

Monday 22 June 2015

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Enterprise and Environment

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans for a consultation on unconventional gas and fracking.

(S4W-26063)

Fergus Ewing: Ministers have been meeting with representatives from community, environmental and industry groups to discuss the consultation and our pre-consultation preparations.

Further details of the consultation and accompanying work will be announced in due course.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (Scottish National Party): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has for the future of forestry.

(S4W-26209)

Aileen McLeod: The forestry sector is important to Scotland because of its contribution to our economy and the wider social and environmental benefits that our forests provide. Forestry is already a devolved matter and forestry policy in Scotland is determined by Scottish Ministers, but the management of our national forest estate and other forestry functions are still provided by the cross-border Forestry Commission, with the powers and duties in relation to those functions resting with the Forestry Commissioners. I believe that now is a good time to complete the devolution of the arrangements for the management of forestry in Scotland by agreeing a transfer of Forestry Commissioners' powers and duties, as they relate to Scotland, to Scottish Ministers. We have agreed with the UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that officials will work jointly to consider options for taking this forward and I will announce further details of this work in due course.

Finance

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Independent): To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-22018 by John Swinney on 23 July 2014, what assessment it has made of the (a) accuracy and (b) completeness of (i) its entries and (ii) the entries of other bodies in the electronic Property Information and Mapping Service (e-PIMS).

Holding answer issued: 16 June 2015

(S4W-25893)

John Swinney: The Scottish Government updates its own data through a notification system when changes occur to fulfil its responsibility to the Cabinet Office for the accuracy and comprehensiveness of its data.

The Scottish Government is only one of a number of participating bodies in the e-PIMS, and therefore has only partial access to the detailed records of other public bodies. It is the responsibility of these bodies to assure the Cabinet Office of the accuracy and comprehensiveness of its own data in e-PIMS and e-PIMS Lite.

Learning and Justice

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what (a) expenses and (b) incentives are offered to participants at the information events regarding the implementation of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and which organisations are paying for these.

(S4W-25983)

Fiona McLeod: The Scottish Government has held three regional information events on the Act that were open to the public. No expenses or incentives were offered at these events. A further information event specifically for parents, children and young people was held on Saturday 20 June and parents, children and young people attending that event were offered support for travel costs and childcare. Gift vouchers were made available to those parents and carers attending the event who wished to accept them to thank them for attending. Gift packs were provided to children and young people who attended. The costs were met from the overall total Scottish budget of £100,000 for public information events on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government how much funding it is providing toward the information events regarding the implementation of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

(S4W-25984)

Fiona McLeod: The Scottish Government has budgeted £100,000 for public information events on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government which organisations are providing funding toward the information events regarding the implementation of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, broken down by amount provided.

(S4W-25985)

Fiona McLeod: The Scottish Government is providing funding for a number of public information events on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. It has budgeted £100,000 for this purpose.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government how many people have registered to attend the information events regarding the implementation of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, and what information it has regarding how many (a) have applied or (b) are expected to apply for reimbursement of (i) travel and (ii) childcare costs.

(S4W-25986)

Fiona McLeod: Approximately 600 people registered to attend the three regional information events. A total of 90 people registered to attend the information event held on 20 June 2015. Any parents, children and young people who attended any of these public information events were offered support for travel costs and childcare and any costs incurred were met from within the overall £100,000 budget for public information events.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government how many places will be available at each information event regarding the implementation of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

(S4W-25987)

Fiona McLeod: A total of 500 places were available at regional information events held by the Scottish Government. A total of 90 places were available at the information event for parents, carers, children and young people held on 20 June 2015.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government what action it has taken in light of reports that two in five fostered teenagers are living with their third foster family since going into care.

(S4W-26069)

Fiona McLeod: The Scottish Government recognises the need for all children and young people, including those who are in care, to live in a safe, secure, permanent, nurturing home. Regrettably, we know that too many children and young people in care experience drift and delay leading to multiple placements.

The Scottish Government is working with the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland to deliver our Permanence and Care Excellence (PACE) programme, which brings together partners including local authorities, children's hearings, health, education and the courts to look at how they can improve systems and practice to deliver permanence more quickly for looked after children and young people. PACE uses improvement methodology to identify and test changes to get rid of drift and delay in the system. It is currently working in Aberdeen City, Renfrewshire and Aberdeenshire and aims to expand to a further four areas in 2015-16.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to support the retention of experienced foster carers.

(S4W-26072)

Fiona McLeod: In response to a recommendation of the national review of foster care the Scottish Government agreed to develop a learning and development strategy that will provide the opportunity for foster carers to work towards a more structured framework of training that also recognises the skills and experience gained by foster carers.

The Scottish Government funded a recruitment seminar held in Glasgow during Foster Care Fortnight in 2013 which was run in partnership with Glasgow City Council and The Fostering Network (TFN). In response to requests from attendees, a quarterly national recruitment and retention forum, hosted by TFN, was established to share good practice and experiences in recruitment and retention.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Scottish National Party): To ask the Scottish Government what decisions it has taken following the announcement that it would not proceed with the planned prison for women at HMP Inverclyde.

(S4W-26210)

Michael Matheson: When I announced in January 2015 my decision not to proceed with HMP Inverclyde as a large national prison for women, I said that it did not fit with my vision of how a modern and progressive country should be addressing female offending and that we needed a bolder, more radical and ambitious approach in Scotland.

Following a period of dialogue with national and international experts and local engagement, the Scottish Government has decided that there will be a new small national prison for women on the current site of HMP Cornton Vale, accommodating around 80 women, and five small community-based custodial units across Scotland which will each provide around 20 places. The new units will provide accommodation and support appropriate to the needs of women offenders and help them maintain links with their communities.

This will deliver 180 new high quality gender specific places for women in addition to the 50 we already have at the recently opened HMP Grampian. Alongside this, elements of the existing female estate will be adapted or decommissioned over time. These proposals offer greater flexibility in seeking to shift from custodial to community-based solutions and are closer to the spirit of the recommendations of the Angiolini Commission on Women Offenders (2012).

Whilst providing these new gender specific custodial facilities for women, I am also determined to reduce the use of custody in line with the principles set out in the report of the Scottish Prisons Commission (2008) that we should “target the use of prison where it can be most effective – in punishing serious crime and protecting the public”.

We will work with partners to increase the use of community disposals such as electronic monitoring with enhanced support provided in the community. We will increase investment in community based services both for those diverted from prosecution and serving community sentences – this includes the £1.5 million investment in services for women announced earlier in 2015.

We will consult on proposals to further strengthen the presumption against ineffective short-term prison sentences.

The Scottish Government is determined to reduce the number of receptions into custody each year for men and women. Using improvement methodology and working with a small number of pathfinder sites, we will work closely with local partners to test the most effective ways of reducing the use of remand and short-term sentences.

This ambitious vision offers the best potential to turn around the growth over the past decade in the female prison population, to offer effective alternatives to custody and to further reduce rates of reoffending.

Transport Scotland

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government how much it expects to save through reform of the Scottish Safety Camera Programme and whether this will be reinvested into frontline enforcement activity.

(S4W-26101)

Derek Mackay: The primary objective of the Scottish Safety Camera Programme review was to maximise the programme's capability in contributing to casualty reductions, ensuring delivery of the most effective and efficient outcomes and that best use is being made of existing resources.

The grant funding available for the delivery of the programme will be maintained at current levels, and any efficiencies delivered through the review's proposals, including structural savings through reductions in management costs, will be reinvested into frontline enforcement activity.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-25932 by Derek Mackay on 11 June 2015, what its position is on the comments at section 7.3.6 of the Transport Research Laboratory publication, *HGV speed limit increase evaluation: final report*, which suggest that all of the data required to fully assess the potential safety risk from raising the speed limit for HGVs was not available, and, in light of this, whether it will carry out its own risk analysis on a road by road basis.

(S4W-26106)

Derek Mackay: The Scottish Government notes that research commissioned by the Department for Transport concludes there are significant challenges in assessing the likely implications of a rise in HGV speed limits. What is clear is that the department forecasts the increase in HGV speed limits south of the border will lead to an increase in deaths and serious injuries.

With this in mind, the Scottish Government feels it is more appropriate to understand the outcomes of the trial currently underway on the A9, where the rise has been implemented in conjunction with an average speed camera system, than engage in further research which may be equally limited by the practical challenges of assessing such a change. We will also ensure that evidence emerging from the change in England and Wales is taken into account in future considerations of HGV speed limits.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has considered the application of the Teckal exemption to the provision of ferry services on (a) Clyde and Hebrides and (b) Northern Isles routes.

(S4W-26110)

Derek Mackay: The Teckal exemption requires a challenging series of conditions to be met to avoid European procurement regulations. Notwithstanding the applicability, or otherwise, of the Teckal exemption, the European Commission's Maritime Cabotage Regulations still require the tendering of the Clyde and Hebrides and Northern Isles ferry services, given the provision of state aid to support these services. Consequently, the Scottish Government has not discussed the Teckal exemption with the European Commission.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government on what dates it has discussed with the European Commission the applicability of the Teckal exemption to the provision of ferry services on (a) Clyde and Hebrides and (b) Northern Isles routes from public procurement legislation.

(S4W-26111)

Derek Mackay: I refer the member to the answer to question S4W-26110 on 22 June 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>

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what (a) legal and (b) other advice it has received regarding the application of the Teckal exemption to the provision of ferry services on (i) Clyde and Hebrides and (ii) Northern Isles routes.

(S4W-26112)

Derek Mackay: The Scottish Government draws on oral and written legal advice as appropriate from its lawyers, from Counsel, from external solicitors and from Law Officers. However, other than in exceptional circumstances, the Scottish Government does not comment on the source of such advice, and the content of any legal advice remains confidential.