

Increasing the number of new mothers in Scotland who breastfeed

5 August 2017

Scottish Labour has today unveiled proposals to include breastfeeding equipment in Scotland's new baby box.



Breastfeeding rates are lower in more deprived areas and among younger mothers. Across Scotland, almost half of babies born in 2015/16 were being breastfed at their health visitor first visit, at around ten days of age. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health this week said social stigma is a major barrier to breastfeeding, and more must be done to support women to continue breastfeeding beyond the first few weeks.

Inequalities spokesperson Monica Lennon has now written to SNP ministers to call for a pilot scheme to try and increase the number of new mothers in Scotland who breastfeed.

She has suggested the baby box could also include additional items, such as a breast pump, nipple shields and cream and a higher quantity of nursing pads, and other products that women may need to support them to breastfeed.

Consideration should also be given to assisting women to have access to nursing bras and supporting them to achieve a healthy diet.



Labour's proposal is part of the party's summer campaign, For The Many, which this week is focused on tackling inequality. You can read more about the campaign by clicking on the image below:



The full text of Monica Lennon's letter is as follows:

To Mark McDonald MSP and Aileen Campbell MSP

Minister for Early Years and Childcare/Minister for Public Health and Sport

Dear Mark and Aileen,

I am writing, ahead of World Breastfeeding Week which begins on the 1 August, to raise some ideas about how we can better support new mums in Scotland to breastfeed.

As you know, I have highlighted this issue several times in the Scottish Parliament and through parliamentary questions. I still believe that there is more that can be done to support and encourage breastfeeding in Scotland. Whilst welcome progress has been made over the last decade, rates of breastfeeding in Scotland at the 6 – 8 week review remain relatively low. The World Health Organisation recommends that babies should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of their life, but, as you will know, only 28.2 per cent of babies in Scotland are still being exclusively breastfed at 6 – 8 weeks, according to ISD statistics. There is also wide variation across health boards, as well as depending on the age of the mother and areas of deprivation – with younger mothers and those from more deprived areas the least likely to breastfeed their children.

Breastfeeding may be natural, but it is not always easy. This is why I am writing to ask the Scottish Government to go further to help change the culture and conversation around breastfeeding so that individual women have the right support that is tailored for them. The evidence shows that breastfeeding has a positive impact on long-term health outcomes. It therefore makes sense that the Scottish Government should be doing all it can to promote awareness of these benefits, whilst also providing practical support to assist women in their choices.

The baby box, due to be provided to every new mum in Scotland from August 2017, presents a unique opportunity to improve breastfeeding support. This would be consistent with the stated intention of the baby box – to provide every child in Scotland with the best possible start in life.

This is why it has been my preference that aids to support breastfeeding are included in the baby box – such as nipple cream, nursing pads and breast pumps. In addition to signposting women to information about the benefits of breastfeeding, this would be an important way of changing the culture and conversation around breastfeeding in Scotland and could encourage more women to take it up. I know from our previous correspondence that nursing pads will be included in the baby box, which is very welcome.

I remain concerned, however, that women experiencing poverty or low-incomes and other economic, social or health barriers, are not getting enough targeted support.

Take Lanarkshire as an example. At the 6 – 8 week review in Lanarkshire in 2015/16 only 17.6 per cent of babies were being exclusively breastfed and just 24.2 per cent were receiving a mixture of breastmilk and formula. This is the second lowest rate in Scotland, second only to NHS Ayrshire and Arran which had respective rates of 16.8 per cent (exclusive) and 24.1 per cent

(mixture of breast and formula milk). These are some excellent projects being led by both NHS Lanarkshire and volunteers engaged in peer support but clearly more must be done.

So, I am proposing that the Scottish Government run a pilot scheme of including direct aids to support breastfeeding in the universal baby box. This could include additional items, such as a quality breast pump, feeding bags, nipple shields and a higher quantity of nursing pads, creams and other products that women may need. Consideration should also be given to assisting women with access to nursing bras and supporting them to achieve a healthy diet. Inclusion of breastfeeding aids in the baby box would be a very practical resource, in addition to existing advisory services.

I would love the baby box to have a greater focus on breastfeeding nationally and I am pleased that the Scottish Government will be keeping the scheme under review. It is in this spirit that I hope that you will consider implementing a targeted pilot scheme in Lanarkshire to assess the impact on breastfeeding rates over a set period of time.

I very much hope that you take this proposal on board and I would welcome the opportunity to have a meeting to discuss this matter further.

I look forward to hearing from you. Given the high level of public interest in these issues, I will also be making a copy of this letter publicly available.

Yours sincerely,

Monica Lennon

MSP for Central Scotland and Scottish Labour inequalities spokesperson

Tackling Scotland's housing crisis

6 August 2017

Home is at the heart of all of our lives.

It's the foundation on which we raise our families, the bedrock of our dreams and aspirations. But for too many people, the housing pressures they face are getting worse, not better.

There is a housing crisis in Scotland. With overcrowding and a lack of suitable accommodation for families and people with disabilities, Scotland not only needs more homes, but more of the right homes.

For Labour, housing is a social justice issue – and always has been

throughout our proud history.



This week, we revealed how the SNP government is underestimating social housing demand in Scotland by around 30 per cent. While the Scottish Government estimates that there are 142,500 households on council waiting lists, this does not include people in the six local authorities which have transferred their stock to housing associations: Glasgow; Argyll and Bute; Dumfries and Galloway; Western Isles; Scottish Borders and Inverclyde.

Our analysis shows the real figure is closer to 200,000.

It doesn't have to be like this. . Shelter Scotland has identified that 60,000 affordable homes need to be built by the end of this Parliament to address the housing shortage, a figure Scottish Labour committed to meet.



Labour wants to see a national house building strategy which sets out the numbers of houses to be built in each area and allows for proper planning and delivery. This strategy also means planning local jobs and apprenticeships around the programme.

We need to ensure there is the capacity, the available land and the resources to be able to deliver the houses for social rent that are required. A national house building strategy with local delivery plans for every local council area of Scotland would do just that.

Today we are demanding the SNP Government introduces tougher targets to make private rented homes more energy efficient.

Soaring energy costs and poorly insulated homes have pushed a third of those living in the private rented sector into fuel poverty.

We are setting an ambitious target to ensure that all private sector properties reach an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of at least C by 2025.

This would help to reduce bills for families living in rented homes, and help to tackle climate change.

As it stands, the SNP Government proposals would currently only require private sector properties to reach an EPC rating of at least D.

Throughout this week, our summer campaign will focus on how Scottish Labour would make Scotland a greener country. Read more about our campaign, For The Many, by clicking the image below:



We honour Keir Hardie by keeping alive his ideas and promoting his work

In August 1892 – 125 years ago today – Keir Hardie took his seat in the UK Parliament.



The MP for West Ham South had defeated the Conservatives in an election and would now be sitting at the very heart of British democracy. In his 35 years, he had come a long way from the two-roomed cottage he was born in in Newhouse, North Lanarkshire.

Just four years before he entered parliament, at a public meeting in Glasgow in 1888, the Scottish Labour Party was founded – with Keir appointed the party's first secretary.

In his election address in the Mid-Lanark by-election of that year, he said: *"I ask you therefore to return to Parliament a man of yourselves who being poor can feel for the poor, and whose whole interest lies in the direction of securing for you a better and a happier lot."*



Women's rights... healthy homes... work for the unemployed... opportunity for all... the values that Keir Hardie stood for all are still at the heart of our movement today.



When Keir took his seat in parliament in 1892 he wore the clothes of a working man, rather than the top hat and frock coat that was expected of an MP. Earlier this year, our new MP for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill – Hugh Gaffney – continued in that fine tradition by wearing his old work shirt on his first day in the Commons.



Hugh is the treasurer of the Keir Hardie Society. Keir dedicated his whole life to the Labour cause, which is why we honour him today by keeping alive his ideas and promoting his work.

By remembering what he achieved in the past, we remind ourselves what we seek to achieve in the future – a Scotland and UK that works for the many, not the few.

Unlike the Tories and the SNP, our party is not funded by big business and lottery winners. We rely on individual donations from our members and supporters, to fund our campaigns and to help rebuild our party from the grassroots up.



To celebrate this 125th anniversary, Scottish Labour and the Keir Hardie Society are offering an opportunity to purchase a commemorative pin badge gift box, which includes three special edition pin badges, in return for a donation of £12 or more. All donations will help us keep the spirit and values of Keir Hardie alive in towns and cities throughout Scotland.

Click the image below to donate:



Join the Keir Hardie Club by clicking here:



Labour created the welfare state and will always fight to protect it

By Alex Rowley MSP, Scottish Labour deputy leader



WHEN the recent oil price crash hit the north-east, thousands of Scots were suddenly left without work.

The number of unemployment benefit claimants soared in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, with many without a job for the first time in their lives. This is why we have a welfare state, which – like the NHS – is there for all of us in our time of need.

Nobody knows what is around the corner, and our benefits system provides security and dignity should we fall on hard times.

Labour created the welfare state and will always fight to protect it.

But poverty in Scotland is rising due to SNP and Tory attempts to balance the books on the backs of the poorest, slashing funding to public services and to social security payments.

By the end of this decade up to £1 billion will have been cut from Holyrood's budget by the Tories at Westminster.

However, the SNP has the power to stop the cuts – yet has chosen to meekly pass austerity on to families here in Scotland. In fact, Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon have cut £1.5 billion from local services since 2011, including £170 million this year alone.

All this does is push more people into poverty, and increase the reliance on our welfare state.

In the coming years, many existing benefits are being merged into Universal Credit, which is supposed to make access to social security payments less complicated. It has been rolled out in parts of Scotland and is due to be introduced in full across the country by the end of 2018 – starting this October.

But there is a six-week waiting period for payments at the start of the process, and that risks pushing even more people into poverty.

Last week, I wrote to the Tory minister in charge of the system, David Gauke, to demand the roll-out of Universal Credit is halted.

The Tories need to listen to the warnings from Citizens Advice Scotland, which found that in areas where the new Universal Credit has been introduced, there has been a 15 per cent rise in rent arrears issues.

There is also a growing problem with the benefits cap, which the Tories have reduced to £20,000-per-household.

Labour tried to persuade them to exempt lone parents, so that we don't push more children into poverty by punishing them for their parents' circumstances. The Tories ignored us.

As a result, in Aberdeen North, 46 per cent of 'capped' households are single parents, rising to 49 per cent in Aberdeen South, 59 per cent in Moray, 72 per cent in Banff and Buchan and 76 per cent in Gordon.

The Tory MPs who now represent many of these areas should be knocking on Theresa May's door to force a rethink.

Much of our social security system rightly remains reserved to Westminster, ensuring that we can pool and share resources across the UK.

But the Scottish Parliament does now have the ability to make different decisions to the Tories.

For example, we could use Holyrood's social security powers to end cruel and inhumane assessments for the tens of thousands of disabled people who receive Disability Living Allowance as they move to new Personal Independence Payments (PIP).

Unfortunately, the SNP decided last year to ask the Tory Government to retain responsibility for certain benefits in Scotland until 2020.

That decision to delay the powers means that 130,000 Scots will be assessed under the current system. It is a dereliction of duty from the SNP and shows that Nicola Sturgeon is not serious when she promises to take a different approach to the Tories.

Similarly, SNP claims that Holyrood cannot provide assistance to the women

born in the 1950s who have had their state pension age changed without fair notification have been exposed as false.

The Department for Work and Pensions has confirmed that Scottish ministers have the power to introduce 'discretionary payments', should they wish.

With the powers of the Scottish Parliament we can make different, fairer choices to those of a Tory government. That's what Labour would do.

And at the next General Election we can get rid of the Conservatives and elect a government that works for the many, not the few, across the entire United Kingdom.

This article originally appeared in the Press and Journal on Friday, August 4, 2017.



SNP false claims over WASPI exposed

Over 2.5 million women born in the 1950s have had their state pension age changed without fair notification, leaving many in poverty. Scottish Labour believes these women deserve both recognition for the injustice they have suffered, and compensation for their losses. Around 253,000 Scottish women have been affected by this change, as highlighted by the Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign.

In February this year, Jeane Freeman, the SNP social security minister, told the Scottish Parliament that the Scottish Government could not provide assistance to WASPI women. The image below is what Ms Freeman said in the chamber:

To Jackie Baillie, I say that I am not prepared to let the Tory Government off the hook but, even if I was, section 28 of the Scotland Act 2016, on exceptions to reserved areas, says that top-up does not include pensions assistance or assistance

However, a Freedom of Information request to the Department for Work and Pensions reveals this to be false. The image below is from a letter to Jeane Freeman from the UK Government Pensions Minister.

The substantial new welfare powers that the Scottish Parliament has provides you with options to support people affected by changes to the State Pension, including supporting women affected by increases in State Pension age, should you so wish. Of course, this is entirely a matter for the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to decide.

One such option, however, could be for you to legislate to introduce new discretionary payments using section 26 the Scotland Act 2016 (exception 7 to Section F1 of Schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998). This power was introduced to give you the widest possible scope to help meet the short-term needs of people in Scotland, which could include those who are affected by changes to the State Pension. In respect of which, there is no prescribed definition of 'short-term', and this will be substantially for the Scottish Parliament to determine.

Ahead of the 2016 Holyrood election, Labour campaigned to use the social security powers of the Scottish Parliament to support some of the WASPI women

LABOUR WILL USE THE POWERS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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Scottish Labour

Now, our economy spokesperson Jackie Baillie MSP has written to Jeane Freeman asking for her to apologise and act to help the WASPI Women. The contents of the letter are below.

Dear Jeane,

Discretionary payments under Section 26 of the Scotland Act

I am writing following the publication of the Freedom of Information requests which prove that the Scottish Government has the powers to provide financial assistance to the WASPI women.

As you will be aware, thousands of women born in the 1950s have been left facing real financial difficulty because of the lack of notice given by the Tory government about changes to the state pension.

Ahead of the 2016 Holyrood election Labour campaigned to use the social security powers of the Scottish Parliament to support some of the WASPI women who were losing out because of the Tories.

You have repeatedly stated, including to parliament in February, that the provisions in the Scotland Act do not allow for assistance for the WASPI women.

It has now been proven beyond doubt that this is simply not the case. I am writing to you today urging you to apologise for misleading the Scottish Parliament and, more importantly, the WASPI women over the powers of the Scottish Government in this area.

The new powers delivered by the 2016 Scotland Act should be an opportunity to deliver radical policies in Scotland – instead of simply pursuing another grievance agenda with the UK government. You have the power to act. The question therefore, is not whether you can, but whether you will?

A public apology on this will be an important statement that this government will finally focus on embracing the new powers rather than misrepresenting them.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Baillie MSP