

# Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

David Clelland MP

www.david-clelland.org.uk

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## *Bus Services Funding*

Local transport authority Chief Executive **Bernard Garner** and I met with Local Government Minister **Phil Woolas** and Bus Minister **Gillian Merron**. I am very concerned that the concessionary fares system will have to be partly funded locally yet again next year. I have made it clear to transport ministers and the Secretary of State that the bill to make concessionary fares a national scheme must include provision to create a level playing field by reimbursing Nexus the £7.2m it has cost us so far.

## *Olympic Games - Benefits for Gateshead?*

I was slightly surprised to find that Dave Anderson and I were the *only* North East MPs to attend this important briefing in the House of Commons about the delivery of the 2012 Olympics! The point of the meeting was how we can best maximise opportunities arising from the Olympics in the North East. It is vitally important to ensure that this event - as important as it is - does not deprive regions like ours of resources, so this meeting provided a good opportunity to discuss our strategy for ensuring we keep on top of developments, particularly at a time when there are forecasts of escalating costs! (right, with One North East's Stacy Hall, Jon Armstrong of the London Olympics Organising Committee and Tim Cantle-Jones from Sport England)



## *Gateshead Town Centre Redevelopment*

I had a very fruitful discussion about the redevelopment of the town centre with Tesco's Graham Haydon White. Tesco own most of the buildings in the area bordered by Jackson Street, High Street, West Street and Ellison Street and are now looking seriously at how best to combine their plan for a larger store with the community's need for a vibrant, modern and attractive Town Centre. This redevelopment has been too long coming but I was pleased to learn that positive and detailed proposals should be ready next year. I was also pleased to learn that the green agenda will be very much to the fore in the planning of the new Town Centre



## *Gateshead College - a College for the Future*

I met David Cheetham, College Principal and Kim Davies, Deputy Principal to discuss the **Further Education and Training bill**. The huge investment made by this government in FE has done much to ensure that it is taken seriously as an alternative route to qualifications. However, I am less enthusiastic about the fact that FE remains too much the junior partner to Higher Education and hope that this bill will begin to address that issue. We were also able to discuss the ongoing development of the new college site on Gateshead's Knowledge Campus. Following the ending of merger talks with Newcastle college several new ventures are being developed to extend opportunities for students.



## *Caring for Carers*



I addressed the **Gateshead Crossroads 'Caring for Carers' Conference** held in the Sage. My on-line petition asking for a review of the all-or-nothing rule that applies to the **carers' allowance** is still gathering signatures on my web site. I shall be taking a small delegation from the **Gateshead Carers' Association** to present the petition to **10 Downing Street**. The full text of my speech is on my web site.

*With college students on a recent visit to Parliament*

# Parliament

The Queen's Speech included Bills on **pensions** which will extend coverage of the state pension and link increases to earnings, **welfare reform** and the replacement of the child support agency; security in our own homes with Bills tackling **anti-social behaviour, reforms to the criminal justice system, a new legal services board and immigration control**; and dealt with the biggest threat of all to our security - **climate change** - with a Bill to protect the environment and secure long-term energy supplies.

A full list of Bills can be found on my website but I highlighted the bills that will have particular impact for the people of Gateshead in **my speech in the Commons**. Briefly, whilst I welcomed most of the content, including the **Roads Congestion Bill**, I queried whether we really needed yet another **local government Bill**, with yet another attempt to introduce elected mayors.

I also tabled several **Early Day Motions**. Commending **Gateshead Council** for winning an international prize for reducing carbon emissions in its vehicles; calling on the government to promote **high speed rail links**; calling for changes to the **Carers Allowance** and another calling for a **fully integrated national motorway** system to end the economic isolation of the north east, and reduce regional disparities.

I do not want to inundate members with material so the full text of my speech, Early Day Motions and other work in Parliament can be found on my web site or from my office for those members who do not have access to a PC.

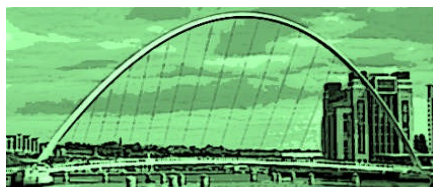
New legislation from the Queen's Speech presented to the House of Commons included the **Offender Management Bill** and the **Welfare Reform Bill**. This controversial

Bill, following on from an equally controversial White Paper, seeks to reform housing benefit and incapacity benefit, and help the disabled or previously sick into work. My view is that there must be *real* help available, and training geared specifically to the disabled, not just punitive sanctions.

I asked **Transport Secretary Douglas Alexander** what plans he has to ensure road pricing would be preceded by improved public transport. Without that, road pricing will become just another unpopular tax - a point I made in my speech to the House. I pressed him in the **Transport Select Committee** about obstacles to economic development in the region and the need for improvements to our transport infrastructure.

Given the amount of money spent in the region on **lottery tickets**, I challenged **Jack Straw**, the Leader of the House, on the absence of North East projects from the short-list of 29 for awards from the national lottery Living Landmarks fund - yet 8 from the South West were included.

And in **Prime Minister's Questions** I asked about the anomaly in the Carer's Allowance that has resulted in a drop in income for many carers.



## Constituency

I met with constituents taking part in **lobbies of Parliament** about the local government pension scheme and about the new National Offender Management Bill.

I addressed the **Internet Watch Foundation** conference launching their **national poster campaign** warning of the dangers to children

posed by the internet. It can be a wonderful gateway to entertainment and knowledge, but the internet also holds the potential for harm to the unwary and naïve.



Internet Watch Foundation Conference, Newcastle

I also met with representatives from the Gateshead Tesco team to discuss the long overdue redevelopment of **Gateshead Town Centre**. The great achievements on the Quayside are coming to a conclusion - notwithstanding Calliope of course - and full attention must now be given to the Town Centre and the High Street. Tesco, as owners of much of the area concerned, will be central to the process.

I attended the **Regional Labour Party Gala Dinner** held in Gateshead Civic Centre. This major fund raising event was addressed by David Miliband, Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Affairs. As warm-up act, I welcomed guests and introduced our host for the event, Baroness (Joyce) Quin



As this will be my last report before Christmas may I extend seasons greetings to all and hope for a happier and more peaceful new year.

