

Pension law changed after Steve's campaign

Following years of campaigning by local MP Steve Webb, a new pensions bill has just been passed into law which will markedly improve the state pensions of women retiring after 2010.

Steve has been speaking out in Parliament for many years about women's poor pensions and now the law is to be changed to give a boost to the pensions of women (and some men) who spend time caring for family members and are unable to work full-time and pay full National Insurance.

But the MP is concerned that bringing the

changes in on a single day – 6th April 2010 – means that those who reach 60 just a day or two earlier could miss out on very dramatic improvements to their pension.

Calculations for Steve Webb by the House of Commons library show that by being born a day 'too soon' some women could lose more than £25,000 on their pension over the course of their retirement.

He is now calling for the changes to be phased in so that there is not a huge and unfair 'cliff-edge' which would leave those who retire before 6 April 2010 with a poor pension for the rest of their lives.

Steve Webb was one of the first MPs to take up this issue with the Parliamentary



Steve attended this rally in London, organised by people who have lost their pensions

Company pensions

Thousands of workers who thought that their company pension was safe have been horrified to learn that when their company went bankrupt their pension fund was not secure.

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Ombudsman and her damning report found that successive governments had failed to alert scheme members to the fact that their money was not secure.

A rescue fund has now been set up to help such workers, but Steve has continued to vote in Parliament for more generous support for those who have lost out through no fault of their own.

Making prisons work

The Northavon constituency includes three very different prisons – a women's prison at Eastwood Park, a Young Offenders Institution at Pucklechurch, and an open prison at Leyhill.

Steve Webb regularly visits the prisons and supports the work that is done there. But he has been increasingly concerned about the inadequate Home Office

vetting of the prisoners sent to open conditions at Leyhill. These concerns were vindicated in the recent report by the Chief Inspector of Prisons who found that people were being sent to Leyhill who were not suited for open conditions.

Now Steve Webb has written to the new Home Secretary pressing for action to ensure that the Government is not using the overcrowding problem elsewhere in the prison system as a reason to send unsuitable people to Leyhill.

Phone masts - success!

A mobile phone company has agreed to move a mast which was to be placed right next to a local primary school.

This results from a successful partnership between local residents, campaigners and Steve Webb MP.

Phone company O2 planned to put a mast on the telephone exchange next to Elm Park Primary School in Winterbourne.

However, determined parents and local residents joined forces with their local MP to fight the plans.

Campaigners held public meetings and came to Westminster where Steve Webb chaired a meeting with the phone company.

O2 have now agreed to



Flashback: The Evening Post's coverage helped the campaign

identify an alternative location for their mast.

Steve Webb said: "I am delighted that we have been successful in getting this planned mast moved.

"It is a great testimony to our effective local campaigning with parents and residents that this multinational company listened to our protests and took notice".

Future of Northavon

At the next General Election the name 'Northavon' will finally disappear from the parliamentary map.

Under new boundaries drawn up by the independent Boundary Commission, most of the seat will come under a newly named 'Thornbury & Yate' constituency.

But residents in Almondsbury, Bradley Stoke, Pilning & Severn Beach and Winterbourne/Frenchay will instead be placed in a new constituency called 'Filton & Bradley Stoke'.

However, until the next General Election Steve Webb remains MP for the whole Northavon area and remains happy to support residents living in any part of the constituency.

Veterans Badge - success!

Dozens of local veterans of the armed services have had their service recognised thanks to an awareness campaign by local MP Steve Webb.

During the last Parliament the Government introduced a 'Veteran's Badge' for all who served in HM Armed Forces before 31st December 1969. World War II Veterans who served in the Cyprus Regiment, Home Guard or Polish Forces under UK Command are also eligible.

There is also a separate UK Merchant Seafarers Veteran's Badge for those who served prior to 31st December 1969 on a vessel which was to facilitate military operations.



Steve with Stewart Gill of Thornbury after he received his Veteran's Badge

Steve was concerned that many local residents had served in this way but did not know about the badge and so publicized it in the local media.

As a result hundreds

were in contact with the MP's office and application forms were issued. Most of these have now successfully claimed their badges and are wearing them with pride.

Women carers miss out on thousands in pensions shake-up



How the Daily Mail reported the story

Trains

Since taking over services in and around Bristol as well as mainline services from London to Bristol and South Wales, First Great Western's performance has been among the worst in the country.

Many residents have complained to Steve about the poor service, both on mainline and commuter services.

The MP has had a meeting at his Westminster office with senior managers

from First Great Western and has made plain to them the anger of local people about poor services.

He has also written to the Transport Secretary to ensure that he monitors closely the performance of the company and threatens to withdraw their franchise if services do not improve.

Bus fares are too high

One of Steve's ongoing campaigns is to get action on

exorbitant bus fares in the local area.

Many local residents, especially young people without a car, have contacted Steve about the high level of fares.

In response, Steve has had a meeting with the Managing Director of First Group in Bristol.

He is also working with South Gloucestershire Council to look at concessionary fare schemes that might benefit young people in particular.



Backing the Blue Peter Shoebiz appeal



Steve has supported Tina Mitchell, founder of the Hammer Out charity for brain tumour sufferers (above left) and Karen Rose and others working for people with Parkinson's Disease (above right)

Steve regularly visits community groups and supports local charitable causes through visits.

If you would like your local MP to help with your charitable work or to visit your group, feel free to contact his office.



At the RSPCA roadshow in Yate

"Postage tax" threat

Plans by the Royal Mail to charge more to businesses who serve rural customers have been condemned by Steve Webb.

Under plans being considered by Postcomm, the postal services regulator, the Royal Mail would charge big companies lower postal charges for delivering letters in big urban areas but higher charges for deliveries to smaller towns and villages, such as many in South Gloucestershire.

This could lead to town and village residents having to pay more than city dwellers for basic services.

Steve Webb said: "Postal charges should be the same wherever you live – we should not have a backdoor 'tax' on living in the countryside".

The regulator is now consulting on whether or not to reject Royal Mail's proposals and will report at the end of the year.

More details can be found on the Postcomm website at www.psc.gov.uk

"Friends" and bloggers

As well as being available through more traditional routes such as letters, phone calls and constituency surgeries, Steve Webb is working hard to be easy to reach for those who are keen users of the internet.

As well as having more than 5,000 members of his constituency e-mail group, the MP has set up pages on social networking sites 'Facebook', 'MySpace' and 'Bebo' so that younger people in particular

can find it easier to get hold of their MP. Steve featured in a Channel 4 programme earlier in the year which was filmed in Yate and featured local residents who are in touch with their MP online.

Steve is also believed to have more constituency 'friends' than any other MP on the fast-growing 'Facebook' network. He also launched a new 'blog' or online diary earlier this year to keep local people informed.

To find Steve online you can:

- visit his website: www.stevewebb.org.uk
- view the blog at: www.webbsteve.blogspot.com
- find him in the 'Bristol' network at www.facebook.com
- find him on MySpace at www.myspace.com/stevewebb1
- find him on Bebo at www.bebo.com/stevewebb1



Channel 4 filming Steve and three members of his e-mail group at the O2 shop in Yate