

Questions

Period ending: 27 Feb

Awaiting answers...

Dr Richard Simpson: To ask the Scottish Executive which NHS boards (a) do and (b) do not provide fully trained deafblind guide/communicators, whether directly or jointly with local authorities or through a voluntary organisation, and what steps it will take to ensure equality of access to a deafblind guide/communicator for deafblind people. (S3W-21181)

Marlyn Glen: To ask the Scottish Executive how its policy takes account of the high incidence of communication difficulties among young offenders in terms of both direct provision of speech and language therapy and, more generally, the communication accessibility of criminal justice services. (S3O-5994)

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): in light of recent reports raising concerns over mental health in relation to the recession, what is being done to ensure that people have the support that they need. (S3O-5873)

Shona Robison: The uncertainty and change that is the consequence of the economic situation can be difficult for many people to cope with. The Scottish Government funds a range of programmes and services which offer support, including the Breathing Space telephone advice line for those suffering from low mood or depression and the National Debt Line which has in the last month launched a public awareness campaign.

Motion

Period ending: 20 Feb

S3M-3415 Ian McKee: European Parliament Elections 2009

That the Parliament expresses concern that a recent Eurobarometer poll commissioned by the European Parliament, which surveyed 27,000 people across the 27 EU Member States, found that only 26% of respondents were aware that European Parliament elections are taking place in June 2009; notes that Scotland has a poor record of voter turnout at European Parliament elections, often reaching just above 30%; further notes that the European Parliament has direct and indirect legislative competence in a substantial range of policy areas, including chemical safety, the environment and food and agriculture, which have a major impact on Scottish citizens; urges the Electoral Commission to intensify its 2009 campaign to ensure that Scotland's citizens are aware of the upcoming elections and are given sufficient information on voting methods, and encourages all candidates for the European Parliament, including currently elected MEPs, to raise the profile of the elections and encourage voter participation.

Supported by: Alasdair Allan, Kenneth Gibson, Sandra White, Bill Kidd, Bob Doris, Shirley-Anne Somerville, Hugh O'Donnell, Jamie Hepburn, Gil Paterson, Stuart McMillan, Dave Thompson*
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/businessBulletin/bb-09/bb-02-16f.htm>

Questions

Period ending: 20 Feb

Mental Health

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will develop a national mental health service for deaf people and, if so, what the timescale will be for achieving a service agreement to that effect. (S3W-20543)

Shona Robison: Mental health services for those with sensory loss continue to develop and improve. For example, a new dedicated community service and a deaf counselling service are now operational and have been well received by service users in Lothian. National access to specialist in-patient services when needed is long established through referrals to the John Denmark Unit in Manchester with attention to transitions a feature of the care pathway.

We are examining with partners the merits of a Scotland-based in-patient facility and how to further improve regional specialist community services.

Questions**Period ending: 13 Feb****Access for Disabled People**

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S3W-18831 by Stewart Stevenson on 8 January 2009, whether it will be re-advertising for new members of the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland in order to make the further appointments expected. (S3W-20233)

Stewart Stevenson: The Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland will be advertising for new members in order to make further appointments. MACS recently commenced discussions with the Scottish Government's Public Appointments Unit and the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland in order to establish the best course of action to attract potential members.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S3W-18835 by Stewart Stevenson on 8 January 2009, how much funding the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) will receive from the 2008-09 budget and how this compares with the funding that MACS has received in the past. (S3W-20234)

Stewart Stevenson: I refer the member to the answer to question S3W-18835 on 8 January 2009. All answers to written parliamentary questions are available on the Parliament's website, the search facility for which can be found at:
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Apps2/Business/PQA/Default.aspx>

Concessionary Travel

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S3W-18862 by Stewart Stevenson on 11 December 2008, what consideration is being given to the introduction of free travel on trains for concessionary travel pass holders. (S3W-20213)

Stewart Stevenson: The review of the Scotland-wide Free Bus Travel Scheme for Older and Disabled People is nearing completion. A report of the review is being finalised and I expect to receive it shortly.

Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will provide details of its plans for the future of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland as part of new scrutiny bodies for social and health care. (S3W-20858)

Shona Robison: I am aware of concerns expressed by stakeholders about this proposal, particularly about the perceived loss of independence for the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland (MWCS) and the safeguarding role.

That is why Cabinet agreed earlier this week that while the MWCS will remain very much part of the simplification programme we will step back at this time from taking the MWCS' functions into either the new health or the new social care body.

We will discuss further with the MWCS and engage directly with stakeholders on the way forward. At the same time we will review the operation of the MWCS over the next four to six months to establish how best to take the MWCS forward as part of the simplification programme.

Mental Health

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive, in light of recent reports raising concerns over mental health in relation to the recession, what is being done to ensure that people have the support that they need. (S3O-5873)

Shona Robison: The uncertainty and change that is the consequence of the economic situation can be difficult for many people to cope with. The Scottish Government funds a range of programmes and services which offer support, including the Breathing Space telephone advice line for those suffering from low mood or depression and the National Debt Line which has in the last month launched a public awareness campaign.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it has received from mental health organisations in opposition to the merger of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland. (S3O-5929)

Shona Robison: Ministers have received representations from various stakeholders expressing concerns and seeking further engagement about the proposal to bring the Mental Welfare Commission into a new scrutiny body.

Ministers are considering how these representations can be addressed in the proposed changes.

Questions	Period ending: 06 Feb
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Concessionary Travel

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S3W-16793 by Stewart Stevenson on 27 October 2008, whether it will list the disability groups that it has met in relation to the concessionary travel pass, also showing (a) dates and (b) locations of the meetings. Holding answer issued: 2 February 2009 (S3W-19959)

Stewart Stevenson: Prior to the introduction of the Scotland-Wide Free Bus Travel Scheme for Older and Disabled People, the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland was represented on the National Concessionary Travel Implementation Project – Eligibility Task Group. The Group met on 14 and 30 June, 26 July and 9 August 2005 at Victoria Quay, Edinburgh. More recently I have met with representatives of the "Fare Deal" Campaign – a campaign involving 12 charities representing older people and people with disabilities. As part of the current review of the scheme a number of disability organisations were consulted about their views on the scheme.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions have been held with disability groups and others regarding concessionary travel companion cards for people accompanying disabled passengers. Holding answer issued: 2 February 2009 (S3W-19960)

Stewart Stevenson: Prior to the introduction of the Scotland-wide Free Bus Travel Scheme for Older and Disabled People in April 2006, discussions were held about concessionary travel companion cards with the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers, and the then Strathclyde Passenger Transport, as part of the consideration of the eligibility criteria for the scheme.

The Steering Group currently carrying out the review of the scheme is looking at all aspects of the scheme and considering how it could be improved. All of the above groups, and others, have been provided with an opportunity to comment on the review.

Concessionary Travel

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will deliver the policy intentions of the national concessionary travel scheme to people who are unable to use conventional buses. Holding answer issued: 30 January 2009 (S3W-19865)

Stewart Stevenson: Although the scheme already includes demand responsive/community transport services which are locally registered services, this is one of a number of issues being considered as part of the review of the scheme. The review is nearing completion.

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it recognises that the eligibility criteria for the national concessionary travel scheme exclude people on the lower rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance and whether it will consider the reach of the scheme in its current review. Holding answer issued: 30 January 2009 (S3W-19866)

Stewart Stevenson: We are aware that the eligibility criteria do not include people in receipt of the lower rate of the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance. This is one of a number of issues being considered as part of the review of the scheme. The review is nearing completion.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how many young people have acquired a Scottish national entitlement card that is not a youth travel card. (S3W-20264)

John Swinney: As of 26 January 2009, there were a total of 248,470 cards issued to young people aged between 11 to 26.

Of these, 186,492 were for those young people aged 11 to 15 and 19 to 26 inclusive i.e. those young people not eligible for the Young Persons Concessionary Travel Scheme.

These figures exclude cards issued to young disabled people who qualify for the Scotland-wide free travel scheme for older and disabled people as these are not readily available.

Homecoming Scotland

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture's directorate will use Homecoming Scotland 2009 to promote Scotland's creative industries. (S3O-5792)

Linda Fabiani: Homecoming Scotland 2009 provides a fantastic opportunity to showcase Scotland's cultural and creative industries. The huge variety of festivals and events will allow people from all over the world to experience and celebrate with the rich and varied culture of Scotland. For our creative industries, the increase in visitors brings the prospect of offering and publicising their products, contemporary and traditional, to a wider audience.

Mental Health

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what consultation it undertook with stakeholders prior to announcing the proposal to merge the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland and the Care Commission, listing (a) who was consulted, (b) the method of consultation and (c) when it took place. (S3W-20146)

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will publish details of any consultations it has had with stakeholders in respect of the proposed merger of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland, NHS Quality Improvement Scotland and the Care Commission. (S3W-20147)

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with key stakeholders about the proposed merger of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland. (S3W-20163)

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what consultation it has undertaken and what further consultation it intends to undertake on the proposed merger of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland. (S3W-20165)

Shona Robison: The proposals supporting the First Minister's statement to the Scottish Parliament on 30 January 2008 on Delivering More Effective Government indicated that the future of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland (MWCS) would be reviewed as part of the consideration of the scrutiny and complaints landscape. The follow-up announcement on 6 November by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth announcing the outcome of this consideration enables discussions on the proposed changes to be undertaken with the bodies and external stakeholders.

Engagement with external stakeholders has already begun and further events are planned.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what financial savings it would expect to make by merging the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland and the Care Commission. (S3W-20148)

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what benefits and enhancements, other than financial savings, it envisages achieving in merging the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland and the Care Commission that could not be achieved by closer joint working. (S3W-20149)

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what functions of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland (MWCS) are to be subsumed within any new organisation resulting from the proposed merger of MWCS with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland and the Care Commission, rather than retained within an independent section, unit, directorate or division of that organisation. (S3W-20150)

Shona Robison: The new bodies will be empowered to plan and work together collaboratively on, for instance, joint inspections in a manner which is not achievable with their current legislative powers.

The changes proposed envisage the creation of two new scrutiny bodies which will carry out the functions of the existing bodies including the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland. It will be for the new bodies themselves to decide how they are organised to carry out those functions.

The financial costs, savings and benefits for the creation of the new scrutiny bodies will be set out in full in the Financial Memorandum to the Public Services Reform Bill, in which the legislative provisions will be included.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will ensure that the independence of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland will be retained in any new structure arising from its proposed merger with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland and the Care Commission. (S3W-20151)

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will keep the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland independent of the NHS while keeping NHS Quality Improvement Scotland within the NHS, if the two organisations are merged. (S3W-20152)

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it intends to go ahead with the proposal to merge the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland. (S3W-20161)

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that the merging of an independent protective body such as the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland (MWCS) with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland would create a conflict of interest in relation to the MWCS's independence from government. (S3W-20162)

Shona Robison: Ministers have been made aware of the views of the affected bodies and their stakeholders on these proposals which include concerns about the continued independence of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland, particularly in carrying out its safeguarding role. The legislative proposals to be carried forward for the new bodies will ensure the safeguarding functions currently carried out by the MWCS will be maintained.

Mental Health

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive when a national deaf mental health service will be in place. (S3W-20101)

Shona Robison: Mental health services for those with sensory loss are developing and improving. A new dedicated community service and a deaf counselling service are now operational in Lothian. National access to specialist in-patient services when needed is provided by the John Denmark Unit in Manchester.

We are looking to improve on current arrangements and are considering the merits of a Scotland-based in-patient facility. We are also considering how to improve regional specialist community services with the three regional planning partnerships.