



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Immigration Detention Meeting

Tuesday 23 July 2019, 1.30 - 3.00pm
Committee Room 13, Houses of Parliament, SW1A 0AA

Parliamentarians present: Alison Thewliss MP (SNP) - Chair
Helen Hayes MP (Labour)
Baroness Hamwee (Liberal Democrat)

Others present: Andy Murphy (Office of Alison Thewliss MP)
Emma Ginn (Medical Justice / Secretariat)
Kris Harris (Medical Justice / Secretariat)
Zak Suffee (Medical Justice / Secretariat)
Elspeth Macdonald (Medical Justice / Secretariat)

Minutes

1. Welcome / introductions / apologies

1.1 The chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. Apologies were noted from Baroness Lister of Burtersett, Joan Ryan MP and Hywel Williams MP.

2. Report of launch event

2.1 It was noted that the APPG's launch event, held in Parliament on 23 June 2019, had been very successful. Over 80 people had attended, including 15 parliamentarians from different parties, people with direct experience of detention, and representatives from a wide range of relevant NGOs, public bodies and law firms. The guest speakers – Janahan Srivanathan, Kolbassia Haoussou and Mike Fordham QC – had all spoken powerfully about the harmful, unjust nature of detention and the urgent need for parliamentary action on it.

2.2 There had been considerable positive feedback about the event from attendees. It was agreed the group would consider holding a similar event next year.

3. Discussion of issues raised at inaugural meeting

3.1 The secretariat briefly discussed the topics members had highlighted as of interest at the group's inaugural meeting in April, namely:

- a) Large-scale use of immigration detention in the UK
- b) Immigration detention as an issue impacting both rural and urban constituencies
- c) Home Office decisions to detain/release - lack of transparency
- d) Suicide and self-harm in detention
- e) Situation for women and families
- f) Situation for victims of torture
- g) Lack of access to legal advice, interpreters and other services
- h) Ongoing threat of detention during reporting process - impact on health, including mental health

It was noted that if members required additional information on these or other topics, the secretariat could assist.

4. Work plan

4.1 The secretariat discussed the proposed APPG work plan for the next 6 months. As far as possible, activities would be linked to wider parliamentary and policy developments:

- a) Removal Centre Rules – The Home Office was producing a new version of the Detention Centre Rules, provisionally known as the Removal Centre Rules. Various NGOs including Medical Justice had been consulted by the Home Office on the draft version, and had raised concerns in a number of areas.

The final version of the rules would be laid in Parliament as a 'made negative' statutory instrument. The date for this was not known. It was agreed however that once it happened the APPG would hold a meeting with relevant NGOs to discuss any outstanding concerns with the final version and to consider what, if any, additional parliamentary action might be needed.

- b) Adults at Risk Annual Report – The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) David Bolt had submitted his first annual report on the working of the adults at risk process. Commissioning this report had been one of the recommendations made to the Home Office by Stephen Shaw in his 2018 review. The report's publication date had not been confirmed.

It was agreed that the APPG would hold a meeting with Mr Bolt to discuss his findings once they had been published. The chair and secretariat would send an “in principle” invitation to Mr Bolt during recess, pending the actual publication of the report. The chair would also table a question to try and clarify the publication date for the report.

In addition, it was suggested that the group invite Stephen Shaw to speak to the group in the near future. The chair and secretariat would follow up on this.

- c) Detention centre visits – The chair had secured an individual visit to Dungavel, which she would undertake during summer recess. The secretariat would provide briefing information and useful contacts prior to the visit.

It was agreed that the APPG would also undertake a group visit to the Harmondsworth and Colnbrook detention centres (located at Heathrow Airport) before Christmas. The chair and secretariat would submit the necessary request to the Immigration Minister to get this underway.

- d) Immigration Bill amendments – The fate of the current Immigration Bill under the new Prime Minister was not yet clear. Considerable work was already going on around the 28 day time limit amendment to the Bill. The chair had agreed with parliamentary colleagues leading this work that they should continue to do so, to avoid any confusion or duplication. The secretariat were also in touch with the NGOs leading on the campaign.

A number of NGOs were also considering an additional amendment on safeguards for vulnerable adults. Further information would be provided on this once available.

- e) Quarterly detention statistics – They were a useful moment to take stock of trends and changes in the implementation of detention policy. There were significant gaps in the data, however. Previously the Home Affairs Select Committee used to press the Home Office on the gaps and request additional data. This was no longer happening however, and might be something the APPG should consider raising.

It was agreed that the secretariat would provide the APPG with a short digest of the detention statistics after they were published each quarter. The digest would highlight the key points and also note what was missing. These could then be pursued further in Parliament by members through questions etc.

- f) Other topics on horizon – Brexit, including the possibility of a no-deal scenario, and its implications for the detention of EEA nationals in the UK was raised as a key issue to monitor.

Likewise, developments around Brook House IRC would be important to follow. This included the outcome of the current retendering of Brook House’s contract, and the

possibility of a full statutory public inquiry into the abuse of detainees at the centre, following a recent High Court ruling on the matter.

The issue of the third runway at Heathrow, which under current plans would involve the demolition of Harmondsworth and Colnbrook detention centres and building of replacement facilities in a new site, was also noted as a potential future topic for APPG attention.

5. AOB

None.

6. Summing up / close