



Motion S4M-16013: Jenny Marra, North East Scotland, Scottish Labour Date Lodged: 21/03/2016

Second Annual Deaf Sector Conference

That the Parliament celebrates the Scottish Council on Deafness's (SCoD) second annual deaf sector conference, Connect and Communicate, which was held in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on 10 March 2016; understands that it focused on communication, attracted 125 delegates and a total of 200 people attended; notes that workshop facilitators, language and communication professionals, and volunteers, both hearing and deaf, took part in the conference, which included the promotion of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015, the See Hear Strategy and inclusive communication, and supports the work of SCoD and the deaf sector in Scotland in aiming to support a society in which deaf people have equal access, rights and citizenship.

Supported by: David Stewart, Siobhan McMahon, Jackie Baillie, Colin Beattie, Kevin Stewart, Hanzala Malik, Anne McTaggart, Richard Simpson, Kenneth Gibson, Jayne Baxter, Alison McInnes

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S4M-16013&ResultsPerPage=10>

S4M-15766 Health

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-15766, in the name of Jenny Marra, on health. I call Jenny Marra to speak to and move the motion.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

I recognise and thank national health service staff up and down this country for the tireless and professional job that they do in caring for our sick and vulnerable people in communities, surgeries and hospitals the length and breadth of Scotland. That is the way in which we should start every health debate, because, as we know, those staff are the backbone of the NHS. We are proud of them, we support them and we thank them for their work.

However, NHS staff need more than thanks and appreciation. They need the resources to allow them to deliver the high-quality local services that people expect and demand, which is where we politicians enter the fray. While our NHS staff and other public servants work tirelessly, we are today debating the funding challenges, the fiscal options and the political decisions that can enable or inhibit them in doing their job. With the fiscal framework for the new tax powers now agreed, we know that the powers that we have long anticipated will soon be transferred and that, with a good financial deal behind them, we have the potential to truly bring about change.

Nevertheless, there are serious questions for us about what kind of nation we want to be. Do we want to be one that rightly demands better public services and that is prepared to pay for them, or one that rightly demands better public services but finds excuses not to pay for or deliver them? Today, a consensus has emerged among the Scottish political parties, which only the Conservatives break from. With Nicola Sturgeon's announcement on the council tax, we now all agree that, if we want better public services, we need to be brave enough to ask people to pay for them.

To read the full debate, please click [here](#).

Communities

S4W-29836 Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-29498 by John Swinney on 9 February 2016, on what date it will announce plans to extend superfast broadband to the remaining 5%.

John Swinney: It is not yet possible to confirm a date, although we expect to begin new procurement activity later in 2016. There are a number of steps that need to be taken prior to announcing our plans in detail. This includes finalising coverage to be delivered by the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband programme, undertaking an Open Market Review to establish commercial plans and agreeing the appropriate state aid route. Currently we are working with the UK Government to develop a proposal to the European Commission for a new UK-wide state aid scheme for broadband. We expect this to be finalised in the coming months.

S4W-29923 Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on introducing restrictions on charities and other third sector organisations in using public funds to lobby (a) it, (b) local government and (c) the Scottish Parliament.

Alex Neil: A key theme of the Programme for Government is encouraging and facilitating participation by everyone in the debates and decisions that matter to them most, regardless of circumstances or backgrounds. We recognise that third sector and equalities organisations play an important role in this, providing a voice for communities on public policy, and bringing a deep level of insight into the issues faced by communities and the most vulnerable people in society. We have no wish to deter this important part of our democratic process, and have no intention of adding a clause to our grant offer letters, as the United Kingdom Government is planning to do. Existing Scottish Government grant provisions give the required protection and would prevent the use of grants for party political lobbying activity. We therefore already have appropriate and well-designed controls in place to ensure that public money is spent for approved purposes only.

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_ChamberDesk/WA20160301.pdf Page 1

S4W-30016 Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to mark International Day of Older Persons on 1 October 2016.

Alex Neil: The Scottish Government will work with its stakeholders to agree how to mark the day as we have done in previous years. The Scottish Older People's Assembly celebrated International Older People's Day on 5 October 2015, during older people's week, by holding its annual assembly in the Scottish Parliament with politicians and around 150 older people. Age Scotland's member groups are currently planning their activities for the day and it is expected that the community grants fund of £80,000 awarded to Age Scotland will support many local events.

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_ChamberDesk/WA20160302.pdf Page 1

Inquiry: Contracted out health and disability assessments

For many years the Department for Work and Pensions (the Department) and its contractors have struggled to provide timely, high quality health and disability assessments to inform decisions about benefits or to help people on sick leave back to work. We are encouraged to see that the Department and its contractors have reduced backlogs and delays for claimants in receiving decisions, and are slowly improving the quality of assessments. However, contractors' performance still does not meet claimants', the Department's and taxpayers' expectations. There are particular concerns about the quality of assessments. As the Department increases the number of assessments to be completed by contractors it cannot afford to be complacent and must learn from past experience to ensure contractors are set challenging but realistic targets against which they are held to account. The Department also needs to develop a competitive market for health and disability assessments to ensure that there are sufficient credible bidders for contracts as they come up for renewal.

The Department has increasingly used third-party contractors to provide health and disability assessments. In 2005, the Department awarded a contract to Atos Healthcare (Atos) for Incapacity Benefit and, from 2008, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) assessments. After Atos requested to exit the ESA contract early, the Centre for Health and Disability Assessments (CHDA) a wholly-owned subsidiary within MAXIMUS, took over ESA assessments from March 2015. In July 2012, the Department signed three concurrent regional contracts to provide Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessments: two with Atos and one with Capita Business Services Limited (Capita). In July 2014, the Department signed a contract with Health Management Limited (HML), a wholly-owned subsidiary within MAXIMUS, to provide the Fit for Work service in England and Wales. The Department and its contractors have reduced the backlogs that existed. Outstanding PIP assessments fell from 242,000 in mid-2014 to 57,000 in August 2015, and outstanding ESA assessments from 724,000 in early 2014 to 410,000 in August 2015. Over the 3 years from April 2015 to March 2018 the Department expects to spend £1.6 billion on contracts for around 7 million health and disability assessments.

Recommendations from the inquiry

1. There are unacceptable local and regional variations in the performance of the Department's contractors.

Recommendation: By autumn 2016, the Department should publish quarterly national and regional data on contractor performance and average and maximum times to return both ESA and PIP assessments.

2. Claimants are still not receiving an acceptable level of service from contractors, with particular concerns for claimants with fluctuating and mental health conditions.

Recommendation: As the previous committee noted in 2014, the Department needs to ensure that it, and its contractors, make the process easier for claimants and ensure it has well-trained, knowledgeable assessors who are sensitive to the complex issues that claimants are dealing with, particularly those with mental health conditions. We expect significant progress to be made within 12 months, when the Department should update the Committee.

3. Too many assessments do not meet the standard required.

Recommendation: The Department and contractors need to develop a more complete and effective regime for monitoring and improving the quality of assessments. This includes ensuring contractors meet the required standards for reports.

4. The unit cost of assessments has increased, but there has been no noticeable benefit for claimants or taxpayers.

Recommendation: To demonstrate value for money from increasing costs, the Department must show that these costs lead directly to better performance and outcomes. The Department should update the Committee in 12 months' time on the actual costs incurred and service received.

5. The Department appears to have repeatedly misjudged what contractors can deliver and the uncertainties underlying what can be achieved.

Recommendation: The Department must challenge the underlying assumptions used in bids using the experience it has now acquired of the contracts in practice and set out consistent principles for identifying and handling the uncertainty of critical assumptions during procurement and the contract itself.

6. There is a real risk to value for money if there is not a competitive market for health and disability assessments.

Recommendation: The Department should consider the merits of different commercial approaches, particularly those used in markets where competition has been limited, to ensure it is well-placed to deliver value for money if market interest falls.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmpubacc/727/72706.htm>

National Living Wage

903817 Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the national living wage on wage growth.

The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): The national living wage will mean that a full-time minimum-wage worker benefiting from the policy will earn over £4,000 more by 2020 in cash terms, a rise of more than 35%. Due to the ripple effects on those on higher incomes, up to 6 million workers will benefit. The national living wage will drive up productivity; it will make sure that work pays; it is progressive and fair; and I am proud it is being introduced by a Conservative Government.

Royston Smith: I thank the Chancellor for his response. I am delighted that the national living wage will come into force from 1 April because Southampton has a high number of low-paid workers, which this policy addresses. What assurances can my right hon. Friend give my constituents that their jobs will be protected as a consequence of this wage rise and a strong local economy?

Mr Osborne: The assurance I can give is that, alongside the national living wage, we have cut taxes for businesses so that they have more money to invest in their workforce. We have introduced and increased the employment allowance, which helps small businesses in particular. I introduced that increase at the same time as announcing the national living wage. We are of course making big investments in the Southampton economy so that it is a great place to grow a business and employ people. All those things will help the hard-working people my hon. Friend represents so well.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): Wage growth matters, but surely it is the bottom line of your payslip that really counts. That is why the Chancellor is wrong to say that this is progressive. The Resolution Foundation has found that, over the next Parliament, those in the top half of our

income distribution will benefit more than those at the bottom. How can the Chancellor say that what he has done will help those with the least?

Mr Osborne: The hon. Lady seems to be opposing the national living wage. I think it is a progressive policy. Indeed, it was based on work by the Resolution Foundation. If you want a regressive policy, I will give you one. How about increasing the basic rate of income tax? That is what the Labour party is proposing in Scotland—the first sign of what an economic policy would look like under this new Labour leadership. How can an increase in the basic rate of income tax, which would hit people earning over £11,000, be remotely progressive or fair?

903838 Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Most businesses, as well as workers, in my constituency warmly welcome the introduction of the national living wage and the increased spending power it will deliver. Will the Chancellor and his team carefully monitor the implementation of the national living wage to see whether there are any unintended consequences, particularly in sectors where margins are already small, such as farming, social care and hospitality?

Mr Osborne: We will of course monitor the impact of all our policies on the economy and on particular sectors. That is one of the reasons why, alongside introducing the national living wage, we have introduced the new council tax supplement for the social care sector. The Office for Budget Responsibility analysis when we announced the national living wage was that, while in theory 60,000 jobs could be lost in the future that might otherwise have been created, the other policies we were pursuing would see over 1 million new jobs created, so the overall effect is an increase in employment of over 1 million.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): How can the Treasury ensure that employers do not reduce the hours of work of their employees, many of whom are in receipt of low incomes?

Mr Osborne: Many employer organisations and businesses have welcomed the national living wage, and many studies suggest that having a higher floor for wages drives up productivity, which, as the hon. Lady will know, is one of Britain's great economic challenges.

For further information on the debate, please click [here](#).

Welfare Reform and Work Bill

Consideration of Lords message

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I must draw the House's attention to the fact that financial privilege is involved in Lords amendments 8B, 8C, 9B and 9C.

Before Clause 4

6.7 pm

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendments 1B, 1C and 1D.

Mr Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the Government motion to disagree with Lords amendments 8B and 8C and the Government motion to disagree with Lords amendments 9B and 9C.

Priti Patel: Lords amendments 1B, 1C and 1D place a duty on the Secretary of State to publish data annually on four low-income statistics. Let me start by being very clear about what the Government

are not doing in these amendments: we are not returning to the broken state of affairs in the Child Poverty Act 2010; we are not returning to a policy approach driven by flawed income measures; and we are not compromising on the new life chances measures and the approach that we have set out in the Bill. Income measures do not drive the right action. They focus the Government's finite resources on the symptoms of child poverty, not the root causes.

Let me be clear on what these amendments are about. They provide a further guarantee that information on low income will be made available for all to see, every year. We have repeatedly given commitments on that throughout the passage of the Bill, in both Houses. The "Households below average income" publication, which provides a range of low-income data, already has statutory protection as a national statistics product. We are now reinforcing that with a new statutory duty to publish those data annually. Three of the four income statistics—relative low income, combined low income and material deprivation, and absolute low income—are already routinely published in the HBAI publication.

Our commitment goes beyond the data that are already published. It will also place a statutory duty on the Secretary of State to publish new data annually on children living in persistent low-income households. The information will be based on a new data source, and the first figures will be published before the end of the 2016-17 financial year. We believe that those data are a useful addition, because they tell us about families who are stuck on low income.

However, although we have given full statutory guarantees that those low-income data will be published annually, we will not commit to the Government's laying a report on them to Parliament. Reporting to Parliament on those statistics would incentivise Governments to take the wrong action and would simply continue to drive actions, such as direct income transfers, that fail to tackle the root causes of child poverty. The duty to publish low-income data is fundamentally different from reporting on or setting targets for them, and Opposition Members should not confuse the two.

For further information on the debate, please click [here](#).

Personal Independence Payment

11 March 2016

Volume 607

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson)

Later today I will be publishing Command Paper Cm. 9194: "The Government response to the consultation on aids and appliances and the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment".

PIP was introduced with the intent of supporting claimants with the greatest need to help them meet the extra costs arising from their disability or long-term health condition. In line with this, it was expected that these extra costs would be significant and ongoing. In December last year, the Department for Work and Pensions launched a consultation on aids and appliances and the daily living component of personal independence payment because of concerns that the policy on aids and appliances might not be working to achieve this.

This was in light of concerns highlighted by the first independent review of the PIP assessment undertaken by Paul Gray, and evidence that suggested that significant numbers of people who are likely to have low or minimal ongoing extra costs are being awarded the daily living component of the benefit solely because they may benefit from the use of aids and appliances for certain activities. These aids and appliances are often provided free of charge by the NHS and local authorities or can

be purchased for a low one-off cost. The number receiving the daily living component of PIP solely as a result of needing aids or appliances had also tripled in the space of 18 months for claims assessed under normal rules. In addition to this, there had been a number of judicial decisions, based on the current legislation, that had broadened the scope of aids and appliances to include articles, such as beds and chairs, which are unlikely to be a reliable indicator of extra costs.

The consultation ran from 10 December 2015 to 29 January 2016 and invited views on how support can best be provided to help meet the costs of people who rely on aids and appliances. The Department was keen that as many people and groups as possible had the opportunity to contribute their views, and held a number of meetings and events with key stakeholders to ensure this.

Having carefully reviewed the evidence, I have decided to proceed with halving the number of points awarded from two to one for the use of aids and appliances in relation to the fifth and sixth daily living activities. The considered view of the Department is that the need for an aid or appliance when completing activities five and six is a less reliable indicator of extra costs than for other activities, and that halving the points for these activities will allow us to continue to deliver PIP in line with our initial policy intent. Points will continue to be awarded for the use of aids and appliances, including on activities 5 and 6, and the points awarded for all other descriptors remain unchanged.

My intention is that these changes will take effect in January 2017, following review by the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC), in line with normal procedure. Additionally, as PIP is due to be devolved in Scotland, I will be discussing these changes with the Scottish Government following the Scottish Parliament elections to ensure implementation is in line with the recommendations of the Smith Commission. The Government continually monitor the effectiveness of PIP to ensure it is delivering its original policy intent and that improvements are implemented where they are identified. A second independent review of PIP is due to be delivered by April 2017.

In addition to delivering these changes, I remain committed to ensuring that we offer the most appropriate and effective support and best possible claimant experience for disabled people. In my meetings with disabled people and stakeholder organisations I am often told about the need for better co-ordination across health and disability support services and the potential to improve outcomes for those with a long-term disability or health condition through closer working between services. That is why I am announcing that the Government will be considering the case for long-term reform of disability benefits and services that is fair for the taxpayer and for those with disabilities or health conditions. Work will be taken forward over the coming months across Government and in consultation with those who provide relevant health and disability services. The findings will be reported to the Prime Minister later in this Parliament.

For more information, please click [here](#).

Welfare Next: 21 March 2016

Volume 607

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Stephen Crabb)

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement.

It is a privilege to stand here at the Dispatch Box as the new Secretary for Work and Pensions. First, I would like to pay a huge tribute to the work of my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith). He came into this job six years ago with a real sense of mission and purpose to transform people's lives for the better and he achieved some remarkable things. I intend to build on that success.

As a one nation Conservative, my vision is to support everyone to achieve their full potential and to live independent lives. That means people having the stability and security of a decent job, and

children growing up in a home with the benefit of that stability. There are now over 2 million more people in work than in 2010 and almost half a million more children now grow up seeing a mum or a dad go out to work each day. We are ensuring these opportunities extend to all those in our society, including disabled people.

Today, there are more than 3 million disabled people in work. In the past 12 months alone, 152,000 more disabled people have moved into work, with 292,000 more in the past two years. That represents real lives transformed as we support people with disabilities and health conditions to move into work and benefit from all the advantages that that brings. We are also supporting the most vulnerable and are determined that those with the greatest need are supported the most. Our reforms have seen support for disabled people increase. In the previous Parliament, spending rose by £3 billion. We are now, rightly, spending about £50 billion on benefits alone to support people with disabilities and health conditions. Devoting that level of resources to such an important group of people is, I believe, the mark of a decent society.

Personal independence payments were introduced to be a more modern and dynamic benefit to help to cover the extra costs faced by disabled people, something its predecessor benefit, the disability living allowance, did not do. PIP is designed to focus support on those with the greatest need and we have seen that working. For example, 22% of claimants are receiving the highest level of support, compared to 16% under the predecessor benefit DLA.

Before Christmas, the Government held a consultation on how part of the PIP assessment worked in relation to aids and appliances. As the Prime Minister indicated on Friday, I can tell the House that we will not be going ahead with the changes to PIP that had been put forward. I am absolutely clear that a compassionate and fair welfare system should not just be about numbers; behind every statistic there is a human being, and perhaps sometimes in government we forget that. So I can also confirm that after discussing this over the weekend with my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, we have no further plans to make welfare savings beyond the very substantial savings legislated for by Parliament two weeks ago, which we will now focus on implementing. I turn directly to the welfare cap. It is right that we monitor welfare spending carefully. The principle of introducing a welfare cap is the right one, given the huge increases in welfare spending under previous Labour Governments—up nearly 60%. If we do not control the public finances, it is always the poorest in society who pay the biggest price, so we need that discipline. The welfare cap strengthens accountability and transparency to Parliament—something that simply was not in place under Labour—and we make no apology for this. As we are required to do, we will review the level of the cap at the autumn statement, when the Office for Budget Responsibility formally reassesses it, but I repeat that we have no further plans to make welfare savings beyond the very substantial savings legislated for by Parliament two weeks ago, which we will now focus on implementing.

Against that backdrop, I want to build on the progress we have made in supporting disabled people. We made a manifesto commitment to halve the gap between the proportion of disabled people in work compared with the rest of the labour market. As I have outlined, we have made good progress in supporting disabled people into work, but to go further will require us to work in a way we have not done before and to think beyond the artificial boundaries of organisations, sectors and Government Departments to an approach that is truly collaborative. That is why today I want to start a new conversation with disabled people, their representatives, healthcare professionals and employers. I want the welfare system to work better with the health and social care systems. Together we can do so much better for disabled people.

This is a hugely complex but hugely important area of policy to get right. Disabled people themselves can provide the best insight into how support works best for them. I am determined, therefore, that all views will be listened to in the right way in the weeks and months ahead, and I will be personally involved in these discussions. The events of recent days demonstrate that we need to take time to reflect on how best we support and help transform people's lives. That is the welfare system I believe in, and I commend this statement to the House.

To see the full debate please click [here](#).
