

## Update from the office of Thangam Debbonaire MP: May 2018

### Headlines

- May is a short month for Parliamentary work, with a recess and two Bank Holidays. However, it has been a busy period for Thangam's work with All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) she chairs. Alongside working on the report from the Inquiry by the APPG Children, Teenagers and Young Adults with Cancer, she founded a new APPG on Perpetrators of Domestic Violence, which has a particular focus on the forthcoming Domestic Abuse Bill and continues to work on refugee policy, particularly in the context of the Immigration Bill, as chair of the APPG Refugees.
- The coming weeks in Parliament will be about the UK exit from EU: The EU Withdrawal Bill comes back from Lords and we will need to defend the 15 significant amendments won by Labour peers, plus the Trade Bill and various other Bills related to the UK's exit from the EU. These bills will dominate politics for the rest of the year.
- Casework is dominated by immigration cases, including those affected by the Windrush scandal. The Home Office has not acted as fast as was originally promised, so Thangam will continue to challenge the department.
- In the constituency, Thangam held a rally with Shadow Health Secretary Jon Ashworth. She also held a wide range of meetings with constituents and local organisations.

### 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 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on 5<sup>th</sup> July – as part of the Labour Health team I am heavily involved in this.
- As the Immigration Bill is coming up, I am putting in a lot of time and effort behind the scenes working on amendments to reform the law about refugees and asylum seekers to give them greater protection and support. This involves cross-party working, liaising with refugee organisations and refugees, meeting the Minister and building consensus.
- Everything in Parliament is dominated by the UK Withdrawal from the EU and as a Labour Whip my working time in Parliament is greatly taken up with work on this, helping to keep communication lines working and building consensus. As well as the EU Withdrawal Bill, now in its 8<sup>th</sup> month or so going through Parliament, we have the Trade Bill, the Customs Bill, the Fisheries Bill, the Agriculture Bill and the Immigration Bill. I will be whipping the Fisheries and Agriculture ones and heavily involved in the others so legislation is taking up a great deal of time, both my time and everyone else's.

### In more detail:

#### Parliamentary activity

- **APPGs:** In May, Thangam set up the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on **Perpetrators of Domestic Violence**. The inaugural meeting was attended by many MPs and peers from several parties; Minister Victoria Atkins and Jess Phillips MP spoke.

- Thangam also chaired two evidence sessions of the APPG on **Children, Teenagers and Young Adults with Cancer**. Witnesses gave evidence about children/young people's experiences as patients. The report will be published this summer.
- In her role of chair of the APPG on **Refugees**, Thangam chaired a joint meeting of the **APPG Refugees and APPG Sudan & South Sudan, and APPG Eritrea**. It discussed solutions to migration challenges in the Horn of Africa region.
- Thangam participated in other APPG events, including APPG Prostitution's event launching a report on pop-up brothels and is reading APPG Yemen's report on Yemen.
- **Debates:** In a debate on the Government's Serious Violence Strategy, Thangam spoke about [the importance of education in preventing all forms of violence](#).
- In the [May Adjournment Debate](#), Thangam spoke about a number of issues including the public sector pay cap, cuts to aid spending and NHS funding.
- **Oral Parliamentary questions:** Thangam spoke 13 times during May. During various Parliamentary question sessions, she asked the [Government how pensions will be affected by Brexit](#) – a concern several constituents have raised with her privately. She also [asked the Attorney General](#) about the importance of domestic violence perpetrator programmes. She [questioned the Leader of the House](#) on parliamentary procedure. And after hearing the concerns of a disabled constituent, she challenged Work and Pensions Minister Sarah Newton on the [administrative burden to receive Access to Work grants](#). The Minister has now agreed to meet Thangam to discuss this.
- She brought up two important questions around trains, [confronting the Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling](#) on electrification of Bristol's train line and [challenging Transport Minister Nusrat Ghani](#) on the lack of disabled access to platforms on Bristol's local train line. The Minister has now agreed to meet with Thangam and local councillors to discuss these problems.
- She asked Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [what the Government is doing to protect music venues](#). She is following this up.
- Thangam also asked Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson [how he would challenge Trump on a lasting solution to the Iranian nuclear deal](#). This will continue to be a focus.
- **Written questions:** During May Thangam submitted written questions on a range of topics, including healthcare and immigration issues.

### Other parliamentary meetings and events

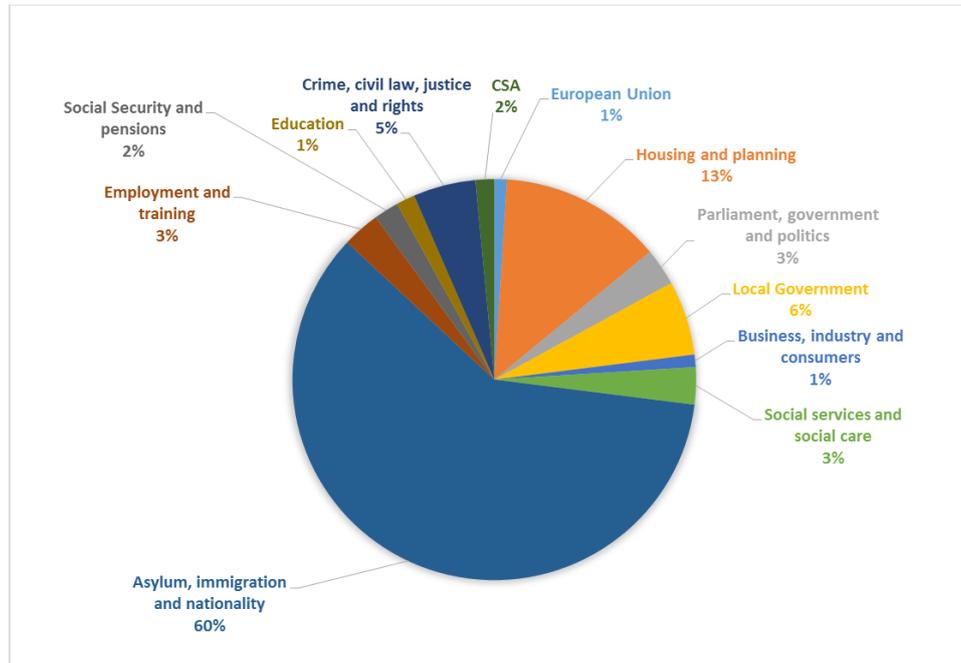
- Thangam hosted an event for [Unit DX](#), a laboratory space for science startups in Bristol.
- Thangam met students from Hotwells School when they visited Parliament.

### Media

- Thangam spoke to [BBC Radio Bristol](#) (listen in at 16:10) and the [Bristol Post](#) about the accessibility of local trains in Bristol.
- Her launch of the APPG Perpetrators of Domestic Violence was covered by the [Bristol Post](#).
- Thangam's work to protect Bristol music venues was highlighted in [a feature in the Bristol Cable](#).
- The [Bristol Post also published a story](#) on Thangam's response to the breast cancer screening scandal.
- Thangam commented on drugs testing at the Love Saves the Day festival, in both [Vice magazine](#) and the [Bristol Cable](#).

- Thangam wrote about her work on the perpetrators of domestic violence in [Bishopston Voice](#). In the [St George & Redfield Voice](#) she wrote about police cuts and in the Bristol Post wrote about the Windrush scandal.
- On the blog, Thangam wrote about her [recent event to help the victims of the Windrush scandal](#) and the level of debt some [student nurses are facing when they graduate](#).

## Constituency casework



## Overview

This month the casework team has been exceptionally busy, opening 62 new cases. The majority (60%) of the new cases are immigration problems - an increase from 45% last month. We are currently managing an open and active caseload of 207 cases.

## Surgery

Thangam held her regular Saturday surgery session where we met with constituents who wanted to discuss a wide range of policy and casework issues. This included airport expansion and climate change, overcrowded housing, asylum and immigration and the Access to Work scheme.

**Windrush:** We continue to support constituents affected by the Windrush scandal. Constituents are reporting that they are experiencing delays with the dedicated Home Office task force and it is fair to say that these cases are not being resolved in the timescale previously promised by the Home Office. We are liaising with the Home Office, writing to the Immigration Minister and pressing for a speedy resolution to these cases.

## Notable casework successes

We continue to do all we can to offer support and assistance to all constituents who contact us. In May, Thangam and her team:

- supported a family who have now been granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK.

- liaised with the passport office and supported the parents of a child who was born abroad. The child has now secured her first British passport and is now able to travel to the UK and the family can be reunited after many months apart.
- secured a refund of an immigration health surcharge collected by the Home Office in error.
- asked AQA exam board to change the grade boundary rules for the Applied General Qualifications to bring them in line with A Levels, in response to concerns raised by students at a secondary school in the constituency. This has resulted in students passing these important exams when they would otherwise have failed, securing their admission to further education. This success will benefit students across the country.

### Constituency visits and events

- Thangam held [a rally with Shadow Health Minister Jon Ashworth](#). The event, attended by around 200 Labour members was a chance for him to set out Labour's alternatives to current Government policy on the NHS, in the run-up to the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of the NHS. Two [care workers from Sirona](#), who run residential care homes in Bath and North-East Somerset, spoke about how their wages and conditions are under threat due to cuts.
- **School visits:** Thangam visited Torwood House School in Redland, [speaking to the older children on democracy and the workings of government](#). She also visited Bristol Grammar School, where she spoke in an assembly on young people and politics. She also visited Cashmore and St Philips Marsh early years centres.
- **Speaking events:** At Bath Festival, Thangam spoke on a panel entitled 'Who Runs the World?' alongside MPs Jess Phillips, Jo Swinson & Rachel Reeves. At Vegfest vegan food festival she took part in a well-attended Q & A with fellow vegan MP Kerry McCarthy.
- **Meetings:** Thangam met the Harbour Master to discuss casework in Bristol's harbour. She also met with Members of Youth Parliament for Bristol, to discuss various matters including their campaign to lower the voting age to 16.
- She met with The Loop, a charity which offers free drug testing, and learnt about their testing procedures ahead of the Love Saves The Day festival.
- Thangam met with representatives of pension provider Hargreaves Lansdown, one of the larger employers in the constituency, about their work. She secured a commitment from them to support community activities in the Redcliffe area.
- She met with a group of people from LGBT Labour, working with the Bristol West LGBT Officer, to discuss the content of proposed forthcoming legislation on gender recognition.
- Thangam met with Councillor Asher Craig and senior police officers to discuss community relations, and with the CEO of Stand Against Racism & Inequality (SARI).
- She also hosted and facilitated a packed public meeting on parking in Ashley ward.
- Thangam attended Shabbat service at Bristol & West Progressive Jewish Congregation.
- **Arts events:** Thangam visited an art/science crossover exhibition called "Creative Reactions" at Hamilton House and a new exhibition at We The Curious. She also attended a performance by the British Paraorchestra, who are based in Bristol, at Bristol Old Vic, and a performance of And Then They Came For Me, a play about the Holocaust, at the Alma Theatre.