



10 DOWNING STREET
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23 January 2023

THE PRIME MINISTER

Dear Sir Benon,

During my appearance before the Liaison Committee on 20 December, I said that I would write on a number of points made by Members. You subsequently followed this up in writing on 9 January.

Questions 1 and 9 (Ukraine)

The UK is dedicated to ensuring Ukraine wins this war. A window has now opened: Russia is on the back foot due to resupply issues and plummeting morale. We therefore want to accelerate the UK's diplomatic and military support to Ukraine in the weeks ahead in a bid to push Russia further back. A long and static war only serves Russia's ends and Putin will only negotiate when it is clear his battlefield options are exhausted. Progress on the battlefield is therefore necessary to put Ukraine in the strongest possible place to enter future peace negotiations from a position of military, economic and diplomatic strength. This is the only way to secure a strong and lasting peace.

In line with the recommendations laid out in the Chilcot Report, the Government has regularly monitored and evaluated its strategy, adjusting it when necessary. The Government has consistently sought to learn lessons in its response, including by using red teams, independent all-source assessments and external experts to inform its decisions.

We are conducting a refresh of the Integrated Review to learn the lessons from Ukraine and ensure we are investing in the strategic capabilities and partnerships we need to stand firm and uphold the open international order.

UK Armed Forces' munitions and equipment

We have given £2.3 billion in military support for Ukraine, and I have committed to meeting or exceeding this amount this year. This is the second highest contribution in the world after the United States and demonstrates that our commitment to democracy and open societies remains steadfast. The funding for replacing munitions and equipment granted to the Armed Forces of Ukraine from Ministry of Defence stocks comes from the HMT Reserves. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) remains fully engaged with industry and allies to ensure that those stocks are replaced as quickly as possible.

The MoD was allocated an additional £560 million in the Autumn Statement to bolster munitions stockpiles and industrial resilience. As part of that it is investing in the resilience of key UK munitions manufacturers, while working with NATO allies to identify areas of mutual need and potential collaboration. Further measures are being considered as part of the broader, ongoing Integrated Review.

Maintaining dormant or spare industrial capacity for complex munitions, such as missiles, is rarely feasible. The balance of on-shore manufacturing versus off-shore manufacturing by allies is kept under constant review.

Question 18 (small boats)

The number of crossings are leading to unprecedented pressures on the asylum system. As I told the Committee, the Home Office has not forecast an official figure for illegal Channel crossings in 2023 but there are various scenarios which are informing planning for how to handle small boats this year and ensure the system is resilient.

Many of those who cross originate from safe countries and travel through safe countries. That is unfair on those who come here legally, unfair on those who have a genuine asylum claim, and unfair on the British people who play by the rules. Meanwhile, criminal gangs continue to profit from facilitating life-threatening journeys across the Channel.

That is why I have prioritised this issue since I took office including the new deal with France which secured UK officers embedded with French counterparts for the first time, and increased cooperation with our international partners through the Calais Group.

But we need to go much further. That is why we have set out five new steps: 700 new staff to increase immigration enforcement activity; cheaper accommodation sites so we can move migrants out of expensive hotels; doubling the number of caseworkers so we can clear the initial decision legacy asylum backlog by the end of 2023; a new deal with Albania so that the vast majority of claimants can be removed – with weekly flights until all Albanian Foreign National Offenders and those here illegally in our backlog are sent home; and a new centralised command for tackling dangerous Channel crossings has been set up by the Home Office. The Small Boats Operational Command will oversee operational activity with France to disrupt crossings, save lives at sea and ensure the effective processing of arrivals in the UK.

And we will go further still to solve this problem once and for all. We will introduce new legislation to make it clear that if someone enters the UK illegally they should not be able to remain – but will instead be swiftly detained and removed.

Since the Committee hearing, the Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee has written to me to ask a further series of questions; I have asked the Home Secretary to reply to that letter on behalf of the Government.

Question 34 (Enforcement of protected marine and land areas)

I am proud that the UK has played a leading role in driving forward progress in international efforts to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss through our presidency of COP26 and through COP15.

Natural England has a broad range of enforcement powers to secure the positive management of designated sites and has published guidance on the enforcement of environmental crime, including at Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Natural England's key focus is helping people to comply with requirements. But where the offence is significant or environmental harm has been caused, it will take enforcement action.

Natural England enforcement officers work with the National Wildlife Crime Unit, a specialist police unit, and in 2022 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs more than doubled its funding of the unit to over £1.2 million over the next three years.

The Environment Agency also has a key role in preventing harm to sensitive habitats, particularly related to air and water quality. We are aiming to have all Marine Protected Areas in English waters protected from damaging fishing activity by 2024.

Questions 47 and 48 (Universal Credit and childcare costs)

Financial help with childcare is crucial for families. That is why we have a generous Government offer. The vast majority of Universal Credit (UC) claimants receiving the UC childcare element do not hit the UC childcare caps. In fact, between August 2020 and July 2021, 92% of UC claimants receiving a payment for the UC childcare element were eligible to receive the full 85% of their childcare before the earnings taper.

Our current policy provides fairness in the welfare system between those receiving out of work benefits and those in work, by putting in place a reasonable cap on the childcare costs which a household can have reimbursed through UC each assessment period.

To ensure that families who are eligible do not miss out on the help that is available for childcare costs, the Department for Work and Pensions is currently promoting the UC childcare costs' offer as part of a national advertising campaign.

Question 55 (Poverty statistics)

Poverty statistics come from Department for Work and Pensions' annual Households Below Average Income publication.

The latest published statistics show that in 2020/21 there were: 1.2 million fewer people in absolute poverty than in 2009/10; and, 200,000 fewer children in absolute poverty than in 2009/10.

Households below average income: an analysis of the income distribution FYE 1995 to FYE 2021 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Question 53 (Healthy Start scheme)

As the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Health and Social Care informed the House in December, the Department of Health and Social Care is working with the NHS Business Services Authority and the Department for Work and Pensions to obtain data on the uptake of the Healthy Start scheme for the most recent period. This will then be published as quickly as possible.

Questions 90 and 91 (Retained EU Law Bill)

The Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill is part of the Government's commitment to put the UK statute book on a more sustainable footing. By ending the special status of retained EU Law, we will reclaim the sovereignty of Parliament, and restore primacy to Acts of Parliament.

Departments are in the process of identifying their retained EU laws and considering whether they should be preserved, reformed, revoked or allowed to sunset, as well as developing plans for delivering their departmental Statutory Instruments programme. While departments cannot bring forward regulations under the powers in the Bill until it is enacted, I can reassure you that work is already underway. Where appropriate, departments are engaging with external stakeholders to develop and finalise policy and legislation proposals in the usual way, and in particular prioritising making a tangible difference to improving people's lives in the UK. The Bill contains robust scrutiny mechanisms that will enable the appropriate scrutiny of any changes made under the powers in the Bill. We remain committed to working collaboratively with Parliament in order to deliver the programme of secondary legislation following this Bill, as we did with our programme of Statutory Instruments ahead of Exit day.

The Bill will revoke the majority of EU Retained Law so that it expires on 31 December 2023. All retained EU law falling within the definition of EU derived subordinated legislation and retained direct EU legislation will expire on this date unless the sunset is extended for specific pieces of retained EU law or it is otherwise preserved.

None of this work is about watering down standards, such as our strong record on workers' rights, maternity rights, or environmental protection, having raised domestic standards over recent years to make them some of the highest in the world.

The Retained EU Law (REUL) Dashboard will document the Government's progress of amending, repealing or replacing REUL that is not right for the UK. It will enable the public to hold the Government to account on REUL reform.

Question 101 (The Balkans)

The UK supports a more secure and prosperous Western Balkans future, built on strong foundations of democracy, the rule of law and regional cooperation. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has heightened the risk of instability in the Western Balkans. We will not allow Russia to destabilise the region.

We are working with partners in the Western Balkans to reduce their dependence on Russian energy and their vulnerability to economic coercion. We fully support Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and we will continue to take measures against those who threaten that. We welcome the recent reduction in tensions in northern Kosovo. We are working with international partners to support the long-term goal of normalisation of the Serbia-Kosovo relationship.

The Foreign Secretary attended the Berlin Process Summit last November with Western Balkans leaders. The UK was the only non-EU country to do so. The Minister for Europe discussed regional tensions when he visited Kosovo, Serbia and North Macedonia in December, and my Envoy, Lord Peach, continues to engage actively across the region.

Yours sincerely,


Sir Bernard Jenkin MP