

Alan Whitehead MP

Spring newsletter to constituents in Southampton Test

Southampton Test Constituency: Bevois (part of), Coxford, Freemantle, Millbrook, Portswood and Swaythling, Redbridge and Shirley.



Staying connected

Keeping our city connected is vital to our prosperity - as a port, as a regional shopping centre and just as a city in which it is easy and convenient to get around.

Recently, I've been meeting ministers about the future of our port's freight services and the need for better rail links to keep the freight moving. I've also conducted a number of campaigns on bus routes and use in the city and had the privilege of naming one of the new Uni-link buses. Uni-link has been a great success with students and non-students alike and often carries a weary MP on his way home from London.

This spring newsletter sets out some of the activities I've been involved in over the past few months and also includes details of services and benefits people might be missing out on. My way of staying connected myself you might say!



Naming a brand-new bus with Peter Topple in memory of his wife Daphne, a regular user of the Uni-link bus service.



Talking with Southampton Junior Neighbourhood Wardens on their visit to the Houses of Parliament

Junior Neighbourhood Wardens take over parliament

In December, a group of Southampton Junior Neighbourhood Wardens visited me at Westminster for a tour of parliament. The visit sprung from the day I spent as a Neighbourhood Warden in Maybush. Having learned about the flourishing junior wardens scheme I suggested they might like to visit parliament for the day.

I am delighted to hear that the government's Neighbourhoods Renewal Fund has just announced funding to expand the scheme across the city, making it the largest of its kind in the country.

In parliament

Clean neighbourhoods

Highlighting concerns from constituents I recently met in Redbridge and Portswood, I spoke in favour of the government's Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill. This will give greater powers to the police and local authorities to tackle areas like fly-tipping, litter and other anti-social behaviour.

Climate change

I spoke during the Queen's speech debate on the subject of climate change and have continued my work promoting sustainable energy. This has included initiating research on the true costs of nuclear power to improve comparisons with sustainable energy sources.

Fire safety

I spoke in favour of new government measures to improve fire prevention, highlighting the sad fact that homes where a number of people are living together are particularly at risk.

If you would like a free Home Fire Safety Check phone the Community Fire Safety Department of Hampshire Fire & Rescue on 02380 626809. They will assess your home and fit any necessary smoke alarms free of charge.

Internet shopping

I led an Adjournment debate on the relatively new phenomenon of internet shopping. My view is that the implications of increased shopping via the internet will have implications for the high street, the vitality of our town and city centres and needs to be planned for.

APW pensions

Following-on from the APW pensions debacle which affected a number of constituents, I chaired a meeting of trade unions and representatives to discuss the way forward and the wider implications.

News...

World AIDS Day petition from Southampton University students



The Student Stop Aids Society make their views known on World AIDS Day.

A petition of 460 signatories collected by Southampton University Student Stop Aids Society was handed in to me on World AIDS Day (1st December). It called on the government to press for extra funding for HIV / AIDS, prioritise universal access to treatment and for greater investment in health care services in developing countries.

I offered my support to these aims and took the matter to Hilary Benn, the Minister for International Development. In his reply he outlined the work the government is doing and assured me that AIDS will be a centrepiece of the UK's G8 and EU Presidencies in 2005.

● visit www.alan-whitehead.org.uk for more information



Along with other volunteers, I lent a hand to help redecorate St Jude's Hall, Shirley Warren, home to Coxford & District Youth Project.

Benefits: don't miss out

New government research shows the number of people not claiming the benefits to which they are entitled is higher than ever.

Did you know?

- 1.8 million pensioners and 600,000 people of working age fail to claim the Council Tax benefit to which they are entitled – an average of £400 per person.
- Last year £2.5 billion of Pension Credit or Council Tax Benefit was left unclaimed.
- Other under-claimed benefits include Income Support, Minimum Income Guarantee and Housing Benefit.
- Nationally 1.8 million children miss out on a free school meal they are entitled to.
- Not all benefits are means-tested – Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance are there to help meet the extra costs of disability or frailty irrespective of income.

Examples...

- Frank and Doris are a pensioner couple aged 68 and 69 respectively. Their joint income is less than £181.20 a week. Their Council Tax can be paid for them through Council Tax Benefit.
- Fred is a single pensioner with a weekly income of £100. He can claim Pension Credit to help meet his general living expenses.
- Mary looks after her elderly mother who needs almost constant help to cope with personal care and getting about. Mary's earnings are less than £79 a week. She can claim Carer's Allowance as well as Housing Benefit. Mary can also ask her local Social Services for an assessment to identify the extra help she needs to assist her with her caring responsibilities.

Contacts for further information

- For information about Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance contact the Benefits Enquiry Line on Freephone 0800 88 22 00
- To check your entitlement to Pension Credit, call the Pension Service on 0845 60 60 265. To apply for Pension Credit, call Freephone 0800 99 1234.
- For Housing Benefit advice, call Southampton City Council on 8083 2031.
- For advice on Council Tax Benefit contact Southampton City Council on 8083 2031 or visit their Castle Way Offices

Current campaigns

Bring back 'Oops' cards

Once routinely seen in public, 'Oops' cards were a simple way of reporting potholes, faulty street lights or other highways problems. I think their return would be welcome and have talked to the city council to see if this is possible.



A new medical centre for Portswood

With Sainsbury's planning to develop the Portswood bus depot site I asked local residents for their views on the subject.

Whilst most were broadly in favour of a new supermarket, they highlighted the need for a new medical centre over other ideas for the site. I am working to see these views are incorporated.



Civil Service Sports Ground



I am continuing to help with the campaign to save Freemantle's last remaining green space. The site of the former Civil Service Sports Ground is now up for sale having been left to fall into disrepair by its owners. I have asked questions in parliament and written to the current owners to express my concern and find a way for the land to be enjoyed by the community.

Then and now...

There have been many changes in Southampton over the past eight years. Here are some of them:

- Reading, writing and arithmetic among children all improving . Now well over 60% of Southampton children reach level four in maths and English - then it was just over 50%.
- Now 4000 Southampton children get over two hours free pre-school education each day. Then almost none did.
- Health service investment in the city is booming - the new walk-in centre in Shirley, the new heart and cancer facilities at the General Hospital and a 50% increase in the hospital budget in the city over the past five years.
- Crime figures, particularly burglary and vehicle crime continue to fall in the city. There are more police officers than ever before and new powers to tackle anti-social behaviour. There are currently 92 anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) in operation in the city.
- Over £1 billion has been invested in renewable energy, including jobs for Southampton in renewable technology production.
- Over 9000 pensioners in Southampton now receive pension credit on top of their basic state pension.

But there are new challenges:

- Affordable housing for younger people to rent and buy in Southampton and Hampshire.
- Making sure that new powers to tackle anti-social behaviour work effectively in our city.
- Ensuring more young people in Southampton stay in education or training to gain the skills they need to succeed in life.
- Identity cards – needed to combat identity and other fraud, prevent illegal immigration and get people access to what they are entitled to.
- Making Southampton a more sustainable city so that we play our part in combating climate change - better public transport, more traffic from the docks by rail, better recycling in the city.



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