



John Barrett MP's Monthly Update

March 2009

February has been another busy month both at Westminster and in the constituency. This is not designed to be an exhaustive list of my work, but should give you an idea of what I have been involved in this month.

Scam Awareness Month

This month I have been campaigning to raise awareness of scams operating in the constituency. I have produced a Scam Awareness pack with all the information you need to reduce the chances of you or a friend or family member falling victim to a scam. I have contacted thousands of local residents and have posted out hundreds of packs already. Let me know if you would like one. For full details follow this [link](#) to my website.

Supporting Local Businesses

I always try to keep regular contact with many businesses throughout Edinburgh West. Last week I walked the length of St Johns Road in Corstorphine visiting local businesses, conducting a business survey and talking to managers and staff in an effort to find out how they are coping with the financial downturn. I will be visiting many other parts of the constituency in the coming weeks to get the views of local businesses.

It has been heartening to hear that many businesses are riding out the recession and have full order books. However, others are having a really tough time and some could go under if they do not receive the support they need. If you are a local business owner and have not yet received one of my business surveys, you can download one [here](#).

Dealing with rising unemployment

Unemployment in Scotland rose by 11,000 over the last quarter to almost 140,000. With 2,300 job losses having already been announced by the Royal Bank of Scotland, sadly more job losses are inevitable across the city in the months ahead. Edinburgh has had a relatively low level of unemployment for many years and some people will experience unemployment for the first time in their lives. If you'd like to read more about this issue, here's a [press release](#) I issued on the 11th February.

Edinburgh Climbing Centre, Ratho

One success story which had grown from a business that struggled in its early days is the Edinburgh Climbing Centre at Ratho. This is a hidden gem and is one of the best indoor climbing arenas in Europe and is well worth a visit. As well as climbing it has facilities for all the family. I tried out some climbing walls for myself and survived to tell the tale. For more information about my visit, be sure to visit my [weblog](#). To find out more about the facilities at the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena, click [here](#).



Extra help from Westminster

As part of the Lib-Dem Work and Pensions team it was my job in the House of Commons to put forward our views on the recent uprating of pensions and benefits, including unemployment benefits such as jobseekers allowance. This totalled £6.2bn additional support with approximately £4billion going to pensioners. /



Extra Help from Westminster *continued*

Although the increase is welcome, I stressed to the Minister that many pensioners who are entitled to Pension Credit are still not yet receiving what they are entitled to. I will continue with my campaign to publicise this to ensure that more people get all they are entitled to. We are used to hearing about fraud against the benefit system, but millions of pounds also remain unclaimed by many who miss out because of a complicated system. To find out more about claiming the pension credit follow this [link](#).

If you think you might be eligible for pension credit please contact my office on 0131 339 0339 for more information.

MP's Second Homes

Some constituents have asked me why some MP's have a second home in London, following allegations that the Home Secretary has abused the system. My own position is that I have one home and it is in Edinburgh, where I have lived for many years. Because of the nature of my job which requires me to spend 3-4 days a week in London each week I rent a one bedroom flat in London. This is in no way my "home" and is nearer to the feeling of staying in a hotel. I pay all my costs for my Edinburgh home myself, while the accommodation cost of staying in London is met by Parliament. Full details of these costs are published on my [website](#).

Community Councils

Parliament does not sit for one week in February and this is a good opportunity to work for the week in the constituency and to meet with many of the groups and organisations I cannot meet when Parliament is sitting. I returned to Corstorphine Community Council and was able to catch up with lots of local issues. It took me back to the many years I spent as a Community Councillor, before being elected. Some of the issues back then, such as anti social behaviour, are still causing the same problems now. I also travelled to Murrayfield Church to speak to a group on disability issues. They have a very vibrant group, who meet every Sunday evening – it was good to get their thoughts on the issues of the day.

Fairtrade Fortnight

From 23 Feb - 8 March is Fairtrade Fortnight, held once a year to celebrate the Fairtrade movement and

highlight its importance. Times may be getting tougher for us, but we should still spare a thought for the 2 billion people – a third of humanity – who still exist on less than \$2 a day. I have tabled a commons motion celebrating Fairtrade fortnight.

You can read an article I wrote on Fairtrade Fortnight [here](#).

Ivan Cameron

On a sadder note, Prime Minister's Question Time was suspended this week following the sudden death of David Cameron's son Ivan. After condolences from each of the parties, to a silent chamber, I feel it was the right decision for parliament to have a short break to allow people time to reflect. Sometimes with all the frantic activity we experience each day it is good to press the 'pause button' and to stop for a moment. This was one of those times. It made me think of friends who have lost children and it is something every parent dreads. I phoned home to see how everyone was and they too were shocked at the sad news. For the rest of the day there was a strange feeling at Westminster with everyone in a more sombre mood.

Gaza Update

The crisis in Gaza may no longer be the lead item in the news any more but for many Gazans the situation remains desperate. Earlier this month I challenged the Foreign Secretary to take action to end arms exports to Israel as well as to armed Palestinian groups after Amnesty International confirmed the use of White Phosphorus and other illegal weapons by the Israeli army during the recent conflict. For more details read my recent article, '[Barrett calls for Israel arms embargo](#)'.

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If you would like to know more about what I have been doing at Westminster and in the constituency visit my [website](#)