Advice Surgeries

The latest of my weekly by-appointment surgeries I held at Cambridge House included:
* A grandmother whose grandson was killed in a brutal attack. The CPS accepted a guilty plea to manslaughter rather than fight a contested trial for murder. I'm helping her get a copy of the pathologist report and ensure that her heart breaking statement is read in court before the sentence is passed
* A family whose care for their 13 year old son has been cut from nursing care 7 nights a week to carers only 5 nights a week. They care so wonderfully for the young boy, including dealing with his tracheostomy and with their other son who also has health problems. I'm helping them challenge the care reduction. His needs have not diminished - so neither should the care. And, as his grandmother says, she's not getting any younger and finds it harder to care for him and his brother.
* A man protesting about the loss of the Nags Head in Camberwell as a pub for the longstanding local community. One side-effect of the "gentrification" of Camberwell is that property is so valuable that local pubs are squeezed out. He and his friends go there for a reasonably-priced pint several days a week. Without that they will become more lonely and isolated.
* A mother complaining that her 15 year old son was stabbed at Harris Academy Peckham and spent the night in hospital, but that the school didn't call the police. The perpetrator has been permanently excluded but clearly there needs to be proper consideration of the offence and the response that is needed to ensure that he doesn't do it again. The mother has called in the police and they are taking action.

I am keeping the new surgery system under review. But so far the new system is working well and the number of people who I'm helping has remained steady since changing from open door (and long wait) to phone and email with appointments for those who need them.

School Cuts

The Tories are about to make the first real-terms cut in the schools budget for over two decades, the steepest our schools have faced since the 1970s. Over half of schools up and down the country are facing cuts and it is unlikely any area of the country will be spared. But the cuts are particularly bad for schools and families across Southwark.

Schools in the borough are expected to lose up to 3% of their budgets per year over the next two years as part of Government cuts, which for schools like John Donne Primary equates to more than £400,000, or about 10 teachers.

A group of local parents have formed the Southwark Parents Against Cuts to Education campaigning group. On 9 March they held a public forum at John Donne Primary School to organise against the Tory education cuts. I spoke at the meeting along with John Donne Heads Simon Wattam and Nick Tildesley, Clr Victoria Mills, Southwark’s Cabinet Member for Children and Schools. Kevin Courtney who leads the National Union of Teachers. The hall was packed full of parents, teachers and local councillors, all united and determined to protect Southwark Schools.

Cutting funding for Southwark schools will be a huge backwards step, undoing the good progress they have made in recent years. Helen Hayes MP, Neil Coyle MP, Clr Peter John OBE and I have written to the Education Secretary, Justine Greening MP protesting and we will be meeting the Schools Standards Minister Nick Gibbs ahead of the consultation closing on 22 March. Read our letter to the Education Secretary here and find out how to get involved in the campaign.

Kevin Gould RIP

It's with great sadness that I report that Kevin Gould has passed away. He was a member of our local party for more than 20 years and I shall miss him greatly as I know that we all will. Kevin was an absolutely and totally Labour man through and through. His Yorkshire roots gave him a lifelong passion for social justice and a hatred of injustice and oppression. He had a huge intellect and when he welcomed you in to his home in Caroline Gardens you had to tiptoe over piles of books on every subject under the sun. He played a key role in his ward - Liddle. He was interested and knowledgeable on world affairs but never overlooked the importance of local issues including backing his local councillors and building up the ward. At election time his windows were nearly blacked out with Labour posters and he would go out door-knocking every night. He was only ever kind and warm to me - even when he disagreed with my support for the Blair and then the Brown governments. He was a model of how you can keep your principles, speak your mind and stay loyal and true to your party. And he had a wicked sense of humour. What a loss he is to us - but above all to his former wife Joyce and his lovely daughter Jeanette. There will be a memorial ceremony for Kevin where we can all share our memories of him and party members will get notification of the date and venue.

For further information about my work in the constituency please see my website www.harrietharman.org
February Casework:

Action on 316 cases:
- 129 new cases
- All replied to within 12 working days

Constituency Case Studies — Resolved Cases

I was contacted by the daughter of an elderly disabled resident from Livesey, whose move from a care home to sheltered accommodation was delayed. I wrote to Southwark Council on her behalf and she has now moved into a newly built mobility flat.

An unemployed man from Camberwell contacted me because he had a prospective job offer as a lorry driver but was having difficulty trying to get funding from the Jobcentre to get his HGV/LGV licence. I wrote to the Department for Work and Pensions on his behalf and they agreed to fund his training course.

A single father from Peckham Rye contacted me about his 18 year old son who became a victim of fraud after buying a car, and who was being pursued for approximately £3300 by a vehicle finance company. I wrote to the company and they wrote off the debt.

Southwark right to accept Lakanal ruling

On 24 February I attended the court hearing where Southwark were prosecuted for their failures in safety regulations in the Lakanal House fire with Dave Lewis of Sceaux Gardens TRA. Three women and three young children tragically lost their lives in the fire. Nothing can ever bring them back to their grieving families, and it is right that Southwark Council fully accept the ruling and the fine that’s been imposed on them. Investment to improve Lakanal House for the tenants living in it instead turned it into a deadly fire trap. No-one would have died if they had re-assessed the fire safety of the block after the work was done. But the Fire Brigade, too, were responsible because as the fire spread and safety measures failed they failed to change instructions to residents. Those who accepted the instructions to stay in their flat died. I’m calling on Her Majesty’s Fire Service Inspectorate to investigate the Fire Service to ensure that they are able to react effectively when circumstances change.

Campaigning to re-open Camberwell station

Helen Hayes MP and I have had a meeting with Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling, to press for the re-opening of Camberwell rail station, on the Thameslink Line between Loughborough Junction and Elephant and Castle.

This is important for Camberwell residents who have suffered from poor transport links for years, especially following the disappointment of the proposal for the Bakerloo Line extension to not go through Camberwell, and with the ongoing disruption to Southern Rail services. The proposal is backed by King’s College Hospital, as transport problems create difficulties for staff, patients and visitors to the hospital. Initial feasibility studies showed it would be possible to construct a modern station at this location if timetable changes could be made to accommodate an extra stop. I will continue to work with Helen Hayes MP, the SE5 Forum and Cllr Kieron Williams to call for the station to be re-opened.

Challenging the Government on Brexit

On Monday 13 March I voted in favour of both Labour-led Lords amendments to the Article 50 Bill—the first would have guaranteed the rights of EU citizens living in the UK before Brexit negotiations begin, and the second would have given Parliament a vote on the final Brexit deal. For months we have been working to end the uncertainty for EU citizens and improve the parliamentary scrutiny of Brexit. Despite cross-party support for both amendments the Government defeated them by 335 to 287 and 331 to 286 votes respectively.

Oliver Goldsmith

Meeting parents and head teacher Anita Asumadu about fair funding for Southwark schools with Cllr Johnson Situ and Cllr Mark Williams.

Sacred Heart

Great to welcome sixth form students from Sacred Heart school to Parliament.

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