

Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Auf Wiedersehen, Pet

I hosted an event on behalf of the **Newcastle Gateshead Initiative** in the House of Commons to announce the investment of £2m from the Northern Rock Trust. This is new funding towards a £140m target, with £51m already committed from regional partners. Kevin Whately was just one of many well known personalities who turned up to hear of plans to bring a series of world class exhibitions, conferences and festivals to the region over the next 10 years in Newcastle/Gateshead's "Culture10" programme.



NEXUS Employee of the Month



I presented **Lynne Dickinson** with her award after she was voted Employee of the Month unanimously by colleagues at Nexus.

Lobley Hill Telecommunications Mast Proposal

I joined **Cllr Margaret Duddin** and local residents in their protest against plans to site a telecommunications mast on the pavement in front of the library at Lobley Hill. This is one of a number of mast applications from companies desperate to cope with the increased demand for services from mobile phones.



North Benwell Management Initiative



And I joined North Benwell residents at the launch of the new project, designed to improve local services, increase community safety, tackle unemployment, low educational achievement and poor health.

I was also pleased to present certificates to young people who had made a positive contribution to the local community.

Comment

Yet another month in which **Iraq** continues to dominate UK politics, with the massacre of more than 270 Shia pilgrims celebrating one of their holiest festivals following on from last week's suicide bomb attacks in which 109 people died at the offices of the two main Kurdish parties. The terrorists who are committing these acts are condemned from all sides and their attempts to spark civil war is being resisted by all people of good will in Iraq. Work continues on forming an Iraqi national government so that the people of Iraq can begin to plan their own future.

The Tories, after first agreeing to participate in **Lord Butler's inquiry** into the intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, have now withdrawn support, fearing that the facts of the inquiry may not offer the media opportunities Michael Howard hopes for, and needs. Meanwhile, the list of embittered ex-Ministers, unable to adjust to a position on the back benches and who now see a new career in opposition politics, continues to irritate. But political expediency can be a two-edged sword - how did Clare Short's conscience not bother her so much during the years she was a Minister?

Parliament

THE CHINESE WAY in which the Chinese cockle pickers met their death in Morecambe Bay, and the conditions in which they lived, highlighted many of the problems faced by illegal migrants. Government is seeking to address some of these issues via the **Asylum Bill** and via the measures to deal with citizens from the 10 countries about to **join the EU**.

The UK will benefit from all new EU citizens working legally, paying taxes and national insurance,

and contributing to the economy - a preferable alternative to illegal working that fuels the sub-economy and undermines decent working conditions. Those who come here but do not work will not be able to claim benefits. *Accession nationals must support themselves for at least two years: those who do not may be removed.*

The Commons completed the **Asylum and Immigration Bill** which now goes to the Lords. The Bill seeks to deal with abuse of the system and reduce unfounded claims whilst giving protection to genuine refugees. One clause of the Bill removes a disincentive to people leaving voluntarily when their claims fail, by ending benefits for families of failed claimants, bringing the policy into line with that for single people. Children will be cared for.

I have a problem, however, with the Home Office policy that says that certain nationalities will not be removed because their home country is too dangerous, yet still refuses to allow any support. Another clause simplifies the appeals process to stop people lodging multiple, groundless appeals solely to frustrate removal.

Another substantial piece of legislation was the **Pensions Bill**, the most important piece of pensions legislation for over a decade. For the first time ever, 10 million people in defined pension schemes can rest assured that they will still receive a pension even if their company goes bust, leaving the scheme underfunded. The scandal of workers contributing to a pension scheme for more than 40 years, only to see it vanish overnight, will be ended.

Other pieces of legislation included the **Employment Relations Bill**, the **Sustainable and Secure Buildings Bill**, the **Gender Recognition Bill** - which gives transsexual people the opportunity to gain the rights and

responsibilities appropriate to the gender in which they are now living, but the Bill does **not** force churches to agree to marry transsexuals.

Other Debates included one on the transfer of **call centre** jobs overseas, in which I was able to highlight again the **LloydsTSB** decision. I also took part in a Fabian Society debate about **House of Lords' Reform**.

I met with Health Secretary John Reid to discuss the remarkable advances in the NHS under our government and was pleased to hear that Gateshead is to get **£3.3m for 40 Extra Care Housing Units**. This is on top of the recently announced **£69m for Housing Regeneration and Renewal in Newcastle/Gateshead**.



Constituency

I have met with **Hari Shukla**, of Equality North East, and visited **The Edge**, the new work units on Newcastle's Buddle Road (*below*).



I attended the opening of the final phase of the **Discovery Museum** (*below*)

