

## **Cross Party Group on Carers**

**Tuesday 26 January 2016**

**Committee Room 5, 2pm-3:30pm**

**MSPs and their representatives:** Joan McAlpine, Claudia Beamish, Johann Lamont, Eva Kestner (office of Rhoda Grant), Eleana Kazakeou (office of Jim Hume)

### **Individuals and organisations:**

Jo Bluett, Laughter for Health  
Elizabeth Henderson  
Carolynne Hunter  
Jude Clarke  
Gillian Fergusson  
Cath Purdie  
Amy Watson, Carers Trust Scotland  
Roseanna Macdonald, Scottish Youth Parliament  
Elizabeth Morrison, Life Changes Trust  
Liz Platt, PAMIS  
Pete Collins, PAMIS  
Heather Loughran, PAMIS  
Shaben Begum, Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance  
Gill Westwood, Citizens Advice Scotland  
Lorraine Allan  
Claire Cairns, Coalition of Carers in Scotland  
Gillian Reid, Enable Scotland  
Fiona Collie, Carers Scotland  
Katla Helgasson, National Dementia Carers Action Network  
Tom Wightman, Carers Reference Group  
Reece Harding  
Celia Sweeney

**Apologies:** Graeme Dey MSP, Jackie Baillie MSP, Martin Armstrong-Prior, Harry Robertson

Joan McAlpine chaired the meeting. The minutes of the previous meeting were proposed by Fiona Collie and seconded by Tom Wightman.

It was acknowledged that this was the last meeting of the Carers Cross Party Group in this Parliamentary session, and both conveners thanked the members of the group for their input, noting how the diversity of the group gave many perspectives on caring and that some very interesting and powerful stories had been shared.

Jo Bluett gave a presentation on the Carers Laughter Club project ([www.laughterforhealth.org.uk](http://www.laughterforhealth.org.uk)) which offers free places to carers. The club has recently received funding for a third year and carers who attend show a measurable improvement in their health and wellbeing. Elizabeth Henderson, a carer who attends the club, spoke about her experiences there and how it has enhanced her ability to cope with her caring situation. Joan asked whether the club got any referrals from GPs or any social prescribing. There was not much evidence of this, and there was a need to promote the club amongst carers' organisations and other channels that carers access.

Any carers interested in joining or finding out more can contact Jo at [jo@laughetrforhealth.co.uk](mailto:jo@laughetrforhealth.co.uk) - it is hoped that the project can expand further into future across other areas of Scotland.

There was an update on the Carers Bill, which is at Stage 3 in Parliament and being debated on the 4<sup>th</sup> February. Peter Collins mentioned that it is not always easy for carers and their families to know about how bills progress through the Parliament. Joan stated that one of the benefits of the CPG was to allow opportunities for consultation and to represent a variety of carers' opinions, and that like all legislation, the Bill could only be properly tested and evaluated following its implementation. Fiona Collie said that over the course of the Bill's parliamentary scrutiny, there had been a number of messages and responses from carers that had been incorporated into the Bill through amendments, such as hospital discharge and the need for emergency planning. The next stage of the legislation, where regulations and guidance are drawn up, will be another way for carers to make their voices heard. It was agreed that whatever final shape the Bill took, it must make a practical difference to carers' day to day life experiences. The Adult Carer Support Plan will go some way towards looking at the impact a caring role has on someone's life, so that people who have multiple caring responsibilities are better recognised and supported.

Questions were asked about the Bill's funding, as there was an awareness that local authorities are facing cuts and it was not clear whether funding for the Bill would be protected. The Financial Memorandum that accompanies the Bill is clear that money will be available for implementation, and that this will mostly be distributed to integrated bodies. There was some discussion about how to record unmet needs, in case funding issues meant that Councils would not be able to meet all carers' needs. Claire Cairns confirmed that the Adult Carer Support Plan would allow preventative support to be put in place.

Celia Sweeney noted that it is not always easy for carers to self-identify, and this might cause problems if they remain hidden and do not access support. Fiona Collie confirmed that it will also be the responsibility of local authorities and other bodies to identify carers, offer a carer support plan and provide access to support. This will not suit all carers, particularly those who have had bad experiences in the social work system, but it will make sure that a majority of carers can access support mechanisms.

Potential Stage 3 amendments that have been suggested by the National Carer Organisations were discussed. Support for bereaved carers, preventative support in local carers' strategies, support for equalities and recognition of equality groups, and a move to national eligibility criteria are all amendments that could strengthen the Bill, and the National Carer Organisations have lobbied for inclusion.

Jude Clarke noted that it could be difficult to find out about Parliamentary processes, and there was a discussion on how best to get information to carers in an accessible way, and how to publicise these amendments. All information is available on the Parliament website, and the national carer organisations have regularly been briefing their stakeholders on any changes or new developments. Several people confirmed that their local support organisations had been very helpful. Joan McAlpine suggested a central information point, such as a blog, where information could be kept.

Gillian Reid spoke briefly about the Enable Scotland emergency planning toolkit, which had recently launched. Materials on how to make an emergency plan are available on Enable's website <http://www.enable.org.uk/families/Pages/Emergency-Planning.aspx> and training is also available for people who work with carers and families.

The lack of support for advocacy in the Carers Bill was discussed. The Bill provides for carers to be given information about advocacy services in their area, but if none exist then there is no further provision, despite advocacy's link to preventative support and good outcomes; there was a discussion about whether this was linked to financial constraints, and whether the lack of advocacy provision was affecting the proper implementation of preventative support models or a rights-based approach to support. Joan McAlpine noted that advocacy issues had been raised repeatedly in the Parliament and that resourcing was a common theme.

The meeting ended at 3:30pm.

Procedures for re-registering the group will follow the Scottish Parliament election on 5 May 2016.