

View From the House

Many of you will know of my support for the New Art Gallery and how the Arts help us make sense of the world around us. So I was delighted with the announcement that Sunday openings will commence soon particularly as there will be a forthcoming exhibition of Damien Hirst's work.

More importantly I was pleased to add my voice for the New Art Gallery's bid to host the Turner Prize Exhibition in 2015. The Prize is awarded each year to a young British contemporary artist and alternates between the Tate Britain in London and a regional gallery. Previously, the prize has generated significant controversy and sparked much debate in the national media. Hosting the prize in Walsall will bring national attention to the Borough as well as thousands of visitors from Britain and across the world. Walsall will be on the cultural map. We will all benefit from hosting the Turner prize – in an area which has a manufacturing base – out of carbon comes a diamond.

Just before the Parliamentary recess, the Government suggested that it will drop its long standing commitment to allow 12 weeks for responses to consultations on changes to policy. Public consultations could now be as little as 2 weeks. So interested parties will have very little time once they are aware of a consultation to consider a response.

This is already happening with the consultation at the Three Crowns School in Paddock. Residents had been given little more than two weeks to respond to a consultation on plans to build 8 detached houses on Green Belt land. A similar application was firmly rejected by residents in October 2010. Residents told me that only some of those living in the roads around the site were contacted rather than everyone in the area.

OFSTED's report into Walsall Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services found it to be inadequate and was highly critical of the management of Walsall Children's Service. The leadership of the Council must ensure that the budget is sufficient to fulfil the statutory obligations of this service to protect the vulnerable.

I was disappointed that in Walsall South, 320 people aged between 18 and 24 have now been claiming Job Seekers' Allowance for more than a year. This is a 178% increase on the figure a year ago. Young people must be supported to get that first step in employment. The Government's austerity policy is not working.

Valerie Vaz MP