Minutes of AGM and Meeting APPG on Housing and Care for Older People

Time: 2 - 3:30pm

Date: 25/05/2021

Location: Zoom

Speakers:

* Housing Minister Chris Pincher MP
* Professor Roy Sandbach
* Gary Jones (Sparko TV)
* Orit Eyal-Fibeesh (Sparko TV)
* Helen Burrows (BT)

Parliamentarians Present:

* Lord Best
* Peter Aldous MP
* Baroness Andrews
* Baroness Barker
* Ruth Cadbury MP
* Baroness Greengross
* Lord Haselhurst
* Lord Young

Parliamentarians who have registered their support:

- Ben Everitt MP

- Margaret Hodge MP

- Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP

- David Simmonds MP

- Liz Twist MP

Agenda:

2pm - Introduction and welcome - Peter Aldous MP

AGM/Election of Officers

2:05pm - First session: the Housing Minister:

The Right Hon Chris Pincher MP

Q+A with Chris Pincher

2:45pm - Second session - How technology can improve older people's lives:

Professor Roy Sandbach (Chair, Inquiry into Technology for an Ageing Population)

Gary Jones and Orit Eyal-Fibeesh (Sparko TV)

Helen Burrows (Policy Director BT)

Q+A for tech speakers 

3:30pm meeting closes

AGM:

Parliamentarians who ran for election and role they ran for:

Lord Best – Co-Chair

Peter Aldous MP – Co-Chair

Baroness Andrews – Vice-Chair

Baroness Barker – Vice-Chair

Ruth Cadbury MP - Vice-Chair

Baroness Greengross - Vice-Chair

Result of election:

Lord Best – Co-Chair

Peter Aldous MP – Co-Chair

Baroness Andrews – Vice-Chair

Baroness Barker – Vice-Chair

Ruth Cadbury MP - Vice-Chair

Baroness Greengross - Vice-Chair

Financial Statement was agreed upon

Summary of Speakers’ Presentations:

Housing Minister - Chris Pincher:

The Housing Minister explained both his understanding of the severity of the situation with our ageing population, noting that there will be over 6 million people of pension age by 2040, and of the need to tackle this issue as a matter of urgency.

The Minister addressed several key aspects to improving access to appropriate housing for older people:

Firstly, he highlighted the government’s current actions on planning reform. He explained that through this the government aims to get more housebuilders involved in projects to build homes for older people, thereby making these homes more readily available across the country both in supply and in location.

Secondly, the Minister explained that he is working on a Task Force created to explore and address the challenges in the way of providing more homes for older people. He explained that this Task Force will combine work from MHCLG and the Department for Health and Social Care. He explained he aims for this Task Force to move quickly, as a matter of urgency, but not so fast that they are unable to secure solid funding from the Treasury.

Thirdly, he explained the benefits of the government’s Affordable Housing Programme: detailing that 10% of the £12.3 million being spent on AHPs is required to be used for ‘adaptable living purposes’ including both provision for disabled and older people.

Fourthly, the Minister discussed the changes to Part M of the Building Regulations, highlighting stronger rules on accessibility, for example the importance of enabling wheelchair access. He did however say that more details regarding this matter would be available later in the year – something he offered to address at a later APPG meeting in the autumn.

When asked a question regarding ‘right-sizing’ by Lord Best the Minister explained that two in every three of these ‘right-sizing’ moves frees up homes for younger people and families. He supported this as a concept and said it is to be encouraged. He went on to highlight some obstacles that need to be overcome in order to ensure more ‘right-sizing’ takes place. These were: the need to identify barriers to sector growth (why more appropriately sized houses aren’t being built), the need to work out how to encourage older people to move to new ‘right-sized’ homes and the need to further discuss and collaborate on this issue with other government departments.

The Minister reiterated his belief in the importance of this sector and its affect on health and the economy. He went on to convey his belief that APPGs are an extremely important vehicle for affecting change and reiterated his ongoing support for the work of the APPG on Housing and Care for Older People.

Professor Roy Sandbach:

Professor Sandbach gave an overview of how technology can improve the lives of older people. As the Chair of the TAPPI (Technology for our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation) Inquiry he spoke about some the discoveries this Inquiry had made.

He explained 94% of older people have internet in their homes and 75% of people over 65 use the internet daily. But that ultimately, we need to get technology on our side, not just access to it, but the ability and confidence to use it properly, as it is inevitably going to be a prominent part of the future of housing, design, and care, especially post-pandemic where people have become increasingly reliant on technology for a vast array of purposes from socialising to keeping organised.

Roy reiterated the importance of technology in the home, both in new homes and in existing homes. He pointed out that technology provides a living platform that enables ‘better and longer lives’.

Professor Sandbach went on to highlight some ways in which accessibility and useability of technology can be improved for older people. He explained both the lack of presence, and the need, of a technology marketplace for both consumers and providers to ensure optimal accessibility. He also highlighted the need for clear and useful guidance on the application of technology for older people, something he explained the TAPPI Inquiry are endeavouring to provide. Finally, he also pointed out the need to engage professionals, from all areas within the housing for older people sector, in proper technology training so that they are able to support older people to better their relationships with life-enhancing technology.

Gary Jones (Sparko TV) + Orit Eyal-Fibeesh (Sparko TV):

Gary began by introducing himself as the Development Manager at Sparko, explaining that he has had a long history of working with charities associated with the wellbeing of older people. He also gave information about how the Sparko TV product works by explaining that it runs through an individual’s TV with the aim of increasing their social, physical and mental wellbeing.

Orit, the CEO of Sparko, then went on to explain about the product and its uses. She emphasised the importance of a hybrid approach to care for older people, something that Sparko intends to provide as they aim to support people, who are not technologically literate, to be able to socialise, keep fit and stimulate themselves all from home. Sparko TV also intends to help older people organise to do similar activities to these things outside the home, in the company of other people.

Sparko does this by providing a vast array of services including; organising online social meet-ups, providing advice directly from Age UK, offering exercise classes, providing social and educational opportunities in order to keep one’s mind active and busy, as well as providing video calling functions for keeping in contact with friends and family and also offering an option to set reminders, such as to take one’s medication.

Sparko TV aims to free up carers time by relieving them of their role in helping older people to carry out all of the above, thereby ensuring they have enough time to carry out their more immediate tasks.

The Sparko team told the APPG guests that their unique product had filled a gap in the market and continues to grow in popularity.

Helen Burrows (BT):

Helen began by explaining her role as a Policy Director at BT specialising in areas of digital inclusion and consumer fairness. She explained that although 97% /98% of homes have access to the internet there are still many vulnerable people, especially older people, who do not have fixed or decent access to the internet. She explained that older people are the most likely to suffer from poor connectivity. Helen drew to the group’s attention what some of the barriers to good internet access are, including: issues of your area having poor connectivity, not having the correct equipment, and not being able/feeling confident to use the equipment.

Helen went on to explain that BT is working on ways to solve this problem: including by offering a reduced priced bundle for those on lower income pension credit and other forms of benefits to ensure access to cheaper broadband as well as working with the government to improve the access to broadband nationally with the aim of making broadband go ‘further and faster’.

Helen emphasised that older people are able to live more independently for longer when able to access the internet and reiterated BT’s aim to help improve internet accessibility for older people across the nation.