

City of Durham CLP Report – June 2015

**Constituency & Community News**

**The General Election 2015**

I must begin by thanking all of you for the hard work that you put in during the General Election campaign.

This election saw a huge increase in the majority for Labour in Durham, and this was down to our efforts speaking to voters on the doorstep.



Roberta and local members campaigning in Durham

We were also asked to help our colleagues in Redcar, and you all did a fantastic job supporting their Labour candidate Anna Turley through regular visits to the constituency, and telephone canvassing here in Durham. I am sure that, like me, you were delighted to hear that Anna won in Redcar, taking this seat back from the Liberal Democrats.



Roberta with the 'Woman to Woman' campaign mini-bus.

Sadly, these results were not replicated nationally, and we will all be devastated that we don't currently have a Labour Government in power. However, we must celebrate our success here in Durham, and get ready to continue campaigning across the constituency.

## MP launches campaign for a Town Council for Durham City

In April, I launched a petition in Durham Market Place to call on Durham County Council to consult on the formation of a Town Council for the unparished areas of Durham City.

The centre of Durham is not represented by a parish council, and many residents have been in touch with me to tell me that they don't



Roberta and members of the Labour Party at the launch of the Town Council Petition

feel their voices are being heard, and that there is a democratic deficit when it comes to the City Centre.

A Town Council could take control of some local services and have a say on local planning issues. Durham County Council is required to carry out a community governance review if the petition is signed by 7.5% of the electorate - around 1400 names - and I hope that the residents of Durham City sign this petition.

If you wish to sign the petition, there is a copy on reception at Redhills, or alternatively you can contact the office for further details.

## **Roberta speaks on the County Durham Plan**

Following the release of the Planning Inspector's report on the County Durham Plan in February 2015, I was disappointed to see that Durham County Council have taken the decision to seek a judicial review of the Plan.

It was clear from the Inspector's report that a number of policies contained within the draft Plan were unsound, and that work needed to be done to make sure that these policies were robust enough for County Durham. Instead of consulting with local people and other stakeholders on the content of these policies, the local authority has taken the decision to challenge the Planning Inspector's findings in court.

I was pleased to see however that Durham County Council have indicated that they will look at interim policies for Durham City that address student accommodation, and an Article 4 Direction, and I will be working closely with the local authority on these issues.

## **Advice Surgery Sessions**



I have continued to notice more and more people attending my advice surgeries over the last year, with the Government's cuts to local services meaning many of my constituents are still finding it incredibly difficult to make ends meet.

I will continue to work to help those in our communities that need my help, and I am committed to supporting local residents dealing with the effects of the unfair policies being pursued by the Tory Government.

## Miners' Gala 11 July 2015

We are rapidly approaching the date of the Miners' Gala in Durham, and we will once again be hosting a Labour Party Tea Tent. So far, we have had a tremendous response from members wishing to help with



baking, sandwich making and working in the tent on the day, but it would be wonderful to get as many people as we can helping out in some way.

Previous years have shown that the Tea Tent is always a huge success for the Labour Party, and is always appreciated by those who stop by for some refreshments.

Should you wish to get involved, please e-mail [durhamcitylabour@gmail.com](mailto:durhamcitylabour@gmail.com) and outline how you can help.

## Campaign Meeting and Barbecue

On 6 June 2015, we held a campaign meeting and barbecue in Redhills, to allow everyone the opportunity to discuss the General Election result, and to say thank you to our Labour members who did so much during the campaign to make sure we had a strong result in Durham.

The meeting was extremely useful, and will give us a guide to how we will address our campaigning in the future. It was wonderful to see so many of you there., to share your experiences of the General Election campaign, and your ideas for the future.

Thankfully, the weather held out for the barbecue afterwards, and we all enjoyed some wonderful food and company. I want to extend my thanks to all of you who came along, and to the people who kindly provided barbecues and food on the day. Once again, your help was very much appreciated

## National and Policy Issues

### Labour Party Leadership Contest

The leadership election has offered some really great candidates, and should lead to an interesting debate and discussion about the future of the Labour Party. I think this is a vitally important opportunity for our members to engage in an honest and open discussion about how Labour ensures that we represent voters in the future.

I will be supporting Yvette Cooper for the position of Leader. I believe that now is the right time for a woman to lead the Labour Party, and Yvette has the skills and experience to be a huge success.

In particular, I support her policies of providing extra help for working parents, tackling child poverty and the promotion of women's rights. Her experience in Government also means she is well placed to hold the Tories to account for their policies - a key priority for any future Leader.

### National Carers Week



Roberta at the Carers Week Parliamentary Event

On 8 June 2015, I attended an event to celebrate Carers Week, an annual campaign to raise awareness of the challenges faced by carers, and to highlight the contribution they make to our communities.

I have worked closely with organisations that support carers, and in the UK there are over 5 million people caring for someone without any pay.

I was pleased to see that the event in Parliament was extremely well attended. I will continue to support carers in Durham as much as I can.

## Opposition Day Debate on Housing

As well as continuing in my role as Shadow Minister for Planning and Procurement, I have also taken on responsibility for the Housing brief. In this role, I took part in the Opposition Day debate on Housing on 10 June.

The debate was scheduled by Labour to try and make the Government recognise that there is a growing housing crisis in our country, and we must bring forward a comprehensive plan to build more homes,



including affordable housing, boost home ownership, improve the private rented sector and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping.

Unfortunately, the Government have so far failed to acknowledge that if no new homes are built, there simply will not be enough places for people to live. Even though the previous Tory/ Lib Dem Government presided over the lowest level of home building since the Second World War, the response from the Government was lacklustre and dismissive.

I will continue to do everything I can to make sure the Government recognises and addresses this crisis.

## MP supports Adult Learners' Week

On 16 June 2015 I was delighted to be able to attend the Adult Learners' Week reception in Westminster, organised by the National Voice for Lifelong Learning, NIACE.

Adult Learners' Week was organised to celebrate the achievements of those who have engaged with lifelong learning, and to highlight the positive impact further education can have on social mobility and the economy.



Roberta at the NIACE Parliamentary Reception

Despite the importance of training, vocational courses and adult education, the Government have announced that funding will be cut by 5% in the next academic year.

It is so important to highlight the importance of further education, so I was especially pleased to be able to meet with NIACE and add my support to the vital work they do championing those who wish to engage with lifelong learning.

## 38 Degrees Pesticides Campaign

I have recently attended an event hosted by Friends of the Earth and 38 Degrees aimed at raising awareness of the proposed plans to temporarily lift a ban on bee-harming pesticides

I am hugely concerned that the Government will look at requests to let these dangerous pesticides back into our soil despite clear evidence of the damage they can cause.



I will continue to encourage further action to reduce harmful pesticide use which causes damage to the bee population.

## All Party Parliamentary Universities Group

As many of you may know, I am joint Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Universities Group (APPUG), and this week we met to discuss the PREVENT strategy, and the effect this is having on our universities.

This strategy was put in place by the last Labour Government, and has since been amended with the introduction of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 to create a new obligation on universities and other bodies to ensure that individuals are not drawn into terrorism.

The event saw lots of interesting debate and discussion, and one of the key topics of discussion was the need to protect freedom of speech as this is hugely beneficial to the policy making process.

I was pleased to welcome back previous members of the APPUG, as well as some new faces, and I look forward to taking part in further events in the future.

## UN Soroptimist Event

I was honoured to be asked to speak at the 'Change the World' conference on 13 June 2015, organised by the Soroptimist charity. This organisation is a global volunteer movement which works to empower and transform the lives of women and girls at a local, national and international level.

Gender equality benefits families, societies, economies and governments, and a major driving force behind this is education. Expanding educational opportunities for women can help stimulate productivity, and ensure that poor households are less vulnerable.

In the UK, we are very lucky that the majority of girls have access to a good education, however this is far from the case globally. Soroptimist's Millennium Development Goals stress the importance of educating women and girls throughout the world, and this is something that I will continue to support, both in Westminster and beyond.