

View from the House

As we start the New Year we are confronted with pictures of homes being flooded from heavy rainfall. In the comprehensive spending review the Government cut flood defence spending from £665 million in 2010-11, to £540 million for each year until 2014-15. The Environment Agency budget was cut by 20% with the loss of 2000 staff. This is a false economy. As the Agency said, every £1 spent on flood defences saves £8 in avoiding future damage.

The Health Service continues to dominate the political landscape. The organisational changes brought about by the Health and Social Care Act are starting to bite. PCTs are now morphed into Clinical Commissioning Groups, CCGs. Then from the 1 April 2013 the NHS Commissioning Board takes on its responsibilities. But the NHS Commissioning Board also has local outposts. It is vital we do not let the organisational chaos undermine the NHS and the founding principles that it remains free at the point of need.

And yet there was a £3billion under spend in the Health budget in the last two years. This has been returned to the Treasury. Also the UK Statistics Authority confirmed, on the Treasury's own publication *Public Spending Statistics* that "expenditure on the NHS in real terms was lower in 2011-12 than it was in 2009-10". So the Government's claim to have increased the NHS budget in real terms in each of the last two years is challenged by the independent UK Statistics Authority.

Locally I have been contacted by constituents who have had difficulty with their rubbish collection. Walsall MBC has operated a "Zero Tolerance" policy on what is allowed to be put in recycling bins. The Council should be working for residents not penalising them. This is a far from straightforward system. The Secretary of State at DCLG recently said that everyone "has a basic right to have their household rubbish taken away each and every week".

In other parts of the country, there is a weekly rubbish collection which includes all the recycled waste in a separate bag. There was a recycling facility at Morrisons at Lichfield Street which has been removed. Now there are more carbon emissions as people have to travel by car to the nearest recycling facility. How difficult is it to achieve a simple system. ? Austerity measures by cutting essential public spending are short sighted.

Valerie Vaz MP