

# Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

David Clelland MP

www.david-clelland.org.uk

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## Gateshead Youth Council

I was happy to support the fun day organised by the Youth Council's Youth Events team in Saltwell Park - great activities, all focused on young people, including a disc jockey training session (which nowadays involves 'scratching' the records) as well as information on housing, education, employment and volunteering. All funded by Gateshead Council - another example of how the Council is reaching out to disengaged groups across the community.

## Olympics coming to Gateshead!



Just as the Games closed in Beijing, the Mayor raised the Olympic flag at Gateshead Stadium which will be a training ground, hopefully also with an ice rink or snow dome too!

## Welcome to Eaga

I visited Eaga's new customer services centre at the Watermark in Gateshead to see how staff deal with the 32,000 calls each week from people applying for Warm Front energy efficiency grants or advice about making their homes greener and more



affordable to heat. Rising fuel prices and the need to protect the environment make their work increasingly important. Since 2000, the Warm Front scheme has helped more than 3,000 households in the Tyne Bridge constituency, giving out grants worth almost three million pounds! (above with government affairs manager Ann Toms)



## Summer Fairs

I joined the Deputy Mayor to open the Dunston Summer fair and attended the Bensham Fair at Brighton Avenue School. Both, like the Lobley Hill Festival I went to last month, were well-attended, and my congratulations to local Party members who were both prominent in the organisation and on the day. Its exactly this sort of dedication and commitment that keeps the Party very much to the fore of local communities and I have nothing but praise for local Party activists who devote so much of their time to keeping up the Party's profile.

(top left with Deputy Mayor Joe Mitchinson, bottom left with Cllr Kevin Dodds chatting to local police, left with Cllr Gary Haley and ward chairman Sharif Abbas)

## Comment

This time last year, the Labour Party was riding high in the opinion polls, Gordon Brown - as new Prime Minister - had dealt masterfully with floods and terrorist attacks, and we were looking forward not only to what promised to be a good conference (and was) but also to the possibility of a general election. But Events intervened. Some - like the abolition of the 10p tax band - were self inflicted problems created by the Government itself but everything else - the 'credit crunch', rising fuel prices, rising food prices, the downturn in the UK housing market - stems from international events and the world economic downturn. I remain of the view that the UK has a strong basic economy, and that we will weather the storm without diving into a long recessionary period, but fear for the future is now the defining factor in voters' perceptions. As a result we lost the Glasgow East byelection.

The difficult economic situation almost certainly kept Labour voters at home in Glasgow. Add to that peculiarly local factors - huge question marks about why a sitting MP should resign, internal dissension, squabbles over the candidate - plus the looming presence of the SNP, and the result was always going to be tricky. I thought we'd just hold on but the result turned out to be an unmitigated disaster. And now, against all the odds, we have another by-election in another Scottish constituency with many of those same factors in play!

I'd like to think that the Labour Party's Fight Back has started, with the recent announcements on Stamp Duty, and other proposals to help the struggling housing market and to enable local authorities to develop much-needed social housing and also the measures to help people with rising energy costs. In a sense, the 'fight back' actually started in July when the Government froze fuel duty for a full year and

increased the Winter Fuel Allowance for 12 million elderly and vulnerable people.

But there has been no let-up in the negative media scrutiny to the extent that it overshadows everything Ministers do. Such as the recently launched plans for regulating pre-school child care to ensure that very young children receive quality educative care. A good scheme that comes on top of the **180 new schools** that have been opened in the biggest new school building programme for 30 years - but good news is ignored by a media obsessed by the 'should/must/will Gordon go?' debate.

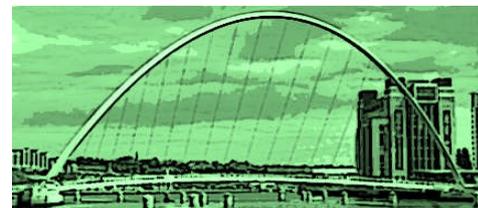


## Parliament

Obviously, with the House in recess, only a few weeks of legislative business have taken place since my last report, but members might be interested to note that the **Employment Bill** received a Second Reading, and the **National Insurance Bill**, the **Health and Social Care Bill**, the **Housing and Regeneration Bill** and the **Crossrail Bill** had final readings after their consideration in the Lords. Statements that will be of interest to members include one made by the Education Secretary about the delays in processing this summer's SATs results and Communities' Secretary Hazel Blears' statement on **Communities in Control** which was accompanied by a White Paper that contains a number of flawed proposals in my view.

Before the House rose, I had the opportunity meet with the **Prime Minister** We discussed the general political scene and I also took the opportunity to specifically raise a number of issues - **support for carers**, and the (then) ongoing Freightliner site saga in particular. In addition to the usual **Northern Group** and **PLP meetings**, I met with representatives from **Age**

**Concern**, and the **Local Government Association** and the **CIU** to discuss the serious problems facing the clubs world.



## Constituency

Recess started well, with the **Felling ward party Social** - as always, a really good night out, with good entertainment, good food and good company as demonstrated by the photo below!



I visited the excellent and hugely improved **Kingsmeadow School** to express my support in the wake of unfair media coverage. I was able to discuss this with Education Secretary Ed Balls when he came to 'state-of-the-art' **Gateshead College** at my invitation, after I told him of the fantastic opportunities on offer, and I welcomed **Treasury Minister Jane Kennedy** and **regional minister Nick Brown** to Gateshead for an economic summit. I met with **Gateshead Council's Leader** to discuss issues such as the Town Centre redevelopment and the welcome news that the Freightliner site logjam is finally broken. I visited the **Mecca Bingo** to support the promotion of energy-saving lightbulbs and appeared on the **Politics Show**. I am currently visiting **Party branch meetings** and have attend 4 so far. While members are concerned at the general political situation I detect no support for the press fervour for a leadership contest. Rather a desire to get on with finding solutions to the problems our country is facing.