





Sarah Dyke

**MP for Somerton & Frome
& Parliamentary Candidate for
Glastonbury & Somerton**

 sarah.dyke.mp@parliament.uk

 020 7219 4975

 House of Commons, London. SW1A 0AA

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sarahdyke.uk



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[@SarahDykeLD](https://twitter.com/SarahDykeLD)

Dear friend,

Thank you for taking the time to read my April update.

If you'd like to know more about any of the subjects mentioned, to raise issues of concern or to invite me to a local event, please contact me at sarah.dyke.mp@parliament.uk.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

NHS

I was alarmed to learn, recently, that **an estimated 91,000 people called 999 or turned up to A&E after struggling to get a GP appointment**, ONS figures from a month-long period earlier this year have revealed.

*There are 56 fewer fully qualified GPs in Somerset now than there were in December 2016, a statistic I took the opportunity to highlight in the House of Commons Chamber last month. Many constituents in **Wincanton** and elsewhere in the **Somerton and Frome Constituency** have told me of their frustration at being unable to access a GP.*

Analysis of the Office of National Statistics survey by the Liberal Democrats found that, overall, one in twelve people (8.5%) said they didn't manage to make contact with a GP practice the last time they tried to, while another 11.5% said they only managed to make contact two or more days later. Almost one in three (31%) described contacting their GP practice as either difficult or very difficult. The Liberal Democrats are calling for a legal right for people to see a GP within seven days, or 24-hours if in urgent need, with 8,000 more GPs to deliver on it.

In March, I tabled a question to the Department of Health and Social Care asking what steps they were taking to tackle **shortages of ADHD medications - an issue which affects people right across our area and indeed the country**. In April I received an answer, which is that the issue should be resolved by April or May. The Government Minister's response is available in full here:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20829>

Last month, I added my voice to Allergy UK's campaign, raising awareness of why allergies are too big to ignore. **The UK has one of the third highest allergy rates globally**, yet hay fever is still sniffed at, food allergies are brushed off as a lifestyle choice and allergic eczema is dismissed as just dry skin. When will the government, NHS and society recognise that allergies are too big to ignore?

Did you know that thousands of people in Somerton and Frome now have a new right to carer's leave? The Carer's Leave Act, a landmark piece of legislation, came into force on Saturday. It gives all employees in Great Britain who have unpaid caring responsibilities for a family member or friend the statutory right to take up to five days of unpaid leave a year to fulfil those responsibilities. Wendy Chamberlain, my Liberal Democrat colleague, brought forward a Private Members' bill on Carer's Leave back in 2022 and has been instrumental in getting this legislation on the statute book. Find out more:

<https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/work-and-career/the-carers-leave-act-2023>

Related but separate to this, I stood up in Parliament and asked the Home Office last month what they were doing to protect vulnerable people from exploitation and modern slavery following the publication of a damning report by the former chief inspector of Borders and Immigration who highlighted serious issues with the Home Office's handling of care worker visas.

I was delighted to see that Somerset Council's Amanda Rae received nationwide recognition for her outstanding contribution to social work. The British Association of Social Workers (BASW UK) has been shining a spotlight on the incredible work of the profession through their Amazing Social Workers campaign, as part of their celebrations marking World Social Work Day. The campaign celebrates the achievements of individuals and teams across the profession, highlighting the importance of social work to our communities and raising awareness of the positive difference social workers make to people's lives. Congratulations to Amanda on your well deserved award and thank you for everything you do.

Special Education Needs and Disabilities

This is an issue which comes across my constituency desk very regularly, as it affects many of my residents and their children. It is a privilege advocating for those children and their families, who deserve nothing less than the very best. That's why I'm delighted that in April the Liberal Democrats called for a new national body to fund support for children with the most complex needs.

The new "National Body for SEND" would pay any costs above a certain threshold, helping to end the current postcode lottery that is leaving parents in many areas struggling to access the support for their child they need. The extra funding would be determined by the child's current needs, with the new body also overseeing SEND funding to ensure it is spent as effectively as possible to support each child.

The Liberal Democrats are also calling on the Government to cut the amount that schools pay towards the costs of a child's additional SEN support – currently £6,000 per child. This would help to remove the financial disincentive that stops schools from identifying their pupils' needs as early as possible.

Local Government Funding

In April, I asked the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities what steps it was taking to address the fact that urban councils receive about 38% more Government funding per head than rural councils such as Somerset Council. I am yet to receive an answer. The Local Government funding formula is in urgent need of reform to ensure that vital funding gets to where it is needed so that all Councils can deliver the services we rely on.

In a separate but related Parliamentary debate, I also called upon the Government to focus on improving the future resilience of our roads and provide local authorities with specific funding for it. Local Councils need longer-term funding settlements so that they can plan ahead and deliver longer-lasting road repairs.

Law and order

New statistics released last month by the Home Office reveal that 2 million crimes - or almost 6,000 on average every single day - went unsolved in 2023. That's a 4.6% increase on 2022. This Government has left frontline police overstretched,

under-resourced and unable to focus on solving crime. I'm calling for a return to proper community policing, where officers are visible and trusted, with the time and resources to focus on solving the crimes that impact local communities the most.

Defence

I championed Wincanton's Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Club in Parliament last month, raising the profile of the important work that they do for all who served our country.

Agriculture

Last month in Westminster, I highlighted farmers' concerns about the cost of red diesel. The price of Brent Crude Oil has soared by 16% over the past three months and there are worries that it could rise even further.

Transport

Highway safety continues to be a focus of mine, following another fatal collision on the A361 Frome bypass. In April, I demanded an urgent meeting with Somerset Council and other stakeholders to discuss the safety of the A361. The bypass is riddled with blackspots along its entire length and, tragically, three lives have been lost on the road within nine months. I met with Somerset Council and Avon & Somerset Police on the 24th of April, and am committed to keeping everyone informed of the outcome in due course.

I've been campaigning for a new train station in the Langport and Somerton area. Langport Transport Group and Somerset Council have been waiting since July 2022 for a Government response to plans submitted for a new train station for Somerton, Langport and the surrounding area. It's time to get this vital project off the ground. I'm currently running a petition giving residents the opportunity to express their support for the proposed station and putting pressure on the Government to give it the green light. Please, add your name here and consider sharing the link so that we can capture the strength of community interest:

<https://www.sarahdyke.uk/campaigns/new-train-station>

Community Engagement

I held two coffee forum events in April - one in Bruton and one in Curry Rivel. I listened closely to a wide range of issues, and my team and I gathered a sizable amount of personal casework from both events. More community engagement events are planned in May, with *Meet Your MP* events in Martock and Somerton happening on Wednesday 29th May. More information on that will be shared in due course.

Last month I also visited **Frome Community Fridge** to talk to coordinator Terri Pitts about plans to open two more outlets in the town, including a 'grab & go' breakfast fridge at Frome College. Launched in 2016, the Community Fridge was the first of its kind in the UK and has since saved enough surplus food to fill eight Wembley stadiums. It's replenished by the brilliant Terri - winner of a BBC Radio Somerset Make A Difference Award last year - and her team of 91 volunteers and welcomes a remarkable

1,200 visitors every day. As Terri explained, "Everyone's welcome and everyone who visits is doing their bit to reduce food waste and help save the planet." You find out more about the project and Terri's fundraising campaign here: [Community Fridge - Frome Town Council](#).

I was delighted to learn that **Somerset has been rated "excellent" in a recent independent review of English public libraries**. It was a pleasure to join trustees and volunteers at Somerton Library yesterday, to celebrate its 5th anniversary. The library has bounced back after a significant drop-off in users during the pandemic and is once again providing a vital service to Somerton and neighbouring areas. It was a particular treat to meet one of the library's oldest and most avid readers, who regularly borrows six books a week!

Last month I met with Dr Lynne Sedgmore and Cllr Liz Leyshon to get to know more about the exciting projects involved with the £23.6m **Glastonbury Town Deal**. It's a wonderful opportunity to grow the local economy, support businesses, improve infrastructure and enhance local facilities. The projects I saw have been shaped by the community for the community, and will be completed by the end of March 2026. It gives me great joy to see that they all have regeneration and sustainability at their heart. I can't wait to see the plans come to fruition!

Green technology and Net Zero

Last month I **called on the Government to invest more in the infrastructure we need to capitalise on green technology** and boost the green economy. It is great to see a £4 billion gigafactory coming to Bridgwater in Somerset, which will place our county at the heart of the UK's green revolution and play a critical national role in our country's fight against climate change. However, the Government's own legally-binding target of Net Zero by 2050 for the entire UK is fast approaching and we need a fully-costed, joined-up plan to ensure that we can get there by 2050 or indeed much sooner.

Calling all schools! National Grid Electricity Distribution are offering grants of up to £25,000 per school to install solar panels to help cut carbon emissions and energy bills. Apply and find out more at: <https://funnel.solarforschools.co.uk/NationalGrid>