

City of Durham CLP Report – September 2015

Constituency & Community News - Events and Openings

**Roberta visits Belmont Primary School**

On 18 September 2015, I had the wonderful opportunity to visit Belmont Primary School, and speak with the School Council about the work Members of Parliament carry out in both Westminster and their constituencies.



In July, the pupils who sit on the School Council had the opportunity to visit Parliament and I followed this up by visiting the school to discuss their experiences, and answer their questions.

I was delighted to see how engaged these young people were with politics, and how it affects our daily lives. My thanks go to the teaching staff of Belmont Primary School for organising such a wonderful trip to Westminster, and for giving me the opportunity to visit the school.

## Roberta acts as auctioneer for Homeless Hub

On Saturday 19 September, I had the chance to act as a guest auctioneer for Homeless Hub's promise auction campaign.

Homeless Hub is a social action project, and is part of the National Citizen Service Youth Programme. The aim of this organisation is to change the perception of homelessness in Durham, and to increase awareness of what the experience of being homeless means for those who are unfortunate enough to find themselves without a home.



Roberta acting as guest auctioneer at the Homeless Hub fundraising event

The auction was hugely successful, with the money raised being used to support charities such as Sanctuary 21 and Moving On. I was delighted to be able to lend my support to this event, and was pleased to see so many people attending, and willing to take part in raising money for such a worthwhile cause. I very much look forward to supporting Homeless Hub in the future.

## Advice Surgery Sessions



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

I will continue to work to help those in our communities that need support, and I am committed to helping local residents who are dealing with the effects of the unfair and divisive policies being pursued by the Conservative Government.

## **Roberta visits the new Hitachi Factory**

Over the summer, I had the opportunity along with other local MPs, the leader of Durham County Council and our MEPs, to join Hitachi Rail Europe at the official opening of their new Rail Vehicle Manufacturing Facility in Newton Aycliffe. I am certain that residents in Durham will benefit from new jobs coming into the area, and will welcome the arrival of this state-of-the-art facility.



## **MP opens New Brancepeth Housing Development**

In August, I had the pleasure of officially opening the new Sleetburn Court housing development in New Brancepeth.

This scheme features nine 3 or 4-bedroom houses, and has been built by Prince Bishop Homes, a subsidiary of the housing association Derwentside Homes.



Roberta officially unveiling the Sleetburn Court development

All of the properties are of a very high standard, and it is excellent that the housing association are providing much needed housing in the more rural areas of Durham.

## Durham Miners' Gala



Roberta at the Miners' Gala

On 11 July 2015, Durham once again held the annual Miners' Gala.

This year was a huge success, with wonderful weather and huge crowds celebrating the wonderful heritage of Durham. I very much enjoyed catching up with everyone, and joining those marching with their local banners, such as local councillors John Turnbull and Paul Taylor with the Brandon Banner (left).

It was also great to be able to welcome Yvette Cooper and the other leadership candidates to the Miners' Gala, and I know Yvette enjoyed her time in Durham.

The Tea Tent was a tremendous hit with those who visited, and I would like to thank all the members who got involved this year. Your help ensured that once again, the Tea Tent was the best place to go for much needed refreshments!

## Roberta supports family carers

On Wednesday 23 September, I launched the Kinship Carers Project in Durham City. Kinship Care is organised by Relative Experience, a body made up of three charities: Grandparents Plus, Family Lives and the Family and Childcare Trust.

This project aims to support children being cared for by family and relatives that aren't their parents. Illness, death, imprisonment and neglect are just some of the reasons that children may be in the care of extended family, and it is often grandparents that take on this vital role.

It is estimated that across the UK 300,000 children are being looked after by 'kinship carers', and most of these families get no support. I was delighted to be able to offer my support to this important project, and look forward to supporting them in the future.

## Roberta attends Holiday Hunger event

On Friday 24 August, I was delighted to attend an event organised by Gateshead Council designed to tackle 'holiday hunger'. For those families who receive free school meals, providing extra meals during school holidays can be a real struggle, with food banks reporting a peak in demand during school holidays.



This event featured a range of activities for children, and information for parents, such as how to cook on a limited budget. A free lunch was provided for those who attended, and it was wonderful to see so many young people coming along and getting involved.

## MP celebrates CLP Award Winners

At the CLP AGM held on 26 June, the outstanding contribution of a number of members was once again recognised, with four National Merit Awards received during the meeting.

My congratulations go to Val Hudson; Patrick Conway; Aurelia Smith and Katie Corrigan, whose award was collected by her mother Margaret. These awards rightly recognise the exceptional work they have all carried out within the constituency.



Roberta with the National Merit Award winners

### Refugee Crisis

Like most people, I was deeply shocked by the scale of the refugee crisis in Europe and beyond. This is now the worst humanitarian crisis to reach European shores since the Second World War, and I have personally written to Durham County Council to ask for a commitment that it will take in a number of refugees.



Local members gathering signatures on a petition in Durham Market Place

I was delighted to support the initiative taken by a number of local members in organising two street stalls to raise awareness of this issue, and to start a petition calling for action by Durham County Council.

The first event took place on Wednesday 9 September, and over 100 signatures were gathered in less than two hours. Local members carried out another such event on Friday 19 September, with equal success in gathering support.

This petition will shortly be presented to Durham County Council, in support of the work being carried out already to look at how they can assist in helping Syrians fleeing violent conflict.

## Voter Registration

As you will know, recent changes to the system of voter registration means that every individual has to now register, rather than this being done by one member of the household. Sadly, this has seen a drop in the number of registered voters within the constituency.

It is vitally important that we make sure that as many people as possible are engaged with the democratic process, and using their right to vote. We must ensure that we are focussed on campaigning to get people to add their names to the electoral register.

I have also recently held meetings with Professor Tom Ward, Pro-Vice Chancellor of Education at Durham University, the academic registrar and the Principal Electoral Officer to discuss way that we can ensure that all students are registered to vote.

Previously, Universities and Colleges could register their students, however they now have to do this themselves and it is important that we encourage students, as well as permanent residents to register to vote in Durham.

## MP welcomes Digital Upgrade in Durham

In August, I joined local County Councillors David Hall and Bill Kellett to welcome the availability of superfast broadband to residents and businesses in Sherburn, and to celebrate the fact that Digital Durham has now connected over 70,000 properties in the area.

People in Durham, especially those that run businesses, often raise the issue of broadband connectivity with me. I hope that Digital Durham continue the rollout of superfast broadband to the area, as this will hugely benefit the local economy, as well as make everyday life easier for everyone.



Roberta welcomes superfast broadband to Sherburn

## **MP welcomes Council consultations**

On 17 September 2015, Durham County Council began a consultation on an Article 4 Direction for Durham City, and the Interim Student Policy for HMOs and Purpose Built Student Accommodation.

Along with local residents, I have campaigned strongly on the need for an Article 4 and stronger policies relating to student accommodation for many years. Although I welcome the fact that that at long last the local authority have recognised the need for these important policies to protect Durham City, it is unfortunate that it took so long to get this process underway, as a number of inappropriate schemes have already been approved for the City Centre.

This consultation runs until 30 October 2015, and I would urge everyone to get involved and make their views known to the Council. There are a number of consultation events planned in the coming weeks, and details of these are available on the Council website.

I will continue to work closely with the local authority and residents on this important issue for Durham.

## **MP holds Post Office consultation meetings**

In August and September, I held two consultation meetings in New Brancepeth to discuss the proposed relocation of the Post Office. This branch is hugely important to the village and several residents contacted me on this issue.

It was heartening to see a number of local residents taking the time to come along to the meetings and share their views on these proposals. I encouraged everyone present to take part in the Post Office consultation to make sure that their opinions were taken into account.

The consultation period has now closed, and we are awaiting confirmation from the Post Office on the results of this exercise, and I will continue to work closely with local residents and the Post Office on this issue.

### St John's College Learning Resource Centre

In September, I met with Reverend Professor David Wilkinson to discuss the future of the proposed Learning Resource Centre at 17 South Bailey.

A planning application for this scheme was rejected by Durham County Council on 8 September, and following this decision I took the opportunity to discuss with St John's College the best course of action to move this scheme forward.

I look forward to working closely with Durham County Council and St John's College and other stakeholders to ensure a scheme is proposed that is acceptable to the World Heritage Site, and addresses the concerns of the planning committee and others.

### Roberta calls site visit in Ushaw Moor

On 4 September, I held a site visit in Ushaw Moor with a number of local authority officers to discuss planning issues within the village.

Following a public meeting in July, a number of residents raised concerns about the state of Station Road; the former club site;



The former club site, Station Road, Ushaw Moor

Eshwood View, and the derelict former bakery amongst others.

I will continue to work closely with Durham County Council to ensure that all of the issues discussed during the site visit are thoroughly investigated and addressed.

### Roberta speaks during two housing debates

In July, I spoke in two debates, both of which were on the subject of housing.

The first was on Shared Ownership Housing - a symptom of the scale of the housing crisis currently gripping the UK.

The extent of the problem is evident not only in London, but also in the North East, and despite calls for the Government to double house building, this is yet to happen.

I also spoke in a Westminster Hall debate on Housing Supply in London, which has now reached a critical point. Housing is not just important in London, but this situation is fuelling difficulties elsewhere, particularly in places like the North East.



### MP backs Breast Cancer Now Wear It Pink Campaign



In September, I was delighted to attend the Breast Cancer Now Wear it Pink campaign event, and help raise awareness of their upcoming Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October.

Since 2002, over £27 million has been raised by Breast Cancer Now to fund world class research.

They currently fund grants in the City of Durham worth £20,000, and I was delighted to be able to show my support for this important cause.

## Communities and Local Government Questions

On 14 September I was in the House of Commons for Communities and Local Government Questions. Part of my role as a shadow minister in Labour's Communities and Local Government team is to hold the Government to account and question them on their policies.



A key issue on which we pressed the Government was the issue of rough sleeping, which I am proud to say was reduced by 75% under the last Labour Government. My colleague Lyn Brown, who will soon be moving on from the Housing Team, asked the Government why the number of young people sleeping rough in London alone has increased by a whopping 123%. The Government have contributed massively to this problem by removing the housing benefit entitlement for 18 to 21-year-olds.

Unsurprisingly, the Minister had very little response. The policies being pursued by this Conservative Government are divisive and damaging to our communities, and the lack of action on this critical issue is evidence of this.

## **Labour Party Leadership Election**

On Saturday 12 September, I joined my Parliamentary colleagues at a special conference in Westminster for the announcement of the new Leader and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party.

As you know, this election was won by Jeremy Corbyn, and he is joined by Tom Watson in the role of Deputy Leader.

## **Saying Goodbye**

### **In Memorium - Gerry Steinberg**

I am sure that like me, you were extremely saddened to hear the news of the passing of Gerry Steinberg, former Member of Parliament for the City of Durham.

Gerry served the City of Durham with distinction between 1987 and 2005, and was an incredibly active MP in the constituency. Although he will be missed by those of us who knew him, Gerry's legacy lives on in Durham. Gerry leaves behind a wife, Meg, and two children. Our

### **The Very Reverend Michael Sadgrove**

As you will know, in September The Very Reverend Michael Sadgrove retired from his post as Dean of Durham.

Michael joined the clergy over 40 years ago, and has served as Dean of Durham with distinction for over 12 years. During this time he has overseen the hugely successful visit of the Lindisfarne Gospels to Durham, and instigated the Open Treasure Project, which is designed to transform the way visitors experience the Cathedral.

I would personally like to thank Michael for his contribution to the City of Durham during his time here, and wish him well in the future.

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