

Minutes



Joint meeting of the APPGA and the APPG on Learning Disability on Hate Crime
12 May 2014
14:30-15:30, Committee Room 9, House of Commons

Chairs: Robert Buckland MP (Chair, APPGA), Lord Rix (Chair, APPG on Learning Disability)

Speakers:

Norman Baker MP, Minister for Crime Prevention at the Home Office

Living in Fear researchers from the University of Kent, MCCH Society and Autism London (Colin Guest, Rob Marno, Allan Finn, Kathy Johnson, Lisa Richardson)

Kevin Healey, campaigner

Richard Lawrence, Mencap

Robert Buckland MP welcomed and thanked visitors for attending the meeting. Speakers were introduced and Colin Guest and his team were invited to begin with a presentation about the research.

***Living in Fear* research team**

- [*Living in Fear*](#) is the product of a three year study into hate crime against people with autism or a learning disability. This is the first piece of robust research into this topic, and it focused on towns in Kent and Medway.
- The research covered a wide range of abuse, and the report sets out clear recommendations for reducing the incidence of hate crime against people with autism or a learning disability, and improving reporting and recording of incidents. Recommendations include:
 - more and better advocacy support in police and home settings
 - references to the risk of this type of abuse to be included in the Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) system
 - better education of children and young people in developing positive attitudes towards those with disabilities
 - the Home Secretary to lead on the review of the hate crime action plan
 - the Department of Health to reform annual health check procedures to include risk of this type of abuse
- The Jigsaw project in Kent has already begun to pilot some of these changes, with participation from police officers, schools, healthcare and public service providers.

Kevin Healey

- Kevin provided a brief history of the abuse and bullying he has experienced, and how abuse he has received on social media has inspired him to take action and campaign to raise awareness about the issues and difficulties in prosecuting individuals who commit hate crime online.
- He recommended a range of measures including stronger laws to tackle hate crime, both in person and online, and better cooperation from social media companies with the police in investigating abuse.

Richard Lawrence

- Richard described his experience of being a victim of hate crime. School children threw stones at him and his fiancé. When the police were called, the crime was treated as anti-social behaviour rather than a hate crime.

- Richard told his colleagues at Mencap about the incident and they suggested a mediation process. This was arranged between Richard and the school, and Richard was invited to share his experiences with the children involved.
- Although Richard still feels unsafe at times, the particular group of children now leave him alone and the school were very cooperative.
- Richard suggested that when dealing with such incidents, the police should reduce the jargon and speak plainly, provide regular updates to victims on progress of the case and treat hate crimes seriously, and not categorise it as anti-social behaviour.

Norman Baker MP, Minister for Crime Prevention

- The Minister introduced the updated hate crime action plan, [Challenge It. Report It. Stop It](#)
- The Home Office have identified two main routes to address hate crime: legal action and changing attitudes.
- In terms of the law, the UK has one of the strongest legal frameworks in the world for preventing abuse and bigotry. Recording of hate crime has improved and the police are putting preventative measures in place.
- The Law Commission published a consultation on hate crime in July 2013 and it is due to publish its response, and highlight any gaps in the law, next month. There may be an opportunity for interested individuals and organisations to influence this.
- In terms of attitudes, police and public attitudes and understanding of hate crime - particularly against those with learning disabilities or autism - also needs to change.
- The College of Policing is leading on improving training for police officers in autism, learning disability and mental health so that officers can better support victims and those who come into contact with the criminal justice system.
- In response to Kevin Healey's experience, the Minister clarified that cybercrime is taken seriously and there are laws in place to address this. On the whole, investigating authorities have found social media companies such as Twitter to be cooperative.

Robert Buckland MP then opened the meeting to questions from Parliamentarians and members of the public.

Kevin from DGSM Your Choice asked how the Minister planned to engage other government departments in the action plan. The Minister said that the action plan is a government-wide strategy, and that local authorities also had a role to play in ensuring that budget cuts did not have an effect on services for vulnerable people.

An audience member asked why this topic was not being debated in Parliament. The Minister explained that debates follow a timetable of legislation, or when an MP or Peer applies to hold one on a specific topic. He suggested that audience members ask their MPs to apply for a debate. Kevin Healey also clarified that MPs had debated hate crime during the Ten Minute Rule Motion introduced by Ian Mearns MP last year for his campaign.

Leslie Stanberry suggested that the department needed to invest more time and resources into prevention of hate crime. He also highlighted that authorities such as the police are often unaware of the specific communication needs of people with autism or learning disabilities and this was preventing progress. The Minister acknowledged that it was important to ensure that people who work in services are properly trained. Communication is a big issue but there are no easy answers, and the department would continue to encourage appropriate training.

An audience member expressed concerns about crimes being reported and not investigated properly by the police. The Minister said that if a crime is committed, it should be reported, recorded and prosecuted.

Dr Juli Crocombe, Chair of the APPG on Autism advisory board, asked if society's attitudes could be changed through interventions in the media. The Minister said it was important to maintain a free and independent press but admitted that the media did have a role to play in society's attitudes and there were collaborative measures in the action plan to address this.

The Minister clarified that where a crime has been committed online, social media companies have a duty to assist the police in their investigations. He promised to write to the chairs of the APPG on Autism and APPG on Learning Disability on this point, and Robert Buckland said that this would be made available to members.

When asked about the role of the police and other organisations in improving reporting, investigation and prevention of hate crime, **David Quirke-Thornton, Deputy Director for Children and Adult Social Care at Medway Council** said a key measure in tackling hate crime against people with autism or learning disabilities would be helping the public to understand disability, and this is what the Jigsaw project is currently working on.

Lord Rix thanked the Minister, speakers, Parliamentarians and attendees for contributing to the discussion and closed the meeting.