

Weekly Political Update

15th June 2015

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Health

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Item	Summary
Written question on the availability of hearing aids	<p>Jim Shannon MP (DUP, Strangford) has asked the Department of Health what steps it is taking to ensure the availability of hearing aids.</p> <p>In response the newly appointed Minister of State for Care and Support, Alistair Burt MP (Con, North East Bedfordshire) said that Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are responsible for the provision of conventional hearing aids for mild to moderate hearing loss within their local population. He added that as with other services CCGs commission, they should take into consideration assessments of local need and any relevant clinical guidance from appropriate national bodies such as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.</p>
London Assembly Health Committee published report on access to health services for deaf people	<p>The Health Committee of the London Assembly has published a report, <i>'Access to health services for deaf people'</i>, which calls <i>'for urgent action to eliminate the disadvantages deaf people still face when accessing the health service'</i>.</p> <p>The report was led by Andrew Boff AM (Con) and found that <i>'deaf people in London are more likely to suffer ill health than the rest of the population, largely because they face problems accessing health services that should be available to all.'</i></p> <p>The report made four key recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urgently needed data on hearing disability should be routinely collected and compiled by NHS England London. Estimates for London's deaf population range as widely as 25,000 to one million and a lack of data makes it difficult for health services to plan and provide services that meet the needs of deaf patients.• Local Clinical Commissioning Groups should jointly commission support services for deaf people to improve the standard and level of these services. They could save money together and create a more competitive market.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• London GPs and NHS Trusts should review the accessibility of their complaints processes for deaf patients. Direct links, including an ‘easy read’ format, should be clearly visible on websites in order to make it easier.• A universal standard for British Sign Language (BSL) interpreting should be provided in GP surgeries and hospitals. <p>Action on Hearing Loss gave written and oral evidence to the inquiry. Director of Policy and Campaigns Roger Wicks participated in the seminar held to launch the report and subsequently appeared on London Live to promote the report’s findings.</p>
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Television

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Item	Summary
<u>Written question on the provision of access services on Video on Demand</u>	<p>Jonathan Edwards MP (Plaid Cymru, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) has asked the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) what steps it is taking to help people with sensory loss enjoy on demand television content by increasing the provision of subtitles and audio description.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State with responsibility for broadcasting, Ed Vaizey MP (Con, Wantage), said:</p> <p><i>“The Government remains committed to seeing an improvement in the provision of access services for video-on-demand (VoD) services and will continue to monitor progress. If ATVOD’s 2015 annual survey of VOD Services indicates that significant progress has not been made, then as stated in the Connectivity, Content and Consumers Paper (July 2013) we will consider legislation in 2016.”</i></p> <p>Dave Anderson MP (Lab, Blaydon) asked a very similar <u>question to the DCMS we received an identical answer</u>.</p>

Transport

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<p><u>Oral question on disabled peoples' access to public transport</u></p>	<p>Shadow Cabinet Office Minister Chi Onwurah (Lab, Newcastle Upon-Tyne Central) tabled an oral question asking what assessment the Department for Transport has made of the progress in improving disabled people's access to public transport.</p> <p>In response the Transport Minister Claire Perry (Con, Devizes) said that the 2015 annual progress report on promoting accessibility for disabled people on public transport has just been published, and it demonstrates good progress in achieving an inclusive transport system. The Government remain firmly committed to improving disabled people's access to all public transport services.</p> <p>In her supplementary question Chi Onwurah said that the vision on inclusive transport should by now include talking buses, given that the technology is so widely available. She went on to say that <i>'the Minister has done nothing to ensure that is implemented and has cut by half the budget for accessibility, so when will we have inclusive public transport?'</i></p> <p>In response Claire Perry said that <i>'83% of buses operating in the UK now meet legal accessibility requirements, and that will rise to almost 100% by the end of next year.'</i> On talking buses she said that the Government <i>'have been advised that the cost of rolling that out across the country is prohibitively high.'</i> However she called for all data on public transport open-sourced so that applications can be designed to give disabled people a personalised service when accessing public transport.</p> <p>Paul Maynard MP (Con, Blackpool North and Cleveleys) raised the difference between theoretical access and actual access for disabled people, using the example of lifts being out of order for days or weeks on end.</p> <p>Claire Perry said that she wanted to discuss this issue further.</p> <p>Jim Shannon MP (DUP, Strangford) asked if the UK Government has had discussions with its devolved counterparts to ensure that there was uniformity in the access people with hearing and sight loss when travelling across the UK.</p> <p>Claire Perry said that she was not aware of any discussion.</p>
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	<p>James Brady MP (Con, North Wiltshire) said that he supported disabled access to transport but that for many rural bus providers cannot afford to offer accessibility services. He said that one solution would be <i>'dial-a-ride services, such as the one offered by Bradies taxis in Malmesbury, ...whereby elderly and disabled people in particular can ring up and find small buses to take them where they want to go'</i>.</p> <p>Claire Perry welcomed this question and said that the Government made money available in the previous Parliament to support exactly that sort of community access scheme.</p> <p>Shadow Transport Minister Gordon Marsden MP (Lab, Blackpool South) said that Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, the Royal National Institute of Blind People and the House of Commons Transport Select Committee have all said that the Government's exemption of bus companies from mandatory driver training is not working. He accused the Government of ducking the issue, saying that a recently announced research project amounted to a <i>'review of the review of the review.'</i> He called for the Minister to stop the buck being passed on disabled peoples' access to transport.</p> <p>In response Claire Perry said that that almost 100% of drivers have now received some form of disability awareness training. She said that the Government thinks <i>'the future lies in providing public sector data, so that people can use an app themselves to make their specific journey. The cost of providing this across the UK can be prohibitive, but we will have 100% accessibility on all buses by the end of next year'</i>.</p>
<p><u>Written question on competition for bus accessibility</u></p> <p><u>Written question on development of new</u></p>	<p>Shadow Transport Minister Gordon Marsden (Lab, Blackpool South) has asked the Department of Transport when the winner will be announced of the Transport Catapult competition for the design of audio-visual systems on buses.</p> <p>In response the newly appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Transport, Andrew Jones MP (Con, Harrogate and Knaresborough) said that the winner was announced on 13th March and that further details can be found <u>here</u>. The winning design is a low-cost adjustable wristband given out by bus drivers incorporating a Bluetooth device that links up with the driver's ticket machine and vibrates when the passenger is close to their chosen stop.</p> <p>Gordon Marsden also asked what steps the Government are planning to take to encourage the adoption by the bus industry</p>

<p><u>assistive technology on buses</u></p> <p><u>Written question on bus driver disability awareness training</u></p>	<p>of the winning submission to the Transport Catapult competition for the design of audio-visual systems on buses.</p> <p>In response Andrew Jones said that Transport Systems Catapult have committed to invest £50,000 to develop the winning design into a working prototype and are now working to procure a suitable technology company to undertake this work. He said that when a prototype design has been finalised the Government will look to engage with bus industry representatives to determine the most appropriate way to trial the new technology.</p> <p>Gordon Marsden also asked for the status of the Government's review of the UK derogation from EU law on training in disability awareness for bus and coach drivers and whether the Department for Transport plans to seek to extend that derogation or apply for a new derogation.</p> <p>Andrew Jones answered that In March 2014, the Department for Transport reviewed the use of a derogation applied under EU Regulation 181/2011 (concerning bus/coach passenger rights) that exempts bus and coach drivers from undertaking mandatory disability awareness training until March 2018 and a summary of responses was published in January 2015. He added that departmental officials are currently in discussions with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) about undertaking a research project on the quality and impact of disability equality awareness training currently offered to bus and coach drivers. He finished saying that the Government '<i>will consider all the evidence and, in the meantime, will continue to press the bus industry to ensure that bus and coach drivers are adequately trained to allow them to meet the needs of all passengers</i>'.</p>
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Charity Fundraising

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<p><u>Oral Question on charity fundraising</u></p>	<p>During the weekly Business Questions within the House of Commons John Spellar MP (Lab, Warley) said that the country had been shocked by the death of Olive Cooke, who had '<i>been pursued by charity fundraisers</i>'. He said that vulnerable pensions across the country were often '<i>targeted not only by charity fundraisers but by criminal organisations, many operating from outside the UK</i>', causing great distress to them and their families. He asked if the Government will make an early</p>
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	<p>statement setting out what cross-Government action can be taken to <i>'stop this gross exploitation'</i>.</p> <p>In response the Leader of the House of Commons, Chris Grayling MP (Con, Epsom and Ewell) agreed with the point made about Olive Cooke, saying it was <i>'a shocking case and an example of wholly inappropriate behaviour'</i>. He went on to say that the <i>'Government will bring forward measures to address issues in the charitable sector. That will provide an opportunity to debate and discuss these issues, but I hope he [John Spellar] will make a point of continuing to push on this matter during this Parliament. He will not find opposition in any part of the House to ensuring that charities operate in a way that is acceptable and, frankly, consistent with the role they are supposed to play.'</i></p>
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Disability

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<p><u>Written question on the future of the Access to Elected Office fund</u></p>	<p>Shadow Minister for Disabled People Kate Green MP, (lab, Stretford and Urmston) asked the Minister for Women and Equalities whether the Government plans to reopen the Access to Elected Office fund in the present Parliament.</p> <p>In response Caroline Dinenage MP (Con, Gosport) said that no decision has been made on the future of the Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund pilot, pending an evaluation which is currently being undertaken.</p>
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Defence

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<p><u>Oral question on hearing loss amongst veterans</u></p>	<p>During oral defence questions Heather Wheeler MP (Con, South Derbyshire) asked what steps the Government are taking to implement the commitment in the Conservative Manifesto to address hearing loss in veterans. The <u>Conservative Party Manifesto</u> (p.78) made a commitment to <i>'work to address hearing loss among veterans.'</i></p> <p>In response the Defence Minister responsible for personnel and veterans, Mark Lancaster MP (Con, Milton Keynes North) said that the Royal British Legion was recently awarded £10 million over five years to address long-term hearing issues. Work has already started with key stakeholders, and the Legion aims to</p>
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	<p>launch the fund in early autumn. From summer 2015, the MOD will introduce new hearing protection measures for UK armed forces personnel, which will reduce the number of veterans with service-attributable hearing issues.</p>
<p><u>Oral question on support for veterans with hearing loss</u></p>	<p>Rob Ffello MP (Labour, Stoke-on-Trent North) used Defence questions to raise the plight of his constituent, a veteran with profound hearing loss. He said his constituent '<i>whose hearing was profoundly damaged during his time in the Army, cannot get any financial support because the support available for the armed forces is far different from that for people who work in, say, a factory, and have their hearing damaged there</i>'. He asked if the Government if this was right.</p> <p>In response Mark Lancaster MP (Con, Milton Keynes North) referred to the £10 million funding given to the Royal British Legion (see above) and said that he would happily meet with Rob Ffello to discuss the individual case.</p>

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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.

Oral Parliamentary Question (OPQ) and Written Parliamentary Question (WPQ)

Parliamentary Questions are used by both MPs and Peers to question 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, oral questions can also be used to make political points. Parliamentary questions are a vital tool in holding the Government to account. The Prime Minister answers oral questions from 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.

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 introduced into the House of Commons:

- **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