**Minutes of the APPG on Domestic Violence and Abuse Meeting**

***Creating a Truly Transformative Domestic Abuse Bill: Recommendations Report Launch***

**1-2pm, Wednesday 12th September 2018**

Committee Room 14, House of Commons

**Chair**: Maria Miller MP

The group’s 2017-18 programme covered a range of different issues related to the domestic abuse bill, including the protection of migrant women, the health sector response, and access to safe housing for survivors. To support this programme the APPG heard from a range of experts, academics, practitioners and survivors who provided a clear ‘on the ground’ picture of the barriers and issues survivors face on a daily basis. This evidence, ministerial engagement, and the knowledge and expertise of specialist services, have fed directly into the group’s report and the recommendations the APPG is making for the bill and the non-legislative package which will support it.

The meeting was chaired by Maria Miller MP. Parliamentarians in attendance also included Jess Phillips MP and Peter Kyle MP. The APPG heard contributions from the following speakers:

* Katie Ghose – chief executive, Women’s Aid
* Sadi Khan MBE – survivor, campaigner and businesswoman
* Victoria Atkins MP - parliamentary under secretary of state for crime, safeguarding and vulnerability

**Maria Miller MP**

Maria introduced the meeting and highlighted that the report being launched today brings together the work of the APPG from the last year and provided clear recommendations for the domestic abuse bill. She commented that she was proud of the work she has undertaken with Jess Phillips MP and Women’s Aid, and that we would be continuing to work with the home secretary and the minister (Victoria Atkins MP) on the report’s recommendations.

**Katie Ghose**

Katie thanked Maria, Jess and the officers of the APPG for their work over the last year. She emphasised that survivors are at the heart of the work carried out by Women’s Aid, and that the APPG also strived to achieve this as well. Katie highlighted survivor moments from the previous year that had really resonated with her, including; the survivor who was unable to access the support and services she needed due to having no recourse to public funds, the survivor who was constantly moving from one unsafe, inappropriate temporary accommodation with her two children to another, and the survivor who went from an abusive childhood to an abusive marriage and felt she did not know what a healthy relationship was.

Katie stated that the APPG’s report mirrored the issues that Women’s Aid hear from survivors and services on a daily basis, and clearly made the argument that the domestic abuse bill must go further that the criminal justice system. This is particularly vital as most survivors do not contact the police. Katie echoed a number of the report’s overarching recommendations; that the bill must help all survivors – including survivors with no recourse to public funds, and domestic abuse must be a priority in the health and social care sector.

Katie highlighted the welcome news from over the summer recess; that the government have decided not to go ahead with their planned supported housing reforms and that refuges will remain in the welfare system. She made it clear that there was still more to do to ensure that domestic abuse services had sustainable futures, and the government still needed to look closely at the current funding gaps services are having to cope with. She concluded that the report covered a breadth of recommendations that indicated that though domestic abuse may start in the shadows, it touches all aspects of a victim’s life. She stated that we must make domestic abuse everyone’s business, and hoped that the recommendations would be taken seriously by the government.

**Jess Phillips MP**

Jess commented that the challenges the APPG had heard over the last year had been well-represented in the report. She added that the group had been mindful, and had made recommendations that are possible and realistic, and the APPG would continue to work with the home office and civil servants on these. She thanked Women’s Aid for being secretariat for the group, and thanked all the specialist organisations and survivors who attend the meetings and provide crucial insight that enables the group to produce detailed and important reports like this.

**Sadi Khan MBE**

Sadi spoke of her own personal experience which started after she got married at 19 years old. The day after she got married, she made her new husband a cup of tea, and he slapped her as she hadn’t ask for permission. The abuse continued from this point, getting more severe and violent, despite her attempts to behave differently; she couldn’t do anything right. She wanted to tell her family, but her husband (and later her sister) spoke of the shame that would bring her family. She also wanted to tell the police, but was brought up to believe that you could not call the police on your husband. Sadi also highlighted that when she was being abused she would scream loudly but no one would come to check if she was OK – her neighbours did not think it was their business – and when she went to the doctors covered in bruises, they failed to ask her where she got them from.

Sadi finally built up the courage to go to the police station, after almost being beaten to death. The police brought her husband in and the Officer and she was met with an inexcusable response. The officer said to her that her husband was crying in the interview room and that this would ruin his life, and asked if she was sure she wanted to prosecute. Sadi dropped the charges and went home, only in the end to be helped by a 19 year old man when her apartment set on fire.

Sadi questioned how we can expect people to know what’s ok and not ok or what help is out there. She stated that these issues must be taught in schools, the importance of giving men opportunities to become ambassadors and all service needed to be trained on all aspects of domestic abuse. She concluded that if the detail is right, then the domestic abuse bill should not be underestimated. If we made domestic abuse everyone’s business we would be empowering the whole nation.

**Victoria Atkins MP**

The minister commented that it was always a pleasure to be invited to these APPG meetings, to listen to the group’s conclusions and to work with the group on these issues. She indicated her horror at Sadi’s experience, and added that she was determined to tackle domestic abuse and women fleeing for safety. She emphasised that this highlighted the need to turn the focus away from the perpetrator and on to the victim, and to reinforce that it is never the fault of the victim. She added that a bill is a long process, but that the government are committed to it.

In regards to the bill the minister noted that; still need improvements in training programmes, she had high hopes and expectations of the commissioner role who needs to be independent and to hold the government to account, how key relationships and sex education was, the importance of rolling out Operation Encompass across the country, and how vital it was for a greater focus on the impact of domestic abuse on children. She also noted that it was clear from Sadi’s experience that we must do anything we can to break down the wall of silence and shame.

The minister noted that the government received 3,200 responses to the bill consultation, and the Home Office are working through these now and will publish a draft bill by the end of the year. The aim was for the bill to be introduced to Parliament in the next session (April onwards). She concluded that she hoped the supported housing reforms announcement gave everyone hope for the domestic abuse bill, and that she looked forward to continuing to work with the APPG on the bill.

**Points covered in the discussion session with attendees included:**

* Concerns about older survivors, and the continuing belief that older people do not suffer domestic abuse.
* Commented that the recommendations were heartening, and it was important the group succeeded in getting them in the bill.
* Concerns about the family courts and the lack of protection for survivors and victims, and that survivors are sometimes losing custody of their children to the perpetrator.
* Disappointment that the bill consultation did not focus on migrant survivors sufficiently.
* The importance of the Istanbul Convention was raised.