

# A Year in Southampton . . .



Alan Whitehead at the Despatch Box in the House of Commons.

**The election was followed almost immediately by an invitation from the Prime minister to join the government as a Junior minister with responsibility for Local Government, the Fire Service, and Health and Safety matters.**

**This inevitably produces tensions with my role as a constituency MP. I am away in London more, and some constituency issues have to be 'referred' because of the need to act totally independently as a minister. However, I believe that I have been able to represent the city well and indeed, much of the knowledge and experience gained from close involvement with city matters has been of benefit to me as a Local Government minister.**

A new example that springs to mind concerns abandoned cars: during the election I talked to many people about their experience of having cars dumped or sometimes set alight in their streets or car parks. I also talked to the Council and after the election to those responsible for framing the rules on periods of notice and towing vehicles away. I was able to play a part in framing some radical new action on ensuring that abandoned cars can be dealt with more quickly by local authorities, and that those responsible for dumping them can be more easily traced and, if appropriate asked to pay the cost of their removal, instead of the local council tax payer.

But I have also been involved in a number of important issues in the City during the year.

There was the campaign, ultimately successful, to ensure that Vospers received full consideration for the building of Fisheries Protection vessels and for new Navy destroyers. It may be that some of Vospers will be moved to Portsmouth as a result of the securing of these contracts, but the importance of the work for hundreds of families in Southampton cannot be underestimated.

The effect of new tar content regulations on the production of cigarettes at British American Tobacco in Millbrook also took up much time. I used considerable energy in lobbying for extended periods of implementation of the new regulations to allow BAT to adjust its production, and on clarifying the way the regulations would allow BAT to describe their products. In both cases a partial victory was won, but one which will safeguard jobs in the city for the future.

The future of buses in the city has been a continual cause of concern throughout the year. I have worked actively with local people to protect existing routes such as the 20 and 21, and with the City council in looking at new ways to support services, or introduce new operators better able to preserve vital routes. Much progress has been made.



Alan Whitehead being interviewed by local television about the Abandoned Cars Initiative to tackle the problem across the citywide. Alan was able to play a major role in framing new powers for the council to take decisive action.