



Government Must Halt the Rollout of Universal Credit

Dozens of local people have been getting in touch with me, desperately worried about how they're going to pay their rent or buy food because of severe delays getting their Universal Credit payment. One woman, the full-time carer for her ill mother, told me she had waited over 2 months for her money, was struggling to pay her rent and was frightened about being evicted. Another woman told me that almost 8 weeks after applying for UC she was still without any payment, couldn't pay her bills, had mounting debts and was struggling to provide for her 4 children on just £247 a month. Every time she rang the Department for Work and Pensions she had to wait 2 days for a response. But waiting 2 days is not an option when you have 4 children to feed.

These experiences are by no means the exception. 5,198 households in Camberwell and Peckham have been moved onto the Government's shambolic UC scheme.

UC was intended to simplify the system – turning benefits into a single monthly payment, replacing the multiple benefits people receive, including Housing Benefit, Income Support, Working Tax Credit and Jobseeker's Allowance. But far from simplifying the system the Tories' poorly designed scheme has included an in-built 6 week wait for money. No one receives full payment before this - one in four people wait longer than 6 weeks and one in 6 claimants have not been paid anything at all even 6 weeks after the payment is due. Going 6 weeks without money has forced many families in Southwark into crisis, with many having to turn to foodbanks. Pecan, a Peckham-based foodbank, reports a 94% increase in the number of people referred to them between January and March 2017 compared with the same period last year and tell me the main reason for this is UC.

For all the rhetoric of Theresa May's first speech on the steps of Downing Street about supporting families who are 'just about managing', Universal Credit is the latest in a long line of Tory benefit changes making families in Southwark worse off – including the continuation of the cruel Bedroom Tax, cuts to Child Tax Credits for families with 3 children and changes to disability support. In fact her government continues to hit the most vulnerable families hardest - research by the charity Child Poverty Action Group shows that single parents are disproportionately hit by UC. Working single parents in Southwark will lose £800 a year by 2020 and some are expected to be over £2,000 worse off.

Southwark was one of 6 pilot areas for UC and serious warnings were raised from the outset. As far back as 2013 Council Cabinet member, Cllr Richard Livingstone, warned "the DWP needs to go back to the drawing board or it will have devastating consequences for vulnerable tenants and landlords alike". The Government refused to listen and now Southwark are once again warning that people are facing extremely long waits for rent and are falling into arrears. The council tell me they don't know why it's taking so long for housing costs to be paid, "as a landlord we are very much in the dark".

At Tory Conference Ministers said they would ensure more people are given advances but this will be nowhere near enough to address the problems with UC and Labour are calling for an urgent halt to the rollout. Even the former Tory Prime Minister John Major and 20 Tory backbench MPs are backing our call. It's time for Theresa May to stand by her words, show she is listening to those affected, charities and colleagues and end this disastrous UC rollout to protect yet more vulnerable families from slipping into crisis. Last night the Tories didn't even bother to turn up to vote and defend their own UC rollout. They know their policy leaves people worse off and some with no money at all and plunged into debt. It's as clear as can be that yet again the Government can't command a majority in the House of Commons.

Rape Crisis South London

As part of my work to improve protection for rape victims in the criminal justice system this month I met Rape Crisis South London to hear about their vital efforts supporting victims of rape and sexual assault through the ordeal of trial. In 10 of the recent cases Rape Crisis South London worked, on a victim's previous sexual activity and sexual preferences was raised in court. One of the Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVA) told me it was difficult to reassure victims about what awaits them in court because they can't guarantee that they won't be grilled about their previous sexual history. The fear of this and having it splashed across social media deters victims from reporting to the police or giving evidence at trial.

Victim Support South London

Just in the last year alone Victim Support South London have been supporting over 500 victims and their families in Camberwell and Peckham

who have suffered from crime including violence, burglary and elderly people targeted by fraudsters. Despite Tory cuts to The Met Police and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, Victim Support are working hard to ensure that victims get their vital services. I met with them to talk about strengthening the forthcoming Domestic Violence Bill.

Both organisations were clear to me that the defence using sexual history smearing of victims is deterring women and men who are victims of sex crimes going to court and for those who do take cases to court it is immensely damaging to their confidence and self-respect. I am working with a coalition of women's rights charities, MPs from all parties and members of the House of Lords to change the law to restrict the use of victims' previous sexual history in court and prevent victims being put in the dock when it should be the person accused who is on trial.



LeSoCo—Lewisham/ Southwark College

I visited Lewisham and Southwark College (LeSoCo) at their campus at The Cut and met with Principal Carole Kitching. We discussed the increase in the number of Southwark students enrolling and the threat to progress from Tory cuts to 16-19 year old education funding.



National Labour Women's Conference 2017

Over 1000 women attended this year's National Women's Conference in Brighton. We heard from Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities Dawn Butler MP, Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry MP and Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn.



Southwark Clinical Commissioning Group

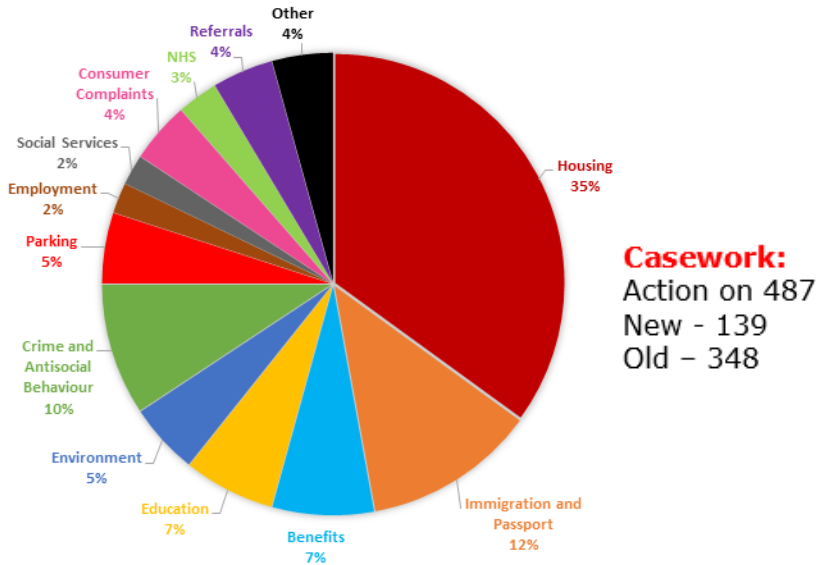
Last week I met with Southwark NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to discuss local health services in Camberwell and Peckham including:

- *The increase in A&E waiting times and NHS operation lists
- *The CCG's work to successfully increase the number of GP appointments available in the borough this year.
- *The CCG's work with Southwark Council to improve mental health provision in the borough and the threat to this from the Tories cutting the council's grant by almost half since 2010.

Southwark CCG are doing all they can to improve care despite deep NHS cuts. I will continue to liaise closely with the CCG on local health issues and urge the Government to provide them with the money needed to meet the care needs of people living in Camberwell and Peckham.



NEW CASES - SEPTEMBER



Helping constituents with their problems

*A woman came to see me concerned about the neglect and abuse she felt her elderly relative received at Queen's Oak Care Home prior to their death. I have raised the matter with the police, Queen's Oak Care Home, the Care Quality Commission and Southwark social services.

*Residents from newly built flats in Faraday came to see me because their heating and hot water is not working properly, they don't think repairs are being done properly or that the block is being kept secure by their housing association L&Q. I have taken this up with L&Q and asked for the residents to keep me updated.

*A Camberwell man trying to help his 14 year old son's promising football career at the same time as getting him a good education came to see me because he was concerned his son faced exclusion as he was abroad in Argentina playing for the Ecuadorian national team for 2 weeks. I've written to his son's school and football team to see if they can come to a suitable arrangement to keep his education going while he pursues the possibility of a stellar football career.

*A woman whose British husband was abducted 2 years ago while he was working in Nigeria came to see me concerned that the Foreign Office was not doing enough. I have written to the Minister at the Foreign Office for Africa asking him what he is doing to find and free the man.



*I was contacted by a Ghanaian student living in Nunhead who could not start his pharmacy degree at university because he had not received his permanent residence card. I wrote to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and his permanent residence card was issued soon after and he has started on the course.

*A woman from Peckham contacted me because she has had no hot water in her new flat since she moved there one month ago. I made urgent enquires with Southwark Council and her hot water was sorted out the next day.

*A Peckham Rye resident contacted me concerned about the rise in anti-social behaviour and harassment she and her neighbours had been experiencing after nearby blocks of flats were decanted in Solomon's Passage. I wrote to Southwark Council and they informed me that they liaised with the Police to address and resolve this issue.

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