

Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Warm Homes in Gateshead

The Gateshead Warm Zone is a government-backed initiative supported by Gateshead Council and the Gateshead Housing Company, designed to eradicate fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency across all homes in Gateshead. The project, due to start on 1 February, follows a similar scheme in Newcastle and will assess whether a house will benefit from free loft and cavity wall insulation and central-heating measures. Non-qualifying homes will also be able to benefit from substantially reduced insulation costs.

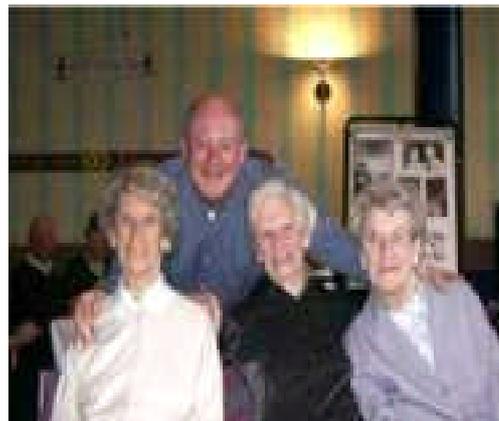


Health Campaign Launch

Sadly, it was too damp to actually stick up the campaign poster but I was glad to be able to help launch this Benwell campaign which highlights the benefits of breastfeeding and tries to smash some of the taboos about breastfeeding in public.



100 Years Young

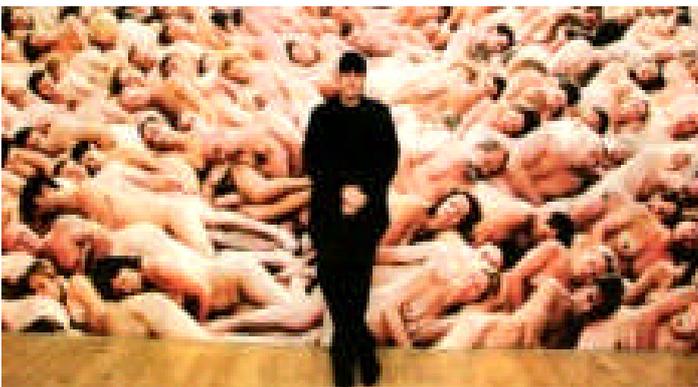


I was truly delighted to be a guest at my aunt Eadie's 100th birthday party. The party lasted 5 hours as auntie Eadie - who still goes out dancing three times a week - spent as much time on the dance floor as she did chatting to guests.

(pictured left to right, my mother, who will soon be 90, auntie Eadie and auntie Anne, the baby of the family at only 88. The genes must be good!)

Spencer Tunick at Baltic

Full marks to whoever encouraged New York artist Spencer Tunick to create his latest work on Tyneside - the press coverage has been phenomenal, with double page spreads in the Guardian and other national newspapers as well of course as our local press and endless TV and radio coverage. The exhibition is definitely worth seeing and no, I was not a participant



Comment

If a week is a long time in politics, the last month must have been interminable for the Lib Dems as their leadership contest fell apart. Finding a brand new, shiny leader to replace one with a drink problem must have seemed like a good idea - once - but then, George Galloway probably thought it was a good idea to appear in the Big Brother House. At least Menzies Campbell is hardly likely to be involved in sex scandals or prance around in a red leotard.

But whilst these might provide almost endless opportunities for mirth, in real life we face local elections in only three months, never an easy task and certainly not so after 8 years in government.

On the domestic front, the **Education White Paper** in particular raises challenging issues; **Welfare Benefit reforms** worry some members; the restructuring of the **police authorities** is causing some disquiet; problems with **pensions** remain.

In the run-up to the local elections we need to resolve issues surrounding these policies and then concentrate on winning for labour in Newcastle and Gateshead.

The recent deaths of British soldiers in **Iraq** threatens to re-ignite the debate about the war. Whilst I understand the reasons for opposition to the invasion, whatever the viewpoint it's important to focus on the *fact* that Iraq's fledgling democracy daily grows stronger; and that more and more citizens are now able to lead ordinary lives, free from the tyranny of either Saddam Hussein or the chaos of insurgency. No death is ever acceptable but these British soldiers - and others who have lost their lives, whether supporting forces or Iraqi - have died to enable the

growth of a stable Iraq, with all the benefits that will bring to the Middle East and the world.



Parliament

Legislation completed by the House of Commons included the **Equality Bill**, the **Work and Families Bill**, the **National Lottery Bill**, the **Police and Justice Bill** and the **Criminal defence Services Bill**.

Legislation not quite going to plan was the **Racial and Religious Hatred Bill** where amendments proposed by their Lordships were subsequently also agreed by the Commons against the wishes of the government.

Statements included one from the **Education Secretary** who announced a review of the current systems to ensure that no-one convicted or cautioned for a sex offence could work with children. Other Statements included the announcement of a **Primary Care and Social Care White Paper**, and a Green Paper proposing **reform of welfare benefits**. This introduces new measures designed to help disabled people back into work - one of the 7 pilot projects has been running, with considerable success, in Gateshead.

I met with the DWP Secretary of State to express my general but cautious support for the reforms - welfare support should be to cushion, not to smother - but I also pointed out that the reforms need dedicated staff input at a time when DWP are cutting benefit agency staff numbers.

The debate on the **Education White Paper** continues - ironically against the background of the **biggest single rise in GCSE results in over a decade**. I have taken part in meetings and brief-

ings on the subject.

I have also had a series of meetings with parliamentary colleagues, transport authority representatives and Ministers in an attempt to resolve the problems that will arise in Tyne and Wear from the **introduction of free bus fares for pensioners**. Some money has been secured to help the Metro deliver free fares but we are still around £5m adrift. I remain deeply concerned, a point I made to the **Deputy Prime Minister** in Questions and am following up with the Prime Minister

I chaired a **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association seminar**, attended a reception in **Downing Street** and had meetings with the **Leader of the House** and the **Chief Whip**, representatives from the **Showmen's Guild**, **British Airways**, **Universities from the North East** and the MD from **Express Engineering** on regional issues.



Constituency

The usual round of surgeries were held.

I launched the start of **Gateshead's Warm Zone** which offers free energy-efficient measures like loft insulation and wall cavity insulation to householders whose fuel bills take up more than 10% of their income.

I discussed local health issues with the chief executive of **Gateshead PCT** and took part in a poster campaign, designed by the **Sure Start** project in Newcastle's Adelaide Terrace to promote confidence in women to breastfeed their babies in public.