

A local resident recently contacted me regarding the amount carers earn outside their caring responsibilities before it impacts their Carer's Allowance. The issue of supporting carers is in my view incredibly important and one I was keen to look into further.

We often hear a great deal about the 5.8m army of unpaid carers looking after some of our most vulnerable members of society. Their work saves the public purse a phenomenal £119bn according to the latest research. But we don't often hear as much about those who are caring and working at the same time.

Currently 3 million people in the UK combine paid work with care and can earn up to £100 per week before it impacts on their Allowance. The earnings limit was increased by £5 in April 2010 but has not been up-rated since. The point that the gentleman made was that the earnings limit could, like benefits, be increased by inflation because if you do go over the limit you lose the whole Allowance. As there was no suggestion of an uncapped earnings limit I thought that the gentleman made a really good point and one I was keen to take up with Ministers.

Combining care and work enables not just additional financial independence but also alternative respite for those with caring responsibilities. Mental health and well-being is often advanced by work-related activities. Therefore helping carers stay in employment, even if it is for a few hours per week, is a worthy way of providing some sanity in an otherwise difficult and sometimes challenging home life environment.

As well as looking at inflation linked increases to the earnings limit we need to look at flexible working practices. Some of this is being dealt with by current legislation going through Parliament, but not all and this is certainly an issue I shall continue to work on to help support those, like my constituent who is combining work and care ultimately for the benefit of all of us.