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Weekly Political Update

Week ending 17 February 2012

Westminster

Deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Health and Social Care Bill – Report Stage (Day 2)	<p>The difficulties faced by people with hearing loss when accessing health care services were mentioned during debate on the Health and Social Care Bill in the House of Lords.</p> <p>The Government Relations team worked with Baroness Whitaker (Lab) to ensure that hearing loss was mentioned when a number of probing amendments she tabled were debated.</p> <p>The Department of Health has published a series of factsheets on the Health and Social Care Bill to explain particular topics and themes.</p>

Disability issues – employment and welfare

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Welfare Reform Bill – Third Reading and consideration of Commons amendments	<p>After the Welfare Reform Bill received its Third Reading in the House of Lords, Peers considered amendments to the Bill which had been made in the House of Commons. Peers did not insist on overturning the Commons' decision to time limit contributory Employment and Support Allowance to one year but Welfare Reform Minister Lord Freud (Con) accepted the recommendation that the time limit could be increased by secondary legislation in the future.</p>
Work and Pensions Select Committee Report on Personal Independence Payments (PIP)	<p>A report into the additional living costs of disabled people by the Work and Pensions Select Committee concluded that the Government should learn the lessons of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) when it brings in a new eligibility assessment process for Personal Independence Payments (PIP).</p> <p>The Committee recommends that the Government</p>

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	should not introduce PIP assessments nationally until it has satisfied itself, in the planned initial roll-out of the new assessment in a limited geographical area, that the assessment is empathetic and accurate.
PQ on assessments for Personal Independence Payments (PIP)	Lord Morris of Manchester (Lab/Co-op) asked the Government whether medical practitioners' examinations in the homes of disabled people will, as part of the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) system, be replaced with assessments at Atos assessment centres such as those currently carried out for Employment and Support allowance.

Disability issues – social care

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
PQ on local authority spending on social care	Lord German (Lib Dem) asked the Government what proportion of money allocated for local authority spending on social care that also benefits health in 2011-12 was spent on prevention services and communicating equipment and adaptations.
Health Select Committee report on social care	The Health Select Committee published a report on social care, in which it calls for greater integration of health and social care and recommends a single commissioner for older people's health, care and housing services.

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Consultations

Title: Personal Independence Payment: assessment thresholds and consultation

Source: Department for Work and Pensions

Deadline: 30 April 2012

[Health and Social Care Bill – Report Stage \(Day 2\)](#)

Baroness Whitaker: My Lords, in supporting this group of amendments to which I have put my name, perhaps I may first say how grateful I am to the Minister for his letter of 29 November in response to the Committee debate. He confirmed in that letter that speech language and communication needs are included in the remit of public health. This group of amendments simply makes that clear for the Secretary of State and for commissioning groups. I suggest that it would not otherwise be clear. Look at what has happened: 70 per cent of British Sign Language users admitted to A&E units will have no interpreter provided. Increasing numbers of people with hearing loss have problems even with making appointments and understanding the diagnosis of their GP.

Since Committee, as the noble Lord, Lord Ramsbotham, would have said and as the noble Baroness, Lady Hollins, said, the report of the communication champion, Ms Jean Gross, has been published with further evidence of cuts by 10 local authorities to speech therapy services of more than 15 per cent. The Royal College of Speech And Language Therapists reports that 70 of 109 such services jointly funded by the National Health Service and the education authorities had lost the NHS element. More than half of newly qualified speech therapists have not found jobs. This crisis in the provision of speech and communication therapy means that for a significant proportion of children with these conditions-I remind the House that it is the most common disability of childhood, which substantially limits the chances of reaching their potential at work and even in relationships-this problem will be neglected without the kind of emphasis that these amendments provide. It needs to be clear that the health duties will include communication needs.

[PQ on assessments for Personal Independence Payments \(PIP\)](#)

Asked by Lord Morris of Manchester - To ask Her Majesty's Government whether examining medical practitioners' examinations in the homes of disabled persons will, as part of the personal independence payment (PIP) system, be replaced with assessments at Atos assessment centres such as those currently carried out for employment and support allowance assessments; and what consultation they have had with those eligible for PIP and the organisations that represent them regarding changes to such assessments.[HL15132]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Lord Freud): For most individuals a key part of the assessment for personal independence payment will be a face-to-face assessment with a health professional.

This will allow an in-depth look at their circumstances and give individuals the opportunity to put across their own views of the impact of their impairment on their everyday lives.

However, we recognise that they may not be appropriate for everyone.

For example, we will not be expecting people who are claiming under the terminal illness provisions to attend consultations or where we have already gathered sufficient evidence from other sources

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on which to carry out the assessment. In developing our proposals for delivering personal independence payment we are seeking to learn from the experience of delivering the work capability assessment, including looking at the findings of the Harrington reviews, and from customer insight work.

This will help to ensure that the process is fair, empathetic and supportive to individuals. We are also working closely with organisations representing disabled people and have set up a dedicated group to help us design delivery arrangements for the benefit.

We intend to discuss issues around the operation of the assessment with this group in the near future. No decisions have yet been taken on where face-to-face consultations will be carried out-for example, in claimants' homes, assessment centres or other locations.

This will depend in part on the outcome of the tendering process, which will determine who will deliver the assessments.

The department is in the process of tendering for a framework of providers to deliver future health and disability assessments.

A competition amongst framework providers for the PIP assessment will then commence. We envisage this being completed by summer 2012. As part of the tendering process we will ask potential providers to set out their proposals for delivering face-to-face consultations, including where these will be carried out.

We will make clear to them that their proposals will need to reflect the needs of disabled people and that they must put in place arrangements to visit claimants in their own homes where they are unable to travel to other locations.

[PQ on local authority spending on social care](#)

Asked by Lord German - To ask Her Majesty's Government what proportion of the £648 million allocated for local authority spending on social care that also benefits health in 2011-12 was spent on (1) prevention services, (2) communicating equipment and adaptations, (3) telecare, (4) crisis response services, (5) maintaining eligibility criteria, (6) re-ablement, and (7) mental health.[HL15444]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Earl Howe): The department collected information from primary care trusts in September 2011 to understand how the £648 million transfer was progressing and on which services it was being used.

The information suggests that the money is being used on a wide range of services.

A full breakdown of this can be found in the National Health Service publication The Quarter: Quarter 2, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

[Welfare Reform Bill – Third Reading and consideration of Commons amendments](#)

The Bill to introduce a universal credit was debated in the Lords ping pong stage today.

During the day's debate on the Welfare Reform Bill, the Government was defeated during a division on an amendment to Motion B. Amendments were agreed to Motion E and Motion H without vote.

Divisions and debates

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Motion B and Motion B1

Moving Motion B, which stated that the Lords did not insist upon amendments 2, 3 and 26 to which the Commons had disagreed, Welfare Reform Minister Lord Freud said that the Government did not believe that taxpayers should be expected to meet the cost of somewhere approaching 1 million spare bedrooms, at a cost of around £0.5 billion every year, as this was “clearly” unfair.

The amendments could reduce the savings from the Government’s proposals to reduce housing benefit and universal credit for working-age claimants living in social sector properties that were under-occupying their accommodation by £300m a year, he added.

Crossbench peer Lord Best moved Motion B1 as amendment to Motion B, and proposed that amendments 3B and 26B were accepted in lieu, stating that requiring people settled in their council or housing association homes to move or pay a fine of what would be £728 per annum on average, seemed very harsh.

He felt that the reduction would mean a very significant reduction in living standards for all households affected. Lord Best detailed that the amendment would still require all 670,000 households, rising to 740,000 as the pension age increased, to move if they were to avoid paying the tax, but no one would have to pay until they had been offered and had turned down an alternative tenancy.

Shadow Work and Pensions Minister Lord McKenzie of Luton supported the amendment in lieu, and stated that it could not be cost-free if protection was to be provided for hundreds of thousands of households that, on average, could see their income fall by £14 a week. There was no merit at all in an economic incentive to move to smaller properties when there were no smaller properties to move to, he added.

In reply, Lord Freud stated that the Government would apply a percentage reduction of 14 per cent for those underoccupying by one bedroom, and 25 per cent for those underoccupying by two or more bedrooms in April 2013. This was part of a package of reforms to keep the housing benefit bill under control, which he had never tried to disguise, as the Government was trying to sort out the budget deficit.

Motion B1, as an amendment to Motion B, was agreed by 236 votes to 226

Motion E and Motion E1

Lord Freud moved Motion E, which stated that the Lords did not insist on amendment 17 which the Commons had disagreed to, and agreed with the Commons on amendment 19A, explaining that amendments 17 and 19 would increase the time limit for claimants receiving contributory Employment Support Allowance in the work-related activity group from the proposed 365 days to a minimum of 730 days.

He added that the Government had to strike a reasonable balance between the needs of sick and disabled people claiming benefit, and those who had to contribute towards the cost, which he acknowledged included disabled people who paid their taxes.

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Lord Freud believed that a time limit of one year struck the right balance between restricting access to contributory benefits and allowing those with longer-term illnesses to adjust to their health condition.

Moving Motion E1, which proposed that the Lords did not agree to Commons amendment 19A and proposed amendments 17B, 17C, 17D and 19B in lieu of amendments 17 and 19A, Lord McKenzie stated that they recommended that the time limit for the contributory employment and support allowance could be increased by secondary legislation in the future.

Responding, Lord Freud welcomed the amendment, as the time limit of 365 days was still specified in the Bill, but with the added flexibility to increase the number of days by order.

Motion E1, as an amendment to Motion E, was agreed without vote

Motion G and Motion G2

Moving that the Lords did not insist upon amendment 47, Lord Freud stated that the benefit cap was about promoting fairness and incentivising work. The Government did not want to demonise people on benefits, but at the same time felt that people who could work should be expected to do so, and that the benefits system should encourage individual responsibility.

Speaking to Motion G2, Lord McKenzie said Labour supported a benefit cap but did not consider the manner in which it was to be introduced by the Government to be sensible, while there was a risk of creating the impression that everyone on benefits is getting £26,000 a year. He felt that the cap should recognise different housing costs, especially in London.

Responding, Lord Freud said found it very hard to think about regional limits being set by a new quango, as it would be confusing and complex. The Motion would “mess up” and delay the application of the cap, he added.

Motion G2, as an amendment to Motion, was rejected by 233 votes to 134

Motion H and Motion H1A

Lord Freud moved the Motion H, which stated the Lords did not insist on amendment 73, suggesting that it was not unfair to ask for a small contribution to the cost of running a child maintenance system against a backdrop of other financial support. Charging must have a role in the new system to ensure that the failings of the Child Support Agency (CSA) were not repeated, he added.

He acknowledged the concerns around vulnerable groups, particularly parents with care, and although the Government would not further amend its current proposals, it wanted to have the powers to evolve charges in line with evaluation.

Lord Freud accepted Motion H1A, as it clarified the ability to do this.

Motion H1A, as an amendment to Motion H, was agreed to without vote

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Motions agreed following a division

Motion B1, as an amendment to Motion B
Motion G (following the rejection of rejection Motion G2)

Motions agreed without division

Motion A
Motion C
Motion D
Motion E1 as an amendment to Motion E
Motion F

Motions withdrawn

Motion A1
Motion D1
Motion F1
Motion G1

Motions not moved

Motion H2

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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

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