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in Weston and the villages

The Gazette

This publication has been funded from the Incidental Expenses Provision of John Penrose. Promoted by and on behalf of John Penrose MP at 24/26 Alexandra Parade, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1QX and printed by Harmsworth printing, tel:01332 595607

Cancer Patients Face Postcode Lottery

A nationwide investigation by Weston-super-Mare MP John Penrose has exposed a 'confused and unfair' NHS postcode lottery for the prescription of new cancer drugs.

Tarceva is one of a new generation of anti-cancer drugs. It has very few side-effects compared to normal treatments like chemotherapy. It's been available free on the NHS in Scotland for over a year, but not in England. Here cancer patients can only get it by going through a complicated and bureaucratic 'exceptional circumstances' process with the local NHS Trust.

John started his investigation after he was contacted by a constituent who had been diagnosed with lung cancer.

John said: "I am delighted that our local PCT agreed to give Tarceva to my constituent. The passion and hard work of the patient, the determination of the local GP and

the commitment of the consultant made all the difference."

"But I've discovered that the national picture isn't so good. Cancer accounts for one in twenty deaths in the UK, claiming the lives of more than 33,000 people every year."

As part of his investigation John questioned all the English Primary Care Trusts asking how many patients had applied for and been prescribed the life enhancing cancer drugs.

John said: "It's another postcode lottery, but with people's lives at stake. The existing structure is confused, chaotic and plain unfair."

"Here in North Somerset, 2 patients applied and both received

the drug. Elsewhere, some Trusts have listened sympathetically to patients' requests. Others refused virtually every request for help. In Devon, 5 patients with non small cell lung cancer applied and all 5 got the prescription. But, next door in Cornwall, 5 applied, 4 were refused and 1 is still under review.

"Patients deserve better. Of course the NHS should provide different patterns of service in different areas to meet different clinical needs. But those decisions should be based on evidence. The Department of Health has a responsibility for national standards in healthcare. On this evidence it is clearly failing in its duty."

Call for Epilepsy Warning on Computer Games



A warning about the danger of computer games triggering photosensitive epileptic fits is being raised in Parliament by MP John Penrose.

The Weston-super-Mare MP is quizzing Government Ministers after being contacted by a constituent whose 10 year old son developed epilepsy playing a recently released computer game.

John has tabled a number of questions to the Minister demanding to know why companies are allowed to produce games that are potentially dangerous.

John said: "I was shocked to hear that this game had caused an epileptic fit. Tragically this young man will now be prone to epileptic fits for the rest of his life."

"People with photosensitive epilepsy usually develop it between the ages of seven and nineteen - the prime ages for playing computer games.

"There are well-established tests to



show which scenes from a new game may cause problems. Games manufacturers should have to identify risky scenes and either remove them or include a clear warning instead. At the moment we only have guidelines that aren't legally binding. That isn't good enough.

"We don't allow toy makers to sell products that could poison or injure our children. **This shouldn't be any different**".



John Penrose MP - Working for you all year round

Problems of Tooth Decay Exposed

MP John Penrose has highlighted the problems of tooth decay among children aged five and under in North Somerset.

Quizzing Health Minister Rosie Winterton in Parliament, John said:

"The Minister may not be aware that the incidence of tooth decay among under-fives in my constituency is above the national average. What specific measures is she taking to ensure that some of the resources that she has described this afternoon will be targeted on the dental health of that important group?"

The Minister responded:

"We have introduced a number of initiatives, such as Brushing for Life, which works

through schools. It is about teaching young children how important it is for them to keep brushing their teeth, using fluoride toothpaste. There are a number of public health initiatives that have been very successful. Obviously, local authorities and PCTs can now consult on the issue of fluoridation, which can in itself be very helpful in improving dental health."

Speaking after the debate John said:

"North Somerset has an above average level of decayed, missing and filled teeth in children aged 5 and under."

"Educating youngsters about brushing and good oral hygiene is essential. But that's only part of the solution."

"We need a better NHS dental service in North Somerset. The problems being caused by the Government's dental contracts, introduced last year, are coming home to roost. Last year I raised the issue directly with former Prime Minister Tony Blair during Prime Minister's question time."

"Since then, I've been following up with North Somerset PCT. I'm pleased that any money from dentists that stop offering NHS services will be ring-fenced and ploughed back into other local NHS practices."



■ **MP John Penrose says that we need a better NHS Dental service in North Somerset**

Westhaven School Gets Specialist Status Bid

John Penrose has described the approval of Westhaven Special School's bid for specialist status in Business and Enterprise as "a tribute to the hard work of the staff, pupils and parents".

John said:

"It is great news that Westhaven's bid for specialist status in business and enterprise has now been approved. Their Ofsted report in 2003 concluded that this was a "good and improving school" with "excellent leadership" from the head and staff."

"I was lucky enough to see them in action when I visited Westhaven to hand out prizes for some excellent Christmas card designs earlier this year. I met staff, pupils and parents and was struck how everyone was clearly working together. They're quite a team."

"Following last year's disappointment, I was

contacted by the Under Secretary of State for Schools to pass on the good news that the school's bid was approved. It is thoroughly well deserved."

A successful bid will give the school £100,000 for business-themed education and young enterprise schemes.



John gets a Taste of Somerset



John Penrose was on hand to open the "The Taste of Somerset" event organised by the Hutton Horticultural Society and the Hutton Parish Council. A marquee on St. Mary's Field showcased over three dozen producers of food

and drink, crafts and organisations from different parts of Somerset. Proceeds from the auction and donations from exhibitors in the Taste of Somerset went to the Children's Hospice South West and the Weston branch of the R.N.L.I.

Every week John Penrose MP holds a surgery at different locations around the constituency. For help, advice or to make an appointment, please contact Grace Roper in John's constituency office on

01934 613841

John Penrose MP - Working for you all year round

MP Backs Truck Ban

A ban on long distance lorries using North Somerset's country roads as a short cut to the M5 is getting closer.

MP John Penrose has been campaigning for the ban for several years. It would stop long distance HGVs from going through Burrington Coombe or Blagdon on their way to the M5 and should relieve some of the traffic pressure on Banwell, Sandford and Churchill and on Stock Lane through Congresbury and Langford.

John said: "I'm pleased that the new administration at the council has got this moving. Traffic problems have been getting steadily worse for years. Residents have waited long enough."

"Unless we take action locally, there's little immediate prospect of improving the lives of people living in the local villages."

"Of course a weight restriction isn't a complete answer. But any other solution could take years to be approved and built."

"It seems that we're facing a long and difficult campaign to convince the Government's various departments to take our traffic problems seriously."

Local councillors have echoed the comments, saying long distance HGVs were unnecessarily blocking up environmentally sensitive roads over the Mendip Hills. The lorries cause congestion and pollution at local beauty spots like Burrington Coombe and the villages within North Somerset's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



■ MP John Penrose has been campaigning to convince the Government's various departments to take our traffic problems seriously.

Schools Lose Out.



Another school year has now started. North Somerset schools receive just £3,574 per pupil.

That's:

- ✗ £8 less per pupil than nearby Somerset.
- ✗ £141 less per pupil than nearby Bath and North East Somerset
- ✗ £616 less per pupil than nearby Bristol
- ✗ A massive £2,454 less per pupil than the London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Are our children really worth £616 less than their friends in Bristol?

The Summer edition of the Gazette highlighted the fact that North Somerset's school pupils are some of the worst funded in the country. There was a massive response to the Gazette's fair funding petition. A huge number of readers signed our petition calling for a fairer school funding system. And there's still time to sign and make sure your concerns are heard.

The f40 group is a major cross-party campaign

by the 40 worst funded education authorities in the country to persuade the government to put this right. Local MP John Penrose is supporting it in Parliament. North Somerset Council has signed up with the backing of local Councillors.

f40's aim is simple, to achieve fairer funding for all children. Wherever they live, all children with the same needs should have the same access to:

- ✓ teacher and teacher assistant time and attention
- ✓ the national curriculum and a wide range of other activities
- ✓ up to date resources and equipment
- ✓ extra help for special needs to ensure inclusion and personalised learning
- ✓ well-managed and serviced schools.

Ideally every pupil would get a base entitlement to meet their base needs, plus extra for factors like deprivation or special needs.

Please sign the petition supporting the f40 campaign, or write to John Penrose MP at The House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.

the campaign for
fairer funding in education



We the undersigned call on the government to introduce a fairer system of funding for all children in school, including early years and 14-16 education

We believe that the current formula for distributing funding is unfair and penalises children in the poorest funded authority areas, like North Somerset, which is 135th out of 148 local education authorities

The current review of funding arrangements gives the Government a perfect opportunity to put right a system which is increasingly unfair and inequitable. We support the proposals put forward by the f40 Group and look forward to seeing a significant change in the education funding formula for 2008 - 2011.

Name _____ Signature _____

Address _____ Postcode _____

Email address _____

**Please return to
John Penrose, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA**

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John Penrose MP - Working for you all year round

Ambulance Response Times Get Worse



Figures obtained by MP John Penrose show that ambulance response times for the most serious emergencies have got worse since the service was merged with its neighbours last year.

The merger was supposed to improve services and produce cost savings too. But so far the response times for the most serious emergencies have got 4% worse and only half the promised savings have been found.

John said:

"Before the merger, people were very concerned that combining three ambulance services into one could be disastrous. It looks like they were right. Rapid response rates for the most serious emergencies in North Somerset have got worse.

"I am pressing local ambulance chiefs for a detailed explanation. We need to know how they plan to put things right. I have also asked them to confirm when the financial savings will be released to shore up a creaking frontline.

"Our ambulance teams are doing a tremendous job, despite the merger being forced upon them. But they need more support."

The merger is supposed to deliver financial savings of £1.6 million over five years, which would be ploughed back into the service. So far £700,000 has been identified. It is unclear when this money will actually be released as savings.

A spokeswoman for the ambulance service said



MP John Penrose says that our ambulance teams are doing a tremendous job - despite the merger being forced upon them.

the drop in response times was a result of calls increasing by between four and six per cent. She said moves were in place to make the service more efficient but would take time to filter through.

Mast Moved Away From Homes

Network Rail has reduced the height and changed the location of a proposed communication mast in Weston following pressure from local campaigners and MP John Penrose.

The train operator has moved a mast, which was supposed to be built in Wyvern Close, away from residential properties. It has promised to reduce its height from 29 metres to 20 metres.

The change of heart came after a campaign was launched by nearby residents, supported by Weston MP John Penrose and North Somerset Councillor Dawn Payne.

The company says the masts, which are being installed across the country, are part of a programme to improve safety and communication for trains. Unlike ordinary phone masts, they don't need planning permission because they count as railway infrastructure.

MP John Penrose also called on Government Minister Yvette Cooper to make sure Network Rail seeks planning permission for its masts in future, like mobile phone operators. She replied that there were no plans to do this.

John said: "I am disappointed. Network Rail should have the same requirements to get planning permission for GSM-R phone masts as commercial mobile phone operators. Whatever the benefits to the rail network, local people's voices should be heard.

"Since the Government won't listen, I raised the issue directly with Network Rail chiefs. I'm encouraged by their response.

"They agreed to listen to planning comments from North Somerset Council. They are also considering a new consultation process for their masts, to make sure that local people's concerns aren't simply ignored in future.

"Of course, words count for very little unless they are backed up by concrete action. I will be pressing Network Rail to ensure they follow up on their commitments and listen to the local communities they are affecting."

MP Delighted by new Scanner

Patients with bone problems can now have a scan at Weston General Hospital.

Local MP John Penrose, who has been campaigning with osteoporosis groups and local sufferers to bring a scanner to Weston, attended the official launch.

The trust has been hoping to secure funding for a scanner for some time.

A DXA scan is a painless test that measures the density of bones. Generally, the denser they are and the stronger they are and the less likely they are to break.



To find out more about John Penrose's work - visit his website at

www.johnpenrose.co.uk

John Penrose MP - Working for you all year round