



November 2015 Edition

Autumn Statement



In the Autumn Statement the Government said it will be reversing the planned cuts to Tax Credit. This is as a result of the combined opposition from HM opposition Labour Party, peers of the House of Lords and the people who have emailed and written in against the proposed Tax Credit cuts. This is a victory for democracy and welcome news for over 4,900 families in Walsall South who would have been affected. But in the move to Universal Credit millions will still face a huge cut in income.

Local government funding is being slashed. The Central Grant will fall by 56%. This is a reduction to local authorities of £6.1bn from £11bn to £5bn by 2019/20 and will have a devastating effect on local services already under pressure from previous cuts. Libraries, street cleaning, roads and public sector frontline staff, basic services that keep communities functioning will be cut or reduced. Pleck Library and South Walsall Library are under threat as they always are when there is a Tory administration at Walsall MBC.

Police funding is another area where the Government conceded that it had made a major error in calculating police budgets. As a result of the erroneous calculation, West Midlands Police would have lost £28.3 million from its budget next year. This would have had an impact on the number of officers on patrol in Walsall South. After pressure the Government said funding will be kept at the current level.

Burma Urgent Question



On Thursday 5 November 2015 I was granted an Urgent Question by Mr Speaker ahead of the elections in Burma which took place on Sunday 8 November 2015. There was concern from opposition groups and human rights organisations about the conduct of the poll. Up to one million members of the Rohingya community had been disenfranchised, the Election Commission had considered delaying the ballot on spurious grounds and Amnesty International had reported that there were 96 political prisoners in the country.

I am pleased that the elections took place largely without incident. I hope that a Government can now be formed which fully reflects the people of Burma.

Meetings at West Bromwich Road and Walstead Road



I met with residents of Walstead Road and West Bromwich Road on 6 November 2015 with Mr Steve Pretty, Head of Engineering and Transportation for Walsall MBC. Residents of Walstead Road are experiencing difficulties with the speed humps and traffic islands which were installed on the road in 2013. The positioning of the humps and the traffic islands which are positioned between them makes it difficult for them to reverse out of their driveways. They have also resulted in damage to cars, created hazards for motorcyclists and noise and vibrations for residents. The

meeting with Mr Pretty was productive. Residents made clear to him the difficulties they have faced. He said that he would review the use of speed humps.

At West Bromwich Road, residents have had to put up with many motorists travelling well in excess of the 30mph speed limit on the road. There have been a number of serious incidents there in recent years. Mr Pretty was positive about the possibility of locating a "Watchman" sign on West Bromwich Road. This would display a warning along with the registration number of drivers travelling in excess of the speed limit.

Meeting with Caparo Administrators



I arranged an urgent meeting with the Administrators of Caparo, PriceWaterhouse Cooper, following news of 122 redundancies at Caparo Atlas Works at Heath Road in Darlaston on 30 October 2015. I asked the Administrators for their assessment of what had led to Caparo Atlas Works being placed into administration, what provision had been made to support employees who have been made redundant and about the prospect of

Caparo Atlas Works continuing to trade as a going concern. I also emphasised the importance of ensuring vital skills are not lost, but are maintained for the future particularly with a number of major infrastructure projects in the near future including HS2.

Historic CHOGM Women's Forum



I was delighted to be part of the UK Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) delegation to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) Women's Forum in Malta which took place from the 22- 24 November 2015. This was a historic event as it was the first time there had ever been a women's forum. At the Forum there were over 400 delegates from 32 countries. The theme of the Forum was: 'Woman Ahead: Be All That You Can Be'. Delegates identified the opportunities and the barriers that women face in the

twenty-first century and set out 27 points for the Commonwealth Heads of Government to recognise.

Public Health Budget



I have written to the Secretary of State for Health over cuts to Walsall's Public Health budget. I asked him to consider increasing Walsall's public health budget as Walsall is number 35 on the list of the most deprived local authority areas in England, but will have the least funding per head of any authority in the Birmingham and Black Country area under the proposed arrangement.

There is growing concern in Walsall about the £1.6 million shortfall in public health funding. Under the current allocation, Walsall's public health budget is already underfunded. The proposed reduction in funding will be a double hit on top of existing inequalities and will have a serious detrimental effect on public health in Walsall. If Walsall's allocation was the same as neighbouring authorities with similar levels of deprivation, Walsall would receive an additional £4.26 million per year.

Public health funding is intended to support people in protecting and improving their own health. Recent figures from Public Health England show that the health of people in Walsall is generally worse than the average in England.

World Diabetes Day took place on 14 November 2015 and I recently joined actor Chizzy Akudolu from the BBC's *Holby City* to raise awareness of diabetes at an event organised by the SiverStar Diabetes charity.

Remembrance



The Remembrance Sunday Parade and service took place with a march past by the Staffordshire Band and Cadets and other youth organisations. The procession led by the Mayor Cllr Angela Underhill and Mr John Underhill. The service was led by Revd Mark Kinder from St Paul's at the Crossing and addressed by the Ven Sue Weller the Archdeacon of Walsall.

I also attend the Service and Parade at Darlaston Town Centre. And laid a wreath. This year I used a quote from the poet Rupert Brooke-... "...there is a corner of some foreign field that is for ever England....." on the card on the wreath.

British Values at Pheasey Park Farm



On Friday 27 November 2015 I visited Pheasey Park Farm Primary School on Wimperis Way to discuss British Values. I was delighted to be invited by the School's Badge Holders who are Year 6 members of the School Council to talk to them as part of the School's British Values Week. This gives pupils the opportunity to learn about the values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs as part of the

Spiritual, Moral, Cultural and Mental element of the Curriculum.

As part of the discussion, the pupils asked me what legislation I would put through if I had the opportunity. I said that I would make education free for everyone from reception class through to university, including the abolition of tuition fees. When I asked what they would change if they were in power, they showed a good awareness of local and national issues including broken glass on the pavement outside the Cat and Fiddle Pub, the need to stop all wars and ensuring the NHS remains free at the point of use.

Science and Technology Committee



It has been a busy month on the Science & Technology Committee. The Committee is currently undertaking inquiries into Science in Emergencies, the Investigatory Powers Bill, the Science Budget and Big Data.

On 19 November 2015 the Committee Queen's College and the Bodleian Library, Oxford as part of 'Parliament Week'. We took evidence as part of an informal seminar (though with the look of a select committee hearing) in the Bodleian's Divinity School where we heard from Oxford academics: first on the UK's response to Ebola and second on some of the opportunities and risks of Big Data. The seminar also included questions to the experts from the audience of sixth formers. It was a useful seminar as we heard how the UK responded to the Ebola crisis as it unfolded internationally.

Earlier in November the Committee heard evidence on the Investigatory Powers Bill. I asked the witnesses about the collection on bulk personal data such as records from the DVLA and about whether the differences between data and content have become blurred in the Bill.

News in Brief

Questions:

- To the Minister for Business, Innovation and Skills I asked what specific steps can be taken to preserve those skilled jobs for the future, given that infrastructure projects are coming up in the West Midlands?
- At Church Commissioners Questions I asked what assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the effect of funeral poverty on fees paid for funerals.
- At the debate on the Compulsory Emergency First Aid Education Bill I intervened and asked the minister whether she agrees that given the events of 7/7 and 13/11, it is now more important than ever to make sure the whole country knows how to cope in an emergency and can do its civic duty to save lives?
- At education questions I asked: "UCAS has reported a shortfall in trainee teachers for chemistry and physics. What bold steps will the Minister take to ensure that young people are taught by qualified teachers in science, technology, engineering and maths?"
- I asked the Secretary of State for Health: "The Secretary of State referred in his statement—in the last line of page 1 of the copy we have been given—to a "time-limited period" during which negotiations will take place. Is that a day, a week or a month? Will the contract be imposed after that?"

Westminster Hall Charing debates:

- Two debates on 4 November 2015 on the Wanless Review and the Dickens File and the Regulation of Care Homes and two debates on Tuesday 10 November 2015