



DR DAN POULTER MP

Member of Parliament for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich

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Content from Dr Dan Poulter, MP

At the time of writing, I think it fair to say that winter has been relatively kind to us, in that we've not experienced much in the way of snow and ice. The days are becoming noticeably longer and the countryside is already seeming to show some early signs of coming back to life. The longer, brighter days are certainly welcome, particularly for those who perhaps are elderly or more isolated, living in the more rural parts of the county.

However, one of the things that makes me particularly proud to represent this area of the country is that we are so lucky here in Suffolk to have such a strong sense of community spirit and inclusion. I especially enjoy meeting so many dedicated volunteers and visitors at the regular coffee mornings and social events that take place throughout Central Suffolk and North Ipswich. Community events such as these provide a vital lifeline for those living in a rural county like Suffolk, bringing together like-minded friends and ensuring that local communities stay connected and in touch with one another.

Suffolk people are warm, friendly and caring and I've witnessed first-hand the kindness of our volunteers who run the many community wellbeing cafes and initiatives across Central Suffolk and North Ipswich. There are a growing number of community cafes and wellbeing initiatives, such as mental health cafes and dementia friends sessions, across the county and there is good evidence that facilities such as these can boost mental health and wellbeing, as well as providing a vital opportunity for carers to benefit from peer support and access helpful support information, if required.

Many of these cafes and drop in centres operate from existing community hubs, such as libraries, community halls or church rooms but the concept is simple; a willing band of welcoming volunteers offering a warm welcome, tea, coffee and biscuits or homemade cake, and the chance for people to come together for a friendly chat. The cafes are used by all age groups and many offer the chance to learn new crafts or skills as well.

At a recent meeting with Ipswich and East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, I was pleased to learn that they are taking a proactive view about investing in community resources, such as these, to boost mental health and wellbeing in our county. Although attitudes and behaviour are slowly changing towards mental ill health, there is still much more to be done and I will continue to do all that I can to fight for more money and better mental health services here in Suffolk.

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