



Thangam Debbonaire

Member of Parliament for Bristol West

November 2018

MEMBERS' REPORT—DECEMBER 2018

When political historians look back at 2018, they will see this year has been dominated by Brexit. It certainly has for me. And November 2018 has been no different.

However, over the last month I have found time to work on other things too, including opposing cuts affecting schools, police and benefits—all things which concern people I meet in regular canvassing sessions (pictured). As you will read in my report below, the government's austerity project is producing tragic results in Bristol and beyond.

I hope to see you all on Friday for the social. And I wish you all a restful Christmas break and a Happy New Year. Let's hope 2019 brings more hopeful, positive politics!

Thangam Debbonaire



FIGHTING TORY BREXIT CHAOS

I still believe the best position for the UK is to be in the European Union. But failing that, we should negotiate membership of the Single Market and a customs union.

In Parliament this month, I [challenged the Prime Minister](#) to start listening to the 48% of people in the UK (and 80% of people in Bristol West) who voted to remain in the EU. Unfortunately, Theresa May's unpopular Withdrawal Agreement is bringing us ever closer to 'no deal', which would be a disaster for the country and Bristol.

Let's be clear: while the 'Withdrawal Agreement' is often referred to as a 'deal', it is no such thing. It is 585 pages on leaving the EU, and a 27-page, vaguely-worded wish list for everything that comes

after March next year.

As a whip, I am now working on the deluge of legislation we must get through if the UK is to leave the EU in March next year. In particular, I have been working on the Agriculture Bill, the Fisheries Bill and the Healthcare Bill. The latter piece of legislation will hopefully safeguard the EHIC card, which allows you to get free medical treatment across the EU.

- In the House of Commons on 5 November, I demanded that Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes [uphold the government's commitment](#) to citizens of other EU countries living in the UK.
- On 15 November, I [asked Trade Minister Graham Stuart](#) whether he will stay in his job to protect UK businesses from a chaotic departure from the EU.
- On 22 November, I asked Transport Minister Jesse Norman what arrangements the government will make to keep Bristol's aviation industry running if we crash out of the EU. [His answer](#) was far from reassuring.
- On 29 November, I [challenged Solicitor General Robert Buckland](#) to provide the legal advice on the Brexit withdrawal agreement.



IN THIS REPORT...

Page 1—Tory Brexit Chaos

Page 3—In Bristol

Page 2—In Parliament

Page 4—Casework Roundup

IN PARLIAMENT

BEHIND THE SCENES—THANGAM'S VIEW

Under the Tories' watch, police numbers are being cut, schools and NHS are chronically underfunded, air pollution still blights our environment and homelessness has increased rapidly. So I find it infuriating that Brexit is taking all the time and energy in Parliament right now.

Despite this emphasis, I used a recent question to the Prime Minister to raise school funding (see below).

Nonetheless, as one of Jeremy's whips I'm working flat out and with members of all parties to try to vote down the Tories' Withdrawal Agreement and ensure we don't end up in a 'no deal' situation. This is going to be difficult, but if we manage to defeat the government, Labour will first call for a General Election. If this fails, we will be pushing for all other available options including another referendum with 'remain' on ballot paper. The Parliamentary Labour Party is almost completely united on this strategy, across all wings of Brexit opinion.



CALLING OUT THE PRIME MINISTER'S MISLEADING SCHOOL STATISTICS

On 21 November I confronted Prime Minister Theresa May with analysis from the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), which showed education funding per pupil has fallen 8% on the Tories' watch.

This further exposes the nonsense of Theresa May's repeated claim, that [schools funding is at a "record high."](#) This completely fails to take into account rising pupil numbers and costs.

With such a cynical manipulation of numbers, how can we trust the government's figures on anything?

I have visited all state-maintained schools in Bristol West and heard serious concerns from teachers and parents. They tell me schools are being forced to cut whole subjects and many activities. Pupils with special needs and disabilities are losing the support they need.

State schools desperately need more funding, otherwise the gap between state and private schools is likely to widen even further.

POLICE CUTS MAY COST LIVES

Since 2010, police budgets across the country have been cut dramatically. Avon & Somerset Police has lost more than 650 police officers and hundreds of other staff.

On November 1st [I asked Attorney General Robert Buckland](#) whether he was satisfied with the modest funds allocated to the police in the recent budget.

Cuts over the last few years are likely a factor in a 39% increase in recorded crimes in the Avon & Somerset area over the last three years. Even more worryingly, violent crimes and public order offences have risen particularly quickly. As police across the country have become ever more stretched, [detection rates have fallen](#).

This puts people in danger. Two women are still killed by their partner or ex-partner [every week](#) in England and Wales. To bring such grim statistics down, the police need resources to be able to respond to emergencies quickly.

OTHER WORK IN PARLIAMENT

- [I challenged Justice Minister Lucy Frazer on legal aid for asylum seekers](#). Government cuts have made it increasingly difficult for them to access this help, even though they often come to the UK with very little.
- I hosted Sanctuary in Parliament, an event exploring the right to work, family reunion and ending indefinite immigration detention.
- I spoke in the [debate on the Courts and Tribunals Bill](#), raising my concerns that cuts to court services will disadvantage those who find it difficult to travel long distances to court hearings, including asylum seekers.
- Last but not least, [I spoke up for vegans](#) in the Commons during a debate on food!

UNIVERSAL CREDIT BITES

On 5 November I [challenged the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions](#) about whether Universal Credit will have an effect on poverty.

Universal Credit was created to replace a number of different benefits – such as Job Seekers' Allowance and Child Tax Credits – by delivering a single monthly payment. However, from its very inception, it has been beset with problems which have had a devastating

effect on people's lives. The DWP's own records show that 4 in 10 claimants were experiencing financial hardship after migrating on to Universal Credit.

Yet despite these problems, the government are still sticking by their scheme.

According to the Child Poverty Action Group, one in four children in the UK are now affected by poverty. Crisis' latest report into homelessness, rough sleeping has increased by 139% since 2010.

IN BRISTOL

DEBATING BREXIT IN BRISTOL WEST

During November, I have spent my time in Bristol speaking to a wide range of people about the UK's departure from the EU. This means speaking to many members, constituents, chairities, trade unions and student groups, in meetings, on the doorstep and on the phone.

I have also been responding to an unprecedented level of correspondence about Brexit. This includes more than 100 questions raised during a recent public meeting, answered in [this document](#), and many hundreds of letters, emails and petitions.

It is interesting to see the wide range of opinions on display in Bristol West. Please contact my office if you would like to speak over the next few weeks.



OTHER EVENTS IN AND AROUND BRISTOL

- In November, I also met the Creative Youth Network, which brings together young asylum seekers and refugees to campaign for positive change. I hope I can work more closely with these inspirational people in the future.

- I also visited Hinkley Point C in North Somerset, the site of the first new nuclear power station in a generation. This fascinating visit was one of a series looking at future sources of low carbon energy, organised by the Industry in Parliament Trust.



MEDIA ROUND UP

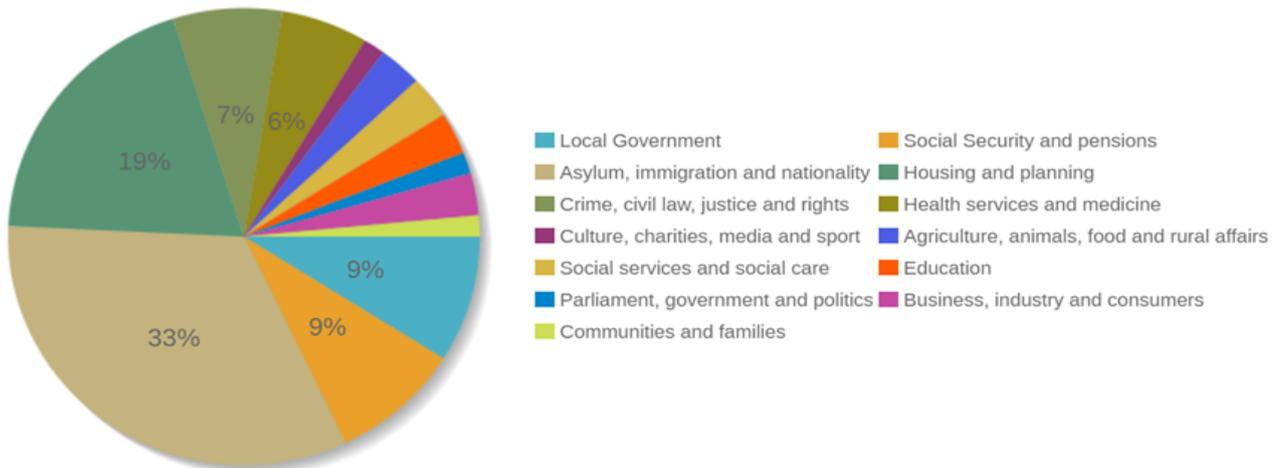
- This month I appeared on the [BBC's Sunday Politics](#), discussing air pollution and Brexit.
- In The Times, I wrote [an op-ed](#) arguing that there are strong economic reasons to treat refugees and asylum seekers more fairly (you can also read it without a Times subscription [here](#)). I also [commented in the Independent](#) on the shocking quality of asylum accommodation.
- My challenge to the Prime Minister on her use

of school funding figures was covered in [Bristol Post](#) and BBC Radio Bristol.

- [ITV interviewed me](#) about the closure of Chandos House, the last drug treatment centre in Bristol.
- On Brexit, the Bristol Post wrote about [my reaction to the Prime Minister's Withdrawal Agreement](#), and [Bristol247 covered my challenge to the government](#) to preserve the rights of EU citizens.
- I was also called for a law to prevent dangerous pavement parking in the [Bristol Post](#).
- My speech in the debate on the Courts and Tribunals Bill was picked up in the [Law Gazette](#).
- I spoke to [The Independent](#) about the recent case of a young refugee being assaulted.
- On the blog, I wrote about [Remembrance Sunday](#), the [demolition of Westmoreland House](#) and – you guessed it – [Brexit](#).

CASEWORK REVIEW

NOVEMBER 2018



OVERVIEW

Another busy month with 71 new cases opened. 33% of this new caseload is immigration work and 19% are housing problems.

SURGERIES

In the future we plan to arrange more constituency surgeries across the constituency rather than at a single location. This month Thangam met with constituents to discuss a wide range of issues including family reunion for refugees in Damascus, complaints about Home Office delays, problems with NASS accommodation, bereavement payments for unmarried partners, the degradation of nature and natural places in the South West, employment support allowance appeal and Brexit.

CASEWORK SUCCESSES

Many of the cases that we deal with are intractable and constituents often come to their MP as a last resort when all other avenues of help have failed. Despite this we are able to help and this month has seen some great successes – expediting a No Time Limit application so that a destitute constituent can apply for welfare assistance, securing car parking for a carer, supporting a successful ESA appeal for a Parkinson's sufferer, supporting a successful reconsideration of a PIP refusal, assisting a constituent to obtain a national insurance number, pressing the DWP to re-instate a constituents Pension Credit, supporting a visit visa for a family member to attend a wedding, successfully supporting asylum, leave to remain and spousal visa applications and securing an Immigration Health Surcharge refund.