

HAMPSHIRE CHRONICLE

Letter from Westminster

AS the evenings draw in, May's General Election seems like a long time ago but it's worth remembering it was only five months since the Government was elected.



Steve Brine MP

Our approach since then has been rather old-fashioned; to set about delivering the manifesto upon which we were elected.

One huge focus for me in this Parliament, following on from some of the work I did in the last, is prison reform. My interest is, of course national, but also local because I have HMP/YOI Winchester in my own constituency.

Prison is a service that all too often fails and locks in poverty as a result. Half of all criminals reoffend within a year of being released while as many go into prison with no qualifications and come out little better.

Furthermore, all the problems that may have led them to that life – drug addiction, mental health issues, family breakdown – remain unchanged.

My view; we simply cannot go on with this level of state failure and we can't afford to either. Let's remember, Britain has the highest level of incarceration in Europe and it's costing you and me some £30,000 a year per prisoner.

As the Prime Minister David Cameron said in his conference speech last month: "We have got to get away from the sterile lock-em-up or let-em-out debate, and get smart about this." Yes, at last!

Regular readers will know I served on the powerful Justice Select Committee for much of the last Parliament and it was there my interest in this subject was fuelled. And it was a trip with that committee to Texas in 2013, which showed there is a smarter way. I wrote about it at the time for the *Hampshire Chronicle*.

Of course I believe if you've committed a crime, punishment must follow and when it's serious enough, that must mean prison.

However, my trip to the United States taught me we should not confuse the 30 per cent of offenders we are scared of with the 70 per cent we are mad at. If we invest in rehabilitation more than punishment alone we will reduce recidivism rates in this country as they have dramatically in Texas.

It's not about letting them out, throwing open the prison doors, but it is about slowing down the rate they are coming in. I believe it's the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do and it will save us a fortune.

I predict this is going to be a big area of social reform in the next five years and am actively discussing ideas with Justice Secretary, Michael Gove so watch this space.

You can read more, see pictures and follow the links via; www.stevebrine.com/texas

You can find more information about my wider work as your local MP, in Westminster and the constituency online or through 01962 791110.

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