



# News from **Westminster** Aug-Sep, 2023

No. 163



## Report from Sharon Hodgson MP



*Sharon opens the new Barclays pod in the Galleries, Washington.*

### **New Barclays Local Banking Pod opening, Galleries**

On the 31st August, I attended the opening of the Barclays local Pod in Washington. Following the announcement of the planned closure of the Barclays branch in the Washington Galleries, I was, like many of my constituents, deeply worried that this decision would leave many members of our community without proper access to vital services crucial to maintain their financial freedom. In-person banking remains incredibly necessary, but following conversations with the Barclays team managing this transition, I am confident that nobody will be left alone or forced to use online banking they cannot access under their new system. Their Pod which is now fully operational in Washington Galleries, will be staffed by Barclays colleagues who worked in the previous Galleries branch and offer face-to-face support, Monday through to Friday, from 9.30am to 3.30pm. This commitment to maintaining their important in-person presence, despite the changing landscape of highstreet banking, is very encouraging, but I will continue to monitor this transition closely to make sure we can maintain fair and equal access for all members of our community.

### **A-Level and GCSE exam results day, 2023**

In August many students celebrated their school exam results and did incredibly well despite the levels of disruption and lost learning they experienced in recent years. These students suffered through the Tory mismanagement of the

pandemic, and worryingly Ofqual (England's exam regulator) has found that differences in levels of attainment and progression to university between state and private school students has increased since 2019. This worrying statistic shows how students in private education are thriving while our state education system continues to struggle. This highlights how the charitable status of private schools entrenches educational inequality and shores up the 'class-ceiling'. By removing this charitable status, we could reinvest in state education and begin to close this growing gap for our young people. I look forward to a Labour Government that works to redress this balance and consign such stark inequalities to the past.

### **By-elections**



In July I had the pleasure of joining our newest Labour MP Keir Mather on his campaign trail in Selby and Ainsty. Keir secured a hugely successful win in the by-election by overturning a 20,000-strong Tory majority. I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Selby and Ainsty, and it was great to catch up with northeast MP candidates Alan Strickland running for Sedgefield, and Sam Rushforth for Bishop Auckland (pictured). There will be more by-election campaigning following the resignation of Mid-Bedfordshire MP Nadine Dorries, and the by-election called in Rutherglen and Hamilton West after 12,000 constituents signed a petition to remove SNP MP Margaret Ferrier. This is a brilliant opportunity to build back Labour's strength in Scotland where support is key for General Election success. While on all accounts Mid-Bedfordshire is a Conservative stronghold with a majority of 24,000, and the Rutherglen election is set to be tight in the marginal swing seat, Labour's victory in Selby stands as a testament of what can be achieved when we come together to fight for change.



***"The Bread and Butter Thing" visit, Pennywell***



In late July, I was invited to attend the *"The Bread and Butter Thing"* in Pennywell Neighbourhood Centre. The hub opened by Gentoo and RE:GEN enables members to get £35+ worth of nutritious food, for £8.50. It was brilliant to meet those who are providing such a valuable service, working to support the local community. Since opening in November, they have sold over 2,200 grocery bags and continue to work diligently to support our community. The food insecurity that has arisen over the last 13 years of Conservative austerity, coupled with the lasting impact of the disastrous Tory mini budget has left us with a cost-of-living crisis that is still devastating families and households. As we run up towards an election next year, stark realities such as this prove time and time again that this country needs a change of Government, to put an end to this cost-of-living crisis.

***Together for Children (TFC) visit, Sulgrave***



I had the pleasure of visiting one of the activity programmes run by *Wear Here 4* over the 6-week school holidays. This summer, a wide variety of programmes are being delivered by *Wear Here 4* across Sunderland for school-age children as part of their free school meals holiday activity provision. The programmes centre around sports, well-being, theatre, arts, and crafts, and provide a great opportunity for children to socialise with friends and try something new. I was particularly happy to see the children at the former *Top Club* bouncing around on 'kangaboos' and even having a silent disco.

***Visit to Gentoo Homes, with the Northern Housing Consortium, Washington***



I recently visited 20 Gentoo properties on the Whinell estate with the Northern Housing Consortium. The Northern Consortium have been working with their members to highlight the work done to improve the energy efficiency of homes across the North, reducing their environmental impact and saving tenants money on their bills. I was delighted to see first-hand the benefits of the retrofit work, which included the installation of new windows, doors, external wall insulation, flat-roof installation and a whole-house ventilation strategy. The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings for the 20 properties have jumped from Ds and Es, to a healthy C. Tenants have seen an improvement in thermal comfort and will benefit from lower energy bills. I look forward to seeing similar repairs being completed around the constituency.

***Sunderland Youth Council meeting***



I met with the Sunderland Youth Council to discuss the ongoing campaign for Universal Free School Meals. It was great to hear from the Youth Council about their experiences with school meals and their thoughts on how we can improve school meals for everyone. I look forward to seeing how the Youth Council progress with their interests in politics, with some considering standing to be a local councillor in the future.

**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](http://www.sharonhodgson.org) E: [hodgsons@parliament.uk](mailto:hodgsons@parliament.uk) Twitter: <https://twitter.com/SharonHodgsonMP>**