



# News from **Westminster** Dec, '23 – Jan, 2024 No. 167



## Report from Sharon Hodgson MP



*Proud to share this moment with my good friend Dame Diana Johnson and other Labour friends elected with us on the 5th May, 2005. In the lobby voting for her amendment, which passed with the help of Tory rebels.*

### **New year message**

I would like to wish all of us across Washington and Sunderland West, and especially our new friends in Gateshead South, a very happy New Year. 2024 will undoubtedly be a demanding year, with the much-anticipated General Election as well as the Mayoral, Police and Crime Commissioner and Local Elections which are scheduled for the 2nd of May. It is now almost four years since Keir was elected leader of the party and it is a testament to his leadership that Labour holds an 18-point lead over the government. I look forward to continuing the hard work for our communities and to seeing you on the doorstep campaigning to get a Labour Government. Just as the Labour Party rebuilt Britain post-war, harnessed the white heat of technology in the 1960s and built a more compassionate society in the 1990s, this Labour party too will get Britain's future back in the 2020s.

### **Contaminated blood scandal**

The Government recently suffered its first defeat since the 2019 election, as over 100 Tory MPs defied the Whip.

The vote was for an amendment to the Victims and Prisoners Bill, which will set up a body to deliver compensation to victims of the contaminated blood scandal – the worst treatment disaster in the history of the NHS. Many victims who were disgracefully left out of the initial compensation scheme will now be eligible for compensation. Although the amendment had Labour's firm support and had been introduced by Dame Diana Johnson MP (pictured left), it was the 22 rebel Tories who voted for the amendment rather than just abstain, that were the deciding factor in its passing. This marks a victory for the victims, and a tremendous failure for this Prime Minister.

### **Rwanda vote in Parliament**

It was an embarrassing month for the Conservatives as they faced another rebellion, with over 10% of Conservative MPs abstaining on the vote to introduce the Government's second attempt to send asylum seekers arriving in the UK to Rwanda, after the Supreme Court declared that the Government's initial scheme was unlawful. Shamefully, these abstentions came from right-wing Tories who believed the legislation didn't go far enough. As the Government continues to play politics with people's lives, Labour has a compassionate plan that will end the backlog, give asylum seekers the support they need and live up to our commitments to international human rights legislation.

### **Upcoming by-elections**

Following yet more scandals for Tory MPs, another by-election could be on the cards in early 2024. The MP for Blackpool South, Scott Benton, faces being suspended from Parliament after seriously breaching parliamentary standards. If the suspension passes through the Commons, a recall petition will be triggered allowing his constituents to call a by-election. Benton could be facing the same fate as disgraced Tory MP Peter Bone, who was recently recalled by his constituents. A by-election will be held in Wellingborough, potentially as early as February. The surge in by-elections triggered over the last few months is emblematic of this Tory party, who have been hit with a wave of sleaze and scandal. Only Labour can provide an honest and hard-working Government to get Britain's future back.

## NUJ action



I share the concerns of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) about the proposed 450 job losses at Reach PLC which mark the third round of major redundancies for them in 2023 alone. This will have a drastic impact on local journalism, including at The Chronicle and The Journal in Newcastle, particularly news editing teams and the sports news desk which have taken a major hit. Numerous MPs and I wrote to Reach PLC's CEO to voice our concerns. I have also met with representatives of the NUJ and plan to work with them on this issue going forward.

## APPG school food meeting

This was a month full of activity for the school food campaign. We held our APPG meeting on School Food where we focused specifically on the challenges surrounding food allergy risks in schools. Our varied agenda worked to represent voices from every affected group including from the families of those living with allergies, from food technology teachers and from union representatives, speaking on behalf of school food catering staff. Our speakers achieved a fantastic snapshot of how allergy prevalence and the shocking lack of standardised statutory allergy guidance for schools makes everyone in schools less safe, and illustrates the ways in which guidance, training and policy must exist in a framework geared towards inclusion and equality of access.

## NEU/CPAG launch - The Universalism Multiplier report



I had the pleasure of partaking in a panel event for the National Education Union (NEU) and the Child Poverty Action Group's (CPAG) report 'The Universalism Multiplier'. This report, which specifically focused on the experiences of parents and teachers of the Mayor of London's ongoing universal free school meals scheme shines a fantastic light on the breadth of change that a universal school meal offer brings to school settings and family households. Universal Free School meals is the great leveller, and I am so excited to see this cause that I have been championing for over 15 years really come into its time where I feel we are closer than ever. It was a privilege to share the stage with fantastic youth activists and educators as we fight for change.

## Israel-Hamas war

As the devastation in Gaza continues, I am deeply concerned to hear the numbers of innocent civilians who are being killed and I firmly support the International Criminal Court's right to investigate all actors in this conflict. We have had several Urgent Questions in Parliament on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, during which the Government detailed the role they are playing to help bring about a sustainable ceasefire. As this crisis continues, we must continue to push for a two state solution, as it is the only option that will provide peace, security and statehood that is so needed for Palestinians and Israelis. Whilst we strive for this solution, I was pleased to see the Government follow Labour's calls and ban those committing settler violence from entering the UK. Following the UN's 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, I wrote to the Government to ask what they are doing to help investigate crimes of gender-based violence on October 7th and to support survivors. I have also asked the Minister for Women and Equalities to confirm that the UN Human Rights Council would clearly condemn the gender-based violence perpetrated and wrote an article in The House Magazine on this issue. Link to article here: <http://tinyurl.com/4etr6psv>

There is no better time than now to encourage your family and friends to join the Labour Party. Join here, by using this link here: <https://labour.org.uk/members/why-join-labour>

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>