

## **Holyrood Briefing – June 2008**

### **Housing Needs Not Met**

In a recent debate on housing in the Scottish Parliament, I urged that progress be made by Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) in taking forward secondary stage transfer - that is allowing tenants the choice to have their homes transferred to smaller community based housing associations.

Housing remains a difficult issue for many people - whether it is because of the cost of buying a home, the difficulties of securing a mortgage, the impact of the credit crunch on people's ability to keep their homes, the need for high quality rented houses in safe communities or the dangers of homelessness. It is essential that the government recognises the importance of tackling all of these issues, not simply focussing on house building in isolation.

I went on to criticise the Scottish Government for its lack of a housing strategy, in particular its failure to name a target for social rented and affordable housing. I contrasted that with the record of the previous Executive which made funding available for 21,000 such homes.

My concerns, as I explained, are also that the Scottish Government has not given sufficient thought to community regeneration nor to meeting the housing needs of the elderly and people with disabilities. The ending of guaranteed funding to meet the needs of people in these circumstances is a cause for grave concern.

The Scottish Government has next to nothing to say about how it will help people facing repossession nor of councils with huge housing debts.

### **Transport Needs of Disabled**

I am concerned that the Scottish Government proposes to abolish the Mobility and Access Committee which gives advice on transport issues from the point of view of people with disabilities.

The Scottish Government proposes to absorb the Committee's functions within a larger body called Passenger View Scotland on which disability groups will have 3 representatives out of 15.

There seems to be an intention to scrap as many organisations and agencies as possible in the name of efficiency. I am in favour of efficiency in government but not at the expense of ignoring the views of the people affected.

If the proposal goes through, then I will work to ensure that the new arrangements meet the needs of people with disabilities.

### **Play Schemes Saved**

I was delighted to hear that Glasgow City Council has decided not to proceed with its proposals to scrap the summer play schemes for young people in special schools.

These play schemes are vital for improving the quality of life for such young people - and provide critical support to working parents.

In particular, I would like to express my admiration for the parents who campaigned to keep this facility and my thanks to Councillor Alistair Watson who took up the issue so effectively on their behalf.

**Policing Brings Results**

The annual report of Strathclyde Police for the South of Glasgow points to a 9.9% fall in crime in 2007/08 compared with a 5 year average. In actual terms, there were 6587 fewer recorded crimes last year compared to the 5 year average.

The report, however, is not complacent and expresses concern in particular with persistent high levels of anti-social behaviour.

I am keen to support the efforts of the police and to ensure that there are enough police on the beat. The Scottish Government has promised an extra 1,000 police and I shall be keeping track on ensuring that Glasgow receives its fair share of extra policing. This is important because all too often people feel that statistics do not reflect their direct experience of crime - and it is still the case that victims of anti-social behaviour feel their circumstances are not being addressed.

**Johann Lamont Speaks out**

Much is made of the problem of health inequalities in Scotland but, as I heard at a briefing by NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, the real challenge facing us all is the inequalities within Scotland - the West of Scotland is overwhelmingly more ill and dies younger than the rest of Scotland - and also the variation in health across Glasgow.

Pollok constituency is somewhere in the middle of Glasgow constituencies across a range of measures which includes life expectancy, heart disease, smoking and drug and alcohol abuse.

There have been significant improvements in tackling heart disease for example; however, a great deal more remains to be done to make our citizens healthier and more active.

Detailed profiles of the local areas across my constituency are available if anyone would be interested in more information.

These figures demand that Glasgow's share of health spending must increase and I shall continue to press for this.

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From time, I like to practise what I preach so, in line with the strong 'keep active' messages sent out by health professionals, I found myself once again participating in the Women's 10k at Bellahouston Park.

It was a great day with a fabulous atmosphere - and had the added bonus of making me feel ever so virtuous.

Congratulations to all those who made sure the event was such a success.

### **Surgeries**

**Friday 13<sup>th</sup> June** – 2.00pm – Labour Rooms, 996 Mossspark Drive, Cardonald

**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> June** – 10.00am – The Wedge, 1066 Barrhead Road, Pollok

**Friday 20<sup>th</sup> June** – 2.00pm – The Wedge, 1066 Barrhead Road, Pollok

**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> June** – 10.00am – Labour Rooms, 996 Mossspark Drive, Cardonald

**Website :** <http://www.johann.org.uk>