



VALERIE WELCOMES SHADOW EDUCATION SECRETARY



Valerie welcomed the Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Tristram Hunt MP, to Pheasey Park Farm Primary School to open the School's digital Collaborative Classroom.

Valerie said: "Pheasey Park Farm Primary School's digital Collaborative Classroom is one of the cornerstones of the School's plan to become an Outstanding school and an internationally recognised centre of excellence for digital learning. I was keen to show this innovation to the Shadow Education Secretary, Tristram Hunt MP and invited him to Walsall to open the Collaborative Classroom, which is the first of its kind in Europe."

"The classroom comprises three wall mounted interactive touchscreens, two multi-touch tables and notebook computers for each child. This is designed to enable pupils to work and learn with each other collaboratively so that each child is engaged with the lesson. With their teacher's involvement I hope this will help children achieve their potential."



Budget

The Chancellor presented the Government's annual Budget on Wednesday 19 March 2014.

Valerie said: "According to the independent Office for Budget Responsibility, people are £1,600 a year worse off. This is not a budget for everyone."

"The Budget made no mention about youth unemployment which under this Government has increased. The number of young people on the dole for over a year has almost doubled, with nearly a thousand people aged 18-24 in Walsall South claiming Job Seekers Allowance."

"According to figures released that day Walsall South has the 41st highest unemployment rate. This Budget will not help reduce unemployment in Walsall South or tackle the cost-of-living crisis that many people across the country face."

Planning and the Green Belt in Walsall South

Valerie secured an Adjournment Debate on "Planning and the Green Belt in Walsall South" on Monday 31 March 2014.

Valerie said: "I have been alarmed by the number of Planning Applications granted for building on the Green Belt in Walsall South. The most recent application relates to the construction of 59 houses at Great Barr Park and an approximate reconstruction of Great Barr Hall. What concerns me in this Application is the use of enabling development to build on the Green Belt. English Heritage has confirmed to me that nothing of historical significance remains in the building. The application does not meet the criteria for development on the Green Belt set out in Paragraphs 80, 88 and 89 of the National Planning Policy Framework. There are no very special circumstances."

"I am concerned that Walsall MBC have shown that they may not be acting in the interests of residents but of developers. How else would you explain that the Notice of a Planning Application was sent out on 23 December 2013? I am pleased that the Minister suggested practical advice on the application."

Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani Release

On Wednesday 19 March 2014 Valerie welcomed the reports from Reuters of the release of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani from Iranian jail.

Valerie said: "Just after I was elected as an MP, I asked the Prime Minister in PMQs on 15 September 2010 to raise her case with the Iranian Government as she was facing being stoned to death."

"I have tabled an EDM which calls on the Government to apply further pressure on the Iranian Government to outlaw the practice of stoning and other forms of the death penalty, flogging or imprisonment for those women convicted of "adultery", which is a violation of any and all definitions of human rights."

Criminal Justice and Courts Bill Committee

As a member of the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill Committee Valerie heard evidence and scrutinised the Clauses of the Bill.

Valerie said: "There are [Clauses relating to Judicial Review](#) which could limit JR cases. This is an important part of our democracy as it allows citizens to challenge decisions made by Government on unlawful grounds. We voted against Clause 53, which penalises interveners for costs. Interveners are invited by the court to provide evidence that otherwise would not be available, often saving the court costs. Clause 50: invites Judges to look behind the decisions. This is not their role. Clause 26: I opposed single magistrates on two main grounds: that the provision offends the basic principles of the justice and legal system in this country and secondly that it will not do what is intended, which is to save costs."

Surgeries

Valerie holds regular surgeries. To arrange an appointment, please call the Constituency Office on 01922 635835

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News in Brief

Hospital Closure Clause



On 11 March 2014 Valerie voted for the amendment tabled by Shadow Secretary of State for Health Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP to remove Clause 119 from the Care Bill. Unfortunately this amendment was

defeated by the Coalition Government 297 to 239.

Valerie said: "I have always been opposed to giving the Secretary of State the power to shut down any hospital. Many constituents wrote to me about deleting this clause."

Badger Cull Vote

The motion on the badger culls was debated on Thursday 13 March 2014.

Valerie said: "I was pleased that this motion was passed 219 Ayes to 1 Noes. I have always been opposed to the Badger Cull."

George Rose Community Garden



"I was delighted to help plant a new hedgerow at George Rose Community Garden. It was wonderful to see so many members of the local community turn out to take part in the development of this new green space in Darlaston, making it a much cleaner place to live."

Bike Right

Launching a cycling initiative at SureStart Palfrey Children's Centre Valerie said: "Palfrey Sure Start is working with BikeRight to encourage people to learn to cycle. They will run cycle training classes every other Saturday in Palfrey Park."



Broadway West Playing Fields

Valerie tried the archery session at the re-opening of the Broadway West Playing Fields for community sporting use:

"The event was a great success with many members of the community turning up to take part in an archery session. I hope the community takes advantage of this space. People need to emphasise the importance of an active, healthy lifestyle, especially the younger generations."



King Charles Primary School

Following a visit to King Charles Primary School in Bentley. Valerie said: "The Children were very engaged with their work. I wanted to let the children know about Parliament and how to visit it."



Family Mediation

Valerie asked the Justice Minister about family mediation.



Valerie asked: "May I ask the Secretary of State to correct the record? In the House, he said that family mediations had not fallen, but a letter from the Minister of State for Justice says that publicly funded referrals and family mediations have fallen."

Valerie said: "The Minister contended that the percentage of successful mediations has not fallen. But has failed to address the key issue which is that the number of publically funded referrals and mediations have fallen under this Government."

Valerie's question and the Minister's response can be viewed [here](#).

Health Select Committee

The Health Select Committee, of which Valerie is a member, has published reports on the accountability hearings with the General Medical Council and Monitor, they are available to view [here](#).

The HSC heard evidence about Care.data. Valerie said: "The NHS Information Centre must take steps to ensure transparency in how it carries out its functions. I was concerned to hear that the medical records of 47 million patients had been sold to The Staple Inn Actuarial Society who then advised insurance companies who refined premiums. The use of Care.data has currently only been approved for commissioning and in the future for research purposes. Patients data should not be sold to insurance companies, commercial companies and private sector research organisations without the people's consent. The public should have been properly informed about who has access to their medical data so they can decide what happens to it."

"Patients data is private. I asked Max Jones, Director of Information and Data Services at the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC), for the cost of the contract with Atos to provide a software tool to support the HSCIC's General Practice Extraction Service. Mr Jones was unable to answer, but has since written to the Committee to inform us the contact is worth £10.11m and will run for another four years."

Maternity Allowance for Self-Employed Mothers



On Tuesday 11 March 2014, the draft Statutory Instrument: The Social Security (Maternity Allowance) (Participating Wife or Civil Partner of Self-employed Earner) Regulations 2014 was enacted.

"This grants entitlement to Maternity Allowance for the spouses of self employed workers who participate in their spouse's self-employed business but receive no income. The Minister specifically cited farmers wives or the wives of male shopkeepers as among those most likely to benefit from this change."

"Many women may not be aware that they are entitled to Maternity Allowance, which is worth up to £136.78 per week for up to 39 weeks of Maternity Leave."

Burma

Valerie raised ongoing issues in Burma with the Minister at Foreign and Commonwealth Office Questions.



Valerie asked: "May I urge the Minister to press the Burmese Government? There is still concern about the census. Many people have been displaced, Médecins Sans Frontières has been suspended from Rakhine, and there needs to be constitutional reform by 2015 if there are to be free and fair elections."

Valerie's questions and the Minister's response are available [here](#).