

Pharmacists

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive when responsibility for routine repeat prescribing will be transferred to pharmacists. (S3W-22021)

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government has no plans to transfer routine repeat prescribing to community pharmacists. Trained pharmacists can prescribe under supplementary and/or independent prescribing arrangements. These arrangements can include repeat prescribing.

In addition, the Chronic Medication Service (CMS), which is one of the key elements of the new community pharmacy contract, will formalise the role of community pharmacists in the management of individual patients with long-term conditions.

Volunteering

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what mechanisms are in place to promote volunteering to staff. (S3O-6459)

Mike Pringle: The SPCB endeavours to provide maximum flexibility for employees to balance their work and private life, which includes making time for volunteering purposes. And it also looks to support any direct requests for staff to take time off for volunteering, working to ensure that we balance the needs of the business with personal wishes wherever this is possible.

The SPCB observes all its statutory duties in terms of granting paid special leave for certain public duties. In addition, staff may apply for unpaid special leave to carry out voluntary and/or charitable work in the UK or abroad for any period of less than three months whilst a career break can be requested for a period of three months – two years for the same purpose.

Freedom of Information

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what the average cost of responding to freedom of information (FOI) requests has been in each year since 2006. (S3W-21200)

Bruce Crawford: We do not hold information on the average cost of responding to FOI requests.

Freedom of Information

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how many freedom of information requests it (a) received and (b) responded to in (i) 2007 and (ii) 2008 and at what cost. (S3W-21197)

Bruce Crawford: The Scottish Government inherited a system from the previous administration that did not record all requests centrally. In particular, only the more complex requests tended to be recorded centrally. This means that the information held in relation to the number of requests pre 1 January 2008 is not comprehensive.

As of 1 January 2008, the Scottish Government put in place an Information Request Tracking System which has considerably improved the accuracy of the information we hold on request handling. All requests are now recorded (except those which are regularly and easily dealt with, such as requests for consultation papers and publications).

In 2007, the Scottish Government recorded 779 requests and issued 431 responses. In 2008, we recorded 1,258 requests and issued 1,149 responses.

Regarding the cost of responding to FOI requests I refer the member to the answer to question S3W-21200 on 16 March 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

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the review of the national concessionary travel scheme is examining the possibility of allowing two carers to be eligible for free travel where a disabled person is unable to travel with only one carer. (S3W-21651)

Stewart Stevenson: The review of the Scotland-wide Free Bus Travel Scheme for Older and Disabled People is looking at how the scheme has been operating since its introduction in April 2006. This includes considering the eligibility criteria for companions. We anticipate the report of the review will be published within the next month.

Concessionary Travel

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what meetings have taken place in the last 12 months between representatives of the Scottish Government or Transport Scotland and the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK regarding the reimbursement of concessionary fares and whether it will provide a copy of the minutes of any such meetings. (S3W-21700)

Stewart Stevenson: There have been a number of meetings between representatives of the Scottish Government and/or Transport Scotland with the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK over the last 12 Months, where the issue of the reimbursement of concessionary fares would have been discussed. Most of these have been in the context of the on-going review of the Scotland Wide Free Bus Travel Scheme for Older and Disabled People. It would be premature to consider releasing any records from these meetings prior to the conclusion of the review report, as this could be seen to be prejudicial to its outcome.

Motion

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: 13th March****Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland**

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answers to questions S3W-18835 and S3W-20234 by Stewart Stevenson on 8 January 2009 and 10 February 2009 respectively, what percentage of the £6.6 million budget for Transport Strategy and Innovation the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland will receive in 2008-09. (S3W-20897)

Stewart Stevenson: In 2008-09, the budget for the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) is part of the wider Transport Strategy and Innovation budget. The Transport Strategy and Innovation Budget is a Level 3 figure. Current Scottish Government Finance Guidelines are that we do not publish figures below those shown in the Level 3.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how much funding the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland has received in each year since it was established in 2002. (S3W-20898)

Stewart Stevenson: From 2002-03 until 2004-05, the Mobility and Access Committee Scotland (MACS) was allocated the following budgets:

2002-03 - £100,000. 2003-04 - £200,000, 2004-05 - £200,000.

From 2005-06 until 2007-08, MACS received funding from the Scottish Government's Mobility budget.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many meetings the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) will hold in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10 and how these figures compare with the number of meetings that it held in previous years. (S3W-20901)

Stewart Stevenson: In 2008-09, the Mobility and Access Committee held two meetings of its main committee. The first of these, which took place in July 2008, was the final meeting of MACS in its previous incarnation. The second one took place on 20 January 2009. This was the initial meeting of the newly established committee, the appointments of whom were announced on 19 December 2008.

In 2009-10, quarterly meetings have been arranged, but the committee will meet more often than that when business requires. The first meeting takes place on 28 April 2009.

In previous years, MACS generally held main committee meetings every two months.

Direct Payments

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S3W-20102 by Shona Robison on 4 February 2009, whether it will review the funding arrangements for Orkney Islands Council to enable its waiting list of direct payment applications to be eased and whether it will consider granting transitional funding in light of the council's limited scope to make cuts in other areas to fund direct payments. (S3W-20997)

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government will be providing local government in Scotland with record levels of funding over the period covered by the spending review 2008-11. The vast majority of the funding, including the funding for self-directed support, is provided by means of a block grant.

It is the responsibility of each local authority to allocate the total financial resources available to it to achieve agreed outcomes, and the Scottish Government will monitor performance to make sure that

our shared national priorities are achieved. It is not for the Scottish Government to intervene in how local authorities organise these services. However, Orkney Islands Council and NHS Orkney are working with the Scottish Government Joint Improvement Team to look into redesigning services to support more integrated working across health and social care.

In addition, the Scottish Government is funding three local authority test sites (Dumfries and Galloway, Glasgow and Highland Councils) to evaluate the effectiveness of three different interventions to increase the uptake of self-directed support, including bridging finance (investing to save).

Questions

Period ending: 6th March

Scots Language

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how it intends to take forward the recommendations contained in the report, Audit of Current Scots Language Provision in Scotland. (S3W-21039)

Michael Russell: It is clear to me that the recommendations contained in the report of the Audit of Current Scots Language Provision in Scotland cannot be taken forward seriously without involving the Scots language community.

My predecessor Linda Fabiani also shared this view, and shortly after publication of the audit hosted a conference on 9 February 2009 for individuals and organisations with an interest in Scots language matters, where the findings of the research were formally presented and possible ways forward to better promote and develop the Scots language in future were discussed.

I intend to capitalize on the suggestions and views expressed by delegates at the conference and as a next step will soon carry out more focused consultation on the emerging issues with representatives from the Scots language community.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will institute on-going monitoring of provision of support for the Scots language in order to build on the work done in the audit of current provision for the Scots language. (S3W-21040)

Michael Russell: The Audit of Current Provision for the Scots Language was not intended to be exhaustive and could not capture every single act of provision in Scotland during the time available to the staff undertaking the research. However, the Scottish Government recognises the potential that such a resource offers to policy makers and language practitioners, and will take steps to enable individuals or organisations whose acts of provision were not captured in the first instance by the audit to send reports on their activities. Our intention is that the table of provision contained within the audit becomes a "living document", so that a broader picture of provision in Scotland may be presented throughout the year, as reported by Scots language providers.

S3W-20543 - Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab) (Date Lodged Wednesday, February 04, 2009): 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.

Due for answer Wednesday, March 04, 2009

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/businessBulletin/bb-09/bb-02-05e.htm>

Languages

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure adequate teaching of the languages of China and Japan in tertiary education. (S3W-21323)

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how it intends to support Japanese studies and Chinese studies in universities. (S3W-21324)

Fiona Hyslop: Subject provision in tertiary education is a matter for individual institutions as autonomous bodies.

Mental Health

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S3W-19341 by Shona Robison on 20 January 2009, whether it will provide an answer that specifically addresses the points raised in the question. (S3W-20942)

Shona Robison: There was extensive consultation during the Crerar Review, which reported in 2007, on the proposals for change to the scrutiny landscape.

I had discussions on the proposals with the Convenor of the Care Commission and the Chairs of the Boards of NHS Quality Improvement Scotland and the Mental Welfare Commission Scotland, both prior to and following the announcement on 6 November 2008 on the creation of new scrutiny bodies for health and social care.

The Scottish Government announced on 13 February that while the Mental Welfare Commission will still be part of the simplification programme we will step back at this time from taking its functions in to either the new health or new social care body.

We will be engaging directly with the bodies and their stakeholders on the way forward while reviewing the Mental Welfare Commission's operations and how best to take it forward as part of the simplification programme.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made in providing an appropriate number of in-patient places in child and adolescent psychiatry services. (S3W-21000)

Shona Robison: We are working closely with NHS boards to ensure that the number of specialist in-patient beds match need and demand.

For children, there are nine beds, provided on a national basis, at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children (Yorkhill). For adolescents, a new facility opened on 25 February in the West of Scotland with 24 beds. Consideration of local and regional needs are still underway in the North around plans to increase the current six beds to 12, and in the South East who currently have 12 beds.

We have also offered £2 million of new money on a recurring basis, to be matched by new resources from NHS boards, to accelerate the development of specialist CAMHS in-patient services and supporting intensive community services.

Mental Health

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that the treatment of depression and other mental health illnesses should, in the first instance, be treated by methods other than prescribed drugs. (S3W-20723)

Shona Robison: Our objective continues to provide the best and widest treatment options for the service user and clinician in each case. The treatment of depression and other mental illnesses should be based on a clinical assessment of needs and should include medication, therapies or life style changes as appropriate to the circumstances of the individual.

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has a strategy to tackle depression. (S3W-20725)

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government is committed to providing appropriate care and treatment to those who suffer from depression in line with national clinical guidelines. This is supported by work to put in place integrated care pathways for depression that meet the standards established by NHS Quality Improvement Scotland; the commitment to increase access to psychological therapies in Scotland in line with the evidence base for effective interventions; screening for depression for those with coronary heart disease and diabetes and appropriate treatment; access to online and telephone based cognitive behavioural therapy and self-help for depression; promotion of physical activity as both a treatment for depression to reduce the risk of developing depression, and our target of increasing the range of non-pharmacological responses to depression to reduce reliance on anti-depressants.

Young Offenders (Communication Difficulties)

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-09/sor0226-02.htm#Col15277>

9. Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): 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)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Young offenders should have access to the same opportunities as all other young people to ensure that they develop the communications skills that enable them to grow, live and work in the contemporary world. Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide those educational services to all young people of school age, including young offenders.

When in custody, young offenders have access to a community speech and language therapy service, following referral from prison health care services, as well as a wide variety of learning opportunities that aid the development of communication skills. As the independent Scottish Prisons Commission found, we need better outcomes for offenders and communities. We took account of that in "Protecting Scotland's Communities: Fair, Fast and Flexible Justice", which is our plan for a coherent and comprehensive management strategy to reduce reoffending and tackle the underlying causes of crime.

Marlyn Glen: Given that speech and language therapy provision is available for only 16 hours per week in Polmont and cannot be accessed at all by offenders in Cornton Vale, does the minister share my concern for the success of rehabilitation measures when there is a mismatch between the skills levels of offenders and the literacy and communication requirements for important programmes, including anger management and drug rehabilitation courses? How will that mismatch be reduced?

Kenny MacAskill: The Scottish Prison Service is consistently on that case. Some services are provided by local authorities, some are provided by health boards, and some are required to be provided by the Scottish Prison Service. At my meeting with the Prison Reform Trust next Tuesday, one of the matters under discussion will be how we care for and deal with young offenders who have such difficulties. Clearly, many young offenders are in custody because they have committed serious offences—that goes with the turf—but we should also recognise that many have problems, whether with drug or alcohol addiction, learning or other difficulties.

Our hard-pressed Scottish Prison Service cannot possibly provide such youngsters with the skills and assistance that they need when it is overburdened with the continual churn in and out of prisoners on short-term sentences. The service tells us that assessment of such youngsters usually takes something like eight weeks. If a youngster is in prison for only a short period, the service cannot possibly carry out the literacy and numeracy analysis that is necessary. That is why, if we are to allow the service to do what is necessary, we need to provide it with headroom by ensuring that prisons are only for serious and dangerous offenders. Those who commit less serious offences should be dealt with either under the summary justice reforms or through tough community sentences.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I want to press the cabinet secretary a little further on that. He did not really deal with Marlyn Glen's point, which was about the low level of support that young offenders institutions such as Polmont provide for dealing with speech and language communication problems. Does he appreciate the significance of the problems that are faced by some young people who end up in prison? Will he undertake to look at the provision of such services that are available in young offenders institutions? Notwithstanding the wider context of the reforms to which he rightly referred, will he review the issue, perhaps by asking an outside body to consider whether current provision could be improved?

Kenny MacAskill: As I said, we as a Government are continually on the case. We recognise that youngsters coming into the system can have severe educational and learning difficulties. Not that long ago, issues such as dyslexia were not even identified or considered, but we now know that a significant element of the prison population not only has learning difficulties but suffers from conditions such as dyslexia. Clearly, we require to deal with that.

On Marlyn Glen's point, the position at Cornton Vale is frankly quite shameful. We know that many of the women come in with a mental health problem or a drug or alcohol addiction. Many of them have been victims of abuse in their own lives and have suffered a lack of educational attainment for a variety of reasons. Such matters are not simply a criminal justice problem but a social problem. We need to recognise that prison should be for those who commit serious offences or who are a danger to our communities. We should not continue to lock up people who would be better dealt with by having their alcohol or drug addiction treated in the community or by paying back the harm that they have done through the sweat of their brow.

Disabled Persons' Parking Places (Scotland) Bill

This Bill was passed in the Scottish Parliament on Thursday 26th February 2009. To read more, go to Col 15 at <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-09/sor0226-02.htm#Col15277>