



News
from
Westminster
Mar/Apr 2020

No. 126



Report from Sharon Hodgson MP



In the Health Inequalities debate, Sharon makes the case that Coronavirus will exacerbate the difference in health outcomes.

Coronavirus

I know many people will be worried by the ongoing Coronavirus outbreak. I want to start by saying that my thoughts are with the loved ones of people who have sadly died from the virus, and with those who are unwell with it. We must also pay a huge tribute to all the fantastic NHS staff who are doing an incredible job in difficult circumstances. This also goes for all of the key workers and frontline staff working to keep our country going, across our schools, emergency services and all other public services, as well as the supermarket and delivery sectors.

Whilst the Labour Party has been broadly supportive of measures taken by the Government, including support for businesses and workers, it is becoming increasingly clear that this Government are failing to deal with this crisis adequately. There are endless reports of NHS staff not being given the vital protective equipment they need to safely do their jobs, and the confusion around advice for businesses has led to many people being asked to continue working when they are not deemed necessary, putting themselves, their families and the wider community at risk. I have published an open letter to the businesses in my

constituency who are forcing their employees to put themselves at risk by attending work when not a key worker or for an essential business. You can read it here:

<https://bit.ly/2R1aFvw>

I will continue to press the Government on both issues, and on ensuring that the financial packages announced truly support people and businesses. I am also collating concerns raised with me by constituents and feeding them through to the Labour leadership to raise with the Government directly. I have also written a letter to Matt Hancock – signed by over 100 other Labour MPs – calling for free prescriptions for all during this pandemic. You can read that letter here:

<https://bit.ly/2QYHfB>

Coronavirus has highlighted the stark inequalities in our society and further exposed some of the huge gaps in our welfare state. Short term action by the Government is to be welcomed, but they should recognise that there is much more to be done to ensure that everyone in our society is equally equipped to deal with the drastic changes that such a pandemic brings.

Gasification Plant update

I have received a response from Luke Hall MP, Minister for Local Government and Homelessness at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government following my request for the planning application for a gasification plant in Hillthorn Park to be recovered. This request has been rejected by the Minister. The planning appeal process for the gasification plant is currently adjourned until June. I will continue to keep constituents updated on developments.

How my office is currently operating during this crisis.

For the safety of my team and myself, we have all temporarily moved to working from home. My office will largely continue to operate as normal, and you can still contact me through email, by phone or via the post. Surgery appointments have been suspended for now but will resume once it is safe to do so. My website has a page with information and regular updates on Coronavirus which you can access here:

<http://www.sharonhodgson.org/covid19>

In and around the constituency

Public Meeting, Ayton



In early March, I held my second public meeting, this time in Ayton in Washington South Ward. Along with Councillor Louise Farthing, I listened to the concerns of local residents regarding environmental issues such as noise and air pollution, littering and fly tipping. I know that Louise is working hard to raise these issues locally with the Council, and I have written to Government Ministers and the Highways Agency in order to raise these issues at the national level where applicable. Given the current public health situation, I have postponed the public meeting I was due to hold in April, but I hope to reschedule as soon as I am allowed to.

Visit to Bidfood in South Shields



Also in early March I visited the Bidfood UK Simply Food Solutions, in South Shields, with my colleague Emma Lewell-Buck MP, a North East business which is now one of the largest wholesalers of specialist hospital food in the UK. It was great to learn about how they're ensuring that hospitals and care homes across the nation have access to nutritious, specialist food, catering for Halal and Kosher menus also.

In Parliament

World Book day in Parliament

At the start of March, I continued my annual tradition of performing the Lambton Worm, along with some school children in Parliament, to celebrate World Book Day 2020. I was very impressed at how quickly they picked it up, considering none were from the North East.

Teal Heroes awareness event in Parliament



Before the lockdown, I was delighted to take part in the Annual Teal Heroes event in Parliament as Chair of the APPG on Ovarian Cancer. Members of Parliament from all parties dropped by to become Teal Heroes and raise awareness of the symptoms of this form of cancer, which many women are unaware of and which GPs often miss also. Great progress has been made in recent years, but persistent delays in diagnosis and treatment show that there is still more to be done.

WASPI DWP Question in the Chamber

At DWP questions, before Parliament rose, I pressed the Minister to ensure that the thousands of women affected by the state equalisation of the pension age, including many thousands in my constituency, would be fairly compensated. Yet again, these women were dismissed by the Government. I think it is unacceptable that the Government has not taken action on this issue, and I have every confidence that these campaigning women will continue to fight for the justice they deserve.

Health Inequalities debate

Last month, as Shadow Minister for Public Health, I spoke in an Opposition Day Debate on Health Inequalities. In the UK, life expectancy is stalling and in some cases declining; but this is not a world-wide trend. After ten years of savage cuts to public health budgets, the healthy life expectancy between the most and least well-off is widening. I made the case that the outbreak of Coronavirus would only exacerbate this problem, with those in low-paid work, zero-hours contracts or in insecure employment forced to choose between their health or putting themselves at risk by going to work, in order to pay their bills and eat. I called for the Government to reverse their years of inaction and properly fund public health services, and publish the public health grant for 2020/21 to allow cash-strapped local authorities to begin budgeting to address poor health. Current events since have shown how valid my concerns were.

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