

Why Midlothian MP Kirsty McNeill will back assisted dying bill

Midlothian MP Kirsty McNeill has written a letter to constituents setting out why she will today back the Assisted Dying Bill.

The Labour MP says she has listened to evidence and views from different side in the lead up to today's vote and believes it will mark "the beginning of a new and better approach to the end of life in our country".

But she adds: "I do not expect everyone to agree with either my decision or my reasoning but I do hope, in setting it out, we can understand each other a little more.

"The ability to disagree well, recognising the humanity of those of different perspectives and the strength and legitimacy of their arguments is, in my view, the single most important skill we must develop in our democracy. That spirit was much in evidence in our discussions in Midlothian.

"The sensitivity and care with which people have debated some of the most fundamental questions about what it is to be human have been extraordinarily moving and will, I hope, continue to characterise our deliberations in future."

The MP goes into detail about the discussions she has had with experts, legislators and families who have experienced end of life care.

She says she believes better palliative care is needed and will continue to be sought regardless of the decision on the bill and she adds that the legislation put forward is still in early stages and will be revisited and further debated before any final draft is produced.

Speaking about the current situation in the United Kingdom she says up to 600 terminally ill people take their own lives every year.

She adds: "The suicide rate among those diagnosed with low survival cancers is 2.4 times higher than among others. I do not think we can tolerate a situation where people take matters into their own hands in this way.

" It is currently legal for someone to refuse life-sustaining treatment (like ventilation) or food and water. While it is distressing to think of it in this way, the nature of this decision means we do have to speak plainly: in this country we already allow the terminally ill to starve themselves to death even while in the care of our NHS.

"In fact, if they wish to die, as matters stand we *force* the terminally ill to starve themselves to death or to refuse life-sustaining support like ventilation with all the distress that causes both to them and their loved ones."

The debate on the Assisted Dying Bill is currently being held in the House of Commons. Kirsty's full explanation of her decision can be read on her website at kirstymcneill.com/assisteddyingvote/

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter