



THANK YOU

Dear Friends

I want to thank you for voting for me on 7 May 2015, helping to more than triple my majority to 6,007 votes with a 7.5% swing. Your support has been invaluable over the past five years. I was pleased to meet many of you during the election campaign and I am always very keen to hear your views on local, national and international issues. I will continue to support you.

Yours ever
Valerie

ELECTION OF THE SPEAKER



As the first act of the new Parliament, the Rt Hon John Bercow MP was re-elected as Speaker unopposed. It was a great honour to “drag” Mr Speaker to the Speaker’s Chair, a tradition which dates from the days when the Speaker’s duty to represent the views of

Parliament to the monarch could have put the Speaker at personal danger.

Mr Speaker Bercow has been a strong voice for the modernisation of the way Parliament operates and has stood up for Backbench MPs to hold the Government to account.

APPOINTMENT TO THE PANEL OF CHAIRS

I am delighted to have been appointed by Mr Speaker to the Panel of Chairs on 4 June 2015. This means that I will chair Delegated Legislation committees, Westminster Hall debates and Public Bill Committees.

The Panel of Chairs comprises 36 Members from all sides of the House appointed by the Speaker at the start of each Parliamentary Session.

MENTAL HEALTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION



I led an Adjournment debate in the House of Commons on the issue of mental health in higher education on Thursday 11 June 2015.

“This is an important issue for students. I called for the Minister to carry out a review of counselling provision in higher education

institutions, formulate a policy and fund it properly despite the challenging financial times; to stop the changes to Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) that are planned for 2016-17; to work with the Department for Health so that NHS and university counselling services collaborate in areas with a high student population and to publish guidance so that students who interrupt their studies for mental health reasons are properly supported by higher education institutions during that period.”

“We are saddling our young people with, on average, a debt of £44,000 at the start of their working lives, which they then have to carry through.”

“A 2013 survey by the National Union of Students found that 49% of students had felt depressed during their studies; that 55% had felt anxious during their studies; and that 20% considered themselves to have a mental health problem. The Higher Education Policy Institute and the Higher Education Academy have produced two consecutive reports that show that students generally feel lower levels of wellbeing than the general population.”

“We must support our students so that they can discover and unleash their talents and fulfil their potential for the good of us all.”

EDUCATION AND ADOPTION BILL

I spoke in the debate on the Second Reading of the Education and Adoption Bill on Monday 22 June. It included provisions to force ‘coasting schools’ to become academies and to remove adoption functions from local authorities.



I said in the debate: “Education should be about the best interests of our children. Ultimately, society benefits from that, but I am struggling to find it in the Bill. I find the term “coasting schools” incredibly demeaning. Not only that, but the Secretary of State does not define it in the Bill and chooses to introduce regulations to do so. If the Bill were a contract, it would be void for uncertainty.”

“I reminded the Minister about Joseph Leckie Academy. It was promised £17 million under Building Schools for the Future, which was then cancelled. It then had to bid for funds, and managed to receive £4 million but it still needs a further £4 million to be able to replace the dilapidated main teaching block.”

“On the adoption provisions, it is a scandal that children have to wait a long time to be adopted, but at the end of the day the social workers will make the assessment. It is therefore concerning that the Government have refused to fund the College of Social Work—the very place that is needed to promote social work as an important profession.”

“One part of the Government—the Treasury—wants devolution revolution, but the Secretary of State has placed herself above the wishes of parents and reserved powers so that she can transfer functions away from local authorities.”

“The Bill is not in the best interests of children, parents and families—the very people the Government were elected to serve.”

Surgeries

Valerie holds regular surgeries. To arrange an appointment, please call the Constituency Office on 01922 635835

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QUESTIONS IN PARLIAMENT

In May and June, I asked:

- The Health Secretary whether the Manor Hospital will get further support to treat the additional patients attending the Manor owing to the closure of Maternity and Emergency services at Stafford Hospital. The Health Secretary responded that he would look at all hospitals which have been affected.
- The International Development Secretary what were the implications for the UK as a result of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations conference on 29 May in Bangkok? The International Development Secretary responded that UK would work to support Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia in addressing the issue.
- The Leader of the House for a statement and an urgent review of the Blue Badge Guidance for Local Authorities. The Leader of the House responded that the Guidance must be tight to prevent abuse of the system but that I should challenge the decision.
- The Housing Minister what assessment he has made of land throughout the country that has planning permission for housing that could help the Affordable Homes Programme. The Housing Minister responded that 261,000 sites have been granted Planning Permission for housing in the last year but did not say how he would ensure they are developed.
- I was also a guest on the BBC Sunday Politics Midlands on Sunday 7 June 2015. Topics discussed included local devolution, the West Midlands Combined Authority and High Speed 2.



CLOSURE OF JUNCTION 9 OF THE M6

I wrote to the Transport Secretary for clarification of when the slip road at Junction 9 will reopen. There is confusion as two different dates were published for its reopening. A Highways England press release dated 20 May 2015 said that the closure will remain until 30 November 2015. Other information published by Highways England said that it will reopen on 30 July 2015.

I know many of you are inconvenienced by the chaos, the lack of information about the closure and the congestion. I have not seen any work taking place on the slip road recently.

Since the closure was implemented in January this year I have often seen the diversion routes heavily congested with local and motorway traffic, causing severe delays.

DELVES INFANT SCHOOL



On Friday 26 June 2015, I visited Delves Infant School to meet the members of the School Council.

I toured the School with the new Head Teacher Mrs Arnold. The School Council and I had a roundtable discussion and I was asked questions covering a range of issues. These included why I wanted to become an MP, what being an MP involves, how I can help people and what a typical week is like for me.

MEETING AT STAFFORD ROAD



I arranged the meeting on Thursday 25 June 2015 for residents to put their views to representatives of Centro and National Express, after two new bus routes were added to the road including a double decker bus.

Stafford Road is a quiet residential side street and residents are angry that the high frequency 79 service

has been added to the road as well as the 34. There are already two other bus services using Stafford Road. Centro had diverted the 327 route away from Stafford Road following a meeting I arranged in September 2013.

The residents were able to tell the representatives of Centro and National Express about the problems caused by the new bus routes including noise and vibrations as the buses pass over speed humps, buses mounting the pavement as they cannot get past parked cars, buses getting stuck when they cannot pass each other and the invasion of privacy from double decker buses parked outside first floor windows.

There were a number of helpful suggestions including diverting the 79 away from Stafford Road to the island at Darlaston Green.

The representatives from Centro and National Express West Midlands agreed to look at which bus routes travel along Stafford Road and to respond with a number of possible alternatives.

VISIT TO RAC HEADQUARTERS

The RAC is one of the larger employers in Walsall South employing nearly 700 people.



On Friday 12 June 2015 I visited the group's headquarters at Brockhurst Crescent, off Bescot Crescent.

The Centre included staff from the technical department, roadside assistance contact centre, customer solutions despatch centre and around 470 staff in data and analysis. The Centre handles 2.2m customers calls for assistance a year with 9,800 calls answered on average every day. The RAC have 8.2 million members who can call on them for assistance.

I was also shown around a patrol van with its state of the art tools and a towing mechanism. When not in use it folds up and fits neatly in the rear of the van. The "universal" tyre was also developed on the site which shows the innovation that takes place there. Some cars may not carry a spare tyre. At the roadside the RAC patrol man can fit a tyre with universal fittings which will get the member home or to a garage where the tyre can be replaced. All this was developed as a result of knowing what the members needed.