

View from the House

One of the tools open to a backbencher to put through legislation is a Ten Minute Rule Bill. I have drafted 2 such Bills. Usually they do not progress much further than a Second Reading but discussions with the Government of the Day can lead to implementation.

So I was delighted when the Prime Minister agreed to meet with me and the umbrella group Joint Council for Epilepsy. We met after PMQ in the PM's office behind the Speakers Chair.

The Prime Minister was very supportive and said he would ask the Departments of Health and Education to look again at my Bill's proposals. The Prime Minister also offered his support in raising awareness of the issues around epilepsy at future national campaigns which tackle the stigma still associated with the condition. The Bill asks for immediate referral to a specialist clinician for anyone experiencing a suspected seizure. It also asks for an annual assessment in schools to identify the additional needs of children with epilepsy to help them achieve their potential. I am hopeful there will be guidance to implement the provisions without the need for legislation.

For the first time we debated a motion which arose from an e-petition – on Europe. In my view this debate on Europe was a distraction especially as it was given the same amount of debating time as the Health Bill 3rd reading which is privatising and fragmenting the NHS right here right now. Our view is there should be a referendum when there are major constitutional changes.

Locally, we had a success. Philip Antill came to see me at my surgery not long after I was elected. He had presented a petition to the Council in 2008 about the bus lane on Birmingham Road. I know they have an important role but this lane was not very long and was creating difficulties for residents and drivers alike.

So I was pleased when Council officers responded to my call for a meeting and listened to residents' concerns. I can now report that the bus lane has been removed. This shows what can happen when we all work together to resolve a problem.

This year it has been my pleasure to celebrate with Councillor Bill Madeley, who has served as a councillor for over 40 years, and my predecessor the Rt. Hon Bruce George. Both have deservedly been made Freemen of the Borough..

Valerie Vaz MP

30th October 2011