

## City of Durham CLP Report – January 2013

### Constituency & Community News

#### ‘Save Our NHS’ campaign

Following the Lib Dem-Tory Government’s passing of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, despite huge opposition from the general public and medical professionals, the National Health Service has seen huge changes. The struggle to restore the NHS to its previous form continues, with members of the campaigning group ‘38 degrees’ leading and organising events in local areas.

A number of our comrades including Carol Reeves, Jonathan and Linda Lovell, Bob and Val Hudson and many others are actively involved in the local ‘Save Our NHS’ campaign group who have a petition with over 8,000 signatures to present to the North Durham Clinical Commissioning Group. Sadly, a meeting planned for 18 January, I had been invited to speak at, had to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances but this will certainly not deter the determined campaigners who feel passionately about this subject.



## British Youth Council comes to Durham

On Saturday 8 December I was invited to sit on a panel of parliamentarians at the British Youth Council (BYC) Youth Democracy Convention.

The 16-18 year olds were very interested to question



the panel on the current economic

climate, child poverty across the globe and the rising costs of attending university.

I have also been making enquiries as to why Durham County Council has not yet held elections for the BYC and I have pushed for them to do so.



## Roberta visits Browney Primary School for 'Raising Aspirations' Week

I visited Browney Primary School during their 'Raising Aspirations Week' to speak with pupils about different careers including being a Member of Parliament.

It is great to see the School running this programme for its pupils; I am sure that it will inspire them to work hard and raise awareness of the wide range of careers that these young people could enter in the future.

I would like to thank the students and the teachers at the school for inviting me.



## Taking up issues in Bowburn

Recently myself and the local Councillors, Jan Blakely and Mac Williams, have been made aware of the increasing issue of anti-social behaviour in Bowburn.

A number of issues were raised at a recent advice surgery. I therefore organised a meeting with the Councillors, residents and Neighbourhood Warden Inspector Paul Anderson to follow up on these.



The Police have reacted very positively and have agreed to step up patrols in the area. In the meantime, I will be working with the Councillors and the community to ensure that any reports are dealt with appropriately as I want to ensure that people feel as safe as possible in their communities

## Brand New Primary School in Esh Winning

Thanks to the last Labour Government, Esh Winning now has a fantastic new Primary School where students can use the state of the art facilities to help get the most from their education.

Unfortunately, projects like these are now becoming a thing of the past especially in this area. Instead of investing in our children's' future, the LD/ Tory Government is focusing on changes to exams which could create a two-tier education system to the detriment of many young people.



## Home to School Transport Petition



On Friday 11 January I collected a petition against the Home to School Transport policy from residents in Sherburn Village which will hopefully be read out in Parliament on Tuesday 29 January.

In response to the £200 million in cuts it has received from Central Government, Durham County Council amended its policy in line with national policy to only provide free bus passes to children who travel over three miles to secondary school.

Parents from Sherburn Village and Sherburn Hill are concerned that the route which would have to be taken is unsafe. It would appear that current national guidelines are inappropriate and I would like to see these changed.

## Roberta speaks at Voluntary Sector Conference

The Voluntary Organisations Network North East held a one day conference to discuss campaigning techniques on Friday 18 January. I was invited to speak on how voluntary organisations can best



involve MPs in their work.

I was pleased to hear of all the fantastic campaigns local organisations are currently working on.

It is great to see our community coming together to support such important causes and I would encourage others to get involved.



### Roberta discusses planning on Newsnight

Planning has been hitting all the headlines recently, and on 9 January I appeared on Newsnight to speak about Labour's emerging planning policy, and to challenge the Planning Minister Nick Boles MP on the Lib Dem/Tory Government's damaging plans.

The Lib Dem-Tory Government had announced a new policy which would mean that Neighbourhood Planning Forums which have held a referendum on a Neighbourhood Plan and have gained a positive vote in favour would get 25% of the Community Infrastructure Levy (a charge which builders pay to develop land) in their area. Unfortunately, in the short term this policy would create huge inequalities as to date few areas have Neighbourhood Planning Forums and those that do are generally the more affluent ones.

I explained the importance of Garden Cities, such as Letchworth and Welwyn, to help provide much needed housing without causing detriment to existing communities.



## Roberta speaks at the Commonwealth Youth Parliament

December 2012 saw the 5th Commonwealth Youth Parliament take place, with delegates travelling from across the world to debate current issues and the Conference's theme of 'Governance'.



I think it is extremely important that young people take part in political discussion, whether through membership of a party, organisation or in schools.

It is important that they understand how the decisions which affect their lives are made.

## Roberta challenges the Government on probation

On 18 December I asked the Justice Minister Jeremy Wright what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Probation Service, following on from Early Day Motion 622 which I recently signed. This EDM welcomed the news that the Probation Service won the British Quality Foundation Gold Medal for Excellence in 2011. The Probation Service in Durham does an effective job working across the Durham community and I was delighted to see so many MPs recognise this.

Budget cuts by the LibDem/Tory Government have affected the resources available to the Probation Service. A Report released today has shown that one third of young people put into care by Probation Services were placed over 100 miles from their homes, while two thirds were placed over 50 miles from their homes. This is unacceptable and I will push the Government to ensure that the Probation Service is adequately resourced.



## Update on planning policy development



I continue to work to develop an alternative planning policy for Labour. This involves regular liaison meetings with the LGA, Labour Planning Leads in local authorities, members and relevant agencies and organisations.

We are hoping to be able to bring forward proposals for consultation in September.

I continue to work locally on a number of planning issues including Mount Oswald. Indeed, it will take up a great deal of my time in the coming weeks as is going to committee on Wednesday 5 February.



I will be interested to hear what members think of the plans.

## Women Bishops Debate

Following the decision of the Church of England Synod in November not to allow women Bishops I spoke in a debate in the House of Commons on this issue in December. I feel very strongly about this issue on grounds of equality but it is also very important to Durham as we are part of the Church of England episcopate.

Not surprisingly, many constituents have written to me on this topic.



### Campaigning continues

Thank you so much to everyone who has been out campaigning over the past couple of months. We've been having some great door-knocking sessions, with residents across the city meeting their local candidates and discussing the impact of Lib Dem-Tory cuts on residents across the City of Durham.

The local elections are now less than four months away so please come campaigning if you can- we need to use these elections to send the Government a clear message.



### Durham CLP Annual Dinner

The special guest at this year's Durham CLP annual dinner on Friday 15 March 2013, will be Shadow Cabinet Member Jon Trickett MP. Last year's dinner was a huge success, raising money for the CLP campaign fund as well as being a fun night.

The three course dinner will be served in Durham Town Hall and will be preceded by a reception on arrival.

**As always, there will be a raffle and prize donations will be gratefully received. Please leave into Redhills. We also need people to donate bottles of wine. We need all branches to support this and Local Government candidates too because the money is for the local elections.**



### Kathleen Carr

I was deeply saddened by the loss of our much loved and active member, Kathleen Carr. Kath was very well respected by everyone who knew her. She will be very sadly missed by myself, my staff and by many, many people from our community, especially West Rainton. Our thoughts are of course with Kath's family during this difficult time.