

## Alex condemns Council's poor special needs provision



*Left: Alex speaking recently at a Scottish Society for Autism reception. (© Brian Fischbacher - all rights reserved)*

Alex has condemned North Lanarkshire Council's treatment of children with special needs, arguing that many children – particularly those with autism or Asperger's syndrome – are suffering because the local education department does not know how to deal with them. Alex has obtained assurances from First Minister Alex Salmond that he would look in to the matter and offer any assistance that he could. Speaking in parliament Alex said:

"I regret to say that in the North Lanarkshire area the needs of a significant number of children, particularly those with autism or Asperger's syndrome, are not being dealt with properly. Indeed, the prevailing consideration appears to be cost rather than those children's needs."

Alex has also hit out at the Council's lack of action over this issue:

"I have received a number of complaints from parents who are treated very badly by the education department. There seems to be a 'shut up and do what you're told' attitude, which is not helpful, and only leads to the children concerned losing out on a decent education.

"We do not want to go down the legal route, but I believe that North Lanarkshire Council is failing to meet its obligations under the 2004 Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act.

Mr Neil welcomed a commitment from Alex Salmond that he would investigate the matter and respond in due course.



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## Interim report derides "flawed and biased" A&E closure plans

Alex has praised the interim report by the Independent Scrutiny Panel, set up by Health Secretary Nicola Sturgeon to examine why the A&E units at Monklands and Ayr were to be shut. It is heavily critical of both NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Ayrshire & Arran, concluding that they failed to make the case for closing the units. It also rubbished their claims that there would not be enough consultants to keep them open, as there is actually a going to be a surplus in Scotland.

Alex said "This casts the health boards – and former health minister Andy Kerr, who ordered the closures – in a very bad light. I find it intolerable that they deliberately presented evidence in a biased manner to force through the closures. This is why we were right to call in an independent scrutiny panel to look at these controversial proposals again."

"This is a damning indictment of the decision-making procedures within these NHS boards, and again highlights the need for giving people more say in how their health boards are run. The independent scrutiny panel will be holding public meetings in Ayrshire and Lanarkshire to hear views of local residents, and I expect they will be left in no doubt as to the level of public concern at these decisions."

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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## **Abolishing Right to Buy is affordable homes solution**

Alex has welcomed the Scottish Government's decision to end the right to buy for new properties, and a commitment to build 35,000 new homes a year. With figures showing that thousands of people remain on housing waiting lists across Central Scotland, combined with a steady decline in the number of council and housing association homes, swift action is needed to reverse this trend. A long-time campaigner on the issue of affordable housing, Alex said:

*"Housing is consistently one of the issues that constituents come to me about most. If we are serious about achieving sustainable growth, labour mobility and improved living standards, people must have an affordable place to live. It must also be tackled now – house prices continue to soar across Central Scotland."*

*"Local authorities have a vital role to meeting demand for social housing, but there is little incentive for them to build new houses at the moment. Allowing them to keep hold of all of their future housing stock will help ensure that they contribute to our aim of 35,000 new homes in Scotland a year – a target that is both achievable and necessary."*

### **McMahon "complacent" over flood school**

Alex has accused Michael McMahon of complacency over plans to build Uddingston Grammar School on a flood-plain. "Mr McMahon has accused me of scaremongering over this issue, but if he'd listened to the objections of local residents and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, he'd realise why the latest planning application has been rejected."

## **NHS Lanarkshire to reveal details of PFI**

NHS Lanarkshire has agreed to reveal full details of all Private Finance Initiative contracts it has entered into with private companies, in response to pressure from Alex.

After a two year fight, NHS Lothian was recently forced to publish details of all agreements it has made with private company Consort, after the Information Commissioner Kevin Dunion ruled they had no legitimate reason to withhold the information. In light of this, Alex wrote to NHS Lanarkshire demanding that they make their contracts publicly available, which they have since agreed to do. Alex commented;

"I am delighted that Kevin Dunion has ruled in favour of truth and transparency. NHS Lothian obviously did not want the public to know what their contracts cost – but it is public money that is being spent, and we as taxpayers have a right to know how it is being used."

"I am particularly interested to know what the contracts relating to Hairmyres and Wishaw cost. It is long-established that these credit-card style repayments do not offer the taxpayer value for money. NHS Lanarkshire were within a whisker of downgrading the Monklands A&E because of a lack of resources, and South Nimmo Practice in Airdrie faces closure, because we are told there is no money to keep it open. With money clearly tight, it will be interesting to see if the PFI/PPP contracts used by NHS Lanarkshire are part of the solution or, as I suspect, part of the problem."

## **Alex calls for Dog shock collar ban**



Alex has signed a parliamentary motion calling on the government to ban the inhumane electric dog training collars. He said "The use of such cruel means to train animals has no place in civilised society. Dogs cannot associate the electric shock with their master's command, so it is very distressing for them." Alex is pictured above being electrocuted by Natalie Smart and Penny Johnson of the Scottish SPCA, who are campaigning hard for an outright ban in Scotland. He was not smiling so much after he had felt the shock!