

There are two parts to my column this week. The first part is to say a massive thank you to all those who came to my pensioners fair last Friday. We had around 60 stall holders ranging from those promoting activities and leisure, care and healthcare, emergency services and transport operators, through to banks, financial awareness and scam busters. We also had a new fashion label, the Able Label, promoting fashionable wear with less fussy bits like buttons. The venue, Holmesdale School, was fantastic and their students got engaged with the fair through drama demonstrations about scams and doing hand massages and nail polishing. I have had some wonderful feedback from people who came and picked up information leaflets and joined clubs, which is frankly what it is all about. I am looking forward to next year already!

The second bit of this column is to mention a major piece of policy work I announced this week in Parliament. As Minister for Gambling I have been dealing with increased public concern over the high stakes machines that are allowed in high street bookmakers, called Fixed Odds Betting Terminals. These machines mean you can lose £100 in just 20 seconds. They were allowed under the Labour legislation that liberalised gambling machines in 2005 and have spread in number ever since. After an earlier call for evidence, Government has determined we must take action on this machines and I announced earlier this week we would cut the stake from £100 to between £50 and £2. I have had an enormous amount of support from local residents who have been affected by these machines on this and wanted to take this opportunity to thank them. We need to do more to reduce the risk of harm to the most vulnerable and I am pleased we are making progress.