

Ashara Taylor, Scottish Labour Party candidate for Fraserburgh and District

Dear Ms Ramsden,

Thank you for your letter. My answers to the questions are as follows:

*"How will you go about protecting public services in the current economic climate?"*

I believe in keeping services - such as the maternity ward and library - local, and improving the services which we already have. For example, although the new swimming pool is an admirable development, the provision of free sports services should also be a priority. It is disappointing that the services we have - e.g. the basketball and tennis courts, skate park, and putting green - are not kept up to standard.

*Will you oppose any proposals for privatisation of key council services?"*

In general, privatisation is a way for politicians to be seen to reduce costs. However, as with the PFI scheme, introducing a privatisation element into the provision of a service can often lead to hidden costs for the taxpayer in the long run. Furthermore, privatisation leads to vested interests in services which should be provided for all, without any profit motive. As such, I am in opposition to privatisation of key council services. I feel that costs can be reduced through a more efficient and innovative provision of services instead.

*With budgets going down, how will you protect standards in social care?"*

The secret to protecting standards in social care is to listen to the needs of those who require it. When people suffer from Alzheimer's disease or dementia, for example, their whole life is affected, and care needs to be provided for them across many different branches of the council service. Standards in social care can only be improved if issues are tackled on all fronts.

*How can you ensure that the amount of personalisation or self-directed payments are at a level for elderly or disabled payments are at a level for elderly or disabled people to purchase an adequate amount of care?"*

Whilst personalisation or self-directed payments allow people a certain amount of choice in their care, it also leaves open the possibility that there are those who cannot afford to purchase sufficient care for themselves, based on the allocated budget. The principle behind self-directed payments is that every individual is different and as such requires different care, and it's therefore clear that the budget allocation for self-directed payments should be (and, I believe, will be) individually assessed. It is important that this stage of self-directed support is monitored carefully.

*Do you believe that everyone delivering public services should be paid the Living Wage?"*

Yes. According to The Poverty Alliance, about 18,000 workers in local government in Scotland are paid less than £7.20 per hour, a figure that is wholly unacceptable. In the

present climate, where fuel, food, and electricity bills have risen, the Living Wage is necessary to ensure a minimum standard of quality of life. As such, I am a supporter of the Scottish Labour Party's 'Fair Pay for All' campaign.

*Will you recognise the contribution made to our children's education by classroom assistants by supporting them in opposing cutbacks?*

The legislation in this area is dominated by the aim of providing "adequate and efficient" education for children (e.g. the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, s1; The Standards of Scotland's Schools Act 2000 s1; and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act s4). I personally oppose these cuts, but it would be my duty as Councillor to listen to the views of the local residents and act according to what they have to say. I believe that the education a child receives at school is fundamental in determining their opportunities afterwards, and education is therefore a priority of mine.

*What will you do to lessen the impact of the UK Government's Welfare Reforms which will see many families losing entitlement to a range of benefits including council tax benefit, housing benefit and working tax credits?*

The Scottish Welfare Reform Bill (of March this year) aims to protect some of the benefits provided in Scotland such as free school meals and concessionary travel. However, there are still wide-ranging negative impacts that will be (and are being) felt as a result of the UK Welfare Reform legislation. For example, the introduction, from April 2013, of benefit penalties for those of working age over occupying local authority or housing association housing will affect over 94,000 social housing tenants of working age who will, on average, lose about £11 per week (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/354080/0121362.pdf>). As councillor I would do everything in my power to ensure that those who are being affected by the reforms - who include some of the most vulnerable in our society - are protected and helped.

*Do you think it is fair that council staff should have their pay frozen while inflation is getting high and the rich are getting richer?*

No. Furthermore, I think that the government's attitude in this regard is irresponsible: they appear to be pitting private sector workers against public (for example with the pension debacle) to distract from the fact that the country is currently being run by the rich for the rich.

*Will you support the council negotiating a Green Workplace agreement with trade unions to help meet climate change targets?*

Yes. "

Thank you for getting in touch.

Yours Sincerely,

Ashara Taylor