

View from the House

These last four years have sped by as we watch and enjoy the continued success of our Olympic athletes from London to Rio– and of course Usain Bolt.

Since 2012 there was much talk at the time of the Olympic legacy that would encourage people to use the facilities to get active and fit. But during that time the obesity levels have not fallen. The figures for children are stark. A third of children are overweight by the time they reach secondary school. The Government's strategy - and there must be a national strategy - has failed despite the Secretary of State for Health announcing he wanted to take "drastic action".

Slipped out while we were all sitting on the couch watching the Olympics, the Government's obesity strategy now consists of eating less sugar and doing more exercise. There is no mention of the action on fat content reduction, no ban on advertising foods high in fat, sugar and salt during family shows. Nor will there be any action on supermarkets' promotion of multibuy of junk foods.

The Health and Social Care Act set up the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) which would coordinate and work with GPs, providers and local authorities to tackle obesity. Despite opposition to the reorganisation it went ahead. The consequences are that the NHS announced that Walsall CCG was "inadequate" and will necessitate "special measures". The very organisation that should be coordinating an obesity strategy in partnership with public health is not effective.

Hard on the heels of that announcement was an Ofsted report which set out concerns about secondary education in Walsall. What makes organisations responsive and effective is accountability to those they serve. When constituents come to me to raise their concerns it is my responsibility to point out to those who wield decision making powers to affect change. Ofsted said that there should be more accountability. Good heads and good hospitals see raising concerns as a learning exercise rather than as criticism that needs to be defended.

Everyone can learn from best practise – a primary school initiative where children run or walk a mile every morning around the playground is now spreading nationwide.

We can learn from the Olympic athletes who have a strategy to win with the support of finance, trainers, nutritionists, and who understand that perseverance, the routine of training and practise has made them winners medallists or not. Lets make it happen.

Valerie Vaz MP

22 August 2016.