



News
from
Westminster
Dec 2015/Jan 2016 No. 81



Report from Sharon Hodgson MP



Sharon pictured here with Royal Mail postal workers at Washington during her visit on National Postal Workers' day before Christmas.

Floods

Over the Christmas period, we all saw on our TV screens the devastating floods that swept the north of England and parts of Scotland and the after effects which have ruined people's homes and livelihoods. Pictures of the elderly, the most vulnerable in society and pets being saved from the waters by our armed forces and emergency services has been both heart-warming and heart-breaking to see.

It is saddening to think that those people affected by the floods have now either been evacuated from their homes for months on end, with no sign of a quick return, or for those not evacuated have gone days without power in damp and sodden homes.

That is why it was welcoming to see the flame of community spirit burning bright with communities helping raise thousands of pounds for those affected and showing small signs of generosity and humanity during the festive period to those in adversity.

It is now up to the Government to offer action and reflect on the mistakes made that exacerbated this devastation right

across the north of England and Scotland. It is clear that the Government's cuts to flood defence spending and to our emergency services has stretched them to the point where there is no resilience in place to react to situations such as the floods this winter.

That's why in the coming weeks, I and my colleagues on the Labour benches will make sure that the Government is held to account and that flood prevention and effective defences are available and in place so we don't see scenes like these repeated again.

Rail prices

As we all rang in 2016 with our friends and family, the excitement of what the New Year had to offer was quickly diminished by the announcement that rail prices in England, Scotland and Wales would be hiked up by 1.1%. Since 2010, we have seen rail fares rocket by 25% – more than three times faster than wages – and the cost of some season tickets have risen by almost 40% due to decisions made, or the lack of, by Government ministers.

Though the 2016 price increase is the smallest in six years, passenger satisfaction ratings and service punctuality has deteriorated since 2010 and there has been no sign of improvement. Commuters have time and again been promised that ticket fare increases would go towards funding vital projects to improve our rail network, yet many improvements have been delayed and passengers are still travelling on ever-crowded and unreliable trains.

With our train network up to 40% less efficient than the best performing European railway systems, such as Germany, with evening rail fares in the North rising by 162% (far outstripping the pay packets of people in Washington and Sunderland West), it is time that the Government got to grips with the issues facing our burgeoning rail services and provide a top-class service for commuters.

In the Constituency

George Washington Primary School Pantomime



It is always lovely to visit the local schools in the constituency and there's no better time than Christmas when all the children are getting involved in festive activities, that's why I was delighted to be invited to George Washington Primary School to watch the Year 5 and 6's pantomime performance of Cinderella. It was great fun and the Ugly Sisters were my favourites.

Constituency Labour Party Fundraiser

It was great to see so many members and supporters come along to our Christmas fundraiser at the Top Club just before the Christmas season got into full swing. It was lovely to see so many friendly faces and enjoy each other's company and raise money for this year's local elections campaign. Thanks to Councillor Graeme Miller for organising a great evening.

National Postal Workers' Day visit



As part of National Postal Workers' Day and in the lead up to their busiest time of year, I visited Washington's Royal Mail delivery office to meet staff and congratulate them on their hard work throughout the year. Our postal workers are vital and it is important we continue to support their jobs and the services they provide.

In Parliament

Kellogg's National Breakfast Awards

I was honoured to be asked to help judge and announce the winners at this year's Kellogg's National Breakfast Awards which celebrates the contributions made by schools and local community groups who provide hungry children with a healthy breakfast each morning before they go to school. Hunger can be very detrimental to a child's education and breakfast is vital for children to succeed during the school day.

Top 20 Public Sector Most Influential People in Catering

I have for many years been a passionate advocate for universal free school meals, especially universal infant free school meals, which was rolled out in 2014 and which I worked, as part of a



large coalition of campaigners, to protect in the Spending Review. That's why it was a huge honour to be recognised for my work in the Top 20 Public Sector's Most Influential People in Catering at the 2015 Awards.

Children in Care Debate

In my role as Shadow Children's Minister, I spoke in a Backbench Business Debate on how we can do more to prevent children going into care and staying with their families. My speech



focused on how early intervention can be key to reducing the number of children going into care by providing support to struggling families. I also highlighted the support needed for kinship carers who are often overlooked by Government for financial support.