

APPG on Domestic Violence: AGM Minutes

Wednesday 13 July 2016, 6pm-7pm, Committee Room 20

Jess Phillips MP chaired the AGM of the APPG.

8 Members in attendance were: Jess Phillips, Caroline Nokes, Jo Stevens, Flick Drummond, Chris Elmore, Chris Matheson, Matthew Pennycook, Gavin Newlands.

The membership of the APPG was confirmed as below:

- Jess Phillips – Chair (LAB)
- Maria Miller – Vice-Chair (CON)
- Nusrat Ghani – Officer (CON)
- Caroline Nokes – Officer (CON)
- Sir Peter Bottomley – Officer (CON)
- Angela Rayner – Officer (LAB)
- Thangham Debbonaire – Officer (LAB)
- Fiona Mactaggart – Officer (LAB)
- Caroline Lucas – Officer (GRN)
- Baroness Glenys Thornton – Officer (LAB)
- Vicky Foxcroft – Officer (LAB)
- Gavin Newlands – Officer (SNP)
- Sir Keir Starmer – Officer (LAB)
- Peter Grant – Officer (SNP)
- Sarah Champion – Officer (LAB)
- Norman Lamb – Officer (LIB)
- Baroness Sally Hamwee – Officer (LIB)
- Matthew Pennycook – Officer (LAB)
- Flick Drummond – Officer (CON)

For further information about the APPG on Domestic Violence please contact Lucy Hadley, Campaigns and Public Affairs Officer on l.hadley@womensaid.org.uk.

APPG on Domestic Violence: Welfare Reforms and Domestic Abuse Meeting Minutes

Wednesday 13 July 2016, 6pm-7pm, Committee Room 20

- Jess Phillips MP chaired the meeting of the APPG.
- Members in attendance were:
 - Jess Phillips
 - Flick Drummond
 - Gavin Newlands
- Speakers in attendance were:
 - Hilary Fisher, Director of Research, Policy and Campaigns, Women's Aid
 - Shaminder Ubhi, Director, Ashiana Network
 - Paul Anderson, Policy Manager, Homeless Link

Jess Phillips, Introduction to the main issues

Jess outlined some of the main issues around welfare reform policies and domestic abuse. Issues mentioned included the housing benefit cap to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, Universal Credit and split payments, the benefit cap to £20,000 per family, housing benefit restrictions for 18-21 year olds, two child limit on tax credits, ending of lifetime tenancies and the 1% social rent reduction.

Paul Anderson, Policy Manager at Homeless Link

- Homeless Link estimates that 30% of users of homelessness services are women without dependent children and that around 1500 women sleep rough each year as a result of domestic violence.
- There had been no consultation or impact assessment before the decisions around LHA Caps and the 1% Rent Reduction took place.
- Homeless Link estimate that LHA Caps will reduce rental income by over half to homelessness services; £216 million per year approx. This would wipe out most or all homelessness services (96% get Housing Benefit).
- The LHA cap is already leading to withdrawal of resources, stalled developments and reconfiguring of services away from supported housing.

- Cumulative reductions under the 1% Rent Reduction although a fraction of the LHA Caps loss would still be enough to probably push half of homelessness projects out of existence.
- Homelessness agencies recognise that there needs to be a new funding regime under Universal Credit. The feedback from them has been that key principles need to be Security of funding and Simplicity.
- For homelessness and refuges there is a particular problem around funding of short-term projects where lots of people stay less than a month. We will either need Universal Credit to pay Housing Costs for a shorter period of time than a month or to have some form of block funding.
- Roughly half of people in homelessness services and 10% of people sleeping rough are under 25. 18-21 Housing Costs rules are due to come in next April but we have had no regulations showing how they plan to do this.
- The Government has committed to protect the most vulnerable but we do not know who they mean by this and how this will happen in practise.

Hilary Fisher, Director of Research, Policy and Campaigns at Women's Aid

- Hilary outlined the areas of welfare reform and housing policy that Women's Aid is concerned could have a negative impact of survivors of domestic abuse and the services that support them. These are:
 - Capping housing benefit in the supported housing sector to LHA rates
 - 1% reduction in social rent per annum
 - Capping housing benefit to £20,000 (£23,000 in London) per family
 - Capping housing benefit for 18 – 21 year olds
 - Two child tax credit limit
 - Ending lifetime tenancies
 - The roll out of Universal Credit
- Women's Aid is recommending that supported accommodation, especially specialist domestic violence refuges should be exempt from the Housing Benefit LHA Cap and the 1% social rent reduction.

Shaminder Ubhi, Director of Ashiana Network

- Ashiana was founded in 1989 to support mainly young women aged 16-35 from Turkish, South Asian and Middle Eastern communities.
- Ashiana runs three refuges with 21 bed spaces and also provides 'wrap-around' services such as advice, counselling and prevention. Ashiana supports women who are fleeing forced marriage and women who have No Recourse to Public Funds.
- Shaminder explained that the imposition of the LHA cap would significantly affect Ashiana and would probably force them to close.

- Ashiana have calculated that in one refuge, 60% of the funding would be lost, close to £50,000.
- Shaminder recommended that supported housing should be exempt from the LHA cap and that a sustainable funding solution for specialist refuges be sought.
- Shaminder argued that if the government were to put money into these services, there would be a huge amount of savings; for every £1 invested in the service, Ashiana provides £8 worth of value back to society.

Jess Phillips, Next steps for the APPG

- Continue to lobby for supported accommodation to be exempt from the policy to cap housing benefit at Local Housing Allowance rates.
- Continue to discuss the issue of inadequate 'move-on' accommodation provision, for survivors leaving refuges.
- Continue to discuss how Universal Credit payments should be safe and accessible for survivors.
- Continue to work with the government to ensure the two child tax credit limit exemption for survivors of rape is fair and appropriate and does not put an unnecessary evidential burden on survivors of rape and sexual violence and ensure that domestic abuse survivors can be included in the exemption.
- Continue to call on the Government to expect domestic abuse survivors from policy that will restrict 18-21 year olds in accessing housing benefit.
- Continue to push for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.
- Continue to push for a long-term and sustainable funding solution for refuges.

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