

Welcome to my May newsletter

We're two months away from the end of this parliamentary session and there's still a lot for the House to get through in that time. Not the least – in regards to Brexit.

As ever, if you want to get in touch about any of the issues covered here – or anything else – you can arrange an appointment at one of my regular advice surgeries by calling my office on 0207 219 4243 or e-mail me at Gareth.thomas.mp@parliament.uk

Brexit – where are we now?



Since my last update, Theresa May's deal has been defeated in Parliament not once, not twice but on four separate occasions. The long-anticipated exit day of March 29th has come and gone, and we have a new Brexit day – October 31st. In late March, I was proud to be one of 1 million marching in London to demand a final say. I still firmly believe that it shouldn't just be up to the 650 Members in Parliament to get the final say on which Brexit option is decided. Given that Brexit has such huge implications for our country, it is only right that once a deal has been finalised, the people should have the final say.

The dilemma within Parliament is how close or how distant a relationship we want with the EU. Every independent economist suggests that the more distant our relationship with the EU in the future, the greater the adverse economic impact. For me, that means if any deal should go back to the people, we should opt for the softest Brexit possible, staying in the Customs Union and the Single Market.

University Fair

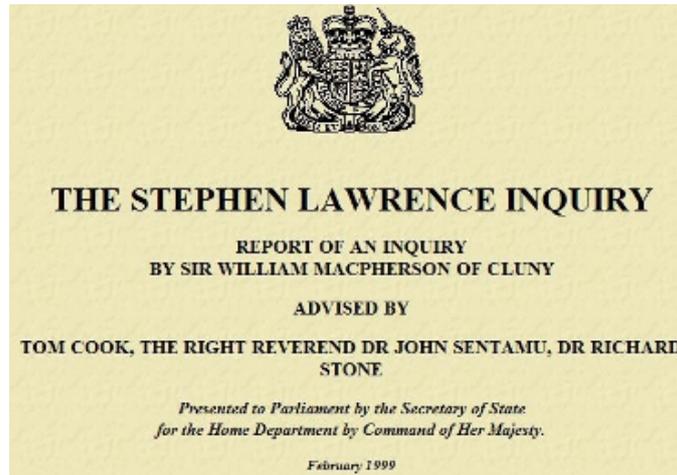


Close to a thousand students and parents were in attendance this year for my third annual University Fair in partnership with Whitmore High School. This year's event played host to representatives from 30 universities including Brunel and LSE, as well as internationally renowned Oxford and Harvard. For the first time, we played host to a series of key speakers covering the application process to Oxbridge, studying Medicine/Dentistry, Student Finance, STEM Careers and Degrees via apprenticeships (sponsored degrees).

My intention when I first organised the University Fair three years ago was to even out the playing field a little and provide our school students with some of the same opportunities as their privately educated peers. The majority of schools in Harrow are considered above average by Ofsted, with an estimated sixty-three per cent of local school students now going onto Higher Education. I believe that academic and professional success should not be restricted to those who come from fee paying schools. It should be available to all in Harrow.

Following the success of the Uni Fair, I will be organising a Careers Fair alongside Rooks Heath College, with participation from many of Britain's leading industries. The Careers Fair will take place on the evenings of **June 17th and 18th** from **5-8PM**. Please get in contact with my office if you would like more details.

Stephen Lawrence Day



On the 22nd of April, we marked the very first National Stephen Lawrence Day. It has been 26 years since his tragic racist murder. February saw the 20th Anniversary of the Macpherson report. Prompted by Stephen Lawrence's racially motivated death, the report sparked an incredibly important debate about policing and racism.

During the Debate on the 20th Anniversary of the Macpherson Report, I was very happy to pay homage to Chief Superintendent Dal Babu, who led the police in the London Borough of Harrow until 2013. Today, the proportion of officers from BAME backgrounds is still half what it would be if it reflected the general population; in 20 years since the Macpherson Report, it is clear that progress has been exceptionally slow.

Watch a clip of my intervention here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YrKDi0gH7w>

Council Funding Debate

Harrow Council is one of the lowest funded councils in London and earlier in this Parliamentary session, I held a debate on the future funding of the council.

In 2015-16, Harrow Council's revenue spending power per head was £159, 17% lower than the London average, ranking it 26th out of the 32 London boroughs. A similar comparison with the England average shows Harrow's revenue spending power per head was £127, 14% below the average, ranking it 105th out of 120 local authorities. Quite how the Prime Minister can claim that austerity is over is beyond me. In Harrow, as nationally, it feels unrelenting and frankly, it is getting worse.

You can read the debate here: <http://bit.ly/2R1Qijl>

Catholic Sixth Form Academies Debate



Last month, I held a debate in Parliament on the Future of Catholic Sixth Form Colleges, such as the excellent [St Dominic's Sixth Form College](#) in my constituency. Catholic Sixth Form Colleges face double discrimination in terms of funding; receiving less funding than colleges that have become academies, whilst not being able to convert themselves (as their religious character isn't protected). The best solution is for the Government to increase funding for all post-16 colleges to stop this double discrimination from taking place; I will continue pushing to raise the rate in Parliament.

The debate can be watched here: [Catholic Sixth Forms Debate](#)

Mental Health Support Charities

Lastly, I have recently met with a group of activists from the Harrow Citizens; a broad community-based movement dedicated to improving the lives of people in Harrow through local campaigns. The group have compiled two helpful directories for our distribution, covering Adult and Children's Mental Health services in Harrow.

We have forwarded this on to various schools and local charities but if you know of any support groups this can assist, please pass on the links below -

Adult Mental Health Directory - <https://gareththomas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2019/04/Adult-Mental-Health-Support-in-Harrow.pdf>

Children & Young Person's Mental Health Directory - <https://gareththomas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2019/04/Children-and-Young-People-Mental-Health-Support-in-Harrow.pdf>