First Year Recollections

Firstly thank you very much indeed for electing me as your MP for Kensington. It has been a busy year and a whirlwind transition from being a local councillor and the Deputy Mayor of London, to being your MP for Kensington.

In Parliament
Arriving with 181 other “newbies” after the election last year we were immersed for the first week in training, and learning some of the traditions and customs of the House, but also of course finding our way around! There are more passages, secret staircases and doors than in a Harry Potter film, and everyone I met, including the most experienced, explained that they too were yet to master their way around! The older committee rooms with their carved wooden panelling, and pictures of predecessors peering down from the wall, really give a sense of the history and significance of the House.

Having had a business career and been elected to almost every tier of local government I know it is important to discover how to make the system work. Fortunately I am old enough to have known many of the Government Ministers for some time and thus I already had some useful contacts, but needed to set about getting to know the rest!
events to meet the Ministers, and learn about the work of their departments. I think these were an opportunity for them to see us as well as for us to meet them! We were all invited to No.10 which was very exciting.

I received masses of briefings from hundreds of organisations, businesses and charities who wanted to catch our eye, and inform us of their work. There are over 200 All Party Parliamentary Groups and up to 30 events organised in Parliament on any day. I was keen to learn about a whole range of things, but realised that I would have to curtail that instinct!

All of this is the backdrop to the Chamber – which is the part you all know best from the television. The House sits on most weekdays, and with a majority of 12, it is not unusual to see the Prime Minister and all the Cabinet members in the voting lobby as every vote counts equally. As a result, we have been spending many late nights going through the voting lobbies. I found the fact that I was not able to organise my own timetable and diary quite difficult to get used to, as sadly it means that I cannot come to as many constituency events as I would like to.

**Debates**

In the House, the Minister will speak first to start a debate, and if you wish to contribute you must be there from the start. The Speaker will have a list of those who have requested permission to speak and will choose a speaker from each Party in rotation. We have all had to learn the correct form of address and Parliamentary etiquette in the Chamber. Most debates are time limited – for example 3 – 4 hours – and usually those that wish to speak can do so (although there are often a number of disgruntled members in the tea room afterwards who did not get called!).

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Visiting No. 10 Downing Street

Attending meetings in Parliament

Making my Maiden Speech

Speaking up for London Taxi drivers in Westminster Hall Debate

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are useful for highlighting or focussing on a particular topic, and the Minister has to respond after both sides of the debate have been heard. Additionally, at the end of every day we have “adjournment debates” where a member can raise an issue and the Minister responds. It is customary to stay and support the MP if the subject is topical or relevant to your area.

I was elected to the Science and Technology Select Committee which meets weekly and covers a fascinating array of topics that are important to us all. During the year, we have visited CERN, and I have spent time shadowing one of the Professors at Imperial College’s studying regenerative National Heart medicine. Further detail of the topics the committee have covered can be found here.

My role in Parliament is to make sure that Kensington is always represented when we are considering new legislation. Examples of this include the recently debated ‘fairer funding’ for schools, which I believe would have a detrimental impact on schools funding in London. We have had a meeting with the Schools Minister and the Leader of RBKC to make our point more powerfully.

Much of our time in Westminster is spent between the main House “the Palace of Westminster” and Portcullis House the new building which is reached via the cloisters and then a tunnel. Many select committees and other events are held in Portcullis House and most MPs also have their offices there and even further afield. The chimes of Big Ben resonate throughout the building to chivvy us on our way. Our office is in the original Palace building, above the Chambers.

Constituency
I spend most mornings in the Constituency with
Crossrail plans, Thames Water, tackling local drug and alcohol addiction and Hep C. I then hop on the tube to Parliament to work through the business of the day, the diary, letters and follow up on the meetings I have attended. The most effective way to get things done, and make a difference is to speak to the Ministers either in formal meetings, or in “Tea Room surgeries” to make them aware of the consequences of what they are proposing, or to highlight something that is vital for Kensington. For some meetings I bring in RBKC colleagues – such as the Leader of our Council, Nick Paget Brown – or else I can convene stakeholders in order to discuss the detailed implications of legislation.

We hold open surgeries in the Constituency most weeks, which gives me and the team the opportunity of going through more complex cases. However if it is just a case of writing a letter on your behalf, we can usually sort this out via email, which allows us to deal with cases more promptly. If you are contacting us about a matter that is the responsibility of the Council, we shall of course refer it to them and your councillors to follow up.

**The Team** we have split our workload into:
- Constituency casework – John Sweeney
- My work within Parliament – Hannah Evans
- Constituency outreach – and liaison for all Constituency events and meetings – Milly Walker

The team also attend local meetings, which gives you a chance to get to know them and we always have a team debrief.

In the office we have received over 150,000 emails this year. We read them all, and we aim to respond to those that need our assistance as soon as we can. We are always interested and grateful to hear your views, especially about...
when I want to contribute to a debate. My views on current legislation can be found on my website (here), but unfortunately due to the huge volume of automated campaign emails we receive, we are often unable to send individual responses.

Local activities
From the office we have contacted 15,000 constituents, held 25 “meet your MP” events, and I have visited 17 of our local schools. Do please invite me to your school – I am happy to come to an assembly, an event, or meet a group of pupils. Many schools have also taken up the opportunity to visit the education department here at Parliament – please find more information here. It is an excellent resource.

I have attended 200 meetings with residents so that I can listen to your concerns and problems. Please do invite me to any of your Residents Association events or meetings and I shall certainly attend if I can.

We have also welcomed a number of groups to Parliament – so if you would like to visit, please get in touch. You can also go on a formal tour which can be booked in advance (although please note that tours of the Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben) will be suspended from 16th December due to repair works).

We have recently received responses to our Carnival questionnaire. As a local resident I am aware that there are many contentious issues here that need resolution, and strong feelings on both sides. We received over 1,000 responses from residents and this survey has been independently validated by ComRes. This research project was entirely funded by local residents. I continue to meet with the Police and with representatives of the organisers, and I look forward to taking forward your ideas and
We fundraise for local research projects, and would be happy to hear from you if you feel you would like to contribute.

I take the responsibility of being your MP very seriously and welcome any comments you have. I produce a brief newsletter every couple of months and if you would like to sign up to that please email the office.

With best wishes,

Victoria

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