



## **ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON YOUTH AFFAIRS**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD AT 5:30PM, TUESDAY 17 MARCH WILSON ROOM, PORTCULLIS HOUSE**

#### **GUEST SPEAKERS**

- **ROB WILSON MP, MINISTER FOR CIVIL SOCIETY**
- **CHLOE SMITH MP, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR NORWICH NORTH**
- **STEPHEN CANNING, DEPUTY CHAIR OF CONSERVATIVE FUTURE**
- **MITA DESAI, CHAIR OF THE BRITISH YOUTH COUNCIL (BYC)**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME**

**Group Chair, Julie Hilling MP (JH)** introduced the group and briefly set out the format of the meeting. She said this was the final meeting in a series of meetings held ahead of the General Election.

#### **2. SPEAKERS INTRODUCTION – ROB WILSON MP, MINISTER FOR CIVIL SOCIETY**

**Rob Wilson (RW)** spoke about the importance of social enterprise. He said he had recently visited Eastbourne and was impressed by the contribution he saw young people making to their community. He talked about the success of the National Citizen Service (NCS) and how it encourages empowerment and engagement amongst young people and said he wants to see it expanded. He argued that young people want meaningful jobs and careers, and said the Government has tried to ensure young people have the skills necessary to get those jobs. He added that the Government has helped young people through education reform and creating more apprenticeships.

#### **3. CHLOE SMITH, MP FOR NORWICH NORTH**

**Chloe Smith (CS)** explained that she was elected when she was 27, and that she had become interested in politics in her teens because of the lack of transport in her local area. She argued that being an MP gives her the opportunity to be a national lawmaker and local champion. She argued that she had chosen to become a Conservative because the party does not believe in labelling people. She said Conservatives have helped young people get on the housing ladder through starter homes and the Help to Buy Scheme.

#### **4. STEPHEN CANNING, DEPUTY CHAIR OF CONSERVATIVE YOUTH**

**Stephen Canning (SC)** said he had previously been involved in the British Youth Council. He explained that he had written to his local MP about a skate park in his area when he was 12 and had never expected to get a response but instead ended up having a meeting with his MP. He said he ran for election and became a local councillor at 18 and now chairs his local youth service. He added that he had recently also become a county councillor in Essex and now sits on panels to help failing schools. He outlined that Conservative Future is the wing of the Conservative party for 16-30 year olds. He said he has the opportunity to go to speaker events and door knocking.

## **5. MITA DESAI, CHAIR OF THE BRITISH YOUTH COUNCIL**

**Mita Desai (MD)** said that the BYC's manifesto is based on a TEN month consultation with BYC delegates about their key issues. She said if young people feel the issues that are important to them are not being heard then they should get involved with BYC.

## **6. DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE**

**Sonia from Mosaic Youth** asked why people are not able to vote at 16.

**Grace** argued that many young carers are mature enough to vote at 16 and should have a say in how to improve things. However **an attendee** suggested that if the voting age was lowered it would be harder for parents to tell their 16 and 17 year old children what to do.

**Elsbeth from Artswork** said young people are engaged in issues but not in party politics.

**Jack** asked whether the organisations that young people are involved in will be constrained by the Lobbying Act.

**Emma Jane from St John Ambulance** asked how the Conservatives are encouraging young people to vote. She said there should be more political education for young people and said that current Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) is useless. She called for a curriculum for life which covers finance and politics.

A number of young people raised points about ways to promote voter engagement. **Soxol** from Leicester YMCA asked why it is not possible to vote online. **A young person** suggested there should be easy to read manifestos from the main parties because they are all too long.

**Another young person** asked how the Conservatives plan to build up the reputation of politics.

**Josh from Gateway** said the fact that it is likely there will be another hung Parliament after this election means we need a better voting system.

**A young person** questioned how young women can engage in politics if politicians do not represent them.

**Terry** asked about the engagement of young women and young people from BME backgrounds in politics.

**RW** responded that there is no agreement in government on the issue of votes at 16 although the referendum in Scotland did show that 16 year olds can play an important and informed role in politics. He added that the Government are about to respond to the Youth Select Committee inquiry.

**CS** said she had recently changed her opinion on votes at 16 and had previously thought there was no clear evidence to support it. She said that she now thought that the introduction of votes at 16 would be a good way to show young people that they are welcome in politics.

**SC** said that just introducing votes at 16 is not the best thing to do and it should come alongside a package of education.

**RW** pointed out that just 42% of 18-24 year olds voted in the last election, compared to 67% overall of the population overall. He said that rightly or wrongly politicians respond to people who are using their right to vote, not those who stay silent.

**CS** said she supported the idea of having a simple manifesto. She argued that charities are not unduly restricted by the Lobbying Act and said that there are always regulations on people who are trying to influence the outcome of an election. **RW** added that charities always speak up for those they are trying to help and nothing will change that.

**CS** argued that people should not use stereotypes about women in politics as it is not constructive or positive. She said everyone in the room should tell their friends that they had attended this event, where the panel was more than 50% women.

**RW** said in his local council elections there are 11 candidates, 6 are women and 2 are from BME backgrounds, which he said indicated that politics is changing.

**MD** said there are no logical reasons not to have votes at 16. She said it is important to acknowledge the barriers which stop certain groups getting into politics and involve them in the conversation. She said when BYC needed more women on their board they made this known to encouraged people to apply.

**SC** said it is important to challenge stereotypes.

## **EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND TRAINING**

**Noor from the Young Women's Trust** asked about youth unemployment and said that there are consistently more female than male NEETs (not in education, employment or training). She said that some young women feel abandoned and like they are not going anywhere.

**Another young person** said the only jobs available are apprenticeships or internships and then management roles which are not suitable for people at the start of their career. She said wanted a real job and not to work for free half the time.

**A representative from St John Ambulance** questioned why first aid is not on the national curriculum.

**A young carer** argued that they needed better identification in schools and in the workplace. **Another young carer** asked how they were expected to afford tuition fees following the increase.

**An attendee** said that cuts to transport services prevent young people from accessing employment.

**A young person** argued that there should not be cuts to the arts because they help make well rounded young people.

**Lukasz from Mosaic Youth** asked why so much money is put into the NCS, which works with young people for three weeks a year, at the expense of youth services which work with them all year round.

**Andy at Artsworld** said some young people feel like they don't have a future after an apprenticeship because there are no jobs available.

**A young person** spoke about the importance of non-academic learning on issues such as the environment and gender based violence.

**A representative from the Young Women's Trust** said there need to be more apprenticeships for people without 5 A-C grades at GCSE.

**A young person** said PSHE should be compulsory so that people grow up to be safe and confident in their adult life. A representative from St Johns Ambulance asked what the biggest obstacle to PSHE being compulsory is.

**A young carer** asked what support the Conservatives will provide for young carers in primary and secondary school. **A young person** argued that people on apprenticeships cannot afford to pay rent.

**RW** said that there are more apprenticeships under this government than ever before, and there has been a 20% rise in the National Minimum Wage. He said young people have struggled to get jobs in the past because they haven't had real apprenticeships which should include a mentor and the passing on of skills.

**CS** said she was interested in the campaign by St Johns Ambulance but questioned whether first aid knowledge is something that can be spread through other ways, or if it has to be done through schools. In response to the questions on funding cuts she said it is important to understand that currently the government spends £90 billion more than it raises every

year, which is equivalent to several thousand pounds per person. She argued that being in debt is not a good idea and we cannot have secure economy whilst dealing with debt.

**RW** said NCS is not taking money from other youth services. He argued that it is up to local authorities how much money they spend on youth services.

**SC** said that students pay less and pay later under the new student loan scheme. He added that apprenticeships are the way that we will bring the economy up to speed.

## **WELFARE REFORM**

**Noor** argued that more should be done to tackle tax evasion rather than cutting benefits.

**A young person from the YMCA** argued that removing housing benefit is removed from 18 – 25 year olds this will lead to an increase in homelessness. **Soxol** argued that Jobcentres do not understand young people.

**A representative from Mosaic Youth** said there should be more testing in schools to help identify dyslexia. **An attendee** argued that more needs to be done to help young carers accessing drug, alcohol and mental health services.

**RW** said that the Conservatives want to give people the opportunity to work rather than live their life on benefits. He said that there needs to be a way to fund apprenticeships, for example through savings incurred from implementing the benefit cap, and said he wanted people to transfer from benefits to work.

**CS** said that this Government is committed to dealing with tax evasion but she argued that dealing with it is not a 'silver bullet', and it will not raise so much revenue that no other cuts are needed.

**RW** said that it is important that unemployed people recognise their rights but that in signing up for benefits they had responsibilities and obligations that they had to live up to. He said it was right to penalise those who failed to meet those obligations.

**MD** argued that if there was a war the Government so the money should be found to fund departments that provide essential services. She said youth services save money in the long run and added that the aim of education is to create functioning young people with life skills. She said that young people are being demonised but they face barriers too. She urged young people to get involved with BYC.

## **CONCLUSION**

**JH** thanked the speakers and attendees. She reminded attendees that engaging in politics does take a bit of effort but it is worth it.

## ATTENDANCE LIST

Organisation
3FF
Anne Frank Trust UK
4Children
Artswork
Foyer
Gateway
Get Connected
Girlguiding
Hillingdon Council
London Youth
Loughborough Foyer
Mosaic Youth
Multiple
NACRO
ONE
Pro Action Herts
Sanctuary Housing
St John Ambulance
Step by Step
UK Youth
Ycare International
YMCA Leicester
YMCA South London
Young Women's Trust
Connect Communications
BYC
NCVYS
YMCA