

Working Together for Common Good

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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Friday was a rewarding day with students and staff at one of our excellent schools. Every teacher was confident and showed admirable interest in their subject and in each pupil.

Students were quietly lively. Their questions were relevant and respectful. Some seemed interested in the life of political service. I said, quite seriously, that when they had concluded their education, if they were good enough and motivated, think of training to become a teacher. If they were not good enough, lower sights and become an MP?

Durrington High School, like other popular schools, has a fine effective system to integrate new teachers, supporting them as they choose their way of building interest and achievement in their subject.

School heads and governors worked together with West Sussex County Council a few years ago to reduce the number of school changes by most children in Worthing, making the town schools similar to others in the county. That helped success in schools.

There is cooperation now to manage the downward fluctuation in pupil numbers. Local heads briefed me about the growing surplus of primary places. I asked central government to review the unnecessary insertion of an extra school. WSCC and responsible people in our multi-academy trust engaged with the minister and with officials. Success came in the end. Our shared ambition now is to gain extra SEND places in the constituency.

In later life, addictions can harm lives. Many family members are damaged by the activities of people caught by heavy drinking, drug abuse, excessive gambling and a range of other addictions. Addiction can follow trauma. It is not a choice. Worthing West is one of the first constituencies to hold a Recovery Fair. We heard on Friday about the 12 Steps that can lead to living with addiction, becoming sober or clean or no longer continuing with destructive habits.

My generation was not generally familiar with substances other than ordinary cigarettes and alcohol. I was 20 years old before I was more of a drinker, less of a teetotaler. Foolishly, I was the rare person who took to smoking in my twenties. I told the meeting in the Guildbourne Centre that I denied addiction to cigarettes for about twenty years. One day I told my mirror reflection that I was an addict. From that day over thirty years ago, I have neither smoked nor have I wanted to. One fag could end abstinence.

Members of Al-Anon spoke realistically of living with the addiction suffered by someone they loved.

Later, a visit was pure fun. With friends, I visited the Ferring Country Centre. The flowers and shrubs on sale and the café refreshment are admirable. The bedding plants may survive the frosts to blossom in spring. Some of our daffodils stems have unfrozen; the trumpets shine in the office like gold.

Before returning to Westminster late on Monday, I attended the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont in Belfast for the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. We discussed how the Windsor Framework might lead to restoration of the Executive and Assembly.

Flying back, I appreciated how many people cooperate for a passenger to check-in, turn up, clear security, find refreshment, join others in a plane, fly and then collect baggage before choosing a transport option to get home. I declare a big thank-you to everyone in the aviation industries, in ground transportation and in the hospitality trades.

On Tuesday I co-chaired two notable all party meetings at Westminster. The Cabinet Office minister Jeremy Quin came to talk to the Infected Blood survivors about compensation after the scandal. I had also led the group recognising the businesses created by black, Asian and minority entrepreneurs. Traders and business builders meet our needs, employ our neighbours, contribute taxes and take risks in the search for prosperity.