

Conference - Blackpool 2014



NEWS FROM YOUR NORTH WEST MEPS

As the New Year is now upon us it's hard not to reflect on the year that has gone before. We all started 2014 in very different circumstances but left the year having campaigned long and hard and now having been your MEPs for 6 months. Our last joint newsletter in October let you know about how we were settling into the European Parliament and what committees and delegations we had been allocated - since then the work has really begun in earnest.

IN THE PARLIAMENT

The new European Commission (EC) has been officially in position for over a month now after a vigorous period of questioning from the Parliamentarians. President Juncker's Commission was formally voted in with 423 votes to 209 with 67 abstentions. Labour MEPs have called on the new Commission to revise the posted workers directive, stop the exploitation of migrant workers, halt the undercutting of local pay and conditions and take action to protect people from the scourge of precarious employment, such as zero hours contracts. We have asked that they tackle excessively high energy prices across the EU, get our young people into work and do more to ensure that Europe remains a force for good in the world with strong leadership that has the courage to make the changes that are needed in a jobs and growth agenda. In Plenary, as MEPs, we've been voting to support the youth employment initiatives, women's rights, for the protection of global human rights, a better Digital Single Market, the association of Ukraine and the budget. This week in Plenary MEPs voted by a big majority, 498-88, calling for an EU "common position" on recognition of a Palestinian statehood, proposed by Labour's Richard Howitt MEP, as foreign affairs spokesperson of the Socialists and Democrats Group.

Theresa has been working a lot on energy policy in the Parliament and has now built consensus as a Shadow Rapporteur for an Opinion on greenhouse gas emission trading with the Socialist & Democrat Group where we sit, but also across the Parliament with cross-group agreement on the key issues. She has also hosted several high level meetings on issues including Carbon Capture & Storage, fuel poverty, regional funding and European-wide legislation on tyre safety with Steve Rotherham MP. In Committee Theresa has been speaking about support for micro-businesses as well as SMEs, protection of intellectual property rights, and closing the gender and BME gap, and has been asking questions on issues such as the self-determination of Western Sahara, radio spectrum, and energy policy. In November Theresa also wrote an 'Op-ed' for World Aids Day and has been supporting the #letssavelives campaign to tackle neglected global diseases such as HIV, AIDs, TB and malaria.

Theresa has also met with the UK Science Council, representatives for International Day of Persons with Disabilities (including a great artist from the UK called Susan Austin), Eurocities, the CBI, Pat McFadden MP, the UK Science Council, the Royal National Institute of Blind People, Universities Allied for Essential Medicines, Kellogg, BT, Universities UK, Energy Networks Association, Liverpool Vision, the Heseltine Institute of Public Policy and Practice and others! Throughout she has been keeping in regular contact with the Trade Unions and has been working to ensure that the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) will not endanger the NHS or prevent a future Labour government from bringing the NHS back into public administration; on this matter, the current UK government can easily obtain the exclusion of the NHS from any future deal, and we will keep pressing it to do so. Labour MEPs will also not support any deal that in any way limits the sovereignty of the British people and the autonomy of its elected representatives, in particular through flawed ISDS mechanisms.

Afzal has spoken in Parliament six times since the last newsletter on crucial issues including the problem of young European ISIS fighters travelling to Iraq and Syria to join the conflict. Afzal urged EU governments to work better with parents to combat ISIS recruitment and to draw up a better strategy to combat false ISIS narratives. He also spoke about the recognition of a State of Palestine, which as Labour MEPs we all support, where he called on all EU governments to follow in the UK's footsteps by voting in favour of a Palestinian State; he urged that, although the vote is symbolic, it would be an important stepping stone to realising the only solution to peace and justice in the region, namely, a two state solution. He has also been working on the Case of Asia Bibi and Pakistan Blasphemy Laws. Afzal spoke twice on this issue to condemn the abuse of Pakistan blasphemy laws to persecute religious minorities. He also called on the EU, however, to work with Pakistan to aid its change and reform as opposed to severing relations. In addition he is working with academics from universities in Leeds and Manchester to promote the EU's global role as a protective player on the world stage and has met with a number of representatives from the Greater Manchester Fire Service to help promote their latest fire rescue technology both across Europe and Internationally.

Outside of the chamber Afzal spoke as a keynote speaker at a conference on Children in Conflict, highlighting the continued suffering of children in the aftermath of the Israeli-Gaza conflict. Whilst he welcomed urgent humanitarian aid, he also called for bold political steps to be taken to end the cycle of conflict and chaired and spoke at a conference on Protecting Human Rights in Counter-Terrorism, where he asked for more sophisticated ways to tackle terrorist threats that avoid arbitrarily taking citizens under custody. He has also been to the 8th Asia-Europe Parliamentary Meeting in Rome, the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign & Security Policy and the Common Security & Defence Policy and on a visit Bosnia-Herzegovina as Shadow Rapporteur as part of his Parliamentary activities.

The issue that mainly occupied Julie in the Culture committee this autumn was the review of copyright and how to adapt legislation to take account of the new challenges of digital societies. The Commission aims to launch the review process in the coming months. At this early stage of the legislative process, Julie's priority is that everyone engaged with this issue should have a chance to state their concerns and that stakeholders enter a dialogue to ensure that policy makers make fair decisions keeping the common good in mind. The agenda was also very full in respect of women's rights with a conference on women's involvement in the Arab Spring, an exhibition opened by Julie on the fight against Female Genital Mutilation and the 10 days of international action on the Elimination of Violence Against Women organised in Brussels and Strasbourg. In addition, Julie participated in a Socialists and Democrats mission to Rome to represent the FEMM committee during an inter-ministerial summit on women's rights organised by the Italian Presidency of the EU. Julie is a member of the global forum Women in Parliaments, and is a founding member of the newly established European Caucus of Women Parliamentarians.

Julie also hosted the European Writers Council conference on fair remuneration, SOLIDAR's event on informal learning, EUCIS' Adult Learners' Week, World Vision's event on children's rights and attended regular meetings of the expert working group on the Quality of Childhood focusing on the mental health situation of children & young people in the EU and on the crisis facing school leavers. She has spoken at the European Federation of Libraries policy meeting on copyrights, at the Children in Conflict Zones conference with Afzal, a UNICEF Ebola fund-raising event, on food security issues and child nutrition on World Food Day, and about cultural heritage and social cohesion at the Network of European Museum Organisations. She has also co-moderated the S&D conference 'Culture as a dynamic social & economic tool', attended the 3rd International Conference on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons hosted by the Austrian government in Vienna, participated in Culture Action Europe's International conference and General Assembly in Newcastle-Gateshead, and accompanied constituents to Ypres as part of the international Mayors for Peace initiative, commemorating the terrible loss of life in World War One.





As your MEPs we have also been working together on issues that affect the whole of the North West so it was a pleasure to recently welcome the Cammell Laird strikers to Parliament to be heard by the Petitions Committee, and are extremely pleased that the EP has asked the UK government to apologise for its actions at that time after 30 years of injustice. We have written joint letters to Arts Council England about funding imbalances for the North West which need to be urgently rectified, and to Eric Pickles in the Department for Communities and Local Government about serious concerns we have over mistakes from the department affecting the work and funding of social enterprises delivering business support in Merseyside and Lancashire. We are a strong team and will continue to work in this way on your behalf. Along with the whole European Parliamentary Labour Party we are also extremely concerned about Local Economic Partnerships and how their constitution may affect funding getting into regions, particularly the North West, from Europe. We have written to the government on this crucial issue and will continue to press for a solution until the £895 million that the North West region is due from the EU is secured, money which will be invested in existing and future projects to create jobs and balance inequality.

As well as our work above we have started to welcome groups from the North West to the European Parliament to see the work that we do and the Parliament itself first hand. We've had constituency groups, Young Labour groups, Fabian Women, and a very successful multi-faith group of leaders and young people visit us in Brussels. The Parliament provides a limited number of sponsored visits to EU institutions each year, and if you are a group that you think would be interested, please get in touch with our offices.

AROUND THE REGION

All of us had the pleasure to attend North West Labour Party Conference at the start of November where we gave our European report and hosted a fringe on the Saturday evening. Theresa was also delighted to speak at the very successful trade unions (TULO) fringe and to be able to thank Young Labour for their invaluable campaigning work at their conference. Theresa and Julie also spoke at a meeting for women members along with Harriet Harman and other great female politicians. It was great to be able to speak to so many Labour Party members and Trade Union colleagues about the work we are doing. We also all attended an event in Blackpool about supporting women in politics with Theresa and Afzal speaking about the underlying gender inequalities in our social structures.

We've also had very interesting conversations with councillors and New Economy Manchester about what the Greater Manchester devolution really means and what we can achieve across the region with increased decentralisation.

Theresa has also given a keynote speech to National UNISON LGBT conference, had really fruitful meetings with young people, councillors and residents about how to provide better youth provision in Lancashire, joined the Chair of Merseyside Fire Authority and Merseyside MPs to protest against unfair cuts being imposed on the area from central government, taken part in a very successful Youth Council Question Time event in Oldham organised by Oldham Leader Jim McMahon, met with leaders of the Jewish Community with Julie, visited Bentley Motors and the inspirational South Cheshire College in Crewe, held discussions with senior politicians across Merseyside regarding the possibilities of devolution to city regions, and spoken to participants on the Local Government Association's Next Generation Programme for future Labour Leaders in local government.

Afzal has arranged for a meeting between the early Recruitment department of BAE Systems and a number of leading BME figures in the North West to help with the industry's efforts to reach out to more BME young people. He is also helping the campaign for the Fibroid and Education Trust, a new charity set up by Charles Kwaku-Odoi and Anita Osei of the Command Prayer Ministries, to help generate research for women's health issues commonly found in Black African and other communities. Following the sad death of Alan Henning, Afzal spoke at a tribute held in Salford. He will also be on the steering committee for the newly launched Manchester European Movement.

Julie has taken part in many events around the region including speaking at a White Ribbon Men Against Violence event in Preston, participating in a youth democracy event at the People's History Museum in Manchester with Afzal and MPs Lucy Powell and Mike Kane, visiting local businesses in West Cumbria, promoting women's leadership in further education with the UCU, attending arts events such as Eden Arts 'Winter Driving' Festival in Penrith and working with Victim Care to support the families of victims of homicide and manslaughter with a Memorial Service in Liverpool Catholic Cathedral. She also joined women from Trafford and Lancaster Women's Refuges in London to hand in a petition of 38,500 signatures asking David Cameron to guarantee funding for vital Women's Aid services.

As well as this we have been making sure that our offices spend as much time working together as possible, both between each of us and also between Brussels and the North West. Theresa held her office launch at the end of October and was joined in the UK by her Brussels team following three 'Away Days' for the whole team. Julie's office opening will take place just before Christmas.

CAMPAIGNING

As mentioned in our last newsletter, we all supported Liz McInnes in her by-election campaign for Heywood and Middleton and it was fantastic to see her elected to Parliament on 9th October. We've also been pulling on our hats and gloves to campaign in council by-elections in Bolton and West Lancashire.

However, we're still concentrating on our 15 key seats across the region, of course. We have been in Rossendale & Darwen, Pendle, Carlisle, Wirral West and Crewe amongst other seats recently. Theresa was proud to have also supported the launch of Manchester Withington's General Election campaign for Jeff Smith and Afzal helped to launch Pendle's campaign for Azhar Ali and organised fundraising for Amina Lone in Morecambe & Lunesdale.

But we have also been out in Southport with the great Liz Savage, supporting the campaign to retain West Cumberland hospital, and backing Clive Efford's 'Save our NHS' Bill along with many other campaigns that we are part of to make sure that the North West is the best it can be.

So, another busy couple of months for us, but thoroughly enjoyable!

You can find out more information from our websites and offices - this is just a fraction of activities so far. The details are all to the right. Please don't hesitate to contact us!

Best wishes for winning in 2015,

Theresa, Afzal and Julie

Theresa Griffin
Unit 303, Vanilla Factory, 39 Fleet Street, Liverpool, L1 4AR
www.theresagriffin.eu
theresa@theresagriffin.eu
@TheresaMEP
www.facebook.com/TheresaGriffinMEP

Afzal Khan
Unit 9, Wesley Centre, Royce Road, Manchester, M15 5BP
www.afzalkhan.org.uk
contact@afzalkhan.org.uk
@akhanmep
www.facebook.com/AfzalKhanMEP

Julie Ward
Workington Town Hall, Oxford Street, Workington, CA14 2RS
www.juliewardmep.eu
contact@juliewardmep.eu
@julie4nw
www.facebook.com/julie4nw