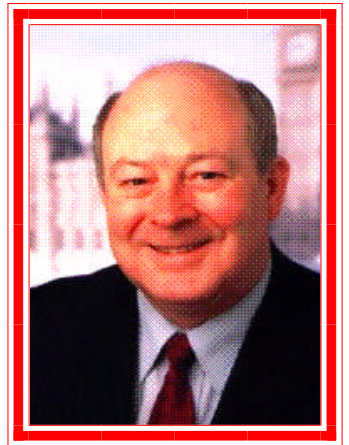


# Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Victorious candidate (Cllr) Pauline Dillon

## *Dunston Teams By-Election*

I take all elections seriously, particularly local by-elections as low turn-outs can make it notoriously difficult to predict the result, especially - as in this case - when we had a controversial local school closure, bus service cuts and a month of bad publicity for the Party. So no party conference for me! But the end result was worth it - a majority of 425 over the Lib Dems, actually a slight swing to Labour and no evidence of Tory revival.

## *Culture Minister Visits Gateshead Library*

I was delighted to be able to join Cllr **John McElroy** in welcoming Culture Minister **David Lammy** to **Gateshead Central Library**. The Minister wanted to see for himself Gateshead's 'Cultural Ribbon' and was interested to see the research and archiving of records of Gateshead's soldiers killed in WW1 carried out by volunteer Maureen Bails (left)



## *Education Minister Visits Newcastle College*

I joined **Education Minister Bill Rammell** on his visit to the College's new Life Sciences building which offers state of the art education to catering and beauty students. I also discussed the difficulties faced by students in the wake of transport fund-



ing problems and how they might be resolved and the discussions with Governors from Gateshead College about a feasibility study to examine and assess the benefits of merging the two colleges into one institution.



## *Stronger Voice for Patients and the Public?*

Community Health Councils were replaced only recently by PPI (Patient and Public Involvement in Health) Forums. Now they too are to be replaced, and I met with representatives from the **PPI Gateshead Hospitals Forum**—to hear their concerns about the new bodies, LINKs (Local Information Networks) that are to replace PPIs. I really don't care what the body is called as long as it has effective scrutiny powers over health trusts and truly represents the views and aspirations of patients and their relatives through proper democratic accountability.

## *Changing Face of Gateshead*



I was glad to join local residents, Council Leader **Mick Henry**, Bridging Newcastle Gateshead Chair **Jim Coulter**, and **Michael Long** from Lancing Homes, who will build 195 new homes and complete the transformation of the **Sunderland Road** site

into a once more thriving community living in a mix of good quality energy efficient family homes and apartments.

## Comment

After a damaging few weeks for the Party, that I feared might have had a detrimental affect on the Dunston Teams by-election, the **Party Conference** turned out to be a more healing event with a good final conference speech from **Tony Blair** and good speeches from **Gordon Brown** and other senior ministers. Such is the nature of Party Conference these days. More a platform for set piece speeches than the rough and tumble of policy debates of yesteryear. It certainly seems to have avoided any local difficulties and the by-election result turned out better than it might have looked at the beginning of the campaign.

I liked Gordon Brown's speech too, and appreciated the change he had made to his usual style to reveal more of the man behind the tub-thumping statistics. And now I hope that we can draw a line under inter-factional warring between the kamikaze generals and get on with the business of government - in the last few weeks, it has seemed as though the only ones who want to win the political war has been the 'poor bloody infantry'. Frankly, a period of silence and self-restraint would be a small price to pay for five more years of a Labour Government.

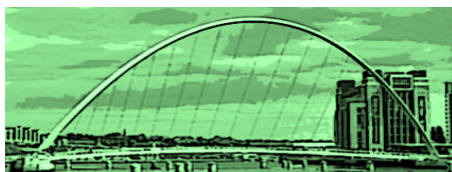


## Parliament

Parliament resumed after the recess, with the remaining stages of the **Road Safety Bill**. Another bill was the **Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Bill**. This Bill - which I, and other trade unionists have long campaigned for - covers corporations as well as most public sector and voluntary organisations. An organisation will commit an offence if the way its activities are managed by its senior managers lead to a death. The death has to be a 'gross' breach of the duty of care, which means that there must be conduct falling far

from what can be reasonably expected of the organisation.

The Bill is a distinct improvement but, as I pointed out during the debate, there are a number of possible weaknesses and the Home Secretary assured me these would be looked at in committee.



## Constituency

Obviously, with the House of Commons in recess, I have been able to spend the summer working in the constituency helping constituents and raising Labour's profile.



Two big speeches this month. **Northumbria Victim Support's Regional Conference** in Gateshead's Swallow Hotel (above), where I used the speech as an opportunity to remind the Home Office that any review of the criminal justice system must keep the needs and the rights of the victims of crime at its heart, and at a **Friends of the Earth conference on Climate Change**. Climate change has gone beyond the 'is it happening' debate; we have to act, and act now, and we can't leave it to governments to do it all for us. 'Not me, gov(ernment)' is not an option, as I told the meeting, we all have a part to play. *Full text of speeches on website*

Once again I took part in the **Great North Run** - by attending the pre-run dinner at the invitation of my old friend Brendan Foster. After a week of training I managed to complete the 'courses' in a time close to last year's effort.



In addition to the Ministerial visits mentioned on the front page, I have also attended the launch of the **Association of North East Councils' Manifesto** which sets out a strategic framework for the Region's economic development, including plans for investment in jobs, and my personal hobby horse of the importance of improving our transport infrastructure.

At my meeting with Gateshead Hospitals PPI Forum we discussed a range of issues, including the **Help the Aged report** that revealed that some old people in hospital, too frail to eat without help, are left virtually to starve. The Forum promised to investigate Gateshead's hospitals record and let me have their findings.

I also launched an internet petition this month, in newspapers and on the radio, calling on the government to change the rules relating to **Carers' Allowance**. At present, the carer cannot earn one penny over £85 without losing the entire allowance of £46. I think there should be a sliding scale to avoid sudden loss of income. I urge members to visit my website, and sign the petition!

Work is also progressing on my ambition to have a **register of reliable tradespeople** available to Gateshead's pensioners - I hope that with the council's support we can put in place a register that elderly and vulnerable people can consult for minor as well as major household repairs. Too often unscrupulous, so-called 'tradesmen' take pensioners' meagre savings and give shoddy work in return.

Members will recall that, in July, MPs were instructed to cease seeking support in the **selection of Gateshead's Labour candidate** by the NEC pending the setting of a timetable, and I have honoured that decision. The timetable will soon be agreed and I will begin contacting members to discuss this important issue as soon as it is Authorised by Regional Office.