

BELL RIBEIRO-ADDY MP

Monthly Report, January 2021



Outsourcing is rotten to the core

We all saw the images of substandard food parcels circulating on social media earlier this month. The scandal around these insulting food parcels, which somehow turned £10.50 into barely £5 worth of food refocuses the sheer failure of outsourcing and the devastating impact this is having on communities up and down this country, not least in Streatham.

The Government's own guidance was barely different to what was provided in these parcels. It also turned out that the chairman of the company that supplied them also helped write the guidelines! To make it even worse, the parent company is trying to avoid a £113m tax bill. All this makes it clear it's not just a case of one rotten apple - Tory outsourcing is rotten to the core.

There's a danger that talking about corruption makes these processes seem like an accident - although it's hard to think of a better word. We need to be clear: that this slow siphoning of public money into the pockets of Tory donors is not an aberration. It is exactly how the Tories have rigged the system to work.

Outsourcing free school meals puts vulnerable children at the mercy of private companies' profit margins, just as outsourcing Test and Trace has put our health at risk. The pandemic has made it clear that we need resilient public services that make maximum use of the money we put into them.

The free school meals scandal is a stark reminder that Labour must fight to replace these parasitic outsourcing companies with publicly funded, publicly delivered services that actually serve the public.

With schools looking likely to stay closed until at least mid-March, I'm fundraising with Lambeth TechAid to get laptops to children in need.

[Click here](#) to donate.



**#Laptops4
Learning**

BELL RIBEIRO-ADDY MP
STANDING UP FOR STREATHAM

In the Constituency

Meeting Keir Starmer in Streatham

I was glad to welcome Keir Starmer to Streatham ahead of Labour opposition debates on Universal Credit and Free School Meals. We met at the Brixton Norwood Food Bank, where I had the opportunity to raise the mounting challenges being faced by people in our community, from doubling unemployment to rising food insecurity and the Government's failure to supply schools with remote learning technology.

The pandemic has exposed the root causes of many of the problems in our society: from inequality to outsourcing. Now more than ever, we need a Labour Government that will address these ideas.



Delivering laptops to Glenbrook Primary School

Last month saw the official launch of my Laptops for Learning campaign, delivered with the help of the always brilliant Lambeth Tech Aid. With the Government confirming the further closure of schools for at least another month and at least one-third of their promised laptops failing to materialise by the end of this month, it's very clear that there are ongoing shortages in our area.

This month, we've managed to deliver a further 37 Chromebooks on top of the other 105 devices we've managed to get to schools in Streatham. I'm working to establish how many children are still without access to devices and internet but if you're able to make a small contribution to the initiative in the meantime, it would be much appreciated.

In recent meetings with teachers, it's clear that schools are adapting well to remote learning but as one head rightly pointed out, the fact that remote learning is improving makes the digital exclusion faced by some pupils all the more serious.

You can donate over on the Lambeth TechAid website (just click the Laptops for Learning in Streatham option: <https://opencollective.com/lambeth-techaid>.

Read about why the time for **free broadband** has come

Meeting with schools

Over the course of the month, I have met with a number of local school leaders to discuss how they are coping with the pandemic. From my meetings with local headteachers, it's clear schools are eager to get students learning in-person again as soon as safely possible but they're acutely aware of the risk reopening poses to community transmission, especially with the emergence of new more infectious variants of the virus.

We cannot risk another rushed return to school. I will continue to support teachers and education staff in their efforts to make schools as safe as possible and limit transmission to the wider community. It is vital that the Government gives them all the resources they need to manage ongoing closures and ensure a safe reopening – when infection rates are sufficiently low.

In the meantime, I am looking to help schools in our area to acquire devices and internet access for students, whilst also keeping an eye on the situation with Free School Meals.

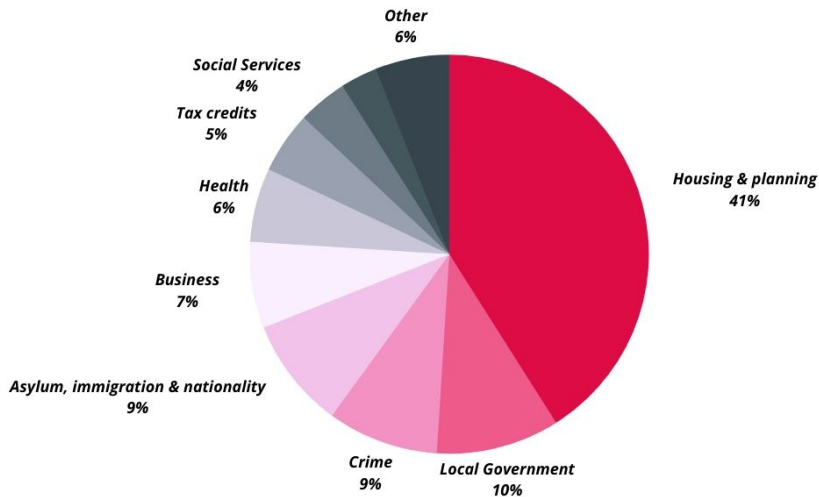


Little Growers' Club

A big congratulations to the Little Growers' Club, who recently won £5,000 of funding from Higgidy to build a dedicated vegetable patch for primary school children up on Streatham Common. During the pandemic, we've seen how green spaces are a source of entertainment, exercise and escapism for all of us. Protecting and improving them has to be a top priority as we look to move beyond the pandemic. I'm excited to see the finished results when lockdown is over!

Casework

I have opened 100 cases this month, 69 of which have been closed. A large portion of these cases have been in relation to housing issues, immigration and reports of crime. I have also seen a recent increase in cases regarding tax credit.



January Statistics

Correspondence

This month, I have had several constituents write to me regarding the Government's Trade Bill, rightly angered by the attempts to bypass Parliament, reduce our food standards and sell our NHS. I've also had many constituents write to me regarding the Environment Bill, calling for amendments that strengthen the Bill and improve our environmental standards. With the UK's coronavirus vaccination programme well underway, I have naturally been receiving a range of emails with queries relating to the vaccine. The vaccine presents a massive step forward in bringing us closer to finding a way out of this pandemic and I am happy to answer any questions about the vaccine or point people towards someone else who may have answers.

Lambeth Made community meeting

Towards the end of the month, I joined the online Lambeth Made community meeting to discuss the action plan for Brixton Hill. It's always good to get a chance to talk to local residents about the issues that matter to them, particularly when it's harder to get out during these difficult times.

We discussed a range of plans for the area, including schemes to address air pollution and traffic jams, create an outdoor multi-use space off Blenheim Gardens and address anti-social behaviour. Cllr Jacqui Dyer Cabinet Member for Jobs, Skills and Community Safety will be leading similar sessions across other wards in the constituency.

If you have an issue that you need help with, or know someone else in the constituency who may benefit from having their MP fight their corner, please email me at bell.ribeiroaddy.mp@parliament.uk with your full name, postcode and a brief outline of the problem you are experiencing. My team and I will be happy to try and assist you as best we can.

[Bell.ribeiroaddy.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:bell.ribeiroaddy.mp@parliament.uk)

In Parliament

Lockdown restrictions

On January 5th, England had no choice but to lockdown as cases increased to the point of overwhelming the NHS. Predictably, this belated lockdown was not enough to stop deaths from breaching the 100,000 mark. A year on from the arrival of the first COVID-19 cases in the UK, we now have the highest death toll in all of Europe and one of the worst death rates in the world. That is a shocking indictment of our Government's policy, which puts us in a similar league to countries like the USA, Brazil and India.

Every single lockdown we go into is further proof that we should have adopted a Zero Covid strategy at the outset, brought virus levels down and suppressed it with a highly effective Test and Trace system - not the shambles that the Government has cobbled together.

I voted in favour of the latest restrictions but made it clear that we cannot expect people to give up their freedoms without giving everyone the support they need. I called for the Government to consider cancelling rent, extending the eviction ban, increasing sick pay and committing to provide every single child with a device and internet access.

The common thread of all these failings is the Conservative Party's decision to pursue the interests of big business rather than the interests of public health. In the event, we're now seeing the worst recession of any large economy as well as some of the worst health outcomes. That's because you can't have a healthy economy without healthy people. The repeated gamble of trading off public health for the benefit of private profit might deliver for the very lucky few but it is never going to deliver a better economy. That is the argument we need to make.

Trade Bill

The Trade Bill returned to the Commons on the 20th January for its "Ping Pong" stage whereby MPs had the opportunity to vote on a number of amendments from the House of Lords. I was pleased to vote for amendments proposed by the Lords which aimed to protect the NHS from future trade agreements, food, animal welfare, the environment, human rights and labour laws.

Sadly, all but one of these were voted down by this Government. As the Bill returns again to the Lords I hope that they will continue to amend this Bill to put the brakes on the post-Brexit race to the bottom.

Environment Bill

Tackling the climate crisis is going to require leadership, planning and action from central government. As the recent fiasco around Green Homes reminds us (companies out of pocket and less than 5% of green homes grant budget paid out), we cannot simply outsource the climate emergency.

As we rebuild, we must put the environment at the heart of everything we do. But sadly, the Government's Environmental Bill fails to do this. I supported amendments to protect bees and other pollinators, tackle air pollution, reverse biodiversity loss, regulate chemicals and reduce waste. Sadly, these were voted down.



Holocaust Memorial Day 2021

LIGHT THE DARKNESS

27 January 8pm

Light a candle and safely put it in your window

[#LightTheDarkness](#)



We should never forget how important it is to take the time to remember and reflect on the atrocities of the past. It was an honour to speak in the Parliamentary Holocaust Day Memorial debate, where I talked about the need to do more than just going back to normal in the wake of the pandemic.

In these dark times we talk a lot about going back to normal. But we have to remember that our normal was rising levels of anti-Semitism and all forms of racism across the UK. I quoted 94-year-old Holocaust survivor Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, who recently said that she hopes the coronavirus pandemic “will wake people up to have better attitudes towards each other”.

The atrocities of the Holocaust, and other past events, teach us that we must challenge prejudice and the language of hatred on a daily basis. We must condemn it when it marches across our streets. We must expose it when it tries to rear its head on online platforms. We must stamp it out when it seeks political legitimacy. When prejudice is reinforced and empowered, this threatens the very fabric of democracy.

The recent situation in the USA is a reminder of what happens when hatred and discrimination are left unchecked. The responsibility is with us to be the light in the darkness, learning from the past to ensure that such horrors can never happen again. That means making a conscious effort to challenge racism every single day.



[Click here](#) to watch my contribution to the debate.

Labour Opposition Days

Universal (Dis)Credit

As the pandemic rages on and people continue to lose their jobs, businesses and livelihoods, thousands have been forced to rely on the Government's shoddy universal credit system. At the start of the pandemic, the Government introduced a £20 per week uplift to the standard UC rate for one year. For many, this £20 uplift has been a lifeline and the Tories' plans to cancel the uplift would be devastating for thousands of families across the country.

This is not a case of Government largesse. Even with this small uplift, we've seen more than half of families in receipt having to borrow money to make ends meet. The situation for those in receipt of legacy benefits is even more dire, with two-thirds of disabled recipients struggling to afford essentials like food, heating and water amid the increased costs of the pandemic. They have seen no £20 increase.

On the 18th January, Labour held an Opposition Day debate, calling for the Government to cancel its plans to slash the uplift. As if their contempt for working-class people wasn't obvious enough, the Government didn't even bother to show up to vote on this.

Providing for children in lockdown

It's not just vital healthcare contracts that the Tories have outsourced to their nearest and dearest. Tory donors have also been given key education contracts to provide Free School Meals and devices to children in need, with similarly disastrous results.

I have repeatedly joined calls to supply every single child with a laptop or appropriate device for learning and to extend Free School Meals through the holidays and to all children who need it (not just those currently eligible).

As we approach another school holiday, the Government are refusing to continue its free school meal provision for the February half-term, leaving it to local councils to set up FSM provisions for the week, which will be logistically difficult for councils to set up.

The Government's insistence that it doesn't have a responsibility to feed children during half-term seems to be a running pantomime that we go through with each holiday or short break. I will continue to push for insourcing on Free School Meals and hope with enough noise, we can prompt another U-turn.





Workers' Rights: no to Fire and Rehire

In the wake of news that the Government was planning to review EU-derived levels of overtime pay, holiday pay, rest breaks and work time limits, Labour put down a motion calling on the Government to maintain existing standards. With companies currently trying to fire and hire with impunity and thousands of unpunished health and safety breaches during Covid, it's clear that we need to go further than this and focus on strengthening workers' rights across the board.

Council Tax

The Government has passed the costs of coping with Covid onto local government at every opportunity. Lambeth Council has been forced to spend an extra £43 million as a consequence of COVID-19. Initially, the Government promised to meet these increased costs but has since reneged. This will leave many councils with little choice but to raise council tax. For the average home in Band D, this would mean an extra £93 out of the household budget every year. On top of the financial strains of Covid already, this would have a devastating impact on households around the country, particularly those less well-off. I was pleased to back Labour's motion opposing an increase in council tax and calling for the support councils were promised.

My question to the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office

I was appalled to find out that just 25 doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been delivered in low-income countries by the middle of January. Just one low-income country to be exact. As wealthy countries purchase more vaccine stock than they can possibly use, poorer countries are being priced out of the process. The Government likes to trumpet its contribution to the WHO's Covax scheme – the UK has allocated more funding towards this than any other country.

But Covax is still in competition with high-income countries to secure the vaccine, which will delay the possible rollout. The WHO director-general has criticised some manufacturers for prioritising getting their vaccines approved in wealthy countries, where they could make greater profits as well as expressing fears that manufacturers will seek to prioritise honouring contracts with governments.

A better alternative would be to adopt an intellectual property waiver to allow low-income countries to begin producing Covid-19 vaccines, treatments, diagnostics and other tools used to fight the disease without fear of being sued or prosecuted. I asked the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office about the UK Government's refusal to support this call.

Of course, we know the real answer. Yet again, they have chosen to put the profit of pharmaceutical companies ahead of saving lives in some of the poorest countries in the world.

Campaigns

Yemen Can't Wait

On January 25th I joined the Day of Action for Yemen, co-ordinating a joint letter that went out on behalf of the Socialist Campaign Group. We are calling on Boris Johnson to follow in the steps of Joe Biden stop fuelling the war by selling arms to Saudi Arabia.

Since the start of the war in Yemen, the UK has exported more than £5.3 billion worth of arms to Saudi Arabia. In that same time, the Government has logged at least 516 instances of possible human rights violations by Saudi Arabia.

The UK remains the second largest arms dealer in the world. There's a growing knowledge of the central role we play in supplying arms and military training to repressive regimes around the world. I saw this over summer when dozens of constituents wrote in to demand an end of tear gas and rubber bullet sales to the USA under Trump.

With Yemen on the brink of a humanitarian disaster, the UK should play no role in fuelling further violence. We must end arms sales to Saudi Arabia.



Promoting uptake of the vaccine

Labour and Tory MPs don't agree very often but we are absolutely united around the importance of the vaccination scheme. This month, I joined other Black MPs from the Conservatives and my own party to make a video promoting uptake of the vaccine and dispel some of the misinformation currently circulating.

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on BAME communities. Black men and men from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds aged under 65 have a more than five times higher risk of related mortality compared to men from a white British background.

But the vaccine is a ray of hope in these dark times. That's why it is so important to ensure misinformation doesn't put Black communities at risk and provide culturally competent guidance. We all have a role to play in getting the facts and challenging falsehoods. The best way to find out about the vaccine is to talk to a trusted health professional, whether it's your pharmacist or GP.

I also argued on [Politics Home](#) that BAME communities must be at the heart of the vaccination drive.

Fund welfare, not warfare

The UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons came into force this month, banning their use under international law. It's been signed by 122 countries so far, but not the UK. The UK government, in its commitment to keeping nuclear weapons, stands apart from the vast majority of countries globally, who have signed up to the TPNW. Not only this, it also stands apart from the overwhelming majority of its own citizens, who want it to sign up to the TPNW.

New polling by Survation for CND shows that 83% of Labour voters support a total global ban on nuclear weapons, while 68% want the government to sign up to the TPNW. This means a huge majority of Labour supporters back nuclear disarmament through a UN-planned, time-bound process.

If it has any aspiration to a peaceful and democratic foreign policy that faces up to the real security threats facing Britain, Labour's position on nuclear weapons should reflect that of its voters and the public.

Firefighters stitched up

I stand with emergency workers in their calls for better safety and firefighters are no exception. This month, fire bosses unilaterally terminated an agreement allowing firefighters to safely assist the NHS and care sector's response to the pandemic, just as they were requested by the Government.

Because of this, there are now no agreed national safety protections in place for firefighters delivering higher-risk Covid duties, exposing them and their communities to this disease. I'm supporting the FBU's call for them to revert this decision and take the necessary action to keep frontline firefighters safe.

Stop the British Gas Fire

With the British Gas strikes ongoing, I recently joined local gas engineer Daniel to talk about why he was fighting back against his employers' plans to push him onto a worse contract with no choice. Companies firing their employees and rehiring them on worse terms is not new. What is new is more and more people waking up to this injustice and demanding change.

With the company refusing to even negotiate, British Gas workers have been left with no choice but to go on strike. It's completely wrong for a profitable company to try and use a crisis as an excuse to force their workers to do more hours for less money with reduced rights. When we allow big companies to fire their entire workforce and rehire them on worse terms, this sends a shockwave through the wider economy. The more companies are allowed to do this, the more likely it is to have a knock-on effect, bringing down standards in other companies too. We cannot afford this as we rebuild from Covid and that's why as well as standing with British Gas workers, I'm echoing their call to outlaw the practice of fire and rehire altogether.



[Click here](#) to find out why British Gas engineers are on strike

There is power in a Union

In the early days of the New Year, I was pleased to support the NEU in their action to protect communities across the country. When the Government insisted it was safe to open schools after Christmas - in spite of sky high infection rates - they made the right call and pushed to keep schools safely closed. Subsequent data has proved, contrary to repeated Government claims - including just this week at Prime Minister's Questions - that schools are indeed a vehicle for virus transmission, particularly with the new infectious variants.

At the time, Streatham was designated as one of the areas where schools would remain open - despite having similarly high infection levels compared to the surrounding areas, making this an even more important one to win locally.

There is a genuine balance between safety and education but the real question we should be pushing the Government on is why they have refused to give schools the things they need to stay safe and cope with disruption, whether it's their delay in providing laptops and devices to children who need them, their failure to compensate schools properly for COVID-safety measures, their or their refusal to put in-place plans that have the consent of school staff.

I was proud to support the National Education Union in their planned Section 44 walk-outs and glad that they managed to force an important U-turn to keep our communities safe. As we head into Heart Unions week, let's support our trade unions in their battle for better workers' rights.

In the end, one of the most important lessons of this pandemic is the power that we possess when we act together and unions are at the heart of this.

Beu Ribeiro-Addy

Contact Me



[Bell.ribeiroaddy.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:bell.ribeiroaddy.mp@parliament.uk)



(020) 7219 6695



www.bellribeiroaddy.com



@BellRibeiroAddy



@bell_ribeiroaddy



@Bell4Streatham