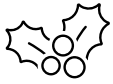


eNews December 2022



Welcome to the December edition of my eNews. This has been a challenging year, with three Prime Ministers, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the cost-of-living crisis and the death of her Late Majesty the Queen.

I wish everyone a peaceful Christmas and Happy New Year.



Chapel Lane Battery Storage Site Rejected



The Walsall Council Planning Committee has rejected the Anesco Battery Storage Site, due to be built on Chapel Lane. This is a great win for everyone who put in objections, and it has taken a great deal of work to ensure the case was made on planning grounds. The Planning Committee at their meeting on 1 December 2022 agreed with the officer's report. It mentioned that over 300 comments were received objecting to the proposals, including the letters that I submitted and objections from local groups. 🌀

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Visit



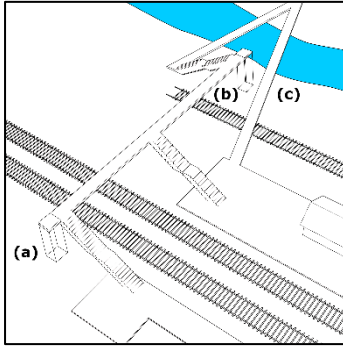
On Friday 9 December I visited St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Rough Hay Road, Darlaston, as part of Parliament Week. The pupils asked me searching questions about my work in Parliament. I explained different processes such as how a Bill progresses through both chambers and the ways I can hold the Government to account. I said that I can ask questions to the Minister about local, national, or international issues and that I went into politics to help people. I wished the students well for their secondary school choices next year. 🌀

TfWM Reverse Proposed Bus Changes



My constituents raised their concerns about TfWM's decision to withdraw and amend several bus services. This would have a negative impact on the local community. I was concerned to see that the 36, 39, 65 and 310 bus services in Walsall South were at risk. I set up a call with Jon Hayes, Head of Bus at TfWM, on 6 December 2022 to discuss these proposed changes in Walsall South. Jon confirmed that the 39, 65, and 310 will continue to operate. The 36 however will no longer operate on weekday evenings and Sundays. 🌀

Valerie raises passenger accessibility at Bescot Stadium Station with the Secretary of State for Transport



I wrote to Rt Hon Mark Harper MP, Secretary of State for Transport to raise the issue of access to Bescot Stadium Station. My constituents, including parents with pushchairs and the Walsall FC Supporters Trust are alarmed that the only access to and from the platforms is by stairs. The issue could be easily resolved by the construction of two lifts on either side of the footbridge and the addition of a direct path from the station carpark to the platform southbound. 🌀

Walsall FC Together – Supporting Communities Initiative



It is excellent to see Walsall FC take part in the English Football League 'Together – Supporting Communities' initiative to support local families. The club is providing community initiatives including matchday experiences for local families and school partners games where families can purchase tickets at reduced prices. A percentage of the sales will be donated to the schools. I look forward to seeing the success of these initiatives and the local community coming together. 🌀

Valerie appears on BBC Sunday Politics West Midlands



I appeared on BBC West Midlands Sunday Politics. With Jeremy Wright, MP for Kenilworth and Southam. We discussed the nurses strike. I pointed out the importance of valuing the public workers who protected us through the pandemic. The discussion moved to asylum seekers being housed in hotels. The Conservative Government's failure to handle the situation has led to a asylum claim backlog of 150,000, but only 2% have had their asylum claim processed. We also discussed Free School Meals. 🌀

The Staffordshire Band performs at St Martin's Church



On Saturday the 17 December, the Staffordshire Band played to a sold-out audience at St Martin's Church in Walsall. The band was originally formed as The Walsall Wood Institute Temperance Band in the 1900s and became The Staffordshire Band in 1998. The band have performed at a variety of venues, including the Royal Albert Hall. 🌀



Online Safety Bill, Remaining Stages



The Online Safety Bill creates a number of duties for companies that host user-generated content. The Bill has now been watered down and weakened by the Government and no longer creates an obligation for websites to remove 'legal but harmful' material, which means children can still be exposed to damaging material online. The Bill will go back to committee stage and new government amendments will be considered. The Bill is at risk as it has been carried over once before and will fall completely if it does not complete its passage before the end of this parliamentary Session. 🌀

HM Opposition Day: NHS Workforce and PPE Contracts



HM Opposition used the Opposition Day Debate to raise NHS Workforce issues. The motions recognised the shortage of hospital doctors and nurses and to condemn the Government's failure to train NHS staff. I voted in favour, and it passed, Ayes:226 and Noes:0. HM Opposition raised the issue of Government PPE Contracts. In 2020-21 more than £12 billion was spent on PPE: £8.7 billion of this was written off and £4 billion spent on unusable PPE. The motion demanded the truth around how PPE contracts were handed out and was passed without opposition. The Government are now pursuing MedPro to recover £122 million. 🌀

Financial Markets and Services Bill, Report Stage



The Financial Services and Markets Bill establishes the post-Brexit regulatory regime for the finance sector. I voted for a number of amendments to the bill, including one which would have introduced a national fraud strategy and data sharing arrangement. I also voted for a New Clause that would have required the Treasury and FCA to undertake a review into access to in-person banking services and set a minimum level of access that banks and building services must provide. None of the amendments passed. 🌀

Valerie Supports Amendment to Guarantee Access to Free Cash Machines



I signed an amendment to introduce New Clause 7 to the Financial Markets and Services Bill. The amendment proposes that the Treasury must make provision to guarantee a minimum level of cash access, and that this is free. As it stands, a quarter of cash machines charge people to access their own money. The Amendment was also signed by 83 of my colleagues. I voted for the new clause, which was not passed, Ayes: 206 and Noes 271. 🌀

Valerie asks about the Centre for Democratic Resilience



During FCDO Question on the 13 December, the Minister was asked about the potential merits of establishing an FCDO centre of expertise to help support democracies across the world. I asked the Minister. 'Is the Minister aware that NATO has set up a centre for democratic resilience? Will he make sure that the Government do not undermine that work or duplicate it?'. The Minister responded: 'Yes. That is a very good point, and we will enhance and emphasise the work in a perfectly seamless, joined-up approach.'

Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill, Remaining Stages



The Australia and New Zealand Trade Bill ratifies and implements the UK's free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand. I have concerns about the way in which these trade deals were negotiated. The former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has even admitted that the Australia deal was bad for Britain. I voted for two new clauses; one would have required the Secretary of State to carry out an assessment of the impact of the deal on farmers. The other would have implemented a super-affirmative provision. Neither New Clause passed.

Draft Voter Identification Regulations 2022



I voted against the Draft Voter Identification Regulations 2022, which passed, Ayes: 298 and Noes: 199. I share the concerns of the Electoral Commission, Local Government Association and others, who warn that voter ID risks disenfranchising voters, and cannot feasibly be bought in ahead of the May 2023 local election. Despite this, the Government is still intending to use voter ID in four months' time. I am alarmed at this suppression of democratic rights.

Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill



The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill follows the publication of the Levelling Up the United Kingdom White Paper, which highlighted disparities across different regions of the UK. Whilst I support the idea of levelling up these regions, I have concerns about measures of the Bill relating to planning and the environment. I voted for a number of amendments which would have, among other things, hardwired a regard for Climate Change into the planning system. Sadly, none of the amendments passed.

Future and Emerging Treatments for Epilepsy



I chaired an Epilepsy All-Party Parliamentary Group meeting on future and emerging treatments for Epilepsy. I was delighted to welcome Dr Sophie Varadkar and Mr Martin Tisdall from Great Ormond Street Hospital. They discussed MRI-guided laser interstitial thermal therapy for drug-resistant epilepsy. Following this, Anna Norton, Research and Involvement Officer at Epilepsy Research UK, talked about the areas of epilepsy healthcare that can be improved by research.

Ukraine Blind School visits Parliament



I was touched to meet 15 students on who were previously studying at the Ukraine Blind School in Kharkiv, before it was bombed by the Russian Army. The students had also visited Buckingham Palace and were visiting Parliament with their headteacher and the Mayor of Kharkiv. The students sang both the Ukrainian and British national anthems beautifully and later went on a tour of Parliament. The week-long trip was sponsored by the Thomas Pocklington Trust. 🌀

[Thomas Pocklington Trust \(@TPTgeneral\) / Twitter](#)

Asylum Seekers (Removal to safe countries) Ten Minute Rule Motion



I voted against a Ten Minute Rule Motion which bought by a Conservative MP. The motion would have given time for a Bill which allows the Government to ignore some decisions and judgements of international courts. Fortunately, the Bill failed to pass, with only 69 voting in favour and 188 voting against. I am glad the Bill failed to pass, as it called for the Government to break international law would be a serious moral and ethical failure. We must uphold our commitments and continue to meet our obligations. 🌀
