



Report from Sharon Hodgson MP



Sharon with some of the winners of her 2015 Christmas card competition at Washington Arts Centre (see back page).

The shocking terrorist attacks in Paris last month show the continuing challenges we face when it comes to protecting our values and defending our way of life and it is important that this threat does not go underestimated and that a response is carefully considered.

That is why in the coming weeks and months ahead, we must seriously consider the future of our defence and security services with a comprehensive and joined-up strategy that meets the needs of the UK to prevent and mitigate any threats we currently face, as well as preparing for any future threats that may emerge.

Whilst the current Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) won't undo the damage to our Armed Forces inflicted by the 2010 SDSR, it is important that the Government does not leave Britain open to attack. That is why issues around capacity, equipment and morale of armed forces personnel must be addressed if we are to have a strategy fit for the 21st Century; as well as reconsidering the decommissioning of HMS Ocean in 2018, Sunderland's adopted flagship, which only last year underwent a £65million refurbishment. The future of our defence and security is as important now as it has ever

been, when – at the time of writing - the PM is seeking Parliamentary approval to intervene with military force in Syria to combat the scourge of so-called Islamic State and help to end the on-going Syrian Civil War. Any military involvement by the UK should and must be based on checks and balances that learn from past military actions in the Middle-East, along with a clear strategy that not only stops the brutal actions of so-called Islamic State, but brings long-term peace to the region through democratic government that allows Syrians currently fleeing their homes to return and rebuild their lives.

The Autumn Statement

After months of speculation, the Chancellor finally announced the Government's spending plans for this Parliament. Whilst it was welcome to see Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) protected for the duration of this Parliament after the campaign I was heavily involved in, there were still concerns that the announcements made were a masterful show of Osborne's smoke and mirrors tactics. Labour welcomed the Government's decision to make a u-turn on their planned cuts to tax credits and local police forces, after we put pressure on the Government to reverse these decisions. Yet, we must watch to see if people lose out just as badly when these cuts are eventually transferred to Universal Credit. Pair this with the concerning fact that working people will be worse off by £1billion next year, then it is clear that this Government's plans will not support working people. If we are to support working people then economic growth must benefit us all. To do this, significant increases in wages and investment in business, including up-and-coming industries, must be prioritised in the coming years.

Coming up in Parliament

One of the big pieces of legislation coming up will be the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill where Labour will be making sure that local authorities and new combined authorities have the powers to address local employment, economic growth and infrastructure to support local communities.

In the Constituency

Christmas card competition



I was delighted to announce that Dean Brickle of Columbia Grange Primary School was the Overall Winner of my Christmas card competition this year. All of the submissions from the schools showed great artistic flair, and every short-listed child who came along was a winner in my eyes.

Meeting with Members of the Youth Parliament.

It is important to have a strong relationship with the young people in our area that is why I was happy to meet with members of the Youth Parliament at the University of Sunderland to build a relationship with local youth representatives and aid them in their upcoming work.

“Movember” with Washington Components Ltd



I was honoured to meet with staff from Washington Components to celebrate their moustache achievements for Movember to help raise awareness of male-related cancers and health issues. The money raised reached £316 and will be donated to the *Movember Foundation*.

Jeremy Corbyn’s visit to Sunderland.

It was wonderful to see Jeremy Corbyn make his first visit to Sunderland as Leader of the Labour Party even after

the earlier 3 hour statement on Syria and train delays he was not deterred. Jeremy spoke with members about the future direction of the Party and how he forced the Government’s u-turn on tax credits pointing out that this is only a minor reprieve until Universal Credit is rolled out.

In Parliament

Sean Harford Ofsted meeting

As Chair of the APPG for School Food, I have been working alongside key experts to improve the inspection of food provision in our schools and recently met with Sean Harford HMI, Head of Education at Ofsted, to discuss Ofsted’s role in making sure food in our schools helps benefit the education and health of children and young people.

Atrial Fibrillation (AF) Parliamentary walk-in



I attended a Parliamentary clinic hosted by AntiCoagulation Europe to help raise awareness of atrial fibrillation – a dangerous heart condition which causes an irregular pulse and increased risk of stroke. The

screening process for this condition can be done with a machine which monitors your pulse through your hands, and is extremely quick and easy.

Cancer Strategy Roundtable

As both Chair of the Ovarian Cancer APPG and Co-Chair of the Breast Cancer APPG, I was pleased to chair a Parliamentary roundtable on the Government’s new cancer strategy with Dr Harpal Kumar, who is leading on the implementation of the strategy, and Sean Duffy, Cancer Director NHS England on how the new strategy will help improve outcomes and diagnosis for cancer patients into the future.

Education Questions – 30th November



At my second outing at the despatch box this term as Labour’s new Shadow Children’s Minister, I pressed the Government to address concerns around Special Educational Needs.

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