

## **Minutes of meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Safeguarding on Faith Communities**

**Monday 13 November 2023 at 3.00 pm, Grand Committee Room, Houses of Parliament**

### **Present:**

#### **Officers**

Ruth Jones MP (Co-Chair)  
Lord Bishop Viv Faulkner (Co-Chair)  
Janet Daby MP  
The Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timmins MP  
Baroness Sherlock OBE

#### **Secretariat**

Justin Humphreys, CEO (Principal Advisor to the APPG)

Jackie Mills (Minutes)

Observers: Jules Loveland  
Leah Gray  
Barbara Ball  
Dawn Watson  
Hayley Humphreys

#### **Attendees**

Maswood Ahmed, Muslim Council of Britain  
Dr Shazad Amin, Muslim Council of Britain  
Becky Armstrong-Corbett, Ex-JW Advocates Opposing Crimes Against Children  
Jane Chevous, Survivors Voices  
Lance Christie, Advocate for outlawing psychological slavery in cults  
Alan Collins, Hugh James Solicitors  
Duncan Corbett, Ex-JW Advocates Opposing Crimes Against Children  
Judith Davey-Cole, Methodist Church  
Alicia Edmund, Evangelical Alliance  
Yehudis Goldsobel, Consultant  
Kathleen Hallisey, Hugh James Solicitors  
Nell Hardy, Survivors Voices/Responsibility.Ability.Theatre  
Hannah Jones, The Safeguarding Alliance  
Emily Konstantas, The Safeguarding Alliance  
Della Wright, The Safeguarding Alliance  
Carolina Kuzaks-Cardenas, Restored  
Zanna Maynell, Evangelical Alliance  
Jerome McBean, Commission  
Kevin Murphy, NWG Network  
Sukhvinder Kaur, Sikh Women's Aid  
Adam Tankard, Compassion UKI  
Lisa Thurston, Individual  
Aasifa Usmani, Standing Together  
John Viney, Ex-JW Advocates Opposing Crimes Against Children  
Jonathan West, Mandate Now  
Peter Willson, NSP Church of England

## **1. Chair's welcome**

Ruth Jones thanked people for attending the meeting and invited everyone to introduce themselves.

There were no additional items raised under any other business.

## **2. AGM**

Those present for the AGM were:

Ruth Jones MP – Co-Chair  
Lord Bishop Viv Faull – Co-Chair  
Janet Daby MP  
Baroness Sherlock OBE  
The Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP

The current officers of the APPG are:

Ruth Jones MP – Co-Chair  
Lord Bishop Viv Faull – Co-Chair  
Andrew Selous MP  
Baroness Sherlock OBE  
The Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP  
Rosie Duffield MP  
Baroness Hollins  
Tim Farron MP

All those noted above, apart from Tim Farron MP, expressed their willingness to remain as officers.

No other members had expressed an interest in standing as Chair; therefore, Ruth Jones and Bishop Viv Faull were unanimously voted to remain as Co-Chairs.

Finances – Justin Humphreys stated that there was nothing to declare in terms of financial transactions but noted that c. £15k was the value of Thirtyone:eight's services to the APPG in the form of benefit in kind.

No further business was raised and the AGM was concluded.

## **3. Presentation by Jonathan West, Mandate Now**

Mandate Now campaign for Mandatory Reporting of child sexual abuse to become a legal requirement as this isn't currently the case and enables perpetrators of abuse to continue. Many other countries already have this in place.

In the absence of the law, organisations are left with discretionary guidance and free to do what they think is right, often resulting in people protecting the reputation of the institution over the needs of the children in their care.

It takes an average of 26 years for victims of abuse to come forward, so suspicions need to be acted on at the time in order to protect other potential victims. People need to be pushed over the obstacle of thinking 'what if I'm wrong?'. There is no economic reason why mandatory reporting should not be in place as it is proven that the effect on victims of abuse is profound and life-long which often affects their ability to engage in work.

There should be a specialist safeguarding inspectorate to oversee this and other areas.

#### **4. Discussion on Mandatory Reporting**

Many attendees supported this campaign and agreed that this should be made a legal requirement. The issue arises across different faith communities and the APPG can bring its collective voice to lobby government on this. The issue should be considered not in terms of opposing rights and freedoms, but in focusing on the activity being undertaken with children.

The Co-Chairs will consider the best way forward and Jonathan offered to assist with drafting any appropriate document that might be needed.

#### **5. Presentation by Della Wright, survivor, and Emily Konstantas, Safeguarding Alliance**

Sex Offenders are currently able to exploit a legal loophole and change their name by deed poll, without any background checks being made. This provides a false sense of security when an organisation carries out a check on someone.

Della shared her story as a survivor of abuse by someone who changed their name and went on to continue offending. Her experience was that the needs of the perpetrator was put before the needs of the victim. All agreed that this needs to stop.

The results from several Freedom of Information requests to the Crown Prosecution Service and various police forces demonstrates that this issue applies to thousands of offenders.

The current Home Secretary (this changed on the day of this meeting) has committed to changing the law to close this loophole going forward, but previous offenders must also be tracked back.

#### **6. Discussion on Sex Offender name change**

There could be a quick win of using people's NI number as a unique identifier when applying for a DBS check. Many attendees acknowledged the view expressed by Emily Konstantas that there should also be an independent safeguarding authority, to stop viewing this area in isolation and joining education, faith and health. There also needs to be a change to the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to prohibit offenders from changing their name.

Ruth Jones committed to review this issue and consider what may be the most effective way of taking it forward, with questions raised in the House of Commons to continue keeping pressure on the Government.

#### **7. Questions submitted to the APPG**

Question 1 – raised by Jane Chevous, “Given the recent findings of decades of abuse of significant number of people by Mike Pilavachi at Soul Survivor, described as psychological, emotional, spiritual abuse and coercive control, it reveals a gap in our legal protections that the police don't appear to be investigating and no criminal charges have been made. Could this group explore the possibilities of criminalising spiritual abuse and coercive control in religious institutions and communities?”

Response - the terminology needs to be agreed before pushing for criminalisation. Further discussion is needed on the definition so this matter will be brought back to the APPG.

Question 2 – raised by John Viney, “I would like to ask the group if they could address a specific religious group that is showing disregard for children's safety by their non-cooperation with authorities like Charity Commission. Whereas many religious faith organizations have stepped up to make changes and also apologize, Jehovah's Witnesses have not. The latest report from the Charity Commission outlines nine years of court cases and non-cooperation just to bring JWs to the point where they will accept some CC intervention.”

Response – there are concerns arising from the investigation report which need to be explored further. This matter will be brought back to the APPG in due course.

Question 3 – raised by Peter Willson – already addressed.

The Co-Chairs thanked everyone for their contributions and committed to work on all these matters, acknowledging that this may take time.

For any communications to the APPG email is via the Secretariat - [appg@thirtyoneeight.org](mailto:appg@thirtyoneeight.org).

This meeting marked the fifth anniversary of the APPG and a group photo was taken.

## **8. Close and next steps**

- a) Consider what statutory or regulatory work is needed to get Mandatory Reporting put into law.
- b) Review the Sex Offender name change issue and consider what may be the most effective way of taking it forward i.e. raise questions in the House.
- c) Consider the evolving definition of spiritual abuse with a view to further discussions to consider its inclusion in either statutory guidance or legislation.
- d) Explore the results from the Charity Commission investigation into the Jehovah's Witnesses.