

Ever wondered what the point of your local MP is? You could always ask Ron Edwards. Don't tell him, but he has become a bit of a hero of mine. He has an insatiable interest in certain policy areas and doesn't hesitate to contact me or my office with his opinions. But one issue he raised with me got me so cross that I rowed in behind him and together we've had a victory, one that will help many people.

Ron's late wife had dementia and he regularly had to contact his local GP surgery. Unfortunately the surgery was using a premium rate telephone number which meant patients were being charged 13p just for connection and then 40p a minute from mobiles and 5p a minute from landlines. It doesn't take long to incur significant costs and when you are on a fixed income, like many pensioners across the Malling area.

So Ron got in touch and asked me to take this up with the surgeries using the premium rate numbers. He was quite right to do so. He had many discussions with his own GP surgery but had got nowhere, in part because the Government guidelines were not particularly clear about what they expected on patient call charges.

To be fair the surgeries were quite amenable to change when it was pointed out how the 084 numbers were financially hurting those, like the elderly and others on low incomes. After a year of campaigning on this issue I'm delighted that from May every surgery in my constituency will have a local number for patients to call.

It may seem like a small victory but it is an important one. And it is all down to Ron who realised very early on how enlisting the help of his MP could make a real difference to his campaign.