ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON YOUTH AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD AT 5:30PM, WEDNESDAY 28 JANUARY 2015
COMMITTEE ROOM 12, PALACE OF WESTMINSTER

GUEST SPEAKERS

- **LISA NANDY MP, SHADOW MINISTER FOR CIVIL SOCIETY**
- **SIMON DARVILL, CHAIR OF YOUNG LABOUR**

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. SPEAKERS INTRODUCTION

JH introduced Simon Darvill (SD), Chair of Young Labour, who explained the work of Young Labour and how young people can engage with politics. He said that it was good to have the opportunity to speak to young people who are not necessarily politically affiliated. He introduced #ShapeYourFuture, a Labour youth consultation that had recently been launched by Ed Miliband. He also outlined some of Labour's pledges to young people, including:

- To engage in thousands of social media and face-to-face conversations
- To produce a distinct young person's manifesto
- To tackle the crisis of missing voters
- To feedback on the results of the #ShapeYourFuture consultation, whether the results were negative or positive

He further highlighted the importance of National Voter Registration Day, and the fact that even though statistically young people normally vote Labour, they are currently not turning out to vote at all. Arguing that this is one of the principle reasons why cuts are often made to young people's services, he maintained the importance of getting young people engaged and getting them to vote.

On education, he outlined the importance of *"standing up"* for those who concentrate on technical qualifications or don't go to university. He spoke about Labour's pledge to raise minimum wage to £8 per hour by 2020, and stated that Labour believe in equalising the

minimum wage for young people with the adult rate. In addition to this, he raised Ed Miliband's promise to lower the voting age to 16 within one year of the general election.

Finally, he criticised the current government's record on youth affairs, citing youth unemployment, rising tuition fees, and the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) as examples. Only Labour, he said, can deliver the progressive change that is needed in this area.

3. LISA NANDY MP, SHADOW MINISTER FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

JH introduced Lisa Nandy (LN) MP, Shadow Minister for Civil Society, who spoke about the Labour party's policies ahead of the 2015 General Election.

She began by stating that any political party worth their salt ought to be worried about "*shrinking*" youth engagement. She related many issues to those faced by young people in her constituency in Wigan, which she said were not high enough on the agenda at Westminster. She argued that party politics often put young people off engaging with politics, and also highlighted Labour's #ShapeYourFuture Consultation, encouraging all 16-35 year olds, as a group that have been "*clobbered*" by the current government, to participate.

She went on to outline Labour's top priorities in relation to young people, in particular:

- Job creation
- Boosting wages for low-paid workers
- Developing vocational education
- Taking action on housing

However, she clarified that not all of the suggestions received in the consultation would be implemented, stressing the importance of prioritising certain issues and considering a range of different options. As an example, she spoke about the scrapping of the EMA, suggesting that giving young people some measure of power in directing a pot of money given to schools and colleges could be a better solution than bringing EMA back in its previous form – although she stressed that this was an idea, and not Labour policy. She discussed similar options for solving the issue of equal minimum wage, again noting that these were ideas and not policy.

She called on her own experience to comment on how to engage young people in politics, stating that it would be better for politicians to go to young people, and not vice versa, to engage with them. Raising her concern about the 1 million people who have *"fallen off"* the electoral register during this parliament, she reiterated that young people's issues are often overlooked as a direct result of low voter numbers in this age-group.

In conclusion, she argued that as 16 and 17 year olds will one day have to solve all of these problems themselves, this is the principle reason for granting them the ability to vote. Labour, she contended, would find a mechanism for young people to hold the party to account after the election, whether that be through the Prime Minister directly, or through

Parliament. This, she claimed, would help to restore some of the confidence lost following pledges made by politicians at the last general election.

4. LIAM PRESTON, SENIOR POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER, YMCA

JH introduced **Liam Preston (LP)**, who spoke about the work of the YMCA, one of the group's partners, and their manifesto for the 2015 General Election.

He began by arguing that the most important thing is getting young people's voices heard, and said that the YMCA manifesto, which is being developed, represented an opportunity to go out and speak to young people. He highlighted the importance of holding politicians to account, and outlined the areas which the manifesto would touch on, including: housebuilding, rent, homelessness, mental health, non-traditional training and education. He also touched on problems with voter registration, and encouraged every young person to take the opportunity to register to vote before the election.

JH reiterated this point, reminding attendees that even if they turn 18 on the 6th or 7th of May, they will be able to vote and should register to do so. She also praised the YMCA, saying that they carry out good work, and their research is often of use in the Chamber.

5. DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

JH invited young people to ask questions to the speakers, covering a variety of topics including political engagement and the election; employment, skills and training; and health.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Kyle, a resident at the **Foyer Federation in Peterborough** said that in order for votes for young people to be successful, it is important to improve the amount and quality of information that is available to young people, to help them make a balanced decision.

A young person, Esmerelda, responded to Lisa Nandy's comment that a Labour Government would ensure they were accountable to young people by asking how the accountability will work in practice.

Jack, **a YMCA resident** said that he felt that young people had lost faith in government, and asked how the speakers think that could be restored.

Larissa, from Girlguiding, raised concerns over the under-representation of women in politics, which she said impacted on the views of young women in particular.

Another young person stated that the problem with engagement goes wider than just young people, affecting society at large. He emphasised the importance of young people understanding how they can influence politics and get involved in their community.

Another young person said that political advertisements are all aimed at older people, and that political parties should target young people directly. She highlighted social media as a possible avenue for doing this, and said "*it should be easy for me to find out about it*."

JH spoke about her experiences of communicating directly with young people. She said that when she is campaigning, if a young person answered to the door they would get their parents, rather than talking to her themselves. She suggested that Twitter would be a good forum, and asked whether any attendees followed MPs on Twitter.

Hillary from **Walthamstow Council** remarked that young people do not know about election events such as hustings, which she herself has attended thanks to her parents. She said that the voting system itself would deter her from voting.

Simon from the British Youth Council was concerned that students would no longer be automatically registered to vote using their student accommodation address, and asked whether Labour would reverse this policy.

A young person suggested the use of a marketing campaigns to reach young people, and said that social housing tenants were **more** likely to vote. They suggested that the process of voting should be re-branded, incentivising voting by highlighting the chance to make a real change.

Jo from Affinity Sutton raised the topic of education, saying that if the education system does not work for any one person, then that was no good, insisting that the system should be personalised and "*work for you".*

Tracey from the National Citizen Service spoke about votes for 16 and 17 year olds and asked why the Scottish referendum inspired and motivated so many young people.

A representative for Fair Play for Children highlighted the role of schools in teaching children and young people about governance, stating that they are never consulted about the rules that are imposed on them in that context, and so struggle to understand what contribution they can make to politics.

Lucaskz from Mosiac Youth suggested that young people are often disengaged because they are treated simultaneously as adults and as children. He cited examples, stating that the age of consent for sex was 16, yet young people are not allowed to buy alcohol below the age of 18. Another example, he said, was that young people were allowed to work, yet were not subject to the same minimum wage as older people. He argued that this was a patronising approach, and suggested that young people be introduced to 'adulthood' earlier.

Another young person said that she came from a place where children and young people do not trust politicians, and therefore do not engage with politics. They suggested that politicians themselves visit such areas and speak to the young people there directly in order to combat this perception.

A young person said that young people feel like they don't have any sway over politics.

A young person, **Medijah** said that it should be compulsory for young people to learn about politics and political parties whilst they are in education.

Gulwali argued that young people need to have more responsibility as well as more opportunities. He suggested that young people should engage in all areas of political life, not just during the general election. He spoke of his own personal experience as a political refugee, and asked why his status as such prevented him from voting in the UK.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Linda from the Diana Award said it is important that education is embedded at every educational stage including primary school.

Josie from UK Youth said employment must be sustainable and better quality. She asked how the Labour Party would stop young people being exploited. **James from YMCA** said zero hours contracts make it difficult for young people to budget from one month to the next and they don't know if they can pay rent.

A young person argued that there should be free transport for 16-18 years because it can cost around £650 for young people just to attend school, and this problem will be exacerbated when the school leaving age is raised. **Kim from BYC** spoke about how the Children's Commission had found that the cost of school uniform is too expensive for lots of people, and schools are ignoring the Department for Education's guidance on this matter.

A young person highlighted that Labour's plan to raise the minimum wage to £8 an hour is still less than the living wage.

A representative from The Foyer Federation said there needs to a benefit system which is more accepting of young people who are trying to improve their education or skills, and they often end up having to work to support themselves whilst getting an education.

A representative from Young Women's Trust said female NEETs (not in employment, education or training) are often forgotten about. **A young person from Bedford YMCA** said she has tried to get an engineering apprenticeship but she has been unsuccessful, and not enough is done to support women into apprenticeships.

Sam said sometimes colleges use their funding to compete with each other to attract young people rather than to support the welfare of their students.

Mike Gapes MP joined the meeting.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Carissa from Sadiq Khan MP's office said she is on a paid internship and said there needs to be more support for young carers. She also said the transition from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to adult mental health services is difficult and there is not enough support for young people going through that process.

Chloe said the Jobcentre alienates young people and makes them feel bad for asking for help. **Katherine from Girlguiding** said 46% of girls think sex and relationships education needs to improve.

Gulwali said schools create poverty instead of reducing it. **A young person** said it's important to work out what skills the economy needs and make sure they're being taught to young people.

Soxol from YMCA said there should be more integration of health and care. **Jack from the YMCA** said the Milton Keynes YMCA hostel is going to close because of lack of funding.

Gulwali asked how the Labour Party would prevent young people being radicalised. **Jack** said there are not enough people going abroad as part of their education, which is hindering understanding of other cultures.

A representative from Envision asked about the cost of medication for people on low incomes, especially those who take lots of different medicines.

A representative from NCYVS asked about what support is available for first time buyers.

CONCLUSION

SD said political education would come alongside the introduction of votes at 16. He also said people should be able to register to vote when they get their driving license. He also argued that there is no reason why zero hours contracts should exist in the UK.

LP said YMCA were surprised by how much the issue of mental health services came up when they were preparing their manifesto. He noted that 5th February and 16th March are National Voter Registration Day, and emphasised the importance of registering to vote.

LN said a Labour government would restore citizenship education, including politics. She said it's important for young people to have political power and discussed rights-respecting schools. She argued that politicians cannot listen to young people unless young people speak to them, urging more young people to become more politically active. She said Labour's jobs guarantee is an expensive investment but they think it's important and worth it. She also said Labour would introduce compulsory sex and relationship education in schools, and enshrine a right to counselling therapies in the NHS constitution. She criticised

the current Government for cutting funding to PREVENT because it is important for stopping people being radicalised.

JH closed the session by thanking the speakers and attendees, and highlighting the importance of young people's contribution to the group.

FINAL ATTENDANCE LIST

Organisation
Action4Youth
Ambition
British Council
British Youth Council
Connect Communications
Diana Award
Envision
Fair Play for Children
Foyer Federation
Girlguiding
House of Commons
London Youth
National Citizen Service
NCVYS
Office of Sadiq Khan MP
Office of Tim Loughton MP
Participation People
Pro-action Hertfordshire
Sea Cadets
Teens and Toddlers
UK Youth
Wandsworth Council
Wandsworth Youth Council
YLCB
YMCA
YMCA Bedford
YMCA Leicester
YMCA Milton Keynes
Young Advisors
Young Women's Trust
Youth Employment UK