



News from the constituency

Feb/Mar 2021

No. 137



Report from Sharon Hodgson MP



Pictured here: Sharon presents her Leamside Line petition to Parliament, virtually. (details overleaf)



hundreds of NHS staff who died, we must ensure that we don't forget or allow them to re-write history. Labour is calling on the Government to wind down its emergency procurement powers, reintroduce competitive tendering and claw back the money on contracts that haven't delivered. I will be holding the Government to account on their failures and ensuring they don't re-write history.

The Budget

This week the Chancellor announced his Budget in Parliament. After the failures of the Government over the last twelve months and over a decade of neglect under the Conservatives, we need a Budget to fix the foundations of our economy. Instead, the Chancellor just papered over the cracks, rather than rebuilding the foundations.

Tory crony contracts

The Conservative Party have used the Coronavirus pandemic as a business opportunity to further line the pockets of their mates, handing out almost £2 billion worth of taxpayers' money for Covid contracts to friends and donors. The most baffling of all being the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock's former neighbour and pub landlord, supplying the Government with Covid-19 test parts, despite having no previous medical experience.

The High Court ruled last month that the Health Secretary had acted unlawfully on transparency and failed to publish contracts on time. But Matt Hancock has not only declared there was no foul play, he's also tried to re-write history. It isn't even a year since we saw frontline workers on the news every day saying they were scared to go to work because they didn't have the correct PPE. We saw images of our nurses and doctors using bin bags to protect themselves and issuing emotional pleas and warnings to the Government.

Matt Hancock doesn't remember that awful and desperate time and is keen that you forget about it too, but out of respect for our keyworkers on the frontline and the

The Chancellor only mentioned the NHS once in his speech, and failed to even mention social care. There is no financial backing or plan to deal with the ongoing costs to the NHS from Covid nor to deal with the enormous backlog of cases and waiting lists that have built up during the crisis. There is no new money for schools so the Government have assumed that there will be no need for additional investment to help children catch-up on lost months of schooling. And it is the same old, same old with the Levelling-Up Fund prioritising the constituencies of Cabinet Ministers, including the Chancellor's own wealthy local authority of Richmondshire.

The Conservatives want to maintain the insecure economy and unequal country that's been so cruelly exposed by the virus. While the Chancellor is playing politics with the recovery, Labour is backing British businesses.

We must seize this moment to create a secure and prosperous economy for the future. That means creating the conditions for new jobs for people to invest in our economy; breathing new life into town centres and high streets and providing much more security at work.

Some highlights (No. 137 - Feb/Mar 2021)

APPG for Dyslexia & other Specific Learning Difficulties virtual meeting



The closure of schools to the majority of pupils since January have had a profound effect on those with SEND and neurodiversities, like Dyslexia. Learning online presents difficulties for many children, especially those who struggle with distracting environments. To shine a light on the impact of home learning for children with Dyslexia, I heard from professionals across the SEND sector, during an insightful meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other Specific Learning Difficulties.

APPG Arts, Craft and Design in Education Zoom call



I was happy to host another amazing All-Party Parliamentary Group for Art, Craft and Design in Education meeting this week, which focused on the benefits of art education within both prison settings and beyond in recovery and rehabilitation, hearing from a range of voices involved in this type of education and connection with the arts. Further research and evaluations of the no doubt profound benefits of this work is needed.

Leamside Line petition (pictured overleaf)

Across February, I collected signatures on a petition to ask the Government to re-open the Leamside rail line which stretches from Pelaw, through Washington to

Ferryhill in Durham. Re-opening this mothballed line would finally bring a rail link back to Washington after 57 years, with the opportunity to connect Washington and Penshaw with the Metro at South Hylton. Thank you to everyone who signed the petition – it closed on Monday with an amazing 1,801 signatures. I presented the petition to Parliament on Wednesday, to accompany the 'Restoring Your Railways' funding bid submission by Transport North East, which I am co-sponsor of. I am looking forward to hearing a response from the Government in the coming weeks.

Armed Forces Bill

This month the Committee stage of the Armed Forces Bill begins. The Committee for this Bill is unique in that it turns into a Select Committee and can take evidence and go on visits. Whilst Covid restrictions inhibit some of the Committee's usual activity, I am looking forward to working to try and secure amendments that will benefit our Armed Forces personnel, veterans and their families across the country.

Labour 'Dialogue' campaign session Zoom call



Earlier in February we kicked off the online campaign ahead of May's local elections using the Labour Party's online phonebanking system, 'Dialogue'. Members who joined enjoyed this new way of connecting with voters and we had a chance to debrief afterwards amongst ourselves. I would urge anyone interested to come along to further sessions across March, which will be advertised by email. It doesn't matter whether you're a first-time caller or a seasoned canvasser, there will be someone on hand to help you get used to the system.

Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month

March is Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month, something that I am heavily involved with as Chair of the APPG on Ovarian Cancer. 4,100 women lose their lives each year to this deadly cancer, so it is vital that people continue to go and see their GP as if there weren't a pandemic. Please talk with your friends and family and **make sure you know the symptoms:**

- persistent bloating
- persistent pelvic and abdominal pain
- unexplained change in bowel habits
- feeling full quickly, or feeling nauseous
- urinating more frequently

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