

# IntouchUpdate

Recent issues from Westminster and the Constituency

## Update on Legislation

This month I'd like to draw your attention to three particular pieces of legislation which I know from my post bag are of interest to many across the constituency.

### The Children and Families Bill

seeks to reform legislation relating to the adoption and children in care, to aspects of the family justice system, to children and young people with special educational needs, to the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, to statutory rights to leave and pay for parents and adopters, to time off work for ante-natal care and to the right to request flexible working. It had its second reading on 25th February and was approved to go to Committee where it will undergo detailed scrutiny. The second reading gave the opportunity for debate on key issues and concerns. I had the opportunity to raise concerns that constituents had brought to me on special educational needs especially relating to the provision for the post 16 age group and also the links between educational and health providers.

**The Financial Services (Banking Reform) Bill** had its second reading on 11th March. The Bill builds on the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Banking (the Vickers Commission) and on those made by the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards. It seeks to make further provision about banking and other financial services, including provision about the Financial Services Compensation Scheme; to make provision for the amounts owed in respect of certain deposits to be treated as a preferential debt on insolvency; and to make provision about the accounts of the Bank of England and its wholly owned subsidiaries. It makes provision to separate the banking activities on which households and small and medium-sized enterprises depend, from wholesale or investment banking activities which may involve a greater degree of risk and expose an entity

undertaking them to financial problems arising elsewhere in the global financial system.

### The Scrap Metal Dealers Act

**2012-13** The Bill has passed through all stages of the parliamentary process and has been given Royal Assent and is now law. This was a Private Members Bill that had wide cross-party support as well as the backing of the metal recycling industry's trade association (BMRA), energy and network organisations, the Church of England and War Memorials Trust. The Bill proposed a whole-scale reform of the £5.6bn scrap metal industry, which is the principal outlet for stolen metal. The problem of metal theft has caused problems for the transport, energy and telecommunications infrastructure as well as desecration of churches, war memorials and crematoriums. Now that the Bill has become law a number of measures will be introduced that will make it difficult to buy and sell stolen metal.

## Neighbourhood Planning



With several communities around the constituency already working on a Neighbourhood Plan and many others thinking about it, it was a delight to join with the Planning Minister, Nick Boles, in Thame recently as they entered the final stages of work on their plan. Together with Woodcote, Thame began their plan as a Government Frontrunner. I am delighted that the plan has been successfully through its Examination and is set for a Referendum on 2nd May. I am hugely impressed with the work that has been done and am fully behind the 'Vote Yes' campaign.



Friday night with landlord Barry at the Catherine Wheel in Sandford on Thames

It's always good to have the chance to get out and about to chat to people and find out what's on their minds.

On a recent Friday evening in Sandford on Thames I did a stint behind the bar, learning skills from the landlord. Vodka and slimline was a popular choice of drink and pouring a pint of Guinness a new challenge. I stopped short of the Shamrock on the top!

During the course of the evening I had some interesting debates on a whole raft of issues from the inevitable price of a pint to VAT, planning, housing development, and speeding concerns.

The 'locals' in the pub had praise for their Parish Council - the Chairman was a regular - and also for their County Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale. Well done and thank you to you all for all you do in the community.

## HOT TOPICS

### from email campaigns

On a regular basis email campaigns are set up by different organisations. It's good to know what people are concerned about but circular campaign emails are impersonal and so I can only give a standard reply in return.

### NHS Procurement

A recent circular suggests that there are plans for the NHS which could force doctors to privatise more of our NHS. This was about procurement, patient choice and competition regulations.

The Government has now laid out revised regulations which put beyond doubt its strong commitment to putting doctors and nurses in charge of local health services. These come into force on 1st April.

The previous regulations went no further than the set of procurement guidelines issued in March 2010. However, concerns were recognised over the wording. I am pleased that the Government has listened to those concerns and has improved the drafting of the regulations so there can be no doubt about how they apply.

### Concern for our National Bee population

There is widespread concern for our bee population. I recognise the importance of bees and their value to both food security and sustaining the natural environment. You will be pleased to hear that the Government is already taking steps to tackle this issue.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is supporting beekeepers by helping them look after their hives to reduce pest and disease risks and working in partnership with beekeeping groups on a ten year plan to protect and improve the health of honeybees in England and Wales. In addition, the Government is currently considering a range of evidence on the state of bees and other pollinators in order to determine what action is required. Ministers will move quickly to consider the implications of the new scientific and technical evidence when it is available and will act on this information.

## Taking up local issues



Meeting with residents at Goring Station

I am always interested to know the issues and concerns of our communities.

Residents of Goring approached me over concerns relating to disabled access at Goring Station. Like many stations this is a problem, but with new infrastructure necessary due to the electrification of the line residents saw an opportunity to get a lift installed. The well known problem of funding was a concern and so residents asked if I could help.

I have raised the matter with the Secretary of State for Transport on their behalf to seek to ensure that we get joined up thinking over financial investment and maximise the opportunity.

## Early Day Motions

A word about Early Day Motions.

Early day motions (EDMs) are generally used to publicise the views of individual MPs or to draw attention to specific events or campaigns. Due to the volume of EDMs put down they take a great deal of staff time and thus are costly to administer. However as no EDMs ever get to be debated they are widely recognised as being a waste of parliamentary resources and are often referred to as 'parliamentary graffiti'. I am often asked to sign EDMs and when asked to do so I have advised people that as a Parliamentary Private Secretary I am subject to the 'Ministerial Code' which requires me to exercise particular discretion in association with particular groups advocating special policies and to follow its strictures with regard to Ministerial Collective Responsibility. As such along with my PPS colleagues, and for the reasons already given, I do not sign EDMs. This does not mean that I am unable to fully represent the concerns of constituents. There are more effective mechanisms of drawing attention to issues of concern such as parliamentary petitions, parliamentary questions, Westminster Hall Debates and Adjournment debates. Indeed I often put down questions on specific issues and only this month have encouraged one local group to prepare a petition for me to present in the House. When there is a critical local issue that needs parliamentary attention I am always happy to discuss the best way forward in the particular circumstances.

# CONTACT DETAILS

If you would like to get in touch to raise a local or national issue, or to let me know about your organisation or a special event my contact details are below. If you would like help with a specific issue please contact my constituency office.

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