

Climate change - Roger responds to Unicef report on effect on children

Speaking in his constituency after the launch of Unicef's report, *Climate Change: Children's Challenge*, Roger called for action on climate change to prevent damage to children's lives. Roger said: "Unicef's report finds that children in developing countries are suffering the worst effects of climate change, despite them being the least responsible for it. Climate change damages the ability of parents in the poorest countries to provide for their children".

Climate change is not only affecting children in the developing world. A poll carried out by Unicef found that three-quarters of 11-16 year-olds in the UK are worried about how climate change will affect their future and wish the Government would do more to tackle it.



Roger said: "The Government need to take urgent action to tackle the UK's carbon footprint and switch to sustainable energy, to prevent children's lives being further damaged by climate change."

Roger tables Early Day Motion protesting overuse of sanctions at Sparkhill jobcentre in Birmingham

Roger has tabled an Early Day Motion to draw the Government's attention to the high levels of sanctions handed out by Sparkhill jobcentre in Birmingham. Roger tabled the EDM in response to reports by his constituents that, rather than supporting people into

work, the jobcentre was penalising people unfairly and imposing unnecessarily harsh conditions.



Speaking after meeting with constituents in Sparkhill, Roger said: "I am extremely concerned that Sparkhill jobcentre is putting severe sanctions on people who are trying their best to find work and comply with all the conditions of receiving JSA. Unfortunately, this problem is not limited to Sparkhill or even to Birmingham. People around the country who are looking for work in a very tough labour market are being sanctioned for such ridiculous 'breaches' as requesting to rearrange a jobcentre appointment to attend a job interview or a family funeral." The number of sanctions handed out since the Government's new regime was introduced on 22 October 2012 has increased by 11%, with more than 400,000 people being sanctioned.

Roger is also worried by the severity of the sanctions which are being imposed, with the length of time for which people are expected to live on an income of precisely nothing ranging from 13 weeks to a staggering 156 weeks. He commented: "This Cabinet of

millionaires does not seem to understand that it is simply not possible for people to live without receiving any income for months or even years at a time. How on earth do the Government expect people to feed themselves, let alone travel to job interviews?"

calling for an inquiry into the City's "unfettered and unmonitored" access to senior MPs through the City of London Corporation.

The letter calls for an inquiry into the relationship between the City and politicians, and argues that a lack of openness and accountability enables Big Finance to exert too much power over the political and legislative process.

Part of the Department for Work and Pensions

jobcentreplus

Weekly Team Challenge!

The staff member who ruins the most lives this week will receive a bag of sweets!

Get Sanctioning, team!

See your manager for more details



The letter argues that City UK, which lobbies on behalf of the City of London, promotes tax avoidance and also has too much access to ministers and civil servants. Roger said: "Politicians should be accountable to the citizens they were elected to serve, not to the financial industry which has caused such damage to the UK's economy. I am also concerned that the City is linked to tax avoidance schemes which have an incredibly damaging effect around the world, particularly on the poorest countries."

Roger concluded: "Pushing people below the poverty line is not a magic recipe for creating jobs, contrary to what the Government seem to think. All the increase in sanctions will achieve is to push more people into poverty and despair, ironically making them less, not more, employable. Why will the Government not invest in jobs rather than punishing people who are trying as hard as they can to find work?"



You can read the full text of the EDM [here](#).

City of London lobbying needs to be investigated

Roger is among a group of MPs, academics and celebrities campaigning for the investigation of lobbying by the Square Mile. The group sent a letter to the chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life,

Roger has previously campaigned for Government action on Corporation Tax avoidance, and tabled an Early Day Motion calling for a clampdown on the use of British Overseas Territories as tax havens.

You can read the letter [here](#), and the EDM Roger tabled [here](#).

Save Birmingham badgers from culling, says Roger

Following on from Roger's long-time opposition to the ongoing badger cull, he has signed a petition calling for the ban of culls on council owned land and the implementation of local vaccination programmes.

"The object of the petition is to ensure that Birmingham's badger population is safe from slaughter, and that the already available injectable badger vaccine against bTB is used in as many cases as possible", said Roger.

He continued: "There is already widespread concern that cull periods have been extended to meet targets and may have to be extended a second time in certain areas. It is widely known that badgers move to and from previously populated areas, and that this may change the goalposts. This petition is there to remind Birmingham City Council that it cannot just assume that council land is available to reduce the badger population."

Roger also tabled a Parliamentary Question, pushing the Government on why it refuses to routinely include a test for TB as part of the post-mortem carried out on slaughtered badgers.



Roger calls for support for people living with HIV or AIDS to mark World AIDS Day

Roger is supporting World AIDS day and calling for increased global access to antiretroviral drugs to help eliminate preventable deaths. The report released by the UN to mark last year's World Aids Day found that of the 14.8 million people around the world who are eligible for HIV treatment, only 8 million are receiving it. There were also 2.5 million new HIV infections.



Roger says: "With advances in antiretroviral drugs, HIV is no longer a death sentence—at least for people living in rich countries. However, around the world people continue to become infected and to die needlessly due to a lack of access to medication and healthcare. I am supporting World AIDS Day and calling on the Government to do everything possible to increase access to antiretroviral drugs in the developing world."

In the UK, the last year saw the Government announce that the ban on people with HIV practising as dentists, midwives or surgeons is to be lifted from early next year. In addition, studies were released showing that people living with HIV can now have a normal lifespan.

Carbon monoxide poisoning – be aware!

Roger has urged Hall Green residents to protect themselves against the threat of carbon monoxide poisoning. New research from the Carbon Monoxide – Be Alarmed! campaign found that 35 million households in the UK could be at risk of poisoning, as they do not have an alarm in their home to warn them of the poisonous gas.

Carbon monoxide has no smell, colour or taste, so installing an audible alarm that sounds when the gas is present is the only way to make sure you are protected.

The gas can be produced by any fuel-burning appliance – such as a boiler, cooker or fire – which is faulty or doesn't have adequate ventilation.

Roger is supporting the Carbon Monoxide – Be Alarmed! campaign which encourages people to ensure they have an audible carbon monoxide alarm, and that they have all fuel-burning appliances serviced annually by a registered and qualified engineer.

He said: "Audible alarms are available at supermarkets, DIY stores high street shops or directly from energy suppliers. Importantly, they save lives."

You can find out more about carbon monoxide poisoning by clicking [here](#), including useful [instructions](#) on how to properly fit your alarm.



Roger supports proposals to introduce a 20mph speed limit on Birmingham's residential roads

Roger has written to Birmingham City Council to express his support for the Council's introduction of 20mph speed limits on the city's roads in order to improve safety and reduce accidents.

"I am really pleased that the Council is considering lowering the speed limit for residential streets in Birmingham", said Roger. "There have already been too many road deaths in the city, and each one is totally unnecessary and a tragedy for the family involved. I hope that the Council does decide to implement the 20mph limit and make Birmingham's streets safer."

Roger first campaigned to reduce Birmingham's speed limit some years ago. He pushed for the introduction of a 20mph limit on the streets around schools but was told that individual schools needed to make a case for the introduction of limits in their areas. He commented: "It is good news that the Council is now considering applying lower speed limits to the streets around all Birmingham's schools. I urge councillors to introduce the limits as soon as possible to help keep children safe."



Don't drive and phone!

Roger is backing a national campaign, launched by the charity Brake, which aimed to prevent appalling crashes caused by multi-tasking at the wheel.

The campaign appeals to drivers to turn off their phones or put them in the boot, and urges everyone to refuse to speak on the phone to someone who's driving. It was launched almost exactly a decade after hand-held mobiles were banned at the wheel and is being supported by a week-long campaign of heightened police enforcement across the country targeting drivers on hand-held phones.



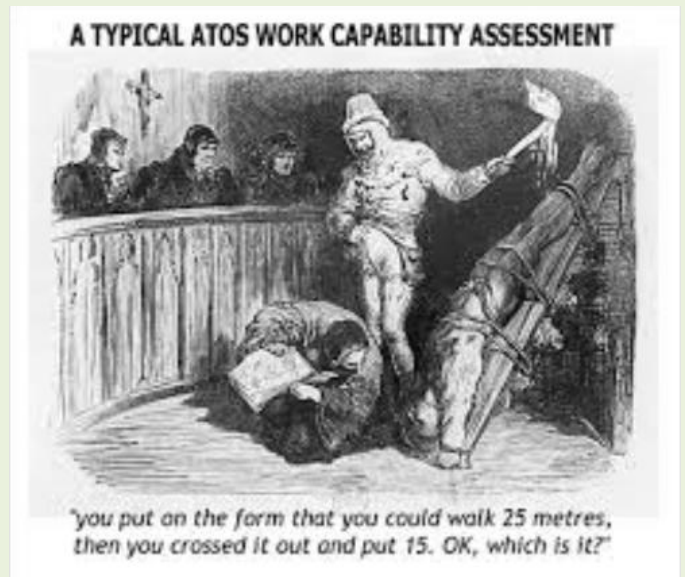
Roger said: "Staying focused is vital to driving safely, enabling you to spot hazards in time and react quickly in an emergency. If you're using a mobile phone or any other gadget you're more likely to crash, potentially causing very serious injury or even killing someone, as in the tragic case of a local schoolgirl in my constituency who was killed by a driver who was texting at the wheel."

Welcome for the Appeal Court decision that Work Capability Assessments disadvantage mentally ill

Roger welcomed a decision by the Court of Appeal upholding a previous ruling that work capability assessments disadvantage people who are mentally ill or have learning difficulties. He has been concerned for some time that these assessments are not designed with the best interests of these vulnerable individuals in mind, leading to unwell people being deprived of support to which they are entitled.

Roger said: "I am really pleased that the Court of Appeal upheld the ruling that Work Capability Assessments do not work fairly for people with mental health problems, learning difficulties or autism. The current system expects the claimants themselves to obtain all the necessary documents from their GP or social worker, even if they lack the capacity to understand what can be a complex process. This results in assessments taking place without the necessary evidence, leading to mistaken outcomes. The DWP must start taking on the responsibility to help collect evidence if the claimant is unable to do so."

The ruling took place in response to a judicial review initiated by two claimants, where the original judgment was that the assessments are unfair to those with mental health problems. Rather than accepting this ruling and changing the assessments to avoid disadvantaging people who are already vulnerable, the Department for Work and Pensions appealed against the judgment, causing the judicial review to be put on hold. This legal process can now resume, with a final ruling expected to be given in 2014 unless the DWP brings further legal action to delay the process.



Roger has tabled a written Parliamentary Question to the Department for Work and Pensions, asking the Secretary of State, Iain Duncan Smith, how he will change the way ESA assessments are carried out in light of the ruling and asking him to make a statement.

You can read Mind's response to the ruling [here](#).

Roger condemns Coalition incompetence and cruelty on benefits

Continuing his work fighting the Government's attack on disabled people, Roger tabled an Early Day Motion which severely criticises plans by the Department of Work and Pensions to introduce a period of 'mandatory reconsideration' as an intermediate stage for claimants who wish to appeal the decision not to award Employment and Support Allowance, during which time ill and disabled people would receive no money to live on.

He also tabled a number of questions for written answer from the DWP, asking how long the mandatory reconsideration of ESA decisions would take and if a maximum time limit for the process would be introduced. In response, Minister of State for Employment Esther McVey said: "There are no plans to introduce a timescale for the completion of the mandatory reconsideration process, however, the process will be monitored to avoid any unnecessary delays". The DWP expects the process to take around 14 days for straightforward cases but "the time it takes to complete will vary depending on the circumstances of the case".

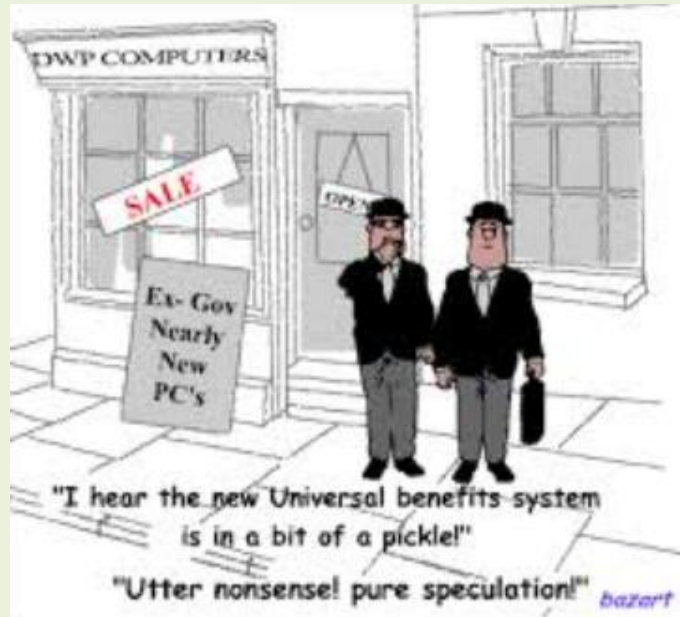
Commenting on the Government's response, Roger said: "The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, is constantly on the lookout for ways to pare back the benefits bill and shoehorn claimants into non-existent jobs regardless of their circumstances. The introduction of a punitive sanctions regime was never going to satisfy him in his undeclared aim to punish the 'undeserving poor' and pick off the easy targets. This is a clear and unequivocal attack on the most vulnerable, such as disabled people, who have a right to state support."

You can read the EDM [here](#).



However, Roger believes that Iain Duncan Smith has bigger headaches on the horizon than pinching pennies from the pockets of those unable to work. On the day of the Autumn Statement, DWP tried to sneak under the radar news that it will miss the deadline of getting all benefit claimants on to Universal Credit by the end of 2017. The Department also announced that it will have to start the IT system again from scratch, at a cost estimated to be at least £140m of taxpayers' hard-earned money. Roger said: "I am happy for my taxes to support ill and disabled people who cannot work, but I

do not see why I or my constituents should pay for yet another Government IT mess-up."



Protect the rights of women in Afghanistan, says Roger

Roger has written to the Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening MP, to urge her to take all possible steps to protect the safety of women and girls in Afghanistan, and to prioritise supporting Afghanistani women who are working to improve human rights.

Roger also tabled a Parliamentary Question to urge the Department for International Development to increase funding to help provide more shelters for female victims of violence in Afghanistan, where there are currently just fourteen shelters. He tabled another question asking DFID for more information about how it is working with the Government of Afghanistan to bring to justice perpetrators of violent crimes against women and girls, and how it will safeguard women's rights following the withdrawal of Coalition forces.



Roger said: “My constituents have written to me to tell me that they share my anxiety about the current situation of women in Afghanistan. Of particular concern is the extremely high level of violence against women and girls, and the number of these attacks that remain unreported and unpunished. I urge the Government to take these factors into account when planning the withdrawal of troops.”

“I believe that it is vital for the UK to champion women’s rights in Afghanistan, and to apply all possible diplomatic pressure to the Government of Afghanistan to take effective action in this area.”

West Midlands Police warn of increase in car number plate theft

At a recent meeting of the Springfield Ward Committee which Roger attended, the local Police Superintendent pointed out that the theft of car number plates was on the increase in Hall Green.

To tackle this, the police have partnered with Halfords to provide a free service to protect local residents. Halfords will fit a car number plate with tamper proof screws free of charge. To take advantage of this offer you’ll need to bring a leaflet which can be downloaded [here](#) or obtained from your local police station.

“Cash for crash” means higher premiums for all

Roger is also backing the Crimestoppers campaign, held in conjunction with West Midlands Police and the Insurance Fraud Bureau, against criminal gangs which manufacture car accidents in order to try to scam insurance companies through fraudulent claims.



Speaking from his constituency, Roger commented: “A Crimestoppers survey found that nine out of the ten postal districts in the UK where this type of crime is most likely to occur are in Birmingham or Bradford. This brings a £392 million annual cost to the insurance industry.”

He continued: “Unfortunately, some people think it is fair game to try to get the insurance industry to pay out, but it is ordinary motorists who actually pay the cost through increases to their already-expensive premiums. All the insurance companies do is pass on the increased claims to honest drivers.

“Because of this, in some parts of my constituency with B11 and B12 postcodes, motorists who have never had an accident in their live are facing ever-increasing premiums, while new drivers have not got a hope of getting car insurance unless they are prepared to hand over thousands of pounds.”

Out and About in Birmingham Hall Green



Above: Roger backs the 'bin-it' campaign at Robin Hood Academy, 21st November 2013.



Above: Roger at the Robin Hood Lane Tesco Express store, supporting the charity food collection event on Friday 29th November 2013.

Roger's work in Parliament this month

Giving voters more power to recall MPs

Roger's work in Parliament in December included voting in the House of Commons in favour of bringing in legislation to allow voters to recall their MPs. This was passed with a large majority, and draft legislation to allow this to become law will be considered by MPs in February.

Speaking after the motion was successfully passed, Roger commented: "For the political process to function, it is essential for people to feel that their MPs are in Parliament to fight for the interests and well-being of their constituents and the country as a whole, not just themselves. I believe that making it easier for voters to recall their MPs will help make politics more responsive and politicians more accountable to the electorate."



Fighting for sustainable energy

Roger also voted in a debate on a change to the Energy Bill which was proposed in the House of Lords. The Lords suggested an amendment which would have enforced tougher standards on emissions of oxides of sulphur and nitrogen from fossil fuel power stations. With its usual lack of concern for the well-being of UK citizens, the Coalition held a vote in the House of Commons because it disagreed with the proposed change and did not want to see the introduction of higher emissions standards.

In doing so, the Government ignored the findings of its own Energy and Climate Change Committee, which called the existing emissions performance standards "at best pointless". Sadly, although Roger and many of his colleagues voted in favour of the Lords' proposed change, the Coalition won this vote and the Government got their way in rejecting the higher standards.

Protesting human rights violations in Colombia

Roger was among a small group of MPs who voted against approving the draft European Union (Definition of Treaties) (Colombia and Peru Trade Agreement) Order 2013. Sixty-one MPs chose to vote against accepting this free-trade agreement with Colombia in

protest against the country's failure to honour its commitments on human rights.

Roger explained the reason for his "no" vote: "Once again, this Government have put economic interests above human rights. In just one year, 37 human rights activists were murdered in Colombia, sixteen of whom were murdered by Government forces during strike action. The free trade agreement sets out standards for human rights protection, but I am concerned that this is just empty rhetoric that will not be enforced. This House should not condone the murder of innocent people by their own Government."

The trade agreement was passed by the House, but Roger and his colleagues who voted against it felt that it was important to make a stand against human rights abuses, wherever in the world they take place.

Voting for tougher controls on gambling

Roger voted against the introduction of legislation which would permit the proliferation of fixed-odds betting terminals, or FOBTs. These high-stakes machines have been described as the "crack cocaine" of gambling due to their addictive nature. Labour MPs opposed the loosening of the restrictions around these machines, but were outnumbered by the Coalition.



As this will be the last Postcard of the year, Roger and his staff extend their best wishes to all his constituents and Postcard readers for an enjoyable and restful Christmas and a peaceful New Year.



For help and advice, please see the 'Helplines' section of Roger's website, available at www.rogergodsiffmp.co.uk/helplineAdvice.php, or [here](#).