

LOTHIAN MEMBERS' UPDATE

Alison Johnstone MSP & Andy Wightman MSP

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This is a report to you, our Party colleagues, focusing on our recent work as MSPs. We've launched a new campaign to help improve care and support for families with premature babies, intervened to try to stop the sale of the Green Investment Bank, and called for fairer funding for GPs and more action on fuel poverty. We're also delighted to have become the first party at Holyrood to wholly endorse the TIE campaign for LGBTI inclusive education in Scotland.



Your Scottish Green Party MSPs for Lothian, Andy and Alison.

Supporting premature babies

In December, Alison – our Health spokesperson – led a Holyrood debate on extending maternity and paternity leave and helping to alleviate the expenses faced by parents of premature babies.

Research by the charity Bliss shows around 5,800 babies are born prematurely every year in Scotland, requiring specialist hospital care. This extended period of care can have a serious impact on the health, wellbeing and financial security of the families concerned.

At the moment, if a baby is born early the mother's maternity leave starts straight away and the end of that leave is brought forward. The law doesn't allow it to be extended. Women can lose weeks of bonding at home if their premature baby is kept in hospital.

Parents can face significant travel costs as they pay regular visits to see their child. And babies born prematurely are more likely to have additional health needs, so when mum

needs to go back to work, baby might not be ready for childcare.

A recent report by Bliss puts the average extra cost to families at £2,045. That's £218 a week being spent on things like travel, food and drink, parking charges, and childcare for older children. 79 per cent of the parents surveyed reported that their family finances were negatively affected by their child's stay in a neonatal care unit, with 1 in 11 struggling to meet rent or mortgage costs.

Parental leave is reserved to Westminster where the Maternity and Paternity Leave (Premature Birth) Bill will have a second reading in March. Alison's debate confirmed that the Minister for Employability and Training supports the principles of the bill, and we secured a commitment from another opposition party in Holyrood to write to the UK Government asking them to take account of the Scottish Parliament debate.

There are many things parents will worry about when their baby is admitted to neonatal care, whether they can afford to be there shouldn't be one of them.

Read more at: greens.scot/alison-johnstone-msp/blog/



Green Investment Bank

Andy and Alison have called on the Scotland Office to intervene in the potential sale of the Green Investment Bank to ensure the bank maintains its commitment to environmental causes and safeguards jobs in Edinburgh.

Reports of the Green Investment Bank being sold to the Australian investment bank, Macquarie, have prompted fears of strategic asset-stripping and profiteering. As we begin the transition to a zero carbon economy, the fate of the Green Investment Bank - which is a key player in supporting this - cannot be allowed to be held in the hands of irresponsible corporate profiteers who have already made investments in fracking and open cast coal mining throughout Asia, Australasia and Europe.

With public interest in financial accountability at an all-time high, it would be foolish for the Green Investment Bank to be purged of its successful ventures in financing key environmental projects throughout Scotland and the UK.

There is also a human element to this story which has not been touched upon. As a significant contributor to Edinburgh's financial services sector, the sale of the Green Investment Bank could lead to the loss of 55 jobs in the city.



Action on planning reform

In December, Andy and Alison contributed to a debate in the Scottish Parliament on the future of Edinburgh's World Heritage Site.

Following the debate, they received many emails from constituents concerned about the boom in short-term holiday lets in Edinburgh and the detrimental impacts this has on their local communities. Andy has raised this in Parliament and will host a roundtable to explore how we can tackle this

issue through regulation and reform of the planning system.

Alison and Andy have also continued to support campaigners opposing the Edinburgh Central Library India Buildings development. They were deeply disappointed at the Government's decision not to call the plans in, given the strength of public opinion.

Your Green MSPs will continue to work to improve the planning system, making the case for a more responsible approach towards preservation of the Old Town and protection of our World Heritage status.



Tackling obesity

At December's Health & Sport Committee, Alison questioned why - when Scotland has the worst weight outcomes of all UK nations - addressing obesity is not a higher national priority. Although preventable, it is costing the NHS hundreds of millions each year.

A report published in December reveals that 22 per cent of children in primary one are either at risk of obesity or at risk of being overweight. In Scotland's least deprived areas, 81 per cent of children were classified as being of healthy weight, compared to 73 per cent in the most deprived areas.

There has been a complete removal of funding from jogscotland and the investment of less than 2 per cent of the transport budget in walking and cycling, even though only 1.2 per cent of journeys in Scotland were made by bike last year, compared to a target of 10 per cent. Greens are calling for at least 10 per cent of the transport budget to be spent on active travel, matching calls from the Institute of Public Health Directors.

Alison will continue to push the Government to be as bold as possible on this as their current budget provisions are regrettably at odds with the need to invest in preventative health measures and affordable, non-polluting transport.

News in brief

Tools to tackle fuel poverty

Fuel poverty is a national disgrace. With over 800,000 households suffering, the Scottish Government failed to meet its target to end fuel poverty by the end of 2016. In November, Andy put forward an amendment proposing additional funding to eradicate fuel poverty, but SNP, Conservative and Labour MSPs voted it down.

Green budget negotiations over the last five years have helped deliver £77 million more for fuel poverty programmes, and Alison secured energy efficiency as a national investment priority. But thousands still find it impossible to meet their fuel bills and almost 50 per cent of Scottish homes fail basic quality standards. It's time to consider what more can be done to steward our housing wealth as a public asset into homes that are warm, watertight and fit for the future.

Fairer funding for GP practices

In January, Alison wrote to Health Secretary Shona Robison to urge the Government to better target GP practice spending in the most deprived areas and for a robust approach to tackling health inequalities.

GPs in the most deprived areas of Scotland are not adequately resourced, receiving just £3.79 more per patient than those in the least deprived. We need the Government to do more to help improve access to general practice in those areas, where GPs have longer lists and patients have more complex health needs and a lower 'healthy life expectancy'. Fairer funding would also allow GPs to have longer consultations with patients, as the results of a recent BMA survey call for.

Young Carer's Allowance

In December, we published polling showing 82.8 per cent of Scots support the introduction of a Young Carer's Allowance, a Scottish Green Party manifesto commitment.

It is estimated there are 800,000 carers in Scotland – up to 100,000 of them under the age of 18 – providing care to one or more people. Young carers are often in dire financial situations as a result of



their commitment to care for relatives. For example, any income they might have through the Education Maintenance Allowance may be cut if they need to miss school due to their caring responsibilities.

Providing financial support for young carers is a clear priority for us and we will continue to push the Scottish Government to take bolder steps to tackle poverty and reduce inequality in our communities.

Bikes for Refugees



Andy and Alison are delighted to support the Bikes for Refugees project which provides bicycles and basic bike maintenance training to refugees. The charity is keen to expand its operations by opening a new workshop in Edinburgh – if you know of any premises, please contact Bikes for Refugees via facebook.com/BikesforRefugeesScotland/

Towards disability equality

In December, Alison welcomed the Government's disability delivery plan, "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People", which lays out an ambitious approach to achieving disability equality.

After years of slow but steady progress, the move towards equality for disabled people has gone into reverse in the past few years. This is in particular as a result of disability benefit cuts, criticised by the United Nations as 'grave and systematic violations' of disabled people's human rights.

With non-disabled people being almost twice as likely as disabled people to be in work (a figure that has barely changed in more than a decade), the Government's aim to halve the disability employment gap is welcome and could not be more urgently needed.

Parliamentary Business

Recently in Parliament, Alison and Andy have lodged motions to:

Highlight the stress and insecurity faced by tenant farmers in the Lothian region and across Scotland who are facing eviction, and note calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that mediation is provided and to take action to stop all pending evictions.

Celebrate Holyrood becoming the first parliament in the world to be awarded triple certification to the Carbon Trust Standard in recognition of achievements in reducing carbon, waste and water use.

Congratulate 14-year-old Ruairi Logan, an S3 student at the City of Edinburgh Music School at Broughton High School in Edinburgh, on becoming the Division 1 boys champion at the National Wheelchair Tennis Championship.

Congratulate everyone who took part in the Marine Conservation Society's Great British Beach Clean at Cramond beach on their efforts to improve Scotland's coastline.

Welcome the publication of the Marie Curie report, Dying to Care, calling for a new approach to make sure that people with a terminal illness and their carers get the social care support that they need to allow them to make the most of the time that they have left.

Pay tribute to Anna Signeul for twelve years of dedicated service to Scottish football, as national coach of the Scotland women's football team.

Welcome Edinburgh Council's approval of the City Centre West to East Cycle Link scheme (CCWEL) which will provide a transport network in the area that is safe for cyclists and pedestrians.

Commend the work of volunteers and regret the recent closure of the SafeZone Edinburgh project which did fantastic work in offering minor first aid, assisting those suffering from intoxication, and helping victims of domestic or sexual abuse, people with mental health issues or anyone finding themselves vulnerable.

Commend the grassroots work of The Causey Development Trust to transform a neglected and car dominated cityscape into a vibrant, people-friendly space celebrating the history and spirit of the southside of Edinburgh.

View all motions online at parliament.scot

Andy's Committees and Cross-Party Groups

Andy is the Scottish Green Party's spokesperson on Housing and Land Reform. In Holyrood he sits on the Economy, Jobs & Fair Work Committee and the Local Government & Communities Committee.

Andy is a member of the following Cross-Party Groups:

- Credit Unions
- Housing (Convener)
- Industrial Communities
- Nuclear Disarmament
- Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency
- Russia (Convener)
- Scottish Showmen's Guild (Deputy Convener)
- Towns and Town Centres
- Women in Enterprise

Contact Andy on 0131 348 6368 or andy.wightman.msp@parliament.scot



Alison's Committees and Cross-Party Groups

Alison is the Scottish Green Party's spokesperson on Health & Sport, Social Security and Children & Young People. In Holyrood she sits on the Social Security Committee and the Health & Sport Committee, as well as on the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

Alison is a member of the following Cross-Party Groups:

- Animal Welfare (Deputy Convener)
- Children and Young People (Deputy Convener)
- Construction (Deputy Convener)
- Deafness
- Health Inequalities
- Improving Scotland's Health: 2021 and beyond
- Learning Disability
- Sport (Co-Convener)
- Walking, Cycling & Buses

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