



# Mole Valley Conservative Association's Newsletter

Issue 61; September 2012

## Welcoming Note

Welcome to the September issue of the Mole Valley Conservative Association's Newsletter from the House of Commons.

To unsubscribe to this newsletter, please contact us through the website 'Contact us' page with a subject line of 'unsubscribe'.

We hope you enjoy reading the September issue.

## News from the House of Commons

### Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Bill



My Private Members' Bill, the Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Bill would allow the Secretary of State to authorise prison governors to interfere with wireless telegraphy in order either to block mobile phones or detect their use. It started its journey through Parliament on 28 June 2012, had a formal second reading without debate, passed a money resolution and was referred to a Public Bill Committee. The Committee will meet on Wednesday, 17 October 2012. The Bill has government and cross party support.

Mobile phones and similar devices in prisons have long been associated with problems such as organised crime, drug supply, bullying and harassment of victims. The previous Government introduced criminal offences of bringing unauthorised electronic communications devices into or out of prisons, and of possessing a mobile phone in prison without authorisation, to add to the existing disciplinary offence of possessing an unauthorised article.

The National Offender Management Service has been trialling the use of equipment which detects illicit mobile phone use and block calls. The technology aims to ensure that it does not affect phones outside the prison perimeter. The trials have demonstrated that the technology can work, although for security reasons the Government does not publish information about which prisons are involved.

On 4<sup>th</sup> September, the Bill had its Money Resolution in the House of Commons. This is a process which considers any costs which may arise from the new legislation. It was a welcome opportunity to say a few words about the Bill in the Chamber:

**Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con):** This is a small private Member's Bill, but before referring to it I must welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to his new job.



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I thank Members on both sides of the House for their support for the Bill, which we hope will progress to consideration in Committee fairly promptly as it is clearly important. During 2011, 7,422 illicit phones and SIM cards were found in England and Wales, and the figure for Scotland—1,335 phones and SIM cards—is proportionate to that. The Bill is sufficiently broad to enable us to hope that, as technology changes and moves forward, it can be adapted to meet whatever the technology comes up with. It is supported not only by the prisons hierarchy, but by the prison officers. We might have that support explained to us in a moment.

I visited a prison last week and there had just been an incident where, due to special timing, warders managed to pick up seven phones with cocaine attached. SIM cards and so on were lobbed over the wall, but they were collected and therefore cannot be used. The key point is not just the phones, but the SIM cards. One small phone does not cost much money, and its adapter and charger can be used for goodness knows how many SIM cards.

These measures will be implemented in such a way that anyone phoning illegally will suddenly find that their phone is engaged constantly, whether they are phoning in or out, and it will be possible to track the phones and pick up the various numbers, which will be useful for anti-crime activities. That is important, because there is ample evidence of the range of activities involved in the commissioning of serious crime and violence, and many of the heavy boys and girls in our prisons have been organising crime outside while they are inside. If one believes only half of what one reads in the *Daily Mail*, one will agree that things such as the harassment of victims and gang activity happen, and that there is also the existence of extremist networks.

It will be possible to set these measures up in such a way that certain numbers will go straight through. By that I mean important numbers. I understand that the Coke machine in the prison can dial outside and tell the supplier that it is about to run out, so the supplier can rush more supplies in. I consider such a provision to be vital.

This is a little Bill with support from both sides of the House, and I hope that it makes progress. I also anticipate the money resolution receiving the support of the House tonight.

**Paul Beresford**  
**Member of Parliament for Mole Valley**



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## Feature Article

### Making a Difference



Before Sir Paul introduced his Ten Minute Rule Bill in Parliament last week, Mark D'Arcy, Parliamentary Correspondent for the BBC wrote a very positive article in his blog about the progress Paul has made on child protection matters over the years. Here it is in full:

#### **You don't have to be a minister to get things done in Parliament.**

Backbench MPs with a few street-smarts and a lot of persistence can change government policy and even the law, if they know how to use the procedures of the Commons to press their case. There's a good example coming up in the Commons tomorrow...in my round-up of the coming week's parliamentary business, I noted that "the former Conservative minister Sir Paul Beresford continues his long-running campaign to tighten up the law dealing with known paedophiles - his Coroners and Justice (Amendment) Bill would introduce restrictions on their access to written material".

For the last 10 years Sir Paul has been bringing in modest measures to close gaps in the law - the latest deals with possession of prohibited written material about children - and cumulatively, his efforts have made quite a difference. Over the years, through a series of private members bills, ten minute rule bills, and amendments to government bills, he has:

- \* banned the possession of indecent images of children in the form of cartoons, tracings, pseudo photographs and CGIs
- \* changed the legal definition of gross indecency with a child so that it applies to under-16s, rather than under-14s
- \* increased the sentences that can be imposed for possession of indecent images from six months to five years, with 10 years for a repeat offence
- \* increased the penalty for distribution of indecent images from a maximum of three years to a maximum of 10
- \* required that judges should have to view the material concerned before passing sentence
- \* introduced a fast-track search warrant procedure, so that if someone on the sex offenders register refuses police access to search their home, a judge will automatically grant a warrant



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\* introduced a five-year sentence for people who refuse to provide a decrypting key to allow police to inspect computers suspected of holding child pornography.

Last year, Sir Paul also piloted through a private members' bill intended to protect children and vulnerable adults from domestic violence in cases where two people in a household could have committed the crime, but neither would admit to it, and each blamed the other. It extended the existing crime of causing a death or failing to take reasonable steps to protect a child or vulnerable adult to cover "serious harm".

He was certainly helped by the procession of criminal justice bills in the Labour years, which provided plenty of opportunities to change the law (the smart tactic in the Commons is to put down new clauses at report stage, where the rules require that they are debated first) but it's an example of how a determined MP who knows how to use ten minute rule bills, private members' bills, adjournment debates and the whole spectrum of Commons procedure can fight a cause over 10 years, and have a significant impact.

Those MPs contemplating a career on the backbenches, or newly returned to them, should take note.



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## News in brief

### Changes to sitting hours



The House agreed on 11 July that, with effect from Monday 15 October (when the House returns from the Conference Recess), it would sit on Tuesdays at 11.30am with the moment of interruption at 7 pm and on Thursdays at 9.30am with the moment of interruption at 5pm. Previously, Tuesday sittings started at 2.30pm and Thursday sittings began at 10.30am.

Tuesday sittings in Westminster Hall will be the same as on Wednesdays, from 9.30am to 11.30am and 2.30pm to 5pm, and Thursday sittings in Westminster Hall will be from 1.30pm to 4.30pm.

Monday, Wednesday and Friday sitting times are unchanged.

### Savings Programme



Sir Paul is a Member of the House of Commons Commission.

The House of Commons Commission and the Management Board are committed to reducing the costs of the House Service by at least 17% in real terms by 2014/15, in line with reductions being made across the wider public sector.

The Savings Programme aims to meet this target through a redesign of services and organisation to achieve savings, as well as some reductions in budgets and services within existing structures.