



Visit to the British Library



On 1 February 2016, I visited the British Library and met the Chief Executive Roly Keating. I wanted to gain an overview of what issues are important to the Library as a public institution. I was delighted to hear about the Save Our Sounds programme, the British Library's Sound Archive consists of over 6.5 million recordings, preserving oral history from the 1880s to the present day. The Library also accommodates a growing number of students who need a place to work following the increase in Universities admissions, and offers 200,000 reference transactions. The Library has committed funding for the next four years.

Regional Growth



I asked the Secretary of State for BIS on 2 February 2016 what steps he is taking to preserve skills for future growth in the steel industry, given that 120,000 companies in the West Midlands are linked to the industry. In my view, the Government needs to take active measures to ensure that these skills are preserved for future use. It is important for those in the steel industry and the economy as a whole.

Debate on Yemen



I intervened in the debate on the ongoing conflict in Yemen on 5 February 2016. The United Nations suggest that over 8,000 people have been killed since March 2015, and more than 21 million people, including 10 million children, are now in need of humanitarian aid. I asked what steps are being taken to ensure that vital aid will be allowed to get through to destroyed areas. I was concerned to hear that a church in Ma'alla where I used to worship was hit, along with a hospital. Access to aid is very important.

British Ethnic Diversity Sports Awards



The British Ethnic Diversity Sports Awards took place on 6 February, which I attended as a guest of the Khalsa Football Federation. We have been working together to help increase support for BAME participation in sport at a grassroots level. I met Paul Elliott, CBE, the former English footballer who was the first black footballer to sit on the FA council, who was given a special award. Many sports stars were present including Frank Bruno, Denise Lewis and Kris Akabusi.

Manor Hospital



At Health Questions on 9 February 2016 I asked the Secretary of State what immediate action he could take to ensure that the Manor hospital can recruit the long-term fully employed staff, not agency staff, in pediatrics and A&E that it now needs. The Secretary of State did not outline a strategy. It was announced in January that following a Care Quality Commission inspection at the Manor Hospital that the Hospital was placed in special measures.

Science and Technology Committee



This month, the Science and Technology Committee held oral evidence sessions examining Space and Satellites. In the first session, I asked the UK space President for his thoughts on the view that the UK Government's approach to funding linked to space focuses too much on the commercial side rather than applied, discovery, translational research, which in my view should be a focus. The Committee also published its 4th report of session on 'The Big Data Dilemma' which examined the opportunities and risks of big data and suggested that the Government should examine how it can build capacity.

Local Government Settlement



It is a scandal that the Prime Minister's own local authority in Oxfordshire will receive £9m from the new £300m transition fund and 83% of this fund will go to Tory-run councils, mostly in the affluent shires. Neither Walsall MBC, nor any other Council in the Black Country were on the list of local authorities receiving new money. In the West Midlands, only Staffordshire will receive £5.56 million. The decision has not been taken on the evidence of need. The £9m given to Oxfordshire comes just a week after the Prime Minister's mother and aunt signed a petition against cuts to Children's Services in the County.

So I asked the Leader of the House: 'if I can show I am related to the Prime Minister, will I get money for libraries and Sure Start centres in Walsall?' I called for a debate on good governance, because we need to know whether Ministers took into account relevant considerations and the reasons for the decisions for that settlement.

Urgent Question on Short Money



On 11 February 2016 I asked about the removal of Short Money, which is given to Opposition parties to enable them to analyse Government policy. In my view, this will reduce Opposition parties' capacity to hold the Government to account, and so undermine democracy. I asked the Minister to start the consultation after the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee has reported, given that 63% of the British population did not vote for this Government, and those people need to have their voices heard when policies hurt them. The Minister said that he was anxious to start the consultation shortly.

Meeting with University of Wolverhampton



My constituents who are residents of Broadway are opposed to the plans of Wolverhampton University to open a new entrance to its Walsall Campus opposite their homes, for which Planning Permission was granted in December 2015. The University said its plans are a response to complaints about parking from the Broadway Park Estate, but these appear to have been resolved by the current temporary car park.

My constituents and I met with University representatives to discuss the plans, and I asked them to consider submitting an amended Planning Application for a car park without the new entrance. I was pleased they agreed to talk to the Council, and I hope this will prevent disruption to residents and other road users. My constituents already have difficulty using their driveways because of the speed and volume of traffic. This decision will worsen the situation, and may negatively affect the value of their homes. Residents have now collected more than 500 signatures opposing the new entrance.

Visit to Birmingham Airport



I visited Birmingham Airport on Friday 19 February 2016 and met with the Chief Executive Paul Kehoe, to discuss the issues facing Birmingham Airport. I would like to see an expansion of the Airport rather than a third runway at Heathrow. The Airport Commission has not looked at the benefits to the Midlands and national economy. With the connectivity of HS2, there is a vital link between air, rail and road which can be established around the West Midlands.

Royal Society of Chemistry Event in Parliament



I sponsored an experiments event in Westminster to mark the 175th anniversary of the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC). 'Great Scott', led by children's presenter Fran Scott, carried out chemistry experiments with MPs to promote the study of chemistry, and the event was an opportunity to discuss the importance of excellent science teaching in primary schools. Many MPs came to the demonstration, and hopefully they will take the message back to the schools in their constituency about the important of science and chemistry in schools.

News in Brief

- **EU Referendum**

The Prime Minister has announced that the UK will vote in a referendum on whether to remain in the EU on Thursday 23 June 2016. In my view, Britain is better off in Europe. It is clear that being in the European Union brings us jobs, growth and investment. The EU has helped to secure workers' rights and make consumers better off too. Leaving would put this at risk.

- **Women's Pensions**

Labour has repeatedly called on the government to bring forward proposals for transitional arrangements for women adversely affected by the speeding up of the state pension age. Over the next four years, women's state pension age will rise by nearly three years. The government has maintained that it won't re-visit the issue. However, pressure is growing on Ministers to address this injustice, and inaction is no longer an option.

- **Policy Campaigns**

This month, many of you emailed me on the strengthening of Freedom of Information Laws, cuts to Employment Support Allowance and TTIP. I support the strengthening of Freedom of Information Laws. I am opposed to cuts to Employment and Support Allowance which will affect the most vulnerable in our society- those with disabilities and long-term health conditions. In my view, there needs to be greater scrutiny of the TTIP proposals, both at UK and EU level.

I chaired these debates and committees:

- **Chairing Debates and Committees**

- On Tuesday 4 February 2016, I chaired a Westminster Hall debate on Regional airports and UK airports capacity.
- On Monday 8 February 2016, I chaired European Committee C which considered the Commission's Better Regulation Package and other documents which could affect scrutiny of EU legislation.