



Harriet Harman MP

Winter Newsletter

2000/2001

Good Riddance To Stock Transfer

Southwark Council have just announced that they are dropping the plan to hand over all their council housing to an independent company. They're right - and I'd been urging them to ditch the plans. But it's worth looking at why the plans were wrong, and what should be done next.

The council went into this proposal with the best of intentions - the government were offering big capital investment for improving and rebuilding estates if they were "diversified" out of council ownership. But nothing was to happen without the tenants approval.

That was an immediate cause of problems. Was it really a free choice, a "level playing field" ? Staying with the council meant no capital investment and estates continuing to decline, and voting to go into private ownership meant cash for a major facelift. Many tenants called this "blackmail" rather than "choice". This created deep cynicism and a sense that their views were being trampled on rather than taken into account. Some tenants, recognising the desperate need for a cash injection for their estate, said they would support opting out - but still with a sense that the process had been unfair.

The second major concern was rents. Tenants know that councillors have to stand for election every 5 years. They know that this is very much in the forefront of councillors minds when they set the rent level. Put the rents up too much and tenants won't be able to pay. Put the rents up too little and there won't be enough money for repairs. Get it wrong either way, and the council know that the votes of council tenants can chuck them out. Tenants know this. But how much weight would their views carry with unknown members of a company board? Even if the board did include some tenants, how would they get elected, or kicked out?

So I'm glad that wholesale stock transfer is a dead duck - but that doesn't mean we can leave things as they are. Though some estates have had a welcome facelift, tenants on others are angry that their estates are going downhill. The Chancellor has, rightly put the NHS and schools first in line for huge investment. He has been able to do that because he's running the economy brilliantly. It's now time to put a big injection of cash into council housing. Not just the estates that are going to be pulled down and rebuilt - but all of them. So that'll be top of my list when I'm next chatting to the Chancellor - oh, not forgetting a big increase in maternity pay too!



“Order Order - An Invitation”

Would you like to visit the House of Commons and see us in action? If so please let my assistant Alun know by calling 0207 219 4218 or by e-mailing me at harmanh@parliament.uk. He can arrange visits for up to 16 people (in the morning) and for two people for debates in the afternoon

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PENSIONS PLUS

Southwark Pensioners Action Group (SPAG) has been very active in lobbying me and the Chancellor - for higher pensions. In November this year the Chancellor announced substantial increases for pensioners.

- Basic state pension to rise by £5 for a single pensioner and £8 for pensioner couples next year. And it will rise by a further £3 and £4.80 in April 2000.
- Winter fuel payment - set at £150 for future years will rise to £200 this year.
- Minimum Income Guarantee to rise by £14 to £92.15 a week for a single pensioner and £140.60 a week for couples in April 2001. It will reach at least £100 for a single pensioner and £154 for a pensioner couple by 2003.
- Pensioners credit to help those with modest occupational pensions and savings.

This is in addition to the Government action already to give free T.V licences for the over 75's and free eye tests

Petrol Prices & Public Transport



During the recent fuel protests I did not have one single letter, E-mail or phone call asking me to press the Chancellor to cut fuel prices. But I did many urging me to insist the Chancellor holds firm on fuel tax and invests in public transport. Here are extracts from two which I brought to the Chancellors attention.

Dear Harriet,

I am writing to express my views on the recent fuel protests. I do not agree with those who protest fuel costs too much and I do not support their actions.

I think the taxes on private transport should be increased to reflect the environmental consequences of the use of fossil fuels.....

Dear Ms Harman,

I am contacting you to let you know that whilst I sympathise with the position of low-income people living in rural areas, in general I feel that the social and environmental costs associated with road traffic make petrol a legitimate source of substantial tax revenue. As a result I did not agree with the recent protests concerning fuel prices and support the government's resistance to calls for a generalised cut in fuel duty.

OUT AND ABOUT IN SOUTHWARK

I have a rolling programme of visits and walkabouts in the constituency. Please let me know if you'd like me to visit in your neighbourhood by contacting 0207 219 4218 or e-mail me (harmanh@parliament.uk) In the last few months my visits have included Crawford Tenants Association, Tustin Estate, Jennie Lee House, Southwark Chamber of Commerce, Lindley Estate, Ledbury Estate, Cossell Sheltered Housing Unit, Pilgrims Way School and Camelot School.



NEW WEBSITE PLANNED

I am currently in the process of setting up a new website, which should be up and running just after Christmas. The website will have latest Advice Surgery Timetables, copies of my reports, local news and much, much more **Watch This Space!!**



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News from Parliament..



New Help for Working Mums

For the last 12 months I've been campaigning for more help for working mothers.

I published research 'Maternal Employment and Child Outcomes' which led to the Chancellor setting up a review on maternity pay and leave and parental leave. I've urged the review to tackle the problem of women being forced to return to work before they feel they or their baby is ready because maternity pay is too low and maternity leave is too short. And some mothers give up their jobs because they cannot manage the hours at the same time as caring for a new baby.

So I've recommended:

- increase maternity pay to £100 per week
- extend maternity leave from 6months to 12 months
- give mothers a right to return to work part-time
- pay parental leave so that parents can afford to take it

The Government are due to publish the results of the review shortly.

More Childcare In Southwark

As Chair of Southwark Childcare First (our Early Years and Childcare Development Partnership) I've been overseeing the rolling out locally of our National Childcare Strategy. In my first year of being Chair we've hit our targets of:

- 1300 more places for Southwark children in after-school and holiday school clubs.
- 1000 more free places for 3 year olds in playgroups and nurseries.

But we still need much more childcare. The new Childcare Information Service is now up and running (tel: 0207 525 5189) and the CIS team report that most calls are from new mothers needing to return to work but not knowing how they can find, or afford childcare.

We've set targets to increase the numbers of registered child-minders in Southwark, but we are still falling short of the numbers needed. So if you know someone who might want to become a minder please contact the CIS Team on 0207 525 5190

We're also needing to train more local people to qualify in childcare. If you, or someone you know would like to get qualified for this vital work please contact the organisation SETTA on 0207 525 0240



SOUTHWARK'S



IMMIGRANTS

The stereotype of immigrants portrayed in the media and believed by the general public (as evidenced by the MORI poll the week beginning 23rd October 2000) are that they are bogus in their claim for asylum, here to scrounge, an burden on the welfare state, their children drag down the standards of the schools and they have a bad effect generally on the area in which they settle.

The evidence of my caseload presents a very different picture and I will be producing a report based on my casework that will highlight that far from "scrounging" they want work. They have a very critical attitude towards those people who could be working but would rather claim benefits or beg. Many are undertaking higher education or working.

Far from being a burden on the welfare state, they are supporting it by their work - as nurses in local hospitals

such as Kings and St Thomas's, and in our services caring for the elderly such as Jennie Lee House in Camberwell.

They have high aspirations and expectations for their children in school, including in some cases even using scarce income in paying for private tuition because of their concern about standards in the primary schools in Southwark.

They are more likely to be the backbone of the local churches than to be "dragging the local area down". Often they are studying in the evening as well as working during the day at jobs for which they are over-qualified.

We must also not forget that many of these people have fled the most horrific and bloody situations, such as those who have come from Sierra Leone having seen family members murdered and having lost touch with others.

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Advice Surgery Timetable (February, March, April, May)

Friday 2nd February 2001	10:00am	Southwark Town Hall
Friday 9th February 2001	10:00am	Southwark Town Hall
Tuesday 20th February 2001	6:00pm	Southwark Town Hall
Friday 2nd March 2001	10:00am	Southwark Town Hall
Friday 9th March 2001	10:00am	Southwark Town Hall
Tuesday 20th March 2001	6:00pm	Southwark Town Hall
Friday 6th April 2001	10:00am	Southwark Town Hall
Friday 13th April 2001	10:00am	Southwark Town Hall
Tuesday 24th April 2001	6:00pm	Southwark Town Hall
Friday 4th May 2001	10:00am	Southwark Town Hall
Friday 11th May 2001	10:00am	Southwark Town Hall
Tuesday 22nd May 2001	6:00pm	Southwark Town Hall

If you are unable to attend you can write to me at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or telephone my constituency office on 0207 219 4218, fax 0207 219 4877.

The FTSE Female Index

The FTSE Female Index – was a joint initiative between The Fawcett Society, The Industrial Society, and myself – it spotlights ongoing resistance to women in the boardroom from the UK's leading companies. The FTSE Female Index, which will be published annually as part of the campaign, ranks FTSE 100 companies according to their number of women board directors. It shows that although 50 per cent of the workforce is female, women make up less than two per cent of FTSE 100 executive directors and less than eight per cent of non-executive directors.



“British Boardrooms are one of the last remaining ‘no-go’ areas for women. We lag far behind the U.S, where business recognises the value of diversity and reflects on their boards the importance of women employees and women consumers. The task now is to expose the extent of the problem, to work for change, to set a target that within 3 years there should be no all-male boards in the FTSE top 100, to monitor progress and to provide a support network to the women who make their way onto boards. British business needs a culture change to create family-friendly workplaces.”

Tragic Death of Damilola Taylor

“All of Peckham has been deeply saddened by the death of Damilola Taylor. We all extend our deepest sympathy to the Taylor family and join with them in urging anyone with information that could help the Police to come forward. Justice must be done. The community must stay united in the face of this tragedy. Everything must be done to back the efforts of the local community to improve North Peckham. Peckham is not the bad area that it has been painted in the national media. Homes, schools, policing and job prospects must be improved. Lord Harris of Peckham has offered a generous donation and a community centre will be built in Damilola's memory. His name will not be forgotten in Peckham.”