

Constituents Helping The Member Of Parliament

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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Many advantages come from modern technology. Communication can be quick. Contacts can be made; people can share real problems. We can exchange views easily at low or no financial cost.

It is useful to be with people. In past years, I gained greater understanding with Dr Gordon Caldwell in Worthing hospital. His experience and clear positive approaches to common problems made a difference to my effectiveness when engaging with the NHS centrally and with health ministers. Recently, I have been able to achieve national change in policy after listening to doctors, ministers of religion, teachers, parents and others.

I regret the restrictions on visiting Care Homes, constituents' homes and places of business. Telephone calls and video links are better than writing letters or email: they do not replace being able to sit quietly together, seeing when to speak and when to listen.

For all the occasional political noise, I am glad that the Conservative, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour parties have been able to back each other on most of the important challenges that have to be faced, when decisions are needed.

When Chris Hare writes the story of the town in the early decades of this millennium, I trust he will notice the overlapping cooperation and underlying friendships, including between candidates hoping to be the parliamentary representative.

I pay my warm tribute to the past Mayor Hazel Thorpe. With her consort, she has been a great participator. She demonstrated community service and leadership and the continuity of dedication to the informal as much as to the formal roles of the Mayoralty of Worthing, West Sussex's largest town.

Also, I am grateful to County Councillor and Councillor and Town Cryer Robert Smytherman. He and I have cooperated quietly on a number of significant issues. Neither of us lets his activities trying to defeat me at general elections get in the way of our common interest in mental health, and in many other issues of importance.

There was a time when two local political parties recruited each other's retiring Mayor. That may not reoccur soon. Even so, let us acknowledge that our aims are the same and that it is good that the electorate have a choice.

One former Labour candidate and I stayed in touch for decades. He built a business training young people, helping them to overcome barriers to learning and employment. On the Arun side of the constituency I acknowledge the expertise and energy and attention to detail of the Ferring Conservation Group's Ed Miller.

The late Derek Whittaker gave much of his life to Rustington Hall. In addition to puncturing my airs and graces, he showed how to help people move through the normal ups and down of independence and later care needs, together with making home maintenance easier and safer for elderly people who may be living alone for the first time in decades.

The lesson for me: whether we are in a new household, by ourselves or in a marriage that has lasted over 50 years, when we give what we can and accept what we should, we can together make lives better in troubling times.

When someone acts as a community sign post, guiding a person facing a problem to my caring team, they may be helping more than just the one. Just about every one of my successful national campaigns followed an individual case that troubled many more than one. Thank you for helping me to help others too.