

View From the House

I start with sad news. On Saturday 24 May 2014, Cllr Tim Oliver Leader of the Labour Group passed away. Tim was an incredible public servant, for the community at Palfrey CA and as a councillor for 18 years. His experience will be missed. At least Tim lived to see his beloved party win control of the Council albeit one seat short of an overall majority. It is so sad that for a person who made such a commitment is not around to deliver his ambitions for Walsall. My thoughts are with his family and friends at this difficult time.

The NHS is back in the news. Lost in the middle of the local and Euro election was the commitment that a future Labour Government will guarantee that everyone will be able to see a GP within 48 hours and an appointment on the same day for all who need one. An extra £100 million a year will be invested in family doctor practices. This will pay for an additional 3 million GP appointments every year. The 48 hour GP guarantee could save hundreds of millions of pounds by reducing the number of patients going to A&E departments and avoidable hospital admissions.

The backing of community hospitals playing a bigger role in the care of patients by Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of the NHS, highlights the worrying aspects of the Government's Health and Social Care Act. The announcement did not come from the Secretary of State for Health but from Mr Stevens. It is not clear what evidence he used for the announcement. Whilst everyone wants to be treated with dignity, as outlined in the Francis report, there are implications for how effective this will make the NHS in delivering a cost effective service. Mr Stevens' appearance before the Health Select Committee where he obfuscated on his opinion that there could be "free GPs" to be like "Free Schools" and his previous role in the private sector in US makes me concerned about his commitment to the NHS as an integrated service.

Some of you have contacted me about the future of the Gala Baths concerned that its future may be in doubt. Having spoken to Tim last year, he was clear that the Labour Group would not close this vital community resource. I hope Ellie Simmons our ParaOlympian is not busy. Hopefully we will not need to call on her to save the Gala Baths....again.

Valerie Vaz MP
1 June 2014