

## Weekly Political Update

29<sup>th</sup> February 2016

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The consultations section is at the end of this document.

For further information on any of the parliamentary terms used in this document, please click [here](#).

### **Health and Social Care**

*Click on link for source*

Item	Summary
<b><u>Local Government Association says that new revenue from council tax will not meet the extra pressure on social care services</u></b>	<p>The Local Government Association has warned that the planned Council tax rises to pay for social care in 2016/17 will not bring in enough money to alleviate the growing pressure on the vital services caring for our elderly and disabled.</p> <p>The LGA said nine in 10 councils in England are considering or have approved plans to raise £372 million for underfunded social care services in 2016/17 by using new powers to increase council tax by 2 per cent.</p> <p>The majority of this extra £372 million income might have to be spent covering the cost to councils of introducing the Government's National Living Wage from April. The LGA has estimated it would cost England's 152 social care authorities at least £330 million to cover increased costs to home care and residential care providers in 2016/17 as a result.</p> <p>Council leaders warn council tax rises are unlikely to prevent the need for continued cutbacks to social care services and avoid consequences around the quality and availability of care for older and disabled people. Councils will also have to continue to divert more money for other local services, including filling potholes, maintaining our parks and green spaces and running children's centres, leisure centres and libraries, to try and plug growing social care funding gaps.</p>

## **Medical Research**

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<b>Item</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<b><u>Written question on Government funding for universities to carryout medical research</u></b>	<p>Jim Shannon MP (DUP, Strangford) has asked the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what additional funding it has provided to universities to carry out medical research.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Universities and Science, Jo Johnson MP (Con, Orpington) provided the information for the amount of money that the Medical Research Councils for UK institutes, including universities, in 2014/15 – of the £696,000 awarded around £12,000 was for charity partnerships.</p>

## **Charities**

*Click on link for source*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<b><u>Charity Commission urges charities to review commercial partnerships</u></b>	<p>The Charity Commission has issued <a href="#">an alert to trustees</a>, warning them to review any commercial relationships they may have.</p> <p>The Charity Commission have acknowledged that ‘<i>charities have many legitimate commercial arrangements raising funds for good works</i>’ but on the basis of recent complaints and adverse media coverage it says that trustees need to ‘<i>ensure their actions reflect the values of their charity as well as meeting legal requirements</i>’.</p> <p>The alert sets out the expectations of the commission including: checking for conflicts of interest; ensuring arrangements are properly documented and reviewed regularly; and, that the commercial benefits to the charity are made clear. It is being published publicly and sent to the 1,700 charities that the commission knows to have some form of commercial arrangement.</p>
<b><u>Written question on lobbying restrictions in charity grants</u></b>	<p>Labour’s Lords Spokesman for Housing, Justice and Communities and Local Government, Lord Beecham has asked the Government to what extent their proposed new restrictions on lobbying by charities extend the existing restrictions imposed by charity legislation – a reference to the announcement that new clauses will be included in grants made by the Government</p>

	<p>to charities which prohibit the money being spent lobbying the Government.</p> <p>In response the Cabinet Office Lord Bridges of Headley (Con) said:</p> <p><i>“The announcement on 6 February was on a new clause for all government grant agreements. This new clause makes clear that grant recipients must not use the grant funding for political campaigning and lobbying unless it is expressly authorised in the grant agreement. Charities remain free to lobby the government, subject to charity law restrictions. They simply cannot use government grant funding to do so.”</i></p>
<p><b><u>EDM motion on the anti-lobbying clause in Government grant agreements</u></b></p>	<p>SNP Spokesman for the Cabinet Office, Tommy Sheppard MP (SNP, Edinburgh East) has tabled an EDM (1138) calling on the Government to urgently reconsider the introduction of clauses in Government grants which stop this money being used for lobbying. The full motion is:</p> <p>“That this House notes with serious concern proposals by the Government, published on 6 February 2016 on <a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a>, for a new clause to be inserted into all government grant agreements, determination letters, from the new financial year, and no later than 1 May 2016, which states that payments supporting activity intended to influence or attempt to influence Parliament, government or political parties, or attempting to influence the awarding or renewal of contracts and grants, or attempting to influence legislative or regulatory action will not be counted as Eligible Expenditure costs; further notes that the Government itself describes this as an anti-lobbying clause; shares the concerns expressed by many third sector and voluntary organisations outlined in a letter to the Prime Minister dated 11 February 2016, among them the impact the clause may have on the ability of voluntary organisation to bring real-world experience of service users and evidence-based expertise into the public policy debate, and that those organisations working on programmes receiving any grant funding may be prohibited from speaking to hon. Members about developments in their local area, suggesting improvements to policy or legislation, responding to the Government’s own consultations, meeting ministers to discuss broader issues and evidence from their programme or even from giving evidence if called by a select committee, and that the clause may therefore have a far broader impact than originally intended; believes the proposals leave the Government vulnerable to accusations of stifling criticism and informed debate about the consequences of its policies; and</p>

	<p>calls on the Government to urgently reconsider the introduction of this clause.”</p> <p>As of 29 February the motion had been signed by 22 MPs.</p>
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## **Television**

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<b>Item</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<p><b><u>Written question on the work of the Digital Accessibility Alliance</u></b></p>	<p>Shadow Minister for the Digital Economy, Chi Onwurah (labour, Newcastle upon Tyne Central) has asked the Department for Culture, Media and Sport what work the Digital Accessibility Alliance has completed or published since it was formed. She has also asked how many times the Alliance has met in each quarter since it was formed.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for the Digital Economy, Ed Vaizey MP (Con, Wantage) said that the ‘Government recognises the importance of Digital Inclusion, and remains committed to seeing an improvement in the provision of digital information services for disabled people’ He added that there has been a steady increase in the number of companies that provide video relay – this was welcomed and Ed Vaizey added the Government will continue to work with interested parties to increase take-up.</p> <p>He also said that:</p> <p><i>“We have also been monitoring progress of the provision of access services for Video on Demand (VoD) content since 2013 through engagement with the Authority for Television on Demand (ATVOD), platform operators content providers and broadcasters.”</i></p> <p>The answer added that the Digital Accessibility Alliance has been renamed as the Alliance for Digital Accessibility and has met twice since it was created.</p> <p>The <u>Alliance was created in December 2014</u> and Action on Hearing Loss is a member.</p>

## Employment

*Click on link for source*

Item	Summary
<p><b><u>Reforms to Employment and Support Allowance debated in the House of Commons</u></b></p>	<p>The House of Commons has debated the Government’s proposed cut in Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) for members of the Work Related Activity Group. During the latest stage of ping-pong for the Welfare Reform and Work Bill the House of Commons debated a Lords amendment which removed from the Government proposed cut in ESA from the Bill.</p> <p>Speaking for the Government the Employment Minister, Priti Patel (Con, Witham) said that the proposed savings from ESA will be reinvested back into employment support for people in the WARG (WARG) group. She name checked a number of Disability Charities Consortium members as being involved in the design of the schemes the money is being spent on. She said:</p> <p><i>“Those in the work-related activity group are given additional cash payments, but very little employment support. As the Prime Minister has recently stated, this fixation on welfare treats the symptoms, not the causes of poverty, and over time, it traps people into dependency. That is why we propose to recycle some of the money currently spent on cash payments, which are not actually achieving the desired effect of helping people move closer to the labour market, and put it into practical support that will make a genuine difference to people in these groups.</i></p> <p><i>“In addition to the practical support, which is part of a real-terms increase that was announced in the autumn statement, we need to reflect on how spending the £60 million to £100 million of support originally set out in the Budget will be influenced not only by Whitehall, but by a taskforce of representatives from disability charities, disabled people’s user-group organisations, employers, think-tanks, provider representatives and local authorities. So far, we have worked with charities including Scope, Leonard Cheshire Disability, the Royal National Institute of Blind People, the National Autistic Society and the Disability Action Alliance.”</i></p> <p>The House of Commons voted by 306 to 279 to reject the Lords amendment – which means that the cut in ESA to the level of JSA has been returned to the Bill.</p>

	<p>The Bill is due to return to the House of Lords on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> February and the Government have tabled a motion to accept the Commons amendment and therefore retain the cut to ESA in the Bill. A compromise amendment has been tabled by Lord Low of Dalston (Crossbench) which would require the Government to report on the impact of the change in ESA before it is implemented, this would be subject to a further vote in each House.</p>
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## **Disabilities**

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<b>Item</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<p><b><u>Westminster Hall debate on Disabilities, Poverty and Inequalities</u></b></p>	<p>Natalie McGarry MP (Ind, Glasgow East) has led a Westminster Hall debate on disabilities, poverty and inequalities.</p> <p>In her speech the Natalie McGarry argued that ‘those living with disabilities especially and disproportionately face economic hardship, which for too long successive Governments have failed to tackle effectively’. She noted that the relationship between poverty and disability was reciprocal – saying that the spread of PIP claimants demonstrated that poverty increased the chances of somebody suffering from a disability.</p> <p>She used her speech to criticise the Government proposed reform of Employment Support Allowance for those people in the Work Related Activity Group.</p> <p>Responding to the debate the Minister of State for Employment, Priti Patel MP (Con, Witham) argued that the Government was trying to support disabled people into work, saying “when it comes to tackling poverty and inequality, the aim of our welfare reforms has been to secure employment opportunities, putting into practice the principle that work is the best route out of poverty. Evidence shows that nearly three quarters of workless families who have found full employment have escaped poverty”.</p> <p>She added that the Government will publish a White Paper in ‘the spring’ which she said:</p> <p><i>“will focus on how we can provide the right kind of support and not just financial support. We are great believers in practical support. We are making sure that advisers and the right kind of support are in place to help people with barriers and disabilities</i></p>

*and to give them the right guidance and the support that they need. At the same time, we are investing a lot more.*

*“In our summer Budget there was provision of at least £115 million for a joint work and health unit to improve the work and health outcomes for people with health conditions and disabilities. The unit has started work. We are also working with disability charities to look at the right way—we will have pilots around the country—to provide practical support and schemes to support people with barriers and health conditions. Mental health is a classic example. The Government are committed to a lot of funding for mental health provision. In particular, we are seeking through this unit to join up the provision and to make sure the signposting and the right sort of provision can take place.”*

## 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.





