



Parliamentary Patter

Parliamentary Report
John Mason MSP

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Parliamentary Patter is published by John Mason MSP to give members of the community a window into his parliamentary and constituency work. This newsletter is distributed monthly to those who have asked for an opportunity to read what their Member of the Scottish Parliament does and thinks.

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Local MSP comments on same-sex marriage plans

SNP Member of the Scottish Parliament, John Mason, has commented on the Scottish Government's announcement that it has decided to bring forward legislation to introduce same sex marriage. The Shettleston MSP, who last year tabled a parliamentary motion on the issue, has said that questions still remain over the commitment to protect religious freedom.

John said: "Crucially, the Government has said that Churches and clergy will not be forced to conduct same sex marriages. That is right and proper and I welcome that reassurance - even before any draft legislation is introduced to Parliament. However, there is now an acceptance that the Scottish Parliament does not have the power to guarantee that protection of religious freedom.

"My vision for society is a pluralistic one where there is respect for all minorities – that has to include both gay minorities and religious minorities.

"The Cabinet has made clear its plans. First and foremost, the Scottish Government must get the UK Equality Act amended to protect churches. They have given this assurance and I welcome that.

"We are part way through a long process for this issue and we still have to see the actual wording of the draft Bill. That itself will be subject to further consultation and debate.

"The Scottish Government has decided to legislate and that is a matter for Ministers. However, it is not really a party political issue, as we know the leaders of the other four parties at Holyrood all support it while minorities in their parties disagree.

"Finally, I welcome the comment that this is a conscience matter and so there should be a free vote for all Members of the Scottish Parliament of all parties - including government ministers."

John celebrates 1 year office anniversary

Local MSP for the East End, John Mason, is today celebrating the one year anniversary from the opening of his shop-front Constituency Office in Parkhead. Since opening his Parkhead office, Mr Mason and his team of staff have dealt with 1,553 constituency cases.



The SNP MSP, who pledged to open a shop front Constituency Office if elected, said he saw his Parkhead Cross office as part of his "open, accessible and available" agenda. During his two years as the Member of the Westminster Parliament for Glasgow East, John Mason also opened a highly visible shop front office on Shettleston Road, where he and his team of staff dealt with over 2,000 constituency cases in just two years.

In campaigning to win the city's East End seat at Holyrood last year, John Mason pointed out that local Labour politicians often stand for election, and then quickly disappear into a business centre where no-one can see them or get assistance with constituency cases.

Speaking from his Parkhead base, the SNP's John Mason, said: "I am delighted that we now have an established Constituency Office in the East End, which local residents can easily approach for advice and assistance. Since being elected last year, we have literally been working non-stop with casework, which is good in one sense, because it means people are keeping in contact with their MSP. What is a little more disappointing, however, is the number of problems people experience on a daily basis. These can range from issues like missed refuse collections, to major issues like benefits being stopped or people being made homeless.

"Housing continues to be the main problem that constituents bring to my attention. Just recently I was visiting a constituent at home who is wheelchair bound but is living in a third floor flat – that's just wrong and is a typical example as to why we need continued investment in socially rented housing.

"My fully-staffed Constituency Office is open Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm, and open until 7pm on a Friday for constituents who wish to attend my evening surgery.

"During last year's election, I pledged to be open, accessible and available to my constituents. Every constituent can phone me at the office or on my mobile and anyone can visit my Constituency Office during the week. Similarly, I am committed to delivering local newsletters around the East End – not just during elections, but throughout the year - and keeping people up to date with my activities in Holyrood and the East End.

"It is a privilege to be the local MSP for Glasgow Shettleston and I am here to serve the people as best I can. We all know the East End has its problems and people need help with a variety of issues, be it housing, social work, education or health. My office is open and my team staff and I are here to help".

John comments on Farepak settlement



“Utterly shameful”, says MSP

John Mason, has commented on news that customers and agents of Farepak, the Christmas savings firm, will ultimately receive half of the money they lost when the company collapsed – after liquidators BDO said that final payments will be made to those who lost out at the end of August.

Numerous savers and agents in the East End were affected by the Farepak collapse, losing hundreds and even thousands of pounds in some cases.

Since the firm collapsed in October 2006, owing £37m to more than 119,000 savers, (20,000 customers in Scotland) over 200 people have died before the lengthy liquidation process proceeded.

John Mason MSP says it is ‘utterly shameful’ that savers are to recover just half of their money back while the final bill for the administrators and their legal advisers has already exceeded £8 million. It is understood that the UK Government will also meet the

legal costs of the company directors - costs estimated as much as £6million.

John Mason MSP commented: “After a six year wait it is utterly shameful that customers and agents will only receive half their money back while administrators pocket millions and taxpayers pick up the tab for the company directors’ legal costs.

“The impact on families in the East End and elsewhere, who had put their Christmas savings in the trust of Farepak was devastating, causing real distress for people who could not have the family celebration they had planned.

“When you have worked hard and put money away for children’s presents and then to lose it all because of other’s failures was incredibly hard. Getting some of the money back is better than nothing but to only receive half and see much more going into the bank accounts of accountancy and legal firms is really galling.”

Shettleston MSP takes on gambling proliferation

Local Member of the Scottish Parliament, John Mason, has launched a campaign to tackle the increased number of betting shops that have saturated the East End. The Shettleston MSP thinks there are too many bookies in poorer areas and that gambling companies are deliberately targeting vulnerable people by placing betting shops next to pubs, bank machines and post offices.

Mr Mason cited local problems, for example in Baillieston Main Street, where bookies are literally side-by-side and has called for rules to be considered to limit numbers. The MSP’s calls comes after Labour deputy leader, Harriet Harman MP, said changes that liberalised gambling laws were a “mistake”. A recent channel four documentary suggested that prosperous areas have around five bookies for every 100,000 people, while poorer areas have about 12.

Mr Mason’s East End constituency, which is only six miles in size and has a population of just 70,000 people, has more than 30 large betting shops. In contrast, West Aberdeenshire, Scotland’s most affluent constituency – with a similar population - has just 5 betting shops.

John said: “Harriet Harman is right – Westminster did make a major mistake and simply allowed the number of betting shops on our streets to spiral

totally out of control but now we need to move on and tackle this.

“There can be no doubt that gambling, just like alcohol, is easy to get addicted to and it has wrecked many families and pushed a lot of people into debt. Obviously there are a lot of good organisations out there, like Gamblers Anonymous, who help people get back on track but we do need to do more to stop people falling into that rut in the first place. It’s on that basis that I’d like the UK Government to reconsider the legislation and carry out a review.

“My main concern is that less well-off areas, like the East End – and the people living here - are being targeted by betting companies who open up bookies next to pubs, post offices and ATM machines and see them as an easy hit.

“There is another issue amongst all of this and that concerns the National Lottery. I am concerned that, whilst East Enders are encouraged to pour a fortune into buying National Lottery tickets and scratch cards, local groups aren’t getting quite as much of the cash back by way of grants.

“Gambling is real problem here and, with over twenty bookies shops in my own constituency – which is actually only six miles in length – there is a clear case for this to be discussed, reviewed and acted upon.”



The Shettleston MSP is calling upon the UK Government to review legislation on gambling

SNP MSP backs Royal Mail and CWU campaign

Glasgow Shettleston’s MSP, John Mason, has given his backing to a campaign launched by the Communication Workers Union and the Royal Mail. Postal staff recently launched an appeal to pet owners to keep animals under control during the summer when postmen and women call to deliver mail.

The Royal Mail recently confirmed that three hundred and twenty attacks have taken place on postmen and women in Scotland since April 2011. Postmen and women face increased danger during school and Bank Holidays when parents and children are at home with dogs being allowed unsupervised in the garden or out onto the streets without restraints. These

attacks usually increase during the prolonged summer school holidays. The number of attacks has actually fallen by 9 per cent in Scotland since 2010, but it still remains unacceptably high.

John, who is regularly round the doors, delivering his own leaflets, said: “I am delighted to give my backing to this very important campaign. I sympathise with postal workers who do a great job all year-round delivering our mail. Having frequent experience of delivering my own local newsletters, I can understand first hand how daunting it is when you walk into a garden and you’re faced with a large aggressive dog!”