

NON-VERBATIN MEETING NOTES

DATE: Tuesday 28 January 2020

TIME AND LOCATION: 13:30-14:30, Committee Room 8, Palace of Westminster

CHAIR: Alison Thewliss MP, Chair of the APPG on Working at Height

MEETING MINUTE

AGM

Immediately prior to the APPG meeting on a worker's right to a safe working environment, the formal election of officers and agreement of terms of reference for the APPG took place at the AGM.

Alison Thewliss MP was elected as chair of the APPG following nominations from Chris Stephens MP and Nigel Mills MP. Alison Thewliss MP then presided over the election of the other officers. The following officers were elected to the group:

- Robert Largan MP (Con, High Peak) elected as Vice-Chair
- Nigel Mills MP (Con, Amber Valley) elected as Vice-Chair
- Chris Stephens MP (SNP, Glasgow South West) elected as Vice-Chair
- Jason McCartney MP (Con, Colne Valley) elected as officer
- Chris Bryant MP (Lab, Rhondda) elected as officer in absentia
- Baroness Bennett (Green Party) elected as officer in absentia

MEETING ON A WORKER'S RIGHT TO A SAFE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Following the conclusion of the AGM, the APPG's inaugural meeting took place in Committee Room 8 in the Palace of Westminster. Alison Thewliss MP welcomed speakers and attendees, and confirmed that the APPG had been successfully reconstituted.

She then recapped on the group's successful 2019, and mentioned the APPG's inaugural report which made a series of recommendations to government, the Westminster Hall debate, the meeting with Minister Justin Tomlinson and previous APPG meeting on enhanced reporting when we were joined by HSE. She then set out the aims and ambitions for the year ahead: to build on the group's work in 2019, by continuing to focus on recommendations made in our report and linking these into the current political agenda. This will stretch across government departments and include areas such as digitalisation, justice reform and agricultural safety.

Alison Thewliss introduced the first speaker, Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham and candidate for the Chair of the Work and Pensions Select Committee. She stated that Stephen Timms had mentioned in his pledge to become Chair of the Committee, that if he was elected, the Work and Pensions Committee would review the remit and resources

INAUGURAL MEETING

A WORKER'S RIGHT TO A SAFE WORKING ENVIRONMENT



Working at Height

of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Stephen Timms MP opened his speech stating that he was pleased that his mention of health and safety in his bid to become Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee had been picked up by the group. He said that the Committee had not looked at the important issue of health and safety for several years but that there was now a compelling case for the select committee to look at the issues because of Brexit and the fact that people are working for longer. He confirmed that if elected as Chair of the Committee, he would look to undertake an official inquiry into health and safety.

Peter Bennett OBE, Managing Director of PASMA thanked Stephen Timms MP for his comments. He spoke of the importance of introducing enhanced reporting and emphasised that introducing the measure would not inflict any additional financial burden onto government or industry.

Alison Thewliss MP, for the benefit of Stephen Timms MP, recapped the APPG's meeting with Minister Justin Tomlinson MP. She explained how the Minister and the HSE seemed positive and engaged in the meeting, particularly around the issue of enhanced reporting, but quickly changed their mind after the meeting. She then introduced the second speaker, Shadow Secretary of State for Employment Rights, Rachael Maskell MP.

Rachael Maskell MP said that health and safety is a very important issue for Labour and that the party plans to undertake a commission into health and safety. She said it was the right time to have an appraisal of the working environment and confirmed that the commission will be broad in its scope and look at issues such as equipment, wellbeing and the number of hours people work. In terms of the party's other key priorities in the area, she said that Labour wants to ensure high health and safety standards are upheld across the economy; and wants to see dynamic alignment between the EU and UK on workers' right and health and safety standards. She said that the party will put the welfare of workers at the heart of everything a future Labour government does, which is why it will establish a new government department, the Ministry for Employment Rights.

She said that Labour and the sector should use the upcoming Budget and the Spending Review to demand that the government address the current underfunding of the HSE and ensure the correct levels of investment are forthcoming. She also spoke about the government's upcoming Employment Bill. She said that under the Bill, there is going to be a single enforcement body, and this represents a good opportunity for the sector to lobby for the kind of enforcement body it wants.

Alison Thewliss MP thanked Rachael Maskell MP and Stephen Timms MP for their contributions and opened the discussion to attendees. Jason Harfield, President of ATLAS noted that a lot of HSE regulations are self-policing and that if the industry is going to move forward there needs to be clarification on who is responsible for health and safety. Rachael Maskell MP agreed with this point and said that HSE is now very reactionary, in part because of the cuts to its budget. She added that Labour is setting out plans to introduce a worker's protection agency to address these issues.

INAUGURAL MEETING

A WORKER'S RIGHT TO A SAFE WORKING ENVIRONMENT



Working at Height

Lord Selkirk, a Conservative member of the House of Lords, agreed with Stephen Timms MP on the need for a select committee inquiry and report on health and safety. He congratulated the group on taking the matter forward and pledged his support.

Andrew Delahunt, Director of Technical and Safety at IPAF recounted an incident in Scotland when someone was trapped at height and died. He said that the equipment existed to save this person, but he was not rescued for a long time. He drew comparisons between this incident and the Grenfell Tower fire. He said there is scope to provide emergency services with the necessary equipment. Alison Thewliss MP agreed that the group should consider the emergency services.

Peter Bennett OBE noted that at the last meeting of the APPG, the HSE said its role was as a regulator and this marked a fundamental change in its role as HSE previously worked in collaboration with the industry to prevent serious injuries and fatalities. Alison Thewliss MP agreed that the loss of the prevention was significant. Jason Harfield said that when rules are self-regulating, as they are now, people do not adhere to them. He added that HSE and the industry need to work together to take as much risk away as possible.

Charles Pitt, Director of Policy and Influencing at the British Safety Council noted that the Council has been struggling to engage with HSE on issues such as air pollution where the employer is not directly responsible.

Andrew Delahunt made the point that HSE investigates incidents, but no information is fed back to industry about how to prevent the incident. He stated that the industry cannot learn how to prevent the next incident without feedback and information about previous incidents.

Jason Harfield said that the APPG should look at organisations that do not belong to trade associations as these organisations are basically unregulated and will have a lot of uncollected data.

Simon Robinson, Marketing Manager at National Access and Scaffolding Confederation said it would be useful to educate the main contractors to ensure they are aware of their obligations.

On the point of trade associations, Peter Bennett said that the Food Standards Agency has a good model. It asks for organisations that are not part of trade associations and focuses on these organisations. Peter argues that that this should be a model for the HSE.

Alison Thewliss MP rounds up the discussion by thanking Stephen Timms MP and Rachael Maskell MP for their contributions and all attendees for joining the discussion. She reaffirms that the APPG has been successfully reconstituted and has an exciting forward programme of activity for the year ahead.