

eNEWS

from Rt Hon Valerie Vaz MP

February 2026

**Birchills Leamore - Blakenall - Bloxwich East - Bloxwich West
Paddock (Part of Ward) - Palfrey - Pleck - St. Matthew's**



Westminster Book Awards 2026



We celebrated 10 years of the awards on 4 February. As Chair of the APPG on Publishing, I opened the event with a speech, followed by Dan Conway, CEO of the Publishers Association and Fleur Sinclair, President of the Booksellers Association. The awards were hosted by Matt Chorley, Radio 5 Live and the winners were Chris Bryant MP, Chris Evans MP and Jacinda Ardern, former Prime Minister of New Zealand. You can read my speech in full on my website. 🌐

IKEA Parliamentary Reception 2026



I hosted the IKEA Retail Reception, 10 February "Food Waste & Sustainability". IKEA was the first global company to halve food waste in 2023. Food prepared by co-workers from IKEA's restaurants including traditional Swedish and plant-based meatballs, Gravlax wraps were sampled. I introduced Mostafa El Garaa, Deputy Country Retail Manager for the UK and Ireland (left), who said IKEA saved the equivalent of 37.8 million meals from going to waste. 🌐

World Cancer Day 2026



4 February is designated as World Cancer Day. I was pleased to invite my constituent Elliot Pfebve, an Ambassador for Cancer Research UK and founder of Pfebve Cancer Support, to the drop in held by Cancer Research UK to raise awareness. The theme of this year's World Cancer Day is 'United by Unique', centring the unique experiences of every person affected by cancer. Elliot was the first in the UK to receive the mRNA Vaccine to combat renal cancer. 🌐

Walsall FC Foundation – Walking Football



Adam Davy, Director of the Walsall FC Foundation invited me on 7 February to see the men's walking football, a popular programme he is developing. Teams take part in matches on Saturday mornings before the main match in the Stadium - that day against Barnet FC. We met Swifty the Walsall mascot. The Foundation which recently celebrated its 35th anniversary, promotes mental & physical wellbeing, and employment support. 🌀

Office of Rail and Road Parliamentary Drop-In



The ORR is responsible for holding Network Rail to account, ensuring NR invest and improve our national infrastructure. I met Declan Collier, Chair of the ORR and raised the issue of Bescot Stadium Station and the lack of progress on its accessibility. Mr Collier agreed to raise the issue with NR. I made the point that prioritising stations for funding for access on the measures of footfall is illogical; if the station is inaccessible there would be fewer users. 🌀

Opposition Day Debate (17th Allotted Day) Lord Mandelson



The Opposition Motion on 4 February called on the Government to release documents covering the appointment of Lord Mandelson as Ambassador to Washington in 2025. A Government amendment was agreed by the House that all documents would be given to the Intelligence and Security committee except for those documents that impact on national security and the UK's international relations. 🌀

Classical Mixtape: A Live Takeover of the Southbank Centre



As Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Classical Music, I was delighted to visit the Southbank Centre for 'Classical Mixtape: A Live Takeover' on Thursday 5 February. The multi-venue event, in the form of a mixtape brought to life, featured classical music favourites and film soundtracks, performed by all six of the Southbank Centre's resident orchestras, including Chineke!, in different venues and the audience moved around the Southbank Centre. 🌀

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Bill: Lords Amendments



The Bill ratifies the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement, signed in 2023, setting up protected zones and helping to protect marine life and habitats in parts of the ocean that have previously been vulnerable to overuse and exploitation. During the debate on 2 February 2026, all 12 Government amendments were accepted, relating to devolution and the effective implementation of the BBNJ Agreement across the country. 🌀

Compensation for WASPI Women



In November 2025, the Government reconsidered the previous Government's 2024 response, including all available evidence. The Sec for DWP, Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP, announced on 29 January 2026 that the Government does not consider that compensation would be appropriate. On 6 February with other MPs, co-signing a letter to the SoS DWP calling for the Government to reconsider the PHSO report, engage with the WASPI women and reconsider compensation. 🌀

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill: Third Reading



The previous Government introduced the two-child limit on Universal Credit (UC). Its effect was to push more children into poverty. From 2010, the number of children in poverty rose by 900,000, reaching 4.5 million in 2024. Removing the two-child limit is the single most effective and immediate way to reduce child poverty. The Bill passed its second reading on 3 February and passed its third reading on 23 February: Ayes 361, Noes 84. 🌀

APPG on Portugal



The group held its Annual General Meeting on 24 February. I was re-elected as Chair, Baroness Hooper, Christine Jardine MP and Florence Eshalomi MP were re-elected as Vice-Chairs. The group held successful meetings in 2025 hosting the Portugal Ambassador to the UK Nuno Brito who spoke about UK-Portugal relations and answered questions and hosting the President of the Portuguese Parliament Jose Pedro Aguiar-Branco and his delegation, pictured. 🌀

Brave New World? Report on Generative AI



On 10 February, I attended the Independent Society of Musicians, the Society of Authors, Association of Illustrators, Equity and the Association of Photographers, roundtable discussion in Parliament to discuss the findings of the newly released report, *Brave New World?* The report led to the creation of the "CLEAR" framework for AI: Consent, Licensing, Ethical Use, Accountability and Remuneration for creators. The creative industry must be protected. 🌀

Local Government Finance Settlement (England) 2026-27



The Government settlement on 11 February now enables councils to rebuild local services and direct resources towards areas with the greatest need. Councils will see a 15.5% increase in core spending power, worth over £11.4 billion compared with 2025-26. The package will also address children's social care reforms, SEND pressures, homelessness, rough sleeping and domestic abuse services. The Motion was voted on and carried: Ayes 277, Noes 143. 🌀

UN Tax Convention Meeting



Global Witness, Tax Justice UK, Oxfam, Greenpeace, War on Want, the Center for Economic and Social Rights, and Amnesty International, held a drop-in on 3 February: "Why the UK Government must support the UN Tax Convention" (UNTC). It could help countries, but not exclusively in the Global South, to reduce debt and reliance on aid, and curb illicit financial flows that deplete public resources, enabling more sustainable developments in other parts of the world. 🌀

Opposition Day Debates and the Charter for Budget Responsibility



On 24 February the Liberal Democrats raised two motions: the Government to disclose papers relating Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor's appointment as Representative for Trade and Investment, which was agreed, and for the Online Services (Age Restrictions) Bill to be expedited. The Commons rejected this: Ayes 69, Noes 279.

The Charter for Budget Responsibility: Autumn 2025, was approved without division. 🌀

Referendums Relating to Council Tax Increases Report 2026-27



The Report, made by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, was approved by the House of Commons on 11 February. Setting the principles for each Council for 2026-27, Walsall Council’s Council Tax will be considered excessive if the basic amount is 5% (2% adult social care and 3% other expenditure) or more than 5% greater than the council tax for 2025–26. The Motion was voted on and carried: Ayes 279, Noes 90. 🌀

UNISON Libraries Drop in



I attended UNISON’s briefing for MPs on 24 February, highlighting how a lack of funding for local councils is severely undermining the ambitions of the Government’s Plan for Change. Walsall has seen a 61% decrease in the number of Council-run libraries between 2010 and 2023, and an 83% decrease in the number of council library workers. UNISON is calling for improved levels of funding in the Spring Forecast. 🌀

Valerie Chairs Westminster Hall Debates



I chaired the debate, “That this House has considered Eating Disorders Awareness Week 2026” on 26 February. EDA Week 2026 runs from 23 February to 1 March and aims to educate the public about eating disorders and provide support to those affected. The motion was moved by Wera Hobhouse MP, Chair of the APPG on Eating Disorders, and responded to by Dr Zubir Ahmed, Minister for Health Innovation and Safety. 🌀

Remembering Dennis Anson



It is with sadness to hear that Dennis Anson, former Councillor for Pleck ward since May 1991 until he retired in 2016 and Mayor from 2012-2013, has passed away at the age of 90. Dennis alongside the late Harbans Sarohi were councillors who brilliantly represented their ward. Dennis was a longstanding member of the Labour Party. During his term as Mayor he supported Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research. My condolences go to his wife Kate and his family. 🌀

