

Parliamentary Debate on the Carers and Young Carers Strategy 28th October 2010



Summary Paper

This summary paper highlights some of the key points that were covered in the debate. Below are quotes from Shona Robison, Minister for Public Health who led the debate. Also included is a list of the MSPs who contributed and details of the issues they raised.

Carer Information Strategy Funding

'I stress that we regard the continuation of the funding—£5 million a year from April 2011—as a priority in the spending review. If we are successful, I will discuss with the national carers organisations and health boards the priority for use of those resources. Of course, local authorities will continue to have an important role in providing core funding to local carers services.'

'A number of members mentioned the carer information strategy moneys. As I said at the outset, that is a priority for the spending review. I recognise the importance of the CIS moneys for supporting carers centres and a number of other important initiatives to support carers in local settings. However, we should recognise that local authorities also support carers centres, and it is important that we make progress on that jointly, because I would not want one lot of public money to replace other public money that has been lost in the system. Those discussions will have to take place locally, but I get a sense that carers centres are recognised for the work that they do.'

Short Breaks

'The strategy builds on the £4 million that we allocated to enable local authorities to make progress in delivering our concordat commitment to provide an additional 10,000 weeks of respite care by 2011. Figures that were published in September showed that overall respite provision increased by nearly 9,000 weeks between 2007-08 and 2009-10, against a target of 6,000 weeks. That is good news, which shows that our investment in respite is delivering real progress.'

'In recognising the voluntary sector's hugely important role in supporting carers, I was pleased to be able to commit £1 million in new investment this year to support the implementation of the strategy, and subsequently to extend that funding to cover each of the five years of the strategy, making £5 million in total. In the current economic climate, that funding is meaningful and will deliver change for carers and young carers. We have awarded the funding to the national carers organisations to enable them to develop innovative, flexible and personalised short breaks for carers and young carers. With our approval, they propose to use it in two ways: to invite bids from stakeholder organisations with service development ideas that aim to increase the choice, availability and quality of short-break opportunities; and to help carers directly and quickly by giving them access to a fund that can help them to purchase a break of their choosing. The national carers organisations are working up the details and will publicise the scheme as soon as possible.'

Joint Budgets and Carer Participation in Planning

'Carers have a crucial role to play in our work around reshaping care for older people, and we are determined that they will not be further burdened by the shift from institutional care to care at home. Indeed, when local partnerships submit their local delivery plans under the reshaping care programme, they will have to demonstrate how the third sector—including carers organisations and carers themselves—will be involved. I am clear that carers should be around the table when the local plans are being developed. We are in discussion with COSLA about making significant resources available to be used in pooled budgets jointly across statutory bodies and involving the third sector. That presents a major opportunity to transform services locally, which can better support carers.'

'Ross Finnie talked again about delivery and accountability. I think that I reiterated in an intervention in his speech that pooled budgets create an opportunity for us to move forward significantly on issues on which there is local agreement between councils and health boards. There is an opportunity to move forward on the changes that need to be made in the interaction between health and social care services. Many of those changes will directly benefit carers, which is why it is important that carers should be around the table when decisions are being made. They should not be an afterthought; rather, they should have a voice at the top table when local plans are being developed.'

Budget Pressures and how these may effect carers

'We should note that there is a strong economic argument for supporting carers, as set out robustly in the strategy: with timely and appropriate support, carers can continue to care for longer and in much better health, diverting significant demands away from health and social care services. In the current economic climate, it is even more important that health and social services, as well as the third sector, make the best use of existing resources. There is a clear spend-to-save argument for supporting carers through earlier, preventive interventions'

'Mary Mulligan, Hugh O'Donnell, Cathy Peattie and Margaret Mitchell commented on resources. The coming pressures on Scottish budgets will not have escaped anyone. I wish that the situation were otherwise, but it is not. Those pressures will affect health board and council budgets, which will affect the pace of change that we can implement with strategies, whether that is the carers strategy or any other strategy. I wish that that were not so, but it is so.

However, I hope that what I have said reassures carers that we are taking practical steps forward through pooled budgets with a significant but yet to be determined resource behind them; the continuation, I hope, of CIS moneys; the respite commitment; delivering through the voluntary sector; and self-directed support, on which I say to Jackie Baillie that we will deliver legislation to move forward. All of those things are important in providing carers with tangible benefits. Such benefits will come from the carers strategy.'

SNP Manifesto Commitment to Annual Entitlement to Breaks from Caring

'I have been quite up front in saying to carer organisations that in the current economic climate, funding such an entitlement is extremely challenging. We would not want resources to be diverted from one set of carers to another, and the economic challenges that we face mean that there is a real danger of that happening. However, we would like to see that commitment being met in the longer term; it is just that it is very challenging in the current economic climate.'

Implementation of the Strategy

'As I said at the outset, we produced the strategy jointly with COSLA, whose members recognise the key contribution that they can make to delivering many of its action points and outcomes, whether through teachers identifying and supporting young carers, schools adopting more young carer-friendly policies and practices, or social workers offering assessment and support to carers. COSLA's involvement in the implementation and monitoring group will be key.

The NHS will also be represented on the group. When I met NHS board chairs last month, I highlighted the important contribution that NHS boards can make to delivering improvements for unpaid carers and young carers.

I referred earlier to the fact that the development of the strategy was a joint effort.

Members can be assured that its implementation and the delivery of the improved outcomes that it seeks to achieve will also very much be a joint effort.

I confirm to members that I am happy to report to Parliament on progress on both strategies. We can discuss further how often that should be, but I am happy to commit to that.'

The MSPs listed below contributed to the debate and raised the following issues with the minister:

Jackie Baillie MSP (Labour, Dumbarton)

- How the strategy will be implemented and monitored and how progress will be reported to parliament
- The continuation of Carer Information Strategy Funding
- The need for a national Carer Training Consortium and the future of NCO carer training funding
- Cuts to short breaks services at a local level and reduction in short breaks for children
- Tightening of eligibility criteria in relation to short breaks
- The SNP manifesto commitment to a minimum entitlement to short breaks
- Progress of the self-directed support bill and extending direct payments to carers
- Transition planning for older parent carers
- Need to protect funding for carer support, including carers centres

Mary Scanlon MSP (Conservative, Highlands and Islands)

- Transition planning from children's to adult's services
- Lack of advocacy services for carers
- Investment in short break services
- Kinship carers

Ross Finnie MSP (Liberal Democrat, West of Scotland)

- Accountability for delivery and effectiveness of CHPs
- Need to re-align resources
- Lack of reference to carers in Single Outcome Agreements
- Importance of short breaks and drift away from provision

Bob Doris MSP (SNP, Glasgow)

- Need for cross-party support to oppose UK cuts which could jeopardise carers
- Effect of welfare reform on carers
- Kinship carers

Cathy Jamieson (Labour, Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)

- Kinship carers
- Need to provide better support to young carers in families where there is drug or alcohol misuse

Mary Mulligan (Labour, Linlithgow)

- The important role of local carer organisations in supporting carers. Mary outlined the work of her local centre, West Lothian Carers Centre
- The challenges for local carer organisations in securing sustainable, long term funding
- Need for adequate and reliable funding for local carer organisations

Hugh O'Donnell (Liberal-Democrat, Central Scotland)

- Slow progress in supporting carers since 1999
- Variability of services and resources across Scotland
- Lack of respite for young carers
- Need for statutory obligation to ensure the strategy is implemented

Linda Fabiani (SNP, Central Scotland)

- Lack of adequate support for older carers looking after a son or daughter with a learning disability and the Older Families Charter

Cathy Peattie (Labour, Falkirk East)

- Need to support young carers
- Financial impact of caring
- Need to provide adequate funding for local carer organisations
- Economic impact of not supporting carers
- Concerns over the future of Carer Information Strategies funding

Jamie Stone (Liberal Democrat, Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross)

- Lack of emergency planning
- Particular difficulties for carers in rural areas, importance of projects such as Crossroads
- How the government will audit the outcomes of the strategy

Margaret Mitchell (Conservative, Central Scotland)

- Lack of statutory right for carers to access services
- Need for GPs to sign up for carer identification
- Need to extend carers annual health check to all carers

Karen Whitefield (Labour, Airdrie and Shotts)

- Concerns of the impact of the end of the Fairer Scotland Fund on young carer services
- Need for meaningful commitment and resources from partner agencies to implement the strategy
- Threats to the funding of local carers centres and an increase in demand for their services
- Kinship care