

VIEW FROM THE HOUSE

The amended Welfare Reform Bill was sent to the Commons. As many of you know, it will introduce a Universal Credit from April 2013.

Disability Living Allowance will be replaced by Personal Independence Payments. Constituents have already been suffering by the cuts to this benefit. A car has been taken away which was used for a disabled son. Another deaf constituent has lost his communicator guide, confining him to his house. Surely as a society we cannot tolerate these attacks on the vulnerable whilst bankers are still pocketing millions in bonuses.

The Health Select Committee, I am a member, published its report into Public Expenditure. It comes at a time when the Government is pushing ahead with its Health Bill, an unwanted reorganisation of the NHS. Our Committee says the Bill is a distraction when efforts need to be focused on how to cope with existing challenges.

This Government does not seem to be listening. Most of the medical profession are now opposing the Government's health reforms. This week health professionals from the Royal College of GPs joined the long list of NHS workers calling for the bill to be scrapped, which includes Nurses, Physiotherapists, Midwives, and the BMA.

In the meantime obesity levels are rising. The UK has the highest levels in the EU and figures show that the West Midlands has the highest level of obese adults, 29% of the population, double the EU average. I was pleased therefore to host Mike Eyre and Ken Whittingham at Westminster to launch the 'E-Bal' programme. This encourages community organisations, health and education to work together to tackle obesity. I hope to see their success in Walsall continue, and progress across the country.

Good news on countering metal theft which has affected Walsall landmarks. The Government issued a statement for new legislation to ban cash transactions in scrap metal markets and to increase the fines for existing offences.

But there needs to be better enforcement, including more powers for the police to close down rogue traders. People selling scrap metal should have their identities recorded at point of sale, and scrap metal dealers should be licensed.

Many constituents have contacted me with their concerns about the possible new Bail Hostel in Moxley. I also have concerns and will be meeting with the Probation Service and others. It seems odd that when there are cuts, money can be found to build a new hostel when others already exist.

Valerie Vaz

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