

City of Durham CLP Report – May 2016

Constituency & Community News

EU Referendum

Along with Labour Party members, and our MEP Jude Kirton-Darling, I have recently been campaigning across the constituency for the UK to remain within the EU.

As the date of the referendum is now approaching fast, it is more important than ever that we speak to local people, and highlight how vital it is for Durham and the whole North East that we stay in Europe.

It is important that we continue to provide a positive message on the many benefits of EU membership for Durham and the North East in providing jobs; encouraging investment; supporting businesses; and protecting workers rights and the environment.

It is great that our campaigning is now stepping up a gear as we approach the referendum date, and we are getting lots of positive feedback from members of the public.



Roberta, Jude and local members campaigning in Durham Market Place

My thanks go to all members who have given their time to campaigning so far, and we will continue working hard all the way up to the referendum on 23 June.

Quarrington Hill Miners' Memorial

I was honoured to recently join members of the local community in Quarrington Hill to unveil a new memorial to commemorate the history of mining within Quarrington Hill.



The artwork was partly funded by planning gain from local development, with the support of the Parish Council.

I wish to acknowledge the hard work put in by everyone involved in this project, and was delighted to be able to unveil this memorable and original piece of artwork.

MP attends Sherburn Banner unveiling

In March, I joined the Mayor of Durham, Cllr Jan Blakey, Ian Lavery MP and members of the community in Sherburn to unveil the new Sherburn Banner.



Roberta with Cllr Jan Blakey and Ian Lavery MP

A full evening of entertainment took place, with a number of local bands performing in Sherburn Village Working Men's Club.

It was wonderful to see so many people coming along and celebrating the heritage of Sherburn Village.

MP speaks at the Lets Talk Housing Debate



I recently spoke at the Let's Talk Housing debate, which took place in Newcastle in April.

The theme of the event was where the next generation will live, and who will pay for it.

Starter homes was one of many issues discussed on the night, alongside the financial viability of housing associations, the

impact of planning on delivering housing, and the difficulty of tackling homelessness given current funding problems.

It was good to have the opportunity to make the point about the lack of affordability in the Government's Starter Homes programme, and it was great to see so many people contributing to a thoughtful and productive debate on the future of housing in the UK.

Roberta attends Parkinson's Support Group

It was really good to be able to attend a recent coffee morning held in Durham Town Hall by the North Durham Parkinson's Support Group.

Parkinson's UK helps drive up standards of care, research new treatments, and improves the quality of life for people with Parkinson's.

The coffee morning was a huge success, and I was delighted to be able to show my support for such an important and worthwhile charity.

I look forward to further events in the future.



Roberta and Parkinson's UK volunteers

Roberta Campaigns in Local Elections

I visited a number of places recently as part of Labour's local election campaign.

This involved question and answer sessions with local activists and members, heading out campaigning with Labour candidates, and participating in phone banks and other campaign activities.



Roberta and Labour members campaigning for the local elections

As we did not have local elections in Durham this year, it was good to have the opportunity to support our Labour colleagues in their campaigning efforts.

MP visits local Pharmacy

Last month, I visited Bowburn Pharmacy as part of the I Love My Pharmacy Campaign.

In December 2015, the Government announced that funding for community pharmacies will be cut by £170m in 2016/17.

This is extremely worrying not only for the staff who do such a tremendous job in our local pharmacies, but also for the people who rely on the essential services they provide.

Many of my constituents have contacted me on this important issue, and I was happy to show my support for the ongoing campaign against these potentially damaging cuts.



Roberta and staff at the Bowburn Pharmacy

MP holds Public Meeting on Sheraton Park

Earlier this month, I met with residents of the Sheraton Park estate and the surrounding areas to discuss the ongoing student development, and the future of any planning gain that will be delivered by the developers.

The meeting was extremely well attended, and it was great to see so many people sharing their views on the how the planning gain should be spent in the area.

It was heartening to hear how a number of different community groups around Neville's Cross have come together to work on the project, and this is being overseen by the area Action Partnership.

I will continue to liaise with residents groups in the area on this matter.

County Hospital Update

As you will know, following a public hearing earlier this year, the Planning Inspectorate approved plans to house over 350 students on the former County Hospital site on North Road in Durham.

Since this decision, I have been in touch with the Planning Inspectorate to highlight a number of factual errors in the Inspectors report, and have joined a number of residents groups to raise a complaint with Durham County Council about the decision taken by the planning committee, and the organisation of the public hearing.



I have also held a residents meeting to discuss this site, and will be working closely with the local residents' groups and the new Engagement Group - formed to liaise with developers and the community - to ensure this development proceeds with as little disruption to the local community as possible.

Fundraising Curry Night

In April, we held another fundraising curry night in Zafflongs restaurants and Bar in Belmont.

Once again, the food was excellent, and a wonderful night was had by everyone who came along. Not only that, but we managed to raise over £850, which will go towards our local elections next year.

Many thanks to everyone who came along on the night, and to those people who helped organise this fantastic event.



I would also like to thank all the staff at Zafflong's for once again providing us with some wonderful food, and making us feel so welcome.

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 set to continue, many of my constituents are finding it incredibly difficult to make ends meet.

I will continue to work to help those in our communities who 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.

Housing and Planning Bill (Act)

This appalling Bill has been something that I worked to mitigate the disastrous effects of since October of last year, right up until it went to the Queen for Royal Assent last week.



Labour MPs and Lords worked hard to inflict a number of defeats on the Government and forced them to add numerous amendments to this Bill; on Starter Homes, Pay to Stay, on the selling of “higher value” council homes and on the privatisation of the planning system. However, few of these amendments made it through the Commons.

So, the Housing and Planning Act remains an extraordinary and extreme piece of legislation. There is nothing within the Bill that really supports the vigorous and progressive building programme of housing across all tenures that is needed to address the current housing crisis.

Labour wants to see housing legislation that will deliver more council housing or social homes, and a better regulated and higher quality private rented sector alongside measures to support home ownership.

Labour understands the need to provide more housing across all tenures, but unfortunately the Government does not.

Academies

Like many of you, I was delighted to hear the recent announcement by the Education Secretary Nicky Morgan that the policy to force all state schools in England to become academies has now been watered down.

Along with Labour colleagues, I vociferously opposed this idea, and argued the case that these proposals were unnecessary, expensive and ideologically driven.

There are so many problems with our education system that still need to be addressed however: the teacher shortage crisis; rising class sizes; exams and assessment chaos; and the widening attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers.

Although these poorly thought out changes have now been amended, I want to assure you that along with my colleagues in Westminster, I will continue to press the Government to offer some real support to our dedicated and hardworking teachers and support staff.

CPA UK

I recently took part in a very interesting discussion with staff from the UN Development Programme where we discussed how parliaments throughout the world can become more gender sensitive, and the key aspects in achieving this.

One of the most important elements to promote women's participation is to make sure that Parliaments function in a way that supports both



male and female members. If we want to move to meaningful equality we need to make Parliaments an attractive work environment for people regardless of gender.

This was a fascinating discussion, and whilst things are moving in a positive direction here in the UK, there is still work to do.

Land Registry

I was very concerned to see that, less than two years after plans to privatise the Land Registry were dropped, the Government has again announced plans to sell off the agency.

As I stated the last time these plans were put forward, the Land Registry is a vitally important part of Durham, and employs a huge number of people.

The Land Registry office in Durham provides many good quality jobs that we desperately need locally, and it is vitally important for our local economy that this is not diminished in any way by potential privatisation

I can assure you that I will continue to monitor this development closely, and will oppose any privatisation plans.

Roberta supports Junior Doctors

Many Labour members across the constituency have been showing their support for junior doctors by joining them on the picket line during recent strikes.

I know that junior doctors in my constituency have taken this action with great reluctance. It is simply a disgrace that junior doctors were forced to take industrial action because the Government refused to take the very real concerns of doctors seriously, and I offered my support in their fight for a fairer contract.

While it is welcome news that the BMA seem to have come to some agreement with the Government over junior doctor contracts, many people are still very wary about what this will mean for our dedicated and hardworking doctors.



Local Elections

Police and Crime Commissioner

Although we did not have County Council elections in Durham this year, on 5 May local people went to the polls to elect our Police and Crime Commissioner.

Local members gave a huge amount of support to our Labour candidate Ron Hogg in his bid for re-election, and knocked on a huge amount of doors in the run up the election.

Many thanks to everyone who got involved in Ron's successful campaign.



Local Elections across the UK

Despite what the national press have been reporting, the recently local elections saw a solid result for Labour across England.

It was of course disappointing to see the number of losses Labour suffered in Scotland, but this represents a unique set of challenges to the Labour Party, and I know that Labour members north of the border will be working hard over the coming years to take back some of those seats.

The result in London was, of course, fantastic to see, with Sadiq Khan sweeping to victory. This represented a triumph of a positive campaign over one built on divisiveness and fear mongering.

I would like to offer my congratulations to Sadiq, and to all of those Labour Councillors who worked so hard to get elected across the country to help fight the unfair policies being implemented by the Government.