

Parliamentary News

(April 1983–July 1983: Part 1)

The Government

During this period (April to July 1983) Parliament was dissolved and a new Government formed. Following the Conservative victory in the parliamentary election of 9 June 1983, the new House of Commons met on 15 June. With the Mace lying under the Table, Mr James Callaghan took the chair as the new Father of the House. The first business concerned the election of a Speaker and the Right Hon Bernard Weatherill (Croydon, North East) was elected, reluctantly conducted to the chair and the Mace was placed upon the Table.

The new Government formed by the Prime Minister in June 1983 included Mr Norman Fowler in his previous appointment as Secretary of State for Social Services and Mr Leon Brittan was appointed Home Secretary.

Mr Kenneth Clarke continues as Minister of Health and Dr Rhodes Boyson was appointed Minister for Social Security. The Under Secretaries of State in the DHSS include Mr Anthony Newton, MP, Mr John Patten, MP, and Lord Glenarthur in the House of Lords, replacing Lord Trefgarne who moved to the Ministry of Defence. Lord Elton continues at the Home Office as Under Secretary of State with responsibility for the Prison Department.

Queen's Speech

On 22 June 1983 the Queen's Speech indicated that the Government intended to continue their support for the services which maintain law and order, to introduce for England and Wales legislation to modernize the law on police powers and to amend the law on criminal evidence and on the police complaints procedures. Proposals would be prepared for the establishment of an independent prosecution service. A new Data Protection Bill would be introduced and a Bill to improve family law and its administration in England and Wales. Further action would be taken to ensure that patients received the best value for the money spent on the National Health Service.

Alcoholism

Young people

On 11 April 1983 Mr Kenneth Clarke gave statistics about the admissions of 15–19 year olds to mental illness hospitals and units with a primary diagnosis of alcoholism or alcohol psychosis or main diagnosis of alcohol dependence syndrome, alcohol psychosis or non-dependent abuse of alcohol. In 1977 there were 79 admissions, in 1979, 88 admissions, and in 1981, 100 admissions.

Scotland

On 13 April 1983, in response to a question, the Scottish Secretary gave statistics about the number of women

admitted to hospitals in Scotland with a diagnosis of alcoholism or alcoholic psychosis in the years between 1965 and 1980. In 1965 there were 443 admissions, in 1975, 1,180 admissions, and in 1980, 1,378 admissions.

Suicide

Mr Finsberg gave details of the number of deaths by suicide registered in the United Kingdom, 1972–81. These were as follows:

Year	Number
1972	4238
1973	4329
1974	4398
1975	4176
1976	4314
1977	4436
1978	4531
1979	4765
1980	4917
1981 (provisional)	5016

Northern Ireland

The number of deaths registered as suicide in the years 1975 to 1982 were given in a written reply on 27 April 1983 by Mr John Patten of the Northern Ireland Office. Details are in *Hansard*.

Mentally disordered persons

In reply to a question on 20 April, Mr Finsberg gave details (in *Hansard*) of the number of patients in mental illness and mental handicap hospitals in each year since 1974. In 1974 (figures for 1980 in brackets) there were 89,426 (74,831) patients in mental illness hospitals and units and 50,923 (44,444) patients in mental handicap hospitals and units.

Mental health (expenditure)

On 19 April Mr Kenneth Clarke was asked what provisions had been made in the Rate Support Grant Order 1983–84 for additional expenditure by Local Authorities under the Mental Health (Amendment) Act 1982. At the end of his reply Mr Clarke indicated that the Act is not expected to impose any significant extra expenditure on Local Authorities. In another reply to a similar question Mr Clarke indicated that additional funds are, however, being allocated to the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work for its extra work arising from the introduction of approved social workers, and this will be of benefit to Local Authorities.

Mentally handicapped children

Mr Rossi of the DHSS replied to a question about the provision of resources to remove mentally handicapped children from NHS hospitals. He said there were now fewer than 2,000 mentally handicapped children in hospital compared with 3,287 at the end of 1978. For the small number of children who need continuous residential health care, the Department is encouraging Health Authorities to provide small homely units in the community; and £3 million of additional funds is being made available in each of the three years 1983–84 to 1985–86 to Health Authorities with special problems. RHAs are being asked to monitor progress. For children in need of residential care whose needs can be met by voluntary organizations or Local Authorities, with Health Service support where appropriate, the DHSS has taken other steps. These include an allocation of £1 million to match money raised by voluntary bodies to care for mentally handicapped children in the community. In addition, changes in the joint finance rules will boost Local Authority or voluntary body care, and £15 million of the joint finance funds is being centrally reserved over the next five years for pilot projects of community care.

Female circumcision

On 21 April the Second Reading of a Bill to prohibit female circumcision was introduced by Lord Kennet. Lord Trefgarne for the Government acknowledged the case for a firm statement in legislation which would put the illegality of the practice of female circumcision in its ritual and cultural sense, beyond any possible doubt. He did not feel that it was clear that the difficulty of definition and scope in the Bill could be satisfactorily overcome. But the Government did not seek to oppose the Bill at this stage and hoped to be helpful. Lord Trefgarne feared however that no guarantee could be given that time would be found for the Bill in the House of Commons.

Mental Health Bill

On 28 April 1983 the House of Lords considered the amendments made to the Bill in the Commons. These were technical amendments and changes to a number of other Acts of Parliament which became necessary as a consequence of the new legislation.

Mental Health Act 1983

This Act received the Royal Assent on 9 May 1983.

Mental Health (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1983

This Act received the Royal Assent on 13 May 1983.

Mental Health (Amendment) Act 1982

On 28 June Mr Harvey Proctor asked for a statement on the progress of the implementation of the Act. Mr John Patten, Under Secretary of State, DHSS, replied that the

new legislation, now consolidated as the Mental Health Act 1983, will be implemented on 30 September 1983. A full Memorandum of Guidance on the Act will be distributed free of charge to health and local authorities and other interested bodies within a week. The various Regulations and Orders that were required under the Act would be laid before the House within the next seven days. Leaflets for patients and their relatives explaining their rights under the new legislation were being prepared and would be distributed to health and local authorities at the beginning of August. Arrangements were in hand for setting up the new Mental Health Act Commission and some eighty or so potential members had received letters of invitation. He would be announcing the appointment of the Commission and the name of the Chairman shortly.

Community mental health care

In reply to a question, Mr Finsberg said on 28 March 1983 that the Government has allocated an extra £11.3 million cash for joint finance next year. This would mean that the Government had increased the cash available to joint finance by 180 per cent during their period of office, over 50 per cent in real terms. Some of this could be used for community mental health schemes.

Mentally handicapped hospitals and patients in Wales

On 28 April 1983 Mr Wyn Roberts gave details of the staffing of mental handicap hospitals in Wales in each of the last ten years, the numbers of patients in age groups and particularly of children. The number of first admissions to mental handicap hospitals by age groups in each of the last ten years was also given. These details are published in tables in *Hansard*.

Drug misuse

On 28 April 1983 the Secretary of State for Health, Mr Fowler, announced that guidelines were being issued on that day for health and local authorities and local voluntary bodies wishing to apply for grants from the £6 million the Government made available over the next three years for improving services to drug misusers.

The objectives of this central initiative are through pump-priming grants: (1) to provide for regional and local assessments of the nature and spread of drug misuse problems; (2) to increase the ability of professionals and others working in this area to help people with drug related problems; (3) to improve links between health services provision and other community based services; and (4) to improve the effectiveness of services available and ensure that they provide value for money.

Under this scheme revenue-dependent projects can be funded for up to three years. Applications were to be submitted by 29 July 1983.

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