



## ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON YOUTH AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD AT 5.30PM, WEDNESDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2014  
GRIMMOND ROOM, PORTCULLIS HOUSE

### YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO LOW-COST HOUSING

#### GUEST SPEAKERS:

- **SIR ANDREW STUNELL MP (LIB DEM, HAZEL GROVE)**
- **LORD BEST (CROSSBENCH)**

The meeting was chaired by **Julie Hilling MP (Lab, Bolton West)**, Chair of the APPG.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

**Group Chair, Julie Hilling MP (JH)** introduced the group and briefly set out the format of the meeting.

#### 2. AGM

The Group's Annual General Meeting took place.

The following people were re-elected to their previous positions:

- **Julie Hilling** was re-elected as Chair
- **James Morris** was re-elected as Vice Chair
- **Tim Loughton** was elected as Vice-Chair, replacing Simon Hughes
- **Sir Peter Bottomley** was re-elected as Secretary

#### 3. SPEAKERS INTRODUCTION

**JH** introduced **Liam Preston (LP)**, **Parliamentary and Policy Officer at the YMCA**, who explained the work the YMCA does in providing supported accommodation for young people. He said questions and comments from the meeting would be compiled and sent to the Housing Minister, Brandon Lewis and the Shadow Housing Minister, Emma Reynolds.

#### 4. SIR ANDREW STUNELL MP

**AS** spoke about his role as a former Communities and Local Government minister from 2010 to 2012, explaining that he had been held some responsibility for housing as part of his brief.

He highlighted that 67% of people aged 16 to 34 live in private rented accommodation, and spoke about the need to improve standards in the sector. He noted that the Government introduced a private rented sector taskforce which is looking at standards in the sector.

He outlined the Government's Build for Rent programme which has provided £1 billion funding for 10,000 extra homes in the private rented sector, some of which would go to young people.

He also argued that more homes are being built through the Affordable Homes Programme, which will create 170,000 new homes, but he said that more needs to be done to increase housing supply, and progress needs to be quicker. He said there is £15 million funding for 730 homes for young people, and argued that good quality housing is needed, which is designed so it is affordable to live in and does not lead to high energy bills and fuel poverty.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE**

**JH** invited young people to ask **AS** questions.

**Rohan from Centrepont** asked what the definition of 'affordable' housing is.

**A young person** raised concerns that the local housing allowance is too low, saying that in Bristol she knew people who could not find anywhere to rent because their local housing allowance could not cover it.

**JH** asked if other areas of the country were experiencing this problem and some young people said they were. **Another young person** stated that even with Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) it can be difficult for young people to cover their rent, and spoke about how difficult it is paying for food and other items whilst relying on benefits.

**Danielle, from Lewisham**, commented that young people need more advice on what to expect when they move into housing independently, for example on the bills they will have to pay.

**AS** responded that affordable rent is normally defined as 80% of market value. However, he said that affordable rent figures are often set at scheme or local authority level, and is on average around 60-65% of market rent. He stated that if he had a 'magic wand' he would increase housing allowance but it is currently set in order to make 25% of the local market affordable. He mentioned that to his knowledge the Government is not providing support for young people moving to live independently but he highlighted that there are schemes at local level –such as Wallet Watchers in his constituency.

**Rohan** asked what housing options are available to young people such as flats or hostels. He also asked why young people have to amass significant debt if they want to go back into education in their mid-20s, particularly if they want to go to university. He argued student loans do not cover high rent levels, particularly if the student receives no additional support. Another young person pointed out that young people lose their housing benefit if they go to university. **AS** noted there are different housing solutions in different areas of the country. The Government commits to spending the money and then local authorities, housing association or

private developers propose a viable project. **TL** explained that there are special grants for young people leaving the care system; otherwise they have to rely on student loans and discretionary grants at local authority level.

**JH** remarked that young people clearly felt a barrier to returning to learning when they are not living at home.

**A young person from Bolton** suggested that there should be more focus on the refurbishment of empty homes. He said young people wait for years to get social housing, and asked what is being done to make the process quicker.

**AS** said the Government are working to get 600,000 empty homes back into use. He suggested that the problem is that some social housing is in areas of very low demand, and said the Government is undertaking one-to-one replacements of social homes when they are sold. He argued that there will be more social housing available at the end of this Parliament than there was at the beginning.

**JH** highlighted that the Government's promise to replace social housing like for like does not always work because the sale of some homes does not raise enough capital to build a new property. **AS** replied that it is an important principle that if you sell a social house it is replaced, and this was a policy the Liberal Democrats had worked hard to introduce.

## **6. LORD BEST**

**JH** introduced **Lord Best (LB)** as a Crossbench Peer. She spoke about his experience in housing as former Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation, former Chief Executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and President of the Local Government Association.

He argued that anyone under the age of 40 has a 'housing problem'. He said at the most of extreme end of the scale there are those who are homeless, and he highlighted the 10,000 beds provided by the YMCA. He commented that other people live in overcrowded accommodation, or pay expensive rents in the private rented sector for low quality accommodation. He added that people often have to live a long way from town centres, or where they work. He said at the other end of the scale it is hard for people already on the housing ladder to buy their next property.

He questioned how the country got into a situation where an entire generation cannot get houses and set out a number of reasons including the failure to build new houses and immigration. He said the main reason is that people are living longer, which means there is an extra generation of people who need houses. He pointed out that elderly people are often reluctant to downsize despite more people needing to be housed every year.

He stated that only half the number of houses needed are built each year and because this has been the case for several years, there is a large backlog. He said that because of the lack of housing, landlords can pick and choose their tenants and house prices have 'gone through the roof'. He argued that young people have been let down by the previous generation, and no one is going to get houses built fast enough.

He argued that young people are a political force but they do not speak up enough. He highlighted that pensioners always 'do well' at election time because they vote, but politicians ignore young people because they do not vote. He said young people should use social media, and pointed to successful campaigns such as the Raise the Roof, Generation Rent and work by Shelter. He said people who need housing are not heard enough.

## **7. DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE**

**A young person from Teens and Toddlers in Southwark** said that she had worked two jobs since she was sixteen and she was disappointed by the lack of support she was receiving as she went through the housing process. She said there are 100 empty homes in Southwark and criticised the lack of effectiveness of the council, saying it takes too long to get things done. She added that no one is willing to take responsibility for the empty homes. She said the problem is not that young people are not proactive but that the system is exhausting, and too slow, which discourages them. She asked who she should put pressure on to get help and questioned who there is for young people to engage with.

**Sokol from Leicester YMCA** said young people do not always have the time and resources to put pressure on politicians, and argued that there should be affordable housing set aside for young people.

**Jack** said young people do not get help to buy homes so they rely on temporary housing. He said some people will never be able to get onto the housing ladder.

**Shelly from the University of the Arts**, said not all young people have a family home which they can live in and even if their parents want to help they sometimes have housing problems of their own. She argued that landlords are able to 'pick and choose' who they rent to, often rejecting people on Housing Benefit.

**A young person** said rents are too high for people to live on student loans. She argued that young people do not get their student loan over summer but they have to keep paying their rent. She asked how young people get on the housing ladder.

**Lord Best** replied that while young people have to rely on student loans means-testing means there are decent grants for those on low incomes.

In response to this **a young person** pointed out that grants are often targeted at specific groups but some people fall through the gaps.

**JH** suggested that the group should feedback to MPs and Ministers that student accommodation is too expensive. She said the expectation now is that students will work, in order to cover rent and living costs, which can impact on their studies.

**A young person** spoke about her experiences as a care-leaver. She said that by going into student accommodation she would lose her flat which she might rely on after she completes her studies. However, she noted that her student loan takes up two-thirds of her rent as she would not be able to claim housing benefit.

**JH** responded that the young people affected by the cost of student accommodation should write a 'case study' about their situation and email it the Group so it can be taken to the relevant Minister.

**A young person from Centrepont** said sometimes young people are unable to live at home because of family difficulties and there is not enough support for them.

**LB** said in areas where there are empty properties young people can put pressure on the local ward councillor. He argued that councils should be empowered to do more, they used to do all the building but the pendulum has swung too far in favour of housing associations.

He gave an example of a housing association in Manchester where two-or-three bed social housing, suitable for families, had been freed up by building bungalows on the same estate, which elderly residents could then move into.

He said councils aren't building for young people and student accommodation is often designed for wealthy foreign students. He argued that shared ownership is a good way for young people to get onto the housing ladder.

**Shenaz from East London** said her uncle had lived in a shared ownership property but it took a year to sell. She highlighted that the landlord had no incentive to help sell the property whilst they were still getting rent.

**JH** said it is important not to try and find 'London solutions' to countrywide problems. She said that because local authorities do not own most social housing in their area, it can be hard to know who is responsible for it. She urged young people to talk to MPs and councils.

**Another young person** said there is too much emphasis on home ownership. He explained he was a care leaver, and refugee, who was at university and there should be more done to support young people through university with their housing costs.

**Jack from Doorway**, spoke about his experiences of being homeless, and was put in a Holiday Inn, where the bottom floor was all homeless people. He pointed out it was very expensive and it would have been better to put them all together in a shared house.

**A young person** said that he lived in supported accommodation provided by St Basils. He said spending cuts mean the other supported accommodation in his area had been shut down and there is a long waiting list. He argued that projects like this should be getting more funding, not having their funding cut.

**A member of staff from Centrepont** recommended that local authorities set up letting agencies to provide information on the private rented sector and social housing. She also said there should be five year tenancies in the private rented sector.

**Julian from Just for Kids Law** said there are no shared ownership properties in the boroughs people live and work in. He said there is no shared ownership in Acton where he lives, while Westminster, where he works, is too expensive. He said if people move out of London it is then too hard for them to get a job.

**Rohan from Centrepoint** agreed, saying if people move out of London the travel costs are so expensive they might as well rent in central London.

**Another young person** noted that young people are not educated on how to rent homes.

**Another representative from Just for Kids law** argued that there are different types of young people, with different needs. For example some young people do have the hope of getting on the housing ladder but others do not. **JH** said often people do not want to live next door to young people.

**LB** said when he worked at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation they tried to build homes in York. He argued there are people who try to stop building from happening, and it had taken nine years to get building started. He said sometimes young people live in supported housing but when they are ready to live independently there is nowhere for them to go. He noted that Hackney have set up a local authority letting agent.

**A young person** said landlords must be stopped from discriminating against young people, for example requiring a guarantor if they are under 25. Another young person agreed and argued that landlords take advantage of the fact that young people are 'clueless'.

**Jack from Doorway** said there is 'only one Doorway' and there should be supported accommodation. **Another young person** argued that the council stereotype young people and she was offered supported housing where she had to book in advance to spend nights with family, and was treated like an offender.

**Emma from Doorway** pointed out that many of the young people they work with are 'NEETs' (not in education, employment or training) and they lack support. She highlighted that often young homeless people are treated, and housed, like criminals.

**Jack** commented that young people need help to become effective members of society.

**Another young person from Teens and Toddlers** agreed and added there should be 'life skills' on the curriculum. **A young person** pointed out that Jobcentre Plus programmes mean housing costs go up when people get into employment.

**JH** suggested that the Youth Select Committee could undertake an inquiry into housing for young people.

**LB** agreed that young people need advice and they should use the internet and social media to share information.

## **8. CLOSE**

**JH** had to leave the Chair to vote.

**LP** took the Chair and thanked everyone for coming.

<b>ATTENDANCE LIST Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Julie Hilling MP	Chair of the APPG on Youth Affairs
Tim Loughton MP	Vice-Chair of the APPG on Youth Affairs
Sir Peter Bottomley MP	Secretary of the APPG on Youth Affairs
Lord Best	
Andrew Stunell MP	
Marcus Jones MP	
2020 Education Youth Ambassador	
Centrepont	
City Year	
Doorway	
IARS	
LB Waltham Forest	
MSYP	
Oasis Aquila Project	
Southend YMCA	
Southern Brooks Community Partnership	
Teens and Toddlers	
University of the Arts	
Waltham Forest Young Advisors	
WCVYS	
YPOD	
YMCA	
British Youth Council	
National Council for Voluntary Youth Services	
Connect Communications	