Hospice UK briefing - Westminster parliamentary activity related to hospice funding in the w/c 22 April 2024

On Monday 22nd April, a Backbench Business Debate was held in the House of Commons on hospice funding. This debate was secured by Peter Gibson MP and Sally-Ann Hart MP, with the support of Hospice UK.

The next day, the House of Commons Health and Social Care Select Committee held a special evidence session on hospice funding. We believe this was held, in part, in response to the national media coverage and parliamentary interest in the issue generated by the sector.

The debate:
The debate touched on many of the key challenges facing the hospice sector across the UK but focused on the need for a long-term sustainable funding solution. Hospice UK provided a briefing for MPs and many hospices contacted their local MP to ask them to speak.

Key topics covered during the 3-hour debate:

- MPs, including Paulette Hamilton MP, acknowledged the range of services hospices provide and the vital role they play in the wider health and social care system.
- MPs highlighted the significant financial pressures on hospices and the impact on the delivery of services, often sharing the experiences of their local hospices. MPs, such as Colleen Fletcher MP, emphasised the volatile nature of charitable income.
- The importance of fundraising for hospices was reported and several MPs shared that they ran the London Marathon this past weekend for hospice services.
- There was recognition that many hospices do not want to be fully funded and value the independence gained from charitable fundraising, but that a sustainable funding solution is needed.
- MPs highlighted the drastic variation in how different integrated care boards (ICBs) commission hospice services. MPs, including Rachel Maskell MP, emphasised the 'postcode lottery' in hospice commissioning and how this is driving inequality in access.
- Several argued that demand for palliative care services is due to an increase in deaths and a desire to die at home.
- MPs raised concerns about the sustainability of children's hospice funding, the distribution mechanism for the children's hospice grant and uncertainty over its future.
- MPs discussed inequities in pay between hospice staff and their NHS colleagues.
- Many emphasised the important role of hospices in the wider health and social care system, how they work to reduce pressure on the NHS and the importance of joining up care across the wider health system.

Responding for the Government, the Minister for Social Care, Helen Whately MP (response available here from 21:42:14) said:

- The majority of palliative and end of life care is provided by the NHS in hospitals, primary care and community trusts and that hospices 'alongside and in addition to that… 'do the wonderful work they do'.
- She stands by a localised approach to funding palliative and end of life care, but Government is working on improving the transparency and accountability of ICBs, citing her regularly meeting with NHS England for updates on end of life care provision.
- Another source of variation is hospices growing organically rather than being services planned in response to population need.
- She is pushing NHSE and ICBs to improve the data they collect on the access to, and quality of, palliative and end of life care.
- Government will continue working with NHS England to ensure that palliative and end of life care is given the attention it deserves, and the NHS is held to account.

- She is pushing for a healthcare system that enables more advance care planning and cannot make any spending commitments beyond the current financial year as this will depend on future spending reviews.

Responding for the Labour Party, the Shadow Minister for Social Care, Andrew Gwynne MP (response available here from 21:32:13):

- He shared his personal experience of losing his mum to ovarian cancer when he was 19 and his dad's more recent death from cancer. He compared the pain and suffering experienced by his mum to the superb support his dad received from a variety of services, including his local hospice.
- Spoke about the importance of choice and dying with dignity.
- Paid tribute to his local hospice, Willow Wood hospice, and spoke about the financial pressures it and other hospices are under.
- Said good care is delivered when the whole system is well connected and works together and emphasised the role hospices (particularly hospice at home) play in integrated care.
- Said we need 'proper joined-up supportive policies for the hospice sector' and for money to 'gets down to where it needs' to be 'at the hospices themselves'.

The list of MPs who took part in this debate can be found in Appendix 1. A full transcript of the debate can be found here and it can be watched online here.

The Select Committee evidence session:

Following this debate the Health and Social Care Committee held an oral evidence session on hospice funding. The following speakers were invited to give evidence:

- Toby Porter, Chief Executive Officer at Hospice UK
- Ruth Driscoll, Associate Director for Policy & Public Affairs England at Marie Curie
- James Cooper, Head of External Affairs at Together for Short Lives
- Dr Syed Qamar Abbas, Medical Director at St Clare's Hospice

The speakers:

- Spoke to the need for greater understanding at ICB level of the hospice sector, including the services they offer, their relationships with the wider system and the need for their inclusion in workforce planning.
- Answered questions on the vital ways hospices support the health and care system, such as supporting people to be discharged from hospital where this is not right for them, and the importance of sharing this good practice.
- Discussed the inequities in who can access appropriate end of life care, and the need to give attention to this.
- Emphasised that while there is value to the charitable fundraising hospices do, these essential services cannot rely on this, particularly as demand rises.
- Shared concerns about workforce costs for hospices, and the need for them to be supported to pay in line with NHS staff pay to protect their recruitment and retention.
- Discussed the need for clarification on the future of the Children's Hospice Grant and to address the support needed for those transitioning from children's to adult services.

The MPs on the Committee questioning the speakers were very supportive. It is our understanding is that it is likely that the Committee will write a letter to the Minister off the back of the session.

The list of MPs who took part in the Select Committee session can be found in Appendix 2. A transcript of the oral evidence session can be found here and the session can be watched online here.

Appendix 1:

Peter Gibson MP (Darlington) (Con)
Sally-Ann Hart MP (Hastings and Rye) (Con)
Barry Gardiner MP (Brent North) (Lab)
Anna Firth MP (Southend West) (Con)
Munira Wilson MP (Twickenham) (Lib Dem)
Sir Desmond Swayne MP (New Forest West) (Con)
Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP (Streatham) (Lab)
Tim Farron MP (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (Lib Dem)
Bob Seely MP (Isle of Wight) (Con)
Bambos Charalambous MP (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab)
Gen Kitchen MP (Wellingborough) (Lab)
Martin Docherty-Hughes MP (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)
Martin Vickers MP (Cleethorpes) (Con)
Steve Brine MP (Winchester) (Con)
Colleen Fletcher MP (Coventry North East) (Lab)
Will Quince MP (Colchester) (Con)
Mrs Paulette Hamilton MP (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)
Sarah Owen MP (Luton North) (Lab)
Ms Marie Rimmer MP (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab)

Andy Slaughter MP (Hammersmith) (Lab)
Paul Holmes MP (Eastleigh) (Con)
Simon Jupp MP (East Devon) (Con)
Rachel Maskell MP (York Central) (Lab)
Edward Timpson MP (Eddisbury) (Con)

John McDonnell MP (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)
Eddie Hughes MP (Walsall North) (Con)
Dame Maria Miller MP (Basingstoke) (Con)
Richard Burgon MP (Leeds East) (MP)
Selaine Saxby MP (North Devon) (Con)
Jim Shannon MP (Strangford) (DUP)
Chris Green MP (Bolton West) (Con)
Sir Robert Buckland MP (South Swindon) (Con)
Jane Hunt MP (Loughborough) (Con)
Chris Loder MP (West Dorset) (Con)
Richard Drax MP (South Dorset) (Con)
Peter Aldous MP (Waveney) (Con)
Steve Double MP (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)
Caroline Ansell MP (Eastbourne) (Con)
James Sunderland MP (Bracknell) (Con)
Jason McCartney MP (Colne Valley) (Con)
Andrew Rosindell MP (Romford) (Con)
Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)

Appendix 2:

Steve Brine MP (Winchester) (Con)
Chris Green MP (Bolton West) (Con)
Mrs Paulette Hamilton MP (Birmingham, Edington) (Lab)
Rachael Maskell MP (York Central) (Lab)
James Morris MP (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con)

Ends. 26/4/24