

Summary from the office of Thangam Debonnaire MP: June 2018

Headlines

- The month in Parliament has been dominated by the EU Withdrawal Bill as it ping-ponged between the Lords and the Commons; the ultimately unsuccessful attempts to defend the 15 significant amendments won by Labour peers; and the concessions made on the 'meaningful vote' amendment that saw a capitulation by the Tory rebels. All against a backdrop of the government's inept Brexit negotiations, which makes the need for Parliamentary scrutiny of a final deal more vital every day. The Trade Bill, the Customs Bill, the Immigration Bill and other bills related to the UK's exit from the EU will follow and will dominate politics for the rest of the year.
- The Immigration Bill will involve much time and effort by Thangam behind the scenes, working on amendments to reform the law about refugees and asylum seekers to give them greater protection and support.
- Casework continues to be dominated by immigration cases, including those affected by the Windrush scandal. The Home Office has not acted as fast as was originally promised and Thangam has spoken out in the media about this failure.

Behind the scenes in Parliament – Thangam's view

- There is a big focus on challenging the government on their treatment of the NHS, particularly in the run up to the 70th birthday on 5th July – as part of the Labour Health team I am heavily involved in this.
- Parliament itself is fraught, with Tory Ministers openly defying or criticising the Prime Minister, ignoring the concerns of businesses about the way they are handling the Brexit negotiations and hanging on to their fragile government only with the co-operation of the Democratic Unionists. Somehow, however, they are hanging on – but in the Labour benches we are all working on preparation for government.
- The Tories are attempting to appear to 'park their tanks on our lawn' by coming up with plans which sound like something Labour would do – until you look at the details. Often this takes the form of appearing to invent a new thing, when they are in reality bringing back something they themselves have cut over the last eight years. A good example of this is their announcement this month of a pilot of 'a new approach to women offenders'. This is actually a watered down version of Labour policy of creating alternatives to custody, such as Eden House in Bristol, developed by Baroness Jean Corston, former Bristol East MP, subsequently cut and/or sold off by Coalition and then Tory governments.

In more detail

- **My work as a Labour Whip** has dominated a lot of my time in and out of Parliament lately, with the hotly debated Bills relating to Brexit. In particular, getting the maximum number of MPs through the AYE lobby to vote for Parliament to have a meaningful vote on the final Brexit settlement was fraught and relentless over several weeks. I was very disappointed and frustrated that in the end, Dominic Grieve MP, the Tory who proposed the amendment, chose to vote against it and took five vital Tory MPs with him.
- Being a whip means a lot of listening, talking and communicating between front and back benchers, trying to resolve people's anxieties, find common ground and bring MPs from other parties with us, as well as work on many Bills, supporting Labour MPs in the Chamber and assisting three teams.

- For example, on the **Ivory Bill** outlawing trade in elephant ivory I supported our Shadow Minister to challenge the government on this. We are pleased to support the aims of the Bill but worried about the details, particularly the knock-on impacts on other animals with ivory.

Parliamentary activity

- **Speeches in debates:** Thangam spoke at length in a debate about [refugee family reunion](#) and briefly about the [Erasmus Plus programme](#).
- **Oral questions:**
 - Thangam asked the Trade Minister how the government, in negotiating post-Brexit trade deals, would avoid [a 'race to the bottom' in environmental standards or workers' rights](#).
 - She asked the Prison Minister about [reversing cuts to facilities for women in the criminal justice system](#).
 - She asked four questions about the Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon: she urged the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth to [get off the fence and support the project](#); questioned the Leader of the House about a delay to the [decision on the](#) project, and about renewable energy; and finally, after the decision not to support it, challenged Business Secretary Greg Clark on climate change and the [environmental impact of dropping projects](#) simply because of short-term costs. She also challenged the government's decision to support nuclear while [dropping the Lagoon project](#).
 - She asked the Minister for Justice to [bring forward compulsory PSHE lessons](#) in schools.
 - She asked the Minister for Immigration about the practicalities of how EU citizens would be able to settle in the UK under the forthcoming [EU Settlement Scheme](#).
 - She drew the attention of the Culture Minister to [the cultural curriculum being developed by Bristol Plays Music and the Music Trust](#).
 - She asked the Brexit Minister how the UK would be able to [continue to recruit the best scientists and researchers](#) from across Europe after we leave the EU.
 - She asked the Secretary of State for Justice whether the forthcoming Domestic Abuse Bill would include [domestic violence perpetrator programmes for prisoners serving time for crimes involving domestic violence](#).
 - She asked the Home Office Minister about the [hidden cost to the economy of domestic violence](#).
 - Last but not least, she also spoke in Parliament about local legendary sports team [the Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls](#).
- **APPGs:** Following the launch of her APPG on Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse last month, Thangam was asked to talk to a group of experts at the Royal College of Nursing. She also chaired the final sessions of the Parliamentary Inquiry of the APPG for Children, Teenagers and Young Adults with Cancer and worked on the draft report; spoke at a meeting of the APPG on Loneliness; and chaired a roundtable arranged by the APPG on Autism on autism and employment.
- **Written questions:** During June Thangam submitted written questions on a range of topics, including various cancers; the benefits of outdoor recreation for children; and the closure of live music venues. So far this parliamentary session she has asked 180 written questions.
- **Ministerial meetings:** with the Musicians' Union and Margot James, Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries (5 June), at which she secured a commitment to a system of work visas for people who need to tour the EU after Brexit;
- With Nusrat Ghani MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport about access at Stapleton Road railway station;

- With disability Minister Sarah Newton, regarding increasing bureaucratic burden of claiming Access to Work grants, as a result of which she has obtained a significant change in practice to help people who need support workers in order to do their jobs.

Other parliamentary meetings and events

- Thangam hosted representatives of TUC Women South West on a Parliamentary visit, answering questions about women in politics.
- She attended events and receptions run by UK Music, Cancer Research UK and Carers' Week.
- She spoke at a Safe Lives event on 13 June.
- Thangam attended the UNHCR Refugee Day reception in Parliament.
- She attended an event on drug policy reform hosted by Anyone's Child.
- Thangam attended a meeting of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) in her role as board member.

Constituency meetings and events

- **School visits:** Thangam visited The Dolphin School, City of Bristol College, Redfield Educate Together, Rosemary Nursery and St Werburgh's Primary School.
- **Festivals and arts events:** Thangam spoke at the St Mark's Road Iftar, a Ramadan street party in Easton with 3,000 guests. She also attended Limmud, a Jewish festival of learning held at Cathedral School. She attended a performance of the Refugee Choir.
- **Speaking events:** Thangam attended the AGM of BUST, the Bristol breast cancer support charity.
- Thangam also spoke and played the cello at Goldney Garden Party, raising funds for the Labour Party.
- **Meetings:** Thangam met with the mayor and the other three Bristol MPs to discuss local issues. She met with NHS campaigners and took their petition for funding to the Houses of Parliament. She attended the European Network on Gender Violence conference held at the University of Bristol.

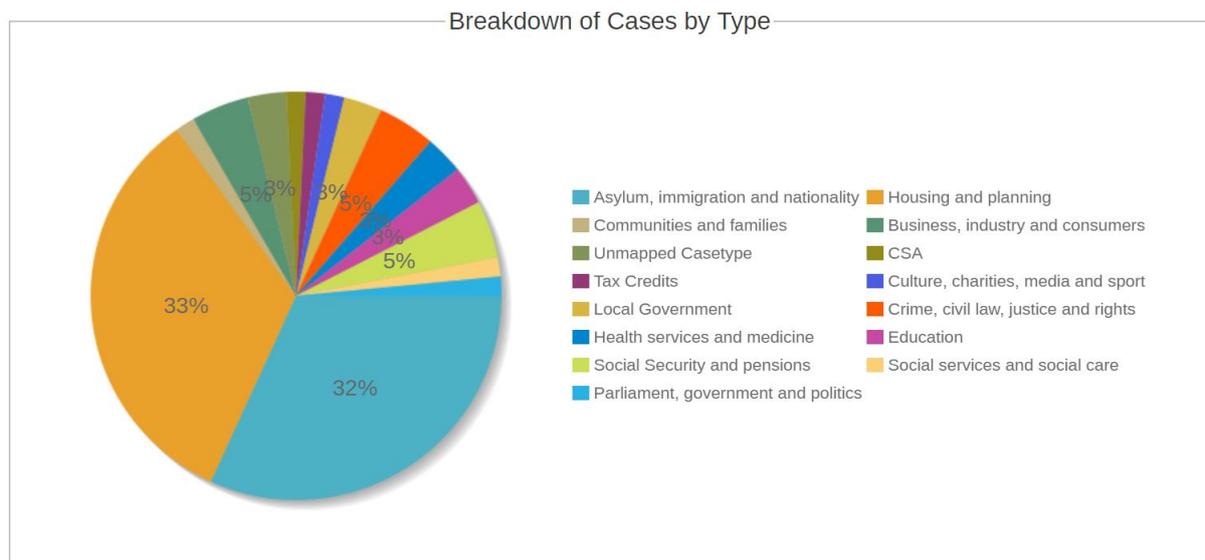
She also met several other constituents and local businesspeople to discuss a wide range of concerns.

Media

- Thangam was interviewed on BBC Points West about the 70th anniversary of the Empire Windrush landing in the UK. She also spoke to Points West about Home Office misuse of immigration rules which is affecting some of her constituents.
- She was [quoted in the New European](#) on sexism in politics.
- She was [spoke to the Independent](#) about drugs testing at festivals.
- The Independent also interviewed Thangam on the number of [refugees who find themselves homeless](#).
- She wrote an article in the summer edition of [Vocalise magazine](#), and wrote about religious events in Bishopston Voice.
- She spoke to the Bristol Post on several occasions about plans for the Arena ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)).
- The Bristol Post covered her stance on the EU Withdrawal Bill amendments [here](#) and [here](#).
- The Bristol Post also [interviewed Thangam](#) on NHS funding.

- She was [interviewed about the 'glass ceiling' in The i](#), to mark 40 years since the phrase was first used.
- She [gave a statement](#) to the Bristol Post on an ongoing murder investigation.
- Thangam's forthcoming Adjournment Debate on drug testing was mentioned on the [BBC News website](#).
- On the blog, Thangam wrote about the EU and UK sharing responsibility for [refugee safety](#), and a longer piece to coincide with [Refugee Week](#); about being underwhelmed by [the government's NHS funding announcement](#); a detailed piece about the [amendments to the EU Withdrawal Bill](#); and her [response](#) after the failure of any of the amendments to pass. She also wrote about her [meeting with the Culture Minister and the Musicians' Union](#), discussing the ability of musicians to tour EU countries after Brexit. As much attention is currently on the World Cup, she also wrote a blog about [the Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls](#).

Casework



Overview

For the first time we have opened more housing cases (33%) than immigration cases (32%). This increase represents the frustrations constituents are experiencing with the lack of suitable housing and the long time it takes people to secure a permanent home through the home choice bidding system.

Surgery

This month's surgery was well attended and Thangam met with constituents to discuss a wide range of problems including immigration, housing, recourse to public funds, criminal justice and parking.

Notable Casework success this month

- Thangam's support helped secure a first British passport application for a child born abroad.
- Spousal visa granted allowing a couple to be reunited in the UK.
- Representations made to HMRC successfully reduced a constituent's monthly repayment rate.
- Supported a constituent facing possession proceedings which have now been withdrawn.
- Speedily resolved an ongoing problem with a broken sewage drain.
- Pushed for a review of a visa decision, now accepted.
- Made representations to support a successful exceptional funding request for treatment.
- Supported a successful asylum claim.