

Roger demands urgent investigation into allegations of unjustified benefits sanctions in Birmingham Jobcentres.

Following a number of complaints from constituents, Birmingham MP, Roger Godsiff, has written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith MP, asking him to investigate, as a matter of urgency, the number of sanctions which are being handed out to benefits claimants at local Jobcentre Plus offices in Birmingham

Roger Godsiff said: "I am receiving an increasing number of complaints from constituents who have had benefits suspended for periods of up to 4 wks on the first occasion because Jobcentre Plus advisors believe that claimants have not been doing enough to find work even when they can show clear evidence of meeting the job search requirements.

He continued: "Set against the background of rising unemployment, an increasing number of people being passed 'fit for work' by dubious and clearly flawed Atos assessments, cuts to housing benefits which have seen landlords automatically sending out eviction notices, the last thing claimants need is a 'kangaroo court' where their only lifeline of support is withdrawn.

Again, the suspicion is that underlying all of this is that sanctions are being applied as an instrument in themselves to reduce benefits and I have asked to Secretary of State a number of questions including whether or not staff at Jobcentres have been given targets for applying sanctions and what recourse claimants have to overturn a decision if they feel that sanctions have been unjustly applied.

Roger concluded: "Currently, there is growing lack of clarity on the delivery of new services and this includes Universal Jobmatch (UJM) which I understand is being rolled out to jobseekers attending the Kings Heath JobcentrePlus and will replace the notice boards on which vacancies are advertised. Constituents are complaining that they are being 'told' to sign up for this new service but it is unclear whether or not to sign up is mandatory and whether failure to sign will again incur sanctions."



In the run-up to Christmas last year, Cait Reilly was forced to give up the work experience she had arranged for herself in a museum, something relevant to her long-term career ambitions, to do unpaid work at Poundland. "It would be more understandable if it was a charitable organisation, or a place where you could build people skills. Plus I was told I had to do it when I didn't have to."



Cait Reilly: "I was told I had to do it when I didn't have to."
 Photograph: Fabio De Paola

Lousy deal for rail travellers....



Commenting on the recent announcement of yet another rise in rail fares Roger said: "The history of year on year increases in the price of tickets and the prospect of these increases carrying on for a number of years in the future is already intolerable for rail travellers. All this of course set against the background of rising profits for the train operating companies and the reduction in opening hours at ticket offices accompanied by reductions in staffing levels and guards on trains."

He went on to say: "We must be the only country in Europe that seeks to price travellers 'off the railways' as capacity fails to keep up with rising demand. Rail passenger numbers have been quoted as being as high as they were in the heyday of the railways in 1926 yet ridiculously, the train operating companies are considering even further rises on the most popular routes to deter travellers."

Commenting on the Coalitions continued persistence with the HS2 Project Roger said: "Many people don't have any choice other than to travel by rail and they will see continued deficiencies in the provision of new and up-to-date rolling stock and much needed extensions to station platforms to accommodate more carriages potentially go without remedy for one huge massive vanity project which will cut 30 minutes of the journey time from London to Birmingham."

Roger has written a letter to Patrick McLoughlin MP, Secretary of State for Transport, asking him to seriously reconsider the Coalitions approach to rail travel.

Teachers fear for the profession over Government plans to abolish national pay

Following a number of representations that Roger received from teachers in the constituency he has written to the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove MP, regarding the concerns that they have over government plans to dismantle the national pay structure for teachers in England and Wales and the long-term effects that teachers believe that this will have on the profession.

Roger said: "Teachers, quite rightly, have a number of concerns over current government plans. They believe that removing the current arrangements for pay progression in the early years of a teacher's career will harm teacher recruitment by removing a key plank of the profession's offer to graduates. They also believe that further extending performance related pay (PRP) in the teaching profession will increase the scope for teachers pay to be decided on the basis of factors outside teachers controls such as the schools individual budgetary position or the attitude of the head teacher."

He went on to say: "The fragmentation of national negotiations is without doubt going to add a great deal to the administrative burden of head teachers and governors and the proposal to allow schools to cut teachers pay when they take up jobs in a new school is most likely to dramatically reduce teacher mobility and will hit women teachers on career breaks particularly hard."

Welfare Benefits Up-rating Bill – Disabled take another hit!!

The Chancellor has exempted some benefits for disabled people and carers from a reduced uprating and those will continue to rise by CPI inflation. These benefits are:

- Disability Living Allowance (DLA);
- Employment Support Allowance (ESA) – Support Group component;
- Disability related tax-credits

However, the Bill will still mean a real terms cut in vital support for many disabled people, which helps them deal with the additional barriers and costs they face as a result of their impairment or condition.

Despite the commitment that DLA will continue to rise by inflation, this is not true of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

Following a Work Capability Assessment (WCA), people who are unable to work can be placed in either the Support Group or the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG). Many disabled people are being placed in the WRAG. The Benefits Up-rating Bill will subject this benefit to the reduced 1% rise. In effect, this will mean that households in the WRAG receiving ESA will be £87.65p worse off a year. Disabled people will also suffer from the reduced rate of benefit up-rating on other sources of financial support they receive, e.g. housing benefit.

Children and Families Bill – More Support, Closer to Home.

Roger wrote to the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, impressing upon him the need in the Children and Families Bill to incorporate, wherever possible, local provision for families both in the interests of both children and families.

Roger said: “Families with disabled children are suffering because they cannot get the help that they need locally and that when they do get back to support, it can very often be available only miles from home. What the families of disabled children need most from the new Children and Families Bill is better support close to home.

I think that we owe it to disabled children and their families to provide this support so that they have a basic quality of care available to them and that these services are not eroded by current plans to reduce benefits expenditure.”

This is the response from Edward Timpson MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families.

https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_9TwqUlWlHK6UzNlOUtTVz11OWs/edit

Roger backs Leveson Report

Roger Godsiff has given his full support to the proposals by Lord Leveson for independent regulations within a statutory framework of Britain’s press.

Speaking after the Prime Minister had rejected the main findings of the Leveson Report Roger said: “The Leveson enquiry has been the most detailed and thorough investigation into the way the press, particularly the tabloids, currently operate in the United Kingdom. It has rightly highlighted the abuses and dishonest tactics which some newspapers have indulged in and it has clearly shown that the current Press Complaints Commission, which is hand-picked by newspaper proprietors, is totally inadequate to bring about meaningful redress for those individuals whose lives are torn apart by inaccurate and untrue press allegations. I deplore the fact that the Prime Minister, having set up the enquiry and promised that he would implement its findings has now back-tracked on these promises and seems to be taking the side of those owners and editors in the press whose actions and illegalities have been so ruthlessly exposed by the Leveson Committee.

Lord Leveson, by proposing independent regulation backed up by statutory legislation, has done a great public service and I for one will be supporting these recommendations.”

UN Vote for Palestinian State is symbolic but necessary.

Welcoming the decision by the UN General Assembly to give ‘non-member state’ status to Palestine within the UN Roger said “The overwhelming support for recognising a Palestinian state by the General Assembly is to be very much welcomed. Although this vote will not change anything on the ground in the Middle East it is symbolic because when the UN took its historic decision to create the State of Israel it also proposed that a separate Palestinian state should be established. This was originally rejected by the Palestinians and other Arab countries but the vote, in response to the call by Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian authority, re-emphasises the desire of the world community including the Palestinian and Arab states to seek a permanent two-state solution.”

Roger signs EDM 817 on Occupied Palestinian Territories area E1

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/print/2012-13/817>

Dangerous Driving – Roger welcomes the introduction of new offence.

“Very little compares with the anguish suffered by families who see a loved one killed or severely injured on the roads and the driver responsible given a meagre sentence of 2yrs with time off for good behaviour” said Roger.

“ I therefore welcome the recent announcement by the Ministry of Justice of the introduction of a new offence of causing serious injury by dangerous driving with a maximum penalty of five years in custody.”

Despite recent developments however Roger expressed concern that court still seemed reluctant to invoke the heaviest of sentences. He went on to say: “There are a number of sentencing options now available but concerns still remain that courts are not exercising these options to the full.”

News of the new offence was contained in a letter to Roger from Jeremy Wright MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice, following correspondence which raised concerns over sentencing policy raised by a number of families in Birmingham Hall Green.

https://docs.google.com/open?id=0B_9TwqUlWcHK6YX_Fpai1BVVVHcGM



Roger has added his signature to a letter from the “Unions Together” campaign to David Cameron and George Osborne which seeks to halt legislation which will pave the way for a ‘shares for rights’ plan allowing small and medium-sized businesses to ask new employees to give up some of their key rights at work, in exchange for shares in the business. For as little as

£2000 in shares, employees may have to give up the right not to be sacked unfairly, redundancy rights, as well as flexible working and maternity rights.

Roger said: “The Government should be concentrating on fixing our economy and getting people back into work, not on inventing hare-brained schemes to make it easier to fire people. The ‘nasty party’ cannot change its spots and will always have to pacify its right wing, particularly all those MP’s who have to sit it out on the back benches because government jobs have gone to the Liberal Democrats.”

He concluded: “There is a growing consensus amongst economists that the severity of the Government cutbacks is stalling the economy. Already the time line on austerity measures is being extended – it is now 2018 – and all this government can think about is eroding workers rights and cutting benefits. You don’t hear them championing stricter controls on UK companies who devise clever ways not to pay corporation tax do you?”



Roger has signed a petition calling on the Government to use the money it gets from our carbon taxes to make our homes super-energy efficient – driving down our energy bills forever.

“Everybody knows that we are facing an energy bill crisis” said Roger.

“Families are suffering huge financial hardship, and one in four households can’t afford to heat their homes. Cold homes are damaging the health of our most vulnerable citizens, including children and older people.”

Babar Ahmad and Syed Ahsan – Consular Assistance

“The welfare of Mr Ahmad and Mr Ahsan is our primary concern. We are committed to ensuring they are treated fairly and in line with internationally accepted standards.” said Alistair Burt, Minister responsible for consular matters in North America following a letter from Roger to the Foreign &

Commonwealth Office regarding the conditions under which Babar Ahmad and Syed Ahsan were being held.

Roger said: "I am encouraged but not complacent about the response from the Minister particularly so as consular staff have been in touch with both men, and members of their families, and are providing consular assistance.

https://docs.google.com/open?id=0B_9TwqUlW6WFdjaGlmSzVFZUU



Give Every Child a Chance - Don't rush to the English Baccalaureate

Roger has signed up for the campaign being organized by the NUT asking Michael Gove, the Education Secretary, to extend the consultation period before the implementation of the English Baccalaureate. His proposal would replace GCSEs in all the English Baccalaureate subjects (maths, English, sciences, a language and history or geography).

Roger said: "I do not believe the current proposals for English Baccalaureate Certificates will ensure a broad and balanced curriculum and that it is a mistake to ignore creative and vocational subjects.

The creative industries contribute massively to the wellbeing of the UK and these measures seem destined to erode them."

He concluded: "The Government is also planning to introduce these proposals with a great deal of haste and is not fully engaging with those who have both an interest and expertise in these matters."

www.ebaccpetition.org.uk



Roger is supporting the GO20 for communities to adopt the 20mph speed limit.

Roger said: "When communities GO20 by adopting a 20mph speed limit and drivers understand those limits and slow down, it makes our communities safer, healthier and nicer places to live.

<http://go20.org/2012/12/14/roger-godsiff-mp-signs-up-to-go-20/>

<http://go20campaign.wordpress.com/why-go-20/>



Roger Opposes the Draft Communications Data Bill

"The more powers you give people, the more they feel they can't do without and then it's too late to put the genie back in the bottle." says Roger.

Speaking from Westminster, Roger said: "In my opinion a balance has to be struck between the rights of ordinary people to be able to communicate without 'big brother' watching them and also the need for vigilance in tracking internet usage involved in terrorism or potential terrorist activities and also criminality and money laundering.

As you know proposals were floated towards the end of the last Government for greater surveillance of various forms of internet traffic but I was not convinced then, neither am I now, that there needs to be blanket legislation brought in. It is much better, in my opinion, if the security services seek the permission of the Home Secretary if they feel there is a need to monitor information traffic as is the case now when permission has to be sought from the Home Secretary for phones to be tapped."

Expressing his concerns at how previous legislation had been abused he concluded: "Previous anti-terrorist legislation was extensively used by local councils to monitor the activities of benefit claimants despite numerous assurances at the time that activity such as this could never happen under the safeguards introduced under the legislation. Legislation like this is a self-fulfilling prophesy, the more powers you give people the more they want, then its too late to put the genie back in the bottle."

"The general public has just cause to believe that their personal information is not safe in government hands or anybody else's."

Safe Standing Parliamentary Event (11th Dec 2012)

Roger Godsiff chaired a panel of experts drawn from football club CEOs, the police, academics and safety professionals to discuss the benefits of safe standing in football stadia in front of an audience of MPs, journalists and football industry figures.

Roger tabled an Early Day Motion on October 15 calling for a 'rail seats' trial at grounds which has been signed by over 50 MP's.



<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2012-13/573>

He said: "Firstly, let me make it clear what we are not seeking to do. We are not seeking a return to old -style terracing. Above all, we are not seeking to devalue the memory of the 96 people who died at Hillsborough or other football disasters such as Bradford, Ibrox or Heysel. I believe that the time is right for a trial to take place and the campaign is asking for the Secretary of State to make the necessary legislative changes to allow this to happen." The Football Supporters Federation (FSF) spokesman said: "Both Aston Villa and the Matchday Commander responsible for policing in

West Midlands now back the FSF's Safe Standing campaign."

Find full recording of the meeting at the link below:

https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_9TwqUlwHK6UERjRW5sRzg0SFU/edit

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gcwgCGGS9s>

Chernobyl children lose out on free visas



Two decades after the world's most serious nuclear accident, the towns near the Chernobyl plant remain semi-abandoned. Work on a new 'safe confinement structure' has begun in order to prevent further contamination

Roger has expressed dismay at the decision by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to end the Chernobyl Children's gratis visa scheme which, for a number of years, has helped thousands of children every year to travel to the UK for respite care without having to fund the cost of visas.

The charities who arrange the trips for the children have been informed that the gratis visa scheme will cease to operate after 31st March 2013 and that the Foreign & Commonwealth Office don't have any plans to reconsider this decision.

Roger said: "Visas for Chernobyl Children from Belarus have been offered free to the charities and, until now, the government has born the costs. I know that the government is cutting back on expenditure but I really feel that this is an area where humanitarian interests should take priority."

The news that the Chernobyl Children's Charities would lose free visas came in a letter to Roger from the

Minister for Europe, David Liddington MP, after Roger had written to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

The Minister also announced that as a goodwill gesture in the final year of free visas, that the government had agreed to cover the cost of Chernobyl children's visas obtained in Ukraine as well as Belarus, up to a ceiling of £200,000 overall for the year.

HELP LINE LIBRARY



Connecting rough sleepers to local services
0300 500 0914 www.streetlink.org.uk

If you're concerned about someone sleeping rough, get in touch so we can connect them to local services.



http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/how_we_can_help/housing_advice_helpline

Shelter provides a **free, national telephone advice line** staffed by **trained housing advisers**. We have helped thousands of people, from finding them a place to sleep to suggesting how to handle mortgage arrears.

Ring 0808 800 4444

8am-8pm Monday-Friday
8am-5pm Saturday-Sunday



Helpline: 0845 608 4455 Email: helpline@patients-association.com

The Patients Association, PO Box 935, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 3YJ

T: 020 8423 9111 F: 020 8423 9119 E: helpline@patients-association.com

Benefit Enquiry Line (BEL)

0800 882200

Lines are open 8:30 AM to 6:30 PM Monday to Friday. From a landline your call is free.

This is a confidential telephone advice and information line for people with disabilities, carers and representatives. It covers England, Scotland and Wales. BEL can provide general benefits advice and information, but staff do not have access to any claimant records and are therefore unable to give information on the progress of a claim or benefits you are already receiving. It is a confidential service and nothing you ask or say will go on your file.

FINANCIAL ADVICE

Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 08454 04 05 06

Consumer Credit Counselling Service

Our FREEPHONE helpline is open from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 3pm on Saturday.
0800 138 1111

<http://www.cccs.co.uk/Contact.aspx>

National Debt Line 0808 808 4000

Office of Fair Trading - Enquiries and Reporting Centre on 0845 7 22 44 99
enquiries@oft.gsi.gov.uk

FREE LEGAL ADVICE

<http://www.birminghamlawsociety.co.uk/Legal-advice/Free-legal-advice.htm>

<http://www.lawworksclinics.org.uk/bflag/index.php>
<http://www.lawworks.org.uk/list-of-lawworks-member-clinics>

CHILDREN FAMILIES AND DISABILITIES

contact a family
for families with disabled children

Get in touch with the helpline of [Contact a Family](#) who work with young children. They may be able to refer you to a local network of refer you to a local network of trained advocates. Free helpline on 0808 808 3555



BIRMINGHAM CONSTITUENCY OFFICE:

Tel: 07889 650544

0121 603 2299

novellm@parliament.uk

Other organisations that may be able to help are:

- λ [Every Disabled Child Matters](#)
- λ [Norfolk Coalition Of Disabled People](#)
- λ [Norfolk Disabled Person's Alliance](#)
- [The Council for Disabled Children](#)

Independent Living Advice Line

Provides advice to disabled people and their carers:

Tel: 0845 026 4748 or email:

independentliving@disabilityrightsuk.org

Disabled Students' Helpline

Our advice service can provide advice on education, training and employment:

Telephone 0800 328 5050 (freephone)

Tuesday 11.30am-1.30pm and Thursday 1.30pm-3.30pm

Or mail: skill4disabledstudents@disabilityrightsuk.org

Mind infoline 0300 123 3393
info@mind.org.uk

