Addressing Poverty with Lived Experience with the APLE Collective, hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty: Minutes

Wednesday 19th October 2022 at 11am

Room P, Portcullis House

Attendees: David Linden MP (Chair), Baroness Ruth Lister (Co-Chair), Beth Winter MP (Officer), Peter Grant MP, Linda Nagy, Katy Goldstraw (APLE Collective), Tracey Herrington (APLE Collective), Amanda Button (APLE Collective), Thomas Mayes (APLE Collective), Tom Croft (APLE Collective), Christopher Burns (APLE Collective), Tracey Knight (APLE Collective), Steve Porter (APLE Collective), Gwenealle Horlait (APLE Collective), Brian Scott (APLE Collective), Camilla Furtado (JRF), Scarlett Barclay, Matthew Beebee (Poverty Strategy Commission), Ed McPherson (Poverty Strategy Commission), Matt Tibbles (Poverty Strategy Commission), Tom McGrath (Good Things Foundation), Peter Kelly (Poverty Alliance), Rob Donnelly (Co-Secretariat, The Equality Trust), and Zhané Edwards (Co-Secretariat, CPAG).

Apologies: Baroness Philippa Stroud, Afzal Khan MP, Lyn Brown MP, Tony Lloyd MP, Cat Smith MP, Robin Millar MP, Ibrahim Alimany (APLE Collective), Anna Francis, Barry Knight, and Aidan Peppin.

1) **Welcome and introductions by David Linden MP, Co-Chair of the APPG on Poverty**
   - David commented that during the Covid-19 pandemic there was a flurry of donations of devices, such as tablets and laptops but the lack of good quality and reliable broadband in his constituency negated the intended benefits of the donated devices for his constituents.

2) **Digital Divide – APLE Collective Briefing (Amanda, ATD Fourth World)**
   - Amanda described what the digital divide is and how it impacts how people on a low income can access public services e.g., booking a GP appointment, Jobcentre.
   - Amanda also detailed some additional challenges faced by those without access to technology – data allowances not lasting as long due to Zoom meetings, unable to do homework as older sibling is using the only tablet, not knowing how to use multiple tabs on a mobile for dual identification to access a bank account.
   - Money is necessary to upgrade your phone to a smartphone and to be able to have internet access.

3) **APLE Collective Lived Experiences:**
   a. **Transport (Chris, Cornwall)**
      ➢ Chris underlined how severe the housing crisis in Cornwall has become. This area has been neglected.
      ➢ Chris spoke about the importance of having data to check train times and the fact nearly all information on public transport is accessible online or via apps.
      ➢ Chris reflected how challenging this could be for people who have run out of data. Especially neurodivergent people, such as people with autism, who could struggle if stranded in London having missed the last train.
   b. **Education in Stoke (Tracey, Expert Citizens, Stoke-on-Trent)**
      ➢ Tracey gave a presentation on the how the digital divide impacts on children's ability to learn.

> ➢ She explained that raising children is becoming more expensive with the need to have a device and internet connection at home to do homework. Tracey also highlighted the arbitrary cut-off points some schools have for accessing help with buying tech e.g., Tracey's children had to share a device as the eldest child was no longer eligible despite still being a pupil.

c. **Children and education (Thomas M, Guildford)**
> ➢ Thomas highlighted the key issues facing parents on a low income when engaging with social services.
>> o E.g., Parents might have to have the meeting in the same room as their children yet are told they're not allowed to discuss the case in front of the children.
> ➢ Thomas raised the importance of parent advocates when parents are in meetings with social services and the difficulties in conducting these meetings online.

d. **Refugee and asylum seekers (Ibrahim, Manchester)**
> ➢ Ibrahim was unable to attend, but a statement was read out in his absence.
> ➢ This highlighted that the cost of topping up data is huge when seen as a proportion of the allowance given to asylum seekers.
> ➢ Asylum seekers are having to choose between using data or energy due to ever rising costs of both.

4) **Additional examples of the digital divide**
- Tracey Herrington shared the APLE Collective's insights with the Good Things Foundation.
- Members of APLE Collective spoke to some of the digital barriers that now exist for people trying to access primary care services on the NHS, such as GP appointments. The risk of misdiagnosis of complex conditions due to the reliance on patients' mobile phone photos to diagnose conditions.
- The issue of patient dignity was also raised. It was mentioned that NHS staff are as frustrated by these issues as patients are. There is also concern around NHS Trust's going fully paperless and what this means for sensitive patient data and the security of this data if it is only held digitally – as this sensitive data could be vulnerable.
- The issue of devices/ equipment, Wi-Fi, and data packages will become even more expensive due to the rising cost of living was raised.
- Those in receipt of benefits or are on low incomes will be excluded from the benefits of fibre optic broadband roll-out as they will be unable to afford download charges.

5) **Q&A**
- APLE members asked whether telecommunications are a devolved issue.
> ➢ Peter Grant MP replied that telecoms are reserved to Westminster. He also warned of the security risks of being online especially for people with low levels of digital literacy and who are also vulnerable.
> ➢ Beth Winter MP spoke about research her office has undertaken in her constituency - Cynon Valley, Wales – on digital excision and the elderly. A multi-agency anti-poverty forum is being set-up in the constituency.
- A cap on charges for data and broadband, like the energy price cap - was also discussed.

- Tom McGrath spoke about some of the difficulties around 'zero-rating' (a technique where internet service providers allow consumers to utilize a specific website without charging their internet data plan) GP websites as there is not centrally held data on GP surgery websites and they all use different service providers.
- Tom also spoke to the 'Minimum Digital Standard of Living' campaign the Foundation is currently working on as well as work the Foundation are doing with the Welsh Government in relation to digital connectivity.

<mark>ACTION</mark> – APLE Collective to send a briefing to the APPG, including recommendations APLE want to make, which will be discussed at the next APPG meeting.

Meeting closed at 12pm.