

Letter from Westminster



**Winchester MP :
Steve Brine**

LAST week, while holding street surgeries, I was asked time and again what I plan to do following the suspension of the Whip (meaning I currently sit as an Independent MP) for voting to block a no-deal Brexit.

There are different views (that's why I'm taking soundings) but there seems wide support for my vote and general agreement I serve Winchester and Chandler's Ford well as a hard-working local MP.

I'm an experienced MP these days. I didn't turn up, a few months back, motivated by a single issue; I have time in Government under my belt and a deep understanding how to get things done for my constituents.

Whether I continue is, in many respects, your decision. Constituents know what I stand for; they know I stood up to be counted when it mattered and they know not every MP does the same.

One gentleman last week, urging me to run, said he'd back me and offered to help. 'Winchester won't let you down' he said. Maybe he's right. The stakes are certainly high. Whatever I do next, I hope my colleagues and I have challenged the modern-day cynicism about politicians that we're all in for it ourselves.

Parliament needs more, not less, independent-minded MPs. Of course I know the strength of working as part of a group - and there's every chance I will still stand as such come the next GE - but regardless, in our system we vote for the person not the party.

And since I last wrote much may have happened but this person hasn't lost sight, in all the madness, of issues that also matter to his constituents.

Issues like school funding which has, almost unnoticed, undergone a revolution since I held a special "Schools in Winchester" debate in Parliament just before the summer.

Central to my pitch was a plea that ministers produce a long-term funded plan for schools as has recently happened in the NHS. So, in case you missed it, funding in primary and secondary schools is increasing by £14 billion.

Per pupil funding will rise and there's more for children with special educational needs and disabilities next year. This was a key focus for me as I see first-hand how high-needs provision is struggling in Hampshire.

Another campaign I have pursued over many years is new investment in colleges such as Peter Symonds.

And finally, we're seeing the biggest reform to teacher pay in a generation, increasing salaries for new teachers to £30,000. All are issues I tackled in my debate. I don't want to see the constituency I've worked so hard for used as a pawn in some national political game.

So while the tectonic plates move around me, I'm in exactly the same place I've always been. A sensible, moderate one-nation MP in the centre-ground of British politics. These are values I know we share in this constituency.

I feel passionately that the tone of political debate matters. How we show regard for one another and listen, even when we vehemently disagree. Brexit has polarised our society. A desire to reach out across that divide, and not just know better because we don't agree, is vital to the health and stability of parliament and the UK.

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