

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON PARK HOMES

The minutes of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes which took place at 2.30pm on Monday, 31 October 2022 in Committee Room 13, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

PRESENT: Sir Christopher Chope MP (convenor and Chairman)

Peter Aldous MP

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Ben Spencer MP

Heather Wheeler MP

Steve Brine MP

Arthur Virgo (representing Philip Dunne MP)

Chris Brannigan, BH&HPA

Patrick Carr, Care Quality Commission.

Grace Duffy, DLUHC

Julie Dufty, DLUHC

Alicia Dunne, NCC

Anthony Essien, LEASE

Katherine Haynes, BH&HPA

Ian Pye, IPHAS

William Tandoh, DLUHC

Anne Webb, volunteer

APOLOGIES

Brian Doick, NAPHR

Sonia McColl, PHOJC

Sir Christopher Chope MP welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Katherine Haynes, who had recently joined the BH&HPA as director of policy and communications.

1. Approval of Minutes

The meeting approved the minutes of the previous meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Park Homes which took place on 16 May 2022 with the exception of :-Page 4. The paragraph beginning Richard Hand (LEASE) should be deleted.

2. Pitch fee review inflation index, switch from RPI to CPI

Sir Christopher Chope informed the meeting that on 18 November he was introducing a Private Members' Bill on the subject. He added that it was fifth on the Order Paper. He said it was designed to alter the measure for the calculation of park home pitch fee changes from the RPI to the CPI. Sir Christopher

thanked officials for assisting with the drafting of this Bill. There had been a delay in circulating this Bill, but it should be printed and published before 18 November.

Sir Peter Bottomley expressed the hope that the Bill would be successful and wouldn't be blocked.

Sir Christopher said that no progress had been made on other issues which were causes for concern. The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill seemed an ideal way of dealing with the problems caused by site owners with corporate structures. He said it was not too late to think about editing those clauses and the DLUHC should be asked to engage with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). Taking on one such case would probably deter others, he added.

Ms Duffy (DLUHC) said that her Department was not in a position to bring forward an amendment to the Bill which was currently going through the House. She stressed that the team working on park homes in her Department was very small and the work involved would require extensive legal resource. She added that she was aware of the urgent and present need to do something about it but her Department was not in a position to bring it forward.

Sir Christopher Chope mentioned the possibility that clauses might be added at the House of Lords stage, if not in the Commons. Ms Duffey responded that Sir Christopher's suggestion could be put to their Minister. Her Department would work within the parameters set by its Ministerial team. Sir Christopher also wondered whether this could be put forward by an ordinary Member of Parliament. Ms Duffy responded by saying that it was a question of what the Government wanted to do.

Sir Christopher asked whether there was a form or a piece of paper which related to how the Government would deal with these complex structures. Ms Duffy said it would require retrospective consideration. It was not something that could be done quickly. There was a basis from which to build but she would not suggest that her Department was close to giving instructions. As the CMA didn't think this matter was within its remit, Sir Christopher suggested that Trading Standards might get involved.

Sir Peter Bottomley made the point that there were no accurate figures about the number of people living in park homes. At the last census there was no provision for this unique form of tenure – were residents home owners, leaseholders, or ordinary tenants? he asked.

Peter Aldous MP added that corporate structures were very complex. He said he couldn't take this forward because he was co-chairing the Bill. Sir Christopher said it would be worth doing and would get the officials on board.

3 Energy costs: Support for home owners; Business supplies to residential parks

Ms Duffy explained that initially the announcement said that there would be support for all houses, but that excluded park home residents. However, by the end of July there was confirmation that the £400 grant would apply to park home residents, but there was at that time no information about how it would be applied. The DLUHC was looking at various options, but the £400 would be applied through local authorities. Ms Duffy said that her Department was emphatic that the payment would not come through site owners.

Ian Pye (IPHAS) mentioned that he had been invited on behalf of IPHAS to speak with a representative from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). He said there had been a lively 'virtual' session with some of her team and they were working on some schemes for testing. It looked like an application procedure. Mr Pye pointed out that within the park home sector there are people with various degrees of IT skills. He said that the testing would go ahead in the week beginning 7 November and IPHAS had provided five volunteers from within its membership to test the schemes. At the end of the following week there would be final testing. Mr Pye said that one of the matters of concern was security. IPHAS was inviting BEIS to send the IPHAS volunteers some 'blind' communications. The next stage would be to look at those with lower levels of IT ability, for example people who were insular and kept themselves to themselves. Mr Pye commented that, sadly, they didn't know who these people were. The first suggestion was that a payment should be made from Section 31 Local Government Act but the problem with that was that there were quite a number of park home owners who did not have a direct supply contract. They probably bought quite a substantial size property and had a licence to connect direct supplies. How do we identify those people? Mr Pye asked. Each local authority has a list of council taxpayers who live on the parks within their jurisdiction, but IPHAS was concerned that a request to ask park owners to provide lists of their energy suppliers might not be universally accepted across the board, especially in areas where there were a number of parks under the same ownership. Mr Pye said he couldn't see any alternative to an application procedure. Security could be assured by asking for National Insurance numbers, but he admitted that such a course could be fraught with problems.

William Tando (DLUHC) said that council tax was one option and there were a whole range of security issues, too. He added that it was vital to ensure that everyone entitled to the payment received it.

Steve Brine MP said that he had raised this matter with Michael Gove MP, who was now back in his old job at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Mr Tando commented that apart from park home residents, there were other groups of people such as travellers and houseboat owners who needed to be included.

Steve Brine MP said it would be relatively simple for councils to identify the parks in their areas and then sort out a rebate and pay them from HMG.

Mr Tando felt it would be down to local authorities, and he appreciated that there were concerns about how long this might take.

Sir Christopher asked whether there was a deadline for this to be resolved. It was important that residents should know.

Mr Tando said there was no fixed date at the moment. He anticipated that payment would be made this autumn.

Ms Duffy said she appreciated the frustration when seen from the outside. However, her Department was not in a position to say when people would get these payments. She added that it would be equitable and that if park home residents hadn't yet received the payment they definitely would get it. She said she would take these matters back to her Minister.

Mr Pye asked whether the payments might be made to park owners for distribution to residents on their parks. Mr Tando said that was not an option. He added that there would also be instances where residents would get discounts on their energy bills. Site owners would get discounts on their bills which should be passed on to residents - the Energy Prices Act sets out the requirements. Mr Tando added that there will be secondary legislation. The site owner must notify residents about when they will get the payment and there would be notification measures in case the site owner did not pass it on. Steve Brine MP mentioned that business customers would get a discount and Ben Spencer MP raised the question of what would happen about bulk supplies of liquefied petroleum gas which were either supplied to residents in large cylinders, or pumped to individual homes from a large tank controlled by the park owner. He explained that this 'bulk' supply was metered and residents received bills from their site owner for the amount of gas they used. Mr Tando agreed to get clarification on the situation concerning LPG. Steve Brine MP

mentioned guidance and asked what was the ‘state of play’. Mr Tandoh said that came under the Energy Prices Act which was passed the previous week and had received Royal Assent. Sir Christopher Chope commented that everyone involved should congratulate themselves on getting park home residents included in the scheme. Mr Tandoh agreed to keep everyone involved up to date on progress.

4 The impact of a change in the maximum park home sale commission, published 16 June 2022

Mr Tandoh said that the report was published in June 2022 and there were some issues that his Department needed to look into. Work was yet to start on this and when that was complete a Government response to the report would be published.

Sir Peter Bottomley said it would be useful if copies of cases could be placed in the House of Commons library. It ought to be available to all concerned. Perhaps Arun District Council could be encouraged to do this.

Ms Duffy said that one of the recommendations was to explore the rationale for commission. She said that her Department would be talking to members of the Working Group to get their reflections on the report.

5 Fit and Proper Person Licensing

Mr Tandoh said the licensing regime had been in place for a year. Initially his Department worked with local authorities to try to get things going as quickly and smoothly as possible. There had been successes, he said. In Arun, applications were refused to site owners. On Thursday there was another successful prosecution in central Bedfordshire. The legislation was working. The DLUHC had regular meetings with local authorities to share ideas. The Department would also be looking at the whole process and good practice where it would help local authorities to share that information. However, the Department was aware that there were still site owners who were causing trouble.

Mr Pye said that most of the complaints received by IPHAS about ‘fit and proper’ concerned situations where residents did not know who was running the park. Where and how does it cascade down to one individual who has the licence? he asked. The conglomerates who manage remotely might have a gardener or handyman in charge of many of their individual parks. Ms Duffy responded by saying that there should be a register of park owners in each local authority area, and it would be useful to know which authorities were not making their registers available. It seemed to her that the person whose name was on the licence wasn’t necessarily the person managing the park. That was

not the intention of the legislation. There was the capacity for local authorities to review that position so that residents could specify the person who was not acting appropriately. Mr Pye felt it was vital for the person on the ground who was responsible for the park to be formally identified. Mr Tandoh added that all sorts of people were employed on parks. The fit and proper person test was intended for the park owner. It was his job, and that of the park manager, too, to ensure that any workers they employed on the park were behaving properly. Mr Tandoh added that sometimes issues concerned with the written agreement were raised with the local authority. Mr Tandoh stressed that the local authority should not be involved. Anything to do with the written agreement should go to a tribunal. Anthony Essien from LEASE added that his organisation would be happy to advise residents about taking a matter to a tribunal.

Ms Duffy said that if a person failed a fit and proper person test they could appeal and if he/she was found to be consistently failing, the licence could be withdrawn and the local authority could appoint someone to manage the park.

6 Any other business

Mr Pye said that he had engaged in correspondence with residents about power outages caused by the storms – Arwen and Franklin – last year and whether they were entitled to any compensation. He had heard of cases where park home residents had been without power for as long as three months. Mr Pye said that the following Tuesday (8 November) he was having a meeting with the deputy director of Ofgem to address this problem. Park owners tended to state that it was down to the supplier. There were a whole range of issues around the provision of energy to a park home site. Mr Pye added that IPHAS had prepared a document setting out what the benefit would be if Ofgem could be persuaded to ‘take under its wing’ park home residents who currently did not have the protection of Ofgem. Mr Pye added that some residents had lost power for four or five days during the previous winter. Some park owners had received compensation and some had passed on paltry amounts, like £25, to residents who had suffered loss. Some had lost well over one thousand pounds where domestic items such as televisions, cookers, and microwaves had ‘blown’ as a result of these outages.

Sir Christopher thanked Mr Pye for bringing this matter to the attention of the Group.

7 Date and venue of next meeting

To be decided and participants informed.

Sir Christopher declared the meeting closed at 15.30.