

Latest News from Duncan Baker MP

Member of Parliament for North Norfolk



I can hardly remember the festive period given we've hit the ground running throughout January. We've covered so much already, here's a roundup of just a tiny fraction of what I've been up to.

Before we get into the news update for this month, we of course heard the incredibly sad news yesterday that His Majesty the King has been diagnosed with cancer. On behalf of North Norfolk, we wish him well, that his treatment is swift and for a speedy recovery.

God Save the King.

The Post Office Scandal

I can't start anywhere else other than by mentioning the appalling situation regarding our sub-postmasters. As many know, this was a personal matter to me and one I had campaigned on ever since I became an MP. I am the only serving MP who once was a sub-postmaster and, like so many, watched the ITV drama featuring Mr Bates unfold with utter disbelief.

After years, we finally see real justice coming at a far greater speed to help compensate and overturn these wrongful convictions and recompense these poor people who lost everything. I have already asked the Minister if I can sit on the Bill Committee to help steer the new legislation through Parliament, such is my knowledge of the subject.

I think I must have been on every major TV and radio network talking about my personal experience and it was quite a moment to be on the live BBC Newsnight programme as well as feature on Channel 4 talking about the Post Office!

My 10 Minute Rule Bill – Autism (Early Identification) Bill

One of my great privileges is to act on problems that constituents bring to me. My office helps so many parents get support and the right schooling for their autistic and SEND children. To me, this has become an area of real interest and, as a father to young children myself, it breaks my heart that too many SEND children are not getting the help they need.

During January, I brought a Bill into Parliament that will make autism training a mandatory module during initial teacher training. This will help ensure the early identification of autism in pupils. It is frankly absurd that as it stands just 39% of primary school teachers have just more than half a day's training in autism.

The Government have been very receptive to changing the initial teacher training framework and supportive to the aims of my Bill. It has been a proud moment to be a voice to those parents and children with special educational needs. You can find my speech via the link below: Just go to 13:03:50 for when my speech starts.

Major Meeting on Improving Mobile Phone Reception

There has been lots of concern around BT's plans to phase out the old analogue phone network and move it to a system that runs on the broadband network. This is called BT Digital Voice. The old network will be switched off by the end of 2025.

People are rightly concerned about the lack of mobile signal in some areas, older people knowing what this means and what to do and whether a telephone connected to the broadband will still work in a power cut. Therefore, I met with many Parish Councils, mobile phone operators and other stakeholders to try to improve our mobile coverage in certain parts of North Norfolk and how to deal with these plans going forward. We will keep working to improve mobile signal and I will help anyone worried about the Digital Voice changes. You can just email my office and we will reach out to you.

The BIG Fundraising Launch – Two Marathons, Running 52 miles for 52 Local Charities

I must be mad, but I have launched my most ambitious challenge yet. In April, I am going to represent North Norfolk once again and not only run the London Marathon but just one week later try and complete the Norfolk Marathon.

This will be to raise money for North Norfolk charities and I hope to break £100,000 in doing so in my first term in Parliament. This will be the cumulative amount of money raised so far from all my charity running.

The challenge is 52 miles for 52 charities and right now, as I write this I have raised nearly £90,000 for local good causes. If you would be so generous as to help me break that £100,000 mark or in fact nominate a charity, I would be so grateful. You can donate or nominate here.

Huge Turnout for my Public Meeting into Flooding

Last Friday night we held our open public meeting into the dreadful flooding we have suffered throughout the constituency. This was held in Hickling to a packed audience of 200, with around 300 more people watching via our livestream. I am

very grateful to my office who worked tirelessly for months to make sure everyone was able to have their voices heard.

A panel of experts and stakeholders from the Environment Agency, Anglian Water, Flood Resilience Forum, County Council and Internal Drainage Board was assembled and residents were able to put their questions to the panel for over 3 hours. Many communities such as, Hickling, Potter Heigham, Horning and Hoveton were all represented with many issues being raised from dredging, flood banks, river levels, maintenance, flood barriers, to climate change and the Herring Bridge. It was an excellent meeting.

My job, is to hold the authorities to account so they try and sort out the somewhat disjointed and uncoordinated way some of the flood response works. I think we all feel something needs tightening up. Perhaps an overseeing body, one that is ultimately responsible and has the right powers to deal with flooding as this is an issue that is only going to get worse with the impacts of climate change.

Is the UEA dentistry school a step closer?

As many know, my father was an NHS dentist for over 40 years and before anyone else in Parliament, following the pandemic, I made representations to the Government that we were to witness a major structural shift in dentists moving, to run private practices rather than work under an NHS contract as Covid subsided. That has entirely come true – much as my father predicted.

He trained in Manchester, during the early 1970s and retired when the NHS contracts changed the way dentists were paid towards the end of the last Labour government. These changes, along with the pandemic, have been the catalyst to see an exodus of dentists from the NHS to only operate as a private practice. As a private practice they can charge more money, operate with more freedom and pick and choose patients. I have fought tirelessly to fix what has happened and I am pleased that finally now, we are seeing a plan to fix dentistry emerge, which I have been heavily involved in.

There are two further major problems. Firstly, we can't get newly qualified dentists to work in rural areas. North Norfolk suffers while young dentists want to enjoy the city lifestyle. It is hard attracting them to our region, just as it is in Devon, Cornwall and other rural places. But secondly, we have no dental training facility in the East of England.

Thanks to a lot of hard work and working with the UEA that might all be about to change, and fast. In the Government's plan to repair NHS dentistry there needs to be an allocation of dentists to training centres, in under-served areas. We are working on plans to deliver that stipulation in the NHS long term workforce plan. As such, we are within touching distance of the UEA building a dentistry school to serve us in the East of England.

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I am proud to have been involved in this and if we manage to deliver it, it will be one of my biggest achievements. Over my shoulder is where the new training school will go.

And with great sadness I mention Clapton passing

It is with great sadness that our beloved rescue cat Clapton has passed away. His cancer had spread significantly throughout his mouth since Christmas. So much so that he just couldn't eat properly and had lost so much weight that it wasn't fair for him to go on like that. It's been heart-breaking to let him go.

He's often featured in Parliament or on my social media as I've campaigned for tougher laws for the protection of pets and animals.

He was part of our family for a decade since we rescued him. He was a lovely little companion and we will miss him greatly. The house feels much emptier without his presence. I know many will be very sad to hear this news but wanted to just let you know.

I hope you found this update useful, I look forward to writing to you again at the end of next month.

Yours sincerely,

Duncan

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