

Tuesday 12 May 2015

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Communities

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has taken account of spending on extra welfare and pensions costs in its proposals to boost UK spending by £165 billion and, if not, how these would be paid for.

(S4W-25271)

John Swinney: The Scottish Government will make it a priority to press the incoming UK Government for an end to the current austerity agenda. Our proposal is to increase spending on public services by 0.5% a year in real terms from 2016-17 to 2019-20. This is estimated to provide at least an additional £140 billion of resources in real terms over the period 2016-17 to 2019-20 compared to the spending plans published in the March 2015 UK Budget. These plans are fiscally sustainable as both the deficit and national debt would be falling as a share of GDP by the end of this Parliament.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will publish an assessment of the cost of its proposals for (a) freezing the retirement age, (b) scrapping the so-called bedroom tax, (c) fully retaining child benefit and (d) increasing universal credit.

(S4W-25272)

John Swinney: Whether these proposals are taken forward will be a matter for the new UK Government. However, the Scottish Government will continue to press the UK Government to take action on these priorities, making a case for modest spending increases of 0.5 per cent above inflation in each year of the new UK Parliament and for an end to austerity.

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what plans there are in the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband programme to provide superfast broadband to households where fibre optic cabinets are too distant to deliver sufficiently fast internet speeds.

(S4W-25391)

John Swinney: The Scottish Government continues to encourage broadband suppliers to design their networks in a way that allows their customers to access superfast speeds. The £412.3 million investment that the Scottish Government and our partners are making through the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) programme is extending fibre infrastructure to non-commercial areas and will increase fibre broadband coverage to 95% of Scottish premises by the end of 2017. The programme is deploying a range of technologies to maximise the broadband speeds available. This includes creating new cabinets as well as rolling out fibre to the premise and fibre to the remote node connections.

We are currently considering options for an additional £41.98 million of public funding for broadband that will further extend coverage and enhance speeds in non-commercial areas. We have also established Community Broadband Scotland to advise and support communities that will not have a superfast connection delivered commercially or through the DSSB programme.

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government how it will help those households that are connected to fibre optic broadband but continue to have very slow internet speeds.

(S4W-25393)

John Swinney: I refer the member to the answer to question S4W-25391 on 12 May 2015. All answers to written parliamentary questions are available on the Parliament's website, the search facility for which can be found at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx>.

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (Scottish National Party): To ask the Scottish Government what commercial value was put on Castle Toward by Argyll and Bute Council when it approached ministers to seek permission to grant a 99-year lease on the castle to Actual Reality Ltd; on what date the council (a) sought and (b) received ministerial permission to grant it at a peppercorn rent, and what conditions ministers attached to the lease.

(S4W-25401)

Marco Biagi: The council sought ministerial permission to lease Castle Toward to Actual Reality Learning and Leadership Company at less than best price in September 2002, and permission was granted on 18 December 2002. In line with normal practice at that time, ministers did not attach conditions to the permission, and the lease terms were not detailed in the consent letter. Information on the commercial value put on Castle Toward by Argyll and Bute Council when it approached ministers is no longer available.

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (Scottish National Party): To ask the Scottish Government whether Argyll and Bute Council informed it that, in 2002, it granted a 25-year lease to Actual Reality Ltd regarding Castle Toward instead of the 99-year lease period agreed by ministers after consent by Glasgow and East Renfrewshire councils and, if so, when.

(S4W-25405)

Marco Biagi: There is no information available to confirm whether Argyll and Bute Council informed ministers of the change in lease period.

Enterprise and Environment

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (Scottish National Party): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on supporting smolt release on a greater range of (a) east and (b) west coast rivers.

(S4W-25309)

Aileen McLeod: The Scottish Government is committed to promoting evidence-based fishery management. Management of salmon fisheries takes place at a local level by district salmon fishery boards who have responsibility for regulation of salmon introductions in their area. Smolt release is one of a variety of potential tools in managing salmon populations and the Scottish Government would encourage those considering this option to do so in the context of the best available science and evidence. As outlined in the response to S4W-25306 on 5 May 2015, the Scottish Government is in the process of publishing a review of the performance of hatchery-reared salmon smolts.

All answers to written parliamentary questions are available on the Parliament's website, the search facility for which can be found at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx>.

Learning and Justice

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the University of the West of Scotland regarding the provision of additional Postgraduate Diploma of Education places at its Crichton campus to train school support staff employed by Dumfries and Galloway Council as teachers.

(S4W-25278)

Angela Constance: The Scottish Government has been involved in constructive discussions with Dumfries and Galloway Council and the University of the West of Scotland to explore innovative solutions to meet local needs and welcomes the commitment from Dumfries and Galloway Council to maintain their teacher numbers.

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning have met the Fair Funding for Kids campaign, as indicated in the First Minister's letter to the member of 4 March 2015, and what action it has taken to address the concerns raised by the campaign.

(S4W-25281)

Fiona McLeod: The First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning have arranged to meet Fair Funding for our Kids campaign representatives on 28 May 2015. Following the First Minister's letter to Jenny Gorevan of Fair Funding for Our Kids, the chief statistician has confirmed that his statisticians are considering ways in which the collection and communication of data could be improved; and, officials have met with COSLA to consider how best to further improve data and information on the implementation of early learning and childcare.

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it will take to ensure effective and independent national oversight of the 600 hours of free early education and childcare.

(S4W-25282)

Fiona McLeod: As set out in the First Minister's letter to Fair Funding for Our Kids, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Angela Constance MSP, is responsible for overseeing the delivery of this policy.

In addition, the chief statistician acts independently of government in assuring the quality of statistics. We are also exploring with COSLA how best we can work in partnership to consider further improvements to data and information.

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will establish a formal mechanism for reciprocal funding arrangements across local authority boundaries to ensure that parents who work in a different council area from where they live have accessible access to the 600 hours of free early education and childcare.

(S4W-25283)

Fiona McLeod: The Scottish Government has discussed with COSLA how best to establish or support formal mechanisms for reciprocal funding arrangements across local authority boundaries. This will be discussed further with local authorities and the Early Learning and Childcare Statutory Guidance Group, which comprises all key delivery partners.

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government how many (a) three and (b) four-year-olds eligible for the 600 hours of free early education and childcare are not in receipt of it.

(S4W-25284)

Fiona McLeod: The Scottish Government Early Learning and Childcare Census collects information on the number of registrations within centres only and not on the number of individual children. However, a registration level of 98.5% of three and four-year-olds is a strong indicator of high uptake. Some children can be registered at more than one setting so this additional flexibility can lead to some children being counted more than once. Also, figures are not adjusted for those three-year-olds who start earlier than the term after their third birthday.

The chief statistician has indicated to the First Minister that statisticians will consider ways in which the collection and communication of data could be improved; and, this will include consideration of any double counting.

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government how many (a) three and (b) four-year-olds eligible for the 600 hours of free early education and childcare attend nurseries that are (i) in partnership with the local authority but have no funded places available and (ii) not in partnership with the local authority.

(S4W-25285)

Fiona McLeod: (i) The Scottish Government does not collate or hold data on the amount of eligible three and four-year-old children who attend nurseries that are in partnership with the local authority but have no funded places available.

(ii) The latest published figures as of December 2013 show there were 3,310 eligible three and four-year-olds nationally, who attended nurseries that were not in partnership with the council. However this does not necessarily equate to 3,310 not taking up their funded entitlement. For example this data will not take in to account split placements, whereby children will attend a local authority nursery or a partnership nursery for their funded hours, whilst attending a non-partnership nursery for wraparound hours.

Number of children aged three and four-years-old registered with a nursery in Scotland December 2013; by partnership type:

	Local authority run services	Private or voluntary sector services in partnership with a local authority	Private or voluntary sector services not in partnership	Total
Age three years	29,580	13,730	1,910	45,220
Age four years	41,780	11,990	1,400	55,170
Total	71,360	25,720	3,310	100,390

Please note:

Information relates to services which specified that their main type of service is 'Nursery' in the 2013 Care Inspectorate Annual Return Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10

Source: Care Inspectorate service lists and annual return data

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether support for living costs available to Scottish domiciled students studying at a university in London are lower than that available to English domiciled students and, if so, for what reason.

(S4W-25398)

Angela Constance: We introduced a new support package for all Scottish domiciled students in the academic year 2013-14. Every eligible Scottish domiciled student, whether they choose to study for free at a Scottish institution, or elsewhere in the UK, has the same eligibility for help with living costs.

While we have simplified the system so that it provides an annual minimum income of £7,500 for all students with a family income of less than £17,000, it no longer features weighted living cost payments linked to the location of study. Accordingly, total living-cost support available to eligible Scottish domiciled students studying at university in London would be lower than that available to English domiciled students. However, as Mr Macintosh may well be aware, there are other university locations where there are issues with living costs.

Mr Macintosh has raised an important issue and I intend to consider it more fully, including the numbers of Scottish domiciled students affected, the costs involved and I am happy to bring the issue back to the Chamber or to Mr Macintosh in due course.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the finding of the 2014 Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy suggesting that literacy standards among schoolchildren have fallen and, in light of this, for what reason its Standing Literacy Commission has previously claimed that such standards have improved.

(S4W-25427)

Angela Constance: Tackling inequality is at the heart of this government's agenda so that every child can succeed in school and gain the skills they need for life. Literacy and numeracy are vital skills in this regard. The most recent findings from the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN) found that most Scottish pupils are doing well, but the Scottish Government has already acknowledged that the results are not as good as they should be.

The independent Standing Literacy Commission considered a wider range of qualitative and quantitative data and evidence - prior to publication of the SSLN 2014 results - and concluded that many of the key indicators of literacy development in early years, school and adult literacy are moving in the right direction. The commission stated clearly that there is still progress to be made, especially

in closing the gap in attainment between the most and least disadvantaged young people. They also made 13 recommendations to improve literacy levels in Scotland, across all sectors, which we are studying carefully and intend to respond to in due course.

Transport

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what information it has on how much local authorities have spent on (a) compensation and (b) legal costs as a result of (i) damage to vehicles and (ii) injuries to pedestrians caused by potholes in each year since 2010-11.

(S4W-25367)

Derek Mackay: Maintenance of local roads, including pothole repairs, is a matter for local authorities. The amount spent by local authorities on compensation and legal costs as a result of damage to vehicles and injuries to pedestrians caused by potholes in each year since 2010-11 is not held by the Scottish Government.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): To ask the Scottish Government what percentage of CalMac Ferries Limited expenditure on onboard catering is spent on items sourced from the islands that the company serves.

(S4W-25371)

Derek Mackay: The percentage of CalMac Ferries Ltd expenditure on onboard catering spent on items sourced from the islands served during financial year 2014-15 was 7%. This figure was for food only and did not include alcohol, or other drinks.

CalMac Ferries Ltd were recently awarded a VisitScotland 'Taste of the Best' accreditation for their use of local produce on their ships. In addition, their commitment to sourcing and serving Scottish produce has been recognised with a nomination at the Scottish Food and Drink Awards for 2015 in the Scottish Sourcing category.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): To ask the Scottish Government how many (a) shore-based and (b) sea-going employees there are in the companies in the David MacBrayne Group, and what information it has regarding how many are resident on islands.

(S4W-25372)

Derek Mackay: CalMac Ferries Ltd employ 522 shore based staff and 986 sea-going staff. Of those staff, 390 are resident on the islands.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-25227 by Derek Mackay on 24 April 2015, whether, under the competitive procedure with negotiations, pre-qualified bidders for the contract will be permitted to discuss the terms of the existing pension schemes for workers after the publication of the invitation to tender.

(S4W-25374)

Derek Mackay: The terms of the existing pension scheme are a matter for the trustees, current employers and employees and their representatives and will not form part of negotiations during the tender process.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made with trade unions representing workers on Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS) on including existing (a) employment and (b) pension protections in the 2016-24 CHFS contract in the forthcoming invitation to tender documents.

(S4W-25375)

Derek Mackay: A joint pensions working group involving officials from Transport Scotland and representatives from the STUC and ferry unions was set up to discuss employment and pension protections in December 2014. The group has met a further three times since December 2014 to discuss specific proposals in relation to pension and employment protections to be included in the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services tender specification.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that pension protections for ferry workers are specified in the forthcoming invitation to tender for the 2016-24 Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract.

(S4W-25376)

Derek Mackay: Scottish Ministers want to protect the CalMac pension scheme in the next Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract in line with their stated principles of fairness, affordability and sustainability for public sector pensions. A pensions working group, involving officials from Transport Scotland and representatives from the STUC and ferry unions was set up in December 2014 to discuss the best way to achieve this outcome.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-25224 by Derek Mackay on 22 April 2015, on what date it will publish the harbour operating agreement with Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd.

(S4W-25377)

Derek Mackay: The Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services harbour operating agreement will issue as part of the invitation to tender, currently planned for June 2015.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether it expects to publish a second invitation to tender for the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract from 2016.

(S4W-25378)

Derek Mackay: The procurement process requires an invitation to tender to be issued, followed by further invitations to submit interim tenders as required, before an invitation to submit a final tender.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will publish the timeline for the procurement of Gourock-Dunoon ferry services from 2017 and whether the contractor for these services will be procured using the competitive procedure with negotiation.

(S4W-25379)

Derek Mackay: Information on the Gourock to Dunoon procurement timeline and the procurement procedure will be provided when the contract notice is published later in 2015.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government for what reason the section of the minutes from the meeting of the board of Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd on 27 February 2015 in which Transport Scotland officials discussed the CalMac Pension scheme and the Merchant Navy Officers' Pension Fund were redacted; whether it will now publish the redacted sections, and for what reason these items were on the agenda.

(S4W-25380)

Derek Mackay: The redacted elements relate to the board's confidential consideration of the pension scheme as part of its normal business as an employer. The minutes of the meeting are prepared by Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) who have no plans to publish the redacted sections at this time.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will publish the section of the minutes of board meeting of Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd on 30 January 2015 at which Transport Scotland officials discussed the pension schemes for workers on Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services.

(S4W-25382)

Derek Mackay: The redacted elements relate to the board's confidential consideration of the pension scheme as part of its normal business as an employer. The minutes of the meeting are prepared by Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) who have no plans to publish the redacted sections at this time.