

Thangam Debbonaire MP:

Annual Report to Bristol West General Committee; July 2016 - July 2017

Key Achievements:

- **Re-elected to Parliament** following the 2017 general election with an **increased majority of 37,336**, which amounts to 65.9% of all votes cast and a **30.3% increase in Labour's share of the vote in Bristol West**.
- **Campaigned across Bristol West** for both the general election and the Metro Mayor election, speaking to thousands of my constituents on the doorstep and via phone, with the help of brilliant local Labour Party volunteers - helping the campaign to win the vote in Bristol West for Metro Mayor and support increased activism. We now have a contact rate of 43% in a constituency with an annual "churn" rate (people moving in and out of Bristol West) of 27.5%.
- **Served as an Opposition Whip** from October 2016 - with specific responsibilities for EFRA (Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs) and BEIS (Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy) teams - helping to shape the general election manifesto through my support for policy development in these teams.
- **SUCCESS - Making PHSE compulsory**: part of the front bench team that forced a government climb down in the Children and Social Work bill to make education about sex and healthy relationships compulsory in schools.
- **SUCCESS - Refugee Integration Strategy**: as Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on refugees, I initiated a landmark public enquiry "**Refugees Welcome?**" (which took evidence from refugees in Bristol). One of the report's key recommendations - for a dedicated refugee integration strategy - **has now been accepted by the government** after my lobbying. I will hold them to account to ensure this strategy ends inequalities in how refugees gain access to public services.
- **SUCCESS - Secured £0.5 million funding for a Clean Air Zone in Bristol**: working with Marvin Rees and Bristol City Council to lobby government to address Bristol's illegal air quality levels.
- **SUCCESS - Letting fees banned**: this was a key campaign pledge when I first stood for election, and **I have held local agencies to account for their treatment of tenants**. In April this year, after consistent pressure from Labour, **the government announced in the Housing White Paper** that they would be banning letting agency fees. I will be pressuring the government to honour this commitment, which will considerably help renters in Bristol.
- **Kept my constituents updated** through media appearances, newsletters, social media interaction (www.facebook.com/debbonaire; twitter.com/thangammp), personal correspondence and my blog (<http://www.debbonaire.co.uk/blog>). I also responded to the views of constituents who have contacted me via email, and have done my best to raise issues in parliament. Many of these emails arise from clicks on petitions on sites such as change.org and 38 degrees. The top 5 topics for email petitions we have received since 2015 is as follows:
 - [Syria](#) - over 3,000 emails received
 - [Fox hunting](#) – over 1,500 emails received
 - [Protecting bees](#) - over 1,200 emails received
 - [Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership \(TTIP\)](#) - over 1,000 emails received
 - [Consultation on the BBC's Charter](#) - over 900 emails received

Further Campaign Successes:

- [Responded to the views of constituents who contacted me in parliament](#) on a massive variety of topics, many of which arose from clicks on petitions on sites such as Change.org and 38 Degrees.
- **Campaigning to keep as close as possible a relationship with the EU**, such as my work on [free movement](#) as well as through regular parliamentary questions to Liam Fox, Boris Johnson and David Davis. Maintained close contact with constituents to update them about Brexit and [held several Public Meetings on Brexit](#) across Bristol which were very well-attended - including a talk by Sir Keir Starmer during the election campaign. This is helping to destabilise the Tory 'hard' Brexit.
- **Helping to turn the tide in parliament against Tory school cuts:** I have written to every head teacher in Bristol West to ask about the implications of the government's funding formula, and - [along with the three other Bristol Labour MPs](#) - wrote to the Secretary of State to request an urgent meeting to help put Bristol's schools on a sustainable financial footing.
- [Hosted a roundtable for major local employers](#) including Bristol City Council, the NHS, Avon Fire Service, Lloyds Banking Group and Airbus, to discuss how to support people with autism in employment in Bristol.
- [Asked my first question during Prime Minister's Questions](#) on the impact Brexit will have on universities, and their ability to conduct world-class research.
- **Participated in a wide variety of TV, radio and newspaper interviews and debates**, including [BBC Four's Any Questions](#) the week the General Election was announced, and continued to write regular columns for local media e.g. Bishopston Voice; St George Voice.
- **Helped hundreds of constituents with casework** through advice surgeries and correspondence through the constituency office (see below for more information).
- [Co-launched a campaign on plastic pollution](#) with Bristol East MP Kerry McCarthy - which is attracting many people in Bristol and beyond in changing Bristol's use of single-use-plastic.
- **Worked to end domestic violence and violence against women and girls** - I helped launch the [White Ribbon All-Party Parliamentary Group](#) (a campaign aimed at engaging men in ending male violence against women - I recruited more male MPs to the campaign); [spoke for and helped persuade the government](#) to sign up to an international agreement (the Istanbul Convention) to ensure that survivors of domestic violence in the UK can access specialist support services; asked a number of relevant parliamentary questions e.g. [accessing housing](#), [legal support](#) and [maintaining anonymity](#); [submitted an amendment to the Digital Economy Bill](#) on online pornography and protecting people from trafficking, coercion, violence and abuse.
- [Secured a meeting with the rail minister](#) to pressure the government to complete improvement works to Lawrence Hill station to ensure all platforms have step-free access.
- **Kept my constituents updated** through media appearances, newsletters, social media interaction (www.facebook.com/debbonaire), personal correspondence and my blog (<http://www.debbonaire.co.uk/blog>).
- **Helped secure a new Post Office in St. George** (which has now opened) .

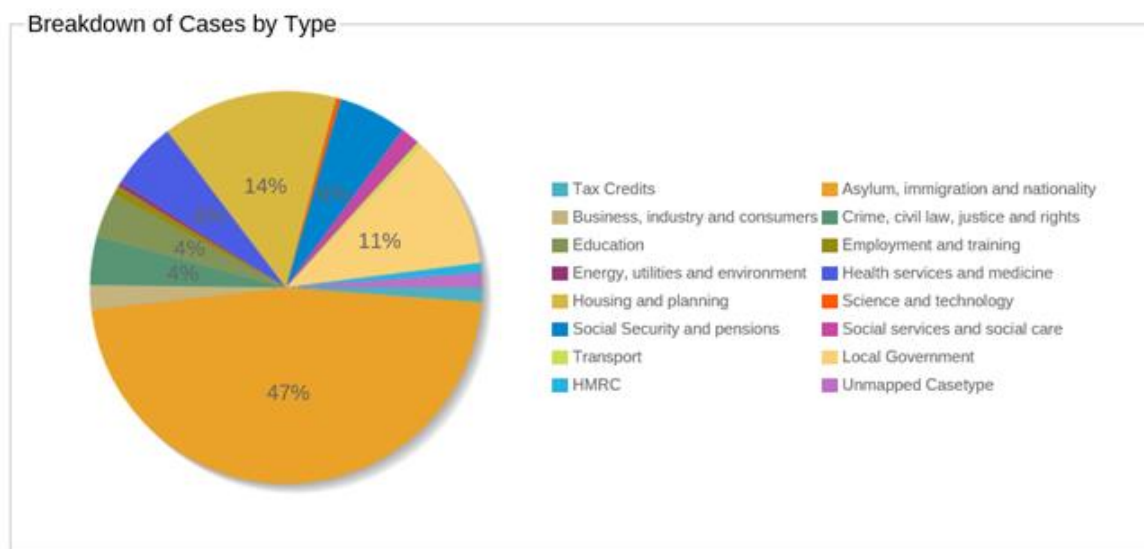
Casework: helping individual people with specific problems

Casework figures for July 2016 - June 2017:

Cases opened: 583

Cases closed: 588

In addition to opening and following up cases through the many calls and emails we receive, we also run monthly casework surgeries. In the last year Thangam and the casework team have met with over 100 constituents to discuss their issues face to face.



Asylum and immigration continue to be the main issues raised in casework (47%) Housing and Local Government make up a further 25% of the work.

Examples of casework successes include:

- **Asylum and Immigration:** assisting constituents in getting responses from the Passport Office and Home Office Immigration Service when applications are delayed; supporting visa applications with letters of support to ensure complex cases are considered compassionately; supporting asylum seekers with issues related to housing in Bristol; working closely with refugee support organisations to progress cases where constituents are destitute and require recourse to public funds.
- **Housing:** working with Bristol City Council to resolve housing issues, including ensuring that families are allocated the correct banding when applying for housing - this has enabled families to move quickly in cases of overcrowding and domestic violence; we have worked with the council to solve housing issues ranging from anti-social behaviour and repairs; we have supported several sick people in getting disabled bays allocated to help with their mobility in the city.
- **Education:** we have supported families in ensuring that their child's needs are met in school and co-ordinating the various agencies to work together more effectively.
- **Welfare:** we have supported constituents who have had problems accessing benefits, working closely with advice agencies in the area to ensure that constituents are supported in the process of

appealing decisions, particularly for Employment Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payments.

Constituency Meetings and Events included:

- **Roundtables:** hosted roundtables for key organisations working to improve safety for women in prostitution, and for major local employers to improve experiences in — and access to — employment in Bristol for autistic adults.
- **Brexit meetings:** I have organised regular Brexit meetings to keep residents informed about the Brexit process and to provide a forum for debate and discussion. Contributors to these events have included Clare Moody MEP, Avon and Somerset Police Force, SARI (Stand Against Racism and Inequality), and [Sir Keir Starmer](#). A recording of a meeting held at the University of Bristol on 8 December is available [here](#).
- **Universities:** visited the Students' Health Centre at Hampton House to talk with students and staff; met with UCU reps at the University of Bristol to talk about current conditions for university staff; spoke at UWE Labour Society; worked closely with Bristol Labour Students to encourage activism during the General Election campaign; spoke to medical students at Bristol about the refugee crisis.
- **Health:** appeared on a panel at the Freedom of Mind Festival discussing mental health in a political context; made several visits to local NHS Services, including to speak to union reps at Southmead Hospital; met with Chief Executives of North Bristol and Universities NHS Trusts; visited the BRI as part of the Alcohol Health Alliance "Day of Action" and met doctors working on alcohol-related liver disease; visited Bristol Drugs Project to learn about the work they are doing in the city.
- **Education:** I have visited 15 Bristol West schools over the past year to speak to students about democracy and to keep in close contact with teachers; met with South Bristol Youth Consortium to discuss equality in educational attainment; opened Unit DX, a new science incubator in St Philips which works with local schools to encourage interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths; attended the opening of the new learning centre at St Werburgh's City Farm.
- **Environmental:** held meetings with Warm Up Bristol to discuss improving insulation in homes in Bristol, and ITP Energised - a local company working on technology to harness tidal energy.
- **Housing:** visited Shelter's new Bristol hub; held meetings with homelessness organisations including St Mungo's, the Compass Centre and the Riverside Project; met with local developers keen to increase the provision of affordable housing in Bristol West.
- **Local government:** worked with Avon Fire Service and Bristol City Council and attended fire safety visits in tower blocks across Bristol in the light of the Grenfell Tower fire; regular meetings with Mayor Marvin Rees and senior officers at Bristol City Council.
- During the course of the year I have also held meetings with a number of local arts organisations, staff and union representatives at HMP Bristol, local charities working on elderly care and loneliness, the Bristol Somali Forum, and a number of local business networks.

Representing constituents in Parliament

Over the past year, I have submitted nearly 200 Written Parliamentary Questions on topics ranging from the electrification of the Great Western Railway Line to the National Funding Formula for schools; from helping homeless people access the private rented sector to research on rare childhood cancers; from the

economic impact of Brexit on the South West to the rights of unaccompanied child refugees. This is a vital part of the Parliamentary process as they allow me to gain further information from Ministers, ask directly for action, and expose potential problems with Government policy.

You can read all of the Written Questions I have submitted by entering my name and the relevant dates [here](#).

I have also written directly to Ministers in many Departments on behalf of constituents and constituency organisations about issues including the accessibility of Bristol city centre for wheelchair users, eligibility for Housing Benefit, Permanent Residency Cards for EU Citizens, and securing global access to clean water, to name just a few. This helps highlight the concerns of people in Bristol West and ensures issues important to my constituents remain high on the political agenda.

Speeches and Oral Questions in Parliament included:

- [Supporting victims of the Grenfell Tower Fire](#)
- [Treatment for HIV - Pre-exposure Prophylaxis \(PrEP\)](#)
- [Maintaining women's voting rights](#)
- [Protecting victims of domestic violence and tackling reoffending rates among perpetrators](#)
- [Promoting human rights in our international trade negotiations](#)
- [The closure of the Dubs programme for unaccompanied child refugees](#)
- [Defending free movement within the EU](#)
- [Health consequences of loneliness in older people](#)
- [Antimicrobial resistance awareness](#)
- [Ending the public sector pay freeze](#)
- [Underfunding at HMP Bristol](#)
- [Disability access for local rail services](#)
- [UK science and research post-Brexit](#)
- [Refugee integration strategy](#)
- [How many specialist trade negotiators does the government have?](#)
- [Homelessness and the housing crisis](#)
- [Safety of police officers](#)
- [Funding for the arts](#)
- [Arms sales to Saudi Arabia](#)
- [Ensuring all women are registered to vote](#)

You can browse my spoken contributions in Parliament [here](#). You can also check my voting record [here](#).

Campaigns for the coming year:

The following are campaigns which I have, or am, either leading, supporting, or helping to lead locally and nationally:

- **Remaining on a general election footing:** through my campaigning in Bristol and Parliament, my support for the Shadow teams I whip and my other whip duties to support the Leader of the Labour party, I will continue to do everything I can to help elect a Labour government.
- **Clean Air Bristol** - everyone should be able to breathe clean air and Bristol is still polluted.
- **Challenging cuts to schools** - proper funding for schools is my top priority.
- **Tackling Climate Change:** I'm campaigning for investment and other support for renewable energy, particularly tidal/wave energy (an underused resource in the South West) and opposing any increase in use of fossil fuels e.g. fracking.
- **Fire safety in Bristol's high rise blocks** - I am working closely with residents and Councillors to make absolutely certain our high rises are safe.
- **Making Bristol an autism-friendly city** - because 1 in 100 people are on the autistic spectrum and face discrimination and exclusion from public space, employment and school.
- **Homelessness reduction** - I want an end to street homelessness and hidden homelessness
- **Let's Stop Plastic Pollution:** I want to [end the use](#) of single-use non-recyclable plastic.
- **Rail for Bristol:** disability access for Lawrence Hill station, electrification of the line, new station at Ashley Hill - I've lobbied the Minister and will continue to do so.
- **Animal Rights:** I oppose the badger cull and any effort to remove the ban on fox-hunting and will continue to speak out on these.
- **Improving responses to cancer and leukaemia affecting children, teenagers and young adults:** I am setting up the All Party Parliamentary Group and preparing a work plan for this group to develop policy, raise parliamentary awareness and lobby government.
- **Reforming international law on responding to refugees:** the law is decades out of date and is not serving refugees or host countries and communities, particularly the countries on the borders with conflict zones. Leading up to the UN Conference in Autumn 2018 I will lead the APPG Refugees in developing our vision for how this should be reformed.
- **Refugee Integration Strategy for UK:** the government has now agreed to the recommendation the APPG Refugees (which I chair) made to develop this strategy, but I will continue to lead this APPG to lobby government for this to be effective.
- **Compulsory high quality Education on Sex and Relationships in schools** - the government has now agreed, but we need to make sure it is done properly.
- **Letting agency fees** - again, the government has agreed, but we need to hold them to it.