

View from the House

It was a privilege to sing on the recording of "You can't always get what you want" for the Jo Cox Foundation. The single is out on 16 December. Some of my colleagues and I recorded the backing vocals as part of a Choir which included a local community choir and professionals from the Royal Opera House. The proceeds will go to the charity set up to carry on Jo's work. Jo was a hardworking MP who gave a voice to those in desperate need abroad and at home.

I raised the International Day of Persons with Disabilities which is celebrated on 3 December. I am disappointed that the Government still has not confirmed whether it will end the humiliating and harmful re-assessments for people with long-term conditions who are receiving Personal Independence Payments.

A recently published National Audit Office report said that sanctions on welfare payments are handed out without any evidence that they actually work. Figures for 2015 show that £132 million was withheld in benefits; £35million was paid for hardship and the costs of administrating the sanctions scheme is £50 million. The NAO concluded that there is no evidence that sanctions are value for money for the British taxpayer.

Recent figures from the Trussell Trust state over one million people have been given a 3 day emergency supply of food. That figure is set to rise next year as more people will face hardship because the Government has lowered the benefit cap.

Science and research in the UK is facing more uncertainty since the referendum. It is welcome news that the Government has committed £2 billion for science and research but there needs to be a firmer agreement, just as the PM made with Nissan, that leaving the European Union does not damage the networks of collaboration between scientists because over 60% of the UK's internationally co-authored papers involve partners in the EU. We have some of the best Universities and research is a vital part of their work.

Exciting news for our local club Darlaston 1874 FC. A new stand is going up at their ground at Bentley Leisure Pavilions. The club rose from the ashes under the hard work of Chairman Neil Chambers and the clubs loyal supporters. Come along to support a local Walsall success. It's all happening on 17th December from 1.30pm.

I would like to wish you all a very peaceful Christmas and all good wishes for the New Year.

Valerie Vaz MP

4.12.16