

DR PHILIPPA WHITFORD MP



The first few months of 2018 have raised a variety of issues both in and out of Parliament. Although Brexit continues to dominate the political landscape, there has been progress on the Ayrshire Growth Deal and I continue to lead the campaign for the UK Government to pay Universal Credit to individuals in split payments. Below is a summary of some of the issues and events I have been involved with - I hope you enjoy catching up with my work. Now, with the new data protection rules, if you want to receive these updates in future you must explicitly opt in, which you can do by emailing philippa.whitford.mp@parliament.uk

JANUARY 2018

Polar Plunge

On New Year's Day, I took part in the first ever *Coastwatch* Polar Plunge in the sea off Irvine's Pilot House. The number of 'dippers' who braved the elements was fantastic, as was the variety of costumes, raising thousands of pounds for a number of local charities, including Coastwatch. Having proved such a success, I know Billy Lamb and the rest of the team at Coastwatch are hoping to make it an annual event. It is certainly a refreshing way to start the year and I'm sure it would help cure any hangovers from Hogmanay!



Picture Courtesy of the Ayr Advertiser

Next Stop Space!

Having promoted Prestwick's potential as a Spaceport since first being elected in 2015, I led the debate for the SNP in Parliament as the Space Bill passed through the House of Commons to become law. I had hoped to amend the legislation to include a liability cap so that spaceflight operators could obtain affordable insurance, but the UK Government voted it down. Without a cap, the prohibitive cost of obtaining insurance for unlimited liability could simply result in launches continuing to take place outside the UK and undermine the development of our indigenous space industry - the complete opposite of what the Bill is intended to achieve! The Government is now consulting on the issue, so hopefully a cap will be forthcoming.

FEBRUARY 2018

GP Services

The shortage of GPs across the UK came into sharp focus locally with Ayrshire & Arran Health Board confirming 101 Medical Practice in Troon would close following the retirement of two of the Partners; and patients transferring to the two remaining town practices. It was disappointing that the Health Board only kept the Practice open for a month, particularly when the Scottish Government is providing funding for Health Boards to take on practice buildings. However, since first raising the issue with the Health Board last year, there had been no success in attracting new GPs. As such, I met with the local Health and Social Care Partnership to hear how they hope to avoid other practices facing the same fate.

The GP shortage is a UK-wide problem and is not an easy fix, particularly with Brexit reducing the number of EU doctors who will come to the UK and causing a third of them in Scotland to consider leaving. The Scottish Government is working to encourage more young doctors into General Practice but this will take time to filter through to GP surgeries.

Philippa by Numbers	
<u>Westminster</u>	
Speeches Made	10
Interventions	6
PQs Asked	57
Committee Appearances	16
<u>Constituency</u>	
Cases	287
Enquiries	231
<u>Media</u>	
Columns / Articles	42
TV / Radio Appearances	10

MARCH 2018

Ayrshire Food Security Network

I was pleased to see further progress with the setting up of an Ayrshire Food Security Network, with all three Council areas now involved. The aim of the group is to enable all those working in community food provision to come together to develop a network linking local food projects, exploring ways of supporting each other and sharing facilities and ideas. With continued austerity leading to rising child poverty, foodbank referrals are also increasing. Initiatives such as breakfast clubs and school holiday food provision are crucial as, without them, many families would literally go without. The intention is to carry out a pilot project under the auspices of the All-Party Parliamentary Group



(APPG) on Hunger, of which I am Vice Chair, to provide fresher, nutritious food and combat rising malnutrition and food poverty, and ensure real food security for those who need it.

WESTMINSTER IN FOCUS

Private Members' Bill



In March, I was joined by a number of charities as I launched my Bill to reform Universal Credit (UC). UC is part of the Welfare System, which should in principle provide a safety net for those who need financial support. However, currently, UC is only paid into one bank account per household, which could increase the risk of financial control and abuse.

Single payments of UC keep women, and to a lesser extent men, trapped in abusive relationships as they have no money to allow them to leave. Research also shows that if monies associated with childcare are paid to the primary carers, most commonly women, then they are more likely to be spent on the children. Until now the UK Government response is that abused women can request split payments - but 85% say they wouldn't dare as it would attract more abuse. I am campaigning for split payments to be the norm to protect women's financial independence.

Petition Launch

In April, I followed up on my work on the Bill by launching a petition so the general public can add their weight to the calls to persuade the UK Government to make split payments the default protocol for UC. Supporting the petition will aid me in my attempts to convince the Government to establish split payments as the norm. If you wish to sign the petition, it can be found here - <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/217450>

Petitions

UK Government and Parliament

Petition

Universal Credit: split payments between adults in each household

The UK Government pays Universal Credit to 1 account per household. Charities have expressed concern this could increase the risk of financial abuse. Payments should be paid to individuals to avoid enabling financial coercion and women being trapped in abusive relationships due to lack of money.

[More details](#)

[Sign this petition](#)

Speeches in the House



Between January & April, I have spoken in debates on:

NHS England Winter Crisis, Space Industry Bill, NHS Blood Cancer Care, Universal Credit, Welfare Reform and Work Act, NHS Primary Care: Ageing Population, GP Recruitment and Retention, Vaginal Mesh, Impact of Austerity on Life Expectancy, Social Care, and Privatisation of NHS Services.



APRIL

Dementia Friendly Communities

Having initiated the set-up of Dementia Friendly Troon and Villages, after being inspired by seeing Dementia Friendly Prestwick in action, it is great to see both initiatives flourishing. The Troon project has now had its first two 'Relaxed Golf' sessions, which are designed to give those with dementia the opportunity to play golf without feeling rushed or pressured. Several players have enjoyed the full nine holes, while others practiced on the putting green, before everyone congregated in the Clubhouse for refreshments. The Prestwick project is running 'Relaxed Cinema' afternoons on their newly acquired screen and sound system, courtesy of *Lairds of Troon*. The Cinema offers a high-quality experience for individuals with dementia and makes significant progress towards making Prestwick more dementia-friendly. I was delighted to join them for their screening of 'Easter Parade', which made us all want to get our dancing shoes on. Going forward, it is hoped that with the two groups working together we can provide a wider range of activities to allow those in our local communities to keep active and enjoy their hobbies.

Child Refugees and Family Reunification

I was delighted to visit Symington Primary to speak to the Rights Respecting Schools Pupil Committee to discuss the issue of family reunification for unaccompanied children and refugees. Back in January, I lodged a petition in the House of Commons on behalf of both Symington and St Patrick's Primary, which called on the UK Government to extend the current definition of family in relation to unaccompanied child refugees. This would allow refugee children to be reunited in this country not just with parents, but with grandparents, aunts and uncles, giving greater scope for them to be with a family member and not be left, effectively, orphaned. I was pleased to update them on the progress of my colleague, Angus MacNeill's, Private Members' Bill which seeks to allow refugees to be reunited with their families, including children who are over 18.



Contact Details

Dr Philippa Whitford
MP for Central Ayrshire

14 Eglinton Street,
Irvine KA12 8AS

Tel: 01294 311 160

Email:
philippa.whitford.mp@
parliament.uk