

# KARL M<sup>C</sup>CARTNEY MP

## Putting Lincoln First

**Speech: Lincoln and District Citizen's Advice Bureau Annual General Meeting**  
**Check against delivery**  
**28th July 2010**

My Lord Bishop, Civic parties, Leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon and Bishop John, thank you for your kind introduction, yes I have given my maiden speech and I wasn't too humorous but did include a few bon mots I hope... and it really is a pleasure for me to be invited to speak today at your AGM.

When Roy asked me to come and speak to the CAB AGM, a well respected volunteer organisation, my mind took me straight back to the first couple of hours after waking up on 7<sup>th</sup> May following the election count.

As anyone who has been involved in a General Election campaign or even a local election campaign, knows – it involves a lot of volunteers. and it is tiring for all involved! The combination of polling day itself and the count normally means you have been up for at least 24 hours and win or lose you grab a few hours sleep and then people then either ring to congratulate you or to commiserate.

In 2005, it was commiserations for me, but this time, in this very hall at 3.35am in May, it was at last congratulations.

So, after taking the first couple of calls, my lovely wife Cordelia made me a strong cup of coffee and a bacon sandwich and I trotted off to look at the computer to see what other results there were around the County and Country, and to check any emails.

After looking at the first few emails in my inbox, the importance of my new job suddenly hit me. People in the city were in such need of help that they were already contacting me asking for support with various issues and problems they had.

And in just under three months, I have helped and taken up the cause of hundreds of people, with the most common being housing, anti-social behaviour, traffic and employment issues. And I am pleased to say that so far I have won more cases than I have lost. – and I intend to keep up that record.

The disappointment for me though is that it people have felt that they had to come to their Member of Parliament to receive an answer or to access help from the city, district or County council, or a statutory agency or a Government Department.

And the disappointment and frustration I have is that its not just because they haven't received the service they should have done, its because although they have written to or contacted these organisations to complain or seek help it is often the case they just don't get anywhere and are left banging their heads against the bureaucratic brick wall. They become lost in a Kafkaesque maze of red tape and unhelpfulness.

Then, when frustrated and at the end of their tether often, they then contact me, I send a crisp letter in a light yellow House of Commons envelope with the crest on, and lo and behold they receive more often than not the answer they needed and wanted all along – or at least in part receive some of what they require.

It really shouldn't come to this. People in this city and across the whole county should have access to the support from the state they need and not have to contact their MP to ensure that correct, suitable coherent and human response that aids them in their time of need.

I know you are wondering why I raise this. Some, or maybe all of you, might have been thinking (and I hope I'm right in using the past tense) ...oh, he's just another one of those chinless MP's just wanting to talk about himself and worrying about how to pay for the upkeep of his duck house, the new washing machine, flat screen TV or the paper bill for the Lincolnshire Echo.

But the point I am raising is this - in my short experience as an MP I have been given a stark and even clearer understanding of the value and importance of the work that Lincoln & District Citizens Advice Bureau performs on behalf of the people in this city and as a national organisation, across the country.

No matter what the colour of the rosettes the MP's are wearing, or the ream after ream of new rules and regulations new Government's bring in or whatever the up and downs of the national or international economy, you are always there for people – local people who are desperate and need that assistance.

And those frustrations I mention, have been the frustrations of Citizen Advice Bureaux for over 70 years, but you have never let them cloud or detract from the way you go about providing a first class support service to the people of our great city, many of whom have tried every avenue or did not even know where to start with their particular problem or issue. As a JP/magistrate I have often seen the consequences for those who have not received the help they needed early enough - anyone can quite quickly 'come of the rails' of life.

Those five and a half thousand people you supported last year are five and a half thousand people who would still be feeling alone with their problems if it wasn't for Lincoln & District's CAB Service, whether that's problems with debt, unemployment, benefits or the myriad of other issues.

You will all be pleased to hear I hope that I have always been a supporter of the Citizens Advice Bureaux, and my wife was a CAB trustee in Kent before we came to Lincoln, but I am not just a supporter of what you do because of the help you give, but also because you are clear about exactly what you do, you pass the Ronseal “it does what it says on the tin” test.

And even more so I am pleased that you reinforce the fact on your website that you are clearly not a Government Agency. I know he is not often quoted in these arenas perhaps, but it does remind me of when Ronald Reagan said that one of the most terrifying phrases in the English language was “We’re from the Government and we’re here to help.”

Your independence is absolutely invaluable and the New Conserv...coalition government - is well aware that often bureaucrats are not the best deliverers of a service or need – those with the right skills and experience are.

Although the Coalition Government are looking for organisations such as this to play an even bigger role in society – yes the Big Society policy - I know this places more pressure on you because as a country and a county and a city we are not out of the financial woods yet.

The pressures you already face can already be seen by the increases in people you have supported in the past year - this will either increase or plateau but certainly not reduce for some time I suspect. This is a real concern and I know with financial pressures everywhere things are tight, but I would urge the councils that provide support to you to continue as best they can and I know that local MP’s will try and help, as we are all in this together. Citizens Advice Bureaux are not luxuries, they are essentials. People need help and you are the best place to find and provide it. Myself and those that work with me in my offices in both Westminster and Lincoln are well aware of the amount of work you as an organisation provide that we would have to if you didn’t – I pass on their and my

thanks. I, and my fellow MP's in the county, will always support the work you do because you support us and you support the people we represent.

So on behalf of myself and the my fellow MP's, I would like to thank you all, and your colleagues and volunteers right across the county for all the work and support that you provide year in, year out. And before I finish, I would particularly like to say to Roy I heard all your messages loud and clear. Thank you.

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