

Weekly Political Report

4th July 2016

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

Hearing Loss

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Item	Summary
<p><u>Westminster Hall Debate on the Action Plan on Hearing Loss</u></p>	<p>Jim Fitzpatrick MP (Lab, Poplar and Canning Town) has led a Westminster Hall debate on NHS England's Action Plan on Hearing Loss and the forthcoming publication of the Commissioning Framework for Hearing Loss Services. Jim Fitzpatrick, who Chairs the All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness, used his speech to set out the evidence on the prevalence and impact of hearing loss. He also noted research from Action on Hearing Loss which found that people wait an average of ten years to seek help after noticing the first symptoms of hearing loss.</p> <p>He went on to outline a number of issues on which he wanted the Government Minister responding to the debate to cover – including the rationing of hearing aids, the potential for a national screening programme and the recognition for British Sign Language.</p> <p>The previous Chair of the All Party Group, Lilian Greenwood MP (Lab, Nottingham South) also addressed the issue of rationing and the impact of budget cuts to NHS audiology services, saying:</p> <p><i>“We are also very concerned, of course, about the risk of rationing access to hearing aids, as local health commissioners’ budgets are under intense pressure. In fact, the report on NHS audiology across the UK published by Action on Hearing Loss and entitled “Under Pressure”, showed that 30% of NHS audiology providers had had their budgets reduced. Along with increased demand, that had led to two fifths of providers making service reductions, resulting in longer waiting times, fewer follow-up appointments and reduced availability of home visits. In a small number of cases, providers were not providing two hearing aids to patients with hearing loss in both ears.</i></p> <p><i>“Worse still, as everyone is aware, North Staffordshire clinical commissioning group decided in March last year to stop funding free NHS hearing aids altogether for those with mild hearing loss.</i></p>

There was a fear that others would follow it in doing that, but so far, as a result of significant campaigning by Action on Hearing Loss and many others, that has not happened. South Staffordshire, South Norfolk, Kernow and Mid Essex CCGs, which had all signalled their intention to restrict hearing aid provision, have now decided otherwise, or have at least delayed a decision until the national commissioning framework is published. However, three CCGs in Worcestershire are currently consulting on potential changes to local health services—including a proposal to cut NHS hearing aid provision; so there is still a threat to services.”

Labour’s Shadow Health Secretary, Diane Abbott MP (Lab, Hackney North and Stoke Newington) welcomed the Action Planning on Hearing Loss and highlighted the importance of reducing the impact of stigma. Speaking on the rationing of Hearing Aids she said:

“The question of hearing aid rationing arises in the context of pressure on NHS resources. One way in which the NHS and CCGs are seeking to manage the pressures is by raising the bar before someone can get access to a service or to help. One of the most alarming aspects of that approach is its effect in mental health, where people must manifest more extreme symptoms before they can get help. It might seem to CCGs that rationing hearing aids is a less obvious form of rationing, because only the patients know or understand what has happened. Thus, as we have heard, since October 2015 one CCG—North Staffordshire—has stopped providing hearing aids to patients who have mild hearing loss, and it subjects those with moderate hearing loss to a questionnaire before it decides whether to provide them with a hearing aid.

“As the Minister heard from my colleagues, it is not acceptable to ration hearing aids in that way. There is a danger that people’s hearing loss will get more severe before they can get the help they need. There are some exemptions, such as for people with dementia; hearing loss can make people more susceptible to dementia, physical disability or tinnitus. However the approach in question is not good enough. If the Government feel that we must have rationing in the NHS, we need clarity about that—it must be transparent and there must be debate. It cannot happen just because the Government feel that somehow they can get away with it.”

She also outlined the case for a programme of hearing screening, saying:

“The charity Action on Hearing Loss commissioned a cost-benefit analysis of hearing screening, which found that screening everyone and providing support to those who need it at the age of 65 would save £2 billion over 10 years, for a cost of only £255 million. Low levels of diagnosis mean that two thirds of people

are not getting the treatment and support they need. The research suggests that there is an average 10-year delay in people seeking help for their hearing loss and that, when they do, GPs fail to refer fully 45% of those reporting hearing loss to hearing services.”

The Minister for Community and Social Care, Alistair Burt MP (Con, North East Bedfordshire) responded to the debate for the Government. He sets out the purpose of the Action Plan on Hearing Loss, saying:

“The Department of Health and NHS England’s action plan on hearing loss, published in March 2015, recognises the impact of deafness and hearing loss on individuals and society as a whole. Crucially, in my view, the plan accepts that hearing loss is not only a health issue, as we have been saying, but a cultural one. Tackling that societal challenge requires an integrated approach across the public, private and third sectors.

“NHS England is therefore committed to delivering 20 outcome measures across five key areas, which have been touched on: prevention; early diagnosis; patient-centred, integrated management; ensuring that those diagnosed do not need unscheduled care or become isolated; and enabling inclusion and participation. That work will be spearheaded by a range of multidisciplinary groups with cross-sector representation.”

He also went on to highlight the problem of people delaying seeking help for their hearing loss and the low level of referrals by GP – which is an issue he said he would look at further research on.

On the key issue of rationing, he said:

“I am aware that NHS England supported a recent decision from North Staffordshire CCG because it was able to demonstrate that its commissioning policy was evidence-based and had followed extensive public engagement. The hon. Member for Nottingham South was right to say that I am extremely wary of rationing early intervention and hearing aids at the very early stage. I fully accept all the evidence that says that it is doing something at that early stage that prevents something else later on. As colleagues have said, no one else has yet followed that. There has been a lot of challenge. It remains possible for NHS England to intervene if it thinks that commissioning has gone badly askew, but for now that has not been followed.

“The forthcoming commissioning framework will support CCGs to make informed decisions about what is good value for the populations they serve, using an evidence-based methodology to determine policy. NHS Improvement has received expressions of concern about commissioners reducing prices for audiology services, causing firms to exit those services and

	<p><i>reduced access and choice for patients. So far, except in one case, those allegations have not been substantiated and no formal complaint has been made to enable NHS Improvement to consider taking regulatory action.</i></p> <p><i>“NHS England could consider any immediate concerns about a CCG’s behaviour at local level under the assurance framework, and there may be scope for NHS Improvement to consider them under the National Health Service (Procurement, Patient Choice and Competition) (No.2) Regulations 2013, under the pricing rules contained in the national tariff.”</i></p> <p>In response to the questions raised about screening he reiterated the advice of the National Screening Committee that the evidence did not demonstrate that screening would provide improvement in quality of life compared to other methods of identifying hearing loss.</p>
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Television

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Item	Summary
<p><u>Written answers on access services on video on demand services</u></p>	<p>Craig Williams MP (Con, Cardiff North) has received answers to three questions on the provision of access services on video on demand services. His first question asked the Department for Culture, Media and Sport what objectives it has set Ofcom for the provision of access services on video on demand content.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy, Ed Vaizey MP, (Con, Wantage) , said:</p> <p><i>“The Audio Visual Media Services Directive, which the UK adheres to, sets out the principles that Ofcom is required to ensure are met with respect to the provision of access services on video on demand services.”</i></p> <p>Craig Williams also asked what assessment has been made of the obstacles to the increased provision of access services on video on demand content. TO which Ed Vaizey responded:</p> <p><i>“Ofcom, the regulator for video on demand services, is reviewing how to improve the provision of access services on video on demand services.”</i></p> <p>In his third question Craig Williams asked if the Government will issue guidance to (a) content providers, (b) platform operators and (c) other participants in the video on demand supply chain to specify who has the responsibility for providing access services on video on demand services.</p>

	<p>In response Ed Vaizey said that <i>'it would be the responsibility of Ofcom, the regulator for video on demand services, to issue such guidance'</i>.</p>
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Charities

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Item	Summary
<p><u>Charity Commission issues report on public trust in charities</u></p>	<p>The Charity Commission has issued a new report 'Public Trust and Confidence in Charities 2016'. The report is largely based on a survey of 1,000 people conducted by Populus.</p> <p>The findings show that trust in charities has fallen from 6.7 out of 10 in 2014 to 5.7 this year.</p> <p>The report finds the fall in trust and confidence can be attributed to critical media coverage of charity practices, distrust about how charities spend donations, and a lack of knowledge among the public about where their donations go. Perceptions of aggressive fundraising tactics have also contributed to the decline in trust.</p>

Transport

Click on Link for Source

Item	Summary
<p><u>Written question on Government support for audio-visual display systems on buses</u></p>	<p>Julian Knight MP (Con, Solihull) has asked what steps the Department for Transport is taking to promote the use of talking buses in (a) the UK, (b) the West Midlands and (c) Solihull.</p> <p>In response Transport Minister Andrew Jones MP (Con, Harrogate and Knaresborough) acknowledged that accessible on-board information helps many people, including those who are visually impaired, to travel in confidence. He added that:</p> <p><i>"Many bus operators already provide next stop announcements on their services, and we have encouraged the industry to explore options for widening its adoption, both through engagement with national representative bodies and with operators at a local level."</i></p>

Consultations

Title: Consultation on official warnings to charities and trustees

Source: Charity Commission

Deadline for written evidence: 23 September 2016

The Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Act 2016 gives the Charity Commission a new power to issue an official warning to a trustee or to a charity when it considers that there has been a breach of trust or duty, or other misconduct or mismanagement in the charity.

The commission wants to seek views on how it proposes to use this new power and welcomes responses from charities, professional advisers, members of the public, other regulators or public bodies that exercise similar powers and anyone with an interest in the charity sector. This will help the commission to shape the approach it takes.

Further details can be found [here](#)

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

