

Week in Westminster

TALK TO US



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People trafficking is a real issue

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Every day I think that nothing else can shock me but virtually every week there is something new and awful that comes to my attention. This week was no exception.

On Friday I spent time with representatives from Caritas which is a Catholic charity based in Salford. Recently the charity has worked to raise awareness of human trafficking and issues of modern day slavery. This evil of our time is often the subject of TV dramas and some of you might have seen McMafia, the latest BBC drama which focused on organised crime and trafficking.

I was fortunate to meet with

James Norton who plays Alex Godman, an Anglo-Russian business man who gets dragged into organised crime and everything that entails including the heroin trade, money laundering and human trafficking.

James was in Parliament with writer, Misha Glenny to discuss how the British Government can tackle this form of global crime. I was very interested to hear Mr Glenny say that the UK is a hot bed for crime of this nature and no part of the TV series has been exaggerated. The most shocking aspect of this though is that this is not just a crime that is happening abroad or in London; it is going on right under noses in Burnley and Padiham. In recent times the police have made several arrests and rescued dozens of people.

The victims are usually vulnerable people seeking a better life, typically they sign a contract that guarantees them work in the UK and often pay for the

privilege. When they arrive here the reality is quite different: they are enslaved and made to work with little or no pay, confined in dirty, overcrowded rooms. They suffer physical and sexual abuse and many are forced into criminal activity and domestic servitude. Their identity documents are taken from them. They live in constant fear for themselves and their families back home.

Lancashire's police are all trained to spot the signs and they need us all to be constantly vigilant. There are many signs to look-out for: people who are exceptionally nervous, always dressed in the same clothes, malnourished, little understanding of English, constantly appear frightened.

It is also important to notice if a house in your street has excessive security measures in place such as bars at the windows, CCTV. If you are suspicious call the modern slavery helpline on 08000121700 or

Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800555111.

On the subject of the police I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Lancashire constabulary and thank them for the work they do to keep us all safe. And let me tell you Government cuts to police funding have not made their job any easier. Since 2010 Lancashire has lost hundreds of police officers and the Government's refusal to adequately fund the force means that this year the Council tax payers of Lancashire will be charged extra Council tax specifically for policing to the tune of £61 million. Talk about passing the buck!

Even with this there will still be a funding shortfall and just at a time when crime is increasing police resources will be in short supply. I raised this in Parliament last week and I will continue to protest until the Government takes the safety of Lancashire seriously.

On Tuesday I was delighted to meet former nurse and health worker Ethel Armstrong. Ethel is 87 years old and was a nurse cadet when the NHS first began in 1948. She still serves the NHS and spends her time travelling the country supporting retired staff. This year the NHS is 70 years old and it is important that we take the time to appreciate our health service.

There are very many problems and every week I complain that the service is underfunded and understaffed. I do this because I care passionately about our NHS and I do not want to see it brought to its knees. I care too much to stand by and see it fail.

It is impossible to talk about the NHS without speaking of the dedicated men and women who work in the service: The doctors, nurses, midwives, porters, cooks, health care assistants, the ambulance drivers, the paramedics, the receptionists, medical secretaries, hospital

cleaners and all those who give us a service that is still the envy of the world.

That's why I'm delighted this year to be participating in the NHS70 Parliamentary Awards. I know that there are some excellent and innovative things going on in and around Burnley, but now I want to hear from you about the best of the best. I'm looking for the local health and care heroes in each of 10 different categories, including professionals, volunteers, charities and community groups who contribute to the health and wellbeing of the people of Burnley and Padiham. Further information, is available at www.nhs70awards.co.uk

Please feel free to call my office on 01282 425744 or email me at julie.cooper.mp@parliament.uk. My next MP's Surgery will be on Saturday, February 24th from 10am – noon at Sainsbury's in Burnley. No appointments are necessary.