



Valerie appointed Shadow Leader of the House



I am delighted to have been appointed to the role of Shadow Leader of the House of Commons by the Leader of HM Opposition Jeremy Corbyn MP. As Shadow Leader of the House, and a member of the Shadow Cabinet I work with the Leader of the House and deal with Commons business. On Thursdays the Leader of the House presents the business and I respond to it.

Visits to Blue Coat Church of England Academy

I was delighted to visit Blue Coat Academy on Friday 14 October 2016, and meet with its new Principal, Mr David Smith. Blue Coat Academy was graded 'outstanding' by Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools (SIAMS) in September 2015. We discussed that the school is split between two sites and concerns over the safety of students when crossing the road to attend lessons. Each year the Academy raises money for a charity voted for by all students. In 2015 students raised over £4,400 for Teenage Cancer Trust.

Valerie delivers first speech as Shadow Leader of the House



I delivered my first speech as Shadow Leader of the House at Business Questions on 13 October 2016. I mentioned that "the EU referendum posed a simple question: in or out. It did not cover immigration, and it did not cover the single market". I urged the Leader of the House for a "debate in Government time on the framework of the negotiating stance, given that there are only five months—and 170 unanswered questions—before article 50 is invoked."

Great Barr Hall downgrading

I welcome the news that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has agreed Historic England's decision that Great Barr Hall be downgraded to Grade II. Great Barr Hall is no longer designated by Historic England as a 'particularly important building of more than special interest'. The planning application submitted to Walsall MBC is for the construction of 57 houses on green-belt land and the redevelopment of Great Barr Hall as a hotel, wedding and conference venue. The proposals submitted to the Council do not set out any special circumstances to outweigh the immense damage this development would do to the Green Belt and disruption it would have caused to local residents. I am awaiting for confirmation from Walsall MBC whether there are any changes to the planning application, subject to public consultation.

Merrions Wood awarded Green Flag



Merrions Wood received the prestigious Green Flag Award 2016/17. The Green Flag Award is now in its 20th year and has recognised Merrions Wood as one of the best woodland reserves in the country since 2011. Trustees PRE Reverend Martin Rutter and Friends Group Committee members, Bob Winkle and Heather Allen have helped maintain it to the highest standards. There are plans to restore the historic gates at both ends of the reserve and to continue to survey the wildlife of the site. I visited on Friday 14 October 2016.

Business Question 20 October 2016



On Thursday 20 October 2016 I addressed the crisis in the funding of pharmacies to the Leader of the House. The Government have proposed a reduction of £2.8 billion currently paid to the healthcare sector. In February, the Health Secretary said that "pharmacists have a very important part in the future of the NHS". So why the cuts?

Valerie attends the CPA UK delegation to Canada



In October, I attended a 4 day delegation to Canada. I met with the Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons, Mr Bruce Stanton. I was delighted to attend the Standing Committee on Women to discuss gender equality. On Day 2, we received recognition in both Houses. In the Commons, the PM Justin Trudeau and all the MPs stood and applauded us. I also attended the Standing Committee on Industrial Trade and in particular we discussed what happens when Britain leaves the EU and our role with Canada.

Valerie speaks on Urgent Question to the Leader of the House



On 25 October 2016, Charles Walker MP put forward an Urgent Question on the Procedure Committee's second report of this Session on Private Members' Bills. As Shadow Leader of the House of Commons I asked the Leader of the House: Whether the Committee will be expanded on a cross-party basis? Will the Committee's terms of reference and the objectives have to change? Will the Leader of the House have to look at changing the right of a Member to present a Bill under a ten-minute rule motion and at the procedure for doing so? We need a full debate, but the filibuster of members bills should stop.

Business Question 27 October 2016



At Business Questions I paid tribute to Jimmy Perry, the writer and creator of "Dad's Army", who sadly died on 23 October 2016. It struck me that we could hear those memorable catchphrases ringing around No. 10. We could hear the cry of, "Don't panic, don't panic!" or, as the Prime Minister slaps down her recalcitrant and wayward colleagues, we could hear her muttering, "Stupid boys". When we ask the Government's position on Brexit, we hear the infamous, "Don't tell them, Pike".

As Shadow Leader of the House, I raised a matter on the closure of the New Art Gallery and libraries in Walsall. I invited the Leader of the House to visit the Gallery and asked the Leader of the House to make representations to the Chancellor, who has recently signalled a change in his austerity policies, on providing a proper settlement for local authorities so that Walsall and others can fulfil their statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

Valerie presents petition on Abberley Hotel

On Thursday 27 October 2016 I presented a petition with over 200 signatures opposing the change of use of Abberley Hotel to a house of multiple occupation (HMO). The Abberley hotel has been empty for a number of years. The number of HMOs are rising locally and nationally. There are already two properties nearby on Slaney Road. The National HMO Network estimated that there were 543,000 HMOs in England in 2013-14.

Valerie responds to the Privileges Committee's Report



I responded to the Privileges Committee's report on conduct of witnesses on Thursday 27 October 2016, It is always a serious issue when witnesses mislead a Committee, and it undermines the Committee process. Members should be able to question witnesses without fear or favour, affection or ill will.

APPG on Epilepsy

I chaired the APPG on Epilepsy on Monday 31 October 2016, the title of the meeting was Epilepsy Deaths. Epilepsy is one of the top-ten causes of early death. We had a discussion on Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy (SUDEP) which can often be traumatic for families. Three speakers addressed the APPG: Professor Stephen Brown (SUDEP Action Chair of Trustees and retired Consultant Neuropsychiatrist), Professor Ley Sander (Medical Director of Epilepsy Society) and Rachel Shah who shared a parent's perspective. The APPG published a report on its work in 2016. This is available to view on my website.

Valerie supports urgent investigation into Concentrix



Following the Opposition Day debate on Concentrix on Wednesday 26 October 2016, I attended an event in Parliament to show support for people who have been badly impacted by Concentrix's inadequate service. I have seen a number of constituents at my surgery who have been victims of Concentrix's poor service. I am pleased to hear that my constituents' tax credits have now been successfully reinstated. The Government needs to announce a full public investigation into the performance of Concentrix. The picture shows Peter Dowd MP and Rebecca Long-Bailey MP of the Shadow Treasury team.

Call for black and Asian Blood Donors

The '#Represent' campaign sees NHS Blood and Transplant join forces with MOBO (Music of Black Origin) to recruit a new generation of blood donors. Donors with Black or Asian heritage are more likely to be rare blood types and patients who require regular transfusions need blood which is more closely matched to their own to get the best outcome, the best way to get this match is blood from a similar ethnic background. There are 134 blood donors from black or Asian communities in Walsall South. More donors are needed. I encourage members of black and Asian communities to come forward and donate blood.