

# Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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## **Local Transport Act**

I was delighted to welcome Transport Minister Paul Clarke to Newcastle to launch the new *Integrated Transport Authority* under the new Local Transport Act. The ITA will replace the Passenger Transport Authority (PTA) and brings with it new powers to coordinate transport policy across the county and improve public transport - especially bus services. As I said in Prime Minister's questions last week "this is a good Labour act of Parliament which has the potential to bring about the biggest improvement in local public transport for many decades. The Tories opposed the act and have committed themselves to repeal it - another good reason for people to vote labour at every possible opportunity".

*Pictured with the Minister and ITA chair Cllr David Woods (left)*



*Above with James Turner Head of NE Region*

## **Big Lottery Fund**

Roughly 300 staff work in the Northern Regional Big Lottery Fund new offices in Newcastle, and I was delighted to see on my recent visit that our constituency, as compared with many others, does very well indeed with awards ranging from the £1m plus to refurbish Gateshead Central Library down to smaller sums in support for the Gateshead Carers' Association, Gateshead Age Concern, and many more local projects.



## **Bobby Moncur - Freeman of Gateshead**

I joined councillors, fellow Aldermen and guests at the ceremony to confer the Freedom of the Borough upon former Newcastle United footballer, Bobby Moncur. In addition to his football record (we could do with his like back in the team today!) and being a Gateshead resident of many years, Bobby has also made a fantastic contribution to local charities and has worked with the Mayor in support of Cancer Research UK.



## **Dunston Hill Primary School**

I visited the newly-built school, speaking to the Head and Deputy, staff and pupils as well as the Chair of Governors about the fantastic new facilities in the school. Not only is it a wonderful building in itself, light and airy with generously-sized classrooms, but children are almost bound to benefit from the resources available - in addition to the well-equipped library, there's an entire suite of computers, enough for every child in the class, to say nothing of the very pleasant playground - what a change from the Victorian, leaking old school with its asphalt yard! And, because it share a site with Kingsmeadow Comprehensive, primary school children can share Kingsmeadow's excellent sports facilities. *(left with deputy Head Julie Watkins)*



## Comment

Firstly, I was conscious that the election of Barack Obama heralded a new dawn in global politics. A speech is just that - a collection of words and phrases, and what really matters is not the rhetoric but the action. And Barack Obama has hit the ground running. Living up to his promise of responsibility and fairness in government, we've seen a sea-change in the American stance on the Israel-Gaza situation, the announcement of troop withdrawal from Iraq, the ending of the Guantanamo Bay prison camp, and the development of a financial bail-out package along British lines plus an evident determination to restrain the salaries and bonuses of bailed-out bankers.

Similar concerns about bonuses to bailed-out bankers are on this side of the pond too, with the Treasury Select Committee grilling some of the culprits.

But the central problem of *all* economies is how to get banks lending again. Clearly we are facing unprecedented economic challenges, a global credit-drought and even the latest interest rate cut has not yet succeeded in unlocking the credit squeeze. Banks simply aren't making enough loans available at low enough interest rates to get things moving again. And we don't have the luxury of time, when sound businesses are going under thanks to the lack of credit, and the unemployment figures are climbing. For that, I welcomed Peter Mandelson's idea of creating a 'People's Bank' using the post office network to offer a complete range of financial services, which might just succeed in kick-starting the usual lending and credit activities.

And lest we forget, the press have a range of agendas, not one of

which favours the Labour Government. Hence the barrage of press stories about *Labour* Lords claiming payments in exchange for influence. The press seem to think its ok for those Lords (mostly Tories) who are also QCs and Judges to speak in Parliament on matters that affect lawyers.

My personal view is that the boasts about influencing legislation probably arose out of vanity and possibly alcohol - there are rules in place that compel their Lordships to declare any financial interests just as there are in the Commons so I cannot see how they could possibly have delivered legislative changes for cash. And if there is to be a ban on Lords having outside interests - should Ruth Rendall stop writing books? Should Lords Puttnam or Attenborough cease making films?



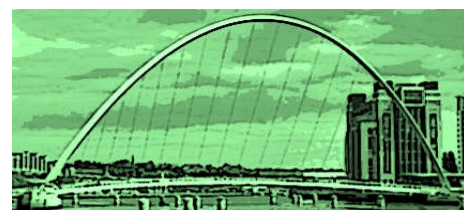
## Parliament

A busy Parliamentary session, as the Bills outlined in the Queen's Speech are introduced including the **Welfare Reform Bill** - which promises more help to get the disabled and workless parents back to work, the **Banking Bill** - which establishes a permanent statutory regime for dealing with failing banks and makes new provision for the governance of the Bank of England by establishing a financial stability committee, the **Saving Gateway Accounts Bill** - which offers a national cash saving scheme for those on lower incomes, the **Business Rate Supplement Bill**, the **Policing and Crime Bill**, the **Corporation Tax Bill**, the **Coroners and Justice Bill**, and the **Political Parties and Elections Bill**.

Other announcements of interest are that English cancer patients will, from 1 April, be able to receive free prescriptions for the drugs they need and that free

school meals will be piloted across England to increase the take-up of school meals. Gateshead has been invited to take part in the pilot.

I have also attended the usual PLP and Northern Group meetings as well as meetings of the Gibraltar Group and the Clubs Group. I have also met with representatives from the Showmans' Guild and Sigoma,



## Constituency

I was particularly delighted to take part in the launch, here in Tyne and Wear, of the first Integrated Transport Authority created under the powers of the new Local Transport Act. I am very optimistic that the Act will make it easier to regulate bus networks through 'quality contracts' so that passengers get the routes, fares, frequencies, integration and pricing structure they need. It truly has the potential to transform bus networks around the country. However, because secondary legislation and new guidance and regulations will take time to bring in, and with the Tories dedicated to scrapping the Act, we have the small problem of winning the general election to overcome if people are ever to see its full benefits.

**It is with great sadness that I have to report the deaths of three colleagues, comrades and friends**

**Councillor Maureen Chaplin (pictured overleaf) who brought grace and charm to the office of Mayor of Gateshead, former Councillor, Mayor and Alderman Les Carr, a stalwart member of the Tyne Bridge CLP for many years and former Councillor, Mayor and Alderman Joe Hattam, a towering and influential member of the Council.**

**All will be sadly missed.**