

*Tuesday 3 December 2013*

## **SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT**

### **Enterprise and Environment**

**Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (Scottish National Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in reviewing the Water Services Charges Exemption Scheme in relation to charities.

**Holding answer issued: 19 November 2013**

**(S4W-18098)**

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The Scottish Government is currently consulting on proposals for a new scheme. This consultation closes on 14 February 2014. I would encourage businesses and third sector organisations to respond.

**James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of (a) the progress of and (b) due diligence in the pipeline project from Kirriemuir sewage works to the River Dean.

**Holding answer issued: 29 November 2013**

**(S4W-18392)**

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The Output Monitoring Group, chaired by the Scottish Government, is monitoring the progress of delivery of all projects including that at Kirriemuir. Its quarterly progress reports are published on the Government's website. The project at Kirriemuir is required to secure environmental improvements to the River Dean water and in particular to protect and enhance aquatic life. The progress of the project was suspended whilst the negotiations with BP, Shell and the National Grid were undertaken. These issues have now been resolved and completion of the project is expected by July 2014.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Scottish Green Party):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will report on its (a) consultation on the Recyclate Quality Action Plan and (b) discussions with the UK Government about any cross-border issues.

**(S4W-18467)**

**Richard Lochhead:** The Scottish Government intends to implement the principal proposal from the Recyclate Quality Action Plan consultation, a statutory testing regime for recyclate contamination levels by April 2014. We will publish a summary of the responses to our consultation before the end of the year.

The UK Government has consulted on a similar quality action plan, and we understand that the UK Government is considering its position on a statutory testing regime. The Scottish Government is not aware of any direct cross-border issues.

The Scottish Government continues to consider all representations from industry, and will maintain close dialogue with stakeholders and, where appropriate, with the UK Government during the final phase of this work.

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (Scottish National Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to ensure that high speed fibre optic broadband is rolled out in rural areas of Falkirk district.

**(S4W-18468)**

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The two regional projects to deliver superfast broadband infrastructure across Scotland are now well underway.

These represent two of the largest next generation broadband investments in Europe, totalling over £410 million of public and private sector investment.

The rural areas of Falkirk where there is no commercial availability of fibre optic broadband are within the scope of our broadband projects. Alongside the commercial deployment, this will deliver

next generation broadband access to 85% of premises in Scotland by 2015 and 95% by 2017. We expect the coverage in the Falkirk area to rise to well over 90% during the project and that this will include coverage in rural areas.

We have published high level roll-out plans on our website: [www.scotlandsuperfast.com](http://www.scotlandsuperfast.com) to provide the latest available information on deployment plans across Scotland. The plans will develop throughout the roll-out period as surveys take place and it is therefore not possible to provide specific details at this point. We plan to provide regular updates on our website, including first announcement of deployment in the Rest of Scotland intervention area, with postcode checker facility, in early 2014.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Scottish Green Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what information it holds on the number of mountain hare that are culled annually and the impact of this on golden eagles (a) dispersing from, (b) likely to be recruited to or (c) nesting in natura sites for which golden eagles are a designated interest.

(S4W-18472)

**Paul Wheelhouse:** *The Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Commissioned Report 278* indicated that a total of 24,529 mountain hares were harvested in 2006-07 across 90 sporting estates (of these, 11,906 were reported to have been taken by 26 estates). This represents 7% of the 1995 published Scottish population estimate of 350,000 and is subject to a 50% margin of error.

*SNH Commissioned Report 278 on the distribution of Mountain Hare in Scotland* shows hares present in all or part of the special protection areas (SPAs) designated for golden eagles.

The report also indicates that the vast majority of hare control occurs in the central and eastern Highlands. In these areas, Report 278 suggests that there is a mixed picture of hare distributional change between 1995-96 and 2006-07 with no clear pattern of decline. The 2006-07 data are the most recent SNH holds.

(a) Golden eagles take several years to reach breeding age and juvenile birds disperse from their parent's breeding territory and range over the Highlands and islands to varying degrees i.e. the young birds are not tied to the SPAs.

As breeding adult birds are territorial, these young birds mainly use areas of suitable habitat that does not form part of a territorial range. Some of the areas these birds will be using will be areas where hare control is being carried out. SNH report 278 indicates that more hares are controlled from September to February, although levels of hares removed for tick control are fairly similar across the year.

(b) Young golden eagles often return and try to settle close to where they were born although some settle elsewhere. The SPAs therefore are reliant on the wider golden eagle population to support recruitment. Only a proportion of the young eagles survive to reach breeding age and it is unknown what, if any, effect the reductions in hare numbers will have on recruitment.

(c) Live prey is of key importance for chick development and successful breeding. As with (a) and (b) there is a potential impact through reducing available prey and/or requiring the birds to prey more on grouse.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Scottish Green Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what information it holds on a link between the culling of mountain hare and the incidence of (a) louping ill or (b) other diseases transmitted by sheep ticks or other hare parasites to red grouse.

(S4W-18473)

**Paul Wheelhouse:** The scientific evidence on this subject has been reviewed in a 2009 paper in the *Journal of Applied Ecology* "Culling wildlife hosts to control disease: mountain hares, red grouse and louping ill virus" by A Harrison *et al.* - see: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2664.2010.01834.x/abstract>.

The authors conclude that there is no compelling evidence base to suggest culling mountain hares might increase red grouse densities.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Scottish Green Party):** To ask the Scottish Government how many applications it has (a) received and (b) granted for the culling of mountain hare since 2011, broken down by (i) year, (ii) purpose and (iii) area.

**(S4W-18475)**

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Licences are required to control mountain hares at any time using certain otherwise prohibited means, or to kill them by any method during the “closed season”. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is the licensing authority.

SNH received one application for the control of mountain hare by snaring in 2011. SNH granted that licence in 2012 and it has been amended twice. The licence was granted for the purpose of preventing serious damage to woodland.

SNH received five applications for the control of mountain hare in 2012. Two of these applications were refused. All of the remaining three were to shoot hares out-of-season and for preventing serious damage to woodland. One was in Highland, one in Moray and one in Aberdeenshire.

SNH received three applications for the control of mountain hare in 2013. Two of these were applications to renew licences issued in 2012 (one in Moray and one in Aberdeenshire). The remaining application was for another site in Moray, and again was for the purpose of preventing serious damage to woodland. Licences were granted for all three, and all three relating to shooting hares out-of-season.

**Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (Scottish National Party):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans for an independent Scotland to recognise the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and, if so, whether it would wish to invoke any of the exemptions under clause 298.

**(S4W-18476)**

**Richard Lochhead:** In the event of independence, the Scottish Government intends to recognise the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. All aspects of that law will be considered.

**David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will extend the network of public service obligation operations in order to secure the air services operated from Inverness to, from and within the Highlands and Islands by FlyBe and its franchise partner and whether it will make a statement on the matter.

**(S4W-18520)**

**Keith Brown:** The Scottish Government has no current plans to extend the network of Public Service Obligation operations within the Highlands and Islands. We have no plans to make a statement on this matter.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government what research it has commissioned on whether the reported increase in amoebic gill disease at salmon farms since 2003 is related to an increase in imports of salmon ovum.

**(S4W-18523)**

**Paul Wheelhouse:** The Scottish Government has not commissioned research into amoebic gill disease that relates to increased imports of salmon ova. However, Marine Scotland Science has developed a programme of research on amoebic gill disease, and further research has been commissioned through the Scottish Aquaculture Research Forum. Earlier this year, an international meeting of government officials, scientists and industry focussed on amoebic gill disease and gill health at the University of Stirling.

### **Governance and Communities**

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Scottish Green Party):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its progress in implementing the recommendations of the Community Council Short-life Working Group.

**(S4W-18463)**

**Derek Mackay:** In response to the Community Council Short-Life Working Group's report and recommendations, the Scottish Government, in collaboration with COSLA, has agreed to support the Improvement Service to undertake a project to help enhance the role of community councils. The Improvement Service will initially work with Scotland's 32 Community Council Liaison Officers (CCLO's) based in each local authority, to support the 1,200 community councils active in Scotland.

This project includes providing training and development opportunities for community councillors, improving communications by establishing a communities of practice website and facilitating a number of networking events to help share good practice. In addition a national register of community councils and councillors will be made available digitally.

The Improvement Service will also work with CCLO's to pilot and trial a range of practical solutions to some of the challenges facing community councils such as contested elections as identified by the Short Life Working Group's report.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-18026 by Nicola Sturgeon on 12 November 2013, whether it will set out how the risk management section of the Scottish Public Finance Manual applies to fuel poverty targets.

**(S4W-18478)**

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The Scottish Public Finance Manual (SPFM) risk management section is directly applicable to the ongoing monitoring of the fuel poverty targets. It states that 'effective risk management should improve policy and decision making, reduce fire fighting and focus resources more effectively'.

The Scottish Government's risk framework is designed to provide a straightforward methodology to help manage risk effectively and it follows five distinct phases: clarifying objectives; identifying risks; assessing risks; addressing risks; and reviewing and reporting risks. The Home Energy Efficiency Programmes for Scotland have risk registers set up which are based on the SPFM criteria and are used to monitor progress towards the outcomes set out for these programmes, including tackling fuel poverty.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government how it monitors levels of digital depopulation.

**(S4W-18491)**

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The Scottish Government does not formally monitor levels of depopulation in relation to specific policy areas. It does, however, fully recognise the importance that digital connectivity has in ensuring the overall sustainability of rural areas.

That is why the Scottish Government and its partners have committed over £280 million to our Step Change programme, which will deliver next generation broadband access to at least 85% of premises in Scotland by 2015-16 and 95% by 2017-18. This investment is focused on areas where the market will not currently go and will play a key role in reducing the digital divide between rural and urban areas.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-17590 by Margaret Burgess on 14 October 2013, when in November the final report and research findings will be published.

**(S4W-18496)**

**Margaret Burgess:** The fieldwork for the food aid scoping study has been completed. The contractor has only very recently submitted the finalised, proofed report and research findings. While it is not possible to give a precise publication date, it is anticipated that the final report will be published in December 2013.

## Health and Social Care

**John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what the average number of patients per GP has been in each year since 1999, broken down by NHS board.

(S4W-18477)

**Alex Neil:** The General Medical Services contract came into effect on 1 April 2004 and patients no longer register with a specific GP. Instead they register with the practice as a whole (even though they may wish to see a particular GP most or all of the time). Latest figures and historical figures from 2004 are available from Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics in Scotland and can be accessed via this link: <http://www.sns.gov.uk/default.aspx>.

Scotland has more GPs per head of population than the rest of the UK

Country	No. of GPs in 2012	Population	GPs: per head of population
		(Mid-year 2012)	
Scotland	4,859	5,313,600	1:1094
England	40,265	53,493,700	1:1329
Wales	2,275	3,074,100	1:1351
Northern Ireland	1,170	1,823,634	1:1559

The average number of patients per GPs are based on headcounts of GP partners and GPs employed on a salaried basis. They do not take account of GP retainees, trainee GPs or GP locums, who between them also provide a significant amount of care to patients.

Health Board	The average number of registered patients per contracted GP									
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	
Ayrshire and Arran	1,358	1,342	1,316	1,296	1,290	1,305	1,351	1,384	1,401	
Borders	1,189	1,147	1,146	1,195	1,125	1,096	1,108	1,086	1,129	
Dumfries and Galloway	1,178	1,122	1,125	1,122	1,135	1,118	1,118	1,160	1,156	
Fife	1,437	1,446	1,436	1,421	1,397	1,395	1,456	1,483	1,479	
Forth Valley	1,383	1,384	1,399	1,317	1,342	1,323	1,344	1,332	1,321	
Grampian	1,338	1,254	1,232	1,220	1,185	1,173	1,184	1,197	1,171	
Greater Glasgow and Clyde	1,491	1,484	1,447	1,442	1,437	1,436	1,449	1,428	1,455	
Highland	920	908	899	860	847	839	849	857	871	
Lanarkshire	1,642	1,647	1,641	1,610	1,607	1,610	1,596	1,600	1,575	
Lothian	1,387	1,329	1,305	1,306	1,305	1,289	1,306	1,263	1,270	
Orkney	507	498	504	471	597	600	644	557	743	
Shetland	761	924	926	717	719	685	759	736	692	
Tayside	1,379	1,341	1,327	1,324	1,324	1,324	1,302	1,302	1,295	
Western Isles	687	674	769	749	691	626	705	760	665	

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that enriched culture medium testing for group B streptococcus infection in pregnancy is available in each NHS board.

(S4W-18497)

**Michael Matheson:** Currently there are no clinical indicators for enriched culture medium testing for group B streptococcus infection in pregnancy, however testing can be carried out in certain circumstances using the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists guidelines.

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent meetings it has held to discuss group B streptococcus infection.

**(S4W-18498)**

**Michael Matheson:** The Minister for Public Health met with Margaret McDougall MSP on 12 September 2013 to discuss screening for group B streptococcus infection in pregnancy.

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government what guidance it issues regarding testing for group B streptococcus infection in late pregnancy, and when it last reviewed the guidance.

**(S4W-18499)**

**Michael Matheson:** The Scottish Government recognises the recently revised guidance called '*The Prevention of Early-onset Neonatal Group B Streptococcal Disease*' issued by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists for obstetricians, midwives and neonatologists in June 2012. This recommends an approach to antibiotics administration based on maternal risk factors. Prevention of late-onset group B streptococcus (GBS) and treatment of established GBS disease is not considered beyond initial antibiotic therapy.

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce the incidence of the (a) early and (b) late onset of group B streptococcus infection in pregnancy.

**(S4W-18500)**

**Michael Matheson:** NHS boards in Scotland are expected to follow professional guidance issued by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG).

Healthcare professionals will have undergone extensive training and education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels to specified curricula standards, including being assessed on competencies in diagnosis and treatments. These curricula will have been developed by relevant Royal Colleges, and approved by the respective regulators. Post-qualification, all healthcare professionals are expected to participate in CPD activities to maintain their skills and knowledge, and health boards do release staff to undertake such activities.

The RCOG in partnership with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine is currently carrying out a recruitment process to recruit a clinical research fellow to carry out an audit across the UK. It will aim to provide feedback and advice to those participating, including Scottish units, about how they can further improve their adherence to the RCOG guidelines on the prevention of neonatal GBS disease.

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government what information it collects on the (a) short and (b) long-term impact on babies of group B streptococcus infection.

**(S4W-18501)**

**Michael Matheson:** The Scottish Government does not collect the above data. Early and late onset group B streptococcal infections are not notifiable under the terms of the Public Health (Scotland) Act 2008.

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that pregnant women whose babies are at higher risk of group B streptococcus infection are identified.

**(S4W-18502)**

**Michael Matheson:** The *UK Standards for Microbiology Investigations: Processing Swabs for Group B Streptococcal Carriage* (SMI B58) endorses and supports the recommendations that only those pregnant women assessed as being at high risk should be tested. The document provides a

recommended method for such testing. This does not however prevent tests being carried out where a doctor thinks it is necessary, with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists guidance setting out the criteria for making such judgements.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) has also carefully considered the potential benefits and harms of screening for GBS carriage during pregnancy and has agreed that there is no clear evidence to show that screening all pregnant women in the UK would be beneficial. There are concerns that, given the relatively low risk associated with most cases of GBS carriage, a positive screen may result in unnecessary and potentially harmful treatment. One of the potential harms of screening for GBS during pregnancy is that large numbers of women might be given antibiotics during labour, risking death or serious injury to a few women from an allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to the drugs; there is also a real risk that strains of bacteria become resistant to antibiotics.

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met stakeholders to discuss group B streptococcus infection rates.

**(S4W-18503)**

**Michael Matheson:** There have been no specific discussions about group B streptococcus infection rates with stakeholders.

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent analysis it has carried out of adverse antibiotic reaction to intrapartum antimicrobial prophylaxis using narrow-spectrum penicillin to combat group B streptococcus infection in newborn babies.

**(S4W-18504)**

**Michael Matheson:** The National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit of the University of Oxford is currently carrying out a sub-analysis of the anaphylaxis study, again looking at those women treated with antibiotics in relation to GBS/presumed GBS infection. This will, for the first time, give a population incidence of the maternal and newborn disease due to anaphylaxis associated with antibiotic use in labour. The study has been running since October 2012 and is due to finish in September 2014. Large population based studies are required for conditions such as these which occur less commonly, so this is being undertaken at UK level.

There is National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance on the use of antibiotics to prevent and manage infection early in pregnancy. This states that:

Antibiotics during labour should be offered to women when GBS has been identified incidentally (e.g. when testing for the cause of a urinary infection) in their vagina, rectum or urine in this pregnancy and to women who have previously had a baby with a neonatal GBS infection.

Antibiotics should be considered for two groups of women in pre-term labour (i.e. before 37 weeks): those whose waters broke before the labour started and those whose waters have been broken for more than 18 hours before birth.

Antibiotics should be prescribed if there is evidence of infection in the women, such as raised temperature.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. *Antibiotics for early-onset neonatal infection: antibiotics for the prevention and treatment of early-onset neonatal infection.* London: NICE; 2012. Available from:

<http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/13867/60633/60633.pdf>.

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to analyse group B streptococcus infection rates.

**(S4W-18505)**

**Michael Matheson:** The Scottish Government does not analyse group B streptococcus infection rates, however Health Protection Scotland does and has produced the following table:

Table 1: Number and incidence of confirmed laboratory reports of invasive Streptococcal Group B infections by year (2009-2013 up to mid-June) in those aged up to 90 days

Number of Invasive Streptococcal Group B Reports by Year:

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*
Early onset (defined as less than 7 days of age when sample taken) number of reports	27	27	27	27	7
Early onset estimated incidence per 1000 births	0.46	0.46	0.46	0.47	0.26
Late onset (defined as 7-90 days of age when sample taken) number of reports	15	19	21	20	10
Late onset estimated incidence per 1000 births	0.25	0.32	0.36	0.34	0.37
Number of births per year (National Records Scotland)	59046	58791	58590	58027	Not available as yet **

Note: These only relate to confirmed cases and there are a number of cases that are treated on clinical grounds and for whom there is no confirmed diagnosis.

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to increase awareness among (a) pregnant women and their families and (b) maternity care health professionals of group B streptococcus infection and how to avoid such infection developing in babies.

(S4W-18506)

**Michael Matheson:** (a) The Scottish Government funds NHS Health Scotland to develop and publish *Ready, Steady, Baby* a guide to pregnancy which is given to all pregnant women at their first booking appointment with a midwife. *Ready, Steady, Baby* advises, that in some areas, routine testing for strep B in mothers is being considered and women should ask their midwife about local policy.

(b) There are no specific national educational initiatives commissioned by the Scottish Government about the suitability of different tests for group B streptococcal carriage.

Healthcare professionals will have to demonstrate knowledge, skills and competence relevant to their profession during their undergraduate and postgraduate training, including in areas of diagnosis and appropriate treatments. It is also a professional obligation that such staff participate in continuous professional development activities in order to keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date.

In the absence of specific national educational initiatives, healthcare staff are expected to follow professional guidance from their respective Royal Colleges, such as the recently revised guidance "*The Prevention of Early-onset Neonatal Group B Streptococcal Disease*" from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, issued in June 2012.

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to increase awareness of the signs of group B streptococcus infection in newborn babies.

(S4W-18507)

**Michael Matheson:** The Scottish Government recognises the recently revised guidance called *The Prevention of Early-onset Neonatal Group B Streptococcal Disease* issued by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) for obstetricians, midwives and neonatologists in June 2012. This recommends an approach to testing and the use of antibiotics administration for pregnant

women. The Scottish Government would expect healthcare staff to follow professional guidance from their respective royal colleges.

A clinical research fellow is currently being recruited by RCOG in partnership with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to audit the implementation of this guidance from the RCOG in maternity units across the UK. It will aim to provide feedback and advice to those participating, including Scottish units.

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what targets it has set for long-term reduction in the number of cases of group B streptococcus infection in babies in the first (a) six and (b) 90 days of life.

**(S4W-18508)**

**Michael Matheson:** The Scottish Government has not set any targets in relation to long-term reduction in the number of cases of group B streptococcus infection in babies in the first (a) six and (b) 90 days of life.

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it plans to provide to local authorities to help them protect vulnerable people from telephone cold calling.

**(S4W-18510)**

**Alex Neil:** The Scottish Government funds the National Adult Protection Coordinator post at the people protection organisation 'WithScotland' and the Scottish Business Resilience Centre. They both have been working with local authorities on pilots on a system for call blocking of cold calls to vulnerable people.

**Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Scottish National Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what support is available to parents whose children are sent to other parts of the UK for specialist hospital treatment.

**(S4W-18533)**

**Alex Neil:** It is the responsibility of those NHS boards commissioning specialist services for children in other parts of the UK to determine the appropriate level of support to provide their parents.

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government what the reasons were for the closure of the British Sign Language (BSL) interpreting service for NHS 24 on 29 October 2013.

**(S4W-18534)**

**Alex Neil:** The pilot online British Sign Language (BSL) interpreting service is still in operation. The online service is part of the NHS24 led BSL pilot project which was introduced in April 2012 to improve linguistic access to health service for members of the deaf community in Scotland. The report of an independent evaluation of the pilot commissioned by NHS 24 is currently being considered.

The British Sign Language service will continue in the interim and both the Scottish Government and NHS 24 are clear that the outcome of considerations should secure the best possible future service to the deaf community.

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will ensure that deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users have continued access to the NHS 24 service beyond the current three-month funded period.

**(S4W-18535)**

**Alex Neil:** I refer the member to the answer to question S4W-18534 on 3 December 2013. 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>.

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government how many cases of Clostridium difficile have been reported in patients aged 65 and over in each year since 1999, broken down by NHS board.

**(S4W-18557)**

**Alex Neil:** The information requested can be found in the following table:

Clostridium difficile infection (CDI) cases in Scotland by NHS board reported under the mandatory surveillance programme (2007 to 2013):

NHS Board	2007*	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013**
Ayrshire and Arran	553	560	439	329	185	153	66
Borders	67	115	73	31	28	46	16
Dumfries and Galloway	154	170	162	92	70	34	15
Fife	376	391	128	84	55	81	22
Forth Valley	307	458	132	71	32	29	9
Grampian	519	953	597	218	101	96	35
Greater Glasgow and Clyde	1753	1395	666	501	326	293	164
Highland	289	150	117	80	48	57	13
Lanarkshire	788	715	281	219	193	170	68
Lothian	980	850	611	406	278	257	127
National Waiting Times Centre	0	3	9	3	3	3	0
Orkney	10	21	21	8	10	8	1
Shetland	12	6	1	0	0	1	5
Tayside	607	524	389	168	127	148	57
Western Isles	15	14	8	11	9	6	10
Total	6430	6325	3634	2221	1465	1382	608

\*Mandatory surveillance of C.difficile infection data began in Scotland in October 2006. C.difficile infection data before this period relates to voluntary laboratory reports which have not been validated, are not based on any case definition, and not available by NHS board. Therefore data before 2007 is not included.

\*\*2013 published data only available up to June 2013.

### Learning and Justice

**Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government how many (a) temporary, (b) agency, (c) seconded, (d) consultancy and (e) other staff from outside its organisation it has hired to work on (i) the white paper on and (ii) other work in relation to independence, broken down by (A) job title and description, (B) contract start and end dates and (C) total remuneration.

**Holding answer issued: 22 November 2013**

**(S4W-18197)**

**Nicola Sturgeon:** No staff from outwith the Scottish Government have been hired to work on the white paper on independence.

Two agency members of staff have been recruited to fill short term administrative roles between October 2013 and January 2014.

Three staff have been seconded. Professor Drew Scott, Professor of European Studies from the University of Edinburgh, was appointed to the Scottish Government as expert advisor on Europe on 3

January 2013 on secondment for three days a week. An energy policy analyst was appointed to contribute to the development of a strategy for energy and low carbon economy between November 2011 and February 2013. In addition, an advisor on electricity market reform was seconded from May 2012 until March 2013.

No other staff from outwith the Scottish Government have been hired to assist with other work in relation to independence.

Please note that remuneration details have not been included, as the numbers of staff involved are very small and providing this information would effectively disclose personal information in contravention of the data protection principles in Schedule 1 to the Data Protection Act 1998.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government what help is available to people with additional support needs in their transition from school to work or further education.

**(S4W-18441)**

**Alasdair Allan:** Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended) education authorities are required to take specific action to help prospective school leavers with additional support needs to make the transition from school to post-school life successfully.

The Act places a duty on the education authority to request and share information from an appropriate agency or agencies, if any, which are likely to be involved with the prospective school leaver on leaving school.

Appropriate agencies, all in Scotland, which may be involved, are: any NHS board, any other local authority, Skills Development Scotland, any further education college, the Scottish Agricultural College and any institution of higher education.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government how many teachers have been absent due to stress in each of the last five years; what the average length of absence was; how much it cost, and what action it is taking to tackle the issue.

**(S4W-18450)**

**Alasdair Allan:** This information requested is not collated centrally. Teacher absences and the causes of these absences are matters for individual local authorities as employers. Each authority will have locally agreed systems in place for managing this.

The Scottish Government takes the matter of workload and stress seriously and has already taken steps to address the immediate issues surrounding implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. There are a range of support materials in place to aid teachers with the transition and Education Scotland inspectors have a clear remit to tackle any bureaucracy which detracts from pupils' learning experience.

The recent publication of the *Audit Scotland Compendium on Council Performance for the 2012-13 financial year* shows the number of days lost per employee for teachers as well as other local government employees in each Scottish council area with a total average for Scotland.

There has been a slight increase this year in teacher absence however in the past five years teacher absence has been consistently less than that of other local government workers:

Days lost per employee (Scotland average in last 5 financial years)	2012-13	2011-12	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09
Teachers	6.6	6.2	6.6	7.6	7.4
Other Local Government Staff	10.9	10.4	10.8	11.6	12.5

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government how many teachers have been absent due to false accusations being made against them by pupils in each of the last 10 years, broken down by local authority; what the average length of absence was while investigations were carried out, and how much it cost.

**(S4W-18451)**

**Alasdair Allan:** This information is not collated centrally. Teacher absences and the cause of these absences are matters for individual local authorities as employers. Each authority will have locally agreed systems in place for managing this.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government how many pupils have been learning a musical instrument in each year since 1999, broken down by local authority.

**(S4W-18461)**

**Alasdair Allan:** This information is not held centrally.

However, as part of the work of the Instrumental Music Group which reported to the Scottish Government on 27 June 2013, the improvement service obtained information on the number of pupils learning a musical instrument across Scotland since 2007-08. This information was published at the time and is repeated in the following table:

Academic year	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Local Authority area						
Aberdeen	1737	1912	1969	1924	1809	1738
Aberdeenshire		2644	2589	2711	2471	2175
Angus	1100-1200	1100-1200	1100-1200	1144 (June)	1142 (June)	1454 (March)
Argyll and Bute	1385	1344	1352	1226	1256	
Edinburgh		4712	4652	4798	4758	
Clackmannanshire	434	509	419	396	439	
Stirling		c810	c810	c810	c810	810
Dumfries and Galloway		1896	2132	1799	2071	1210
Dundee				Approximately 1800		2200
East Ayrshire	1121	1103	1142	1126	1113	1147
East Dunbartonshire					1185	1301
East Lothian	1269	1237	1257	1263	1267	
East Renfrew		1727	1858	1921	1856	1802
Falkirk		1113	1211	1148	1141	1142
Fife		5128	4043	3243	3888	3564
Glasgow		4080	4098	4540	4538	
Highland		2800	2850	2920	2950	3000
Inverclyde	655	725	903	1087	1190	1222
Midlothian			1500	1300	1140	1100
Moray		825-850	825-850	825-850	825-850	850
North Ayrshire	1611	1629	1478	1749	1445	1570
North Lanarkshire		3940	3966	3012	3421	3853
Orkney	480-520	480-520	480-520	480-520	480-520	498
Perth and Kinross	1500	1570	1522	1558	1661	
Renfrewshire		1780	1547	1208	1129	1050
Scottish Borders		2032	1889	1140	981	917
Shetland Islands				751	678	662
South Ayrshire	Approx 1000	Approx 1000	Approx 1000	Approx 1000	1100	1222
South Lanarkshire				3663	2487	2957
West Dunbartonshire	1036	972 - 1022	1140	1024	1105	965
West Lothian	2089	2128	2273	2182	2265	2379
Western Isles						360

Estimated total number of Instrumental Music Pupils across Scotland: 55,067 (8.3% of total primary and secondary school roll).

This is based on 2012-13 pupil numbers where available and 2011-12 pupil numbers where 2012-13 numbers were not available.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government how many music teachers there have been in each year since 1999, broken down by local authority area.

(S4W-18462)

**Alasdair Allan:** Information on the number of music teachers in 2011 and 2012 can be found in the teacher census supplementary tables to the *Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland* publication. This is available on the Scottish Government website and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/teachcenssuppdata>

The data for 2011 and 2012 have been summarised in the following table.  
Number of teachers (FTE) whose main subject taught is recorded as music:

	2011	2012
Aberdeen City	28	27
Aberdeenshire	54	51
Angus	24	22
Argyll and Bute	19	20
Clackmannanshire	10	11
Dumfries and Galloway	35	40
Dundee City	34	27
East Ayrshire	27	26
East Dunbartonshire	27	25
East Lothian	23	24
East Renfrewshire	23	24
Edinburgh, City of	52	55
Eilean Siar	10	8
Falkirk	35	39
Fife	70	71
Glasgow City	78	85
Highland	56	47
Inverclyde	17	18
Midlothian	20	20
Moray	21	19
North Ayrshire	26	28
North Lanarkshire	70	70
Orkney Islands	9	9
Perth and Kinross	31	33
Renfrewshire	34	38
Scottish Borders	23	27
Shetland Islands	12	12
South Ayrshire	25	28
South Lanarkshire	60	64
Stirling	23	23
West Dunbartonshire	20	18
West Lothian	42	42
All local authorities	1039	1049
Grant aided	2	2

For information on the number of music teachers prior to 2011, I refer the member to the answer to question S4W-03916 on 18 November 2011. 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>

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to prevent pupils making false accusations against teachers and what sanctions are available should accusations be found to be false.

(S4W-18464)

**Alasdair Allan:** The Scottish Government understands that any allegation made against a teacher whether found to be false or not, can be very stressful and upsetting to all those involved. Guidance was issued in 2011 which was designed to provide support for schools and authorities in dealing with allegations made against members of staff for whatever reason.

Schools and authorities must have procedures in place which meet the needs of both staff and children and young people and must ensure that any local procedures for handling allegations dovetail with local disciplinary and child protection procedures in accordance with the National Child Protection Guidance (2010) and inter-agency child protection guidelines.

Authorities and schools have available to them a range of strategies and approaches, for promoting positive relationships and behaviour. Support and training in these approaches is provided by Education Scotland's Rights, Support and Wellbeing Team.

**Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government whether ministers can override the decision of the chief constable about the number of police officers deployed on the beat.

**(S4W-18466)**

**Kenny MacAskill:** Scottish Ministers cannot override the decision of the chief constable about the number of police officers deployed on the beat. The police in Scotland operate independently of Scottish Ministers. The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 establishes that the chief constable is 'responsible for the day to day administration of the Police Service, including the allocation and deployment of resources received from the authority.'

I refer the member to the answer to question S4W-18164 on 18 November 2013 which explains that the deployment of police officers is an operational matter for Police Scotland.

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>.

**Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Scottish National Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what procedures local authorities follow when ascertaining the capacity of (a) existing schools and (b) new build schools.

**(S4W-18483)**

**Michael Russell:** The procedures for ascertaining the capacity of both existing and new schools is a responsibility of individual local authorities. This means that each local authority has its own policy at present, however, in response to *Recommendation 23 of the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education* which was published in April 2013, the Scottish Government is currently working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland to develop guidance on a consistent approach which can be applied to capacity modelling in Scotland in future. This will be published in spring/summer 2014.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government what information it has on how much people from other European countries living in Scotland have contributed to the economy in each of the last five years, broken down by country of origin.

**(S4W-18487)**

**Humza Yousaf:** Labour market statistics from the Annual Population Survey provide figures on the number of people from other European countries living in Scotland and their contribution towards the economy in terms of their labour market participation. Data is not available for individual countries of origin due to the underlying sample sizes:

	Total Number of EU Nationals resident in Scotland (aged 16+)	Total Number of EU Nationals resident in Scotland in Employment (aged 16+)
2007	96,400	66,800
2008	112,300	80,400
2009	116,500	81,000

	Total Number of EU Nationals resident in Scotland (aged 16+)	Total Number of EU Nationals resident in Scotland in Employment (aged 16+)
2010	126,700	89,700
2011	136,200	96,300
2012	143,700	95,800

Source: Annual Population Survey, Jan-Dec datasets, ONS.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government on how many people under 16 the police have used CS gas in each of the last 10 years and who in Police Scotland is in charge of monitoring usage of CS gas on under-16s.

**(S4W-18490)**

**Kenny MacAskill:** The deployment and use of CS spray, including the issuing of guidance, is an operational matter for Police Scotland. Officers must ensure that the use of CS spray is fair, proportionate and justifiable.

Police Scotland does not use CS gas, they use CS spray. The Scottish Government does not hold this information.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-18185 by Michael Russell on 21 November 2013, what the timetable is for finalising the new procedure for funding college places.

**(S4W-18556)**

**Michael Russell:** The Scottish Funding Council is currently discussing the details of the new model with the sector. I have asked its interim chief executive to write to you to confirm the timetable.

#### Strategy and External Affairs

**Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government how many and which of the UK's public bodies would have to be replicated if Scotland decided to leave the UK.

**Holding answer issued: 20 November 2013**

**(S4W-17940)**

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Chapter 10 of *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland* (from page 362) sets out the Scottish Government's approach to public service delivery in an independent Scotland, including in relation to the public bodies currently acting for Scotland at the UK level.

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-17874 by Fiona Hyslop on 13 November 2013, whether its policy is to keep details of the meetings between the Minister for External Affairs and International Development and the governments of other countries out of the public domain.

**Holding answer issued: 29 November 2013**

**(S4W-18368)**

**Fiona Hyslop:** No. The Scottish Government publishes information on ministerial engagements and meetings periodically at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/People/14944/Events-Engagements/MinisterialEngagements>

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government further to the answer to question S4W-17874 by Fiona Hyslop on 13 November 2013, whether it issued a statement (a) prior to or (b) following the Minister for External Affairs and International Development's meetings with representatives of the government of (i) Syria, (ii) Egypt and (iii) Turkey and what the reasons are for its position on this matter.

**Holding answer issued: 29 November 2013**

**(S4W-18369)**

**Fiona Hyslop:** The Minister for External Affairs and International Development met with neither representatives of the Syrian nor Egyptian governments. He did meet with the Turkish Ambassador on

31 October 2013 and Mr Walid Saffour, Ambassador of National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. I should explain the Syrian National Coalition is recognised as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people as it is an inclusive body and as such it provides the best opportunity to secure a peaceful transition of power.

Meetings with representatives of overseas governments are a regular part of ministers' work. When appropriate the Scottish Government will issue a statement after a meeting because we may wish to convey our position on a particular issue.

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-17874 by Fiona Hyslop on 13 November 2013, for which meetings it issued a public statement (a) acknowledging that a meeting had taken place and (b) providing details of the topics discussed.

**Holding answer issued: 29 November 2013**

**(S4W-18370)**

**Fiona Hyslop:** I refer the member to the answer to question S4W-18369 on 3 December 2013. 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>.

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-17874 by Fiona Hyslop on 13 November 2013, what geographical or political entity it is referring to as "Kurdistan".

**Holding answer issued: 29 November 2013**

**(S4W-18371)**

**Fiona Hyslop:** The Minister for External Affairs and International Development met with representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government within Iraq.

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-17874 by Fiona Hyslop on 13 November 2013, whether it has commented publicly on all of the meetings listed in the answer and what the reasons are for its position on this matter.

**Holding answer issued: 29 November 2013**

**(S4W-18374)**

**Fiona Hyslop:** The Scottish Government has not commented publicly about any of the meetings listed in the answer. It is our view that private meetings between the Scottish Government and key stakeholders are undertaken on a confidential basis, to allow free and frank exchange of views.

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-17874 by Fiona Hyslop on 13 November 2013, whether it considers that the people of Scotland have a right to know what was discussed at the meetings listed in the answer.

**Holding answer issued: 29 November 2013**

**(S4W-18375)**

**Fiona Hyslop:** It is our view that private meetings between the Scottish Government and key stakeholders are undertaken on a confidential basis, to allow the free and frank exchange of views. Where we think it is appropriate to convey our position on a particular issue, we will make a statement.

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-17874 by Fiona Hyslop on 13 November 2013, whether Mr Dunn has verified the details of the meeting with the government of Egypt on 13 September 2013.

**Holding answer issued: 29 November 2013**

**(S4W-18394)**

**Fiona Hyslop:** The meeting was attended by members of the Egyptian diaspora in Scotland and not representatives of the Egyptian government. The reason for the meeting was to hear from the Egyptian community in Scotland how the current situation in Egypt is affecting them.

### Transport Scotland

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government (a) how many times and (b) for how long on average the (i) M9/A9 and (ii) A92/A972 have been closed as a result of crime scene investigations of accidents in the last three years, and for what reason these roads cannot be reopened for managed traffic flow more quickly in such cases.

**(S4W-18484)**

**Keith Brown:** Details of trunk road closures on the M9/A9 and A92/A972 in the last three full calendar years are contained in the following table. Our records for 2013 are not yet complete:

Road	2010		2011		2012	
	Number of Closures	Average time (hrs)	Number of Closures	Average time (hrs)	Number of Closures	Average time (hrs)
M9/A9	13	05:01	30	04:20	43	03:35
A92/A972	7	06:27	1	05:00	5	05:44

The decision by Police Scotland to close a road is never taken lightly and only occurs when the collision itself has blocked the road, or where there is a need to protect those who might already have been injured and the emergency service staff who are dealing with the incident.

The impact on local communities and the wider economy is always at the forefront of investigators' minds, but there is a need to ensure that incidents are investigated thoroughly to ensure that families of those killed or seriously injured receive the support and information that they deserve and also to ensure that any safety issues are identified and addressed.

Roads are closed in such cases to gather evidence regarding an accident and the length of any closure can vary, depending on the nature and complexity of the incident.

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government (a) how many times and (b) for how long on average the (i) A90, (ii) A96 have been closed as a result of crime scene investigations of accidents in the last three years, and for what reason these roads cannot be reopened for managed traffic flow more quickly in such cases.

**(S4W-18485)**

**Keith Brown:** Details of trunk road closures on the A90 and A96 in the last three full calendar years are contained in the following table. Our records for 2013 are not yet complete.

Road	2010		2011		2012	
	Number of Closures	Average time (hrs)	Number of Closures	Average time (hrs)	Number of Closures	Average time (hrs)
A90	7	05:56	9	08:34	3	08:48
A96	7	05:55	5	06:01	4	09:14

The decision by Police Scotland to close a road is never taken lightly and only occurs when the collision itself has blocked the road, or where there is a need to protect those who might already have been injured and the emergency service staff who are dealing with the incident.

The impact on local communities and the wider economy is always at the forefront of investigators' minds, but there is a need to ensure that incidents are investigated thoroughly to ensure that families of those killed or seriously injured receive the support and information that they deserve and also to ensure that any safety issues are identified and addressed.

Roads are closed in such cases to gather evidence regarding an accident and the length of any closure can vary, depending on the nature and complexity of the incident.

**Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (Scottish National Party):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-10611 by Keith Brown on 6 November 2012, whether it will provide an update regarding how much on average the travel scheme saves people who use it each year.

**(S4W-18493)**

**Keith Brown:** Under the National Older and Disabled Persons Concessionary Travel Scheme, the average saving per year is around £232 for each of the 1.27 million people holding a national entitlement card. This may be estimated from figures for 2012-13, in which the total number of journeys made was 145 million and the average fare per journey was £2.03.

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what the timetable is for the roll-out of 3D-scanners for use in vehicle accident investigations and when they will be available for each trunk road in the Highlands and Islands.

**(S4W-18494)**

**Keith Brown:** Transport Scotland and Police Scotland have been investigating measures to improve clear up times following accidents on the trunk road network. 3D laser scanners are one proposal currently being considered, although no decision on whether to proceed has yet been taken.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government what factors are taken into account by the police when considering whether to reopen roads that have been closed because the sites of accidents have been designated as crime scenes.

**(S4W-18495)**

**Keith Brown:** The decision by Police Scotland to close a road is never taken lightly and only occurs when the collision itself has blocked the road, or where there is a need to protect those who might already have been injured and the emergency service staff who are dealing with the incident.

The impact on local communities and the wider economy is always at the forefront of investigators' minds, but there is a need to ensure that incidents are investigated thoroughly to ensure that families of those killed or seriously injured receive the support and information that they deserve and also to ensure that any safety issues are identified and addressed.

Roads are closed in such cases to gather evidence regarding an accident and the length of any closure can vary, depending on the nature and complexity of the incident. A road will be re-opened once the scene examination has been completed, the vehicles and any associated debris or spillage have been cleared from the roadway and the road has been deemed safe for use by the general public.

**David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the recent changes to FlyBe management and services, what steps it has taken to ensure the security of the network of air services operated from Inverness to, from and within the Highlands and Islands by FlyBe and its franchise partner and whether it will make a statement on the matter.

**(S4W-18518)**

**Keith Brown:** There has been no suggestion that air services to and from Inverness and within the Highlands and Islands will be impacted by Flybe's current turnaround programme. Services operated by Flybe's franchise partner, Loganair, are not impacted by the recent changes. We have no plans to make a statement on this matter.

**David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the withdrawal of the FlyBe services from Inverness to London Gatwick, whether it will consider an application for public service obligation protected service from Inverness to London Heathrow or Northolt and whether it will make a statement on the matter.

**(S4W-18519)**

**Keith Brown:** easyJet will be starting new services from Inverness to Gatwick when the current Flybe services cease. Given that there will be three services a day from Inverness to London, it is highly unlikely that the imposition of a Public Service Obligation on the route would be permissible. We have no plans to make a statement on this matter.

**Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government whether (a) 16-25, (b) senior, (c) disabled and (d) family discounted railcards bought in Scotland would remain valid across the UK rail network if Scotland became independent.

**(S4W-18537)**

**Keith Brown:** The Scottish Government, local authorities and transport operators will continue to work in partnership to deliver services of economic and social importance, including concessions and discounted fares. This Government has shown its commitment to affordable rail services by putting an end to above-inflation fares rises.

*The following questions received holding answers:*

S4W-18425

S4W-18439

S4W-18459

S4W-18460