

Harriet Harman - MP for Camberwell and Peckham

Annual Report 2013

Helping Local People - Constituency casework

A major part of my work as MP for Camberwell and Peckham helping constituents with a wide range of problems. Since January, I have helped over **3,750** people and last year I assisted over **5,000**. Many constituents will have contacted me more than once but this year over **1,300** people have been in touch for the first time. I have a small, dedicated staff to assist me.

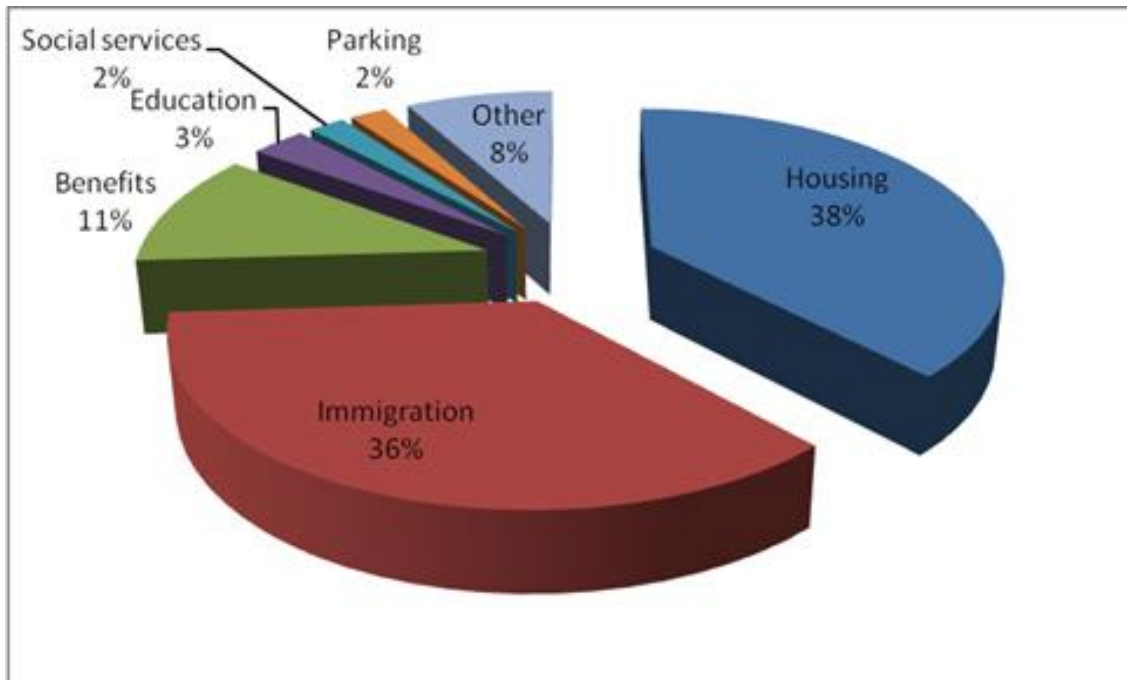
My constituents contact me by letter, email or twitter, and I hold three advice surgeries a month at Walworth Methodist Church Hall in Camberwell Road where people can come to tell me about their problems. I then keep them informed of the progress of their case. Each year, I hold estate advice surgeries with the local Tenants & Residents Association, involving local councillors and Council housing officers.

Casework enables me to help thousands of my constituents as well as keeping me in touch with the everyday, as well as the exceptional problems, they face. If you want to attend one of my regular advice surgeries, you can find the details on my website at **www.harrietharman.org** or call 0207 219 4218.



Casework issues

People seek my help for many different reasons including their housing situation, immigration status, benefit entitlement, and neighbourhood problems. Since January 2013, these are the reasons people have contacted me for help:



Often I am able to cut through red tape, challenge an injustice and make progress for a constituent. Here are a just a few examples of casework successes this year:

*An elderly man from Camberwell contacted me because he couldn't get the bathroom adapted for his 76 year old disabled wife. They had submitted an application to the council but had not heard back for three months. In the meantime, he was struggling to lift her in and out of the bath and feared that they might fall and injure themselves. I pursued this with the Council who completed the bathroom adaptations and also agreed to change the process to prevent such delays happening again.

*A woman who had been the victim of a violent rape got in touch with me because she was concerned that the perpetrator was about to be released only months after he was sentenced. I made a request to the Attorney General that his sentence be referred back to the Court of Appeal as an Unduly Lenient Sentence. It increased to an indefinite sentence with a minimum further three years before he would be eligible for parole.

*A 58 year old single mother from Walworth came to my surgery about the Bedroom Tax. She lives with her 42 year old son, who has cerebral palsy. The flat is categorised as 2 bedroom plus a tiny 'box' room which the Council originally said was

too small to be a bedroom when they moved in 20 years ago. But she was told that the flat has now been classified as 3 bedrooms and she will have to pay an extra £14 each week for the Bedroom Tax. She didn't know where the extra money would come from because her income barely covers the rent and bills. However, despite acknowledging the impact on my constituent, they decided not to reclassify the property.

*A retired man from Nunhead got in touch to say that the tax authorities (HMRC) had told him that he had underpaid income tax for the last three years and that he owed them £2,940. He used to work in construction but has been out of work since 2000 because of ill health. He asked HMRC to waive the debt because he said he could not have known that he was in the wrong tax bracket. They agreed, but unfortunately the problem re-occurred last year when he was told he owed £1,039 in unpaid tax for 2012. He asked again for the debt to be waived but this time they refused. Earlier this year, he was informed that he owes a further £2,113.00 for 2013. I contacted the HMRC who reviewed the case and decided to waive the debt. They are also paying him compensation in recognition of their error.

Young people in Camberwell and Peckham

Tykes Corner Parent & Toddler Group, Aylesbury Estate

In March I met mums, minders and toddlers at the very busy Tykes Corner Parent & Toddler Group on the Aylesbury Estate. I was joined by local Faraday councillors Lorraine Lauder and Dan Garfield along with local community organisers Jean Bartlett, Linda Edwards and Carole Vincent.

St John & St Clements Primary, Peckham

In July I opened the new creative curriculum exhibition at St Johns' & St Clements Primary School. Many thanks to the Head Teacher, Sarah Alexander and Deputy Head, Anna Harding for showing me around. Afterwards members of the school council and their parents told me what they like most about the new curriculum.



Talking with children from St Johns' & St Clements Primary School

Visiting Walworth Academy

In March I visited Walworth Academy to meet the new Head, Yvonne Powell, and a small group of pupils who live on the neighbouring Aylesbury Estate. We talked about living on the Aylesbury and their aspirations for the future. The group came to visit me in the House of Commons in June and I arranged for them to do a tour.



Meeting students from Walworth Academy at the House of Commons

Secondary school choice

One of the things parents are most concerned about is secondary school choice. In July, I released a report entitled "Are parents in Camberwell & Peckham getting the choice of secondary school they want for their child?" which examines first preference applications for entry to secondary school. Some schools in Camberwell and Peckham are doing exceptionally well and have the confidence of parents. But there is still a long way to go as other schools are not winning the confidence of parents.

The report shows that more than one third of parents in the area are not getting their children into their first choice secondary school. This year only 58.7% of parents in Southwark got their first choice secondary school. This is unacceptable. In other parts of the country many more parents get their first choice of school. In York, for example, 96% of parents get their first choice. This is one of the biggest concerns that my constituents raise with me and I, together with the Council, will be meeting the Minister for Education to insist that action be taken to address the concerns of parents who choose not to send their children to local secondary schools.

Campaigning for better transport

Improving the 343 bus service through Peckham

For some time there has been a problem with severe overcrowding on the 343 bus that goes through Peckham on its way to London Bridge. In April, I attended a packed public meeting at Rye Lane Chapel chaired by Val Shawcross, London Assembly Member, and arranged by local councillors Cleo Soanes, Barry Hargrove, Chris Brown & Mark Williams who have campaigned with me to bring this long running problem to the attention of Transport for London (TfL). Given the strength of local support for the campaign and well researched evidence, TfL representatives at the meeting publicly agreed to find a solution—and more buses have now been added to the route during the morning rush hour.



Commuters waiting for the 343 bus during the morning rush hour on Southampton Way

Campaigning against bus diversions in Peckham Rye

When buses were diverted along Therapia & Mundania roads in September because of road works in nearby Forest Hill Road, I joined local residents in their campaign to stop the diverted buses from going down these residential roads. I met Cllrs Barrie Hargrove and Gavin Edwards and TfL representatives who agreed to speed up the road works and in the interim, to mitigate the impact of the buses and monitor their speed. The road works were completed well ahead of time and residents are now enjoying the peace and quiet once again.

Opposing the Government's welfare changes

The Governments' welfare changes, including the Bedroom Tax, started to hit families in Southwark in April this year:

Benefit Cap - the amount of benefit a family can receive has been capped. This applies mostly to out-of-work households as well as women on maternity leave and carers. 294 households in Camberwell & Peckham are losing out and the average weekly loss is £72.16

Council Tax Benefit - the Government is cutting money for council tax benefit by giving Southwark Council 10% less money than it normally receives. The Government said pensioners must be protected so that means other people on council tax benefit will lose out. 11,744 households in Camberwell & Peckham have been affected.

Tax credits - the working age benefits and tax credits that many working families rely on will rise less than the increase in prices this year and this is hurting working families struggling to make ends meet. 8,700 families in Camberwell & Peckham receiving working tax credit are being affected.

Bedroom Tax—The Government has cut the amount of housing benefit people can claim if they are deemed to have a spare room in their council or housing association home. 4,046 people in Southwark and 1,981 in Camberwell and Peckham are now losing between 14% and 25% of their housing benefit.

The Government's justification for the Bedroom Tax - encouraging tenants to move to smaller homes - can't work unless there are smaller homes to move to. In Southwark, more than 4,000 households are being hit by the Bedroom Tax but there are only 160 smaller properties available for them to move to - that's only 4% who could move to smaller properties.

The Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund is completely inadequate to help all the families who can't move and are falling into arrears.

Because so many people were going to be hit by the Bedroom Tax, all Labour MP's voted against it. But it became law because the Lib Dems including Southwark MP, Simon Hughes, supported it and voted with the Tories. Simon Hughes should have voted against it because it is unfair and there are more people hit by the Bedroom Tax in his constituency than anywhere else in the country. The next Labour government will repeal it.

Peckham Food Bank

Because many people are struggling to cope with the rising cost of living, I visited the Peckham food bank (PECAN) in March to talk to local residents about the difficulties they are facing. In 2012, PECAN supported 3,000 people and this year they expect to double the number as a result of high living costs, stagnant incomes, high unemployment and changes to benefits. Many thanks to Chris Price, the Director for showing me around and also the volunteers I met, for running the food bank.

London Mutual Credit Union in Peckham

More and more people feel forced to go to pay day lenders for loans to help pay for everyday essentials. The London Mutual Credit Union (LMCU) offers people an affordable alternative and I was pleased to open their new head office in Peckham in January. Staffed by local people, it offers a range of services including alternative 'payday' loans costing a fraction of the rate loan sharks charge. Ed Miliband chose to announce Labour's plan to impose a levy on payday lenders at the same branch on October 17th. The money raised from the levy would be used to double the amount of public funding for low-cost alternatives, such as credit unions.



Opening the new Peckham HQ of the London Mutual Credit Union in January

The African Community in Southwark

Camberwell and Peckham is a diverse and thriving constituency. We have the largest African diaspora in the UK with about a third of my constituents coming from Africa. Members of diaspora communities in London often send money to support family members in their country of origin, with some individuals sending more than a quarter of their income. And many of these workers are taking on two or three low-pay jobs to make ends meet.

In June I was contacted by concerned constituents about the decision by Barclays Bank to withdraw remittance accounts for UK based money transfer firms that enable families to send money from the UK to relatives back home.

On 17th July, Parliament debated the issue and I met with the new Mayor of Southwark, Councillor Abdul Mohamed, to discuss the impact this is having on communities in my constituency, especially the Somali community. We planned our campaign activities to oppose Barclay's decision, which is having severe consequences for the flow of remittances to some of the poorest areas in the world, and I have also been working closely with Rushanara Ali MP to ensure that these small businesses can continue to provide this valuable service.



Meeting a group of women MP's from Ghana and Sierra Leone visiting the UK Parliament in April

Community Safety

Ensuring lessons are learnt from Lakanal

The tragic fire in Lakanal House in Camberwell on 3rd July 2009 killed 3 woman and 3 children. After almost four long years and several weeks of distressing testimony, the Lakanal House fire inquest finally ended on the 28th March this year. I attended the hearing at Brixton Town Hall, along with representatives from Sceaux Gardens Tenants & Residents Association, to hear the jury give its verdict.

The Coroner made over 30 recommendations and in October, I convened a summit of the key agencies at the House of Commons to assess their progress in implementing the Coroner's proposals. Southwark Council and the London Fire Service have implemented most of the Coroner's recommendations. The London Fire Service has changed their incident command procedures and is currently working on an internal review of their communication systems which I will be keeping a close eye on.

The Council has taken a great deal of action, including training an in-house team of specialists to carry out fire inspections and is shortly to decide whether to put sprinkler systems into existing high rise residential blocks. They are also producing fire safety information packs which they plan to distribute to every tenant and I asked the Council to put this information online.

Calling Met police to account on failed rape investigations

In February the police watchdog, the IPCC, published a report on the failures of a Southwark police unit to properly investigate rape & other serious sexual offences in 2008-09. The shocking revelations, that police officers were encouraging women to drop their claims just to boost their own performance targets, were horrifying. In response, myself, Tessa Jowell & Simon Hughes as Southwark MP's summoned senior Met police officers to a meeting in the House of Commons. We demanded that this time, lessons be learnt and reforms be implemented and embedded in the new unit now under the central command of the Metropolitan Police. We will continue to monitor their actions and report back to our constituents on a regular basis.

Responding to the Police and Crime Plan for Southwark

The Mayor of London announced his plan for policing and crime reduction across London in January. I attended the public consultation meeting at City Hall along with London Assembly Member Val Shawcross and the Leader of Southwark Council, Cllr Peter John. At the meeting, the Metropolitan Police told us that London would be getting 2,000 new police officers. But for Southwark these claims were shown to be false as we will actually have 132 fewer police officers than in 2010. The "Southwark Police 1,000 Campaign" has run since 2002 to campaign to increase the numbers of police in Southwark. When it started we had 775 police officers and since then the numbers have been steadily increasing. There has been close work between Southwark Council and the police, and crime has come down. But the situation is fragile and we do not want to see police numbers come down. I also made the point that the police must take the opportunity to recruit men and women from the black community so the police can reflect the communities they serve. This will help police community relations which are so important in the fight against crime.

Campaigning against cuts to local fire stations

The London Fire Brigade's budget will be cut by the Mayor of London and this government by £45 million over the next two years. Peckham station will lose 1 of its 2 fire engines and two local stations will close including Southwark. In January, I visited Peckham Fire Station to talk to local firefighter's about the proposed cuts. They were concerned about the impact on response times and also the very important fire protection work they do in the community. The bottom line is that in the past three years we've had three enormous fires in Camberwell & Peckham including the terrible fire at Lakanal House. I have called on the Mayor of London to think again and you can read my submission to the London Fire Brigade's Safety Plan for 2013-16 on my website.

Health: Working to protect our NHS

Fighting to improve local hospitals

This year we are celebrating the centenary of Kings College Hospital in Camberwell. I've seen first-hand the contribution King's has made to the local communities it serves. Healthcare has advanced markedly over the last 100 years and Kings has been at the forefront providing world leading clinical services and research which is something I know that our local communities are proud of.



Celebrating the centenary of Kings College Hospital with staff, CEO Tim Smart, Chair, Sir George Alberi and Tessa Jowell MP

But I am extremely concerned by the increase in patients having their operations cancelled; the number has trebled since last year. Kings was in a terrible state before 1997, with overcrowding and patients left waiting in corridors, before Labour investment helped to modernise it and raise standards. Kings is one of the most important hospitals in London. It has improved but we don't want it to slip back. I will continue to meet regularly with its top managers to plan how we can work together to protect and improve Kings services.

Campaign to save South London emergency services

I joined supporters of the Campaign to Save Lewisham A&E and maternity services outside the Ministry for Health in January to hand a petition to the Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt MP. Following his announcement to downgrade Lewisham A&E and close maternity services, I wrote a joint letter with fellow South London MP's to express my concerns about the devastating impact these cuts will have on King's College Hospital - which is already overstretched - with more patients having to come to King's. We have fought a long hard campaign to save Lewisham hospital. The High Court ruled that Jeremy Hunt's decision was outside his remit as Health Secretary. The Secretary of State appealed but lost that appeal on the 29th October. My job as your local MP is to protect our NHS services, and on this one we fought to win, and we succeeded.

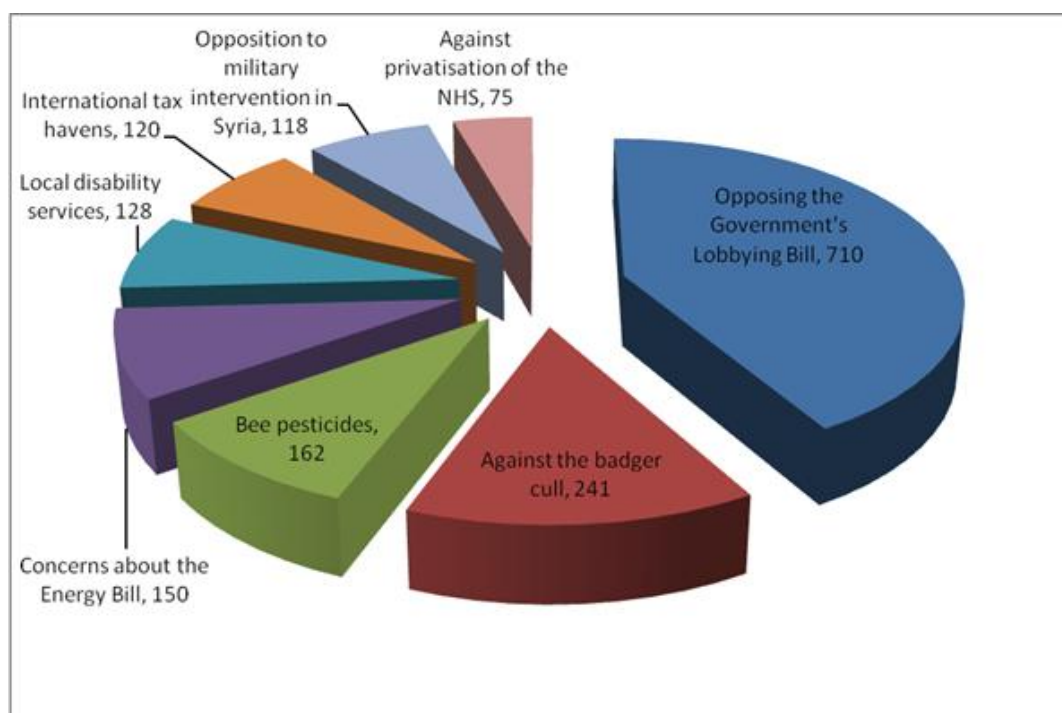


Tessa Jowell, Chuka Umunna and myself campaigning to save Lewisham Hospital

Parliament and policy

The letters and emails I have received over the past year demonstrate that the people of Camberwell and Peckham are concerned about a wide range of issues. Since January, I've received over **3,600** enquiries on over **400** separate policy issues.

The policy issues this year with the highest number of queries from constituents are:



My Shadow Ministerial and Labour Party responsibilities

I'm a Member of Parliament, the Shadow Deputy Prime Minister, the Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Deputy Leader and Chair of the Labour Party.

As **Shadow Deputy Prime Minister** my job is to hold Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, to account. Every six weeks we have Parliamentary Questions in the chamber of the House of Commons where I challenge the Deputy Prime Minister on the most important topics of the day, such as the Bedroom Tax.



Challenging the Government at the Despatch Box

As **Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport**, I speak up for the importance of the arts, culture and sport; develop Labour's policies; and hold the Government to account.

I led cross-party negotiations on Lord Justice Leveson's proposals for reform of the media including press regulation. I also established a network of creative councillors to support the arts in Labour councils, tabled the first House of Commons debate for five years on the importance of the arts, launched a 5 point plan for women in sport, and a plan for jobs and growth in the creative industries.

As **Deputy Leader and Chair of the Labour Party**, I am involved in campaigning and visits with members all around the country, attend regional conferences and join by-election campaigns.

This year I've campaigned in Margate, Aberdeen, Ashfield, South Shields, Dover, Hastings, Cornwall, Milton Keynes and Eastleigh; attended party conferences and policy forums in the Leicester, Birmingham, Scotland, Wales, Exeter and Nottingham; visited Brussels to meet our European counterparts; campaigned in Basildon on the cost of living crisis; launched the local election campaign in Derbyshire; and delivered a keynote speech to the Trade Union Congress.

I attended over 50 engagements at this year's Annual Conference in Brighton which started with Women's Conference and with 1000 women attending, it was the biggest political gathering of women at any party conference ever.

I'm also Chair of the Older Women's Commission which was established to examine the issues that affect women as they reach their fifties. Older women tell us they are overlooked - in the media, the workplace and as they look after their families. So we launched the Commission to ensure public policy properly considers the lives of women in their fifties and onwards, many of whom are balancing work with caring responsibilities across the generations within their families.

Campaigning locally in Camberwell and Peckham

I remain totally committed to my role as Labour Member of Parliament for Camberwell and Peckham. It is a privilege to represent this constituency and I have always regarded myself as part of our Labour team locally - working not just with our Labour councillors and Labour GLA member but also with the hundreds of local party and trade union members who actively campaign in Camberwell and Peckham.

I'd like to thank all our CLP officers and councillors for the hard work that they do arranging branch meetings and making sure that we are knocking on doors throughout the year and despite the weather! Thanks to:

- Andrew Hewitt, Jane Bevis and Sandra Rhule in Camberwell Branch
- Mel Taylor, Dan Garfield and Paul Flemming in Faraday Branch
- Barrie Hargrove and Andrew Eke in Livesey Branch
- Fran Rawcliffe and Sam Ugbade in Nunhead Branch
- Jason Keto-Edwards and Michael Situ in Peckham Branch
- Jonathan Sale and Katherine Dawson in Peckham Rye Branch
- Chris Gonde and Luke Venebles in South Camberwell Branch
- Mark Glover and Jasmine Ali in Lane Branch
- Helen Dennis, Peter Babudu, Jo Baxter, Jamille Mohammed, Ellen Sutcliffe and Ellie Cumbo from the Executive Committee



Campaigning in Peckham with Cllrs Barrie Hargrove and Cleo Soanes, candidates Jamille Mohammed and Johnson Situ, and Melvitine Madu