

APPG for London

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 6 March 2023

Parliamentarians in attendance:

Sir Bob Neill MP
Florence Eshalomi MP
Bambos Charalambous MP
Lord Tope
Lord Greenhalgh

Speakers:

Joanne McCartney, Deputy Mayor of London for Children and Families
Cllr Cafer Munur, London Councils Cost of Living Working Group
Pauline Daniyan, Head of Engagement, London Youth
Yucong Huang, London Youth
Kashmea Awahi, London Youth
Zedan Gustave-Denton, London Youth
Dan Yankah, Youth Worker
Rosie Kurtz, London Youth
Shelby Dvies, Partnership for Young London
Victoria Odude, GLA Peer Outreach Worker

1) Pauline Daniyan, Director of Engagement, London Youth

- The last decade has seen a massive decrease in statutory support for the capital's youth services. This coupled with the impact of the pandemic and now the cost-of-living emergency makes work supporting young Londoners all the more important.
- Statistics from a recent study by the Partnership for Young London:
 - PYL have found that the overwhelming majority of young Londoners (95%) agree or strongly agree that there is a cost-of-living crisis in London.
 - One in five young Londoners say that their financial situation means they have to go without essentials.
 - Young people with experience in the care system are twice as likely to go without these essentials.
 - Housing is the biggest issue for young Londoners in the 18-25 age range. Due to affordability, only one in four young Londoners feel they will be able to live in London in the future.
 - One in ten Young Londoners have sought support for from their council for housing or homelessness.
 - 16–18-year-old Londoners rank mental health as the biggest issue they are facing after housing and cost-of-living.
 - Poor mental health is a major barrier to young people entering the labour market.

2) Joanne McCartney, Deputy Mayor of London for Children and Families

- The Greater London Authority (GLA) does not create policy impacting young Londoners without consulting young Londoners.
- The impact of the cost-of-living crisis on young people is very nuanced. Not everyone faces the same issues. We know the pandemic had a significant impact on young Londoners, particularly in regard to housing and mental health, and this has been compounded by the cost-of-living crisis. The GLA also now has a cost-of-living hub on its website and the Mayor of London is funding free school meals to support primary school children during this difficult period.
- We know from research that young Londoners' mental health has been disproportionately impacted. The Mayor has funded the Youth Mental Health First Aid programme, training thousands of school staff and youth workers to support young Londoners' mental health. The Mayor has also created a toolkit for schools on mental health with Healthy London Partnership. The Mayor is also working to create 200,000 wellbeing champions, with hopefully many of them being young Londoners, so they can help their peers.
- In London, we estimate that 800,000 children, amounting to 43% of London's children, live in poverty. It is incumbent on all of us to listen to young people and make decisions which can help improve the lives of young Londoners. We're working to ensure young Londoners get a good education by promoting inclusive education among London's schools, we're also supporting thousands of young Londoners through the GLA's Young Londoners Fund. Through the New Deal for Young People, we're looking to match young Londoners with a mentor to give them guidance when they most need it.
- The Mayor has been working hard to ensure more council homes are built to provide people with an affordable place to live, and we now have the most council homes in our city since the 1970s.
- The Mayor has lots of programmes supporting young Londoners and we're always keen to listen to hear about what more we can do to support.

3) Youth-led discussion on housing challenges

- Zedane, who lives in a two-bed council flat with his mum, brother, and others, said that the conditions of council housing compared to their cost was unfair. Many homes have damp and mould, but the cost-of-living crisis means rents are going up.
- Zedane also argued there needed to be a greater emphasis on improving council housing rather than just building more, and the government should support councils to be able to do this.
- Zedane argued the cost of housing means families cram into housing which is too small for them, he pointed to his story where he lived in a two-bed flat with six others. Too many people in a small space is challenging for mental health.
- Victoria, who is a care leaver, spoke about the challenges facing care leavers. Many live independently and with the increase in housing bills, wages are not covering costs. She would like to see carers receive more financial advice given that care leavers don't have the same resources and family infrastructure as many other young adults their age. Universal credit for care leavers over 25s would be helpful contribution.

4) Youth-led discussion on mental health challenges

- Shelby argued that mental health services need to meet the diverse needs of young Londoners. Shelby said that it is key to remember that every young person has different needs and there is no "one size fits all". Shelby spoke about the work they have been involved in, working with young people, for Good Thinking, the digital platform supported by the Mayor of London and London Councils.

- Shelby argued that it is critical to co-design services for young people, with young people. Shelby is also concerned that young Londoners don't know where to go to get support and they need better signposting. Partnership for Young London research shows that one in ten young people don't know where to go for mental health support.
- Yucong said as a young person seeking mental health support you get passed around from one person to the next like a rolling ball. She argued that CBT is not for everyone, it is the only free option, but it only deals with surface problems. Yucong believes the government should look at what more can be provided in schools: there need to be safe spaces and counselling, not just 'mental health first aiders'.
- Yucong said that out of school settings in communities are really important, there need to be more affordable activities locally and more accessible youth workers.

5) Youth-led discussion on transport issues

- Kashmea pointed out that London's transport system is the most expensive in the world, according to research by Deutsche Bank. The cost of transport acts as a barrier to education, so it is important on the individual young person and for the country as a whole. She said she has to take substantially longer journeys to school to save money. High transport costs deepens poverty cycles, especially for young people who can't find alternatives to go to school (ie if they mislay a zip card and are turned away on buses, as does happen). And the costs are greater when at university, where distances can be even longer. Kashmea argued that this should be factored in to policies extending free travel to students.

6) A subsequent Q&A chaired by APPG co-Chair Sir Bob Neill covered

- *The particular changes for care leavers who aren't getting the oversight and support that is due to them*
- *Direct experiences of young people illustrating how the mental health situation has been deepened by the pandemic, and how CAMHS is failing them*
- *How the mental health crisis has affected employment options for young people*
- *How housing challenges are not being dealt with by Housing Associations who are stretched and don't have the resources to*
- *Cllr Cafer Munur laid out some of the work councils are doing to try and ensure they're building homes for Londoners and improving the quality of council and social housing.*

7) Closing remarks from Florence Eshalomi MP

- I believe there is cross party support for looking at how we can ensure we properly invest in young people. Housing is a key issue and we will be working with London Councils and other key stakeholders and making sure we try and address these issues.
- If we all say that young people are the future then we need to invest in them. Education, housing, access to good jobs should be basic necessities that we are helping with.
- I'd like to thank the young Londoners for coming to Parliament and addressing Parliamentarians and people who are making decisions. It is so important to hear young Londoners' voices.