

### **View from the House – 3 April 2014**

In the House, in the last few weeks, I have been scrutinising the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill. As members of the Bill Committee, MPs go through clause by clause of the Bill to try and draw the Government's attention to clauses which could be amended. The Bill Committee, as it is called, has been in session every Tuesday and Thursday, morning and afternoon.

One of the main controversial clauses is to allow a single magistrate to adjudicate. I am opposed to this as we have always had open justice in this country. I pointed out that there were clauses littered with the word "adjourned" which will lead to more costs rather than a saving of costs. I also suggested a way forward would be to list the cases before two magistrates or a District Judge at the end of their sitting in open court.

There are clauses which appear to limit a Judge's discretion in Judicial Review cases. The evidence on the numbers of cases does not support the Government's contention that JRs should be curtailed in this way. During evidence sessions we heard concerns that the Bill sets up a constitutional conflict between the Judiciary and the Executive.

The Budget was disappointing in not taking steps to ensure that young people, latest figure 970 in Walsall South, are able to access either a job or training. Staff in the health service will not get a pay rise. This is disgraceful given that they have been at the frontline ensuring the NHS continues to care for patients despite the top-down reorganisation.

I was pleased Reuters has reported that Sakinah Ashtiani has been released. In September 2010 I asked the Prime Minister to raise her case. She was sentenced to be stoned to death in Iran in 2006. On 28 October 2010 I wrote to the President of Iran to ask for the release of Mrs Ashtiani. The letter was signed by a cross party group of 119 MPs.

And I was delighted to help my constituent Mark Dabbs who noticed that the plaque erected for John Carless VC in Carless Street incorrectly recorded the date of his death. I am grateful to the Council who have agreed to replace the plaque with the correct date of John Carless' death of 17 November 1917. Thanks to Mr Dabbs for keeping a WW1 hero's memory alive- a true hero from Walsall.

**Valerie Vaz MP**

**31 March 2014**