

EXECUTIVE REJECTS OFT REPORT ON RETAIL PHARMACIES

Deputy Health Minister Frank McAveety today announced that the Scottish Executive would not be accepting the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) report on pharmacies.

The report recommends that the current control arrangements for NHS pharmacy contracts should be abolished. The Executive asked for comments on the report from Scottish interests before responding.

The Minister said:

“After careful consideration of the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) report, the results of the public consultation and the view of the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Executive Ministers have concluded that deregulation is not the way forward for Scotland.

“Our prime consideration was to weigh the OFT recommendation against our public health policy and the potential impact on patients”

“We remain totally committed to *The Right Medicine: A Strategy for Pharmaceutical Care*. Our recent White Paper, *Partnership for Care*, reinforces its aims by setting out our plans for improving health, partnership working and quality improvement.

“The OFT report suggests that deregulation would benefit consumers, but consumers are also patients. At the forefront of my mind has been the possible impact deregulation would have on patients in Scotland’s remote and rural communities and deprived urban areas. These patients rely heavily on ready access to local community pharmacy and medical support services and that service must be maintained.

“Scotland has, proportionally, more remote and rural areas than other parts of the UK, as well as higher levels of deprivation. The key consideration for the Executive is access to services in these areas. We believe the OFT’s report would run the significant risk of at least reducing, and at worst, removing services in some areas. We are not prepared to take that risk.

“Our current network of community pharmacists already plays a key role in helping improve the health of the people of Scotland and providing care for patients. This is due to the welcome commitment of the profession to deliver our pharmaceutical strategy.

“It is against this background that we have begun to negotiate a new contract for community pharmacies. The primary focus of those negotiations will be on implementing the strategy but we will also consider how the existing regulatory framework can be improved to take account of health policy in Scotland. We will

take the opportunity to consider how pharmacy services in the future can best respond to the interests and needs of patients and consumers in Scotland.