



News from **Westminster** Apr-May, 2023

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Report from Sharon Hodgson MP



Our three newest Labour Councillors: (L-R) Beth Jones, Joanne Chapman and Catherine Hunter. (Image: Maria Herron, 2023)

Local election results

Across the last two months, Labour members across Sunderland have been campaigning tirelessly ahead of the local elections, and should be proud of the results we achieved. Labour held Sunderland Council with five Labour gains, with the Tories being knocked into third place across the city. We know this is undoubtedly somewhat affected by the national picture, but the majority of the gains and voteshare increases are because of the hard work over many months of our Labour group candidates, Cllrs and activists knocking on doors, delivering leaflets and spreading Labour's positive message to residents across the city. Huge congratulations to our re-elected Councillors, and even bigger congratulations to our new Councillors, Beth Jones in Washington Central, Joanne Chapman in Washington South and especially Catherine Hunter in St. Anne's ward. You will all do amazing work and should be incredibly proud of your achievements! I was proud to join many of you on the doorstep and it remains that Labour is a party driven by its volunteer activists who give hours to the campaign, spreading Labour's message and values. The prospect of a better Britain is in our grasp; where hard working people are rewarded, waiting lists are cut, our streets are safe again and

the cost of living pain is eased. This set of local elections has proved incredibly important to Sunderland Labour, solidifying Labour's control of the council and giving a huge mandate once again to our excellent People's Manifesto (2022-2026). But more widely, this set of local elections has been a huge hammer home that the country is ready for change, and crying out for a Labour Government.

Budget and ongoing strikes

The last couple of months have seen yet more inaction and insult by the Government over striking workers. Nurses, civil servants and rail workers were among those returning to the picket lines. Labour has repeatedly called for the Government to enter negotiations with trade unions to no avail and instead has sought legal action and the curtailing of workers' rights. Their continued pursuit of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill is undemocratic, unsafe and unworkable. I fear the bill will only exacerbate strikes and lead to worse disputes. At the same time, the Budget in March did nothing for ordinary working families. The only surprise was a handout for the richest 1% and their pension pots, papering over the cracks of 13 years of failure, the Tories downgraded growth – but Labour will not allow us to keep bumping along a path of managed decline. Labour's mission to secure the highest sustained growth in the G7 that will allow us to create good jobs and productivity growth across every part of our country, so that people can get the opportunities they deserve, public services survive – and eventually thrive once again – and we can build a better Britain where nobody is left behind.

March of the Living memorial visit, Poland

Recently I was honoured to attend the 'March of the Living' in Poland as part of the UK delegation. The event commemorating victims of the Holocaust included a march between Auschwitz and Birkenau, followed by a deeply moving memorial service and tours of numerous significant sites, including the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, that brought to light the history of the Jewish community in Poland that spanned a thousand years prior to the Holocaust. The memories of my time there will stay with me forever, as to take part in this commemorative event was incredibly powerful. I am grateful for this opportunity to pay my respects and celebrate my Jewish heritage.

RIP Les Simpson, from Washington



It was with great sadness that I heard of the passing of Les Simpson. Anyone who knew Les was in no doubt about his love and dedication to our local industrial history, and in particular the valued local heritage of the Washington Banner Group, and the part mining has played on our communities. He will be sorely missed.

FOTBOT Northern annual dinner speech, Newcastle

I was proud to deliver the Keynote speech at the Friends of the British Overseas Territories (FOTBOT) Northern Dinner in March. I've been a keen supporter of our Overseas Territories for many years now, so it's been great to come across a charity with strong links to the North which is working hard to spread awareness of them and the issues they face amongst the public and amongst politicians. I know that when Labour is next in Government, we will be staunch supporters of the Overseas Territories, and I'm glad that so many of my colleagues on the front bench have shown an interest in learning more about them.

Visit to Mickey's Place, Sulgrave Washington.



In April, I visited Mickey's Place in Sulgrave with Washington North Ward Councillor, Jill Fletcher. Mickey's

Place is a fantastic example of a community coming together to support others during hardship - they are a warm hub and provide help with loneliness, social welfare advice, and referrals for people in their time of need, as well as providing healthy meals. I was very impressed with the variety of items offered in the hub's pantry. Service users can pay a small charge for a bag full of fresh food.

Universal Infant Free School Meals debate and Mayor of London meeting.

In April I spoke in a Westminster Hall debate on funding for universal infant free school meals, which has not risen in line with inflation. Schools and providers are being asked to do more with less once again by the Conservative Government – I told the Minister about the benefits of free school meals while raising important concerns from the sector. In March I also met with the Mayor of London's team following Sadiq Khan's announcement to fund universal free school meals for all primary aged children in London. Having met with the sector beforehand to listen to their concerns, I asked questions surrounding kitchen staffing and capacity and was able to relay assurances back to the sector. This is a brilliant initiative from the Mayor of London, and I will continue to call for this to be mirrored nationwide, as hungry children cannot learn.

NHS Dentistry reform debate, Commons Chamber



Last week I spoke in the Chamber on the state of our NHS dentistry system, after the Conservative double whammy of handing out a 8.5% price hike to everyone's dental costs during the midst of the worst ever cost-of-living crisis – whilst also seeing the closure of the BUPA dental practice in Pennywell. Everywhere you look you're paying more and getting less under this Conservative Government. We cannot accept that dental care becomes a luxury, available only to those who can afford it. These are political choices being made by the Tory Prime Minister and his billionaire buddies, who have never had to worry about the cost of anything such as this, or understand the effect this record increase will have on the cost-of-living pressures facing ordinary people in the North East. We need a Labour Government that will prioritise healthcare access for all, clean up thirteen years of Tory under funding and mismanagement, and abolish the Prime Minister's precious non-dom status, to provide the treatment and dental care that the British people deserve. We should not have to suffer because of Tory chaos and managed decline, that leaves dental care a luxury for the few.

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