



2020 year in review...
a year like no other



HANNAH BARDELL MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR LIVINGSTON

2020 – A Year in Review, a year like no other ...

2020 started, like any normal year, with so much promise. My team and I had plans for local campaigns, new ideas for community engagement and some specific issues in my constituency that we wanted to address.

Then the global pandemic hit and many of our plans were put on hold while we worked flat out to respond to an overwhelming influx of cases – an increase of 350% - from constituents and local businesses who faced losing jobs and livelihoods. We are doing our best to keep on top of the wide range of concerns and issues being raised by our constituents but now more than ever it feels like local constituency work is vital and frankly a lifeline for many of our citizens. The last 10 months have been relentless, but we have seen the power of local community spirit, of coming together to help others, of innovation and new business ideas forged from the restrictions of the pandemic. Many organisations in West Lothian have stepped up and gone above and beyond.

One of the highlights of 2020 is the news that a vaccine is being developed right here in West Lothian. I am proud to have worked with Valneva, supporting and advocating for funding for their research and development work on the vaccine. Clinical trials have now begun, initially being tested on 150 volunteers at four sites across the UK, with larger tests planned for April 2021 if these are successful. The UK Government has pre-ordered 60million doses and Valneva will potentially have the capacity to supply up to 250million doses to the UK and internationally. This brings more hope – and around 200 new jobs - for West Lothian.

We have all felt the effects of restrictions imposed to combat the pandemic and Westminster was no different. A hybrid parliament system was established to allow MPs to contribute via video from their home or constituency, but while this facilitated questions to the government it didn't allow for remote contributions to debates. Unfortunately, this meant I was unable to make representation and stand up for constituents on a number of issues close to my heart. The UK Government needs to reconsider the scope of the hybrid parliament system and expand it to include debates in the Chamber and in Westminster Hall, otherwise distance and pandemic restrictions will mean constituencies further from London will be excluded from important conversations that affect their lives and livelihoods.

Despite the challenges of coronavirus, the team and I have achieved many things in the constituency and in Westminster that we are very proud of. Here are some of our highlights of 2020.

2020 | YEAR IN REVIEW

Broxburn families living in Pyothall, Nicol Road and the surrounding area were devastated by flooding which ruined their homes and belongings but local community spirit and a willingness to help neighbours resulted in a fantastic response to help them out. We helped to set up Strathbrock Community Centre as a hub for donations and support for those affected – people and local businesses have been so generous, and we were inundated with donations of food, essential supplies, furniture and vouchers.

Thanks to Purdie Worldwide Removals & Storage, Morrisons, Sandra and the staff at Strathbrock Community Centre, Scotmid Co-operative and Social Bite among others. The surplus left after the families were sorted went to local charities and organisations. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your help.

Reopening roads and representing local communities

We've had a number of successes this year resulting in changes to decisions on roads and roadworks. Two major road closures – Almond Road in Craigshill and the main street in Stoneyburn - invoked a huge outcry from constituents and rightly so. Decisions by the local council and utility companies respectively were made with very little or poor communication and consultation from the local community, in both cases I worked with other local SNP representatives, Angela Constance MSP, Cllr Frank Anderson and Cllr Pauline Clark and we stood shoulder to shoulder with the local community and won.

We all fully appreciate that work needs done, but to cut off homes, schools and local businesses and create so much inconvenience was very unfair. I'm pleased in both cases a resolution was found and the impact to local folk and business was significantly minimised.

Blackburn Post Office

The Post Office provides essential services for some of Blackburn's elderly and vulnerable residents who rely on it to access money and welfare payments. Without these services, I was concerned that these residents could become isolated and their health and wellbeing would ultimately be affected, so both Fiona Hyslop MSP and I wrote to the Council to highlight the impact closure would have - it was fantastic to hear that the Post Office would remain open - you can read more [here](#).

Traders' Market and Shop Local campaign

Chloe in my team worked closely with Craigsfarm Community Hub to organise and host a fantastic Traders' Market, showcasing the very best of what West Lothian has to offer. It was such an incredible success that we are now looking to make it a regular monthly event (Covid restrictions allowing).

It's important to shop local and support local small businesses and I have been encouraging people to do their Christmas shopping in Livingston. I've done almost all of mine buying gifts from local businesses and I've been super impressed with the quality and variety of products available on my doorstep.

Black Lives Matter- Working with The Fair Justice System for Scotland Group (FJSS)

Many in our community and across Scotland were shocked and horrified by the death of George Floyd, which was a stark and timely reminder of the racial prejudice and racism that exists in many societies across the world. Scotland has taken huge steps forward, but we still have a long way to go and I've been working with FJSS on what more we can do locally and nationally.

We started off with a discussion and advice surgery and I was very pleased to speak at the launch of their book 'The West Lothian Connection.' The book further explores the historical links that West Lothian local authority area has with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. It places Historical Injustice into context and how present-day prejudice and racial discrimination have their foundations and roots from slavery and enslavement of black people. You can buy it here- <https://fjssgroup.org/product/sh-the-west-lothian-connection>.

I'm really looking forward to working with FJSS in 2021.

West Lothian Endo Warriors

Candice and Claire have been stalwarts in driving support for endometriosis sufferers in the constituency and across the country. Their efforts have seen successful fundraising to help pay for a PhD opportunity at the University of Edinburgh. The lucky candidate will work directly with the dynamic duo on essential research on endometriosis - a life-changing condition that affects more than 1.5 million women and girls in the UK.

I have been working closely with Endo Warriors West Lothian and the APPG on Endometriosis to raise awareness of the awful impact this condition has on so many people. The APPG launched a report with some fantastic recommendations and I hope they are both considered and implemented as soon as possible. You can see my interview on [BBC Scotland](#) 's the Nine.

Report here - <https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/endometriosis-appg>

Deaths Abroad

COVID-19 cause severe disruption for holidaymakers trying to get home from abroad and many MPs, including me, had constituents stranded and unable to get repatriation flights. The Foreign Affairs Select Committee has produced a report revealing the scale of the repatriation efforts and highlighting the mistakes made by the Foreign Office impacting significantly on families. What was interesting for us is that this report reflected many of the findings from our own Deaths Abroad report and made it crystal clear that there is still much work to be done to support British citizens when they get into difficulties overseas.

There is no legal right to consular assistance and any help is discretionary. I am working alongside the British Rights Abroad Group (BRAG) to look at how this can be changed, academic and legal work has been commissioned to investigate this. I hope to be part of a cross party group that brings legislation for change forward - so that no families who have loved ones murdered abroad, stranded abroad or who experience tragedy overseas get second class or worse, no help.

We have been meeting with both UK and Scottish Governments who have been supportive of our recommendations and I'm pleased that progress has already been made with greater support for victims of crime abroad, as recommended in my report, being seriously considered and financed by both Governments.

I wrote an opinion article for The National newspaper, related to the work I'm doing with the APPG on Deaths Abroad. The point I was making is that as we prepare to become an Independent nation, we must also think and talk about what kind of nation we would be on the global stage - we can learn from the mistakes of the UK Government. [Compassion must be at the heart of our foreign policy](#).

Covid-19 and the travel industry

The travel industry has been hammered by Covid and the lack of support from the UK Gov for constituents like mine has been woeful. I challenged the Chancellor to meet my constituent Douglas McCarthy whose travel company Travelyard is struggling but we have been ignored. It's really not good enough and highly disrespectful. Douglas and his team provide a specialist service, have been helping with efforts to bring folk home during the pandemic and are working their socks off to stay afloat. Issues around insurance and furlough are fully in the remit of Westminster and I intend to make sure the Chancellor faces up to his responsibilities.

Additionally, British Airways staff, including many of my constituents, have been forced out of their jobs, pressured to sign an agreement that has no transparency of the pay breakdown and they are to put it frankly, being totally shafted by BA. I'm pleased to secure a meeting with the Aviation Minister for me and my constituent, but companies like BA need taken to task – I'll be tackling this in the New Year.

Primodos

One of the very first constituents I met after being elected in 2015 was Wilma Ord. She told me about the effects of the pregnancy testing drug Primodos which she believed had caused birth abnormalities in her daughter Kirsteen. Wilma has been campaigning, along with other families, for justice for many years now and this year saw some amazing successes. Led by the indomitable Marie Lyon, whose daughter was also affected by the drug, the campaign group's relentless push for answers, for an apology and for compensation were rewarded.

After an independent review in July found that government health regulators had failed patients and that Primodos was responsible for “avoidable harm”, the UK Government was forced to issue an apology and the German Federal Ministry of Health announced it will launch a review into the drug, which was manufactured in Germany. This is a vital moment in the fight for justice, but the campaign isn’t over yet. I will continue to support Wilma, Marie and the other families and I pay tribute to the incredible work of Marie and the brilliant campaigners.

https://news.sky.com/story/primodos-uk-campaign-prompts-german-government-to-investigate-pregnancy-test-drug-12075155?fbclid=IwAR0t5_WhQejDYhP99wclY6ZKzKi6OxD0d3uEnhUpp4bzZxwFQ1tNwiDPzrM

Standing up to a culture of bullying at Westminster – Lord Maginnis

There was one particular issue that was incredibly difficult and stressful for me and that was the homophobic abuse I experienced from Lord Maginnis. I received this after I publicly called him out in the House of Commons Chamber, for bullying and harassing a member of Commons security staff. His behaviour was unacceptable and after hearing from others who had been on the receiving end of his abuse I decided to make a formal complaint.

After months of investigation, the Lords Commissioner upheld the complaint made by me, a House of Commons security guard and two other MPs. Lord Maginnis was suspended from the House of Lords for 18 months and told to undergo training before he would be allowed to return. Unsurprisingly, he has said he has no intention of doing the training, which speaks volumes about his attitude and the sense of privilege and immunity some at Westminster think they have. This has had a lasting effect on me and on my team – I experienced death threats and horrific abuse on social media but standing up to bullies is something I will always do and am proud to have done.

You can read more about the incidents here

- <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/dec/03/lord-maginnis-faces-18-month-suspension-over-homophobia>

Wellness working Group

The last few years have been a very challenging time in politics, I’m sure we can all agree. The impact on the staff that work in our offices has been profound. I have always had a strong belief that wherever staff work they should be properly supported. The nature of the work that we do as parliamentarians has changed significantly, even since I was elected in 2015 and certainly since I worked in a constituency office from 2007-2010.

Largely because of the deep cuts to welfare and social security by the Conservative Government, my team and I are seeing more and more folk who are facing destitution and tragedy, with the difficult cases like welfare and immigration becoming increasingly complex. We are sadly supporting more folk than ever who are pushed to the edge and often suicidal because of Conservative welfare cuts and that inevitably has an impact on staff. For staff to be able to do the best job possible they must have the best support and resource.

That's why my team have worked to develop a cross party wellness group for staff to advocate for each other across the political spectrum. Based on their own experiences, they raised these issues with the relevant UK Parliament organisations and have secured additional budget for wellness support for constituency and parliamentary staff and are also supporting the wider work to ensure all staff get the right training and support to best manage complex and traumatic casework.

Council of Europe

I was delighted that the Council of Europe and its 47 member states adopted my report 'Drug policy and human rights in Europe: a baseline study'. It advocates for a health and human rights-based approach to drug use and addiction and recognises that the criminal justice approach, that the likes of the UK Government take, are failing people across the world.

I really hope that the UK Government will now adopt all aspects of it, to save lives and protect communities. We need to have an open, informed and realistic debate on drugs policy and human rights and ensure the relevant powers to deal with drug use and addiction are devolved to Scotland, so we can ensure we meet our international obligations and can implement best practice for Scotland. You can see my interview on this issue here –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNyycVcQqNM>

You can also read the full report here

- http://fileserv.idpc.net/library/Drug_policy_and_human_rights_in_Europe_a_baseline_study.pdf

The effect of Covid-19 on refugee communities

I also had the privilege of leading for the SNP on a debate about the impact of Covid 19 on refugee communities and I highlighted the Scottish scheme that means refugees can come to work in our NHS and are literally at the forefront. I reflected on the notion, and what I feel should be a universal truth, that 'we are all Jock Tamson's bairns' and have a common humanity. Refugees and asylum seekers have faced some of the worst conditions in trying to survive fleeing conflict and persecution and are incredibly vulnerable to Covid-19.

I took the opportunity to delve into the detail of that and also highlight how many have skills and want to come here and contribute. That this UK Government stops them doing that is a shambles and shames us all. I used my speech to call on the UK Government to put fairness, decency and humanity at the heart of their immigration policy, because at present it stands as an international disgrace. You can watch my full speech here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-rRVRjsINw>

As ever if anyone has any constituency concerns or cases, please do not hesitate to contact me on "hannah.bardell.mp@parliament.uk"

Yours for Livingston,

Hannah

Hannah Bardell MP
Member of Parliament for the Livingston Constituency