

View from the House

It was an eventful week in the House: the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, following that a statement by the Prime Minister on action in Syria. I had just returned from the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) Women's Forum in Malta. This was the first time a Women's Forum had taken place at the CHOGM. The overall message was that we need to make greater strides in women's equality for the 1 billion women and girls across the 53 countries of the Commonwealth.

Despite the opposition to the Chancellor's policy on Tax Credit and police funding cuts, the Chancellor chose to wait until the Statement to announce he would not be going ahead with those policies leaving many people uncertain right up until the announcement. In my view that is no way to treat people. But that belies the actual truth because in the move to Universal Credit millions will still face a huge cut in income.

Added to that local government funding is still being slashed. The Central Grant will fall by 56%. This is a reduction to local authorities of £6.1bn from £11bn to £5bn by 2019/20 and will have a devastating effect on local services already under pressure from previous cuts. Libraries, street cleaning, roads and public sector frontline staff, basic services that keep communities functioning will be cut or reduced. Pleck Library and South Walsall Library are under threat as they always are when there is a Tory administration at Walsall MBC.

And a bizarre announcement that people who want to be nurses will have to take out a loan. They should receive bursaries as there is a shortage of nurses. I raised the issue in the House that there were more applicants, over 5000 for 500 places at Wolverhampton University. Making nursing students take out loans will have the reverse effect when there is a shortage and much recruitment takes place abroad. And the Secretary of State for Health had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the Arbitration and Conciliation Service after Junior Doctors had been balloted and 98% supported strike action – this is no way to run our NHS.

On Syria, I do not think the government has made the case for military intervention. There is no plan for a political solution. There is no military plan to defeat ISIL-Daesh on the ground – a Tory MP just returned from the region does not recognize the figure of 70,000 ground troops.

Valerie Vaz MP

29 November 2015