

The resignation of Iain Duncan Smith as Work and Pensions Secretary understandably made headline news for several days. I know Iain well and despite crossing swords in the past, mainly when I attempted to amend his Mesothelioma Bill in the Commons, I like and respect him. The work he has done on reforming welfare in order to make sure that those who can work are encouraged off benefits and into employment is hugely important.

On the doorsteps in 2010 people would tell me that they were fed up with going to work every day to see their neighbour “earn” more on benefits. On those same doorsteps in 2015 the reforms were welcomed. Iain didn’t just implement change in order to appease the hard working taxpayer but also through compassion for those who had found themselves in a lifetime cycle of claiming benefits. He strongly believes that if you can work, then doing so is not only better for you as a person and your family but also for society. Yet those who cannot work and especially our most vulnerable in society should always been supported by the safety net of the welfare state.

Iain is described as a compassionate conservatism, something I share with him. I joined the Conservative Party under John Major – I have always described myself as a One Nation Tory. I have received much criticism in the past from some in my own party for views on gambling, alcohol and animal welfare for not being libertarian enough but that attitude allows compassion to be owned by the Left. This need not be the case.

I am pleased the Government announced on Monday that there would be no further cuts to welfare. Being involved in disability groups locally I know that many were frightened of the proposed changes and hopefully will now be reassured. We must always remember that people are not just statistics and that understanding of life is, in itself, a good starting place for compassion.