

# **I Made A Mistake, I Apologise**

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP*

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I apologise for my error last week about the result of the football match in August between Worthing FC and Welling United. As soon as I realised, I wrote to say sorry to readers, the team and supporters through the editor and Monty Street.

Mistakes happen. That is in the nature of being human. How we deal with them is what matters most. When serving as junior employment minister, officials told me there had been confusion in a departmental press notice confusing two trades unions.

I turned down a convoluted explanation; it was wrong to let officials take the blame. This was the brief simple answer in two sentences, as I took personal responsibility: "I made a mistake. I apologise." There was no further interest.

In an extended interview with the Press Association this week, we discussed why some people do not stay long in the Commons. The electorate cause change in marginal seats. Family life can be too disrupted. In the past, an MP might be sent to Brussels as a European Commissioner. A few decide to move on to write popular books or to build a career in a business or running a museum. Some retire, satisfied they had achieved what they came into Parliament to do.

Richard Luce, Shoreham's MP, left to be vice-chancellor of Buckingham University, then governor of Gibraltar before serving the Queen as Lord Chamberlain.

Just as interesting are the people who serve through many parliaments. On the Labour side, Dame Margaret Beckett won admiration when acting as leader of the Labour party. She was first elected in 1974.

Lloyd George, Liberal prime minister, was in the Commons for nearly 55 years, remaining for over twenty years after giving up the premiership. Sir Edward Heath, Conservative prime minister, stayed for about 26 years as a backbencher. Each was Father of the House.

Constituency advice service has rightly grown. That is one of the worthwhile changes over the decades. Nowadays it is seldom accurate to say an MP is out-of-touch. My regular sessions often bring to attention something that could be done better or should not be happening. This Friday in Worthing is my latest. Please contact my office if you would like to attend.

Last weekend I made house calls. Whether calling on the sick or dying, or learning about a tricky employment issue or a questionable decision made by a public authority, my knowledge grows and I have a better chance of doing good. I respond with politeness to the person who thinks I give too much time and effort to helping others. He may in time appreciate how it helps to put wider issues to government.

This week we debated the Online Safety Bill. I was one of the MPs who persuaded the government to commit to make the bosses of modern tech companies personally liable for the companies' responsibilities to protect the young and the vulnerable.

On gender issues, I believe in understanding and adjustments for trans people, without putting women and girls at risk or disadvantage. I objected strongly when an opposition MP lost any self-control, accusing a woman colleague of being transphobic. In strength sports competition, it is clear to me that women competitors should have XX chromosomes, with open competition for all others who choose to enter.

There can also be competition to gain ministers' support for important local ambitions. With encouragement from Worthing's Labour leader Beccy Cooper, I wrote again to Dehenna Davison, the levelling up minister and to Michael Gove as Secretary of State, about how finance from the specialist fund for the Connected Cultural Mile from Worthing station to the Lido will make a big difference in deprived wards, raise our cultural life and boost the great museum.

Mentioning the names of the ministers should get this column into their press cuttings and prompt their officials to put us at the top of the list. I do not say sorry for that.