



David Baines MP
Member of Parliament for
St Helens North

Newsletter
February 2026

Representing Billinge and Seneley Green, Blackbrook, Haydock, Moss Bank, Newton-le-Willows, Parr, Rainford and Windle

INSIDE THIS EDITION:

Community heroes at CETRA in Haydock



And more, including:



Visiting Billinge Medical Practice



Campaigning with pupils from St James' C of E



Earlestown regeneration progress



Dear Residents,

Welcome to my February newsletter which you can now encourage your friends and family to subscribe to [via this sign-up form on my website](#).

I hope you find it interesting and please do feel free to contact me anytime using the details on the back page if you need my support.

Schools White Paper: Every Child Achieving and Thriving

This month, the government has published its **Schools White Paper: Every Child Achieving and Thriving**, which sets out a new vision for our children and schools system where high standards and inclusion work together, with SEND reform as the central pillar.

It's the proposals for SEND reform that have understandably and rightly got most of the headlines, but it should be said that the white paper covers a lot more – including support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who currently attain lower standards at Year 1, Key Stage 2, and Key Stage 4 than other pupils, with only 44% of pupils on free school meals achieving a grade 4 pass in GCSE English and Maths, compared to over 70% of other pupils.

As the white paper says, outcomes for children are still “too often and too much determined by background or circumstances”.

The government has set itself a target to **halve the attainment gap** between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, and will reform how disadvantage funding reaches schools.

Measures to tackle child poverty such as **removing the two child limit** on universal credit are also key to addressing this attainment gap.

I welcome any effort to address the inequality in outcomes, and to give **every child in St Helens North the best start in life and the opportunity to thrive**.

The paper also contains significant proposals for improving maternity pay for school staff, retention incentives for school leaders, plans to move every school towards forming or joining a trust to better share good practice and drive improvement, recognising speaking as just as important as reading, writing and numeracy and embedding oracy in the classroom, and lots more.

I encourage everyone with an interest to read the paper in full, which [is available in different formats here](#).

SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First

I know from personal experience and from the work I've done as our MP that it's the SEND reforms that will be of greatest interest to a lot of families. There is a huge amount of mistrust as a result of years of conflict and chaos in the system. Too many families with SEND children have had to fight too hard, for too long. Nobody can blame them for being sceptical. I've also seen a fair bit of scaremongering and misinformation online which we all need to watch out for (and I say that as a parent more than an MP).

In autumn last year I held meetings inviting local parents, carers and family advocates to attend and share their views, and I contacted every single school in St Helens North, visiting as many as possible to discuss SEND and to find out what was working, and what needed to change.

The feedback I got from people in our communities informed my report '[No Child Left Behind](#)' and I presented this to the Education Secretary and Schools Minister.

I am pleased to see lots of the issues which were flagged by families and schools in St Helens North are being addressed in the government proposals:

You asked – the government listened

First and foremost, local families said they “have to fight too hard to get the support their children need and deserve” – The government is delivering automatic Individual Support Plans in every school, so children get help without a battle.

Families called for “faster access to assessments/diagnoses” – Government is delivering earlier identification and trained staff so needs are recognised and supported sooner.

Families and schools called for faster access to assessments and diagnoses, and warned of a “lack of early intervention in schools which could help avoid bigger problems” – The Government is delivering **£1.6bn "Inclusive Mainstream Fund"** paid directly to schools, early years providers and colleges to deliver targeted early intervention, and a **£1.8bn "Experts at Hand" service placing SEND specialists – including speech and language therapists – in every local area.**

Families asked to “introduce more outreach SEN support” – Government is delivering trained SEND practitioners that will help parents understand their child's development, identify emerging needs sooner and support vital join-up between early years settings, health visitors and SEND teams.

You said communication was too often not good enough – the white paper acknowledges that “clear and consistent communication is essential to reforming the SEND system. Families, education settings and professionals need a shared understanding of children’s needs, what support looks like, when it will be delivered, and how it will work across all phases of education. The government will also “require all schools and other educational settings to create **digital Individual Support Plans for any child or young person with identified SEND**. The plans will capture barriers to learning, day-to-day provision, any reasonable adjustments and intended outcomes.

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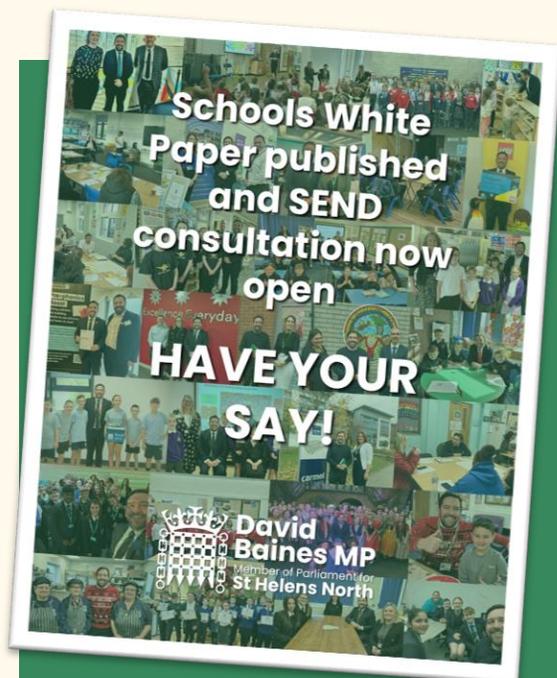
Schools called for more support to help them be truly inclusive and schools and families wanted more training in SEND for all schools and all staff – the government is creating **60,000 new places for children with SEND, including the 10,000 places already delivered, backed by investment of over £3.7bn**, and the white paper commits new investment to strengthen mainstream inclusion and support SEND in schools. **The government is also delivering more funding for SEND training so all staff can better support additional needs, backed by £200m of funding.**

Families and schools said every process is too slow and reactive and the EHCP process is too complex – the government is going to invest in equipping schools to become inclusive with simpler digital plans and early support to help manage potential concerns without the need for escalation. EHCPs will also be created after a specialist package and placement decisions have been made, rather than beforehand. The EHCP system will also be standardised across the country with clear criteria, so that schools no longer have to fill in different forms for children in different boroughs.

There is a huge amount more to look at and to say, and I’m sure we will in the days and weeks to come.

But for now, the bottom line is that [the SEND consultation is open here](#), and I encourage everyone to have their say. I will also be writing directly to all those who have contacted me about SEND with this information.

I’ll continue to listen, and I’ll continue to do all I can to make sure the voices of families and schools in St Helens North are heard at the highest levels.



In St Helens North

Thank you so much to Sharon, Dot, Jill, Margaret and Mal for inviting me to [CETRA on Pimblett Road in Haydock](#) to talk about their fantastic work in the community and discuss how we can help do even more. They are true community heroes.

It was fantastic to [visit year 6 pupils at St James C of E Primary](#) after they wrote to me about their concerns regarding knife crime and asking for help to install bleed control kits around the community. We discussed how we can make this happen. We talked about fundraising ideas, and I have written to the Prime Minister and other MPs to ask for support. As a Yicker, I told the children how much I love Haydock and how proud I am of them.

It was good to [meet Billinge Medical Practice Patient Participation Group Co-Chairs Darren and Andrea](#) to discuss the practice, the progress it has made in recent years to improve care for patients.

[On National Apprenticeship Week, it was great to visit Haydock Asda](#) to meet with store Manager Michelle and Tom who is currently completing a leadership apprenticeship. Huge credit to Asda who are clearly doing a good job of giving their staff opportunities to develop.

It was exciting to be at [the groundbreaking ceremony to mark the beginning of the regeneration of Earlestown Market Square](#). Thanks to the commitment of our council and its strong partnerships – backed by government funding – we're seeing real, visible progress on levelling up our area.

It was great to attend the official [handover of the brand new Newton-le-Willows Police Station to Merseyside Police](#) from the building contractors.

I also welcomed the news that [the OYO Hotel will no longer be used for asylum seekers from April](#). It should never have been used for this in the first place.

There are big elections up and down the country coming in May, including all-out elections for St Helens Borough Council. It was fantastic to meet and help introduce our local Labour candidates who will be running for election in St Helens North and across the Borough.



More in St Helens North

[I had the absolute pleasure of visiting the wonderful Rectory C of E Primary School in Downall Green](#) to discuss a range of issues including SEND and the Schools White Paper. Thank you so much to Headteacher Mr Brook, Deputy Headteacher and SENCO Miss Laverick, and all the staff for inviting me to visit – and most of all, to the incredible children who are a credit to the school and their families

It was brilliant to meet with [Daniel Highcock, a former Paralympic wheelchair basketball player from St Helens who was involved during the 2012 London Olympics!](#) We discussed his proposals to put together a package of support for neurodivergent children and their families.

I met up with James White and Ann-marie from Home Start who recently received the King's Award for all their hard work across our communities. Home Start is a local charity that has provided invaluable support and friendship to families in St Helens since 1988 and has achieved positive outcomes for hundreds of families.

[It was great to meet Rainford Rangers Vice Chair Mike Howells, Head Groundsman Paul Sinnott, and Garreth Rafferty from West Lancashire JFL](#) to hear about the club, including their Rainford Rangers Inclusion FC team, and discuss their exciting plans for the future.

And finally, those who know me will know I'm a huge rugby league fan, and I'm so glad the season has started! As Chair of the Rugby League APPG, I was delighted to [attend the Super League launch in Manchester.](#)

I would also like to take the opportunity to pass on my thanks to Mike Rush for all his efforts at St Helens and for all that he has done for our great club over the years. He deserves the thanks of every fan.

I've been watching Saints for nearly 40 years now, and as usual I was at [the Saints opening home game of the season](#) with my family. Come on you Saints!



Local Government Finance Settlement

St Helens Borough Council is to receive £266m as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement, an increase of £16m in Core Spending Power compared to 2025/26.

Following [weeks of discussion between myself, local leaders and government ministers](#) since the provisional settlement was announced in December, we secured an additional grant equating to £14.7m more cash in total over the three-year period on top of the initial allocation.

The provisional settlement was good but not good enough. After it was published just before Christmas we met with ministers and I also made the case for our communities personally with the Prime Minister. I am delighted to say we've secured a better deal for our borough as a result.

This improved settlement shows the benefit of having a Labour council and a Labour government working together. It's not a fight, it's a conversation, and I will always do all we can to secure the best deal for our borough.



Attending Downing Street last month

Energy bills to fall for St Helens families from April

The Government has confirmed that energy bills will fall by 7% from April – saving the typical household £117 a year.

Ofgem have [confirmed that the energy price cap will drop from 1 April](#), after the Government acted to remove an average of £150 of costs from household bills – funded by asking the wealthiest in society to pay their fair share in tax.

The cost of living is the number one issue I hear about from families across St Helens North and energy bills have been at the heart of that struggle for too long. This announcement is genuinely welcome news – real money back in the pockets of people in our community.

But I know there is still much more to do. One fall in the price cap doesn't end the era of high energy bills. That is why I'm proud to support a Government that is delivering the biggest home upgrade programme in British history through the Warm Homes Plan, and investing record amounts in clean, homegrown power so that communities like ours are never again held hostage to volatile global gas prices.

Free Breakfast Clubs in St Helens North

The Government has announced the next wave of schools set to benefit from their free breakfast club programme from April this year, including three more schools in St Helens North!

Carr Mill Primary School, Rectory C of E Primary School in Garswood and the District C of E Primary School in Newton-le-Willows will join Ashurst Primary, Garswood Primary and PACE in getting free breakfast clubs, and it means that from April in total more than 1100 children and their families in St Helens North will be able to access a nutritious meal at the start of the school day and save money.

These clubs come alongside a raft of measures driven forward by the government to cut the cost of living for families in St Helens North, including expanding free school meals, rolling out 30 hours of government-funded childcare, bringing down school uniform costs and securing the future of Best Start holiday clubs.

I can't wait to see the impact these free breakfast clubs will have from April. It's a testament to both the schools and the government's dedication to getting children school-ready so they are able to improve their attendance, attainment and wellbeing, as well as helping the pockets and purses of local families.



With the Education Secretary in Westminster

Community event to help tackle Ketamine use

Ketamine use is a real and growing problem in communities up and down the country. Merseyside Police are doing a lot of valuable work on this already – led by Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner and Newton Councillor Jeanie Bell – and it is an issue that has been raised with me by lots of local schools and community groups, including Park Farm in Moss Bank who hosted an event organised by Shana Begum and volunteers from St Helens the Best Me CIC bringing together families and groups to discuss how we can work together to further tackle the problem.



Fostering Action Plan

The Government has announced its new Fostering Action Plan to expand fostering, strengthen support for carers and ensure more children can grow up in loving family homes.

The strategy sets a clear ambition to create homes for 10,000 more children to grow up in foster families, backed by £88 million. Measures include a national recruitment campaign, stronger regional fostering hubs, new digital tools to support applicants, and funding to help experienced foster carers create home extensions.

Last month, in the House of Commons, I paid tribute to St Helens foster carers Sue and Dave Cook - which you can watch [here](#) - who were awarded MBEs for their services to fostering.

The couple have dedicated over twenty years to caring for children in need across the borough. In Sue's words: "To be able to give back to these children from St Helens who need us - it is an honour. It is a privilege to have them in our home.

They are one of many examples that demonstrate the transformative impact foster carers have on vulnerable children's lives and the vital role they play in communities across the country and encouraged local people to foster if they could.

Foster carers provide love, stability and belonging to children who need it most. In St Helens North, carers are doing extraordinary work - often in very challenging circumstances.

This plan is about renewing fostering: recruiting and retaining more carers, cutting bureaucracy, and backing carers with the practical and emotional support they deserve. It's also about making sure children can grow up close to home, near their schools, friends and communities.

This work sits alongside the Care Aware MP campaign - and I'm committed to being a Care Aware MP for our area. That means listening to carers and care-experienced young people, visiting local services, and making sure national reform is grounded in real life.

You can find out more about the plan [here](#), and anyone interested in fostering can find out more [here](#)



In Westminster

I was proud to vote in favour to scrap the two child limit for families in receipt of Universal Credit. Every child matters. Every child counts. Every child has a role to play in our country and its future. This will help lift around 2500 children in St Helens North out of poverty. Watch [my speech which addresses some of the myths](#) around this issue, and explains more about why I was proud to vote to scrap this damaging Tory policy.

I welcomed Labour's announcement of [more support for pubs and clubs](#), and confirmation that [ground rents will be capped](#). The government is also continuing with its mission of [fixing the front door of the NHS](#), with more GPs, same-day urgent appointments, backed by an extra £485 million for GP practices.

I am pleased to see that [over 150,000 people will get at least £400 back in their pockets](#) to help with the cost of living. The government is increasing the amount that working-age adults who receive social care must be able to keep after paying for home care (the minimum income guarantee).

I met with Industry Minister Chris McDonald to discuss further steps towards full justice for ex-mineworkers and British Coal staff. The Minister has recently met with both sets of Trustees and agreed a way forward with each. Any decision will need to have approval by the Treasury and some elements of what has been proposed may need to form part of the Budget arrangements. Officials and the MPS Trustees have jointly commissioned a further piece of analysis from the Government Actuary's Department on the Trustees' latest proposals to inform decision making. The Department and BCSSS Trustees are working together on what needs to be done to implement their proposals.

Our posties are amazing and they work so hard all year round. But the way Royal Mail is being run means that sadly this essential service is letting down people in St Helens North That's why I have [raised these concerns with the Post Office](#) Minister who has called in the Royal Mail for talks

It was great to welcome students [from St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic Academy to Westminster](#) this month. Parliament needs more working-class voices from communities like ours and I hope these young people were inspired to get involved and make a difference.

**LABOUR IS BOOSTING
THE LIFE CHANCES OF**

**211,000
children in
the North West
by lifting the
two child cap**

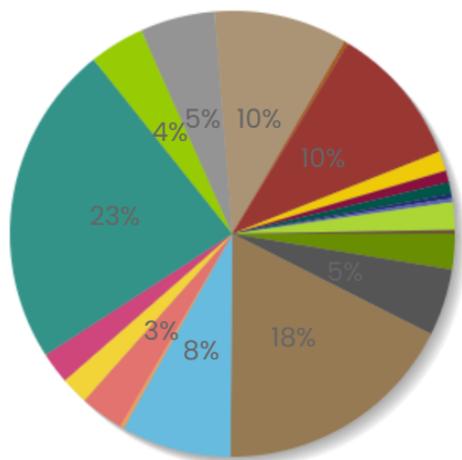


NEW GP CONTRACT

- ✓ Funding to recruit equivalent of 1,600 full-time GPs
- ✓ Patients with urgent needs to get same-day appointment



Casework update



- Asylum, immigration and nationality
- Crime, civil law, justice and rights
- Agriculture, animals, food and rural affairs
- Health services and medicine
- Social services and social care
- Education
- Housing and planning
- Local Government
- Social Security and pensions
- Transport
- International affairs
- Parliament, government and politics
- Employment and training
- Energy, utilities and environment
- Communities and families
- Party issues
- Bulk correspondence
- Defence
- Science and technology
- Culture, charities, media and sport
- Business, industry and consumers

This month my team has dealt with over 500 cases ranging from views on the WASPI campaign, to animal welfare, to local government, to housing support, and pensions. Some examples include:

Leave to Remain Support

Helped to secure an update from the Home Office on delays to a constituents application for indefinite leave to remain ensuring they received their response in a prompt manner.

Passport Enquiry

Helped provide a response from a company who deal with visa applications to ensure that a constituent's passport was returned in a prompt manner after a significant delay.

DVLA License Renewal

Helped a constituent get assurances from the DVLA that their license renewal would be processed as soon as possible.

Pensions Tax Issue

Helped a constituent gain clarification from HMRC to find out the correct amount of tax that they should be paying on their pension ensuring that their rate of tax was the correct amount.

Standing with Ukraine

Tuesday 24th February marked the 4th anniversary since Putin's illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Thousands of innocent lives have been lost and consequences seen at home and abroad with surging energy prices causing fuel poverty for so many.

Ukraine determinedly remains a sovereign, independent and democratic nation, defending democracy and freedom against Putin's authoritarianism.

Our support for Ukraine against Russian aggression – and to emerge safe, secure and sovereign – remains firm.



#StandWithUkraine

As ever I encourage you to get in touch at david.baines.mp@parliament.uk if you need my support or if you have a question, and please do tell me your priorities too. Remember you can follow what I am doing as your Member of Parliament via the dedicated news page on my website and on social media – search David Baines MP on Facebook, Instagram, Threads and Bluesky

David

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