

INSIGHTS FROM A NEWLY ELECTED MP

Nick Fletcher

NICK FLETCHER, NEWLY ELECTED CONSERVATIVE MP FOR DON VALLEY, SHARES INSIGHTS FROM HIS FIRST FEW MONTHS IN OFFICE FROM SURPRISE ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT TO LIFE IN LOCKDOWN.

'Well that's it, last leaflet, last door knock, last conversation. The last remaining question is: have my team and I done enough?'

I record this on my phone walking down a dark damp street, 6.00pm 11 December 2019.

Fast forward thirty hours and the words: 'I therefore declare that Nick Fletcher is duly elected as the Member of Parliament for Don Valley.'

Fast forward seventy-two hours and I walk into Hogwarts or what we all know as Westminster. I am met by a young lady who is going to help me find my way around for the first few days.

I am given a laptop and an iPad only to find when I switch it on, I already have a few hundred emails - better put that away for now!

I have multiple inductions to go to, all run by the Whips, that's an MP's boss, our Line Manager.

At the end of a very long day, a whirlwind of meetings and appointments, I

manage to get five minutes to call home before my head finally hits the pillow.

Tuesday, well just more of the same really. My buddy is very helpful and shows me an area of shared space for all new MPs to use while their offices are being prepared. Here I meet some of my new colleagues, a great bunch from many walks of life, many seem very confident and sure-footed in their new role. So, I put on a brave face and introduce myself as the new MP for Don Valley.

Some good people here, I can see some becoming friends, it really is like going back to that first day at school! I see lots of green bags in my new municipal office and ask what they are for: 'Have you not collected your mail yet?' they ask, 'No' I reply. 'Post office next to the Chamber' is the response. So off I go, only to find my green bag with, you guessed it, hundreds of letters. 'Oh no!' I think, more mail!

Another two days of the same and I am back home and that's it. It's Christmas!

You fast realise that you have two places of work; Westminster and your constituency, so back home does not mean holiday time. No, I need to setup an office here and in Westminster. So, starting with the constituency, I am very fortunate to have two wonderful councillors both of whom want to help. After short interviews they both accept full time positions, starting immediately in the New Year.

I spent an enjoyable Christmas with lots of congratulations from many friends and family and with time to take breath and reflect on what has just happened.

You see this wasn't just any seat, this wasn't just any election, many places have not had a Conservative MP for a long time, but Don Valley has never had a Conservative MP. My predecessor Caroline Flint is a well-respected politician with years of experience and unlike many Labour MPs she had voted with the government on Brexit. A very tough and formidable opponent.

'Let's Get Brexit done' was the message; seems so long ago now but that's what this election was about. Years of stalemate, indecision, conflict and a parliament of no use. An election was needed and, with a new leader and finally an agreement from the opposition, an election was called.

A strong result had to be the outcome; a hung parliament would have meant another year of indecision followed almost certainly by another election in 2020.

And what a result, one of the greatest results the country has ever seen! Now I would love to take the credit for my win, but in all fairness, I don't think I can. I believe the people that voted Brexit in Don Valley love our new leader. He seems to be able to bridge the gap between ex-Etonians and ex-miners and that takes some doing. He managed to be able to speak with everyone and



stayed with the same message that everyone wanted to hear.

Having been in business for twenty-five years, you realise, if people believe in you, you stand a chance. They believed in our Prime Minister's message and they believed in me. That's why I can't and won't let them down.

When you are in business, if you forget the money and concentrate on the job and the customer, the money will come and that's what I feel with politics. If I concentrate on my constituents and where we live, if I keep my promises and put them first then in four years' time, next election, the votes should come again.

So back to the job. It is January, still no office and no real idea where anything is other than the chamber, those green seats, the history that's been made there, the leaders, Churchill, Thatcher ... 'Don't get carried away with history Nick', I say to myself. So, I get in there and ask first my question. I feel fortunate to get the opportunity to speak but, in all honesty, I would rather have passed, so early in my new position.

It went without a hitch, it appears that every day in this job will bring a new challenge, a speech, a question in the chamber, a fund-raiser back home, a school to go and see, a constituent with a heart breaking story you want to help but you may not be able to.

Whatever part of the job it is, I think people know if you are being genuine, if you are being yourself. People can see false, they can see you trying to be something you're not. So how can I bring Nick Fletcher into this job? Having been in business for twenty-five years, I have learnt a lot about getting things done. I'm a big believer in goal setting, I believe that, if you write your objectives down and then tell everyone what they are, you've made a good start. Letting people know what your objectives are means it's more difficult to change them and people can hold you to account if you don't get them done.

I have made no secret of my goals for Don Valley: a new hospital, a rail link to our

magnificent airport, flood defences, more buses and the one that is closest to my heart, putting a stop to the cycle of poverty. Big asks and I may not achieve them all, but Don Valley can be certain I'll try.

The cycle of poverty is probably the toughest. The cycle of poverty needs money but it needs something else too, it needs someone to care, it needs someone to lead, it needs role models - role models who will not let people down, who know that what they say, how they live, how they look will have an effect on everyone around them.

I believe Christ was the greatest role model that ever lived. We also have our Queen as a wonderful role model and so as one of her MPs, I believe I have a duty to try and be a great role model too.

So, with the help of the people of Don Valley, some of the businesses of Don Valley and this levelling up government, I believe we can break the cycle of poverty, we can change people's lives and make a real generational difference. We need to let people know that they are valued but also that they are responsible. We must speak well about everyone around us and ourselves without being boastful. Will we always get it right? No. We are human but if we learn to forgive as well, then we stand a chance.

So up to today and COVID-19. I am sure no one saw this coming on December 13. Is everything on hold? Well, yes and no. The government's priority must be COVID-19 and on a constituency level mine too. I am spending my time, helping all I can. This mainly means supporting people where they need it, reiterating government instructions and basically, being there for my constituents.

The number of volunteers that have come forward has been amazing - the coming together of the country after the past four years of division has been truly wonderful to see. We started an initiative in Don Valley #check3, check your neighbour to the left, to the right and the one over the road. You can never be sure how successful these initiatives have

been, but I hope it has been and I hope this level of community will continue when we have beaten this virus.

So, what about my goals for Don Valley, well I'm still on them, technology is proving to be extremely useful, my diary that was cancelled in March is now filling back up with virtual meetings. Even the house is sitting virtually, so things are moving and there is a realisation that when we come through this, and we will, we do have to continue with levelling up and yes, being good role models.

As I write this, our Prime Ministers is back after his illness. I believe prayer was a large part of his recovery, my church prayed for him, as did I and lots of Christians up and down the country. I've also prayed for the NHS (as well as clapped them) as I know we wouldn't be beating this without them. So, while I have this opportunity, I do say a big 'thank you NHS' for all your efforts.

Now, I don't know when you will be reading this, I don't know how many people may have succumbed to this disease and I don't know if you have suffered or been bereaved yourself. However, I do know one thing, I'm glad we have our leader back, I'm glad we have a health secretary that cares and a government that is doing everything it can to beat this virus.

Personally, I am glad I have my family, friends, colleagues and my Don Valley team, but most of all I'm glad I have my faith as I continue in this new position and at this most difficult time.

Nick Fletcher is the Conservative MP for Don Valley. Nick attended Armthorpe Methodist Church as a boy, and his father is currently a member at Cantley Methodist Church in the Doncaster circuit.

