

# Autism and Mental Health Services

Autism is a condition which affects around 700,000 children and adults. It can also be associated with mental health disorders. I have been a keen supporter of the Government's wish to do more to improve our mental health services.

The Government has made great strides with their Think Autism Strategy, and the accompanying statutory guidance. It sets out best-practice for providing high-quality care, and clarifies that local authorities and CCGs should work together to provide post-diagnostic services for people with autism and co-existing mental health problems.

I am aware that challenges still remain, particularly for young people who can be excluded from accessing mental health services because of their autism.

The Government wants to achieve "parity of esteem" between mental and physical health, in terms of access to services, quality of care and allocation of resources. The Secretary of State has promised that an extra £1.3bn will be invested annually in mental health services by 2021.

With this in mind I have written to the Secretary of State to ask him what can be done to provide autism specific mental health services. I shall post his reply when I receive it.

In the meantime I would ask any constituents who are having difficulties in obtaining services to contact me.

---

# No deal is better than a bad deal

I attended the Urgent Question on the Brexit discussions yesterday.

The government made clear that they still believe No deal is better than a bad deal. They confirmed to me that they are continuing to plan for a No Deal exit. They need to do this as No Deal is still a possible outcome. They also need to do so as the government will have no capacity to resist a bad deal at the last minute if we are not ready to leave without an Agreement.

The government believes they can secure a good deal. This would embrace a full free trade agreement and various other features of a comprehensive economic partnership. It is important it leaves the UK free to negotiate our own trade deals with the rest of the world, settle our own borders, make our own laws and no longer be under the ECJ. The government states they have not offered any specific sums of money, but have indicated areas where they will consider making ex gratia payments in return for a good deal.

Some contributors to this website want me to write all the time about Brexit and respond daily to the false rumours, stories and comments that abound in this area. I have no intention of doing so. Any likely Agreement is probably a year away. It will only be possible to decide whether the Deal is better than No Deal when we know what it is. The discussions will get very repetitious, and my attitude will not change daily as the news flows. In the meantime I do have other constituency interests to pursue. I will continue to engage on the many matters that do not relate to Brexit that affect the lives of my constituents.

No Deal ticks four of the five boxes of what we want from Brexit. It gives us control of our borders, our laws and our money. It means no special divorce bill. It means we are free to negotiate our own trade agreements around the world. It does not deliver us a free trade agreement with the EU, though later after we have left the EU might want one after all. Any Agreement needs to improve on this to be worthwhile.

---

## Getting people out of poverty

The ambition of improving people's living standards is shared across the UK political spectrum. Our debates are not about what we are trying to achieve. All sensible people want their neighbours, friends and relatives to do well, to find worthwhile jobs, and to earn a decent living. The arguments are in practice all about how we achieve that, though some seek to misrepresent the views of others by implying some do not want people to succeed.

The good news is it is not a zero sum game. Someone doing well should not make it more difficult for someone else. As more people set up businesses they create more jobs. As more large companies sell more product and pay higher bonuses, so there is more money to spend on other things, in turn creating more employment.

Nor is the world of school and university a zero sum game. We have expanded educational opportunity substantially, by effectively raising the school leaving age and increasing the number of university places on offer. There is no ceiling on how well any individual can do, no firm limit on how many good degrees are awarded.

Today we read that some places appear better than others at assisting and mentoring people from low income backgrounds so they can succeed in education and go on to well paid jobs. We need to study what has worked best and what has not worked so well, and spread best practice from place to place. Schools need to be properly funded and good teachers valued and supported. It is also a task for the wider community and for the families concerned. Individuals are motivated and assisted by different things. It may only take one comment or expression of support to make the difference for a young person, but as we can never be sure what that is so those in the local community need to try

what they can to show more people that there is opportunity for all and effort can be rewarded.

---

## More proof that the UK is a good place for inward investors

The news that two major pharmaceutical companies are to commit £1bn to investment in research in the UK is further proof that the UK is a good centre for knowledge based businesses. Investors can recruit a well educated workforce and can establish a good business presence in the UK.

The UK also now has the opportunity to set up its own Medicine Agency as we leave the EU. Given the high regard for UK science this could be well received by the world community, and could attract other countries to want to use its facilities and adopt its standards.

The government yesterday set out its vision to assist in the growth of knowledge and technology based activities in the UK. The pursuit of excellence in education and training does involve government spending, standard setting and encouragement. Continuing to attract investors also requires more work on improving road and rail links to ensure sufficient transport capacity, high speed broadband, and other utility provision.

The Industrial Strategy document contains proposals for people, ideas, infrastructure, places and the business environment. It rightly states that ensuring a competitive market is the best to promote growth and innovation. There is some additional cash for transport links between cities, more investment for Broadband, additional money for an Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund and for a general Investment Fund.

The government has expressed an especial interest in Artificial intelligence, clean energy, mobility including self drive vehicles and the issues from more elderly people in the population. It will be interesting to see what they come up with and how this will complement what the market is doing already. The government's best course would be to apply the digital technologies more consistently and positively to the public sector which it runs. Given the emphasis on raising productivity, it would be a good place to start.

---

# Winter Carnival

I enjoyed my visit to the Wokingham Winter Carnival this year. The works in the Town Centre meant we had the pleasure of a laser light show set to music to replace the normal parade of carnival floats. The lasers conjured us Father Christmas, reindeers, presents, and much else that define the start of the Christmas season.

I was grateful to the St Sebastian's brass band for playing to us and accompanying the carols. The Mini Mayor officially switched on the lights. During the day there had been plenty of good music from local bands and singers.

Well done to all who managed and participated in a great event. The organisers adapted well to the temporary disruption of the town centre by the renewal works.