Swift action needed in foster crisis

WHEN four people are crammed into the same room, sleeping closely confined and in bunk beds, it is not surprising that trouble follows. When those four people are children with behavioural problems, it is a real disaster.

This unsatisfactory situation has been highlighted by a Southend solicitor after a 13-year-old boy was forced to share with three other teenagers because of a severe shortage of foster parents in Essex.

The youngster, and those he had to share a room with, were all in need of special care and attention and should have come as no great shock to learn that fights and arguments broke out between the four.

This shortage of foster parents has come about because private agencies are creaming off the best careers, offering them higher wages and better employment packages than the local authority.

Yet Essex Social Services spends thousands of pounds a year in tax fares, getting the 18-year-old from his foster home in Cannock to his school in Southend, and on weekends to see his mother.

To its credit, social services is planning to compete with the agencies to win back, or keep, the best foster parents. It will be a costly business but the soon it comes about the better for all concerned.

ON THIS DAY

1987: Children's author Eileen Browne died
1992: Bannocks March murder
1994: Barnes Wallis presented with a bomb used in the Dambusters raid
1942: The new Waterloo Bridge was opened
1992: King Hussein succeeded to the throne of Jordan
1975: The Government took ownership of British Leyland

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Saddled with

WHEN a motorist suggested she appeared leathered, Terri Gormans responded: "Where's the helmet?"

The Billericay MP admits: "He thought I was dead drunk and I was willing to go it alone."

But she added: "I told him he might as well have a rubber doll in that helmet, you couldn't tell who I was."

In fact, in her bid to keep her whopping 20,000 plus majority, Mrs Gormans launched a determined campaign to win new followers, particularly in Pritsce which joined her constituency for the first time this year.

She said: "I deliberately went on several popular shows like the Mrs Morton Show and Have I Got News For You — after all, most people don't watch Question Time."

"Suddenly I was in the same category as Joanna Lumley and Roy George."

She was certainly recognised on the doorstep: "It was going so well I thought the election would be a pushover."

In fact she became well known all over the world.

"I was on an aeroplane travelling back from obscure part of the globe and an air hostess over to ask what Angus Deayton was really like. I thought he was very
Gorman will never stay quiet

I will fight to split Billericay from Basildon, pledges MP

Faces of firebrand

always talking to me to sit still. Her darning hook has now prompted her to take up jet skiing: "I want to learn how to do a 90 degree turn."

"I'm quite bright intellectually but there's another side of me that likes to be active, scrapping walls and digging holes."

When she and Jim bought their Westcliff-on-Sea home and their historic Orwell Farmhouse, both were in dire need of attention.

"I first doing up a house as creative as painting pictures. I can make my own clothes and I certainly wasn't worried about getting down on my knees and scrubbing floors.

She is also, bizarrely, a dab hand at Swiss rolls. She worked as a jam spreader in a factory before graduating from university with a double first in geology, zoology and botany.

She then turned to teaching and passed a spell as tutor to Jack's Kentucky daughter, Carole. But she admits: "In my house I'm a busineswoman and she soon sat down: BAYA Biological and Nursing Teaching Aids - with Jim. I proved a marvellous success for the company."

"I have at least half a million, probably a million children, are using my products each day."

She became, perhaps unsurprisingly, chairman of the Alliance for Small Firms and her thoughts soon turned to politics. Following a stint on Westminster Council - she had won what had been a safe Labour seat - she set her sights on a seat in the House of Commons.

"I thought I would go into Parliament and change the world - a delusion we all share."

"Anyway I don't think people should become MPs until they are 35, there are too many kids in the House."

She was a supporter of Margaret Thatcher but says of John Major: "He could never make up his mind. We needed strong leadership.

But she wasn't too pleased about his replacement - the diminutive William Hague - describing him as a political maraschino.

"He believes in nothing, stands for nothing and looks as if he hasn't grown up yet."

She is also battling for a Billericay bypass to ease congestion.

As a former teacher, education is very close to her heart and she is in favour of grant maintained schools. "Parents want a good start for their children. I think we should also return to the old-fashioned teaching methods. Children like sitting in rows and listening to lessons."

She added: "But young people are often their own worst enemy. My hairdresser told me she couldn't get an apprentice - they all wanted better paid jobs."

She is also concerned about the future of healthcare. "Billericay Hospital is responsible for such a huge area. I've concerns about the largest hospitals lose touch with the people they are serving."

"There is a lot of unhappiness about the closure of St Andrew's Hospital and even more about Grays Hospital. If we close institutions down the problem is if you destroy something it's hard to recreate it."

"If I was Prime Minister for the day I would decry all the funds from the lottery go to healthcare."

One thing she and the newly appointed Government do go eye to eye on is the ethos of women into Parliament.

"I'm very pleased and would like to see the Conservatives following suit. It is no good saying you have to do it on merit, men don't get in on merit.

"Most have been in the military or foreign affairs, yet two thirds of Government expenditure is on issues which women have first hand experience of - education, cost of living, raising families."

"A lot of men in the Commons have no idea of the cost of a loaf of bread or a pint of milk."

Every year come Budget time she sends the Chancellor's ear on the cost of childcare for women and claims they need more help in the home.

"I employ domestic help on a large scale. We work full time so when I suppose to do the ironing push the vacuum cleaner around and all that jazz."

She admits her outspoken views may have held back her career: "People who talk common sense like me are written off as political class."

But she's quite resigned to life as a backbencher: "We make sure the Government doesn't step over the mark and I see that as a worthwhile job."

Teresa Gorman and husband Jim - married for 45 years

A HIT list of problems Teresa Gorman plans to tackle is headed on her Westminster desk. It is topped by her desire for Billericay to break from Basildon Council and join Brentwood.

The list has already been turned down by the Government but is due to be examined again.

"I did it my last time and I will push it for again. Whatever I think, it is what people in this area want."

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**Gorman on Tory Leader William Hague**

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