement on (a) women and (b) people belonging to specific ethnicities.

Deidre Brock:

[\[19085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to his Oral Statement of 4 December 2023 on Legal Migration, Official Report, column 41, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of the increase to the minimum income requirement on (a) equality of opportunity and (b) reducing negative disparities.

Tom Pursglove:

Any discussions that take place between Cabinet Ministers are confidential.

A full regulatory Impact Assessment will be developed, and the Government will publish an Equality Impact Assessment on this change, and both will be published in due course. We will continue to monitor the policy throughout its implementation.

■ Visas: Graduates

Navendu Mishra:

[\[19489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for what reason he requested that Professor Brian Bell undertake a rapid review of the Graduate route.

Navendu Mishra:

[\[19490\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an assessment of the economic impact of scrapping the Graduate Route.

Tom Pursglove:

The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), led by Professor Brian Bell, has been commissioned to provide further evidence to support the Government's understanding of how the Graduate route is operating in practice and to what extent it is supporting the original objectives.

No decisions have been made on the future of the Graduate route. We will consider evidence put forward by the MAC closely and ensure any policy proposals are subject to rigorous assessment of their impacts.

■ Visas: Personal Income

Colum Eastwood: [19742]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the evidential basis is for increasing the minimum income requirement (MIR) to £38,700 for certain family and work visas; if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of increasing the MIR on those affected in (a) Derry City and Strabane and (b) other regions where average gross annual earnings are below the national average; and if he will ensure that the Government's planned impact assessment of increasing the MIR includes an equality impact assessment.

Tom Pursglove:

Analytical work has been undertaken across Government to support decision making in this process. A fact sheet and an initial assessment on the impact of the changes on immigration can be found on GOV.UK at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fact-sheet-on-net-migration-measures-further-detail>

and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/legal-migration-statement-estimated-immigration-impacts/legal-migration-statement-estimated-immigration-impacts-accessible>.

A full Regulatory Impact Assessment on these changes has been developed and the Government will publish this alongside an Equality Impact Assessment on this change, both in due course.

JUSTICE

■ Community Orders: Suspended Sentences

Dame Siobhain McDonagh: [15829]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many hours of unpaid work handed down as part of suspended sentences were cancelled as a result of not having been completed within 12 months of the sentence being handed down, in each of the last five years.

Edward Argar:

The disruption caused by the pandemic added to a backlog of Unpaid Work hours. The Government is investing an additional £93m in Community Payback over three years. This will allow us to increase delivery of Community Payback back to pre-covid levels of delivery.

We have launched a national campaign to recruit more than 500 additional Community Payback staff to bolster resources in every probation region and new staff are arriving in post. The additional staffing will enable us to boost delivery of Community Payback to pre-covid levels.

There will be a particular focus on delivering more outdoor projects that improve local areas, sustainability focussed and allow the public to see justice being done.

Suspended Sentence Orders cannot legally be extended beyond the length of the operational period of the order which is set by the judiciary. A Suspended Sentence Order ceases the moment the operational period expires, regardless of any outstanding requirements such as unpaid work. Robust processes have been developed to ensure unpaid work requirements are completed in a timely manner, including prompt enforcement action where required.

It is important to note that these hours have not been “cancelled” but due to the legal limitations of a Suspended Sentence Order, the Probation Service is unable to apply for an extension in order to work hours once the operational period has expired.

CALENDAR YEAR	HOURS REMAINING ON EXPIRED SUSPENDED SENTENCE ORDERS
2019	91,588.2
2020	171,124.4
2021	386,845.2
2022	405,800.8
2023	279,639.8

Data as at 27/02/2024

The expired Suspended Sentence Orders detailed here should be viewed in context of the total completed hours delivered as detailed in PQ [171423](#).

By way of comparison, in 2023, 279,640 hours remained on expired Suspended Sentence Orders, while during the twelve months 01/04/2022 to 31/03/2023, over 4.7 million hours of Unpaid Work were delivered.

A number of these expired orders will be as a result of persons being remanded in custody or otherwise unable to complete their hours within the operational period. Additionally, others may have expired due to delays in enforcement, particularly as a result of Covid.

Data are sourced from nDelius and while these data have been assured as much as practical, as with any large administrative dataset, the data should not be assumed to be accurate to the last value presented.

■ Criminal Proceedings: Royal Commissions

Dan Carden: [19696]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what progress his Department has made on establishing a Royal Commission on the criminal justice process.

Mike Freer:

Although we recognise the opportunity that a Royal Commission could present to look at structural questions in the criminal justice system, we think it is right that, following the pandemic and the Criminal Bar Association's disruptive action, we focus on delivering priority measures to speed up justice for victims and improve the justice system over the coming months.

We continue to keep issues in the wider criminal justice system under review.

■ Ministry of Justice: Procurement

Dame Siobhain McDonagh: [18964]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will publish a contract and schedule of requirements for the contract with procurement reference tender_422492/1326965.

Mike Freer:

The contract and schedule of requirements for reference tender_422492/1326965 was published on 20 March 2024 and can be found via the following link:

<https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/d08dc21c-90ec-4912-bc7b-766b17bf266b>.

HMPPS does not tolerate violence under any circumstance, therefore it is vital we do everything in our power to eradicate dangerous behaviour behind bars. This information relates directly to an early-stage trial of equipment, which alongside wider investments into prison security measures such as body worn cameras and x-ray body scanners, will ensure we enhance prison safety and security for our hardworking staff and prisoners.

■ Prison Accommodation

Shabana Mahmood: [17728]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what progress his Department has made on providing 20,000 additional prison places by 2025.

Edward Argar:

We are delivering 20,000 additional, modern prison places, the largest prison build programme since the Victorian era, ensuring the right conditions are in place to rehabilitate prisoners, helping to cut crime and protect the public. So far, c.5,900 additional places have been completed. This includes our two new c.1,700 place prisons, HMP Five Wells, which opened in 2022 and HMP Fosse Way, which opened last year. It also includes, among others, c.590 Rapid Deployment Cells (RDCs) now in place across 11 sites.

There was no commitment to deliver 20,000 additional prison places by 2025. By the end of 2025, we are on track to have delivered around 10,000 places in total. This will include our third new prison, HMP Millsike, delivering c.1,500 places, new houseblocks at HMPs Stocken and Rye Hill, as well as hundreds more RDCs.

We have secured outline planning permission for our fourth new prison, near the existing HMP Gartree in Leicestershire, and for our fifth new prison, near the existing HMP Grendon in Buckinghamshire. We will now seek to deliver those new places as quickly as possible.

We are continuing to push ahead with further options to deliver capacity across the estate, including looking at all options for accelerating timelines.

Ruth Cadbury:

[19382]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of prisoners were sharing a one-person cell with another person on (a) 1 March 2021, (b) 1 March 2022 and (c) 1 March 2023.

Edward Argar:

Crowding levels are published annually in the [HMPPS Prison Digest](#). Figures for the last three years for the number of prisoners sharing a one-person cell with another person for that year can be found in the documents here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hmpps-annual-digest-april-2020-to-march-2021>.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hmpps-annual-digest-april-2021-to-march-2022>.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hmpps-annual-digest-april-2022-to-march-2023>.

The accompanying annex to the latest publication, titled 'Chapter 2 Tables – Prison Crowding' provides the percentage of prisoners sharing a one-person cell with another person for each year since 1996.

The determination of the maximum crowded capacity of a particular establishment is a matter of operational judgement, considering risks to safety and stability.

By the end of this SR period, we will have invested nearly £4 billion towards the delivery of 20,000 modern and uncrowded prison places, the biggest prison build programme since the Victorian era, ensuring the right conditions are in place to rehabilitate prisoners, helping to cut crime, and protect the public. We have delivered c.5,900 of these and by the end of 2025, we will have delivered over 10,000 in total.

These places are being delivered through the construction of six new prisons, as well as the expansion and refurbishment of the existing estate and temporary accommodation. We are also continuing to invest in prison maintenance so that existing places remain in use and are safe.

Ruth Cadbury: [\[19628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether he has made an estimate of the number of proposed new prison places that will be rapid deployment cells.

Edward Argar:
We are delivering 20,000 prison places, the largest prison build programme since the Victorian era. As part of this, and alongside further opportunities to optimise capacity in the estate, the estimated number of proposed new prison places that will be Rapid Deployment Cells is c.1,800. Delivery of the first c.1000 began last year, with c.630 already delivered across 12 sites.

■ **Prison Accommodation: Construction**

Shabana Mahmood: [\[17729\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many prison cells have been built in each year since 2010, broken down by cell type.

Edward Argar:
As some cells hold more than one person, the operational capacity of the prison estate is best understood by the number of places rather than number of cells, and this is how data is recorded by HMPPS.

The below table provides a summary of the number of prison places which have opened in each year since 2010, broken down into Adult Male, Female and CYPSE (Children and Young People’s Estate). Please note that, for simplicity, all places relating to a prison opening are included in the year that the prison opened. In practice, a new prison may take more than a year before reaching its final operational capacity.

YEAR	ADULT MALE	FEMALE	CYPSE	TOTAL
2010	1479			1479
2011	240			240
2012	3066			3066
2013	201			201
2014			45	45
2015	1466	85		1551
2016		78		78
2017	2000			2000
2018	580			580
2019	206			206

YEAR	ADULT MALE	FEMALE	CYPSE	TOTAL
2020	484	24		508
2021	1044	20		1064
2022	2176			2176
2023	2435	24		2459
2024	140	40		180
Total	15413	271	45	15729

We continue to push ahead with the largest prison expansion programme since the Victorian Era – with 10,000 of the pledged 20,000 additional places to be delivered by the end of 2025.

We have also put in place short-term measures across the prison estate to expand capacity by the equivalent of around 2,000 places since September 2022, through doubling up cells and delaying non-urgent maintenance work where safe to do so. Thousands of places are also being created through the expansion of prisons through additional house blocks and major refurbishments at existing prisons and we are rolling out Rapid Deployment Cells across the estate, with c.590 already delivered at eleven sites.

■ Wetherby Young Offender Institution

Janet Daby: [\[19717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of girls aged under the age of 15 (a) have been placed in the last 12 months and (b) are expected to be placed within the next 12 months at the Wetherby and Keppel Young Offender Institution.

Edward Argar:

No girls under 15 have been placed at HMYOI Wetherby in the last 12 months. We do not expect to make any such placement in the next 12 months.

■ Women's Centres: Swansea

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[19654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what progress he has made on establishment of the residential women's centre in Swansea.

Edward Argar:

Planning approval for the Residential Women's Centre at the Trehafod site in Cockett, Swansea, was granted by the Welsh Government's Planning Environment Decisions Wales in August 2023, following an appeal by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Due to delays and uncertainty in securing this planning approval, the MoJ has a

number of ongoing steps to re-mobilise the project and continues to work closely with partners in Wales.

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

■ Construction: Warranties

Mike Amesbury: [\[19449\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, whether he has made an assessment of the effectiveness of the buildings warranty market.

Lee Rowley:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer I gave to Question UIN [11533](#) on 8 February 2024.

■ Counter-extremism Centre of Excellence

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[18924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps he plans to take to ensure the (a) independence, (b) impartiality and (c) academic integrity of the counter-extremism centre of excellence.

Lee Rowley:

The Civil Service code applies to all civil servants. Further details of our work on Counter Extremism will be set out in the usual way.

■ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: Domestic Visits

Jonathan Ashworth: [\[19364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, on how many occasions Ministers from his Department have visited (a) Wales, (b) Scotland and (c) Northern Ireland in each of the last three financial years.

Felicity Buchan:

This information is not held centrally.

■ First Homes Scheme

Mike Amesbury: [\[19450\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what his Department's eligibility criteria for a First Home scheme is.

Lee Rowley:

Eligibility criteria for the First Homes Scheme is publicly available and can be found here: [First Homes scheme: first-time buyer's guide: Overview - GOV.UK](#).

■ First Time Buyers

Andrew Western: [18950]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what estimate he has made of the number of first time buyers in each of the last five years.

Lee Rowley:

DLUHC publishes estimates of first-time buyer numbers as part of the English Housing Survey. See Chapter 3 and Annex 3.2 in: [English Housing Survey 2022 to 2023: headline report - GOV.UK](#).

■ Homelessness: Burnley

Antony Higginbotham: [19507]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pursuant to the Answer of 18 March 2024 to Question 17987 on Homelessness: Burnley, how much funding his Department provided to Burnley Borough Council through the (a) Homelessness Prevention Grant and (b) Rough Sleeping Initiative since 2019.

Antony Higginbotham: [19508]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pursuant to the Answer of 18 March 2024 to Question 17987 on Homelessness: Burnley, if he will provide a link to the relevant page on his Department's website where allocations of grant funding to Burnley Borough Council are published; and whether his Department publishes information on other support provided to local authorities on gov.uk.

Felicity Buchan:

Burnley Borough Council have received £1,080,784 in Homelessness Prevention Grant funding since the first year of the grant, 2021/22. Burnley Borough Council have also been beneficiaries of up to £650,497 through direct allocations and as members of joint local authority bids in Rough Sleeping Initiative funding since they were first funded in 2020/21.

The funding allocations for the Homelessness Prevention Grant are published here: [2021/22](#), [2022/23](#), [2023/24-2024/25](#). The funding allocations for the Rough Sleeping Initiative are published here: [2020/21](#), [2021/22](#), [2022/23-2024/25](#).

Policy, guidance, research and grant funding allocations for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping are published here [Homelessness and rough sleeping - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

■ Housing: Construction

Mr Ben Bradshaw: [18965]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to the study entitled Stepping Off the Road to Nowhere, published by Create Streets and Sustrans on 19 December 2023, what assessment his Department has made of the

potential merits of adapting the funding model for new homes to incorporate gentle density and sustainable transport principles.

Lee Rowley:

The Government is committed to supporting the development of high quality, well designed and sustainable communities through the construction of new homes and, where appropriate, the regeneration of towns and cities across the country.

Homes England's Strategic Plan has a Strategic Objective focused on promoting the creation of high-quality homes in well-designed places. The Agency uses Building for a Healthy Life, a design toolkit for neighbourhoods, streets, homes and public spaces, which covers twelve different considerations including density and sustainable transport.

■ **Islamophobia**

Anneliese Dodds:

[19699]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pursuant to the Answer of 17 January 2024 to Question 10238 on Islamophobia, whether the Government has provided funding to organisations other than Tell MAMA to provide support to the victims of anti-Muslim hatred.

Anneliese Dodds:

[19700]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pursuant to the Answer of 23 January 2024 to Question 10238 on Islamophobia, whether his Department defines anti-Muslim hatred as a manifestation of (a) racial, (b) religious or (c) other discrimination as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

Anneliese Dodds:

[19701]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which (a) domestic and (b) international (i) leaders and (ii) experts his Department has sought views from on how religious hatred is experienced by British communities; and what views and perspectives they have shared.

Lee Rowley:

I refer the Hon Member to the Secretary of State's oral statement made on 14 March 2024 ([Official Report, HC, Volume 747, Column 452](#)).

■ **Leasehold: Reform**

Derek Thomas:

[18912]

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will extend the right to enfranchisement under the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill to leases which are in form agricultural but in essence residential.

Lee Rowley:

We are not currently proposing to do so but I would be happy to meet my Hon Friend to discuss his concern in more detail, should that be helpful.

■ Radicalism

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[18925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what recent discussions he has had with relevant stakeholders on the new definition of extremism.

Lee Rowley:

Over the past year, a wide range of stakeholders were engaged to ensure a balance of views on the definitions development. The definition was tested across Government, with practitioners and with subject matter experts.

■ Social Rented Housing

Mike Amesbury: [\[19173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to increase the number of homes available for social rent.

Jacob Young:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer I give to Question UIN [17100](#) on 13 March 2024.

■ Temporary Accommodation: Children

Mike Amesbury: [\[19171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of children being housed in temporary accommodation.

Felicity Buchan:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer to Question UIN [14761](#) on 26 February 2024.

■ Veterans: Homelessness

Steve McCabe: [\[18974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, how many homeless veterans there are in the UK.

Steve McCabe: [\[18975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, how many veterans are in temporary accommodation.

Felicity Buchan:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [15404](#) on 1 March 2024.

NORTHERN IRELAND■ **Operation Kenova****Hilary Benn:**[\[19535\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what discussions he has had with Iain Livingstone on the publication timetable for the final report from Operation Kenova.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

I met with Sir Iain Livingstone on 6 March 2024 and updated him on the Government's plans to make transitional provision to clarify that final administrative tasks related to a criminal investigation (including, for example, report-writing and publication of reports, such as the Kenova report) can be retained and completed by their original owners on and after 1 May 2024.

As Kenova is operationally independent of the Government, I am not in a position to confirm the publication date of its reports.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY■ **Artificial Intelligence: Migrant Workers****Peter Kyle:**[\[19651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the Answer of 11 March 2024 to Question 17194 on Artificial Intelligence: Migrant Workers, when the new dedicated visa scheme will be operational.

Andrew Griffith:

The new Future Technology Research & Innovation (Government Authorised Exchange) visa scheme is expected to go live on 4 April 2024, which the Home Office announced in their Statement of Changes to the Immigration Rules laid in Parliament on 14 March. This visa scheme will allow sponsored researchers and interns to come to the UK to work in eligible organisation in the areas of the Government's five critical technologies (AI, engineering biology, future telecommunications, semiconductors, and quantum technologies).

■ **Autism: Research****Daisy Cooper:**[\[18948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if she will take steps to commission research into new models of (a) assessment and (b) support for people with autism.

Andrew Griffith:

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Gateway to Research lists 50 active Medical Research Council (MRC) projects looking at autism and/or neurodevelopment. There are a further 27 projects funded by Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and Innovate UK. These cover a range of research questions from

using AI based diagnostics for autism spectrum disorders to optimising technology used on recruitment platforms to meet the needs of neurodiverse applicants.

Autistica, a UK based charity engaged in funding and campaigning for research on autism and related conditions, is receiving £378k through Government support for Early Career Researcher fund.

■ Digital Technology: Wigan

Lisa Nandy:

[\[19342\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department is taking to tackle digital exclusion among older people in Wigan constituency.

Saqib Bhatti:

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is responsible for coordinating HMG digital inclusion policy as part of its commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital age. Digital inclusion is a cross-cutting issue that spans social engagement, education, employment, access to services and many more elements of everyday life.

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology leads on telecoms and digital infrastructure, including Project Gigabit, the Government's £5 billion mission to deliver lightning-fast, reliable broadband to the hardest to reach parts of the UK. In the Wigan constituency, over 98% of premises can access a superfast connection (≥ 30 Mbps), while 92% can access a gigabit-capable connection, up from 0.8% in December 2019. Both of these current figures are higher than the national averages of 97% and 81% for superfast and gigabit-capable coverage, respectively.

More broadly across Government, the Cabinet Office is working to remove barriers and ensure online services are as inclusive as possible by making public sector websites accessible to as many people as possible. The Cabinet Office leads on the Service Standard, a set of principles government service teams and departments must adhere to when creating and running new public services – such as the NHS – and some Local Authorities, including Greater Manchester Combined Authority, have committed to using these as well.

Training is available for elderly people wishing to acquire essential digital skills. Department for Education has introduced a digital entitlement for adults with no or low digital skills to undertake specified digital qualifications, up to level 1, free of charge. Essential Digital Skills Qualifications, introduced alongside the digital entitlement, are based on new national standards which set out the digital skills people need to get on in life and work.

We also recognise that ongoing support is essential to overcome barriers of access. Our network of 2,900 public libraries across England provide a trusted network of accessible locations with staff, volunteers, free Wi-Fi, public PCs, and assisted digital access to a wide range of digital services.

■ Research: East Midlands**Sir John Hayes:**[\[18838\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much funding her Department has provided to research projects based in (a) Lincolnshire and (b) the East Midlands in the last 12 months.

Andrew Griffith:

In the 12 months to start of January 2024, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) awarded:

- £4.7m to organisations performing research projects in Lincolnshire.
- £146m to organisations performing research projects in the East Midlands.

These figures include a range of investments made via UKRI's Research Councils and Innovate UK, but the figure excludes formula-based block grants deployed through universities which will also have gone to research projects in this region.

TRANSPORT**■ Active Travel: Economic Situation****Fabian Hamilton:**[\[19259\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of Create Streets' report entitled Move Free, published on 19 March 2024.

Guy Opperman:

The Honourable Gentleman for Leeds North East introduced me at the launch of the report, where I spoke. I have read it, and will ensure the Department and Active Travel England take its findings into account in the development of future policy and programmes.

■ Department for Transport: Domestic Visits**Jonathan Ashworth:**[\[19366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, on how many occasions Ministers from his Department have visited (a) Wales, (b) Scotland and (c) Northern Ireland in each of the last three financial years.

Anthony Browne:

[Holding answer 22 March 2024]: DfT ministers regularly visit places across the UK. In the 2023/24 financial year, DfT ministers made 7 visits to Wales, 6 to Scotland and 2 to Northern Ireland.

■ European Company for the Financing of Railroad Rolling Stock Convention

Grahame Morris: [\[19321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of the UK signing up to the European Company for the Financing of Railroad Rolling Stock convention.

Huw Merriman:

The Government is supportive of international initiatives to help deliver new vehicles and upgrade existing fleets that improve passenger experience and support our decarbonisation objectives. We are committed to encouraging investment in domestic and international rail services and unlocking greater private financing to support this.

My officials have engaged regularly with Eurofima, the company established by the convention, to discuss the potential opportunities and costs associated with it.

However, given the significant membership requirements of Eurofima, any decision would be subject to the usual value for money considerations.

■ Great Western Main Line

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[19443\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department has made an estimate of the projected number of weekend closures that will take place on the Reading and London Paddington in the next 12 months.

Huw Merriman:

I understand that Network Rail plans to close the Great Western Main Line in the Old Oak Common area on Sunday 17 November, Saturday 28 December and Sunday 29 December 2024 to enable both construction works for the new station at Old Oak Common as well as other essential works required in this area.

■ High Speed 2 Line: Old Oak Common Station

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[19442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to minimise disruption to South West rail passengers in the context of the construction of the new High Speed 2 station at Old Oak Common.

Huw Merriman:

The Department is working with Network Rail, HS2 Ltd, Transport for London and train operating companies to minimise disruption to South West rail passengers. Diversions of services to other London terminals, such as Euston, is under active consideration. This could provide Great Western Railway passengers access to a central London terminal with numerous onward travel connections. Passengers could alternatively use Ealing Broadway station, as they did successfully during the December 2023 engineering works.

Housing: Construction

Caroline Lucas: [\[19032\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the Create Streets and Sustrans report entitled Stepping off the Road to Nowhere, published on 10 March 2024.

Guy Opperman:

The Government is aware of the report produced by Create Streets and Sustrans and will review its findings in due course.

Logistics: Energy

Andrew Lewer: [\[19167\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the (a) cost of energy asset extensions for the logistics sector and (b) time taken to deliver energy asset extensions on the introduction of logistics fleet depot charging.

Guy Opperman:

The Department for Transport (DfT) has established the Freight Energy Forum to address the challenges and provide solutions for the provision of zero carbon energy infrastructure for the freight and logistics sector.

Through the Forum, this government is working with industry to take a holistic approach to understand the future energy demand required for the freight and logistics sector to decarbonise, as this is an essential component in order to determine the energy asset extensions it will need.

As such, an assessment of the cost and potential impact of energy asset extensions or the time it will take to deliver them has not been undertaken. However, we are in regular contact with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) where discussions include the energy infrastructure needs of the freight and logistics sector.

Old Oak Common Station: Construction

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[19444\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of construction work being undertaken at Old Oak Common station on (a) local rail disruption and (b) businesses that support tourism in the South West.

Huw Merriman:

The Department is working with Network Rail, HS2 Ltd, Transport for London (TfL) and train operators to minimise disruption.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[19445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department plans to take to help ensure stakeholders in (a) Wales and (b) the South West receive communications

on the potential impact of Old Oak Common station construction work on (i) rail journey times and (ii) service disruption.

Huw Merriman:

Similar to last year, public communications regarding the works are due to ramp up ahead of this year's Christmas engineering works, in line with usual passenger communications timing. Network Rail is leading the development of a passenger communications strategy working closely with train operators and other industry partners, including Transport for London (TfL). My Department is working with Network Rail, HS2 Ltd, TfL and the train operating companies to minimise the impacts of disruption. The most extensive possessions will be in 2026 and 2028 and stakeholders and the public will be informed well in advance.

■ **P&O Ferries**

Grahame Morris:

[\[19319\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions his Department has had with P&O Ferries.

Guy Opperman:

We welcome P&O Ferries' statement that it is committed to signing the Seafarers' Charter, following Brittany Ferries, Condor, DFDS and Stena Line in committing to work towards meeting its requirements.

Following P&O Ferries' commitment, officials met representatives of the company on Monday 18 March for a technical discussion on how compliance with the Charter requirements should be demonstrated. We anticipate further such discussions.

■ **Parking: Fees and Charges**

Gen Kitchen:

[\[19513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of allocating additional funding to (a) towns and (b) villages with free parking to help maintain those free services.

Guy Opperman:

Local authorities are at liberty to provide free or charged parking. The Department for Transport is taking steps through the Plan for Drivers to ensure that enforcement is fair and proportionate.

■ **Pedicabs: Licensing**

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[19519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information his Department holds on (a) the number of pedicabs outside Greater London that are licensed as (i) taxis and (ii) private hire vehicles and (b) the number and proportion of those pedicabs that are in (A) Oxford, (B) Salisbury, (C) Bristol and (D) Cambridge; and if he will make an assessment of the potential impact on the number of licensed pedicabs of paragraph 8.3 of his

Department's guidance entitled Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing best practice guidance for licensing authorities in England, updated on 17 November 2023.

Sir Christopher Chope:

[19520]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to paragraph 8.3 of his Department's publication entitled Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing best practice guidance for licensing authorities in England, updated on 17 November 2023, what guidance his Department plans to provide on the appropriate adjustments that licensing authorities should make to their licensing requirements for drivers and vehicles to provide pedicab services outside Greater London.

Guy Opperman:

Outside London pedicabs can be licensed as taxis. Pedicabs cannot be licensed as a private hire vehicle as legislation defines a private hire vehicle as a motor vehicle. The Department for Transport issues guidance on licensing taxis and private hire vehicles to authorities who should consider the recommendations made and their obligation under the Regulators' Code to carry out their activities in a way that supports those they regulate to comply and grow. The Best Practice Guidance to licensing authorities in England sets out that where there is local interest in providing pedicab services, licensing authorities should make appropriate adjustments to their licensing requirements for drivers and vehicles to accommodate these requests. Subject to the legal requirements, it is for licensing authorities to consider the appropriate licensing requirements to operate a pedicab under a taxi and taxi driver licence.

The Department does not hold data on the number of pedicabs licensed as taxis in England.

■ Railways: Carbon Emissions

Grahame Morris:

[19318]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of Network Rail's Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy.

Huw Merriman:

The Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy (TDNS) was published by Network Rail in 2020 and primarily recommended electrification as a means to decarbonise the rail network.

The TDNS was used by Government as a guide for decision making. However, alternative traction technologies, such as battery and bi-mode trains, will also play key roles in our transition to Net Zero. We are progressing work on a whole systems approach to decarbonisation by ensuring both track and train are considered.

The Government still expects electrification to play an important role in our programme to achieve our Net Zero 2050 target, which is why since 2010, more than 1,250 miles of electrification has been delivered in Great Britain, including over 900 miles in England and Wales in the last 11 years.

■ Railways: Public Appointments

Grahame Morris:

[\[19320\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recruitment process his Department followed for the recent appointment of the Director General for Rail Services on 18 March 2024.

Huw Merriman:

On 18 March 2024 the Department for Transport announced the appointment of Alex Hynes to the role of Director General for Rail Services. Alex has been appointed through a time-bound secondment agreement with Network Rail. Appropriate approvals were sought and obtained including from the Cabinet Office, HM Treasury and Civil Service Commission.

■ Railways: Shrewsbury

Helen Morgan:

[\[19749\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will instruct Avanti West Coast to hold a public consultation on its planned withdrawal of the Shrewsbury to Euston service.

Helen Morgan:

[\[19750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his permission was required for Avanti West Coast to withdraw its direct Shrewsbury to Euston service.

Huw Merriman:

The Department is required to make decisions as part of industry wide efforts to align timetables to changing demand patterns and restore the financial stability of the railway, the Government asked all operators to present cost saving options. Due to very low passenger numbers, the service between Shrewsbury and London is currently operating at a loss of £1.4 million per year. West Midlands Railway (WMR) and Transport for Wales provide sufficient capacity for passengers between Shrewsbury and Birmingham, and the Department has agreed that WMR will introduce a second hourly Birmingham to Shrewsbury semi-fast service in June 2024 to operate via the Stour Valley and provide quicker journey time between Shropshire towns and Birmingham.

Government support for the operational railway was almost £12 billion in the last financial year – equivalent to more than £420 per household. The Secretary of State's decision to withdraw a service operating at a loss estimated at £1.4 million every year, was taken to help reduce public subsidy and restore the financial sustainability of the railway. No public consultation is planned as, given these clear financial constraints, meaningful consultation is not possible, as it would not alter the outcome.

■ Roads: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes:

[\[19528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much reallocated HS2 funding has been given to Lincolnshire County Council for road resurfacing.

Huw Merriman:

Lincolnshire County Council will receive a minimum additional overall uplift of £287.7 million between 2023-24 and 2033-34 as a result of reallocating HS2 funding. £4.9 million of this has already been paid out in the current financial year with a further £4.9 million to follow in 2024/25, and Lincolnshire is receiving around 30% more capital funding for highway maintenance in the current financial year than it did in the previous financial year.

Funding allocations beyond 2024/25 are a matter for the next Spending Review.

Roads: Repairs and Maintenance**Fabian Hamilton:**[\[19536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance Survey Report, published on 19 March 2024.

Guy Opperman:

The Government takes the condition of local roads very seriously, which is why it has reallocated £8.3 billion of HS2 funding to help tackle some of the issues highlighted in the report in question. This funding will be on top of what local authorities were expecting to receive over the next decade, and will, over time, allow them to transform the condition of their local highway networks.

Shipping: Pay**Grahame Morris:**[\[19594\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will list the mandatory employment conditions excluding national minimum wage rates which apply to seafarers working on routes between maritime ports in the territorial waters of (a) the UK and (b) France.

Guy Opperman:

Extensive details of mandatory employment conditions for seafarers are set out in international conventions including the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 and corresponding UK legislation.

In addition to improving working conditions through our Nine Point Plan for Seafarer Protections, the UK continues to play a leading role internationally in improving seafarer welfare.

Transport: Planning**Stephen Morgan:**[\[19164\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the Create Streets and Sustrans study entitled Stepping off the Road to Nowhere, published on 10 March 2024.

Huw Merriman:

The Government is aware of the report produced by Create Streets and Sustrans and will review its findings in due course.

TREASURY**■ Alcoholic Drinks: Excise Duties****Julian Sturdy:**[\[19611\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of reducing alcohol duty for independent wine merchants.

Gareth Davies:

At Spring Budget 2024, the Chancellor announced that alcohol duty will be frozen until 1 February 2025 to support alcohol producers, pubs, and consumers with cost of living pressures. This extends the six month freeze the Government announced at Autumn Statement 2023 to give businesses time to adapt to the new duty system introduced on 1 August 2023.

As with all taxes, the Government keeps the alcohol duty system under review during its yearly Budget process.

■ Cash Dispensing: Lincolnshire**Sir John Hayes:**[\[18841\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the availability of cash withdrawal facilities in Lincolnshire.

Bim Afolami:

The government recognises that cash continues to be used by millions of people across the UK, including those who may be in vulnerable groups.

The government legislated through the Financial Services and Markets Act 2023 to establish a new legislative framework to protect access to cash. This establishes the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) as the lead regulator for access to cash and provides it with responsibility and powers to seek to ensure reasonable provision of cash withdrawal and deposit facilities, on both a national and local basis. The FCA expects to finalise its regulatory rules in the third quarter of this year.

The most recent analysis undertaken by the FCA is available on the FCA website: [Access to cash coverage in the UK 2023 Q1](#)

■ Climate Change: Investment**Caroline Lucas:**[\[19040\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of (a) the economy-wide investment needs for adapting the UK to climate change and (b) the current funding gap.

Gareth Davies:

The Government is taking action to respond to climate risks and their impacts on our economy and way of life. The Third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3) was published in July 2023. It set out policies and actions to respond to the 61 climate risks and opportunities identified in the Third Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA3).

There is significant public investment underpinning the policies and actions in NAP3, with the Government having committed a record-breaking £5.2 billion investment in flood and coastal schemes in England between 2021 and 2027, helping to better protect hundreds of thousands of properties and avoid £32 billion of wider economic damages. However, adaptation actions cannot be funded through public spending alone, and additional investment from the private sector will therefore be required to support adaptation action over the coming decades. The Government has committed to support the flow of this private finance into adaptation through the 2023 Green Finance Strategy.

■ Companies: Cost of Living and Inflation**Stephen Morgan:**[\[19162\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of the level of profits made by companies outside the oil and gas industries on (a) the cost of living and (b) inflation.

Bim Afolami:

The Government monitors UK corporates' performance on an ongoing basis. Profits as a share of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) for UK private non-financial corporations excluding firms in the UK Continental Shelf have been relatively stable since 2000.

■ Cost of Living**Stephen Morgan:**[\[19160\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the impact of his measures introduced in the Spring Budget 2024 on the cost of living.

Bim Afolami:

The government has demonstrated its commitment to supporting the most vulnerable at Spring Budget 2024 – including the extension of the Household Support Fund, freezing fuel duty, and helping households in debt.

The measures introduced by this government to support households have contributed to real incomes being stronger than expected this year. Real wages are now higher than pre-pandemic level.

■ Credit: Regulation

Stella Creasy:

[\[19613\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to his Department's consultation entitled Regulation of Buy-Now Pay-Later: consultation on draft legislation, how many responses were received; and of those received, how many and what proportion were from (a) buy-now-pay-later providers, (b) charities and advocacy groups, (c) other financial service providers who do not offer buy-now-pay-later products and (d) members of the public.

Bim Afolami:

A list of respondents will be included in the Government's response to the consultation, which will be published in due course.

■ Debt Collection

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[19138\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to ensure that companies in the (a) finance and (b) utility sectors use best practice when collecting debts from vulnerable customers.

Bim Afolami:

The Government wants to see fair treatment of individuals in problem debt, and there is a range of work underway across government and regulators to promote responsible debt collection practices.

In June 2023 the FCA, Ofgem, Ofwat and Ofcom published a joint letter via the UK Regulators' Network (UKRN) setting out how firms in their respective sectors should support customers in financial difficulty. On 18 March 2024, the same group of regulators issued further guidance, setting out their shared expectations on firms' debt collection practices. This is to ensure that firms support customers in debt and that firms' collection practices are not causing harm to customers.

■ Holiday Accommodation: Taxation

Anne Marie Morris:

[\[19067\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what data his Department used to estimate the number of short-term lets that would be suitable for primary residences when the furnished holiday let tax regime has ended.

Nigel Huddleston:

The Government has announced that it will abolish the Furnished Holiday Lettings (FHL) tax regime, equalising the tax treatment of landlords with short-term holiday lets and those with standard residential properties. This will make the taxation of property fairer and simpler while raising revenue for public services. The changes will not penalise or prohibit the provision of FHLs more widely.

The Government keeps all aspects of tax policy under review and any decisions on future changes will be taken by the Chancellor in the context of the wider public finances.

■ Mortgages: Interest Rates

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[19136]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to (a) help ensure mortgage rate stability and (b) support the housing market.

Bim Afolami:

The path to lower interest rates is through low inflation, and the Government is fully committed to supporting the Bank of England get inflation back down to the 2% target, including by keeping borrowing under control.

While the pricing of mortgages is ultimately a commercial decision for lenders in which the Government does not intervene, our plan is working, and the average offered mortgage rates on 2-year and 5-year fixed rates are now lower compared to their peak in Summer 2023. The Government's Mortgage Charter - in addition to the significant safeguards already in place - is providing support to vulnerable households; and mortgage arrears and repossessions remain low.

Housebuilding is a priority for this Government. At SR21, we demonstrated the Government's commitment to investing in safe and affordable housing by confirming a settlement of nearly £24 billion up to 2025-26.

In 2022-2023, more than 230,000 net additional dwellings were delivered and government is on track to meet our commitment to deliver one million additional homes across this Parliament.

■ Tobacco: Sales

Philip Davies:

[19577]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of banning the sale of tobacco products to people born after 1 January 2009 on tobacco duties.

Gareth Davies:

The Government published an Impact Assessment to support the 'Tobacco and Vapes Bill' on 20 March, which includes estimate of the reduction in tobacco duty over the period 2027 and 2056:

[Tobacco and vapes bill IA.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#)

The impact of final decisions on tobacco duties will be assessed and reflected in the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast. .

■ Treasury: Legal Costs

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

[\[19109\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the total cost to the public purse was of legal (a) support and (b) representation to Ministers in his Department in relation to their official conduct in each of the last three years.

Gareth Davies:

Such information is not centrally recorded or collated in the form requested.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Access to Work Programme

Vicky Foxcroft:

[\[19403\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people were waiting for a decision on their Access to Work application on 1 March 2024.

Mims Davies:

As of 1st March 2024, there were 29,871 applications awaiting a decision.

Please note that the data supplied is derived from unpublished management information, which was collected for internal Departmental use only, and have not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard. They should therefore be treated with caution.

■ Children: Maintenance

Drew Hendry:

[\[19632\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to reduce call waiting times to the child maintenance service; and whether he has made a recent assessment of the adequacy of call handling times by that service.

Paul Maynard:

As part of its Modernisation Programme, CMS continues to improve how it communicates with customers and how customers access its service. When a customer first applies for CMS they are enrolled on the online service which provides them the ability to update their information and request changes 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The majority of our customers make use of these online services to effectively meet their needs every day, though we are actively engaged in improving the service further and increasing customer take up.

We recognise some customers need alternative methods to contact us or choose to call us, and on occasion call wait times on our inbound phone lines can be longer than we would like. Speed to answer is continually reviewed throughout the working day and operational resource is regularly reviewed and flexed to minimise excessive wait times.

Over the coming year we will increase customer education on what can be raised and progressed using our online services and encourage more customers to make use of this as the primary channel for their CMS enquiries. This will help protect our inbound phones lines for our customers that need to access our service in this way and reduce the wait time they experience.

■ **Debts: Standard of Living**

Dame Siobhain McDonagh: [\[18957\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether he has made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the findings in the Christians Against Poverty report entitled Pushed under, pushed out, published on 12 March 2024, relating to the impact of high debt repayments on people's living standards.

Dame Siobhain McDonagh: [\[18960\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the report entitled Pushed Under, Pushed Out, published by Christians Against Poverty on 12 March 2024.

Paul Maynard:

No formal assessment has been made.

■ **Employment: Autism**

Daisy Cooper: [\[18947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of average waiting times for autism assessments on employment rates.

Mims Davies:

There are no plans for DWP to make this specific assessment. Whilst we recognise the importance of early identification of autism, a diagnosis is not required to be eligible for reasonable adjustments and the provision of workplace support. These are made, in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, based on functional need.

We are encouraging employers to adopt more neuro-inclusive working practices, which benefit neurodiverse employees irrespective of whether they have a diagnosis. The Buckland Review into Autism Employment, published on 28 February this year, has created a focus for action to improve the recruitment and retention of autistic people. It has identified workplace barriers, and the working practices and initiatives that can reduce them, in order to create a more inclusive working environment for autistic employees and autistic jobseekers.

This is supported by Disability Confident, our scheme to increase employers' understanding of how to recruit, retain and support disabled employees and the Support with Employee Health and Disability online service which guides employers

through health and disability scenarios at work, including making reasonable adjustments.

■ Household Support Fund

Kenny MacAskill:

[19199]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the total cost to the public purse was of the Household Support Fund since 2021; and what the total distribution of the fund per constituency over the same period.

Jo Churchill:

A total of £3bn including Barnett impact has been announced since October 2021 to enable the Household Support Fund to run in England. This includes over £2.5 bn allocated to Local Authorities in England. It is for the devolved administrations to decide how to allocate their additional Barnett funding.

Allocations are made at an upper tier Local Authority, level based on population size and levels of deprivation. Allocations by Local Authority for schemes running between October 2021 to March 2024 can be found at the following links:

Management information for 6th October 2021 to 31st March 2022: [Household Support Fund management information: 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-management-information-6-october-2021-to-31-march-2022)

Management information for 1st April 2022 to 30th September 2022: [Household Support Fund 2 management information for 1 April to 30 September 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-2-management-information-for-1-april-to-30-september-2022)

Management information for 1st October 2022 to 31st March 2023: [Household Support Fund 3 management information for 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-3-management-information-for-1-october-2022-to-31-march-2023)

Allocations for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024: [1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024: Household Support Fund Grant Determination 2023 No 31/6496 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024-household-support-fund-grant-determination-2023-no-31/6496)

■ Household Support Fund: Lewisham

Ellie Reeves:

[19668]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether his Department provided Lewisham Council with an impact assessment on the discontinuation of funding for the Household Support Fund from March 2024.

Jo Churchill:

The government is providing an additional £500m to enable the extension of the Household Support Fund, including funding for the Devolved Administrations through the Barnett formula to be spent at their discretion. This means that Local Authorities in England will receive an additional £421m to support those in need locally through the Household Support Fund.

The funding will be available to Local Authorities in England from 1 April 2024 and will run until 30 September 2024.

■ **Jobcentres: Translation Services**

Sir John Hayes: [\[19526\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of translating languages in Job Centres since 2015.

Jo Churchill:

The information requested is not readily available and to provide it will incur disproportionate cost.

■ **Pension Credit: Veterans**

Steve McCabe: [\[19525\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many veterans received Pension Credit in the 2022-23 financial year.

Paul Maynard:

The information requested is not collected and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

■ **Personal Independence Payment**

Marsha De Cordova: [\[19456\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to his Department's publication entitled Transforming Support: The Health and Disability White Paper, published on 16 March 2023, what progress his Department has made on the test of the feasibility of sharing assessment reports with Personal Independent Payment applicants before a decision is made; and when he plans to publish the findings.

Mims Davies:

We are currently conducting a test to understand the impact of sharing assessment reports with PIP claimants by default. As part of the evaluation, we will gather insight from claimants to understand whether sharing the assessment report provides them with the opportunity to clarify evidence so that we can make the right decision as early as possible and improve trust and transparency in the decision-making process. Once the analysis of that insight is complete, we will consider next steps.

■ **Poverty: Children**

Kenny MacAskill: [\[19197\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate his Department has made of the number of children living in (a) absolute and (b) relative poverty in each year since 2007 in (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales, (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) the UK.

Jo Churchill:

Statistics on the number of Children living in absolute and relative poverty per country in the UK are published annually in the “Households Below Average Income” publication in “table 4.22ts” and “table 4.17ts” (respectively) of “children-hbai-timeseries-1994-95-2022-23-tables” at [Households below average income: for financial years ending 1995 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2023). The latest statistics published on 21 March 2024 are for the financial period 2022/23.

The latest available data can also be found on Stat-Xplore: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>

Kenny MacAskill:**[19198]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate he has made of the number of children living in (a) absolute and (b) relative poverty per constituency in the latest period for which data is available.

Jo Churchill:

Statistics on the number of Children living in absolute and relative poverty per constituency are published annually in the “Children in low income families: local area statistics” publication and can be found in tabs “6_Absolute_ParLC” and “5_Relative_ParLC” at [Children in low income families: local area statistics 2014 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2014-to-2023). The latest statistics published on 21 March 2024 are for the financial period 2022/23.

The latest available data can also be found on Stat-Xplore : <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>

Kenny MacAskill:**[19206]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether he has had recent discussions with (a) Unicef and (b) the United Nations Rapporteur on extreme poverty on initiatives to tackle child poverty.

Jo Churchill:

DWP officials engage with a wide range of stakeholders including UNICEF.

■ Sickness Benefits: South Holland and the Deepings**Sir John Hayes:****[18839]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people in South Holland and the Deepings constituency are on long-term sickness benefits; and how many were on such benefits in each of the last five years.

Mims Davies:

People on ‘long-term sickness benefits’ have been assumed as those in the main phase of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and the Universal Credit (UC) Limited Capability to Work (LCW) and Limited capability for work and work-related activity (LCWRA) groups. The Department regularly publishes Benefit Combination statistics on [Stat-Xplore](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/benefit-combination-statistics) and these were [extended in February 2024](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/benefit-combination-statistics-extended-in-february-2024) to include additional information for those on ESA and the UC Health Journey, so can now be

used to provide the information, from quarter ending May 2019 to the end of the latest quarter, August 2023.

The figures can be obtained from the '[Benefit Combinations - Data from May 2019 for England and Wales](#)' dataset using the 'Additional Claim Details' options. The 'ESA Phase of Claim' and 'UC Health Journey' options should be used to identify quarterly totals for ESA Support Group (SG), ESA Work-related Activity Group (WRAG), Universal Credit Limited Capability to Work (LCW) and Limited capability for work and work-related activity (LCWRA) groups and those on one benefit but not the other using the 'Not On' options. The 'Geography' option can then be used to filter by the relevant Westminster Parliamentary Constituency.

Users can log in or access Stat-Xplore as a guest user and, if needed, can access [guidance](#) on how to extract the information required.

Using the Benefit Combinations data on Stat-Xplore, the number of people on long-term sickness benefits in the South Holland and the Deepings constituency is provided in the table below:

	AUG 2019	AUG 2020	AUG 2021	AUG 2022	AUG 2023
Total	2,540	2,750	2,980	3,260	3,940

Source: [Stat-Xplore](#)

Notes:

1. Totals are rounded to 10.
2. UC Data is not available prior to 2019 as some UC claims were recorded on an interim operational system called UC Live Service (UCLS). Figures for UCLS Health claimants are not currently collated and to develop that information would incur disproportionate cost.
3. A person can claim both ESA and be on the UC health caseload and these claimants would be counted in each separate caseload in the published data on Stat-Xplore. Benefit Combinations data on Stat-Xplore allows these 'Dual claims' to be identified and only counted once in the above.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Children**

Kenny MacAskil:

[19201]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate he has made of the total revenue accrued by the Exchequer since the introduction of the two child limit; and how many and what proportion of households are impacted in (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales, (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) each parliamentary constituency in the latest period for which data is available.

Jo Churchill:

The latest statistics, which include breakdowns by Region and Local Authority are published here: [Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit claimants: statistics related to the policy to provide support for a maximum of 2 children, April 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-and-child-tax-credit-claimants-statistics-related-to-the-policy-to-provide-support-for-a-maximum-of-2-children-april-2023)

The information requested on savings is not available.

Statistics related to the policy to provide support for a maximum of 2 children, by Parliamentary Constituencies isn't currently available.

■ Social Security Benefits: Long Covid**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:****[19718]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to provide benefit support to individuals with Long Covid.

Mims Davies:

People living with a condition arising from exposure to the Covid-19 virus can access the financial support that is available through Statutory Sick Pay, Universal Credit, New Style ESA or Pension Credit depending on individual circumstances.

Disability benefits such as Personal Independence Payment or Attendance Allowance do not include or exclude by condition, instead they look at the needs arising from a long-term health condition or disability. Therefore people living with a condition arising from exposure to the Covid-19 virus are also able to access these benefits in the same way as other people with long-term conditions or disabilities.

■ Unemployed People**Sir John Hayes:****[19776]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of people of working age in (a) Lincolnshire, (b) East Midlands and (c) England are (i) not working and (ii) not looking for a job.

Jo Churchill:

The information requested is available at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/default.asp>

Guidance for users can be found at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/home/newuser.asp>

■ Universal Credit**Dame Siobhain McDonagh:****[18958]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of reducing the maximum benefit deduction rate for people on Universal Credit.

Paul Maynard:

The primary aim of the deductions in Universal Credit is to protect claimants by providing a last resort repayment method for arrears of essential services.

Making deductions from a claimant's benefit is a cost effective and efficient mechanism to recover third party debt and benefit debt. Regulations protect claimants from excessive deductions. There are limits set for individual deduction items, there is also an overall deduction cap set at 25% of standard allowance, although where necessary to support the claimant, this can be exceeded for rent and fuel debts.

■ Universal Credit: Housing

Caroline Lucas: [\[19031\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make it his policy to bring homeowner service charge support in Universal Credit in line with Support for Mortgage Interest by (a) removing the zero earnings rule and (b) reducing the nine month qualifying period.

Mims Davies:

The Department has no plans to amend the support that homeowners receive in respect of service charges.

■ Universal Credit: Rents

Wera Hobhouse: [\[18923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps he is taking to ensure that social housing tenants who receive Universal Credit are not financially affected by the 53-week rent year in the 2024-25 financial year.

Mims Davies:

In the financial year 2024-25 social housing tenants will face 52 weekly rent payment days so Universal Credit will make provision for the exact amount of their liability.

Universal Credit always converts weekly amounts to monthly sums using 52 weeks. This may lead to a slight advantage to the claimant when converting weekly incomes and to a slight disadvantage when dealing with outgoings. The system is used because it is simple to operate and understand. The department has considered alternative options for those with weekly tenancies, but each have their own limitations and disadvantages for claimants and so there are no plans to change.

The legitimacy of this calculation formula in Universal Credit was confirmed by the High Court in 2020 who found it to be neither irrational or discriminatory.

Discretionary Housing Payments can be paid to those entitled to Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs. Since 2011, the government has provided nearly £1.7 billion in Discretionary Housing Payments to local authorities.

■ **Universal Credit: Uprating**

Kenny MacAskill:

[\[19205\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing universal credit by 50% in financial year 2024-25.

Jo Churchill:

There are no plans to make such an assessment.

■ **Veterans: Universal Credit**

Steve McCabe:

[\[18976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps he is taking to reduce the number of veterans on Universal Credit.

Mims Davies:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 6 February 2024 to PQ[11939](#).

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Department for Business and Trade: Legal Costs

Pat McFadden:

[19021]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what the total cost to the public purse was of legal (a) support and (b) representation to Ministers in (i) her Department and (ii) the predecessor Department in relation to their official conduct in each of the last three years.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 21 March 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Ms Nusrat Ghani:

Such information is not centrally recorded or collated in the form requested. More generally, I would refer the hon. Member to the long-standing policies on legal expenditure, as set out recently by Cabinet Office Ministers on 12 March 2024, Official Report, PQ 17709 and 12 March 2024, Official Report, House of Lords, Cols. 1901-1904.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Extension of deadline for representations on anticipated acquisition of Telegraph Media Group Limited

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lucy Frazer): [\[HCWS374\]](#)

On 19 March, I confirmed to Parliament that, on the basis of assessments by the Competition and Markets Authority and by Ofcom, I am minded to refer the anticipated acquisition of Telegraph Media Group Ltd (TMG) by RB Investco Ltd to a Phase 2 investigation on the grounds of the need for accurate presentation of news and free expression of opinion in newspapers.

I set a deadline of 9am on Monday 25 March 2024 to allow the parties the opportunity to make representations to me before I reach a final decision.

Further to a request from one of the Parties, I have confirmed an extension to that deadline, which will now be 9am on Tuesday 2 April 2024.

DEFENCE

■ Defence Nuclear Update

Secretary of State for Defence (Grant Shapps): [\[HCWS377\]](#)

I am today laying before the House the Defence Nuclear Enterprise Command Paper – “*Delivering the UK’s Nuclear Deterrent: A National Endeavour*”.

The Command Paper establishes the UK’s nuclear programme as a critical ‘National Endeavour’ which is vital for our long-term security and prosperity. It details for the first time the full breadth of activity required to sustain and modernise the infrastructure and activities that deliver the UK’s continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent – a cornerstone of national and global security for more than 55 years.

The Command Paper underlines the importance of our partnerships with the communities, businesses and international allies that underpin the deterrent and protect our way of life. It articulates how, in response to the evolving security environment, we will deliver the capabilities and programmes necessary to maintain and sustain our independent nuclear deterrent. It does not represent a change in long-standing nuclear doctrine or our ongoing commitment to our disarmament and Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations.

To deliver the required skilled workforce needed to meet our requirement the Civil and Defence Nuclear Sectors will invest at least £763 million in skills, jobs and education and will see 40,000 additional jobs created by 2030. The government and industry have come together to launch a Nuclear Skills Plan to create more than 5,000 new apprentices, and double the number of graduates over the next 4 years. This plan will also create more

than 400 specialist PhDs over the same period. This collaborative approach will be enshrined in a Nuclear Skills Charter between government and industry.

In parallel, we are announcing a 'Plan for Barrow', a new partnership between national and local government, BAE Systems and the local community that will oversee investment and development in Barrow-in-Furness, the home of submarine building in the UK for the past hundred years. This aims to ensure that it is the kind of attractive place to live and work that will sustain the skilled workforce required in the decades to come. The initial commitment will be for a Barrow Transformation Fund, a ten-year endowment-style funding settlement of £20 million a year over the next decade providing the multi-year certainty and stability needed to support and regenerate the town. This fund will be administered through DLUHC, working with the new Barrow Delivery Board and other government departments to deliver it. DLUHC will make a further announcement on the appointment of the Barrow Delivery Board Chair in due course.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ UK Ocean Leadership

Minister of State for Development and Africa (Mr Andrew Mitchell):

[\[HCWS382\]](#)

My Noble Friend the Minister of State for Climate, Environment and Energy (Lord Benyon) has today made the following statement:

This statement provides an update on UK leadership and engagement on current international ocean issues.

The 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy and its 2023 Refresh set out the UK's vision that by 2030 the ocean will be effectively governed, clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse, linking resilient and prosperous coastal communities around the world, and supporting sustainable economic growth for the UK, the Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies. Fundamental to this is an absolute commitment to upholding the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in all its dimensions, as an essential enabler of global prosperity, security and a healthy planet.

The UK played a significant and proactive role in negotiating the landmark Agreement under UNCLOS on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, known as the BBNJ Agreement. The UK was one of the first to sign the Agreement on 20 September 2023 and is keen to see it enter into force as quickly as possible. 60 States or regional economic integration organisations must become party to the Agreement before it enters into force. To date the Agreement has gained 88 signatures and two ratifications.

The Agreement was laid before Parliament for scrutiny on 16 October 2023. Before the UK can ratify international agreements, legislation needs to be in place to ensure that new obligations can be complied with.

Work is continuing at pace to prepare UK legislation and the aim is to be able to implement and ratify in time for the UN Ocean Conference in June 2025 - an ambitious target date shared by other likeminded countries. The UK intends to play an active part in the first Conference of the Parties that will meet within the first year after the Agreement enters into force, and in the Preparatory Commission to be established by the United Nations to prepare for that Conference. The planned timeline for UK legislation to enable ratification will ensure that the UK remains at the forefront of states working to effectively protect the ocean.

The provisions in the Agreement on Marine Genetic Resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits require a clear legislative framework, including substantive provisions in primary legislation. They create new obligations for UK business – in particular the pharmaceutical, nutraceutical, agricultural-technology, cosmetic and chemical sectors - and science and research, and thorough engagement with key stakeholders is underway to help to ensure that implementation is effective and avoids any unintended consequences.

The UK will continue to be proactive at the international level, in supporting other, particularly developing countries, with their implementation and ratification plans. A project has recently been agreed with the Commonwealth Secretariat to support smaller member countries with their implementation work. The UK is also launching work to develop a shortlist of potential Area Based Management Tools that could be proposed once the Agreement is in force.

More broadly, the UK is also fully engaged in negotiations to discuss the development of deep sea mining exploitation regulations, currently taking place at the International Seabed Authority (ISA) in Kingston, Jamaica from 18-29 March. On 30 October 2023, the UK announced that it supports a moratorium on the granting of exploitation licences for deep sea mining projects by the ISA and has been driving the need for strong enforceable environmental regulations, standards and guidelines to be developed by the ISA and put in place before any mining commences.

As a founding member of the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution, the UK is committed to achieving an ambitious treaty by the end of 2024, with the aim of ending plastic pollution by 2040, including by restraining and reducing plastic production and consumption to sustainable levels, promoting a circular economy for plastic and to manage plastic waste in an environmentally sound and safe manner.

The UK Overseas Territories are home to around 90% of the UK's biodiversity and host a huge range of unique and endangered species, some of which are found nowhere else on earth. The UK-funded Blue Belt Programme – the largest of its kind in the world - protects 4.4 million square kilometres of ocean around the Overseas Territories, underpinning the UK's commitment to protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030. This flagship programme has been central to the UK Government's ambition of leading action to tackle the serious global problems of overfishing, species extinction and climate change.

The UK continues to Chair the Global Ocean Alliance of 77 countries and is ocean champion on the International Steering Committee of the High Ambition Coalition for

Nature & People. Through these positions we are supporting implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework in the ocean, in particular the target to effectively conserve and manage at least 30% of the ocean by 2030. The UK is already delivering on this target within its own waters. 38% of UK waters are included in a comprehensive network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and within the UK Overseas Territories, over 60% of waters are protected and sustainably managed within the Blue Belt.

The UK will continue to play a leading role in the many organisations and initiatives that work to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and in continuing to protect and promote the Blue Belt.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Covid-19 Update

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy) (Maria Caulfield): [\[HCWS376\]](#)

On 21 February 2022, the Government published the guidance, [COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19](#), which set out a plan to live with COVID-19, while protecting people at higher risk of serious illness. In March 2023, the Government announced further changes towards managing COVID-19 like other respiratory illnesses. New changes from 1 April 2024 are the next stage in delivering this approach.

The latest changes are an important milestone in our journey to living with COVID-19. After several years of dedicated resources and focus, COVID-19 is now recognised as an established and ongoing health issue in the UK and the approach to managing it will now be even further aligned with other established respiratory pathogens. Protecting people at higher risk remains the Government's priority.

Vaccines for those at higher risk of serious outcomes from COVID-19 remain central to the Government's approach. Last autumn's COVID-19 vaccination campaign saw over 70% of all people aged over 65 years living in England receive a COVID-19 booster. In care homes, over 80% of residents received a booster, providing vital protection over the winter months. Today, due to a combination of immunity acquired from natural infection or vaccination, COVID-19 is now a relatively mild disease for the vast majority of people.

This spring, a COVID-19 vaccine will again be offered to those most at risk of serious illness, in line with advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. The NHS will also offer more people access to COVID-19 treatments, expanding the eligible cohort from the existing 3.9 million people to an additional 1.4 million people at highest risk of severe illness.

The continued effectiveness of vaccines and treatments to protect people at high risk means that we can transition to an approach where COVID-19 is managed in line with other respiratory illnesses, such as flu. From 1 April 2024, changes will be made to COVID-19 testing to align with other respiratory infectious diseases.

Testing from 1 April 2024

While the virus causing COVID-19 continues to evolve, new variants have not required a return to large-scale public testing. Given the high levels of vaccination among groups at higher risk, wider access to treatments and reduced impact of outbreaks, the Government is now able to remove some of the highly targeted testing which remains in place from the height of the pandemic.

From 1 April 2024, routine provision of free COVID-19 Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests for the management of outbreaks in higher risk settings will come to an end in England. However, free testing to determine the cause of an acute respiratory infection outbreak, where deemed appropriate by a local UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Health Protection Team, in higher risk settings will remain to test for a wide range of respiratory viruses.

Routine asymptomatic COVID-19 LFD testing on discharge from hospital into care or hospice settings will also end to align with the approach for other respiratory illnesses, though NHS Trusts will have local discretion to re-introduce this or other forms of testing as clinically appropriate following risk assessment, involving Local Authority Public Health Teams, UKHSA Health Protection Teams and care providers as necessary in decision making.

Acute health providers should have trusted processes in place with local care home and hospice providers to facilitate safe discharges, as set out in the [hospital discharge and community support](#) guidance. Together with the care home or hospice, hospitals should assess the risk in the period before planned discharge, seeking advice on proposed changes to testing arrangements from Local Authority public Health Teams or UKHSA Health Protection Teams if needed.

Care providers and hospices will also continue to have the ability to discuss and raise any concerns about discharge arrangements through existing local mechanisms. Where a care provider or hospice is providing services commissioned by a local authority or the NHS and has concerns about a planned discharge that cannot be resolved with the acute hospital provider, this includes the ability to contact the relevant commissioner.

Limited testing, including symptomatic testing of staff working on inpatient wards focussed on treating profoundly immunocompromised individuals, will continue in line with locally derived protocols to protect those most at risk. Symptomatic testing of patient-facing hospice staff who work closely with people who are at high risk from severe outcomes if suffering from COVID-19 will also continue as outlined in guidance, in line with similar NHS settings.

The cohort of people eligible for COVID-19 treatments can continue to access free COVID-19 LFDs from their local pharmacy. These people, who are at highest risk of becoming seriously ill, are encouraged to test to gain timely access to treatments. A full list of those who are eligible, and information on how to access tests, is available on the [NHS website](#).

Guidance on a range of infection prevention and control measures in Adult Social Care has now been combined with acute respiratory infection guidance and [has been updated to reflect these changes](#). This guidance, as well as guidance for hospices and other non-

clinical settings, has been updated to reflect the latest evidence and expert consensus. It is technical guidance to support settings in operationalising the changes to the services they are directly responsible for from 1 April 2024.

[Guidance published on 1 April 2022](#) for individuals in the community with symptoms of COVID-19 or respiratory illness continues to set out the actions we can all take to help reduce the risk of catching COVID-19 and passing it on to others.

The future approach to pandemic preparedness

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the public health and economic risks posed by pandemics. The Government is continuing to work closely with partners to reduce the impact of a future pandemic. Together, UKHSA and the Department of Health and Social Care are developing plans to prevent and/or respond efficiently and effectively in the event of a pandemic.

These plans will build on learning from COVID-19, and the findings of the COVID-19 Inquiry, once published. The exact nature of a future pandemic may vary, and so preparedness is considering all modes of transmission and tackling 'Disease X' in readiness for unknown future threats.

The Government has already taken steps to prepare and develop capacity to respond, including through the Moderna-UK Strategic Partnership and the Vaccines Development and Evaluation Centre. Through UKHSA, we retain strong surveillance systems, world-leading genomic sequencing capabilities, and stronger baseline data and analysis functions that will help detect and characterise pandemic threats.

HOME OFFICE

■ **Home Office Update**

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (James Cleverly): [\[HCWS378\]](#)

On 29 February 2024, a report on Part 1 of the independent Angiolini Inquiry was published. The Inquiry was established following the horrific murder of Sarah Everard in March 2021 by then-serving Metropolitan Police Service officer Wayne Couzens.

On the same day, I gave a statement to the House to acknowledge the Inquiry's findings.

Part 1 examined the previous career and conduct of Couzens and found a number of red flags and missed opportunities. Based on these findings, the Chair made a total of 16 recommendations, summarily to improve the policing response to sexual offences, such as indecent exposure, to strengthen police recruitment and vetting practices, and to address toxic police cultures.

Today I can confirm acceptance of all three of the recommendations made to the Government, which the Home Office will now work to deliver at pace. These recommendations are that the Home Office, in collaboration with partners, should conduct a fundamental review of the way masturbatory indecent exposure is treated within the criminal justice system; commission research to establish if there is an

evidence-based link between masturbatory indecent exposure and subsequent offending; and launch a campaign to raise awareness that indecent exposure and sending unsolicited photographs of genitals amounts to criminality and boost victims' confidence to report such crimes.

Further recommendations on police vetting, recruitment and culture were made directly to police forces, the National Police Chiefs' Council and College of Policing, who have also today accepted all recommendations made to policing. I will work closely with policing to ensure that they drive this work forward promptly.

Tackling violence against women and girls is one of my top priorities. I am confident that our strong partnership and shared commitment with the National Police Chiefs' Council and College of Policing will lead to concerted, swift action.

I will provide a further update to Parliament on progress made in implementing the recommendations before Summer recess.

I am grateful to Lady Elish and her team for their crucial and continued work, which will ensure that policing continues to make improvements necessary to rebuild the confidence of everyone they serve. I await the Inquiry's further findings from Part 2, which is examining broader national issues such as vetting, recruitment and culture, as well as the safety of women in public spaces.

■ **Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures (1 December 2023 to 29 February 2024)**

The Minister of State for Security (Tom Tugendhat): [\[HCWS375\]](#)

Section 19(1) of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures (TPIM) Act 2011 (the Act) requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of every relevant three-month period on the exercise of their TPIM powers under the Act during that period.

The level of information provided will always be subject to slight variations based on operational advice.

TPIM NOTICES IN FORCE (AS OF 29 FEBRUARY 2024)	2
Number of new TPIM notices served (during this period)	1
TPIM notices in respect of British citizens (as of 29 February 2024)	1
TPIM notices extended (during the reporting period)	0
TPIM notices revoked (during the reporting period)	0

TPIM NOTICES IN FORCE (AS OF 29 FEBRUARY 2024)

2

TPIM notices expired (during reporting period) 0

TPIM notices revived (during the reporting period) 0

Variations made to measures specified in TPIM notices (during the reporting period) 1

Applications to vary measures specified in TPIM notices refused (during the reporting period) 1

The number of subjects relocated under TPIM legislation (during this the reporting period) 2

The TPIM Review Group (TRG) keeps every TPIM notice under regular and formal review. TRG meetings were convened on 8th and 13th February 2024.

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

■ Community Ownership Fund Round 3 Window 3 Outcome

Minister for Levelling Up (Jacob Young):

[\[HCWS379\]](#)

I am delighted to announce the outcome of Round 3 Window 3 of the £150 million Community Ownership Fund, which will see over £33.5 million awarded to 83 projects across the United Kingdom. This additional funding takes our funding total to around £103.1 million for 333 projects.

This investment will ensure that important parts of our social fabric, such as pubs, sports clubs, theatres, and post office buildings, can continue to play a central role in towns and villages across the UK.

The Community Ownership Fund is helping to reduce geographical disparities across the United Kingdom. To this end, the funding provided in Round 3 Window 3 will see over £3.8 million awarded to projects in Scotland, over £3.1 million to Wales and over £2.8 million to Northern Ireland. This, so far, brings the total funding awarded across Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to over £32.1 million collectively, with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland having exceeded their minimum allocation across the duration of the Fund.

The funding provided in Round 3 Window 3 will also see over £23.6 million awarded to projects in England. This brings the total funding awarded across English regions to over £70.9 million collectively.

The Community Fund is already supporting 250 projects across the UK such as Keighley & Worth Valley Railway's historic railway bridge, in Bradford, England; the Vale of Aeron pub, a favourite haunt of the poet Dylan Thomas in Ceredigion, Wales; the King's Theatre in Edinburgh, one of Scotland's most historic and significant theatres; and Glens Digital Hub in Causeway Coast and Glens, Northern Ireland, which has been transformed into a vibrant community digital hub. These projects are making a genuine difference to their communities.

With the additional investment awarded in this bidding window, I am delighted to be supporting many more small but mighty local assets across the United Kingdom, levelling up the places we love and cherish.

Round 4 will be the final round of the Community Ownership Fund. Recognising that there is limited funding available yet to be allocated to meet the high demand we have experienced, we will seek to hold two final bidding windows to allocate this funding. Round 4 Window 1 will open today (25 March 2024) and close on 10 April 2024. Voluntary and community organisations, and parish, town and community councils can apply for up to £2 million in capital funding, to rescue treasured local institutions.

TRANSPORT

■ Rail Update

Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Mark Harper):

[[HCWS380](#)]

On 4 October 2023 the Government announced Network North - a new, £36 billion plan to improve our country's transport. In addition to this, we confirmed £12bn of investment to enable Northern Powerhouse Rail to proceed in line with previous plans to better connect Liverpool and Manchester. As promised in the Network North announcement, the Rail Minister and I have engaged extensively with local leaders to ensure that this plan was right for them and to understand whether they wished to suggest alternative ways to achieve the objectives with that funding.

We have heard from these stakeholders in favour of continuing to serve Warrington Bank Quay and Manchester Airport and using broadly the current route towards Manchester as part of our Northern Powerhouse Rail plans. There is also interest from local leaders in exploring further options for station design at Manchester Piccadilly and for routings into Liverpool including station options. Government remains open to considering these issues, subject, as usual, to affordability within the funding envelope, standard business case approvals, and demonstrating value for taxpayers' money. I look forward to continuing discussions on these points.

Recognising the consensus reached, I am today confirming that this will represent the basis for the next stage of development. As with any major scheme, delivery will be subject to securing consents and the approval of future business cases. Further, while the consensus reached will form the primary option that we work from, Government will continue to assess alternatives which meet the objectives of NPR, in line with standard requirements for business case approvals. Any scheme must be affordable and

demonstrate value for money for the taxpayer, while seeking to support the rail capacity needs of central Manchester and deliver faster journey times and better connectivity across the Pennines.

On this basis, I will be continuing to promote the High Speed Rail (Crewe-Manchester) Bill as the fastest possible means of consenting the first part of that route into Manchester. Subject to the will of the House, the Government will seek to adapt the Bill to deliver Northern Powerhouse Rail only, removing scope south of the Parish of Millington and Rostherne, which was included only for HS2. The adaptation of the Bill from HS2 to NPR and removal of HS2 scope from the Bill would prompt a further environmental assessment to be produced which would include revised construction impacts with a view to reducing impacts where possible.

In line with these plans HS2 Phase 2b safeguarding will be amended by summer 2024, to allow for any safeguarding needed for Northern Powerhouse Rail.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Pensions Dashboard Update

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Pensions (Paul Maynard):

[\[HCWS381\]](#)

The success of automatic enrolment has led to record numbers of people saving for retirement. Pensions dashboards will allow individuals to view information about their pensions, including their State Pension, for free, in one place online. This will help individuals' awareness and understanding of their pension information and estimated income in retirement, building a greater sense of individual control and ownership.

Since the reset was initiated last year, the Pensions Dashboards Programme has made significant progress building and testing the system which will enable pensions dashboards to work. Subject to satisfactory testing, the programme plans to begin the process of connecting the organisations building a direct connection, including DWP State Pension, from August 2024. Connection testing will then continue to ensure readiness to support wider industry connection from early 2025.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will today publish guidance setting out a staged timetable for connection. This will help smooth the process of connecting the approximately 3,000 pension schemes and providers in scope by the connection deadline of 31 October 2026. The timetable prioritises connection of the largest pension schemes and providers, so that crucial user testing can quickly take place at scale, with the first cohort expected to have completed connection by the end of April 2025. Whilst the timetable is not mandatory, it is a legal requirement that trustees or managers of occupational pension schemes and providers of personal and stakeholder pensions have regard to this guidance.

The Government is absolutely committed to delivering pensions dashboards safely and securely to the public at the earliest opportunity. The publication of the connection timetable marks a significant milestone towards launching pensions dashboards, and

takes us closer to introducing a service that has the potential to transform how individuals plan for retirement.