

Bethan Jenkins' column

This week, I received assurances from Assembly Counsel General, Carwyn Jones, that urgent talks are being held with the UK Government over the planned closure of the HMRC office in Bridgend.

The UK Government proposes to close a further 10 offices in Wales. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is proposing to close a further 95 offices across the UK affecting up to 12,300 staff.

The public sector makes up a large part of available employment in Wales and the UK Labour government's plans will have a devastating impact on our communities. The staff who work in the Bridgend office provide an important service to their local communities and this should be reflected in the government's plans.

I am very concerned that hundreds of jobs and millions of pounds of investment will be lost to the local economies of towns, like Bridgend, if these closures go ahead. It is ridiculous that the UK government is squandering millions on private sector consultants while taking public sector jobs and investment away from Wales.

Also this week, figures have revealed that Wales has been identified for the second year in a row as a UK hotspot for Carbon Monoxide poison. I expressed my concerns and urged the One Wales Government to raise awareness of the issue.

The Corgi Carbon Monoxide Report included Wales with London, Yorkshire and the Midlands as area hotspots taking into account population areas and the number of carbon monoxide incidents. During the period of the report there were 3 fatalities in Wales and 15 casualties.

For the second year running this is uncomfortable reading with Wales yet again amongst Britain's hotspots. I know there has been a reduction in fatalities and casualties from last year but many of these accidents are avoidable.

In the report it states that the main cause of the fatalities came down to a lack of servicing and maintenance of gas appliances.

Another worrying factor that has come from this report is that people's awareness of the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning. While in Wales, 80% of survey participants said they knew the symptoms but 10% of these could not correctly identify them.

It is a sad fact that those physically most at risk are the elderly and children. The government must make sure these vulnerable groups are given better information about the dangers and more support should be offered.