

# News from Your Local MP

19 December 2011

## Welcome!

Here's the latest edition of my regular newsletter. If you would prefer not to receive it in future, please respond to this email and I'll remove you from my mailing list.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

## European Situation

The news has been dominated by the Government's position on the Eurozone crisis. The Prime Minister came back claiming to have secured a veto for Britain. In reality, 26 out of 27 EU members are ploughing ahead without us – it is not a veto, but a humiliating defeat. The Prime Minister has certainly been successful in appeasing the Eurosceptics in his own party, but the reality is that he has secured a terrible deal for Britain. Given the extent of our trade with the EU, the United Kingdom has a direct interest in insuring that a resolution is found. The proposals on the table did not involve Britain signing up to the fiscal rules being drawn up by the Eurozone, but staying in the negotiations would have given Britain influence in securing the best deal for our country, and for Europe as a whole. Instead, inexplicably, the Prime Minister has left us isolated and without influence.

## Beware pay-day loans this Christmas

My Labour colleague, Stella Creasy MP, has been running a very effective campaign to highlight the dangers of pay day loans and other short term credit. She has recently stepped up pressure on the Government to cap interest rates on these loans – which can be 1,700% or more. In the run up to Christmas these loans can be very tempting, but recent research has indicated that 32% of those who took out a payday loan had to get another one to pay it off. There are alternatives - one of which is to join a Credit Union. Details of the Bristol Credit Union are available at: <http://www.bristolcreditunion.org/>

## Public Sector Pensions

A number of local residents have been in touch with me regarding the Government's proposed changes to public sector pensions. Many of them have worked in the public sector for a long time and are understandably concerned about the impact on their pensions. The Government has been busily peddling a myth that public sector pensions are 'gold-plated' and its response is to propose a three per cent increase in contributions. This increase won't go towards future pensions but instead will be used as an attempt to reduce the deficit. The Government is telling public sector workers that they must pay more, work longer and receive less so it's no wonder that people are angry. The previous Labour government engaged in tough negotiations with trade unions on pensions. We did not always agree, but we worked together to find a solution that was fair for employees and the taxpayer generally. The Government needs to realise that genuine negotiations with the unions are necessary.

The Government have used the example of falling private sector pensions to justify their attack on the public sector. It is correct that many private sector workers have seen their pensions slashed, even though they did not cause the financial crisis, and that cannot be right. The Government should be ensuring that any agreement for public sector pensions becomes a bench-mark for decent pensions which sensibly balances how long you work, how much you pay and what you can definitely expect to receive in retirement, not have a race to the bottom.

## **Housing Figures**

In my last newsletter I mentioned the appalling housing figures - not one single new affordable rented home was started anywhere in Bristol in the six months to the end of September. This is the outcome of the Government's decision to make a 60% cut in the housing budget. Even new homes which have been previously agreed are now in jeopardy. Readers of the Evening Post will recall that property developers in central Bristol recently persuaded the Council to drop existing commitments which would have provided 38 flats for affordable rent. So a very bad situation has been made even worse. To stop this happening again I have written to the Housing Minister asking him to issue new guidance to Councils calling on them to resist the demands of developers in situations such as this.

## **Welfare Reform Bill**

This week the House of Lords rejected an amendment tabled by Tanni Grey-Thompson, our most successful Paralympian athlete, to protect the benefits of disabled children. The Government plans to cut Child Tax Credit for disabled children from £52.21 per week to £25.95 per week – a loss of £1366 per year. Around 100,000 disabled children and their families will be affected by this change and it is a disgrace that the Government have refused to listen.

## **Badger Cull**

Regrettably the Government has announced plans to go-ahead with a badger cull in England next year. Rather than pursue a science-led policy they have chosen to cut vaccination trials and ignore the report of the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB which stated that "badger culling can make no meaningful contribution to cattle TB control in Britain." It is expected that a number of charities and other animal welfare organisations could challenge the cull in the Courts. This is a bad policy which will not work, will cost more and result in the slaughter of thousands of badgers.

## **Any Questions?**

If you have any queries about these issues, or have a question you would like to ask about anything else, please do not hesitate to get in touch. Just email me at [dawn.primarolo.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:dawn.primarolo.mp@parliament.uk), phone 0117 909 0063 or write to me at PO Box 1002, Bristol, BS99 1WH.