

Holyrood Briefing – April 2009

SCOTLAND'S FIRST POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION

I had the privilege to take part recently in Scotland's First Poverty Truth Commission, which met in Glasgow City Chambers.

The event, organised by Faith in Community Scotland and Church of Scotland Priority Areas, brought people of faith from across Scotland together to listen to the experiences and testimony of people living with poverty and its impact on them, their families and communities.

I was privileged to be invited to be a Commissioner along with, amongst others, Bob Winter, Lord Provost of Glasgow, Mario Conti, Archbishop of Glasgow, Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan of Strathclyde Police's Violence Reduction Unit and Rt Rev David Lunan, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

It was a very exciting event to be involved in and it was powerful to hear first hand of the experiences, for example, of young people who felt their community was stigmatised, of a woman fleeing domestic abuse, of families having to live with gang violence and the struggle of kinship carers. I am looking forward to how we can build on the event.

I am keen to hear your views on how best we can tackle inequalities and injustice across our communities.

ROBERT WRIGHT

It was with great sadness that I learned of the death of Robert Wright, who contributed so much of his time, energy and ability to improving the lives of people across the community - and this was despite his own ill health.

He was a man who inspired me and many others. He was always challenging, seeking action on a whole range of issues, yet he did so with great grace, humour and warmth. His kindness and personal support meant a great deal to me.

He shall be sadly missed. My thoughts are with his family.

VISIT TO GREATER POLLOK CARERS' CENTRE

I was delighted to welcome Iain Gray MSP to a meeting with Greater Pollok carers. He came along to learn more about the fabulous work done by the Centre in supporting carers and to hear first hand the challenge facing carers every hour of every day.

Iain was very impressed by the event. One of the most powerful messages from the carers was that they should be treated by agencies like social work and health as partners in the care of their loved ones and not people to be ignored or patronised.

In Parliament I have lodged a motion supporting the campaign of Enable which is highlighting the huge pressures on elderly carers of adult children with learning disabilities. This can be a huge burden and a source of great anxiety to the parent and it is important they are properly supported.

The Running Out of Time campaign is asking that local councils establish how many elderly parents are in these circumstances in order that they can be given the help they need.

POLLOK CREDIT UNION

I recently lodged the following motion in Parliament, congratulating Pollok Credit Union on another first!

That the Parliament notes the important role of credit unions within the Glasgow Pollok constituency, across Glasgow and throughout Scotland; in particular, congratulates Pollok Credit Union on its unique and pioneering decision to set up an enterprise trust to take over the running of Pollok Post Office, manage a daycare nursery and offer a budgeting service to those with multiple debt problems, thereby securing jobs and services in the local community and beyond; recognises the real opportunity that these partnerships can provide in offering financial services and money advice to communities feeling the impact of economic recession, and considers that all possible ways by which further such enterprises can be encouraged should be explored.

JOHANN LAMONT SPEAKS OUT

It has been another interesting and varied time for me!

Inclusion Glasgow, which supports adults with learning disabilities to live independent lives, invited me to their Dragon's Den event, where a number of individuals were to make their pitch for some financial support for their 'bright spark' ideas for small business ventures.

I was invited to be a Dragon - which, I am surprised to say, my family and colleagues seemed to think was a role for which I was born! - and we had great fun as we heard the great plans that were put forward. It was not the mega-bucks of the TV programme but it was an inspiring example of how a little financial help - and a lot of support - can change people's lives.

I visited **Lourdes Primary School** one Monday recently to share with the pupils in P6 classes what life is like in the Scottish Parliament.

I had a fabulous time listening not just to their questions but to their opinions and views on a whole range of issues. They also entertained us with singing, playing and poetry recital.

As someone who can be a little grumpy and sleepy on a Monday morning it was a great start to the week! I was simply bowled over by their professionalism, enthusiasm and excellent behaviour.

Students from **St Paul's High School** and from **Rosshall Academy** visited the Scottish Parliament on separate occasions in recent weeks. Both groups showed everything that is great about the young people in the constituency.

On both occasions the students asked tough questions but did so with confidence and politeness and with a real interest in the issues they were highlighting.