

View From the House

In a few days it will be the first anniversary of my election to Parliament as your MP for Walsall South. And I want to thank everyone for their support. Having negotiated my way through the new expenses rules, my constituency office is now established and open for business from 114a Lichfield Street.

It has been a year of a busy legislative programme. As a member of the Health Select Committee, the Health and Social Care Bill has been the main area for discussion. Despite reservations with and almost 6000 responses to the White Paper, the Government proceeded with the Bill without taking these concerns into account.

On the 4th April, the Health Secretary announced a pause in the progress of the Bill. I have been contacted by many constituents who are concerned about the Bill's proposals. News of this pause will be welcomed. However, I am concerned that the consultation will be purely cosmetic. Professor Steve Field has been asked to run the consultation. But he is one of the few outspoken supporters of the Government's plans.

The Health Select Committee report published on 5th April recommended significant changes to the Bill. In particular, to include all the health professionals as members of the Consortia.

I had the opportunity to discuss my Private Members' Bill on Epilepsy and Related Conditions (Education and Health Services) with officials at the Department of Education on 31st March. The Bill is still 'alive', awaiting its 2nd reading in January 2012, so I am hoping that the Government will find time to consider its proposals. The proposals include an annual assessment for children in schools, better links between parents, teachers and healthcare professionals, and faster referral to medical experts.

I wrote to the Culture Minister Ed Vaizey to ask him to intervene when I heard that budget cuts for Walsall MBC and Arts Council England have forced the New Art Gallery Walsall to close its doors on Sundays. Sundays are a rare opportunity for many families to enjoy Walsall's cultural services together. I will continue to campaign for the Gallery to be accessible at convenient times for Walsall's residents and visitors.

Finally, don't forget to vote in the local elections and AV referendum on 5th May. As we are seeing in the news every day, there are people still struggling for the right to vote in democratic elections at great sacrifice.

Valerie Vaz

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