



# HOLYROOD UPDATE

## From Wendy Alexander MSP

### Your constituency MSP for Paisley North



April 2009

#### Voluntary and charitable organisations summit

I and fellow colleagues Hugh Henry MSP, Trish Godman MSP and Jim Sheridan MP were delighted to meet recently with over 20 Renfrewshire local voluntary and charitable organisations in a bid to better understand the challenges being faced by the sector in today's harsh financial climate.

It was good to hear at first hand their continued commitment to the people they represent.

At the same time it was important to listen to their concerns of the challenges they face. There is absolutely no doubt these organisations provide a priceless contribution to the quality of many lives across the whole of Renfrewshire.

The summit was very productive and issues raised at the meeting are already being taken up with Renfrewshire Council and ministers in the Holyrood and Westminster.

#### 81 MORE EDUCATION POSTS TO GO!

28 TEACHERS, 8 CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS

7 INSTRUMENT INSTRUCTORS

7 FOREIGN LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS

10 SCHOOL SECRETARIES

Last year I highlighted the large Education cuts imposed on Renfrewshire schools by the Council budget. Unfortunately this year's Renfrewshire Council budget for 2009/10 imposed a **further £2.5 million** "savings" in Education. This is in **addition** to the **£4.5 million** of Education "savings" the Council introduced last year, 08/09, with a full year effect of over **£6 million** for 09/10. Both budgets combine to a huge **£8+ million** in forced savings for 09/10.

In consequence 122 teachers' posts have already gone. Renfrewshire schools have already borne one of the sharpest cuts in teacher numbers proportionately across Scotland. Now 28 more teachers will go this year along with 8 more classroom assistants, 7 instrument instructors, all foreign language assistants and 10 school secretaries.

These are "made in Renfrewshire cuts" and they should cease. The education secretary Fiona Hyslop told the Scottish Parliament recently, "Sufficient funding has been provided to local government to maintain teacher numbers at 2007 levels.

But in Renfrewshire we have already seen 122 teachers' posts cut - so how can the Council justify planning to axe a further 81 education posts? The Council has received over £10 million extra from the Scottish Government for next year so it is wrong to force through these cuts which will make local people redundant at a time of rising unemployment and who can tell the toll on the level of Education for our youngsters in Renfrewshire.

The worry is - how long it will take to recover from the damage done? If you want to discover more in-depth facts take a look at [www.wendyalexander.co.uk](http://www.wendyalexander.co.uk)

**Disabled Persons Parking Bill:** I am delighted this Bill has now become law. Braehead and Asda have been voluntarily operating measures to stem the abuse of disabled parking places in their car parks and now the way is open for the local authority to follow suit wherever necessary across Renfrewshire. I hope this legislation will make it that bit easier for disabled people to go about their day to day lives without the profound upset of nowhere to park solely due to the selfishness of others.



# More in this month's News ...

## Pensioners Lose Out!

You may remember that this Newsletter warned last June of sweeping changes announced by the Scottish Government to the Free Central Heating scheme for pensioners. Even more galling was continuing to tell Parliament that pensioners were still eligible for a free central heating system - whilst in practice refusing to fund new systems.

I knew local pensioners kept applying but were always getting refused by managing agents Scottish Gas because they were not on benefits.

As a result of my questions in Parliament Housing Minister Alex Neil finally admitted that between May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008, when Nicola Sturgeon made the announcement, and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 not a single pensioner under the age of 75 who was not on pensioner credit in fact got a system. Furthermore, the overall number of systems installed has fallen by more than half since October.

As of the 1<sup>st</sup> of April the Central Heating scheme has now been scrapped in favour of the Energy Assistance Package. As one of the architects of the original scheme with Donald Dewar 9 years ago I am sorely disappointed that the means testing for pensioners introduced last year became part of the eligibility criteria.

## Visitors to the Parliament

I and fellow Renfrewshire MSPs, Trish Godman and Hugh Henry welcomed a bus trip of local residents to the Scottish Parliament. They enjoyed a tour of the building, the repartee of First Ministers Questions, and a visit to the shop. Reports back tell me they had a wonderful day – maybe those who have not visited yet might consider it over summer?



Some of the Paisley, Renfrew and Linwood locals just itching to take over the First Minister's chair!

## Renfrewshire Law Centre battles for Homes Repossession clients

Renfrewshire Law Centre is on the frontline of helping those facing repossessions hold onto their homes. Jon Kiddie and his colleagues Roz Doyle and Aidan West are inundated with tough repossession cases. More help must be available for those facing repossession. Many legal firms refuse to take on repossession cases and Paisley Law Centre steps in to ensure where possible local people are represented in court to help them hold on to their homes.

In March I questioned the Justice Minister Kenny McAskill in Parliament on the case for more help for Law centres such as Paisley who protect people from the worst consequences of the credit crunch. In his response the Minister indicated in the Chamber he would in principle be willing to meet with Scotland's Law Centres to discuss the issue of mortgage repossession cases.

Along with colleague Hugh Henry MSP I went to visit Renfrewshire Law Centre recently to hear more about their valuable work. In 2008 there were 1200 eviction cases raised at Paisley Sheriff Court – this year they expect a significant rise in repossession cases. Increasingly Renfrewshire Law Centre is dealing with tenants facing eviction because their private landlord has defaulted on their mortgage. These vulnerable tenants & owners need better legal protection – and Renfrewshire Law centre does all it can assist.

I will be pursuing with Ministers, who are the lenders who are putting local borrowers under most pressure when they get into difficulties.

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To discuss an appointment or confirm attendance at Paisley, Linwood & Renfrew venues.



## Working for you in Renfrew, Linwood & Paisley North

To be kept informed of my work in Paisley North and the Scottish Parliament please contact me.

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The costs of this publication have been met out of Parliamentary resources.