



all party parliamentary group for healthy homes and buildings

EVIDENCE SESSION 1:

Building our Future Green Paper – Laying the Foundations for Healthy Homes and Buildings

Improving Health Outcomes

Tuesday 31st October 2017

14:00-15:00 Committee Room 6, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

NON-VERBATIM MINUTES

1. Welcome and introductions

Jim Shannon MP

Chair of the APPG for Healthy Homes and Buildings

Jim Shannon welcomed all attendees and especially Rachel Toms and Daniel McDonnell of NHS England. He informed all that in total there were 45 written responses to the Green Paper all of which were positive. He said that of course not everyone can be invited to give oral evidence but over the next three sessions about twelve will appear to highlight their contributions and to answer questions.

He added that the built environment is crucially important as we spend approximately 90% of our time in buildings. Finally, Jim Shannon emphasised that as the Group is all party he will be hoping for all party support for its conclusions including from the Government.

2. Oral evidence session

David Evans, Chief Executive, Airtopia

David began his remarks by saying that he had grown up in Paradise Street Rotherhithe which had been anything but paradise. After 37 years of running his own company he was now determined to improve the quality of everyone's home.

In particular he has now established a social enterprise, Airtopia, to look at the issue of the best way to analyse the air in people's homes as unfortunately their current design often turns them into a petri dish!

He said that there is a real lack of data although the Northern Ireland Assembly has been very good in this respect. Airtopia's aim is to get real data which will then be available per constituency. He

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concluded by saying that in terms of solutions there is a vast amount that can be done by way of self help.

Carla Jones, Allergy UK

Ms Jones began by saying that there are 21million people who have an allergy and that of these a growing number are respiratory for example 85% of those with asthma have allergy asthma.

She went on to say that more energy efficient buildings are creating more allergic reactions. Tighter, less well ventilated, buildings lead to more dust mites and spores. There is a need for minimum standards for ventilation including more extractor fans.

She emphasised that some building materials let off volatile organic compounds (VOCs). The construction industry should use better building materials. These should be durable, repairable, recyclable and non-toxic.

Tamara Sandoul, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH)

Ms Sandoul said that CIEH is a membership body with 7,000 members and it welcomes the Green Paper but that there were a number of issues which it would call upon the APPG to add to its Paper and support.

These include the need to recognise the importance of affordability which is a key factor in the high number of excess winter deaths that the UK experiences. There is also a need for the introduction of a national landlord registration scheme as the private rented sector (PRS) has the highest proportion of category 1 hazards in the home.

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System is in need of an update as in some cases it is based on evidence collected in the 1990s. Similarly overcrowding standards, which are included in the Housing Act 1985, actually have not been updated since 1935.

Ellie White, MIND

1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem this year. The evidence suggests that for the 1 in 3 people who live in poor housing damp, cold and mould are contributory or causal factors in mental health problems. Shelter found that 1 in 5 had a housing issue that negatively impacted on their mental health in the last 5 years.

Therefore, MIND believes the Green Paper underestimates the impact of housing on mental health and it would like to see the recommendations extended so that mental health issues – and not just wellbeing – are explicitly referenced and given parity of esteem with physical health.

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Q&A and contributions

The following additional points were made by attendees or those giving evidence:

- *We need to build better awareness of the importance of ventilation – although some who have asthma cannot open windows*
- *Extractor fans should be fitted in all new kitchens, bathrooms and laundry rooms*
- *Gas sensors (also for humidity) should be encouraged*
- *NICE guidance is being developed on air quality and ultimately the APPG's Green Paper should encourage GPs and others to take this forward*
- *There is also a need to look at urban planning because some trees are very high in allergens for example birch trees*
- *Warmth and energy efficiency are beneficial to mental health – but overheating can be a big problem*
- *We are suffering from the unintended consequences of central heating and double glazing*
- *The burden on the NHS is one quarter from mental health*
- *Internal décor is also important to good mental health*
- *Regulation of the PRS is quite lax compared to social housing sector*
- *97% of homes in PRS have a category 1 hazard such as risk of falls – compared to 13% in social housing sector*
- *Key question is how to compel PRS to improve standards*
- *The 2004 Housing Act is sound in principle but the data is out of date and in need of updating*
- *It will be important for APPG Green Paper to reflect and support recommendations regards fire safety that that emerge from Grenfell Tower Inquiry*
- *APPG should also reflect and build on Dame Judith Hackitt's review of Building Regulations*
- *Furnishings also need to be looked at*
- *Noise represents the second greatest threat to health*
- *Environmental Health Inspectors do look at noise– secondary glazing to minimise noise can be helpful*

Thanks and next steps

Mary Glendon MP and Gill Morris - of the APPG Secretariat – thanked all witnesses and attendees for their contribution and said that the idea is to continue to build consensus on this issue in general and for the recommendations of the revised Green Paper in particular. They concluded the session by reminding all that the next evidence session will be on Tuesday the 21st of November at 2pm in Committee Room 6.

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