

ALEX'S STANDARD

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The Scottish
Parliament

Scottish Parliamentary Newsletter from Alex Neil MSP – Issue 3/10 – February 2010



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ALEX ATTACKS UK ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE PLANS

PLANS TO END RIGHT TO BUY

The Scottish Government has laid plans before the Scottish Parliament to abolish right to buy for new Housing Association and council tenants and for newly built houses.

The move to scrap right to buy is contained in the new Housing Bill which will also introduce an independent Scottish Housing Regulator.

Alex Neil, the Housing Minister said: *"The Housing Bill is a major piece of legislation that will increase the supply of affordable housing and improve the quality of housing in all sectors.*

"Since right to buy was introduced, more than 500,000 council houses have been sold at a discount. This has discouraged many local authorities to build homes. We now have a range of schemes such as Shared Equity to help people get on the home owning ladder, making right to buy obsolete."



Energy Aware: Alex met Jean Speirs and Douglas Sinton from the Pensions Service at a EAGA Energy Awareness event in Motherwell.

Alex Neil MSP has attacked the UK Government for their suggestion that Attendance Allowance could be scrapped in order to fund a reform of social care in England & Wales, which could leave thousands of disabled pensioners in poverty across Lanarkshire.

Analysis from the Institute for Social and Economic Research predicts that the removal of Attendance Allowance would leave 40% of current recipients in below the poverty line. Attendance Allowance is a non means-tested benefit paid to elderly disabled people.

Alex led a debate in Parliament on the issue, and a motion condemning the UK Government's plan was passed. Alex said:

"Currently there are 2640 people in Airdrie and Shotts receiving Attendance Allowance leaving a potential 1056 pensioners in Airdrie to fall into poverty if the benefit is scrapped. The potential impact of withdrawing Attendance Allowance, Carers Allowance and Disability Living Allowance is frightening.

"Attendance Allowance is an anti-poverty measure, recognising that people who are elderly and disabled face additional costs which can put them and their families under significant financial pressures.

"It is astounding that the UK Government has not consulted in Scotland on these plans despite tens of thousands of pensioners facing poverty here as a result of their plans."

New Beginning: Alex had the honour of officially opening the new Uddingston Grammar School building with head teacher Mr John McKay.

The costs of this publication have been met out of parliamentary resources

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ALEX VISITS FALKIRK

Alex Neil MSP recently paid a visit to the popular Probus Club in Falkirk as their guest speaker.

Alex spoke about the world economy, and how Scotland and the UK are positioned globally. He highlighted the £178 billion UK budget deficit and suggested that the blackhole could be halved in the next four years if the economy improves by 3% annually.

Alex said:

"I always enjoy my visit to Falkirk Probus and it was great to see so many folk in spite of the horrible weather."

SURGERY DATES

Friday 12th February:

**Shotts Community Education Centre
10-11am**

**Plains Community Centre
11.30-12.30am**

**Chapelhall Snr Citizens Centre
1-2pm**

**Caldercruix Community Centre
2.30-3.30pm**

Friday 26th February:

**Airdrie Arts Centre
2-4pm**

Friday 5th March:

**Viewpark Community Ed. Centre
10-11am**

**Uddingston Community Centre
12-1pm**

Another Big Cheque: Alex helps Ray Mitchell MBE present another £500 cheque, this time to Angela Valenti the Deputy Manager at PHEW in Motherwell. Alex later toured PHEW and was highly impressed by the service provided for respite care.

ENERGY HELP EXTENDED

Following a review of the Energy Assistance Package (EAP) Alex, as Housing and Communities Minister, recently extended the eligibility for help under the scheme.

The EAP is now available to all households with children under the age of 16 who also receive qualifying benefits.

Alex has also asked the Fuel Poverty Forum to consider whether the EAP could be extended to people with cancer and other chronic illnesses who are in fuel poverty.

Alex said: *"The extension to the Energy Assistance Package will allow 10,000 large families across Scotland to get help to save around £900 a year on fuel bills."*

"I would again urge people to see if they are eligible for help under the scheme by dialling the free phone number 0800 512 012."



Citizens advice: Alex recently visited Airdrie Citizens Advice Bureau to hear about their concerns for local debt levels.

www.alexneilmsp.net