**All Party Parliamentary Group on Ending Homelessness**

**How to Prevent Survivors of Domestic Violence from Becoming Homeless –**

**Officers Meeting Minutes**

26 April 2017, 15.00-16.30, House of Commons, Committee Room 17

**Attendees:**

**Apologies:**

David Mackintosh MP, APPG Chair

David Burrowes MP, APPG Secretary

Dr Paul Monaghan MP, Vice-chair

Tracey Brabin MP, Batley and Spen

Helen Hayes MP, Dulwich and West Norwood

Eilidh Whiteford MP, Banff & Buchan

Sarah Champion MP, Rotherham

Ian Mearns MP, Gateshead

Baroness Manzoor

Lord Best

Richard Benyon MP, Newbury

Chris Stephens MP, Glasgow South West

Helen Grant MP, Maidstone and The Weald

Neil Coyle MP, APPG Officer

Will Quince MP, APPG Officer

**Parliamentary Assistants:**

Ryan Baldry, Office of David Mackintosh MP

Harriet Rainbow, Office of David Burrowes MP

**Secretariat:**

Matt Downie, Secretariat to APPG

Rachel Greaves Secretariat to APPG

**Other:**

Sian Hawkins, Women's Aid

Emma T, Survivor

Guddy Burnet, DAHA

Andrew Bazeley, Fawcett Society

Lucy Allwright, AVA

Tracy Blackwell, Refuge

Lorna Taylor, Refuge

Joe Sheppard, Changing Lives

Ben McDonnell, No Second Night Out

Margaret Williams, East London Housing Partnership

Lisa Jones, Agenda

Cat McGlew, St Mungos

Melanie Graham, Connection at St Martin in the Fields

Lidia Estevez Picon, Connection at St Martin in the Fields

Rachel Krys, End Violence Against Women Coalition

Gareth Parsons, Prospectus

Anna Gardet, Prospectus

Florence Burton, The Women’s Resource Centre

Sarah Stonedale, The Women’s Resource Centre

Monika Pindel, The Women’s Resource Centre

Elinor Crouch-Puzey, Standing Together

Declan Wilkes, My Bnk

Paul Noblet, Centrepoint

Marc Francis, Z2K

**Witnesses:**

Polly Neate, Chief Executive, Women’s Aid

Lou Crisfield, Housing Caseworker, Miles & Partners LLP

Jonathan Joseph, Assessment Manager, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Tanya Pinnock, Survivor

Esther Sample, Safer London

Oliver French, Lankelly Chase

Mary Mason, Solace Women’s Aid

Poppy Terry, Shelter

Jonathan Graham, Salvation Army

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| **Welcome and apologies** |
| Questions to witness from APPG Officers  |
| Overview  | Neil Coyle (NC) began the session by asking the witnesses to introduce themselves, he then went on to ask how much of an issue is homelessness among survivors of domestic violence (DV). The witnesses all agreed the issue is under represented and under calculated. Polly Neate (PN) said at least 91% of women who suffer DV have a housing need and despite that, it is usually treated as a silo issue. Tanya Pinnock (TP) described her experience of DV and subsequently becoming homelessness. She was unable to move boroughs and after staying in a refuge she was placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation and had to move twice. She was assessed as high risk and was unable to return to her secure social rented tenancy. The conditions were so bad in her temporary accommodation she slept on friend’s sofas until she could do a home exchange, which she organised herself. All agreed TP’s story was far too common. Lou Crisfield (LC) stated that the problem was that survivors are forced to go through the statuary homelessness route and that transfers to emergency and move on accommodation could be better facilitated.Jonathon Joseph (JJ) described Hammersmith and Fulham’s approach to preventing survivors from becoming homeless. They try to create a safe space as soon as possible and work in partnership with other agencies to create a joined up approach. The key to their work is identifying survivors quickly and doing two different assessments to work out why there are homeless and providing support for whatever needs they may have.All agreed that Local Authorities are under immense pressure as there is a lack of supply and temporary accommodation is very expensive. Following a question on gateways to support, PN said that a key problem was that survivors who have a severe housing need may not come across as high risk to services and therefore don’t get the long term help they need. Another issue is that some Local Authorities are using MARAC’s (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) to asses housing, which isn’t appropriate and leave people out who need housing help. All agreed that DV needs to be seen as a Housing issue and not just Criminal Justice and that housing teams do not understand the nature and severity of DV or how it effects victims. All agreed that housing need should be assessed before it reaches MARAC.Following a question on Local Authority approaches, LC stated that older women are less inclined to leave their abuser as they won’t be seen as priority need and are given the choice of homelessness or abuse. She went on to say that Wales have changed their legislation so survivors have priority need.NC asked about court injunctions and whether they can help a survivor keep their housing. LC explained that injunctions can be set up quickly but if you don’t have property rights you need an occupation order. This is more difficult to obtain and doesn’t last long. She said a survivor can transfer their tenancy through a divorce but legal aid doesn’t cover that. All agreed that injunctions are not followed up by Criminal Justice or classed as a breach offense. TP said that she was stabbed whilst her perpetrator was under a non-molestation order. Following a question on the role of refuges, PN said that 1 in 6 have had to close due to lack of funding. She said that top up funding from Government is welcome but not consistent and that local connection isn’t working in practise. She told a story of a women who was 8 months pregnant and looking for a 24 hour MacDonald’s to bed down as the refuge turned her away. NC asked about the impact of Universal Credit on survivors and whether it can prevent homelessness.JJ said that Hammersmith and Fulham was a pilot area for Universal Credit and now it has been rolled out across the borough. People can get it in 6 weeks of signing on and they have an assist team to help people with it. He said the problem is with documents, if you have to flee your home you can’t set up a claim. You also have to have a local connection specific Job Centre Plus to make a claim and you won’t get direct payments without that.PC stated that it is highly unlikely a victim trapped in an abusive relationship would request split Universal Credit payments as they would have to inform the abuser. She said the risk of coercive and financial abuse is high with Universal Credit. This could stop victims fleeing.LC said that Universal Credit makes it impossible for survivors to access the Private Rented Sector, she said in her experience landlords don’t want to take people on as tenants as they want rent in advance and Universal Credit is paid in arrears.All agreed the benefit cap and the shared accommodation rate are creating barriers to preventing homelessness.All agreed that Universal Credit also has great implications on survivors with no recourse to public funds. |
| Actions and deadlines | Secretariat to gather more information on the benefit cap and Universal Credit.Secretariat to gather more information on local connection and priority need in Wales.  |
| Sector interventions and questions |
| Overview | Guddy Burnet (GB) spoke about her experience working with Peabody Housing Association and how standards and support for survivors has improved as staff have been trained in identifying people at risk, navigating tenancy transfers and sign posting support. She went on to say a big issue is the perpetrator continuing to live in the family home. GB stated that Housing Associations can do management transfers but often don’t. She also said the Private Rented Sector could do more to support survivors. All agreed that survivors do not tell anyone about that their experience for fear of losing their tenancy or children. All agreed that DV should be a priority for housing providers and this would help lift some of the burden from Local Authorities.Emma T (ET) told the inquiry about her personal experience of DV. After the Crime Prosecutor didn’t support the charge against her perpetrator he was able to move back into the family home where he still lives. In order to flee, she was told by social services she had to find suitable accommodation within a week if she was to keep her children with her. Had it not been for family members who could support her she would have been homeless and without her children. Her family have had to move twice and she feels that despite been a victim, she is being punished and her family uprooted. She wasn’t protected by an injunction and was told it would cost thousands of pounds to get on privately. Margaret Williams (MW) shared best practise form the East London Partnership and how common homelessness is in women who are victim of DV. The partnership works with homeless single women who can’t access refuge places as they have too high complex needs. They found that the number of homeless women who had been victim of DV was grossly under calculated and when they started the project they had expected 20 referrals but received 92. MW said female rough sleepers often hide or get into abusive relationships to stay safe, so go uncounted. She also said female rough sleepers end up in unsuitable mixed-sex hostels and then face further abuse. Esther Sample (ES) told the inquiry about the Pan London Reciprocal which helps survivors with social tenancies move to a new borough without losing their tenancy. They have had success so far and have 29 borough signed up. LC was concerned it was slow to start up and implement but all agreed it was now gaining momentum. Elinor Crouch-Puzey (ECP) spoke about the benefits of Housing First and how it can help long term homeless people. ECP went on to say the Tri-Borough have had funding from DCLG for a Housing First and homeless coordinator to develop a Housing First model there for women who have experienced DV. She went on to say that there needs to greater emphasis on psychologically informed care and a focus on getting survivors quickly into secure accommodation, so they can recover and get back to work. All agreed that DV should become part of pre-tenancy training.All agreed that the Istanbul Convention is welcome but doesn’t go far enough to prevent homelessness. Poppy Terry (PT) from Shelter told the inquiry about the catch 22 which Universal Credit creates for 18-21s and how this can impact survivors or young people at risk. Mark Francis (MF) stated that families going into temporary accommodation are now excluded from Universal Credit and that survivors of DV should be entitled to this also. Sarah Stonedale (SS) then told the inquiry about her experience of DV. SS had to flee her home with her two children and left with none of her belongings. As she had no ID, her Local Authority turned her away twice. Her Local Authority asked her to go back to her previous home, get her ID and a letter signed by her abuser stating that he had raped and attacked her. After relying on food banks and women’s organisations to house her and her children she was eventually housed in a B&B which had very poor standards and her health suffered as a result.   |
| Actions and deadlines | Secretariat to request an evaluation of Pan London Reciprocal. Secretariat to share letter the APPGEH Officers wrote to the Minister on 18-21 Universal Credit regulations.  |
| AOB |
| Overview | NC thanked the witnesses and all other attendees for coming and said the evidence heard was extremely compelling. The APPGEH’s recommendations on the subject would be published in the wider APPG report.  |
| Actions and deadlines | Secretariat to send around minutes to witnesses and Chair. |