

City of Durham CLP Report – September 2017

Conference 2017



During the final week of September, I attended the Labour Party's Annual Conference, which this year took place in Brighton. It was both unifying and uplifting, as well as being the best attended conference that I have yet been to. It was simply great that the CLP sent three really active delegates to the conference—Harry Cross, Mathew Teale and Jessie Jacobs.

Labour is ready. Ready to tackle inequality; to rebuild our NHS; to give opportunity to young people, dignity and security to older people. Ready to invest in our economy. And ready to build a new and progressive relationship with Europe. We are ready for government.

Jeremy Corbyn MP
Leader of the Labour Party



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">  An economy that works for everyone
We will create a million new jobs by investing £500 bn in infrastructure, backed by a publicly-owned investment bank.  A secure homes guarantee
Build a million new homes in five years, with at least 500,000 council homes. End insecurity and protect tenants' rights.  A national education service
Restore free education for all, at every age, and guarantee quality apprenticeships and adult skills. Create universal public childcare.  Put the public back into our economy
Rebuild our public services and expand local democratic participation. Bring our railways back into public ownership.  Secure an equal society
Ensure the rights of all our citizens are protected, take action to tackle violence against women, racism and discrimination. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Security at work
Ensure stronger employment rights, end zero hours contracts. Protect trade union rights and win better pay conditions for all.  Secure our NHS and social care
End health service privatisation. Integrate the NHS and social care for older and disabled people and ensure parity for mental health.  Secure our environment
We will transition to a low-carbon economy, invest in public and community-owned renewable energy and curb energy bill rises.  Cut income and wealth inequality
Build a progressive tax system so highest earners are fairly taxed, boost the incomes of the poorest and close the gender pay gap.  Work for peace and justice abroad
End support for aggressive wars of intervention and put conflict resolution and human rights at the heart of foreign policy. |
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During my time at conference, as usual I spoke at a great many fringe events. This included a CAF/Barrow Cadbury event on International Development policy and the inclusion of civil society, a ONE event on the importance of education for girls, and a Bond reception on the Government's approach to aid spending. I also spoke at a range of planning and housing sessions.

Constituency Campaigns & Visits

Campaigning on Social Care

Over the summer, we participated in three PLP led campaigns highlighting issues that are having a real impact on people in Durham, and across the UK. The first of these focused on Social Care.

Across Durham and the whole country, the Social Care sector is in crisis, and it is decisions made by the Government that have brought us to this point.

Since 2010, not only have local authorities' budgets been cut by an incredible £4.6 billion, but 400,000 fewer people are now receiving publicly funded social care.

In Durham, despite the hard work of the Council, the 42% reduction in budget has meant that vulnerable people are not getting the care and support they need, and this concerns me greatly.



Roberta visiting a Care Home in Durham

I am regularly contacted by constituents struggling to access adequate Social Care and, as well as picking up their individual issues, I will be holding a roundtable summit in November to bring together a number of different agencies, including Durham County Council and the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust. This discussion will focus on dealing with the challenges they are facing in providing good quality care in the future. I will also continue to press the Government on the urgent need for proper funding for social care in Durham.

Roberta highlights Holiday Hunger

The second of our summer campaigns was on the issue of holiday hunger, and the fact that, in County Durham, over 13,000 children were at risk of going hungry over the summer holidays without access to school meals.

Child poverty is at a seven year high, and wages are falling, meaning that families are significantly worse off. I have campaigned extensively on this issue, and it is truly shocking that so many children are at risk of going hungry without a school meal.



Roberta at a holiday hunger activities day

Every child deserves to be well fed every day, and I will be working closely with the local authority, and pressing the Government to ensure a fully funded scheme is put in place in the future to ensure that no child goes hungry over the summer holidays.

This is an issue I have highlighted in the past, and it is truly shocking that so many children are in danger of going hungry in the UK.

Give Britain a Pay Rise Campaign



Under the Conservative Government, wages in the North East fell in real terms last year, compared to a rise of 1.1% from 2002 to 2010, so our third summer PLP campaign highlighted the cost-of-living crisis that is gripping the UK.

While wages increased consistently under the last Labour Government, they have stagnated under the Tories and the evidence shows no sign of

recovery. People living in Durham have experienced falling wages and rising costs, leading many people, who are often in work, to resort to taking out high-interest loans and using foodbanks. This is unacceptable in a wealthy country such as the UK.

Along with Labour colleagues, I will continue to campaign to increase the minimum wage and challenge the Government to remove the public sector pay cap for all sectors. To boost productivity, support families and help the economy, we must increase workers' wages.

Roberta supports Scrap the Cap Campaign

I was pleased to meet with representatives from the Royal College of Nursing Northern Region to discuss their ongoing Scrap the Cap campaign, which aims to highlight the impact the Government's wage cap is having on nurses and their families .

The cap on nursing pay is putting patient care at risk, as more nurses opt to leave their jobs with health services, and fewer new nurses join. In fact, since

2010, there has been a 14% fall

in nurses wages in real terms. Nurses do a wonderful job caring for people in hospitals, care homes and the community, and it is simply not right that they are being forced into hardship by the unfair cap on their pay.



Roberta meeting representatives from the RCN

I will continue to support the Scrap the Cap campaign and will continue to work with the Royal College of Nursing to support nurses in Durham in their efforts to secure a pay rise.

Celebrating Democracy Day at Belmont School

I recently visited Belmont Community School to speak to young people about the role of an MP, both in Westminster and the constituency, as part of the International Day of Democracy.



It was wonderful to be able to speak to the pupils during their assembly on democracy, and it was heartening to see so many of them engaging with politics. I look forward to visiting more schools across the constituency in the future, and do so on a regular basis.

Roberta speaks to school children at County Hall

Also as part of the International Day of Democracy, I joined Bill Kellett, the Mayor of Durham, and his consort and Mayoress Jean Chaplow, to meet with some Primary School children from Coxhoe and Kelloe on their visit to County Hall to learn more about how our democracy works, and the importance of taking part in elections.

I was so pleased to see them taking an interest in politics, and they had some very interesting questions to ask about the role of an MP, and my own experiences in Parliament.



Roberta at County Hall celebrating International Day of Democracy

I would particularly like to thank Councillor Maura McKeon not only for organising such a fabulous event, but for making everyone so welcome at County Hall. It is important that we encourage young people to engage with democracy at a young age, and I look forward to attending similar events in the future.

Roberta visits Citizens Advice Bureau

I recently met the Chief Executive of the Citizens Advice Bureau and staff at their new office on North Road, opposite the bus station in Durham.

This is an ideal location for a drop-in centre and I was so pleased to hear that the extended hours for the drop-in service on a Thursday evening and a Saturday morning have been a success, especially as more and more people are needing help and advice.

These numbers will increase if Universal Credit rolls out in Durham next March as planned. I am very concerned about the impact this will have on constituents, and I will continue to work with both the Citizens Advice Bureau and Durham County Council to monitor the situation.



Roberta with staff from the CAB

Roberta presents National Citizenship Service Awards



Roberta presenting the National Citizenship Awards

The National Citizenship Service recently held a graduation event in Durham, and I was invited to attend to celebrate the achievements of all the young people involved, and to present their awards.

The National Citizenship Service gives young people aged between 15 and 17 the chance to take part in a number of different

activities that allow them to give something back to their community.

It was wonderful to see so many young people getting involved in their communities and learning new skills, and I was so pleased to be able to take part in this celebration event. My congratulations go to everyone involved, and especially those who graduated.

Advice Surgery Sessions

I have continued to notice more people than ever attending my advice surgeries over the last year. With cuts to local services set to continue, many of my constituents are finding it very hard to make ends meet.

I will continue to work to help residents who need support, and who are struggling to deal with the effects of the unfair and divisive policies being pursued by the Government.



Roberta meeting with constituents

The EU Withdrawal Bill

Parliament recently debated the EU Withdrawal Bill, and I had the opportunity to outline why I would be voting against this Bill.



The Bill as presented is profoundly undemocratic, putting wide ranging powers directly in the hands of Ministers, and away from proper Parliamentary oversight and scrutiny. It would place at risk many of the most important rights and protections that UK citizens enjoy, and that we have fought hard to secure over many years.

This Bill would be hugely damaging for our communities and the wider North East. It

makes no provisions to ensure that the UK remain part of the single market and customs union during any transition period, which businesses in the North East have said is a high priority.

Sadly, the Conservatives were able to secure enough votes for the Bill at this stage, but I will continue to oppose this Governmental power grab at future stages in Parliament.

International Day of Democracy in Westminster

At the beginning of September, I spoke in a Westminster Hall debate to mark the International Day of Democracy, where I took the opportunity to call on the Government to help councils to support local democracy better, and to make sure it meets our commitments to international development across the world.

I also paid tribute to the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), who do fantastic work across the world to support and strengthen democracy in many different societies.

As we reflect on the state of democracy worldwide, it is clear that there are many worrying trends both at home and abroad. This is why it is important for Parliamentarians to reaffirm the value of our system of representative democracy, particularly in the face of its critics at home and abroad.

Working to improve education and nutrition in Tanzania



I recently visited Tanzania in my role as Shadow Minister for International Development, to examine the work that DfID and partners are doing to improve nutrition for mothers and children, and improving access to education.

After four days of fieldwork in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Tanzania, we met with senior education, health and finance

officials and politicians to discuss how donors and NGOs could best support the Tanzanian Government to improve health and education outcomes

MP speaks about extremism in education



I recently spoke at a Public Policy Exchange event on Safeguarding Against Extremism in Higher Education, along with speakers from the Department for Education, a number of universities, and legal experts.

I raised the need for the higher education sector to strike a balance between responding to extremism whilst protecting academic freedoms. These freedoms to express, debate and challenge radical and often controversial ideas are a vital part of our free society and our higher education institutions.

Tackling extremism is of course a serious challenge, but our response to this must be focused on violence and other illegal activity taking place on campus, in coordination with councils, the police, and communities.

This is a critical issue in Higher Education at the moment, and as Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Universities Group, I will continue to work with my colleagues and the higher education sector in Parliament to address this matter.

One Size Higher Education Report



As a member of the Higher Education Commission, I was pleased to attend the launch of our One Size Can't Fit All Higher Education report recently. This report makes recommendations to the sector's new regulator, the Office for Students, on how to widen participation in Higher Education, increase social mobility and ensure all providers are offering high quality education.

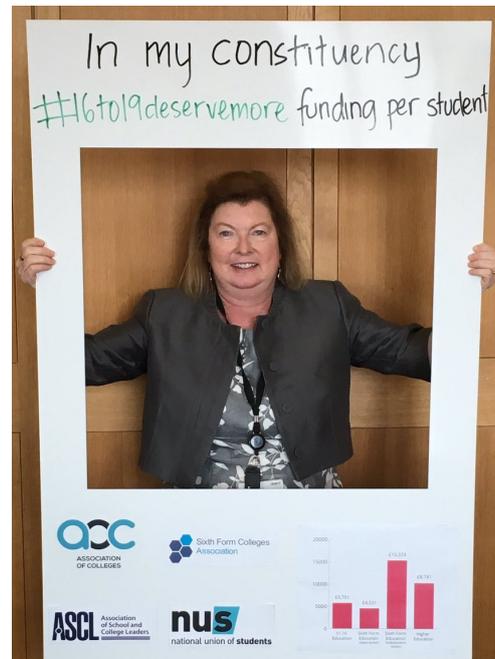
I raised the issue of the lack of opportunities for part-time and mature students, as their numbers are currently restricted due to the rigidity of the funding system. I will continue to work hard to address the need for more diversity and innovation in Higher Education.

Roberta backs the 16 to 19 Deserve More campaign

The education of young people is important not only to the individuals studying, but to the UK as a whole, so I was happy to lend my support to the 16 to 19 Deserve More campaign.

It is vital that we provide our schools and colleges with the resources they need to educate young people, however funding has been fixed in cash terms since 2013, despite inflationary pressures.

To ensure we are giving future generations the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, it is important that the Government invest in education, and I will continue to work in Westminster and the constituency to ensure our schools and colleges are fully supported.



Roberta backs British farmers



Farming is a really important industry here in the UK, so I was pleased to be able to show my support for the National Farmers Union campaign to back local farmers.

This campaign aimed to raise awareness of the need to support our farmers, and suggested a few simple things that we can all do to help, such as making sure that we buy British produce, enjoying the countryside in a responsible manner, and speaking to our friends and family about the importance of supporting British farming.