

City of Durham CLP Report – May 2018

Durham Issues

Walkergate Safety Issues



Following my report at the last meeting, I have continued to liaise with Durham County Council and the police about the ongoing investigations into the death of a student in the Walkergate complex on 7 February 2018.

As you will know, I wrote to the Minister responsible for the Health and Safety Executive to express my disappointment that the HSE could not oversee the investigations, as this tragedy raises a number of complex and interwoven issues, such as the suitability of the Walkergate development for such a concentration of licensed establishments, and Durham County Council's licensing policy for County Durham.

Since the last meeting, Durham Police have requested a review of Missoula's Premises Licence, and I have written to Durham County Council to support this request. I have also again urged Durham County Council to carry out a full review of its licensing policy, as it is clear that the 'one size fits all' approach to licensing in County Durham is not effective, and does not address the unique challenges a compact city centre such as Durham poses in relation to licensed establishments.

Sadly, the last update I received from Durham County Council did not provide much information, and so I have written to the Minister again to outline how important it is that an external body has oversight of these investigations.

It is vital that the public have trust in the outcome of these investigations, and so I will continue to pursue this matter with Durham County Council and reiterate the need for the investigations to be completed as quickly and comprehensively as possible.

City of Durham Parish Council Elections

Thursday 3 May 2018 saw the first elections for the new Durham City Parish Council.

My congratulations go to Esther and John Ashby, Victoria Ashfield, Carole Reeves and Saul Cahill, our new Labour Parish councillors.

My thanks and commiserations go to those candidates who also fought a hugely impressive and positive campaign, but were sadly not elected onto the Parish Council. Despite the result, they should all be very proud of their hard work over the past months, and I hope they will consider standing again in the future,

It is wonderful to have some Labour councillors back in the City of Durham, and I very much look forward to working with our newly elected councillors, and of course the rest of the Parish Council for the benefit of the city.



Roberta speaks about shops in Durham



Many of you have raised concerns about the current state of the city centre, and in particular about the number of shops that are closing in Durham.

I have raised this issue with the BID team in Durham, and with senior council officers too. It is vital that Durham remains an attractive place for residents, visitors and tourists.

Although many of these empty properties are privately owned, I have pressed the council, the Durham City Board and the BID team to encourage landlords to look at the levels of rent they are charging in Durham. I have also suggested that the council approach the valuation office to enquire if a reduction in rates is feasible in an effort to attract more businesses into the city.

We must recognise that internet shopping is having an impact on many high streets, however I will continue to liaise with BID and Durham County Council to try and ensure that Durham remains a busy and appealing city centre.

MP speaks about impact of Universal Credit

The Trussell Trust recently released figures on the impact that the roll out of Universal Credit is having on people visiting foodbanks in the region. It is shocking to see that the number of referrals continue to rise.

Between April 2017 and March 2018, the Trussell Trust provided 17,237 three day emergency food packages in Durham alone. 5884 of these were for children. As the majority of people visiting these foodbanks indicated that the reason they were attending was due to delays or changes to their benefits, it is clear that the introduction of Universal Credit is having a big effect, and is pushing families into debt and destitution.

I have campaigned on the need for a better structure of support to be put in place that will actually address people's needs, and have joined the Trussell Trust in calling for a Universal Support service, which would assist those transitioning onto Universal Credit, and for an urgent inquiry into the poor administration of the benefits system.

To find out more about the work the Trussell Trust does, you can visit their website at www.trusselltrust.org

Update on UUK and UCU dispute

I am sure that like me, you will be pleased to hear that an agreement has been reached between UUK and the UCU which will end the recent strike action.

Following a ballot, UCU members have agreed to accept the UUK proposals to scrap the proposed move to a defined contributions pensions scheme, and will instead set up a joint panel of experts to review the valuation of the existing scheme.



The UCU has indicated that it will keep its strike mandate live, as both the pensions scheme in question (USS) and the Pensions Regulator need to examine this proposal and determine whether it will be supported.

This is however a big step forward in resolving this dispute, and the suspension of strike action should be welcomed.

Constituency Visits

Roberta visits HMP Low Newton

Following on from my recent visit to Frankland Prison, I met with the Governor of Low Newton to discuss the issues that the prison is facing in the future.

Low Newton is an all women prison and young offenders institute, which aims to provide opportunities for women and young people who have been sentenced or on remand to learn and develop skills to help them plan for a more positive future. This is proving more and more challenging for the staff, as prison officer numbers have been cut dramatically since 2010.



Such cuts only serve to undermine the work that prisons such as Low Newton do in helping prisoners, and I will continue to press the Government for more support for our prisons and prison officers.

Roberta meets pupils at Framwellgate School



Roberta speaking to pupils at Framwellgate School

As you will know, I regularly visit local schools and recently went along to Framwellgate School to speak to pupils on the state of politics and the impact of Brexit.

It was great to see so many young people really engaged with the democratic process, and they had some really interesting points and some excellent questions.

Many of the pupils I spoke to were really concerned about the impact Brexit will have on their future, and felt that the best outcome would be to agree a deal as close to our current EU Membership as possible.

MP visits Do Re Mi Nursery



Roberta opening the new facilities at Do Re Mi

I was delighted to open a new facility at Do Re Mi nursery in Meadowfield, along with Baroness Maeve Sherlock.

The work that has gone into creating this new space is incredible, with new equipment for the children to play with, and wonderful themed rooms full of sensory equipment for child-led play.



The energy and enthusiasm of all of the staff at Do Re Mi nursery is a pleasure to see, and I look forward to visiting again in the future to see how the nursery is developing and growing even further!

Advice Surgery Sessions



Roberta meeting with constituents

I have continued to notice more people than ever attending my advice surgeries over the last few months, with more and more complex issues.

With cuts to local services, and changes to benefits set to continue, many of my constituents are finding it very hard to make ends meet and access the services they so desperately need.

I will continue to work to help residents who need support, and who are struggling to deal with the effects of the unfair and divisive policies being pursued by the Government.

Roberta challenges Education Minister



I recently challenged the Secretary of State for Education over the proposed closure of Sherburn Hill school, and the future funding arrangements of other schools in the area.

As part of a debate on the need for social

mobility, I asked the Minister how schools were meant to provide an education that would increase social mobility if budgets were being cut.

Although the Secretary of State failed to answer my question, he has subsequently agreed to meet with me to discuss this issue in more detail, and I will again ask him what the Government intends to do to protect schools in disadvantaged communities such as Sherburn Hill.

Roberta attends Burma APPG

I attended a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Bangladesh and Burma, as the Minister of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office gave an update on the Government's response to the Rohingya refugee crisis.

While the Minister outlined what the Government is doing to aid the Rohingya refugees, including providing humanitarian support and using diplomatic efforts to try and resolve the crisis.

Despite this work, it is clear that the UK and other EU Governments must do more to assist the Rohingya in returning to Myanmar.



Although a deal has been struck between Myanmar and Bangladesh to repatriate Rohingya refugees, there are still concerns about the safety of refugees, as well as the speed with which Myanmar is allowing them to return. It is vital that any refugees who return are provided with proper safeguards, and I will continue to press the Government to do more to support them.

Visits and Engagements

Roberta attends Commission on the Status of Women



I was delighted to be able to attend the 62nd Annual Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the UN Headquarters in New York. I was present as a delegate of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) which is a global organisation that brings parliamentarians together to drive positive democratic change.

This year, the theme of the Commission was addressing the challenges in achieving gender equality, and the opportunities in empowering women and girls in rural areas. I had the opportunity to attend a number of the CSW forums and seminars throughout the week, and chaired the forum on The Voices of Young Women, which discussed the diverse issues that prevent gender equality in rural areas.

This Commission really demonstrated the value of women parliamentarians coming together to learn from each other, and a number of actions were agreed to uphold the rights of women and girls across the globe.



It is vital that we continue to work hard to keep gender equality issues on the political agenda both in the UK and internationally, and if you would like to read more about my time at the Commission, you can visit my website www.roberta.org.uk.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting



Jeremy Corbyn speaking at the Heads of Commonwealth Meeting

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting recently took place in London and Windsor, where Commonwealth leaders met to discuss how we will jointly face global challenges in the future.

The summit's theme was 'towards a common future' and a number of important issues were discussed, including how to build a more secure, prosperous and fair future for the Commonwealth.

This meeting also saw the UK succeed Malta as 'Chair in Office' of the Commonwealth until 2020. It is vital that all of the Commonwealth countries continue to work together to share good governance, protect the environment and create jobs to ensure the prosperity of our citizens.

I look forward to future meetings, and further action on how to address the key issues we are all facing in the future.

Roberta meets with Sixth Form students in Westminster

I was really pleased to get the chance to meet up with a group of students from Durham Sixth Form Centre on their recent tour of Parliament.

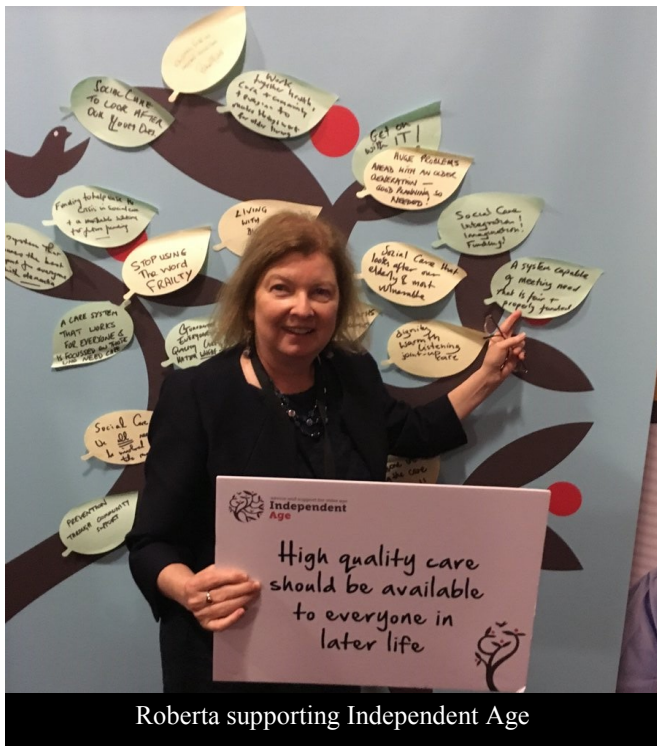
It is always encouraging to see young people engaged with politics, and we had a great discussion about the role of an MP, and the type of work that we do both in our constituencies and Westminster. We also discussed some of the issues facing Durham, and how young people can get into politics.

I really look forward to meeting more students in Westminster, and discussing how they can get involved in politics.



Campaigns in Westminster

Supporting the Independent Age campaign



Roberta supporting Independent Age

The Independent Age campaign aims to give older people support and advice to help them remain independent and live their lives as they choose.

This charity was founded over 150 years ago, and offers regular, friendly contact, as well as free and impartial advice for older people and their families on issues such as care and support, health and money matters.

I was really pleased to be able to highlight the vital work that this charity does, and will continue to support them in the future.

MP supports Keep Britain Tidy campaign

I was really pleased to be able to support the Keep Britain Tidy campaign to encourage people to keep our streets free from litter.

Keep Britain Tidy works to help people reduce their waste, keep our streets tidy, and improve public spaces.

This is particularly important for those of us who live in such a beautiful city as Durham, and I will continue to support the need for us all to reduce the amount of waste we produce and keep our streets clean in the future.

