

# Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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## **Gateshead Carers Week**

Gateshead's Carers Association invited me to join their celebration of Carers' Week. I used the opportunity to ask Ministers to urgently review the rules that limits the earnings of working carers to £84 per week - anything over, and they lose their entitlement to the Carers Allowance. There's an army of carers out there, unsung heroes, providing invaluable care, day in, day out, and they deserve a fairer deal.

*(right with the Mayor Cllr Maureen Goldsworthy and Natalie Freeman at the Open Day)*

## **Minister Delivered to Region**



As part of the Going for Jobs Campaign, I promised to bring the Transport Minister Stephen Ladyman to the region to show him exactly why and how our roads and transport system are impeding the region's economic development, not least here in Gateshead. I was able to deliver on that promise and he spent a worthwhile day in the region, firstly opening the Scotswood Road improvement scheme, then addressing a seminar on congestion control on the Team Valley and finally at a working lunch I chaired with key regional stakeholders in Gateshead Civic Centre.

## **Water, water everywhere...**



Droughts elsewhere but, in a problem picked up by candidate Gary Haley in the local elections, too much is inexplicably appearing in Dunston. I arranged for Newcastle University's specialist to investigate the source. *(above with Gary and Prof. Paul Younger)*



## **Warm Zone Balloon Launch**

It confused the kittiwakes, and a few of the tourists, when we released 15,000 black balloons from the Gateshead Millennium Bridge. Each balloon symbolised a tonne of carbon emissions saved by Warm Zone's insulation and energy efficiency measures in homes across Newcastle and Gateshead. *(and yes, that was my question too, but the balloons were bio-degradable.)*

*(above with Mayors and Cabinet members from Gateshead and Newcastle)*

## **SureStart Celebration**

If I had to name one achievement for Labour, it would be the SureStart programme. I joined the Mayor of Gateshead at the Bede Centre, just before their Teddy Bear's Picnic, to see exactly how this work is helping the development and nurture of children, literally from before their birth, as well as mums and dads. *(pictured right with the Mayor and teddy bears)*



## Comment

The **new shadow constituency party** will soon be up and running. I know that many members view the transition with trepidation, and I understand that - we've been here before! And I know too that many members do not relish the prospect of having to choose between two sitting MPs for the job of parliamentary representative.

*I honestly wish members did not have to make that choice - there is a danger that what will be a long drawn out campaign will be a damaging distraction. But - we are where we are and a decision must be made in the best interests of the Party and the people of Gateshead.*

However, the re-organisation will present us with an opportunity to revitalise and regenerate our local party and we should take full advantage of it.

We certainly need it! National polls have put the Tories ahead for the last 3 months, ostensibly as a result of Cameron's sudden rash of policies. Wrong! **We** have put the Tories ahead, and, as recent by-elections have shown, **we** have a lot of lost ground to regain.

*We can play our part in turning this round.* The creation of the new Gateshead Constituency Labour Party offers us a great opportunity to put new life into our party; to reconnect with our voters and to win back some of the support we've lost.

In particular, I'd like to see the new party producing a constituency-wide newsletter, a campaigning hit-squad, regular voter-identification work and a real, two-way dialogue with our voters. And I'd like to see lapsed members back on board, those comrades who have become disillusioned - so let's make the change in boundaries an opportunity to reinvigorate the **Gateshead**

## Parliament

### Labour Party.

Fairly straightforward pieces of legislation this past month - I had some correspondence from constituents expressing alarm about the provisions of the **NHS Redress Bill**, but I was able to secure assurances from the Minister. Constituents similarly lobbied me about the **Company Law Reform Bill**, seeking extensions to the Bill's provisions to ensure that companies act responsibly in both an environmental and social sense when they run operations in developing or third world countries. I have considerable sympathy with this view - no-one, with any social conscience, could wish to be associated with, for instance, the ways in which obsolete electronic gear is 'recycled' overseas, polluting the environment and damaging workers' health. However this Bill, which sought simply to modernise company law de-bureaucratise business, and small businesses especially, was not the appropriate vehicle. But the exploitation of desperately poor workers remains something that we must stamp out.

Other legislation included the **Compensation Bill**, the **Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Bill**, the **Children and Adoption Bill**, the **Work and Families Bill**, the **Electoral Administration Bill** and the **Charity Commission Bill**. *Please contact my office for detailed briefings on any of these Bills.*

I made a number of speeches this month, in particular during the debate on **Local Transport Plans** - an occasion that I used *again* to raise the desperate need to improve our public transport and road infrastructure here in Tyne and Wear and the wider North East. I also spoke on the continuing need for **reform of the House of Lords**. I spoke on bus de-regulation in the Transport Select Committee and I hope that the

eventual report will recommend more local control over bus services.



## Constituency

In addition to the events on the front page, I have also attended the Open Day at **Bensham Grove** and met with representatives from the region's **North East digital technology industry** to discuss ways in which we can foster and nurture this growing area of the economy and to help new businesses to flourish.

At the time of writing, I am hopeful of a solution to the **Teen Travel** card problem - the transport authority had to axe subsidised travel for youngsters to cover the costs of concessionary pensioner travel, but I have had recent talks with Nexus, the local government Minister, the education Minister and No. 10 and I *think* we might be on the brink of a deal that will enable this important service to continue.

I have stood, literally, shoulder to shoulder with **Joyce Quin** for many years, fighting for the interests of the people of Gateshead and the wider North East, and I was delighted to join the celebration to mark her elevation to the Lords'.

I also arranged for **Bahal Singh** and **Fahim Manzur**, from the Visible Ethnic Minorities group, to travel with me to London to join **Keith Vaz MP** in an event for ethnic minority communities. How we laughed at their stories about the unreliability of Indian and Pakistani trains - this was just before our train had to terminate at Doncaster, where we were then supposed to catch another train to Peterborough and then get a coach to yet another station where we were supposed to get a train to London along with another 800 weary passengers .....