

Weekly Political Update

22nd February 2016

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

Hearing Loss

Click on link for source

Item	Summary
<u>Early Day Motions on Hearing aid services</u>	<p>Norman Lamb MP (Lib Dem, North Norfolk) has tabled an Early Day Motion (EDM) which expresses concerns about the decommissioning of hearing aids and calls on all Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to 'maintain hearing aids services'.</p> <p>Norman Lamb is the Lib Dem Health Spokesman and prior to the election he served as the Minister of State for Care and Support, at which time he had ministerial responsibility for audiology and the publication of the Government's Action Plan on Hearing Loss.</p> <p>The motion notes that measures to reduce access to hearing aids for patients with a mild or moderate hearing loss:</p> <p>"could have a serious effect on the lives of those who rely on hearing aids, potentially making it harder for thousands of hard-of-hearing people to communicate and participate in social activities; notes evidence that delaying the use of hearing aids until the onset of severe hearing loss can lead to poorer outcomes and difficulty adapting to the use of hearing aids; further notes studies linking hearing loss with depression if left untreated; welcomes recent public consultations which show strong opposition to the proposed cuts, and subsequent decisions by a number of CCGs to delay the plans pending the publication of the national report of the Hearing Loss Commissioning Guidance Advisory Group in April 2016; and urges all CCGs to maintain hearing aid services and explore alternative cost-saving options."</p> <p>As of February 11th the EDM had been signed by nine MPs.</p>
<u>Written Question on smoke alarms for the hard of hearing.</u>	<p>Mark Pritchard MP (Con, the Wrekin) has asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she will be taking to ensure that local fire authorities install deaf awareness alternative smoke alarms in homes which make use of warning lights rather than sound as a warning system when requested.</p> <p>In response the Minister of State for the Home Office, Rt. Hon Mike Penning MP (Con, Hemel Hempstead) said that:</p>

	<p><i>“We expect local fire and rescue authorities to determine how to allocate their resources to best protect their communities from the risks from fire. Although each authority delivers a range of community fire safety interventions designed to prevent and reduce the risk from accidental dwelling fires, all also carry out a programme of home fire safety visits. In some cases, these visits, which offered tailored fire safety advice in the home, are focussed specifically on those who may be particularly vulnerable, including older people and those with disabilities.”</i></p> <p>He continued, saying that:</p> <p><i>“Fire and rescue authorities will, in certain circumstances, offer to provide and install free smoke alarms to households without them. This will include alarms designed specifically for those who may be deaf or have other hearing difficulties. How fire and rescue authorities decide where best to target their home fire safety visits and what fire safety equipment, if any, would reduce most effectively the risk to the household is a local matter based on a local assessment of risk.”</i></p>
<p><u>Written Question on councils and the discrimination against people whose first language is Sign Language.</u></p>	<p>Mark Pritchard MP (Con, the Wrekin) has asked the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps his Department is taking to ensure that councils do not discriminate against people for whom British Sign Language is their first language in the provision of council services.</p> <p>In response, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Marcus Jones MP (Con, Nuneaton) said that:</p> <p><i>“The responsibility for providing appropriate support to enable meaningful communication with deaf people by local authorities lies with the local authorities themselves.”</i></p> <p>He followed on from this saying that:</p> <p><i>“All local authorities have a legal responsibility under sections 20 and 29 of the Equality Act 2010 not to discriminate against disabled people in the provision of services and to make ‘reasonable adjustments’, which means for example providing information in an accessible format to allow deaf people to have equal access to their services.”</i></p>
<p><u>Correspondence from Baroness Nicholson Winterbourne has been published regarding deaf members of the House.</u></p>	<p>The Women and Equalities Select Committee has published correspondence from Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne relating to deaf parliamentarians and the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster’. The letter asks the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, Maria Miller MP (Con, Basingstoke) to ensure that her Committee discusses whether reasonable provisions are made for people suffering with sensorineural hearing impairments are made during the restoration of the Palace of Westminster.</p>

	<p>The letter discusses the need for audiology equipment such as hearing loops to be provided, and that the current equipment within the house is, <i>“dated, faulty and fundamentally unsuited to the work of a modern parliament”</i>.</p> <p>She called for the House to take her concerns seriously and ensure that the refurbished Palace of Westminster included accurate, updated and working equipment for the hard of hearing, saying that:</p> <p><i>“the House is in breach of the duty of equality established by The Equality Act 2010 in its failure to make adequate and reasonable adjustments for those with a disability, particularly deafness. When a failure of this magnitude is brought to attention it is not sufficient to point to the future and speculate as to where rectification will be provided. I submit that this issue must therefore be discussed by the Committee as a matter of the utmost importance and it would not be satisfactory to await the restoration of the House in the coming decades for reasonable adjustments to be made. Furthermore, adequate and reasonable provisions must be made in this regard in any interim space that may be used while the Palace of Westminster undergoes significant work.”</i></p> <p>Further information and a copy of the letter can be found here.</p> <p>Action on Hearing Loss has worked with the authorities in the House of Commons to award them our Louder than Words charter mark. We have also been contacted directly by Baroness Nicholson on this issue and have offered her our assistance on this issue.</p>
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Charities

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Item	Summary
<p><u>NCVO Charities letter to the PM in response to the Anti-Advocacy clauses in Grant Agreements</u></p>	<p>The NCVO has written a letter to the Prime Minister, David Cameron (Con, Witney) on the recently announced anti-advocacy clauses to be included in Government grant agreements. The Chief Executives of over 150 charities signed the letter.</p> <p>The letter written by the NCVO stated that:</p> <p><i>“We support the principle that taxpayers’ money must be well spent. And it is because of this that these proposals are flawed in principle, for they may actually cost the taxpayer more money through limiting the range of insight that policy makers can draw upon.”</i></p>

	<p><i>“Organisations funded by government have helped to reform and improve public services. They have held providers to account and brought to public attention failures that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Much of this work can and does save taxpayers money, contrary to the assertions of the report cited as evidence for the introduction of the proposals. The clause itself (published on 8 February on Gov.uk) is drawn incredibly widely and could have a far broader impact than your original intention.”</i></p> <p>Speaking directly to the Prime Minister, the letter noted that:</p> <p><i>“The Compact, which you signed in 2010, remains an important signifier of government commitment to working effectively with the voluntary and community sector. In signing it you committed government to:</i></p> <p><i>Respect and uphold the independence of civil society organisations to deliver their mission, including their right to campaign, regardless of any relationship, financial or otherwise, which may exist.”</i></p> <p>Further information and a copy of the letter in full can be found here.</p>
<p><u>Charity Commission and Financial Reporting Council launch new taxonomy</u></p>	<p>The Charity Commission, the independent regulator of charities, and the Financial Reporting Council have launched the new taxonomy for charities reporting under the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).</p> <p>Currently over 70% of companies file digital accounts with Companies House but up to now this has not been an option for charities. Both the Commission and Companies House are actively evaluating digital filing with the intention of enabling digital filing for charitable companies and thereby making accounts filing easier and quicker for those charities that have to file with both the commission and Companies House.</p> <p>In addition anyone using digital accounts will be able to extract the tagged reporting and accounting information that they want and analyse it more efficiently. Those charities filing tax returns with HMRC will also benefit from having the option of digital filing when submitting supporting accounting information</p> <p>The Commission is currently evaluating the potential benefits of enabling its own digital filing option for charity accounts and anticipates announcing its plans later this year. In the interim, the commission can currently accept digital (iXBRL) accounts for display but has no capability to use or make that data available.</p> <p>Further information and details of the taxonomy can be found here.</p>
<p><u>Lord’s Oral question on</u></p>	<p>Lord Harries of Pentregarth (Crossbench) asked the</p>

Charities and the new Government grants

Government how they planned to implement their new policy restricting how Government grants to charities may be used.

In response, The Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office Lord Bridges of Headley (Con) said that:

“Less than 7% of the £130 billion of grants paid each year goes to the non-profit sector. From 1 May, departments will be required to insert the clause in all new and renewed grant agreements unless Ministers decide, in exceptional circumstances, to qualify or remove the wording. Before 1 May, departments are encouraged to engage with any grant recipients who are likely to be affected by the clause. It will be for departments to employ existing financial controls and take appropriate action if they believe a clause to have been breached.”

On the issue of better transparency and accountability on the funds charities use for lobbying rather than for good purposes, Lord Bridges of Headley praised charities for their work and noted that:

“This clause is aimed at the £130 billion paid out in grants annually. While we may be talking here about charities, we should not forget the £74 billion of grant funding that goes to local government, the £24 billion to ALBs and public corporations, the £8 billion to international recipients and the £4 billion to the private sector.”

Speaking for the Labour Party Baroness Royal of Basildon expressed her concern that *‘any perception that charities are being limited in what they can and cannot say about public policy issues because of their funding would be damaging to public trust in civil society’*.

In response to a question from Lord Hay of Ballyore (DUP) regarding the salaries of senior members of staff in charities and whether the money from government grants contributed to this, he later said that:

“Part of the process that we are trying to ensure is that these grants are properly audited and that we know exactly where the money goes. Regarding the salaries that charities pay to their senior employees, that is obviously a matter for the charities, but I am sure that they will be noting the considerable public scrutiny that they are under—and rightly so.”

Further information and a full transcript of the short debate can be found [here](#).

Disability

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Item	Summary
<p><u>Disability Action Alliance: a new long term strategy</u></p>	<p>The Disability Action Alliance (DAA) is developing a new strategy focusing on its long term sustainability and more collaborative working. The DAA is a membership organisation which ‘promotes partnership working between members to improve the lives of disabled people’. The Government’s Office for Disability Issues is a member.</p> <p>The strategy will both focus on ensuring the long-term sustainability of the DAA and build on natural evolutions in the way that members are engaging with each other. As a starting point the steering group is reviewing the DAA’s impact so far and considering how best to build on achievements. This is with the aim of better enabling collaborative working that makes a positive difference to disabled people’s full participation.</p> <p>Liz Sayce, Chair of the DAA and chief executive of Disability Rights UK, said:</p> <p><i>“The unique thing the Disability Action Alliance does is act as a catalyst. It brings organisations that don’t know each other together, across different sectors, linking people with good ideas to others who can ‘open doors’, with practical results.”</i></p> <p>She noted that:</p> <p><i>“It’s great that disabled people are setting the direction, with many allies, and that organisations led by disabled people are strongly represented on the steering group. I look forward to working with the DAA’s members to forge a successful future for the DAA, enabling collaborative work that leads to strategic and practical change and ultimately to greater participation of disabled people across society.”</i></p> <p>Justin Tomlinson MP (Con, Swindon North) The Minister for Disabled people, said that:</p> <p><i>“Given the importance of the alliance, I am pleased to say that the Office for Disability Issues will be providing a grant for the development of a strategy that places particular focus on the DAA’s long-term sustainability. As a minister with a responsibility for halving the disability employment gap, I am also very encouraged by the decision to ensure that disabled people will be at the heart of delivering the DAA from this point on. To watch this alliance grow and evolve is an honour, and I wish to provide my full support as it takes this courageous step.”</i></p> <p>Further information and access to the full statement can be found here.</p>

<p><u>Access to elected office fund for disabled people</u></p>	<p>Caroline Lucas MP (Green, Brighton Pavilion) has tabled an Early Day Motion (EDM) calling on the Government to ensure that disabled people receive the financial support with the additional costs that they face when standing for election.</p> <p>The motion states:</p> <p><i>“That this House notes that disabled people are still under-represented in politics; further notes that a strong democracy is an inclusive one; is concerned that the UK needs to do more to encourage a diverse mix of local, regional and national election candidates that better reflects the society we live in; regrets the time taken to date to evaluate the pilot Access to Elected Office Fund since its closure in May 2015; notes the Equality and Human Rights Commission's September 2015 recommendation that the Government reopens the Fund in England, and works with the Scottish and Welsh Governments to explore options for making the scheme, or similar funds, available across the UK; and calls on the Government to act on that recommendation as a matter of urgency, so as to benefit disabled candidates planning to stand in local and regional elections in May 2016.”</i></p> <p>The motion has been signed by 40 MPs.</p> <p>Action on Hearing Loss contributed to the Government’s review of the Access to Elected Office Fund and has supported the provision of support to disabled people that the scheme provided.</p>
<p><u>Transport for London (TfL) launches a campaign to highlight the rights of assistance dog owners</u></p>	<p>Transport for London (TfL) has launched a campaign to highlight the rights of assistance dog owners when using private hire vehicles. By law private hire drivers must accept a passenger with an accredited assistance dog and at no extra cost on their fare.</p> <p>The campaign comes as TfL is taking action to prosecute drivers that do not comply with the law. In the last six months, TfL has successfully prosecuted five drivers and three operators for refusing to take assistance dogs, has eight prosecutions pending and is currently investigating eight more cases.</p> <p>More than 7,000 people are assisted by dogs trained and accredited by the seven charities that come under the Assistance Dogs UK umbrella organisation. While Guide Dogs is the best known provider of assistance dogs, there is a wide range of other charities helping users with a variety of conditions, which include Hearing Dogs for Deaf People.</p> <p>Helen Chapman, TfL's General Manager of Taxi and Private Hire, said:</p>

	<p><i>“We are committed to making our services accessible to all our customers. This includes ensuring that our licensees are aware of their responsibilities regarding passengers who require the vital service that assistance dogs provide. The education campaign, along with the increased compliance activity we will be carrying out to support it, will make a real, positive difference to the way people can get around the Capital.”</i></p> <p>The campaign has been welcomed by groups representing assistance dog owners as an important step in ensuring that transport services in London are universally accessible and welcoming.</p> <p>TFL has recently made it easier for customers to report any problems with private hire journeys online at www.tfl.gov.uk/tph-comments, and will be introducing a new taxi and private hire complaint phone line next month, to make it easier for passengers to report issues.</p> <p>Further information can be found here.</p>
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Employment

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Item	Summary
<p><u>Written Question on employment schemes for the hard of hearing</u></p>	<p>Mark Pritchard MP (Con, the Wrekin) has asked the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, if he will provide support to local councils to ensure they protect deaf clubs for people seeking support and help in getting back to work.</p> <p>In response the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Markus Jones MP (Con, Nuneaton) said that:</p> <p><i>“The Government recognises the important role that councils play in supporting those who need additional help when seeking to get back into the workplace. However, as democratically elected organisations, local authorities are independent from central Government and are responsible for managing their budgets in line with local priorities.”</i></p> <p>He continued saying that:</p> <p><i>“This year’s Local Government Financial Settlement does provide a reasonable offer to local government, with a settlement which is essentially flat in cash terms, moving from £44.5 billion in 2015-16 to £44.3 billion in 2019-20. By 2020, when councils will be 100% funded by council tax, business rates and other local revenues, they will finally be fully accountable to their electorate for their financing, decisions and actions.”</i></p>

Written Question on improving employment outcomes for long-term unemployed people with deaf impairment

Mark Pritchard MP (Con, the Wrekin) has asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what provision his Department is making to improve employment outcomes for long-term unemployed people with deaf impairment for whom British Sign Language is their first language.

In response the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Justin Tomlinson MP (Con, North Swindon) said that:

“The Government is committed to ensuring that all disabled people have the opportunity to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations. We offer a number of programmes and initiatives that successfully support disabled people into work, including deaf people or those with hearing loss who use British Sign Language.

Employment programmes such as Work Choice, Specialist Employability Support and Access to Work help disabled people, including BSL users, find, start and remain in work. Access to Work has a dedicated Deaf and Hearing Loss Team, which ensures that people with deafness or hearing loss receive specialist advice and support. Deaf people and those with hearing loss represent the largest group of people helped by Access to Work.”

He noted that:

“Last month, DWP took an important step in making Government services accessible to deaf people or those with hearing loss with the launch of the Video Relay Service (VRS), a six-month pilot which will ensure that BSL users can communicate with DWP staff quickly and easily. This service is available for Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and the Access to Work enquiry lines. VRS can be accessed on a laptop or PC, or through an app on iOS or Android devices.”

He continued, saying that:

“On 4 January, DWP launched a call for evidence for its Market Review of Communications for people who are deaf or have hearing loss. More information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/communications-for-people-who-are-deaf-or-have-hearing-loss-market-review>”

He concluded, by saying that:

“The Disability Confident campaign, launched in 2013, works to improve employer awareness and confidence in unlocking disabled people’s talents, including deaf people and those with hearing loss. We are encouraging employers to register their commitment to become more Disability Confident and receive an information pack and regular updates. More information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/disability-confident>. The Equality

	<p><i>Act 2010 provides statutory protection against discrimination and sets out that employers must make reasonable adjustments for their disabled workers.”</i></p>
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Health and Social Care

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Item	Summary
<p><u>The King's Fund - NHS trusts' deficit estimated at £2.3 billion as NHS financial crisis deepens</u></p>	<p>NHS trusts are forecasting an end-of-year net deficit of around £2.3 billion finds the latest quarterly monitoring report from The King’s Fund.</p> <p>The estimate, based on survey responses from 83 trusts, comes as NHS national bodies are imposing stringent financial controls in an effort to reduce the deficit to £1.8 billion by the end of the financial year. This underlines the risk that the Department of Health will breach parliamentary protocol by overspending its budget. The survey also found that the British public's satisfaction with the NHS has fallen by five percentage points.</p> <p>In relation to the CCGs and their current situation report shows that they are overall in a better financial position, although nearly one-fifth (18 %) are forecasting a deficit and nearly a third (29%) are concerned about meeting their productivity targets.</p>
<p><u>The Health Foundation publishes new report Under pressure relating to poor patient coordination</u></p>	<p>Patients in the UK are likely to be suffering as a result of poor coordination of care between different parts of the health and care system, according to a new report Under pressure published by the Health Foundation. It shows that four in five UK GPs have reported these problems.</p> <p>The report presents the health charity’s analysis of findings from the Commonwealth Fund’s 2015 International Health Policy Survey of Primary Care Doctors. It reveals that 79% of UK GPs report one of their patients has experienced a problem in the previous month because care wasn’t well coordinated across multiple sites or care providers. This compares to an average of 48% across the other countries featured in the survey.</p> <p>The report, which also looked at GP satisfaction and use of electronic medical records (EMRs) shows a varied picture for general practice in the UK:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The UK is a leader in the use of electronic medical records with 98% of GPs in the UK routinely using an EMR in their daily practice. However, the UK lags behind

	<p>a lot of other countries when it comes to practices offering patients the option to email a medical question or concern, at just under four in ten (38%).”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Since 2012 there has been a collapse in the number of GPs who think that the system of general practice doesn’t require change: in 2012, 46% of UK GPs surveyed felt the system worked well and only minor changes were needed, by 2015 this had fallen to 22% – the biggest decline of any of the countries surveyed.” • “67% of GPs in the UK report they are either ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with practising medicine, compared to an average of 79% of primary care doctors in the other 10 countries featured in the survey.” • “Only 26% of UK GPs are ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the amount of time they spend with patients, compared to an average of 59% across the other countries featured in the survey.” <p>Further information can be found here.</p>
<p><u>The Department of Health publishes its shared delivery plan 2015 to 2020</u></p>	<p>The Department of Health has published the its shared delivery plan and its agencies' priority objectives for 2015 to 2020.</p> <p>The plan will be delivered within the settlement agreed in the 2015 Spending Review.</p> <p>The Total Department Expenditure Limit (DEL) was £116.4bn in the financial year 2015 to 2016.</p> <p>Further information on the delivery plan can be found here.</p>
<p><u>Oral Question on the Better Care Fund and demand for Social Care Services</u></p>	<p>Kelvin Hopkins MP (Lab, Luton North) asked the Secretary of State what recent assessment he had made of trends in the level of demand for social care services.</p> <p>In response, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Marcus Jones MP (Con, Nuneaton) said that the Government had provided £3.5 billion of funding to meet the demographic and the pressures on health and social care. He praised the government that this was significantly more than the original £2.9 billion that the Local Government Association estimated was needed.</p> <p>The Shadow Minister for Health, Barbara Keeley (Lab, Worsley and Eccles South) however criticised the government reporting that the Directors of adult social services had said that a total 4.6 billion had already been cut from adult social care. She said that:</p> <p><i>“The social care precept will raise only £400 million a year, and the Better Care Fund, which the Minister mentioned, does not start until next year, at £105 million a year. Government</i></p>

Ministers must consider that they are risking the collapse of social care because their funding is too little and too late.”

In response to this, the Parliamentary Under- Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Marcus Jones MP (Con, Nuneaton) said that:

“The funding coming into the Better Care Fund—£1.5 billion—is all new money for adult social care, and it is going directly to local authorities. The absolute key is the integration of health and social care, and as I have set out to the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) and my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), the Government are determined to achieve that integration.”

Further information and a copy of the full debate 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

