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Candidate seeks health and happiness for all

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A healthy population is the foundation stone of a prospering economy, *writes Gina Miller*.

Amidst economic and social turbulence, politicians tend to fall back on ‘growth’ as the route to salvation. But too many forget that growth is not an abstract economic concept – it is real people doing real work – building businesses and keeping our public services alive.

If people are the currency of growth – and they are – then the foundation stone for economic wellbeing is the health and happiness of the population at large. And we know that 80 percent of an individual’s health outcomes are determined by the social and environmental position they find themselves in. These social determinants of health (SDH) concern conditions affecting how people are born, grow, work, live, and age. Outcomes that affect our financial, social, housing, education, employment and environmental systems, infrastructure, and sustainability.

Access to green space; reliable, rewarding work; and a sense of power over one’s own destiny are all critical to wellbeing, both mental and physical.

Politicians can no longer ignore these facts of life and must start incorporating health metrics in the national measurement of GDP, and from the bottom-up with radical investment and transformation of town centres and local communities.

To achieve that, local government needs far more power and resources. Keir Starmer, as aspiring prime minister, is talking a good talk on more local devolution in England – but as with so much else, gives us no real detail about how he would make it work in practice. With the public finances in such a mess, people want honesty about where the money to make a difference is coming from.

At the True & Fair Party, and as part of my campaign to be MP for Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead and Leatherhead, we have a plan and vision of what to do with more local devolution. We propose a new, modest levy on online and physical retail transactions to replace business rates. This would have two effects: first, to create a more level playing field between shops on the high street and the online giants such as Amazon, and second to raise funds for local services.

With 289 million online card transactions taking place every day, a charge of just a few pennies on each could raise billions and give a shot in the arm to local community funding.

My health and wealth plan would transform town centres into ‘health and happiness environments’ where high street settings would be used as WE Community Hubs to offer early medical intervention and screening, a range of alternative mental health services, respite services, clubs and facilities for young people, after school clubs, job search/accessing re-training, legal aid provision, debt/financial counselling and assistance to access state support such as pension credit and universal credit.

The Centre for Mental Health has recently recommended that government should routinely and systematically assess the impact of every new policy on people’s mental health[1]. I could not agree more.

I believe we – here in Epsom and Ewell – could be leaders in the country on this, using new powers to develop new partnerships between the business, charity and public sectors and pilot a Wellbeing economy in our community.

Wellbeing Economy models of this kind have already been successfully implemented in Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Costa Rica, and closer to home in Wales and Scotland. With a growing number of countries facing the similar issues to us such as an aging, increasingly unwell population, the impacts of the digital revolution and environmental changes, and global insecurity they are looking to a transformation agenda to promote growth, improve public health, shorten supply chains, and create more resilient communities and social fabrics.

After 14 years, the Conservative government is out of ideas. Here in Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead, and Leatherhead, you can choose to be the change. To make a positive vote at the next election, and enact a plan that can put our whole country on a path to a brighter future.

1. https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CentreforMH_PoliciesForBetterMentalHealth.pdf

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