

**St Augustine's Centre, Halifax, UK**  
**English for Life in the UK**  
**Season 3 Episode 3 - The Role of a Member of Parliament**

Mark Hello and welcome to the podcast: ***English for Life in the UK***. This Podcast is for those people who want to improve their English by listening to native English speakers, talking about a range of subjects. We also hope that, at the same time, you will learn more about life in this country.

This is Season 3 of the Podcast, and in this season, we are interviewing a number of interesting people who have had different experiences and jobs.

We strongly recommend that you listen to this podcast at least two or three times - one of which, you could do, using the transcript, which is available from our website, the details of which, will be given at the end of this episode.

In this episode, a new member of our team, Peter, interviews Holly Lynch who is the Member of Parliament for Halifax.

***(Music)***

Peter In previous episodes of the podcast we've talked about elections in the UK. More recently, Mark spoke to Jane Scullion, of Calderdale Council, about local government. In this episode, we're going to look at national government and, in particular, the role of the Member of Parliament or MP.

***(Music) (1 minute:55 seconds)***

Peter I've been joined by Holly Lynch, the MP for Halifax. Holly, welcome to the podcast.

Holly Hi - good afternoon

Peter So, Holly is going to talk to us a little bit today about what it means to be an MP in the UK, but before we get into that<sup>1</sup>, Holly, how - and possibly, why - did you become an MP?

Holly Well, that's a really good question. It was never that I had aspirations of being a politician. I studied History and Politics at university, but I was getting increasingly political. And it was that sense of, if something's not fair or it doesn't work properly, and you can see how something could be changed for the better and it's not being changed for the better: politics, to me, was a way of doing those things. And when my predecessor - so that is the

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<sup>1</sup> get into that - talk about that in more detail, more seriously

MP before me - Linda Riordan - announced that she was standing down<sup>2</sup>, quite close to the General Election<sup>3</sup>, 2015, it was a big decision - to think "**shall I throw my hat in the ring?**" - shall I submit an application form to try and be the Labour party's candidate? And I did that - and it was just a six-day selection period and then I had six weeks to try and convince members of the general public in Halifax, to vote for me, at that election.

So it was never a sense that I really wanted to be a politician - rather that, when the opportunity presented itself, it was a chance to really make a difference and do some good, and so I seized that opportunity with both hands<sup>4</sup>.

Peter That was in 2015, wasn't it?

Holly That's right. Yes.

Peter And so, since 2015, you've been the member of parliament - the MP - representing Halifax which, I think as a constituency<sup>5</sup>, so, the area you represent, is about 70,000 (seventy thousand) people. And you represent all of them, whether they supported you and voted for you or not. So, what does that constituency role involve?

Holly Yes. That is really difficult. So this 70,000 figure: that is just people who on the electoral register<sup>6</sup> - as well - so the actual number is closer to over 100,000 (a hundred thousand) people when you include children into that mix, for example. And you're elected and you represent everybody, but they all want something slightly different from you - there's a great range of opinion and views within that mix. Because you've secured more votes, you are their elected representative, and you have an obligation to do your best for all of those people, but it does take some balancing - making sure you are there, listening to them all, taking on all those views. You don't always .... You are not always able to satisfy everybody, or necessarily agree with everybody, but you've got a responsibility to be honest, open, transparent<sup>7</sup>, listen and be available for people who need you. So, you are that voice for your local constituency in the House of Commons.

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<sup>2</sup> standing down - giving notice that she was to leave the role/job; normally used in a non-employment context. In employment, it would be more usual to say: "resigning" or "retiring" (depending on age).

<sup>3</sup> a General Election is a national election when all the seats in Parliament have to be voted on to decide which party will form the Government

<sup>4</sup> seize with both hands - shows it was something you were eager to grasp, or to get involved with.

<sup>5</sup> constituency - an MP is elected by the voters of an area to represent that area or constituency

<sup>6</sup> electoral register - the list maintained by the local Council of people who are registered as living in the area and who are entitled to vote in elections

<sup>7</sup> transparent - literally capable of being seen through, like a window, but when used of people, it indicates there is nothing hidden in their dealings with others

But at a local level, we do a great deal of, what we call, case work - so that's where people locally contact you with an issue, with a problem - they need some help and support from you as their MP. We have lots of meetings - we call those surgery appointments - where people take us through their problems and we try and do what we can to help. I have my little team - so two case workers, a couple of other members of staff who support me with some of the policy work - which I do predominantly, in the House of Commons. And that really being available locally, meeting with people, is what the Halifax-end of the job is all about.

Peter And on a recent episode of the podcast we spoke to Jane Scullion from Calderdale Council. So how does your role link with the role and the responsibilities of the Council?

Holly It's entirely separate, in all honesty. So, it's a Labour MP and it's a Labour-run<sup>8</sup> Council; those are my colleagues - we speak often - we recognise we've both got responsibilities, in different ways, to do what we can for the people across Calderdale, and Halifax, in my case, but the procedures and our responsibilities are completely separate from each other. So those elected councillors represent wards - so the areas of Halifax - and then they make up the decision-making body of Calderdale Council,

**(6:20)**

I am sent directly to the House of Commons in Westminster<sup>9</sup> where MPs debate, discuss new pieces of legislation, new laws and have a vote on whether they should come into effect or not. So at a local level, we do work closely together, but in terms of our responsibilities and processes, they're actually completely separate.

Peter Now, you're a member of the Labour Party - you were elected as a Labour Party MP - does that in any way contradict or go against this responsibility for representing the whole constituency of Halifax?

Holly That is a constant challenge and a question that you ask yourself as an MP. When you ask people to elect you, you can't say what you would do in every possible scenario, so you have to really just talk about your values, what your principles are - and ask people to trust you, that you will make the right decisions on their behalf, as different pieces of legislation, different situations unfold, in front of you. You go into that election saying: "I'm standing on a Labour Party manifesto, so this is all the policies that we will deliver; this is what we believe in; I am a candidate belonging to that party, because I share those values, and so, if you vote for me, really that is what you're going to get".

Once you've been elected, as you've said, you've got a responsibility to stand up for and represent everybody, no matter whether they voted for you or not, if they are on the electoral register or not - and sometimes, those most vulnerable people in our society that

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<sup>8</sup> Labour-run Council - means that the Labour Party have more representatives (at least 51%) on the council, but other parties will also usually have Councillors, representing other views, and individuals might stand, independently.

<sup>9</sup> Westminster - the area - or borough - of London where the Houses of Parliament are located

need the most help, might not be politically engaged. They might not be old enough to be registered to vote - and you have a responsibility to them - perhaps, even more so. So, I've never been in a position where being a member of the Labour Party has been in conflict with representing those people locally. They may not share my views or [may] want me to do something different but so often in a democracy, I've got a justification for saying "well, this is why...", as long as I'm transparent in explaining all of that and you've got to take some confidence from that, in how you go about your business as an MP, really.

Peter Now what a lot of people will see, in terms of the role of an MP, is the Houses of Parliament<sup>10</sup> and the chamber of the Houses of Parliament. How much time do you spend there in an average week, if there is such a thing as an average week?

Holly Yes - it very much depends on the different types of business or legislation you've got on. So, the House of Commons chamber with the green benches that you might see at PMQs<sup>11</sup> .... that is what so often people think that Parliament or the House of Commons is - and that *is* the House of Commons - but in Parliament, we've got the House of Lords; the House of Commons; and around that, there's all the Select Committees - that's where MPs, on a cross-party basis<sup>12</sup>, come together to scrutinise different pieces of legislation; you've got all-party Parliamentary Groups, where you do something very similar. There's lots of meetings spaces; the Chamber bit - where we see those debates - is only one element of what's going on in Parliament, at any one time, as well, so it's worth bearing that in mind.

But usually, I have to be in Westminster on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, some Thursdays, some Fridays. But I can often be in Halifax on Thursdays, Fridays and then over the weekend, to try and balance those two elements of the job, being there in London, to be a voice for Halifax but you can't be that voice, without being here and listening, without being out and about in your constituencies. So - yes - it's a constant balance to try and do both parts of the job and do them well.

Peter You mentioned "PMQs" - that's Prime Ministers Questions, isn't it? - which is probably the highest profile part of Parliament. Do you always go to Prime Minister's Questions and hear what Boris Johnson, at the moment, has to say?

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<sup>10</sup> Parliament consists of the House of Commons (elected representatives) and the House of Lords (appointed by government and the Queen, and including high-ranking Church and Judicial representatives, and some hereditary members of the nobility who inherit a family honour/title).

<sup>11</sup> PMQs - the Prime Minister's Question time is a once-a-week opportunity to put questions directly to the Prime Minister - otherwise, requests for information or Government statements might be dealt with by a lower-ranking politician.

<sup>12</sup> cross-party basis - involving elected representatives from more than one political party

Holly In all honesty, I don't always go. I don't think it's a very good showcase for politics, at its best. It's the juicy bit<sup>13</sup> that you quite often see on the news, because it's not politics at its best: it's quite raucous, it's ...lots of people disagreeing - not always reflecting the best behaviour, that you would see in a professional environment, I'm afraid to say. Quite often, passions are running high - and people have very strongly held views, but it's not where some of that really good work happens. It is the scrutiny of legislation, it is the quite detailed work on a cross-party basis, to find solutions to issues, that takes place in some of those committee rooms or meeting rooms. Now, some of that work is quite boring to watch, as well - that's politics at its best, but it's not the sort you're going to see on the news.

So if you have the opportunity to get a question at PMQs: that is a really big deal to have the chance to ask the Prime Minister a question, on behalf of your constituents. And the way that works, it's essentially a raffle - it's a ballot - you put your name into it every week and if you're lucky you might get drawn out and that tends to happen only once every one or two years. So - it's a big deal to ask a question, but I'm afraid to say I don't think it's politics at its very best! That's probably because politics, at its very best, is a bit dull to watch.

Peter Just following up on that - so you have had questions at Prime Minister's Questions - what sort of things have you asked, on behalf of your constituency?

Holly So - I think in the last ... it's coming up to 7 years since I've been an MP - so I asked a question - I think I have had 3 or 4 questions - and I asked the first question around policing. It's a big part of my local case work - that people want to see more police officers on our streets and they want to feel safer. I've asked questions around trains - train times and train connections: that our rail services really, really need improving, in this area. I've asked questions about flooding before - which is something which very much affects Calderdale, as well. So those are some of those big issues that are constantly a focus here, as an MP. So when you get a chance to ask a PMQ it tends to be on those types of issues.

Peter I'm interested in the ...this idea of working "across" parties as well, and working on some of these local issues - so I assume, that for example, you would work with neighbouring MPs to represent the broader area, regardless of what political party they belong to.

Holly Yes, you do and Craig Whitaker, being my neighbouring MP from Calder Valley, for example - we've got very different and strongly-held views on a whole range of things, but when it comes to flooding, for example, we've both got responsibilities to the people of Calderdale, we will always try to work together, if we're making a case for more funding - if we need support from central government or support with flood defences, for example -

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<sup>13</sup> the juicy bit is the part of something that is exciting and interesting - it comes from the idea that the juicy part of a fruit is the more interesting and tasty part

that's where we will always have a constructive level of dialogue, where we can work together on things like that.

And then there's other issues, that might not necessarily be local but policy-led. We're a Fair Trade Town here in Halifax and I co-chair the all-Party Parliamentary Group for Fair Trade and I co-chair that with Jason McCartney, who's a Conservative MP for Colne Valley. We've got a shared passion for promoting fairness for our trade policies, in a way that can lift people out of poverty, in parts of the world where we've really got a moral obligation to do more, in that sense. So that's where you can put some of your political differences to one side<sup>14</sup> and work on those single issues, where you absolutely have got a common ground - this is some of the types of work where as I say most of the politics is done but might not be so entertaining to watch on TV.

**(Music) (14:40)**

Peter So the Prime Minister has what's called a Cabinet of Ministers: so members of his own party who occupy the main offices of state and have specific responsibilities. The Labour Party are - currently, at least, - the Opposition Party<sup>15</sup>. So how does the Labour Party address some of those specialist areas that the Cabinet are responsible for?

Holly So, that's right. In government, you have Ministers, and then the next level up from those Ministers is those who are Secretaries of State and they make up the Prime Minister's Cabinet.

We try and reflect that in the way we organise ourselves as the 'Official Opposition' so we have a **shadow cabinet and shadow ministers**.

So, we will look to **mirror** the responsibilities of those Secretaries of State in Government. The challenge for us is they have what we call a Civil Service - so all those really hardworking, dedicated, people who are contracted to work, really for the country, and do the best job they can, but they are given instructions and direction by those Government ministers and the Secretaries of State, but it does mean there are often thousands of people working in those government departments, to support the government in delivering its policies.

When **you are shadowing**, in opposition, you don't have anything like that same support so you have to try and do all of that work to hold those ministers to account<sup>16</sup>, come up with your own alternative policies, as well - but largely you are just doing that on your own.

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<sup>14</sup> put to one side - not let their differences about other aspects of policy obstruct their combined work on an area for which they want to see progress

<sup>15</sup> after a General Election, the largest Party usually forms the Government and the second largest becomes the Opposition, it is an official role and is officially called Her Majesty's Opposition

<sup>16</sup> hold someone to account - ask relevant questions of someone to ensure they give an adequate and satisfactory explanation of their actions

So that is quite a lot of heavy lifting<sup>17</sup> to do in terms of policy. We try and make sure that people in those roles have got some specialisms, some expertise, in that field - but that's not always the case. I've been a shadow minister for different positions, in opposition - and quite often it's an awful lot of detail to bring ourselves **up to speed**, to make sure you are doing that job well. So currently, I **am the shadow minister** for security - so that's "National Security" - things like counter-terror[ism], protecting us from hostile state actors, some of the cyber crime attacks - so that's attacks on line. So those are the areas where I lead for the Labour Party on all of that policy area, right across the country, in addition to my responsibilities to Halifax, as a constituency.

Peter I believe, in the past, you've also been involved on the immigration side of things which ... just to link perhaps, your responsibilities more closely to St Augustine's. How did you find that as a policy area to be involved in?

Holly Yes - absolutely. So I spent a lot of time, we say: "on the front bench<sup>18</sup>" - that's where you are as **a shadow minister** - working in the Home Affairs team. So we effectively shadow the Home Secretary - the work that she and her ministers do, in opposition. I've been the shadow Immigration minister, I've been the shadow Crime Reduction minister, and I'm now the shadow Security minister - so those are all briefs - policy portfolios - that sit within<sup>19</sup> the Home Affairs department.

Immigration is - you know, it's something that can potentially be controversial, but actually shouldn't be. I was only speaking to a constituent<sup>20</sup> earlier that - for any country to thrive, for any economy to thrive, you've got to have the right skills [in the workforce] and immigration is absolutely going to be a part of that. You've also got international obligations around protecting people and offering asylum to those who need it. So more recently, we've had some difficult pieces of legislation put forward by the Conservative Government - most recently, the "Nationality and Borders Bill" that will introduce significant changes to the way the asylum system works, so working with St Augustine's and lots of their brilliant members and those that they work with, trying to channel that lived experience of the asylum system into what will be changes in the legislation, changes in the way that all works. So I was very heavily involved in some of that type of work before moving on to the Security role which is slightly different, but all those briefs do fit together quite nicely, in one way or another.

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<sup>17</sup> heavy lifting = a lot of detailed and/or wide ranging work to become familiar with the policy area adequately

<sup>18</sup> in the House of Commons, the Government sit on one side and the Opposition on the other side, the first row of seats is called the front bench and this where the Ministers and Shadow Ministers sit

<sup>19</sup> sit within = come under the work or broad heading of ...

<sup>20</sup> constituent - here , it means a person who lives within the constituency;

Peter Holly: thank you ever so much for your time and thank you telling us about your life as an MP - and also the role of an MP in the government of the United Kingdom.

Holly It's an absolute pleasure and I am always keen to work with St Augustines and all the brilliant work that they do with the people that make use of the Centre - so thank you, Peter, it's been great to talk to you.

Peter Thank you.

**(Music) (19:46)**

Mark **Language Support**

This is the part of the podcast where I choose some of the words and phrases from this episode and talk about them.

I'm going to choose three phrases used in the interview with Holly Lynch.

The first one, early on, she said "I had to decide whether I was going to **throw my hat in the ring**". That means she needed to decide whether she wanted to be part of the contest to become the candidate, to become the MP for Halifax. Apparently, this phrase originates from the sport of boxing, where several hundred years ago now, when somebody wanted to show that they wanted to be part of the boxing competition, they literally threw their hat into the ring - that's the boxing ring - to say 'yes, I want to be involved in this contest'. So for Holly, it was to say "yes, I want to compete with other people, to become the candidate who will, eventually if I am successful, become the MP for the area."

The second one - she talked about her **needing to bring yourself up to speed** and what that means is to get all the information that you need to be able to do something. So for her, she had taken on a specific role for the Labour opposition - the opposition party to the government - and she had to get up to speed to find all the information about that particular area of responsibility.

Related to that, she talked about the idea of the **shadow cabinet** and of being a **shadow minister**. Obviously, you will probably know that a shadow is normally used in terms of the way the sun creates a shadow on the ground, from a person or a thing, but in this case it means "to shadow" can mean to follow somebody. In this case she used the phrase **to mirror** - so to follow the same brief, the same area of responsibility, as the minister that was part of the government. So she was a shadow who was looking after, for example, Security, and she was following what the government minister for Security was also doing, but she was doing it as somebody who was in opposition, so she would challenge and oppose things in that area, or sometimes support things in those areas that the government was doing. You can **shadow somebody in a job** and that means to follow them around to find out how they do that job. Sometimes people when they first get



appointed to a job, will be asked to shadow the person who is already doing that job before they take it over.

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That's it for this episode. - I hope you've found it useful.

This podcast is brought to you by a team of volunteers from the St Augustine's Centre, in Halifax, Yorkshire. We are a charity that supports in particular: asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. If you want to find out more about our work, including if you are able to, to donate and help us to continue this work, you can find that on our website. Also, there, you can find the transcript - that is, the written version of this episode - and all previous episodes - of this Podcast.

So, our website is:

[www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk](http://www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk)

and I will spell that: so it is:

s-t-a-u-g-u-s-t-i-n-e-s-c-e-n-t-r-e-h-a-l-i-f-a-x.org (o-r-g) .uk

Thank you very much for listening - keep practising your English and we will be back with another episode very soon. Goodbye for now.

***(Music) (25:24) Ends.***