

December 2020 Newsletter - John Cryer MP

Tel: 0208 989 5249, Write to: John Cryer MP, 6 Gainsborough Road,
Leytonstone E11 1HT, Email john.cryer.mp@parliament.uk
Website: <https://www.johncryermp.co.uk/>

December 2020 Newsletter

Dear Resident

I hope that you are keeping well as we approach the Christmas holidays.

Whilst I must of course move onto covering the urgent issues of our time, for the sake of much needed levity my team and I have devised a short Christmas Quiz, which you will find at the end of this report. I hope you enjoy testing the old grey matter and I will reveal the answers in 2021!

Brexit

We have been teetering on the edge of a no-deal Brexit as you are probably keenly aware. It is very clear that ministers' claims of possessing an "oven-ready" deal were simply propaganda and it was a very dangerous claim to make under the circumstances.

I have always been very critical of the European Union but I certainly do not support a no-deal Brexit. I would add that the EU is famous for being ruthless at negotiations, perhaps because figures such as Michel Barnier spend their lives doing nothing but negotiating without having to bother with pesky matters such as fighting elections.

It may be that parliament will be recalled between Christmas and the New Year if the prime minister does manage to secure a deal. In that case, voting against the government means voting for no deal and no one should pretend that this is not the case. The likelihood is, therefore, that Labour MPs would be put in an invidious position with supporting the deal being the least worst option.

Coronavirus

I look forward to the day when I do not need a section in my report on the pandemic.

The past few weeks have been a real rollercoaster, with sources of real hope and new anxieties. We have had the second lockdown which appears to have had a modest impact on infection rates, but they are on the rise again along with news of a new strain which we do not yet know what to make of. We are now in the newly constructed Tier 4.

The vaccine is being rolled out and gradually will help us move out of this unsettling period, provided the largest possible number of those eligible receive it.

The government, it seems, knew that its risky Christmas break should not go ahead some time ago but failed to reverse that decision perhaps fearing a parliamentary vote. Whatever happened, we have seen more delay and obfuscation. The panicky decision to move into Tier 4 straight away put lives at risk as thousands flocked to railway stations, followed by the deployment of police officers.

Public sector pay freeze

The pay freeze for public sector workers outside the NHS being announced is a slap in the face to millions of hardworking people.

Whilst it is only right to ensure that NHS workers receive an uplift there were others putting themselves in harm's way throughout the pandemic, from teachers, police and firefighters to refuse collectors.

Rishi Sunak insists this is not the beginning of a return to austerity, but he is sending a clear message about who it is he expects to foot the bill for coronavirus. I raised this in parliament and asked the chancellor to release the Treasury's assessment of the pay freeze (assuming that such a thing exists).

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and the Labour Party

I have said repeatedly on the record that anti-semitism is a serious problem in the Labour Party. It is not for nothing the EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission) has produced a report about this issue and if you want to read the same you can find it here:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/ymchwiliadau-ac-archwiliadau/investigation-labour-party>

Islamophobia – following my email on the above,

I was also contacted by Labour Muslim Network about a report they had

commissioned into the experiences of Muslim members of the Labour Party. This report highlights yet another problem the Labour Party faces, with clear examples of Islamophobia. The Labour Party should be no place for bigots: standing up for the marginalised is in our DNA. I have raised the issue in my capacity as Chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Again, I would like to thank those people who have been in touch about this issue, especially those who have shared their own personal experiences and concerns in Islamophobia.

Cronyism – PPE and Procurement

It is becoming quite clearly on a weekly basis that there is likely to be a major public sector procurement scandal from the current crisis.

We've had the appointment of Dido Harding to head up Test and Trace having previously been head of NHS Improvement; this has been followed by her becoming the interim head of the National Institute for Health Protection. Previous heads of its predecessor organisations had clinical backgrounds. Baroness Harding does not.

Contractors from firms have come in to 'assist' on a pro rata daily rate seeing them paid several thousand pounds per day, often for things like communications, rather than getting things like the Test and Trace system to actually work.

Businesses have been springing up as PPE suppliers with little or no history of PPE supply to the NHS. Many of these companies have been looked into by the press and colleagues in Parliament and there appear often to be links between Tory donors and many of these companies.

The head of one of the largest political lobbying companies was brought into advise the government. He then advised the companies clients in writing of the second lockdown before MPs or the public knew.

The Government had to quickly look at getting large amounts of PPE as the Pandemic took hold. No one is disputing that although if the government had not taken an axe to the NHS over the past 10 years things might have been different. I have been contacted by local businesses who offered to provide PPE and I put them in touch with the DoH although getting answers from the government on this has proved

persistently difficult.

There is something clearly wrong at the heart of much of this procurement and it has the whiff of the rot that set in around Tory governments of the 80s and 90s when corruption became endemic (for a comprehensive assessment of what happened then, look at MPs For Hire by Mark Hollingsworth).

Dominic Cummings

I do not really know what difference Mr Cummings's departure will make to the functioning or policy of the government. However, I tend to think that when a non-elected official becomes a major story it's a problem for any administration as we found when in government.

Mr Cummings should have resigned months ago over his failure to stick by the rules and the fact that he did not do so has, I suspect, undermined public faith in government policy.

EDM: Suspension of No Recourse to Public Funds

I recently spoke about NRPF (8 October 2020) in a House of Commons debate and argued that, with the advent of Covid, a very high proportion of migrants who face having no recourse to public funds will have been on, and in some cases still are on, zero-hours contracts, so their employers have no incentive to furlough them. From one day to the next, they go from being employed to not being employed, literally overnight. They are then in the position of having no recourse to public funds and rapidly face destitution.

I have now tabled the following Early Day Motion in conjunction with Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants:

That this House believes that the government has a duty to ensure that everyone living in the UK is protected from both the health and financial impacts of Coronavirus; understands that long before the pandemic No Recourse to Public Funds restrictions have pushed migrants and their families into poverty and homelessness; further recognises that migrants with NRPF have been forced to choose between continuing to work throughout the pandemic or providing for their families; is deeply concerned that migrants who may lose their jobs as unemployment levels rise are at high risk of hardship and destitution; believes that preventing people from entering destitution should be a priority and is

more effective than waiting until local authorities have a duty to intervene; further believes NRPF restrictions are nothing more than a cost-shunt on to local authorities who are already struggling under the weight of funding cuts; recognises that although the policy allows for applications on a case-by-case basis to have the condition removed, it is incredibly difficult in practice, does not prevent abject poverty, and may unfairly lengthen the route to settlement by five years; further recognises that the Hostile Environment in all its forms increases racial discrimination; and calls on the government to urgently suspend NRPF conditions.

Fire safety inspections

The Grenfell Tower tragedy should be a source of deep sadness and it is only right that an extensive programme takes place of making buildings safe.

However, the government's fire safety form - EWS1 - is beset with problems that are affecting people locally, many of whom have contacted me.

The form is now a mandatory requirement of any flat sales or remortgages in buildings of 18m or higher. This is causing a problem for many residents because of the shortage of qualified surveyors, leading to long delays for people desperate to sell or remortgage. I have been contacted by people stuck in a property with an ex-partner after irreparable relationship breakdown and others who need to remortgage because their financial circumstances have changed due to the pandemic but cannot. The largest Housing Association operating locally, L&Q, has a huge backlog of inspections (not their own fault) and have told me that they will not even be able to give leaseholders a date for when their buildings might be inspected until next April.

Elsewhere, homebuyers are finding that they cannot get lenders to approve mortgages on buildings which are shorter than 18m if the EWS1 certificate has not been obtained, and for these smaller blocks there is no funding available for remedial works if a building is deemed to be unsafe. Leaseholders at one block in Leyton which "failed" an EWS1 inspection are facing five-figure bills as there is currently no compulsion on the developer/freeholder to shoulder any share of the cost. The Building Safety Minister, Lord Greenhalgh, has told me that informal discussions were had with lenders in the summer over a "common

sense" approach to whether the form is needed on shorter buildings, but residents' recent experiences suggest this has not been adopted.

There has been good news for a few in the form of an announcement concerning those in blocks without any cladding:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-steps-in-to-help-homeowners-caught-up-in-ews1-process>.

I am pressing the Government to make commitments to speed up the inspection process and ensure that the cost of remedial works to dangerous buildings are not passed onto leaseholders and tenants.

Casework

Please bear with me if you have contacted me and are waiting to hear back. We remain extremely busy dealing with casework and policy enquiries and it is taking a little bit longer than I would usually like to reply. You are not being ignored.

As you might expect, coronavirus-related issues continue to represent a large chunk of correspondence with 20 per cent of my November in-tray related to healthcare issues. After that housing issues - traditionally the heaviest caseload of all - make up 15%. Other broad topics making up the remainder include crime, business concerns and welfare.

I have been holding weekly Monday morning advice surgeries by telephone, although these will pause for the Christmas break. My office will close on 22nd December, re-opening on 5th January. As always the number to ring for any assistance is 0208 989 5249.

Christmas Quiz

1. If LEYTON gets 9 and LEYTONSTONE get 14, what does WANSTEAD get?
2. What band or artist has had the most UK Number Ones?
3. Born in Leytonstone, Stuart Freeborn designed which green Jedi for the Star Wars films?
4. If the Central Line scores 1, the Circle Line scores 2 and the District Line scores 3, what does the Northern Line score?

5. Who insisted on a cameo as a condition of letting film makers inside his hotel to film Home Alone 2: Lost in New York?
6. According to the 2011 census, how many Waltham Forest residents identified their Main religion as “Jedi”?
7. Which Liberal MP for Leyton East defected to the Communist Party and became the first Communist to sit in the House of Commons?
8. Which former Leyton Orient footballer went onto become the first black player to represent England at Under 21 level?
9. Born in Leyton, who created the Tube Map?
10. Winston Churchill was the MP for Wanstead. Name the actor who played Winston Churchill and the actor who played Clementine Churchill in the film The Darkest Hour?
11. Janet Lee appears in which Hitchcock directed film of 1960?
12. Born Phyllis Pechey, who appeared with her husband Johnnie as one of the earliest TV Cooks?