



Thangam Debbonaire

Member of Parliament for Bristol West

July 2018

MEMBERS' REPORT—JULY 2018

The heat in July was reflected in parliament—plenty of heated debate but precious little light shed by the government on the most important issues of our lives. From Brexit to climate change; from funding for public services to dealing with our low productivity, the government has no plan. Labour, meanwhile, continues to build and offer alternatives.

But my work this month hasn't only focused on Westminster. I've been campaigning across the constituency in Bristol, knocking on doors and hearing residents' concerns. And we've had a record month for casework. You can read about all of this in this month's report!



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TORY BREXIT CHAOS CONTINUES

Over the past month Theresa May has released two documents outlining her plan for Brexit—the so-called 'Chequers deal' and the White Paper on our future relationship with the EU. Both documents are missing something crucial: an actual plan for Brexit.

In fact, after her Chequers meeting May lost two Secretaries of State and a Brexit Minister. On top of that, the Trade Bill and the Customs Bill—key legislation which will govern our business practices after Brexit—saw Tory rebels voting with us after hard work by us Labour whips. This meant we secured a victory, ensuring the government should seek to keep our membership of the European Medicines Agency. The scale of these Tory rebellions is seriously worrying the government.

Whatever deal Theresa May comes back with, we can and will scrutinise it. But if the government just offers parliament a choice between no deal and a bad deal, this is really no choice at all. I will continue to press for the government to give parliament a real "meaningful vote" on the Brexit deal.

On Brexit, this month I:

- [challenged Andrea Leadsom](#) to hurry up and bring forward key legislation such as the Immigration Bill for scrutiny as time is running out.
- argued that the Future Relationship White Paper [should have considered the needs of workers who tour EU countries](#).
- [pointed out in Brexit questions](#) that government advice for "no deal" preparations look similar to what Brexiteers called "project fear" during the referendum and would devastate Bristol's creative industries.
- [asked the Defence department to reassure the aerospace industry](#) after Airbus warned their ongoing activity in the UK (and Bristol!) may be threatened by Brexit.



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IN PARLIAMENT

BEHIND THE SCENES—THANGAM'S VIEW

There's one word to describe parliament at the end of this session—febrile. It often felt as if the government could fall at any moment, with cabinet resignations and Brexit chaos.

We in the Labour Party are preparing our plans for government. But with the Fixed Term Parliament Act and Theresa May's disastrous general election last year it's not going to happen easily, even with the chaos. Tories would have to vote to dissolve Parliament, which would currently be a little like turkeys voting for Christmas!

In the meantime, I'm exploiting every opportunity that the unstable hung parliament gives. For example, I am lobbying extensively for improved rights for refugees, in preparation for when the government brings the Immigration Bill to parliament later this year.



HOMELESSNESS AND REFUGEES

In a Westminster Hall debate this month, [I shared some of the stories I have heard first-hand as chair of the APPG on Refugees](#), where those seeking asylum in the UK have been left destitute and homeless. One particular problem is that while asylum applicants wait to have their cases assessed, they are prohibited from working or volunteering. This is all the more serious as the Home Office continually misses its own 6-month target for reaching a decision on cases, leaving asylum seekers further removed from the job market when their working restrictions are finally lifted.

I called on the government to end this particular aspect of the "hostile environment" policy that was implemented during Theresa May's time as Home Secretary.

CHALLENGING THE GOVERNMENT ON SHAMEFUL DEATH PENALTY U-TURN

This month, it was revealed that the government did not seek written assurances that former British Citizens would not face the death penalty if they were extradited and tried in America. This is a shocking departure from the principle of opposing the use of the death penalty, which has been at the heart of British foreign policy for decades.

The crimes the men are accused of are abhorrent, but due process must be followed, and [I challenged the Security Minister in the Commons](#) when it became clear that the government had not properly considered the legal basis (or implications!) of this decision.

NO OPT-OUT FOR SEX AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION

Throughout my professional life and my time as an MP, I have campaigned for compulsory relationship and sex education (RSE) to be taught in schools. And as the whip for the Children and Social Work Bill I was able to help secure this commitment from the government.

This month, the government outlined their plans for compulsory RSE. I'm concerned about the two-year timetable for implementation, but more troublingly there is still the opportunity for parents to opt their children of sex education. I [asked the Education Secretary](#) to consider how retaining the parental opt-out would affect children at risk of child sexual abuse and exploitation. Schools should teach *all* children about healthy and safe relationships, and I will continue to press the government to deliver this.

FAMILY VISIT VISAS, ENDING INDEFINITE DETENTION, REFUGEE INTEGRATION AND MORE...

Also this month I

- called on the government to [end indefinite immigration detention](#)
- [secured a meeting](#) with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to discuss refugee integration.
- spoke out against the government's [increasingly tough process for family visit visa applicants](#)
- chaired a meeting of the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology on [LGBT+ health inequalities](#)
- launched the [Labour Campaign for Drug Policy Reform](#).

IN BRISTOL

ST PAUL'S CARNIVAL RETURNS

After a couple of years off, I was delighted that St Paul's Carnival finally returned in time for its 50th anniversary. It is always a fantastic event that brings the community together and this year there were so many events that celebrated the history of carnival. In the morning I joined Ashley Labour councillors Carole Johnson and Mike Davies at a brunch to celebrate the work of the pioneer elders who started this great Bristol tradition, and those who helped make this year's carnival such a success!

I'm thrilled that carnival is back and was enjoyed by so many. I hope that once again this will be an annual event in the Bristol calendar!



LOVE SAVES THE DAY (AND CHANGES DRUGS POLICY)

The work I do in Bristol directly informs the work I do in parliament. And nowhere is this more evident than in my work to reform our failing drug laws.

I visited [the Loop](#) when they came to Bristol to run their drug testing services ahead of Love Saves The Day. The Loop allows potential drug users to submit a sample for chemical tests. That way they can find out what they contain and how strong they are. In many cases they subsequently take reduced quantities of drugs, or hand them in rather than take them.

I would like to see everyone who attends music festivals to have access to these services. But until July this year The Loop was operating in a legal grey area.

I secured [an adjournment debate](#) in parliament this month to debate drug testing at festivals. And I got a result! Home Office Minister Nick Hurd promised that the government would not stand in the way of testing schemes and would check that police forces are correctly informed about their legality.

MEDIA ROUND UP

At the start of the month, Thangam was a guest on [BBC Radio 4's Westminster Hour](#).

Her comments on bouncy castle safety were widely covered, in [Huffpost](#), [CNN](#), [The Mirror](#), [The I](#), and various local papers. She was also interviewed by [BBC Radio Bristol](#) on this topic.

Thangam's stance on a 'people's vote' on Brexit was covered in the Bristol Post ([here](#) and [here](#)) and in an [op-ed in Bristol 24/7](#).

Thangam's adjournment debate on drug safety testing was covered by the [BBC News website](#), BBC Radio Bristol, [Politico](#), [Politics Home](#), [Bristol Post](#), [The Independent](#), [North West Evening Mail](#) and a wide range of music publications, including [Mixmag](#), [Complete Music Update](#) and [Resident Advisor](#).

On the Labour campaign for drug reform, she co-authored [an op-ed with Jeff Smith MP](#), published in LabourList. [The Observer](#) and [The Independent](#) also covered the campaign launch event. Thangam was also interviewed at length for the [Stop and Search podcast](#) on drug law reform.

OTHER EVENTS IN AND AROUND BRISTOL

Also this month I:

- met with the Pro-Vice Chancellor and Registrar of Bristol University to discuss mental health support for students.
- visited the CONNECTED project at Bristol University which tackles plant diseases in sub-Saharan Africa.
- spoke on two panels at the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival—on women in politics and Tolpuddle Question Time.
- attended the Greek Orthodox Church Summer Fete on Lower Ashley Road.
- helped collect signatures at the Redland and Bishopston Branch street stall marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of the NHS.
- met members at the Ashley Ward Branch meeting and took part in canvassing in Lawrence Hill, Cotham, Redland and in Keynsham (North East Somerset).

She was interviewed about her veganism in Viva! Magazine.

Thangam wrote an op-ed in the [Fabian Society magazine Fabian Review](#), on how improving the treatment of refugees should be a key policy of the Left.

She was [quoted in the Bristol Post](#) about the location of the Bristol Arena.

[BBC News At One](#) covered Thangam challenging the Government over their handling of Brexit negotiations.

Following the debate on the Government's changing attitude to the death penalty, Thangam was interviewed on BBC Radio West Midlands and BBC Radio 5Live.

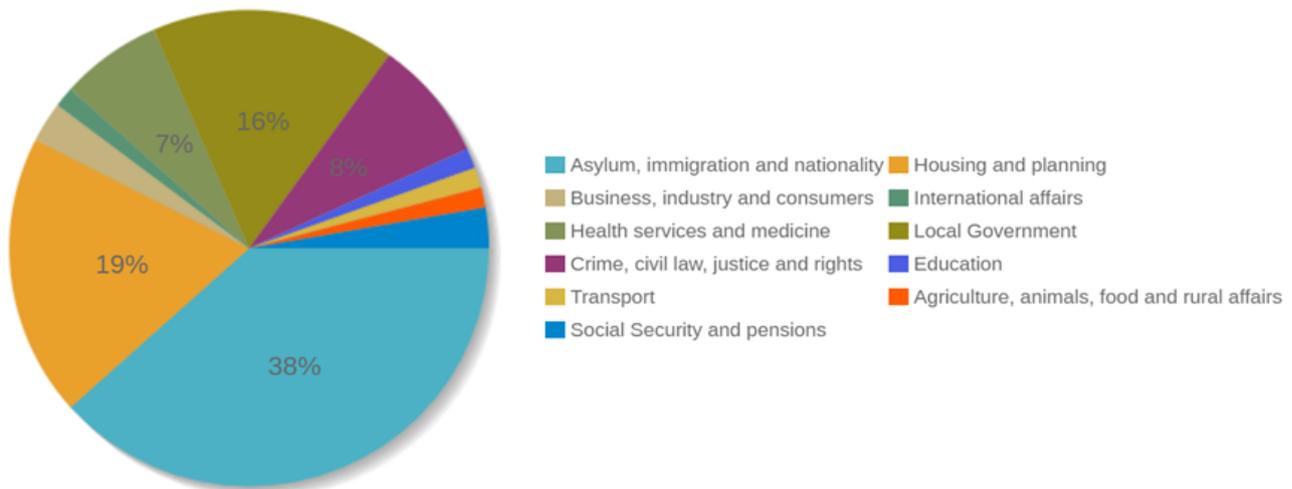
Thangam was interviewed in the [online series 'Meet The MPs'](#). The clip was also repeated on Showcase TV's Money and Politics Show.

On the blog, Thangam wrote about [drug law reform](#), [Brexit](#), [Bristol Pride](#) and the [70th anniversary of the founding of the NHS](#).

CASEWORK REVIEW

JULY 2018

Breakdown of Cases by Type



OVERVIEW

July has been an incredibly busy month with 73 new cases opened so far this month. This has followed a very busy June so we are managing a caseload of 230 open and active cases.

38% of this month's new cases are immigration based and 19% are housing enquiries. Local Government continues to take up a large proportion of our time as we continue to deal with parking, neighbour nuisance, overgrown trees, rubbish and dog mess.

SURGERY

Thangam's surgery appointments are always in high demand and she met with constituents to discuss a wide range of problems including; subject access requests, the Pitchford Inquiry (into undercover policing), application to remove the No Recourse to Public Funds condition, disabled parking, neighbour nuisance and highly skilled migrants facing removal. We have another fully booked surgery scheduled for the end of this month

CURRENT TRENDS

We are continuing to see a great deal of delays with the implementation of immigration decisions. Applicants who are successful at appeal are waiting a long time to receive their documents and biometric residence permits. During this period they are unable to work and get on with their lives. We continue to challenge the Home Office and do all that we can to push for speedy implementations.

The Windrush cases are moving very slowly and there are many people who remain in a precarious situation waiting to have their status confirmed. We continue to press the Home Office and the Home Secretary for a speedy resolution to these cases.

In addition, we are beginning to see casework as a result of the roll out of Universal Credit in the Bristol area. We will be carefully monitoring how universal credit is affecting our constituents.

SUCCESSSES

Successes this month include assisting constituents with the implementation of spousal visas, expediting an application so that a constituent was able to travel to Jamaica for a relative's funeral, securing the refund of an Immigration Health Surcharge (HIS) fee, obtaining an extension of time for someone in emergency accommodation to find alternative housing, supporting a child's first passport application, supporting a victim of domestic abuse to obtain leave to remain in the UK and reinstating a pension credit claim where there has been a dispute over the claimant's date of birth.