



## Minutes of the APPG on Domestic Violence Meeting

### *Tackling the Root Causes of Domestic Abuse*

**4-5:30pm, Wednesday 18 July 2018**  
Committee Room 17, House of Commons  
**Chair:** Jess Phillips MP

The Domestic Abuse Bill pledges to 'transform' the national approach to domestic abuse - providing an opportunity for a response that tackles the root causes of this crime and delivers long term prevention. The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Domestic Violence meeting on 18 July 2018 focused on what measures are needed to change harmful social and cultural patterns of behaviour that underpin abuse and violence, tackle 'toxic' gender stereotypes and prejudices, and promote equality through education and awareness-raising. The meeting also discussed the critical role of engaging men and boys in prevention, and creating a culture where domestic abuse and VAWG are not tolerated.

The meeting was chaired by Jess Phillips MP. Parliamentarians in attendance also included Maria Miller MP, Gavin Newlands MP, Alex Norris MP, Alison Thewliss MP, Angela Smith MP, Baroness Lister and Baroness Hogg.

The APPG heard evidence from the following speakers:

- Anthea Sully – CEO, White Ribbon
- Paulette Furse - Survivor
- Katie Ghose - Chief Executive, Women's Aid
- Nicola Roberts – Singer and Campaigner

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#### Jess Phillips MP

Jess Phillips MP introduced the meeting and oversaw business items for the Group's Annual General Meeting. Jess was re-elected as the APPG's Chair, Maria Miller MP as the Vice-Chair, and the following Members as Officers:

- Sarah Champion
- Vicky Foxcroft
- Baroness Glenys Thornton
- Caroline Lucas
- Baroness Sally Hamwee
- Norman Lamb
- Paul Scully
- Sir Peter Bottomley
- Gavin Newlands
- Alison Thewliss
- Thangham Debbonaire
- Seema Malhotra
- Alex Chalk



- Baroness Sandip Verma
- Emma Hardy
- Alex Norris
- Angela Smith
- Baroness Ruth Lister
- Baroness Gabby Bertin
- Baroness Sarah Hogg

Jess proposed changing the name from APPG on Domestic Violence to Domestic Abuse, however due to concerns raised it was agreed the name would change to the APPG on Domestic Violence and Abuse.

### **Anthea Sully, CEO, White Ribbon UK**

Anthea opened the meeting by setting out how men are conditioned from an early age in their understanding of what it means to be a man, and indicated that this was particularly evident when men are surrounded by sexual images of women. Anthea also argued that when certain actions, like online trolling, are not being addressed properly such conditioning continues to be reinforced. She stated that this is because a toxic culture currently exists, and emphasised that rape and abuse is a part of this culture.

Anthea highlighted that White Ribbon UK was set up to tackle this culture and behaviour, and main aims included promoting equality and respect and to call on all men to challenge sexism. White Ribbon has a national network of over 760 male volunteer ambassadors who engage with other men and boys to call out such behaviour among their peers and promote a culture of equality and respect. She set out a number of campaigns currently being run by White Ribbon, including safer sports clubs and safer music festivals and venues. For example, White Ribbon offers practical support to help festivals, events and music venues stop violence against women and girls.

Anthea indicated that underlying all of White Ribbon's campaigns and aims, is the request to 'ask, listen and act'. She concluded that violence against women and girls is not just a women's issue – it's everyone's - and it takes all of us to take responsibility and a multi-agency response to tackle the root causes, with men and boys having a clear role in this.

### **Paulette Furse, Survivor**

Paulette stated that 'life started out bleak', but she is now standing here as a survivor. She explained that her abuse started at 5 years old, and she was first sexually abused at 6 years old; after her two step-brothers moved in. She described the abusive household that she grew up in; parents often argued, step-brothers were aggressive and violent, and stated that, once when she was trying to protect her mum, she was stabbed in the face.

Paulette described how she was a victim on domestic abuse in her marriage, but thought what she was experiencing was normal and that she had a duty to her



husband. She explained how her experiences in early life shaped this thinking. The abuse perpetrated against Paulette continued to get worse and in the end she fled after four years with her two year old daughter. The night before she fled her husband had tried to kill her.

Since escaping her abusive marriage Paulette has campaigned for change and is proud to be a Campaign Champion for Women's Aid. She emphasised that this campaign work was vital, and issues such as tackling the root cause of issues faced by children needed addressing; for example her step-brother's late mental health diagnosis provided context to their behaviour as young children. Paulette recommended that raising awareness and educating children on these issues would enable children to voice any issues at homes or in their lives much better. She indicated that in the wake of programmes like Love Island and having the ability to have constant access to social media, this was long overdue and we needed to tackle the behaviour and stereotypes that are portrayed in these programmes.

Paulette concluded that she was proud to be part of an APPG that makes legislative changes and changes the lives of survivors and children, and that she is hopeful we will secure the changes we need on these issues.

### **Nicola Roberts, Singer and Campaigner**

Nicola highlighted that domestic abuse is an issue that has deeply affected her, and that she had been controlled, abused and stalked by a previous partner. She described her experience started when she was 22 years old and in a relationship with an older man. After 18 months of abuse, she found her way out of the relationship due and was able to escape with the excuse of work commitments. Whilst acknowledging that not all survivors have this opportunity, she still felt terrified after leaving.

Nicola commented that after the relationship had ended, her perpetrator was waiting for her online and started sending her messages from 65 different accounts. She highlighted that the abuse escalated into him threatening her friends. Despite securing a restraining order the continued coercive control and stalking behaviours she was experiencing from her ex-partner did not stop. Nicola set out her frustrations of having to explain what Instagram was, and other social media platforms, to a judge. She stated that both the judiciary and Parliament have a lack of understanding on social media, which offers perpetrator's an opportunity to continue to control and stalk, and talked about how harmful abuse perpetrated through these platforms can be.

She argued her case highlights that justice system did not protect her. She concluded that we must do better, and the excuse that social media is 'moving too fast' is no longer acceptable due to the impact it has on the younger generation. She indicated that if relationship and sex education was better, maybe she would have run a mile from her perpetrator.

### **Katie Ghose, Chief Executive, Women's Aid**



Katie highlighted that Women's Aid works with survivors who have suffered abuse for weeks, months and years, and are clear that the responsibility for the abuse lies with the perpetrator. She emphasised that as, on average two women are killed by their partner or ex-partner every week in England and Wales and the police in England and Wales receive over 100 calls relating to domestic abuse every hour, the need for prevention is clear. Katie stated that Women's Aid member services undertake prevention every day of the week, but often have to tackle cases when they are at crisis point due to current funding issues. She argued that the Domestic Abuse Bill can make a difference on this, but the Bill must look past just the police and look at schools and health and acknowledge that an increase in public awareness will lead to an increase in demand on specialist services.

In regards to the toxic culture discussed by previous speakers, Katie described the misogynistic wallpaper in society that enables toxic stereotypes and behaviour, and part of the work needed to tackle this includes early intervention and focusing on meeting the needs of survivors. Katie highlighted that Women's Aid 'Ask Me' scheme, part of the Change That Lasts programme which enables members of the public, for example, to understand the nature and impact of domestic abuse and to be confident in how to challenge myths and victim blaming to help prevent unhelpful community responses to survivors. She added that early data on the scheme shows that it is 'breaking the silence' on domestic abuse.

Katie raised the national conversation that Women's Aid started about Love Island and the harmful behaviour that is being portrayed without any obvious consequences for those doing it. Women's Aid have been calling out this behaviour, which has resulted in more young people approaching the organisation. She commented on how important this is, particularly as a recent survey of 120,000 young women in the UK, undertaken in partnership with Cosmopolitan Magazine, indicates that one third had experienced domestic abuse in their relationship. Of those who said they hadn't been in an abusive relationship, almost two thirds (63.8%) said that they had experienced one or more 'red flag' behaviours of abuse. Katie added that education was an important way to create a safe environment for children and young people to disclose their abuse. Women's Aid welcomed statutory relationships and sex education, which should be implemented as soon as possible. She concluded that we have to educate children and young people to tackle the current toxic culture.

## Discussion

Issues raised during the Q&A and discussion included:

- Concerns about the approach taken by social services, which often lead to victim-blaming, therefore there were call for prevention training to be included in their training.
- Following media reporting into false allegations of rape and concerns about evidence disclosure in criminal cases, the Justice Select Committee is undertaking an inquiry. **Suggested that the APPG should request for this be widened out to include domestic abuse.**



- There is a need for more male role models to tackle portrayals in Love Island and music videos.
- **Suggested that the APPG should hold an inquiry on whether we should treat gendered abuse as a public health issue.**
- **Suggested that the APPG should hold inquiries on the role of media and the progress of the coercive control law.**
- There needs to be more schools working on ambassador programmes so children and young people can be role models for their peers.
- Lack of resources is affecting specialist services' prevention work.
- The issue of men being reported to police for abuse, but are getting 'No Further Action' rather than cautions.
- Sexual abuse services are struggling with demand just like domestic abuse services, and that the Domestic Abuse Bill will also have an impact on them.
- Concerns that Magistrates and Judges are still not aware of coercive control, and family courts are especially far behind on this.
- Concerns that victim services aren't good if we're not addressing perpetrators. Victims leave, but the perpetrator is still there to abuse someone else.

**NB:** Nicola's experience was highlighted in the press following the meeting –

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/girls-aloud-star-nicola-roberts-gets-apology-from-cps-over-stalking-case-k3x6n72cs>