

View from the House: December 2015

Welcome to my latest View from the House e-newsletter. If you have any questions about what is happening in Tamworth constituency or more generally then please do get in touch at christopher.pincher.mp@parliament.uk or call my office on 01827 312778.

This will be my last monthly e-newsletter of the year, so I would like to wish you a merry Christmas and a prosperous 2016.

Syria

Whether or not to use military force is one of the most significant decisions that any government takes. The need to do so most often arises because of a government's first duty: the responsibility to protect its citizens. We need a comprehensive response which seeks to deal with the threat that Daesh poses to us directly, not just through the measures we are taking at home, but by dealing with Daesh on the ground in the territory that it controls. Therefore, on Wednesday 2nd December, I voted to extend air strikes to Syria.

In the last 12 months, Britain's police and Security Services have disrupted no fewer than 7 terrorist plots to attack the United Kingdom. All 7 plots were either linked to Daesh, or were inspired by Daesh's propaganda. Daesh has a dedicated external operations structure in Syria, which is planning mass casualty attacks around the world. Daesh targets our young people, using sophisticated grooming techniques to lure them to Syria "to fight; to blow themselves up as suicide bombers; or to condemn themselves to lives of subjugation, oppression and cruelty.

Around 800 British individuals of national security concern have travelled to Syria since the conflict began. Many have joined Daesh and other terrorist groups. Of those who are known to have travelled, about half have returned. Some of these, and many of those who remain in Syria, pose a threat to our security. It is wrong for the United Kingdom to sub-contract its security to other countries, and expect the aircrews of other nations to carry the burdens and the risks of striking Daesh in Syria to stop terrorism here in Britain. That is why Parliament, including 67 Labour MPs and many of their senior figures, took the decision to extend British airstrikes against Daesh into Syria, as an integral part of our comprehensive strategy to degrade Daesh and reduce the threat it poses to us.

Weekly Video Updates

I have recently started recording a weekly video from my office in Westminster. The videos are posted on my Facebook page, and cover topics ranging from Britain's relationship with the EU, Tamworth's low unemployment rate, the terrorist attacks in Paris and Beirut, the Comprehensive Spending Review and military action in Syria. You can view these videos by clicking 'like' on my Facebook page via the following link.

<https://www.facebook.com/ChristopherPincher/>

Funding for Tamworth Schools

I was delighted by the Chancellor's commitment to introduce fair school funding as part of last week's Comprehensive Spending Review. A new funding formula will set a national rate that every school will receive for each pupil, with additional funding for those with extra needs. Crucially, from 2017-18 onwards the resources schools and local authorities will receive will be based on pupil characteristics rather than historic political calculations. The Department for Education will consult on the detail of the announcement in early 2016. The announcement signals an end to the current unfair system, which has lasted for decades and led to a situation where the ten best funded areas of England receive an average of Â£6,300 per pupil of schools block funding, compared to just Â£4,200 in the ten worst funded areas – with no objective basis for the difference.

It follows years of campaigning by the f40 Group of poorly-funded local authorities, and a concerted Parliamentary campaign to make the issue a top political priority. In October, I was one of 111 MPs who wrote to the Prime Minister to call for fairer funding to be introduced, and on 5th November I demanded action in a debate on the issue in Westminster Hall. On Tuesday 1st December, I was pleased to join colleagues as petitions from over 100 constituencies calling for fair funding were presented by MPs in the House of Commons. I would like to thank The Rawlett School, Landau Forte Academy Amington, Landau Forte QEMS, Landau Forte Sixth Form, Wilnecote High School, Tamworth Enterprise College and St Gabriel's Catholic Primary School for their help in promoting the petition amongst parents and students.

Despite this success, I am still calling on the support of Tamworth constituents in the campaign in order to obtain as many signatures as possible. If you would like to sign, please email the following paragraph (shown in bold text), including your full name and address, to my Parliamentary Researcher on christopher.hulm@parliament.uk

'To the House of Commons. The petition of residents of TAMWORTH, declares that the petitioners believe the existing school funding model in England is arbitrary and unfair; further declares that the ten best funded areas of England have on average received grants of Â£6,300 per pupil this year, compared to an average of Â£4,303.71 per pupil in the ten most poorly funded areas of England; and further declares that the petitioners welcome the Government's commitment to introduce fairer school funding. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons supports the earliest possible introduction of a new National Funding Formula for schools in England. And the petitioners remain.'

The Great British High Street Awards 2015

After 230 high streets entered the Great British High Street of the Year Awards, I was really pleased to learn that Tamworth came 3rd in the town centre category on Monday 30th November. Tamworth Council continues to invest in its town centre, developing a new creative quarter which will be home to a business enterprise centre, new restaurants and an upgraded theatre. The number of people on Job Seeker's Allowance in Tamworth has plummeted from just under 2,500 to just 259 over the last five years. This is in part due to the regeneration of our town centre which will be home to a range of vibrant businesses and artists.

Paris Attacks

The news from Paris in November was deeply shocking. These evil and fascistic fanatics must be opposed. Paris is the city of light and we must not allow such people to plunge it, and other democratic societies, into darkness. Because that is what they want to do. In a House of Commons debate following the Paris attacks, I asked the Prime Minister whether

he agreed that for terrorists to pursue their evil trade as effectively as possible they require training, and that training requires territory. Action to reduce Daesh's territory, whether it be in Iraq, Syria or anywhere else, is therefore a vital component to ridding the world of these evil people.

Mr Cameron responded: 'my hon. Friend is absolutely right and what he says relates to the point that Ian Austin made. Much of our policy over recent years has been about closing down the ungoverned spaces where terrorists are able to stay and train. That is why we cannot sit back from all these things. It is why we are engaged in trying to make Somalia into a proper, functioning country. It is why we took action in Afghanistan to try to stop that country being a haven for terror. It is why we cannot stand by while there fails to be a Libyan Government. We have to work harder to bring about some rule of law and order in that country. We do not do this because we believe in military adventurism; we do it because we want to keep people safe in our own country. That is what it is about.'

Bowel Cancer UK

I was pleased to attend Bowel Cancer UK's Parliamentary Reception in October, aiming to raise awareness of bowel cancer and the importance of developing a world class, consistent service across the United Kingdom. Bowel cancer is the second biggest cancer killer in the United Kingdom, affecting both men and women. Every year over 41,500 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer, that is one diagnosis every 15 minutes, and more than 16,000 people die of the disease. There are still too many people dying from bowel cancer when we know that it is preventable, treatable and curable, if it is diagnosed early. That's why I am backing Bowel Cancer UK's call to improve bowel cancer services and support their aspiration to transform survival rates from one in two surviving bowel cancer for five years to three in four surviving by 2025.

Apprenticeships in Tamworth

I welcome the new figures showing 1030 new apprenticeships were started by people in Tamworth last year, meaning a total of 5050 new apprenticeships have been started in Tamworth since 2010. The figures showed a strong rise in the number of apprenticeships started – up 16.9% in the West Midlands in 2014/15 from the year before.

In total 2.4 million apprenticeships were started in England over the last parliament. And the Conservatives are committed to go even further over the next five years and deliver 3 million more by 2020. This means more young people getting the skills they need to get on in life and make the most of their talents, as they do locally at businesses such as Tame Plastics, who I visited earlier this month. Tame Plastics, based in Fazeley, specialises in building structures from an innovative 'co-polymer' thermoplastic, and applications include vehicle bodies and vehicle storage used in the sectors such as the emergency services, energy, and recycling. I welcome their continued success as a business creating jobs and offering apprenticeships in the constituency.

Broadband Survey

Since I launched my survey last month, a large number of residents have kindly contacted me about poor internet speeds. Our correspondence thus far confirms that the areas of Hints, Wall and Canwell in particular are affected by broadband issues. I am asking residents to continue to keep me updated about their own experiences so that I can raise any local concern in Parliament. I will also be meeting directors from BT in early December, when I will inform them of the feedback received so far, and I will forward all feedback to

Staffordshire County Council and Ed Vaizey MP, the Minister of State responsible.

Comprehensive Spending Review

I spoke in the House of Commons last week during the Chancellor's Comprehensive Spending Review. Following the Chancellor's Statement, I took the opportunity to praise the growth of Jaguar Land Rover's workforce in the West Midlands, and asked Mr Osborne how he is going to help more automotive firms recruit locally. I asked the Chancellor: "Over the past three years, Jaguar Land Rover has doubled the size of its workforce in the West Midlands—a job made easier by our skill base. In welcoming the jobs news the Chancellor has given us, may I ask him to say a little more about how he is going to help automotive firms recruit locally, not least from the Torc Vocational Centre in Tamworth, whose automotive hub has received a £2 million grant from Conservative-controlled Staffordshire County Council?"

The Chancellor responded: "I thank my hon. Friend's Conservative council for the support it gives to the car industry, and I thank him for championing the industry in this House. We have made a commitment not only to maintain the money we are putting into our automotive strategy, but to continue doing so for the next 10 years. Obviously, product lines at JLR and other important car firms take many years to develop and invest in. I am sure that long-term commitment to our brilliant car industry will be very welcome."

This Autumn Statement delivers on the promise we made to working people in Tamworth that we would put their security first. Protecting our economic security by taking the difficult decisions to live within our means and bring our debts down, and protecting our national security by defending our country's interests abroad and keeping our citizens safe at home. Employment is up and businesses are continuing to grow. Over the last parliament 130,000 jobs were created in the West Midlands, the number of businesses grew by 42,300 and the number of people claiming the key out of work benefits more than halved, a fall of 83,580.

Small Business Saturday

On Saturday 5th December, I was pleased to support the Small Business Saturday campaign. Our economy could not function without our small businesses and the hardworking businessmen and women who are behind them and I was delighted to celebrate this day supporting the fantastic small businesses in Tamworth. Small Business Saturday is a grassroots campaign and it usually falls on the first Saturday in December. It was first celebrated in the United Kingdom in 2013 and is endorsed by the Prime Minister, Government and all political parties. It is an established commercial holiday in the US, and significantly, in 2014 independent businesses made an estimated £504m in sales during this on the day.

Not only do small businesses make an invaluable contribution to our national growth but they are responsible for nearly half the job creation in the United Kingdom. I am proud the Government has thrown its weight behind small businesses and has introduced a whole host of measures to make it easier for businesses them to set up and thrive. A cut in corporation tax, help with business rates and the landmark Employment Allowance, have all led to the creation of 760,000 more private sector businesses since 2010.

Update from the Environment Agency

Last week I met with Lisa Pinney MBE, Environment Agency Area Manager for Staffordshire, Warwickshire & West Midlands, to discuss the issues and challenges that the agency is currently facing in Tamworth. There were three points raised that I feel would be

particularly useful for constituents to be aware of. Firstly, weirs such as the Ladybridge Weir on the River Tame in Tamworth can be extremely dangerous, with strong currents and hidden obstructions. During the summer, the Environment Agency became aware that people also jump from the bridge into the river at this spot. They have been working with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service on increasing public awareness of the risks associated with this and with the weir. More information on the dangers from river can be found on The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents website.

Secondly, flood warnings and alerts are updated every 15 minutes on the Environment Agency website, where you can sign up for the free flood warnings service. Only 7% of residents in Staffordshire have signed up to receive these warnings, so please do take a look at the link and sign up if you live near any of the following areas:

On the River Tame at Ventura Park

County Drive

Bitterscote

Lichfield Road, Tamworth

On the River Anker at Tamworth Town Centre.

You can sign up online or by calling the Environment Agency Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

Finally, the Environment Agency currently mows the flood defence embankments along the River Tame in Tamworth 3-4 times per year during spring and summer. Due to reductions in revenue funding from 2016/17 onwards, they will be reducing grass cutting to twice yearly (except assets which act as flood storage reservoirs). This will not affect the structural

condition or performance of the assets, however grass will, on occasions, be visibly longer.

Savings and Home Ownership

During Treasury Questions in the House of Commons on Tuesday 1st December, I took the opportunity to ask the Chancellor about the steps the Government is taking to support people with savings and home ownership. Mr Osborne responded: 'this Government backs saving and home ownership. That support is exemplified by the Help to Buy ISA that becomes available today. This new ISA provides direct Government support to anyone saving for the deposit on their first home. For every Â£200 they save in the ISA, the Government will help them with another Â£50. Add it up and the Government will give them up to Â£3,000 towards their first home'—all part of a plan to help working people in this country.'

Following his response, I pointed out that one of the best ways to help people build up their savings so that they can get a Help to Buy ISA and buy their own home is to make sure that they have good jobs with good wages. Therefore I enquired about the steps he will take to drive employment in Tamworth, which has historically low unemployment, and across the Midlands Engine.

Mr Osborne replied: 'I was in the West Midlands yesterday seeing the fantastic investment that Jaguar Land Rover is making there, with Government help. Alongside that we are investing in the west midlands infrastructure. We have just signed an agreement with the authorities of the west midlands, across the political parties, to put more than Â£1 billion into the region over the next couple of decades. There is a long-term commitment to the Midlands Engine and the jobs in my hon. Friend's constituency.'

West Midlands Update

Employment is up in the West Midlands by 142,000 since 2010. That means more families benefiting from the security and stability of a pay packet each month who are better able to provide for their families. Unemployment is down by 43,000 in the last year, so that is fewer people out of work and more who now can get on in life and have the confidence to plan for the future. The unemployment rate in the West Midlands is 5.7 per cent compared to 9 per cent at the last election. There are 42,000 more businesses in the West Midlands than in 2010 — a clear sign our long-term plan to secure a stronger, healthier economy is working, and 11,858 home buyers in the West Midlands have been supported through Help to Buy — enabling them to do so with a fraction of the deposit they would normally require.

Our long-term economic plan for the Midlands aims to make it the 'Engine for Growth' in the United Kingdom, with an extra Â£34 billion being added to the Midlands economy by 2030 and 300,000 extra jobs. Since 2010 the Midlands has been growing faster than the United Kingdom average and has created over 250,000 new jobs. The challenge now is to sustain this, which is why our long-term plan focuses on increasing apprenticeships and skills, improving transport infrastructure, backing science and innovation, building new homes and improving local schools.

Upcoming:

Small Business Saturday in Tamworth, Saturday 5th December:
www.smallbusinesssaturdayuk.com

Christmas Party Nights in the SnowDome, Tamworth, running from 27th November to 23rd December, 7pm until 11.30pm

Tudor Banquet at Tamworth Castle, 5th December from 7.30pm

Traditional Christmas songs in Middleton Hall, Tamworth, 8th December from 6.30pm

Amington Band Christmas Concert, Saturday 12th December from 7.30pm

Tamworth Festive Town Centre Markets, Tamworth Town Centre, 18th to 24 December, 9am until 4pm

New Year's Eve Family Party at the SnowDome, Tamworth, 7pm until 1am

My next surgery is on Friday 22nd January at Philip Dix Centre at 5pm, please get in touch with my office if you would like to book an appointment.

If you have any questions or comments then please do get in touch with me on christopher.pincher.mp@parliament.uk or by ringing 01827 312778.