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Weekly Political Update

Week ending 15 June 2012

Westminster

Deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
<p><u>Parliamentary Questions on access to healthcare for people with hearing loss</u></p>	<p>Sarah Wollaston MP (Con, Totnes) asked the Department of Health if it will issue guidance to commissioners of sign language interpreters in the NHS to ensure that only fully qualified interpreters are used during health appointments.</p> <p>Care Services Minister Paul Burstow MP (Lib Dem, Sutton and Cheam) stated that when making decisions about what services are delivered locally, all NHS organisations must ensure that they have complied with the Equality Act 2010 – for example advancing equality of opportunity by taking steps to meet the needs of people with a disability. He noted that there were no plans to issue guidance on this matter.</p> <p>Debbie Abrahams MP (Lab, Oldham East and Saddleworth) asked the Government who will be responsible for commissioning sign language interpreters for healthcare appointments in the new NHS structure.</p> <p>Responding, the Minister said that it will be for the NHS Commissioning Board and clinical commissioning groups to make arrangements for the delivery of sign language services during health care appointments.</p> <p>These questions were tabled following engagement by the Government Relations team with our Parliamentary Champions on the issue of Action on Hearing Loss’s ‘Equal Treatment’ campaign.</p>
<p><u>Parliamentary Question on support for people with hearing loss at Jobcentre Plus</u></p>	<p>David Hamilton MP (Lab, Midlothian) asked the Government what arrangements it has put in place to ensure that people who are deaf or hearing impaired can communicate with Jobcentre Plus offices. Responding, Minister for Disabled People Maria Miller MP (Con, Basingstoke) referred to the installation of loop systems, an improvement to the textphone service and the provision of communication support during interviews.</p>
<p><u>Parliamentary Question on interpreters in the justice system</u></p>	<p>Julian Huppert MP (Lib Dem, Cambridge) asked the Government about the provision of interpreting facilities in</p>

	the justice system and asked what recent meetings had been held with the Association of Sign Language Interpreters.
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Social Care

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
<u>Lords Question on the draft social care bill</u>	Baroness Wheeler (Lab) asked the Government about the timetable for the draft social care bill announced in the Queen's Speech and asked to what extent the proposals in the bill follow the recommendations of the Dilnot commission. Health Minister Earl Howe (Con) noted that whilst the Dilnot commission's recommendations were valuable, there were significant costs associated with implementing them.
<u>Lords Question on cost of social care</u>	Lord Smith of Leigh (Lab) asked the Government about the growth in the costs of social care brought about by demographic changes.

Disability issues – employment and welfare

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
<u>Department of Work and Pensions publication on benefit appeals</u>	The Government published an interim response to the public consultation on reforming the appeals process for benefit claimants. In future claimants disputing a decision will have to ask for it to be reconsidered before they are able to appeal. Due to the volume of responses to the consultation the Government will not be publishing a formal response until the end of July 2012.
<u>Parliamentary Question on migration from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance</u>	Tom Greatrex MP (Lab/Co-op, Rutherglen and Hamilton West) asked whether the Government had compiled a risk register in advance of the migration from incapacity benefit to employment and support allowance. Employment Minister Chris Grayling MP (Con, Epsom and Ewell) stated that a risk assessment was a departmental requirement but it would not be published.
<u>Parliamentary Question on number of outcomes from employment and support allowance applications</u>	Shadow Employment Minister Stephen Timms MP (Lab, East Ham) asked how many applications for employment and support allowance had come to a final outcome inclusive of results of the appeals process. Employment Minister Chris Grayling MP (Con, Epsom and Ewell) referred to the official statistics on employment and support allowance and the work capability assessment which are available to view here .

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Third sector issues

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Parliamentary Question on removing barriers to volunteering	Mark Spencer MP (Con, Sherwood) asked the Government what steps it is taking to reduce the administrative and regulatory burdens that affect the number of people who volunteer. Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude MP (Con, Horsham) stated that the Government plans to implement most of the recommendations in Lord Hodgson's report, Unshackling Good Neighbours . He also outlined government plans to reduce the number of people who require CRB checks and improve the portability of checks.
Parliamentary Question on the Government's relationship with charities	Seema Malhotra MP (Lab/Co-op, Feltham and Heston) asked how the Government will repair its relationship with charities following the handling of tax relief proposals announced in the Budget. Responding, Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude MP (Con, Horsham) stated the Government's ongoing commitment to helping third sector organisations through initiatives such as the social action fund.
Parliamentary Question on charity involvement in the Work Programme	Gareth Thomas MP (Lab/Co-op, Harrow West) noted with concern that a year on from the introduction of the Government's Work Programme, some of the charities that signed up originally have gone bust and almost 100 have withdrawn their welfare-to-work expertise from the programme completely. Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude MP (Con, Horsham) responded by confirming the Government's belief that it is right for social enterprises to play a major role in the provision of public services.

Consultations

For our responses to previous consultations please see the [consultation pages](#) on our website.

Title: Long-term Conditions Strategy

Source: Department of Health

Deadline: 15 June 2012

Title: Consultation on proposed NHS Institute [Care Homes Programme](#)

Source: NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement

Deadline: 8 June 2012

Parliamentary Questions on access to healthcare for people with hearing loss

Dr Wollaston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue guidance to commissioners of sign language interpreters in the NHS to ensure that only fully qualified interpreters are used during

health appointments; and if he will make a statement.[109509]

Debbie Abrahams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who he proposes will be responsible for commissioning sign language interpreters for healthcare appointments in the new NHS structure.[109616]

Paul Burstow: From 1 April 2013, it will be for the NHS Commissioning Board and clinical commissioning groups to make arrangements, for the delivery of services they are responsible for, including the appropriate provision of interpreters for users of sign language services during health care appointments.

The Department has no plans to issue guidance on this matter. From 1 April 2013 it will be for the NHS Commissioning Board to decide what guidance it wishes to issue to clinical commissioning groups.

When making decisions about what services are delivered locally, all national health service organisations must assure themselves that they have complied with the Equality Act 2010. This includes advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic, including a disability such as hearing loss, and those who do not. Advancing equality involves, for example, taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.

[Parliamentary Question on support for people with hearing loss at Jobcentre Plus](#)

Mr David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what arrangements his Department has put in place to ensure that people who are deaf or hearing impaired can communicate with Jobcentre Plus offices.[109519]

Maria Miller: The Department, through Jobcentre Plus, recognises its responsibilities to make reasonable adjustments for those of its clients for whom the standard telephony channel is not suitable. It is also recognised that people sometimes need to contact Jobcentre Plus urgently, for example to rearrange appointments.

To help ensure deaf and hearing impaired people have full access to its services the Department has taken a number of steps.

Hearing loops are available in offices and textphones are offered as an alternative to telephones; textphone numbers are advertised on relevant websites and included in communication materials. DWP introduced Texbox in late 2009 to improve access to textphone services; this desktop application enables staff to answer textphone calls more effectively using their PCs.

The Department uses a framework of suppliers to provide a range of communication methods, including British Sign Language; lip speakers; sign language communicators and note takers. Jobcentres can arrange for these communicators to be available in offices to support deaf and hearing impaired clients at interviews.

DWP can also communicate with people via email if this is needed as a reasonable adjustment relating to a disability.

Parliamentary Question on interpreters in the justice system

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many times he has met (a) the Association of Police and Court Interpreters, (b) the Association of Sign Language Interpreters, (c) the National Union of Professional Interpreters and Translators, (d) the Professional Interpreters Alliance, (e) the Society of Official Metropolitan Interpreters, (f) the Society for Public Service Interpreting and (g) Visual Language Professionals since May 2010; [109549]

(2) if he will meet (a) the Association of Police and Court Interpreters, (b) the Association of Sign Language Interpreters, (c) the National Union of Professional Interpreters and Translators, (d) the Professional Interpreters Alliance, (e) the Society of Official Metropolitan Interpreters, (f) the Society for Public Service Interpreting and (g) Visual Language Professionals to discuss the provision of interpreting facilities in the justice system.[109550]

Mr Blunt: The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), has not met with these representative interpreter groups however the Ministry sought interpreters' views on the industry during a series of four road shows during late 2009; met various stakeholders in August and September 2010 and consulted key interested parties, including the police, on the proposed Framework Agreement as part of the procurement process and received a wide range of views in response. Now that the Framework Agreement has been implemented the Ministry continues to receive, consider and respond to correspondence from interested parties and groups. We will consider all meeting requests received.

Lords Question on the draft social care bill

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is the timetable for the draft Bill to modernise adult care and support in England announced in the Queen's Speech and to what extent the proposals in the Bill follow the recommendations of the Dilnot commission.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Earl Howe): My Lords, the Government have committed to publishing a draft Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny this Session, and will outline plans for transforming care and support in the forthcoming White Paper. The Dilnot commission's recommendations are hugely valuable. However, implementing them would have significant costs, which must be considered in light of the growing demand for social care, and of other priorities. We will set out the way forward in the progress report alongside the White Paper.

Baroness Wheeler: I thank the Minister for his response. However, with local authorities having to cut £1 billion from current social care budgets, does he not agree that there must be a package of reforms that will embrace current and long-term funding solutions, as well as the legal framework proposals expected in the White Paper and Bill? Will he reassure the House that the progress report accompanying the White Paper will contain a clear timetable for consultation on funding issues? Will he also reassure us that the Government intend to honour the Prime Minister's pledge to deal with social care funding in this Parliament?

Earl Howe: My Lords, this is the first reform of social care law in more than 60 years. It is a unique opportunity to get the legal framework right. That is why we have deliberately taken time to engage fully with those who have experience and expertise in care and support. Many people in the sector have called explicitly for scrutiny on a draft Bill, so publishing a Bill in this way demonstrates our commitment to working in partnership. We remain absolutely committed to introducing legislation at the earliest opportunity in this Parliament to establish a sustainable legal framework for adult social care. The draft Bill will be the critical next step in delivering the reform agenda.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: Will the Government reassure us that in considering adult social care they will also take into account the transitional needs of children with very complex needs as they grow older and transition to adult care, because many of them are in the last phase of their illness and will die in early adulthood?

Earl Howe: The noble Baroness raises the key issue of transition, which will be covered in the forthcoming White Paper.

Baroness Barker: My Lords, the Government will be aware of the report, *Reforming Social Care: Options for Funding*, published by the Nuffield Foundation in May. What is their response to the proposal that some universal benefits that currently go to wealthy pensioners should be restricted to enable the implementation of the Dilnot report?

Earl Howe: My Lords, my noble friend raises an issue that has been very much in our sights as we have prepared the progress report on funding. I can only ask her to be patient a little longer until the report is published.

Baroness Pitkeathley: My Lords, the Minister will know that many older people are concerned not only about how they will fund residential care, should they need it, but also about its quality. How will the White Paper ensure adequate and indeed satisfactory quality for the delivery of residential care, and also the competence of those who deliver it?

Earl Howe: As the noble Baroness will know, one of the main reasons that we wanted to engage widely in recent months with the sector was the very issue that she raised. The quality of social care, the training of those in the workforce and the supply of carers, both paid and unpaid, are concerns going into the future. As the noble Baroness will find out, this will be a major focus of the White Paper.

Baroness Greengross: My Lords, will the Minister reassure some of us who have worked closely with the Dilnot recommendations that the Government will take into account the huge savings to the NHS which, following the initial costs, will result from implementing the proposals? The cost of implementation is very limited compared with the huge annual costs of such care to the NHS. Adequate social care will remove much of that from the NHS.

Earl Howe: I take the noble Baroness's point. Nevertheless, she will recognise that Ministers in government cannot ignore cost pressures arising from proposals such as those of Dilnot. We have calculated those costs at £2.2 billion. This is not money that can be drummed up easily. Nevertheless, we are looking at ways in which to address that particular issue.

Baroness Gardner of Parkes: My Lords, is the noble Earl telling us that the Bill will be only about funding? Following the point raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley, can he assure us that there will be some sort of new training for those who will be doing a job that is half-way between that of a carer and that of a nurse? By losing the SENs we have lost a very powerful and useful facility that can operate in the middle. Surely there is a need for someone to bridge the gap between health and social care.

Earl Howe: My Lords, my noble friend raises an important issue, and I am sure that there will be an opportunity during the Bill's passage to debate the subjects to which she referred. The draft Bill will be published after the Government publish their White Paper and the progress report on funding, and the Bill will set out the legislative framework for adult social care in the future. I have no doubt that noble Lords will wish to raise issues pertinent to that.

Baroness Hollis of Heigham: My Lords, the Minister has referred to drumming up finance for long-term care for older people. He will be aware that higher rate tax relief on pensions-as part of the total of £30 billion of tax relief-amounts to £7 billion a year. Were that money ring-fenced and redistributed within the same age group it could pay for Dilnot three times over. Will he consider looking at that as a source of funding for Dilnot?

Earl Howe: I shall make sure that the noble Baroness's suggestion is fed in to the discussions currently in train on that subject.

Lord Skelmersdale: My Lords, recent press reports-in fact, they are not that recent-have concerned the quality of care, not least the care given by care assistants. In their consideration of this matter will my noble friend and his department consider the registration and suitability of care assistants?

Earl Howe: My Lords, as my noble friend will recall, we debated this subject extensively during the passage of the Health and Social Care Act. The Government's position is that voluntary assured registration is the way forward for the time being. However, we have not closed our minds to statutory regulation in this area.

[Lords Question on cost of social care](#)

Asked by Lord Smith of Leigh

- To ask Her Majesty's Government when they estimate the growth in the costs of social care caused by demographic trends will outstrip the ability of local authorities to fund such care.[HL583]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Earl Howe): Current pressures on the adult social care system were addressed in the 2010 spending review through an allocation of an additional £7.2 billion over four years to 2014-15. This means that along with a programme of efficiency there is funding available to local authorities to protect people's access to care. Future spending reviews will continue to monitor projected demand and costs of social care.

The independent Office for Budgetary Responsibility has estimated that due to demographic change, the costs of the current system of long-term care will rise from 1.3% of gross domestic product in 2010-11 to 1.9% in 2050-51. In light of this-and other estimates of demographic trends-the Government are committed to reforming the social care system. A White Paper and progress report on reform of the funding system of social care are due to be published shortly.

[Department of Work and Pensions publication](#)

Between 9 February 2012 and 4 May 2012, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) undertook a public consultation exercise¹ seeking views on issues relevant to the implementation and operation of the appeals reform provisions in the Welfare Reform Bill. The Bill received Parliamentary approval and has now become the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

Section 102 of the Act enables regulations to be made to require claimants and other persons who disagree with a decision to request consideration of revision before they may appeal against a decision.

DWP received 154 responses to the consultation. The main issues raised by respondents were:

- the need for a time limit for the Department to complete its reconsideration of disputed decisions;
- a proposal that the Department should consider paying Employment and Support Allowance pending reconsideration; and
- the need for improvements to the standard of decision making.

The responses have been analysed and the proposals reviewed in light of all the comments made. The Department does not propose to make any significant changes to the draft regulations included in the consultation document as a result of the comments received.

The volume of responses received means that we will be unable to publish a full formal response before the end of July 2012.

[Parliamentary Question on migration from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance](#)

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his Department compiled a risk register in advance of the migration from incapacity benefit to employment and support allowance; and if he will place in the Library a copy of any such risk register.[109475]

Chris Grayling: The Department's risk management framework requires that each director general carries out risk assessments to identify threats to the achievement of objectives in their business area.

For each of our significant reform or change programmes and projects their senior responsible owners are required to maintain risk registers for the risks inherent within their area.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), does not intend to publish copies of risk registers held by the Department in any form of location.

[Parliamentary Question on number of outcomes from employment and support allowance applications](#)

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications for employment and support allowance have come to a final outcome inclusive of results of the appeals process; and how many of these outcomes were the same as the initial Atos decision at the work capability assessment. [110696]

Chris Grayling: The Department regularly publishes official statistics on employment and support allowance (ESA) and the work capability assessment (WCA). The latest report was published in April 2012 and can be found on the internet at:

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_wca

Table 4 of the publication mentioned above shows that to date there were 1,116,800 initial functional assessments with an outcome, adjusted to account for outcomes after appeals. Please note that the Department only holds information on appeals once they have been heard by HM Courts and Tribunals Service. Therefore the number above includes claims where the appeals process is still ongoing.

Statistics that compare Atos recommendations with final outcomes adjusted to account for outcomes after appeals have not previously been published as official statistics. We will consider whether to include the statistics requested in part of an upcoming statistics release in line with the Code of Practice on Official Statistics.

[Parliamentary Question on removing barriers to volunteering](#)

Mr Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce the administrative and regulatory burdens that affects the number of people who volunteer. [110354]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Nick Hurd): We want to make it much easier to volunteer, so we are implementing most of the recommendations in Lord Hodgson's excellent report, "Unshackling Good Neighbours". To identify any remaining burdens, we have launched the civil society red tape challenge and have urged the sector and the public to contribute by visiting the challenge website.

Mr Spencer: In Sherwood, many people are put off volunteering by unnecessary Criminal Records Bureau checks. Will the Minister update the House on how we can reduce that burden?

Mr Hurd: That is a frustration felt in many constituencies. My hon. Friend will be aware that changes are under way. There are two major thrusts of change: many fewer people will require checks; and those who do will find it much easier to carry those checks around the system—the portability for which people have been asking for some time. Those changes will largely be in place by next spring, and I am sure that they will be as welcome in Sherwood as they will in Ruislip.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): This issue has come up repeatedly. Does the Minister accept that in the coming years the red tape challenge will be judged on the numbers of people who are involved in volunteering and the verdict of those who want to volunteer?

Mr Hurd: All I know is that it is incumbent on Government to get out of the way as much as they can. Many areas of regulation are too intrusive and take up too much time and money that could be better used. I think that there is cross-party support for wanting to encourage more people to get involved, and if the Government can get out of the way, then we should.

[Parliamentary Question on the Government's relationship with charities](#)

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): What discussions Ministers in his Department have had with their ministerial colleagues on charitable donations. [110357]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Nick Hurd): We liaise regularly with other Departments in the development of our agenda to encourage more giving of both time and money.

Seema Malhotra: Research from New Philanthropy Capital has revealed that 65% of charities are being forced to cut front-line services. In addition, after the way in which the tax relief proposal was handled, the expert Alana Lowe-Patraske said:

"It remains to be seen if donors and charities trust this government on philanthropy".

Will the Minister update the House on how the Government will repair their relationships with charities?

Mr Hurd: I think the hon. Lady will find that most people in the sector and most commentators recognise and welcome the Chancellor's change of mind on that. They also recognise that this is a Government absolutely committed to creating the conditions for charities and social enterprises to do more. That includes supporting more giving of time and money through initiatives such as the social action fund, through various match funding and through some generous tax incentives—

Mr Speaker: We are grateful to the Minister.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): I commend the Government for their actions following the consultations on taxation and charitable donations, but may I urge the Minister to look again at the gift aid structure, and perhaps to consider a transfer to a system whereby individuals can deduct their charitable donations from their tax directly?

Mr Hurd: Gift aid and all matters relating to tax are a Treasury matter. My hon. Friend will be aware that gift aid is under constant review, and in the 2011 Budget some welcome initiatives were brought in to make gift aid easier to claim for small charities and small donations.

[Parliamentary Question on charity involvement in the Work Programme](#)

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Twelve months ago, the Minister for the Cabinet Office gave the Work programme as an example of the big society in action. A year on, some of the charities that signed up originally have gone bust and almost 100 have withdrawn their welfare-to-work expertise from the programme completely. Is this yet another example of the lack of leadership from Cabinet Office Ministers for charities across Whitehall, or can we finally expect some action to sort this mess out?

Mr Maude: I do not know from that question whether the hon. Gentleman believes it is right for social enterprises to play a major role in the provision of public services. We do, and more than 500 social enterprises and voluntary organisations are involved in the supply chain. I would have thought that he welcomed that.

Parliamentary terms

Early Day Motion (EDM)

Early Day Motions are formal motions for debate submitted by MPs in the House of Commons. There is usually no time available to actually debate an EDM, but they are useful for drawing attention to specific events or campaigns and demonstrating the extent of parliamentary support for a particular cause or point of view. MPs register their support by signing individual motions.

Parliamentary Question (PQ)

Parliamentary questions are oral or written questions to Ministers in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. They are used to seek information, and Ministers are obliged to explain and defend the work, policy, decisions and actions of their departments. Parliamentary questions are a vital tool in holding the Government to account. The Prime Minister answers to the House of Commons every Wednesday at midday.

Debates

Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords hold debates in which Members discuss government policy, proposed new laws and current issues. All debates are recorded in a publication called 'Hansard' which is available online or in print.

All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal groups composed of politicians from all political parties. They provide an opportunity for cross-party discussion and co-operation on particular issues. All-party groups sometimes act as useful pressure groups for specific causes helping to keep the Government, the opposition and MPs informed of parliamentary and outside opinion.

Select Committees

House of Commons Select Committees exist to scrutinise the work of government departments. Most committees have about 11 members and reflect the relative size of each party in the Commons. They conduct enquiries on a specific issue, and gather evidence from expert witnesses. Findings are reported to the Commons, printed, and published on the Parliament website. The Government then usually has 60 days to reply to the committee's recommendations.

Select Committees in the House of Lords concentrate on four main areas: Europe, science, economics, and the UK constitution.

Written ministerial statements

Government ministers can make written statements to announce:

- The publication of reports by government agencies
- Findings of reviews and inquiries and the government's response
- Financial and statistical information
- Procedure and policy initiatives of government departments

Private Members' Bills

Private Members' Bills allow backbench MPs or Peers to introduce their own legislation. There are three types of Private Members' Bills:

- **Ballot Bills:** A ballot is held at the beginning of each parliamentary year the 20 MPs whose names come out top are allowed to introduce legislation on a subject of their choice.
- **Ten Minute Rule Bills:** The sponsoring MP is given a slot in which they may make a speech lasting up to 10 minutes in support of his or her bill
- **Presentation Bill:** a Member is not able to speak in support of it and it stands almost no chance of becoming law