Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** PE 1584

**Main Petitioner:** Angus Files

**Subject:** Advisory committee on immunisation and vaccination policy

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to set up an advisory committee within NHS Scotland to provide advice on immunisation and vaccination policy.

**Background**

The NHS operates a programme of vaccinations and immunisations which are offered to the public. Decisions on which vaccinations and immunisations should be offered by the NHS are complex and need to take account of a number of factors. The World Health Organisation guidance on ‘Principles and considerations for adding a vaccine to a national immunisation programme’ advises that countries should broadly take account of the following factors:

- The disease:
  - The public health and political priority of the disease
  - Disease burden (i.e. the impact of the health problem on society)
  - The availability of other disease prevention and control measures

- The vaccines:
  - Performance and characteristics of available vaccines
  - Availability of vaccine supply
  - Economic and financial issues

In the UK, consideration of these factors and the issuance of advice and recommendations is undertaken by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) on behalf of the four UK health departments.

**The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation**

The role of the JCVI is to:

“advise UK health departments on immunisations for the prevention of infections and/or disease following due consideration of the evidence on the burden of disease, on vaccine safety and
efficacy and on the impact and cost effectiveness of immunisation strategies.
consider and identify factors for the successful and effective implementation of immunisation strategies.

identify important knowledge gaps relating to immunisations or immunisation programmes where further research and/or surveillance should be considered”.

The JCVI has a statutory basis as a Standing Advisory Committee in England and Wales. However the JCVI has no statutory basis within Scotland and, although the matter falls within devolved competence, the Scottish Government and previous administrations have chosen to receive its advice. Nevertheless, it is entirely up to the Scottish Government whether or not it accepts the JCVI’s advice and chooses to implement it within Scotland.

Scotland does not have membership on the JCVI but it does have representation by two organisations that hold observer status: the Scottish Government (a Senior Medical Officer from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer attends) and Health Protection Scotland. Representatives from these organisations sit in on committee meetings and receive all papers but do not have voting rights. However, the observers contribute to meetings in order to, for example, clarify points of fact, provide additional information or offer an interpretation of data. There is also a new position of ‘co-opted member’, one for each of the countries, representing services tasked with implementation. The Lothian Health Board Immunisation Co-ordinator holds this position for Scotland, and will do so for a fixed term.

Once the JCVI issues a recommendation, the Scottish Government and Health Protection Scotland considers it within a Scottish context and decides whether or not it should be adopted in Scotland. Instructions on the operational detail of the programme, once agreed and put in place, are usually issued via a letter from the Chief Medical Officer.

**Membership of the JCVI**

The membership of the JCVI is not prescribed by statute. The appointment of members and the Chair are made by the Secretary of State for Health in conjunction with the Department of Health, Public Health England and the Department of Health’s public appointments team.

Members are appointed as individuals to fulfil the terms of reference of the Committee, not as representatives of their particular profession, or of their employer or any interest group. New appointments are made via open competition and after an assessment of how well an individual fulfils the criteria of the post.
Membership of the Committee normally consists of academics, practicing clinicians and lay members. Members are usually appointed for a period of three years but, subject to satisfactory annual appraisals and attendance, may be reappointed for a second or third term. Members cannot serve on the Committee for more than 10 years.

Conflicts of Interest

The JCVI Code of Practice\(^1\) sets out that appointments are made on merit and in accordance with principles of the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees\(^2\) and the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments\(^3\). In exercising their duties, JCVI members must observe the seven principles of public life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. These are:

1. Selflessness
2. Integrity
3. Objectivity
4. Accountability
5. Openness
6. Honesty
7. Leadership

Under the principle of ‘Honesty’ it says that holders of public office have a duty to, “declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest”. The Code of Practice also states that they must declare any conflicts of interest at the time of their appointment and promptly notify the Committee secretariat of any changes.

The Code of Practice describes declarable interests as pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests of the Committee member or a family member that have been received in the last 12 months. All registered interests are appended to the minutes of the Committee meetings (see minutes from the meeting of June 2015 for the most recent register of interests).

Scottish Parliament Action

The Scottish Parliament has previously considered specific vaccines and their acceptance within the NHS programme of vaccinations and immunisations (e.g. MMR, HPV). However, there has been no previous action on the specific

---


topic of the JCVI, its constitution or the processes by which the NHS decides whether or not to implement its advice.

Kathleen Robson
Senior Researcher
02 November 2015

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@scottish.parliament.uk

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.