

# Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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## ***BoKlok Showhome Launch***



Following the successful public launch of this new housing initiative at St James' Village in Gateshead, I joined representatives from the Home Group, the Council and the construction industry to celebrate this innovative project - energy efficient, affordable housing for people to buy through a range of options (left, watching Cllr David Napier and Home group's Peter Stott perform the official opening, Swedish style - sawing the log brings good luck, apparently)

## ***Water Aid Launch***



Northumbrian water is a company that has always taken its global responsibilities very seriously indeed - as well as corporate activities in poor countries, the company encourages members of staff to personally contribute to help others - so I was delighted to be able

to express my support for the practical work that Northumbrian Water carry out as WaterAid to bring fresh, clean water to poor communities. (above with Northumbrian Water's John Mowbray)

## ***Fair Trade Fortnight***

I joined International development Secretary Douglas Alexander to mark Fair Trade Fortnight, by showing just some of the items it's possible to buy, knowing that the supplier has been paid a fair price for his produce.



## ***Time for Change***

Led by charities like Mind, mental Health media and backed by Big Lottery funding and Comic relief, this is the most ambitious programme to end the discrimination faced by people with mental health problems. 1 in 4 people will have a mental health problem at some time in their life, so it's an issue that affects everyone. But there's still a massive social stigma, this campaign hopes to ensure that people affected by mental illness - or their relatives - get more support and a fairer deal, and is well worth supporting.

(left with Campaign Director Sue Baker and volunteer Yvonne Stewart-Williams)

## Comment

The financial crisis continues to dominate the headlines with news of the **Royal Bank of Scotland** posting the biggest loss in UK history - at a time when former RBS boss, Sir Fred Goodwin, the man generally hailed as the instigator of the disaster, made away with a pension pot of over £16m. Without public funds, there would be no RBS to pay his pension so taxpayers are right to conclude that it's their money filling his crock of gold. We can just about stomach bailing out the banks, but bailing out the bankers is quite different and I for one want to see some of Sir Fred's money clawed back.

Generally, many people are baffled that so much money is being spent on a banking sector which now refuses to lend - and created the problem in the first place - so three cheers for Northern Rock's decision to start lending big-time. Let's hope it, plus the other measures, kick in soon.

I was pleased to see the response in America to our **Prime Minister's address to Congress**. It was one of Gordon Brown's finest speeches—but you had to watch it live to recognise that as the British media played down what Americans recognised as a great speech. Speaking of a 'global economy in crisis and a planet imperilled', he showed himself to be a serious policy-maker, reaching our across national boundaries seeking reform and regularisation of the global financial system.

Coincidentally, at a time when we're remembering the 25th anniversary of the **Miners' Strike**, another British icon - the **Royal Mail** - comes under scrutiny. Even opponents of the government's proposals agree that it needs to change - the digital revolution has replaced letters with texts and

emails, and private companies have taken chunks of the lucrative business-mail market. Royal Mail is dragged down by a £9bn pension fund deficit, making the company insolvent by any standard. But we're living through proof that the private sector can't magic away financial zeros. Reform is needed but must be based on a guarantee of a six day a week postal delivery, a single price for any letter in the UK, a publicly owned Royal Mail and a guarantee of upgrading the Post Office network.



## Parliament

Obviously, Parliamentary proceedings have been dominated by announcements dealing with the financial crisis - the **interest rate reductions** and the **Banking Asset Protection Scheme** - and debates arising from those issues.

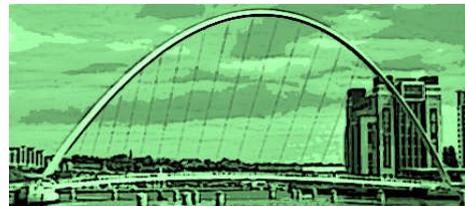
Amongst other pieces of legislation, the House of Commons gave a Second Reading to the **Apprenticeship, Skills and Learning Bill**. I am a strong supporter of this Bill - over the past 11 years, our education system has been transformed, with almost half the youngsters leaving school not just with GCSEs but with *good* GCSE grades (and Gateshead is one of the best achieving authorities in England); more than 3000 schools have been refurbished or rebuilt, and more young people than ever before are going to university or college. But there is more to do to get all young people and adults the qualifications and skills they need, and this Bill seeks to do that.

The House also gave a Third Reading and completed the remaining stages of the **Saving Gateway Accounts Bill** - this Bill is designed to help people on low incomes or on benefits to save. The House also gave a Second Reading to the **Northern Ireland Bill**, which marks one more step in the transformation of Northern

Ireland by setting up the framework for democratic devolved governance. Sadly, such progress is probably not unconnected to the callous killings of two soldiers and a policeman, but I take heart from the unprecedented denunciation of dissident republican terrorists from all quarters of Northern Ireland.

I met with a constituent attending the Parliamentary launch of a new protocol for babies born with developmental dysplasia, and joined Parliamentary colleagues in meeting with representatives from De La Rue's.

I also met with the new Egyptian Ambassador where we discussed the ongoing problems in the middle East and Egypt's pivotal role.



## Constituency

Since my last report I have met with representatives from **Sport England** to discuss the impact and effect of the Olympic plans on the region - one of the areas of concern was the difficulty in quantifying local contractors who had secured work I put this to the Sports Minister on the floor of the House and reminded him of the promise we were given that all regions would benefit from the 2012 games. He promised to publish the details.

In addition to the functions overleaf, I also attended a meeting with the **Leader of Gateshead Council** in which we discussed a number of issues, including my personal bugbear - the location of **HMS Calliope**. Kevan Jones will be the sixth Defence Minister I have lobbied but I will press once more for the relocation of this facility to a more appropriate location to allow for the final phase of quayside redevelopment!