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**APPG for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers**

**Tuesday 21st May 2024, 4:30pm to 5:30pm**

**Attendees**

* Paul Blomfield MP
* Liz Twist MP
* Lord Young of Cookham

**Apologies**

* Baroness Lister of Burtersett
* Baroness Pitkeathley
* Duncan Baker MP
* Ed Davey MP
* Marion Fellows MP
* Nickie Aiken MP
* Wendy Chamberlain MP

**Agenda**

1. **Welcome and apologies; Approving minutes of last meeting; Chair’s Update**Paul Blomfield MP welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that it will be recorded but only shared with APPG officers and members unable to attend. It will not be shared anywhere publicly.

* The last meeting was on 21st February 2024 and the minutes were circulated with the agenda for this meeting.
* The Minutes were approved as an accurate record and no matters arising were produced.

**Chair’s update**

**Paul Blomfield MP -** Since our last meeting, the APPG has continued to be busy. Ahead of Young Carers Action Day in March, I was delighted to be invited to speak at the launch of the Young Carers Covenant, which we’ll receive an update on shortly.

* Then on Young Carers Action Day itself, we held a Parliamentary drop-in where we had lots of MPs and Peers from across parties and and all parts of the UK attending to speak with young carers and sign up to the Young Carers Covenant. It was really encouraging that this included the Minister for Social Care, Helen Whately, Shadow Minister for Social Care, Andrew Gwynne, and the chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, Steve Brine. The session had a real impact, but would encourage people from local groups, if your MP has not yet signed up to the Covenant, then I would encourage you to contact them to ask them to.
* There was a recent Westminster Hall debate on Carers Allowance. Vice-Chair Ed Davey recently highlighted the issue of the 21-hour rule for young carers.
* Many of you will be aware that the Department for Education recently published the 2022/23 attendance data, which for the first time included data about young carers. The findings were really concerning – with the proportion of young carers being persistently absent was nearly double the figure for pupils without caring responsibilities. That drives home the point many of us know about the impacts of caring responsibilities.
* On the back of this new data, I wrote to the Schools Minister to raise our concerns and ask what the Government is planning to do in response, and I have also raised the issue with the chair of the Education Select Committee, Robin Walker, who is an active supporter of young carers. Robin Walker is wanting when he gets the opportunity to press the issue with the Secretary of State. Lord Young also raised the issue through parliamentary questions in the Lords so we have been pressing the issue at every opportunity.

1. **Young Carers Covenant update**

* **Paul Blomfield MP -** Andy McGowan from Carers Trust is now going to provide an update on how the launch of the Covenant went and progress so far.
* **Andy McGowan** – It has now been just over two months since we launched the Young Carers Covenant. The response so far has been really pleasing. To-date, we have had almost 400 signatories to the covenant – including a range of individuals, organisations and politicians from across the UK.
* Some examples of organisations include schools, Hartlepool Community Foundation Trust, local authorities such as London Borough of Sutton Council, and hospitals, including West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals Trust.
* If organisations have not yet signed up, please do encourage them to do so using the resources on the webpage.
* From a political perspective, we will next be focusing on ministers from the Department for Work and Pensions, particularly on the back of the recent coverage of carers allowance and the 21 hour rule, and also how we support young adult carers into employment. This will be happening ahead of Youth Employment Week in July.
* **Paul Blomfield MP** asked how we are using this database of signatories to keep them engaged. Will we be regularly communicating with them?
* **Andy McGowan** explained how Carers Trust will be communicating in the run-up to the election, but also after the election. Ahead of Young Carers Action Day 2025 we will be following up to ask them and organisations who have signed up what they have been able to do so far, and what they plan to do moving forwards. Carers Week will be another opportunity for MPs and Peers to sign up, and we are also logging specific commitments being made.

1. **Children and Families Act/Care Act 2014 – 10 years on for young carers and young adult carers**

* **Paul Blomfield** - This year marks ten years since the passing of the Children and Families Act and Care Act, which gave young carers in England legal rights for the first time and places duties on local authorities.
* When we held our inquiry in November it highlighted issues around identification and assessments, and so thought it would be useful to follow up with a deeper dive into some of the issues.
* Andy is going to start by providing a summary of the feedback received. We will then Dr Chloe Alexander who is an academic at the University of Birmingham and has been involved in young carers policy work a lot over the past decade, and then from Sharron Smith, the CEO at York Carers Centre – who will provide a local perspective.
* We were due to be hearing from Freya, a young adult carer, but her caring situation means she is not going to be able to join, and so Andy will read out something from Freya.
* **Andy McGowan** delivered a presentation summarising the written evidence submitted for the deep dive. The content of this can be found [via the APPG webpage](https://carers.org/downloads/children-and-families-act--care-act---10-years-on.pptx).
* **Paul Blomfield MP** then introduced Dr Chloe Alexander, Research Fellow at the Centre for Care - University of Birmingham, to provide her perspective.
* **Chloe Alexander** explained how young carers and young adult carers have been her focus for the past ten years. I have been particularly interested in inequalities. I am currently working with a group of young adult carers to understand the strengths and weaknesses of this support.
* It is really welcome that the APPG is reviewing the impact of these important pieces of legislation. In my work it does appear that families receiving assessments are seeing the benefits of these legislation. It is linking them into important support. It is however widely acknowledged that the majority of young carers are not receiving assessments. We lack monitoring data to know how many young carers and young adult carers are being raised.
* Along these positive impacts, a concern I did want to highlight is that families are unlikely to get access to social care services, even when their needs have been assessed. There is a lack of services which would reduce/prevent care being provided, or give them choices.
* The Care Act and Children and Families Act are weak in terms of requiring local authorities to do something about the needs there, and the resources are often not there. It is not the norm for these services to be provided by social care on the back of these assessments.
* If there were stronger duties to provide services it would be really powerful changing the circumstances facing young carers.
* The legislation doesn’t really address the impact that NHS services have on young carers. If health services are delayed or withheld, this will have a big impact on young carers , particularly as they can’t bring in services themselves, for example from the private sector.
* Children and young people depend on these policies being in place within public services to protect their rights as children. Otherwise, it could be argued we are effectively using childrens’ positions in families to fill the gaps in public services.
* It’s also to consider the situations of families. It is important to consider ethnicity, financial situation. I have found that families from working class or ethnic minorities have experiences harsher services. In contrast, families from white, middle-class families might experience a more generous intervention.
* I have also seen the impact of in-work poverty and the impact of the welfare system.
* Families that have migrated to UK, with no resource to public funds will be struggling financially – young carers in those situations will be struggling even more.
* Austerity, cost of living crisis and harsh welfare regimes are all factors which are impacting the extent to which the legislation is able to benefit these young carers. They are often cut-off from support.
* In conclusion, legislation provides a good framework in many ways, it could create significant benefits if their rights to receive social care support. For it to benefit all young carers, more is needed to be done to ensure support reaches them and will require changes in policies. There could be stronger duties (e.g. duty to receive support, rather than just an assessment telling them what the problems are). There is a gap in responsibility for the NHS to systemically identify and support young carers. There is a gap in monitoring of how many assessments are being carried out, what support is being provided, and their impact.
* **Paul Blomfield MP** thanked Chloe for the range of important issues raised which can be followed up on. He then introduced Sharron Smith, CEO at York Carers Centre to provide their local perspective.
* **Sharron Smith** explained how the legislation has had some positive impacts – the duty on local authorities to protect children from inappropriate/excessive care and improve wellbeing.
* It has possibly led to improved contracts for young carer services – including identification and duties to assess. Initially awareness was greater and early identification – but over time, this has faded somewhat. In some areas, it is just left to the carers services as part of their contract.
* There is no process to share assessments with local authorities so we are often left holding cases ourselves and trying to fight for services. Assessments also don’t automatically lead to more services, it doesn’t always lead to more support for the cared-for person.
* In our area, transitions Assessments are not really happening, we are not really sure that they are happening. We are not contracted to provide them, but not really sure who is. Only recall one conversation in the last ten years about a young carer transitioning beyond transitions within our services.
* In regards to a whole-family approach, children and Adult services don’t really talk to each other even though they are in the same building. We find that not many adult social care staff are identifying young carers, even when we have delivered training.
* Generally what the Acts say is right, but the issue is with implementation. Still think schools can also do more to be identifying young carers earlier.

**Questions, comments and reflections**

* **Lord Young** **of Cookham** – said that the presentations were really interesting. What really struck and worried him was that families from a lower income background, or ethnic minority communities receive a worse quality of services. It was really worrying to hear this in relation to children’s services. Is this one particular department? Are there people from different communities working with young carers which may help to mitigate?
* **Chloe Alexander** – In my work I was working with a small number of families. In one case, social workers were more critical of parenting, questioning the culture in the family and this tied to stereotypes. In another case, for a working class family, police were helpful, but were much more involved than other families would experience. Families put under more scrutiny compared to other families. Some families found they were criticised much more readily.
* **Laura Selby (Sheffield Young Carers)** – One of the challenges we see with getting access to services at the moment is how long people have to wait on the phone, and families feeling able to stay on the line for 1 hour, 2 hours – you have to have the time, the energy, the phone credit - the financial cost is another barrier that can be encountered, as well as barriers when English is not a first language. Services are so stretched that people who shout the loudest are the ones getting the support if they understand who to speak to.
* **Liz Twist MP** – It struck me very much that what we are seeing is differential treatment being pointed out – we had some explanation but this should not be the case – these families have needs which are not being met. I would be keen to look at how we can raise this issue to see if this is a universal issue.
* **Paul Blomfield MP** – This would be good to follow-up on to test how wide-spread it is and what we might do about it.
* **John Bangs –** One of the things which we are aware of through the Young Carers Alliance network is that there is a really variable approach to younger young carers. There is no lower age limit in terms of the rights in the legislation, or the new rights in the Health and Care Act, but in quite a few parts of the country, there are lower age limits, in quite a number of cases 8 and above. This is often to do with resources, but any local authority who doesn’t have a means to address the needs of young carer under 8s is at risk of being found to being found to have acted unlawfully.
* **Helen Leadbitter** – I wanted to reflect on lower income families and ethnic minorities – this is absolutely what we have been seeing for many years for lesser response from Children’s Services, because of families not necessarily wanting to engage in conversations with local authority because of concern about impact this might have, or facing stigma. But also wanted to highlight particular vulnerability of young carers who are not being recognised as young carers, and who might be in Pupil Referral Units, or home-schooled – which we have particularly seen post-COVID-19 – this isn’t being particularly monitored. They can be particularly hidden. Looking at referrals for young carer services in Hampshire, there are none from police, youth justice.
* In relation to young carers assessment tools, would be good to look at what has been developed in other areas in terms of measuring level of caring and impact. Would be good to see more of these tools shared.
* **Scott (Gloucestershire Young Carers)** – In relation to accessibility, we are having an issue with ‘3 strikes and you’re out’ policy – this is very difficult, because for families where for example there is parental mental illness and they are afraid to pick up the phone, it isn’t addressing barriers for these families, particularly where there is parental mental health challenges.
* We have also had issues with young carers from middle-income families where we have referred them into services for support and the response has been “They look they are doing ok” – they haven’t scratched beneath the surface regardless of the level of need.
* We have also had a number of child protection/safeguarding cases where in the family there are older siblings where the social worker or chairs of conferences are saying the older sibling can take on the caring role, so we are being asked to move the caring from young carer to young adult carer, or even older young carer. This appears to be a recurring thing we are seeing. The transition to adult services is increasingly difficult. There are lots of families not getting appropriate services.
* **Caroline** (Individual) – I was really struck by what Chloe was saying about the different forms of discrimination/prejudice that might come up. I am mindful that sex/gender hasn’t been mentioned, but also can be another factor for discrimination. Female young carers more likely to report that the person they are caring for isn’t getting the support they need – it might be worth thinking about how services approach female young carers and the assumptions they might have, and how this might interlink with other forms of discrimination. The gendered responsibilities around caring are often not highlighted, and so girls are often caring much more, and the impact on their education or wellbeing often isn’t at the front of people’s thinking.
* **Shagufta Khan** (Lancashire Young Carers) – A common theme we are seeing is echoing what everyone else has highlighted. Part of my role is working with school nurses and social work academies and children’s social care workers. It’s highlighted the lack of understanding ten years on about who young carers and what questions to ask – some of them still don’t have the tools to ask the right questions.
* Working with ethnic minority, refugee, LGBTQ+ young carers – identify is key for many of these young carers. A lack of trust is a huge issue – young carers as young as five – they will talk to us because we are the voluntary sector, but they often have lost faith in statutory services.
* There is also a lack of responsibility and a lack of funding – they want to delegate things to us, but it needs to be a joint responsibility. We need to ensure we are amplifying their voices – it’s often a battle.
* **Paul Blomfield MP** thanked everyone for their contributions and asked the panellists to respond and asked Andy McGowan to share Freya’s story.
* **Andy McGowan** – A lot of what Freya said echoes what we have heard – she wasn’t identified until she was 16, and she knows lots of young carers who are providing high levels of care but feel like they have no choice.
* In relation to accessibility of services, where Freya lives, the support for carers aged 18 and above is only available to adults caring for adults, and so because she supports her younger sibling – there is no carer support available to her. Freya also highlighted the lack of support for her family and the impact this had on her mum, but also her sister. Freya would like to see better enforcement, particularly in schools, but also for services to look at families as a whole.
* In the latest safeguarding guidance, one of the new measures is that no carer should be required for translating or interpreting. And so one of the questions is about what steps the Government are taking
* **Sharron Smith** – There is still a long way to go in terms of identifying young carers, but then there needs to be support available.
* Chloe Alexander – I found the testimonies, the different experiences and examples of discrimination really powerful. The restrictions on services, keeping people away, eligibility, can be so detrimental – support is often promised, but then withheld. It doesn’t only create the stress, it also creates additional care.

**Paul Blomfield MP** thanked everyone for their contributions. It has been interesting seeing everyone re-enforcing the common experiences. It reflects what we know from the inquiry, but this has given it extra texture. It underlines the need for us to focus on this moving forward. The next opportunity is going to be 6th June when the 2024 school census data will be published. The response last year was shocking when the question about young carers was asked for the first time, showing how many young carers were recognised. It will be interesting to see whether there has been any improvement, and there will be more opportunities for us to raise some of the issues highlighted today.

* In relation to our next meeting as a group, it will probably in September, depending on if there is an election. If there is an election, we are putting plans in place to ensure that the APPG will soon reconstitute and be a significant player in the next Parliament in raising all of these issues.

**Meeting ended at 5:30pm**