



News
from
Westminster
Jul/Aug 2022

No. 153



Report from Sharon Hodgson MP



Campaigning in Castletown, for one of my regular street surgeries.

Britain is broken

The over-heated housing market means huge profits for investors but unaffordable rents and no chance to get on the ladder for first time buyers. Our public services are weaker than they have been for years – schools can't cope with the learning backlog from Covid, and the NHS is on its knees. Meanwhile crime and anti-social behaviour are rife, unchecked in many of our local communities. Not all of this is the government's fault, although most of it is. But instead of putting us on a sustained path to recovery, Britain has been falling behind under the Tories because we have had no economic growth, spiralling inequality across 12 years of Tory economic mismanagement. Austerity policies have meant areas like Washington and Sunderland West have been left behind, and profit has been put before people and their livelihoods.

The news that the energy price cap will be rising by 80% will be terrifying for families across the UK. It won't be long before we need to start putting the heating on as the temperature drops and that is even before the cold winter nights kick in, and millions of people – including young families and pensioners, won't be able to pay for it. Two in five children across the North East are already living in poverty and fuel

poverty is becoming the norm. With winter on its way, people are scared about how they'll even survive. We have never seen anything like this in our lifetimes, and the Government hasn't risen to the scale of the challenge. While the Tories have been focused on their own leadership contest, leaving a zombie Government behind them, Labour has spent the summer announcing a package of policies that would give a pay rise to the lowest paid workers and provide energy support to help families through this winter. This includes pledging to make the minimum wage reflect the cost of living by making the Low Pay Commission take the cost of living into account and pay the full rate to all over-18s; freezing the energy price cap so that people won't pay a penny more than the already sky-high prices this winter, saving an average earner on the minimum wage over £40 a week paid for from the record profits made by the oil and gas giants. Labour would make sure bills come down in the long term, too. We'll invest more in sustainable, British, energy sources that mean we won't have to rely upon expensive fossil fuels.

The choice to be next Tory leader is down to the two continuity candidates who only offer more of the same; two Johnson allies whose fingerprints are all over the state the country finds itself in today. The support that the Tories are offering just isn't cutting it and we need a Labour Government to give people the support they need and deliver a fresh start for Britain and Northern Ireland. Across summer we have seen unions resort to industrial action across many sectors, from journalists to barristers to rail workers and postal workers. Tory failure to tackle the cost-of-living crisis means food, energy and petrol costs are soaring for working people who are experiencing record falls in real pay and are being bashed by extra tax rises. As a pro-worker and pro-business party, it is up to Labour to keep holding the Government to account while the country suffers because of its inaction. I know that strike action is the very last resort for workers and I extend as always my full solidarity to striking workers. CEOs must come to the table with Unions – where talks consistently fail, we need a Government willing to step in and facilitate talks. More industrial disputes are expected across the winter and I will do my utmost as a constituency MP and proud trades unionist to urge CEOs and companies to the table.

Young People's Project visit.



A few weeks ago I visited the Young People's Project, which works alongside Together For Children. The program helps children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds enjoy healthy food and nutrition during the school holidays. I was also glad to hear that Sunderland is one of the 75 local authorities set to benefit from specific funding for Family Hubs, the Tories version of Sure Start, something for which I have long campaigned to protect.

North East Pride



In July I took part in the Northern Pride parade and celebrations, meeting up with friends from Labour, UNISON and other organisations from across the movement. It was a fantastic day out, marking its post-pandemic return, and a proud reminder that the North East is united in the fight against hate.

Nissan announcement.

Nissan's manufacturing plant is the one of the largest employers in our region, with over 7000 direct workers and plans to grow this workforce further in the coming years. As news broke last month that owing to an unrenewed contract with Renault, Nissan will wind up their casting plant in early 2024, I was very concerned for the jobs of the workers in that operational area.

I therefore immediately met with Nissan and the Unite trade union representatives separately to talk through the news. Nissan assure me that no jobs will be lost as workers will be redeployed into other roles given the workforce is growing in the wider business anyway. However, the representatives from Unite do have concerns about the viability of some such redeployments and I will maintain open communications with both Nissan and Unite to help in any way I can as this progresses.

APPG Levelling-Up inquiry

I co-chaired the recent APPG on Left Behind Neighbourhoods inquiry session into Levelling Up Economic Outcomes, where alongside other MPs I collected evidence from a panel of guests on their experiences of creating, retaining and spreading wealth in local communities. Levelling up, or at least the ideas behind levelling up, are vital to areas like Washington and Sunderland West, where local economies should be driven by community wealth that can propel local ambitions for infrastructure to support all residents.

Faroe Islands delegation visit.



In July I visited the Faroe Islands with a Friends of the British Overseas Territories delegation - an autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark, in the North Atlantic.

Delegations are important to establish relations with all political parties, given nations last longer than any one government. I visited their Parliament – The Løgting – which claims to be the oldest parliament in the world and met Faroese MPs (pictured) to discuss the powers which have been devolved from Denmark.

I met with the head of the Faroese foreign service Gunnar Holm-Jacobsen, to discuss the UK's military interest in the strategic territory and how this has been affected by the rise in tensions with Russia and NATO. With over 90% of all Faroese exports being fish, I also learnt how important the fishing industry is in trade talks, and how bilateral relations can support the British fishing industry. The trip was filled with important conversations about trade, devolution, defence and beautiful, albeit wet and windy, scenery.

Sharon Hodgson, Washington & Sunderland West Constituency

Units 1 & 1A, Vermont House, Concord, Washington,

Tyne & Wear NE37 2SQ

Tel. (0191) 417 2000

W: www.sharonhodgson.org E: hodgsons@parliament.uk Twitter: <https://twitter.com/@SharonHodgsonMP>