



News from Westminster

February 22nd 2007 Christine Russell MP

Your NHS: Labour's 18 week treatment goal

Labour's promise - by the end of 2008 the process from referral, to diagnosis, to the start of treatment will take a maximum of only 18 weeks.



On Monday, I learnt about the progress that Labour is making in getting quicker and better treatment on the NHS for patients in Chester. Our promise to Chester is that by

the end of 2008 the process from referral, to diagnosis, to the start of treatment will take a maximum of only 18 weeks.

Just remember what a disaster the Tories were for our NHS. Under the Tories, people often waited over 2 years for an operation, but Labour's programme of investment and reform has meant that by the end of 2008 most patients will be treated in approximately seven weeks.

This is about the NHS helping change people's lives by improving care and cutting unnecessary delays. This will lead to a much better experience for patients in Chester. I'll keep you posted on progress.

A New Deal for Carers

Millions of carers are hidden heroes who keep families together through their support and devotion. The carers in Chester often provide care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, taking on that precious role that enables a friend or family member to stay at home and live with the dignity, independence and security the rest of us take for granted. Carers are very important and Labour wants them to get more support.

On Wednesday, the Chancellor Gordon Brown and Health Minister Ivan Lewis launched a New Deal for Carers which includes a range of measures designed to recognise the essential work that carers carry out across the country, including:

- ✓ £25 million to be spent on providing short-term home based respite care for carers in crisis or emergency situations in every council
- ✓ £3 million towards the establishment of a national helpline for carers
- ✓ £5 million to support the development of an experts carers programme
- ✓ a wide ranging review of the 1999 national carers strategy

Protecting workers

Plans to protect vulnerable agency workers were published in a Government consultation on Tuesday.

This is welcome news and builds on the measures to improve fairness at work agreed at the Labour Party National Policy Forum at Warwick University in 2004.

It is right that agency workers know their rights and are protected from the unscrupulous practices of agencies that they may fall foul to.

It was pleasing to see midweek that a conman was convicted and ordered to pay more than £20,000 for running an illegal employment agency and charging vulnerable workers up to £124 a time for falsely claiming that he could find them work overseas.

What do you think of biofuels?

Biofuels are liquid fuels made from energy crops like oil-seed rape and wheat that can be mixed with diesel and petrol and used in ordinary vehicles.

Labour introduced the Renewable Transport Fuels Obligation (RTFO) to ensure that from 2008 2.5% of all fuel sold on UK forecourts will come from a renewable source. On Thursday, the Government launched a public consultation to consider increasing this to 5% in 2010.

This measure is predicted to save 1 million tonnes of carbon a year – the equivalent of taking 1 million vehicles off the road. If you are interested in taking part in the consultation go to

www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/drafttrfo/

Tough action on violent crime

The **Violent Crime Reduction Act**, which I voted for in Parliament, came into force last week. It contains tough measures to ensure that police and local communities have the powers they need to tackle guns, knives and alcohol-related violence.

On **Guns** the Act will mean that:

- It is illegal to manufacture, import or sell an imitation firearm and brings in tougher manufacturing standards to ensure that imitation firearms cannot be converted to fire live ammunition and tougher sentences for carrying them.
- Air weapons are sold only through registered firearms dealers, and that all sales take place face to face and tightens up the law on the indiscriminate and reckless firing of air-guns from private property with a new offence of using another person to hide or carry guns or knives.

On **knives** among a range of measures the Act introduces:

- A power for members of staff of schools and colleges to search pupils, students for weapons.

- Currently school staff have the power to search individual pupils if they believe they may be carrying a dangerous weapon. But this new measure will give them more discretion to carry out searches if they suspect groups of pupils of carrying knives and other dangerous weapons, making schools safer.

- An increase to the maximum sentence for carrying a knife in public from two to four years.

On **alcohol-related crime and disorder** the Act brings in:

- A new civil order - a 'Drinking Banning Order' - which will mean drunken thugs can be excluded from certain areas and from bars, pubs and clubs.
- Alcohol Disorder Zones, in which bars pubs and clubs will have to help to pay the costs of dealing with alcohol-related disorder in areas where this is a problem. A new power is now available for the police to impose 48-hour bans on pubs and clubs persistently selling alcohol to underage drinkers.

All good stuff for fighting violent crime in Chester.