

Cross-Party Group on WASPI

20 June 2024

Minute

Present

MSPs

Katy Clark
M Chapman
Meghan Gallagher
C Haughey

Non-MSP Group Members

L Paterson
M Eley
W Millar
F Brown
R Dickson
C McMillan
A Wallis
C Jardine
L Craighead
S McKellar
M Donnelly
Sadie Harris
L McColl
K McDonald
J Cowley
S Arnott
K Nurse
L Quinn
J Farmer
E Loch
J Rimmer
Anne Potter (Secretariat)

Apologies

Peter Aldous
B Wishart
P O'Kane

J Stevenson
C Martinez
L Carmichael
C Houston
M Grierson
V Ilendo
O Sharpe
M Dawson
B Holligan

WASPI Groups Update

Katy Clark welcomed all, both in person & on TEAMS. Apologies from many & special note from Paul O’Kane MSP to offer to meet with WASPI Scotland later. The main focus of this meeting is on General Election July 4 2024.

Party Manifestos

Scottish Conservatives represented by Meghan Gallagher MSP stated their party is keen to support campaign.

SNP MSP Clare Haughey assured us of the SNP support & this followed on from Clares members debate on June 19 which clarified the SNP stance in relation to WASPI Scotland campaign for fair & fast compensation. This is noted in their manifesto.

Maggie Chapman MSP of Scottish Greens was able to confirm her party’s support for WASPI with the emphasis being on securing Fair & Fast compensation which is in their manifesto.

Katy Clark Labour MSP stated that although nothing WASPI Scotland specific in their manifesto Scottish Labour are still pursuing the WASPI issue. She also said if Labour elected July 4 Labour would very much want to enter into dialogue with WASPI, in particular Paul O’Kane MSP who could be involved.

Although Beatrice Wishart MSP Scottish Lib Dems unable to be at the meeting their manifesto is supportive.

The Way Forward

RD commented various hustings had been well attended & covered pension issues. All were reminded to speak with PPC’s.

JC confirmed she was disappointed in the Labour position on WASPI with comments like “Consideration, Listening & Discussion “still being quoted despite the clear PHSO recommendations of compensation being appropriate.

AP reiterated the importance of continuing to lobby PPC’s in every town & village.

KC agreed we should keep lobbying. The PHSO report will be on table post election when new governmental positions will be awarded. KC also confirmed APPG has been heavily involved & should be reinstated after election. If Labour win election they will work with other parties. Mel Stride failed to respond & should have had a plan on how to deal with the case, to provide a fair & just settlement.

LQ said Labour should have shown more concern for WASPI & recalled listening to John McDonnell 4 years ago when he had a plan which we believed to be acceptable.

RD referred to research carried out by Ayrshire group which demonstrates any compensation awarded would go into the local economy. She also added support for WASPI has been incredible & parties are crazy not paying attention to WASPIs plus their families who will be voting. Rosie also reminded us that so far over 230,000 women have died.

SH asked what the point is of PHSO & added the campaign has been lobbying over the years & commented that the issue is still very much alive.

KC stated she has been working on WASPI issues for some time & been involved with manifestos in the past & noted the previous manifesto promise was costed, though it wasn't clear how the money would be raised to pay compensation.

Keir Starmer has said the issue has to be addressed & Rachel Reeves would need to be able to understand financial situation if Labour successful in GE.

KC emphasised the importance of communicating & working with Unions as they are useful in raising issues.

EL commented as a retired UNISON member she will be actively involved going forward.

RD was able to confirm a national UNITE manifesto had just been issued & submitted to Labour party.

Many comments followed, including –

“Labour have had 4 years to look into the WASPI problem but haven't done so, as its not in manifesto & reminded all that this is not going away”.

“The WASPI story is not going to change & we were robbed”.

“I feel betrayed by Labour”

“Considering pledges were signed by Labour its disappointing nothing in manifesto & feels this will influence who WASPIs & their families vote for”

“We don't care who is in Government we just want settlement. There was money to bail out banks & the Gov has saved a fortune”

KC said it wasn't her role as chair of the meeting to justify the reasons WASPI was not included in the current Labour manifesto & whilst there was a package previously it was not part of the main manifesto which was fully costed & outlined how commitments were paid for. KC continues to campaign for justice for WASPI as were many of her colleagues.

MC suggested politicians can work cross party on this well-known campaign as it's important to deal with the issue.

JC commented that the disappointment felt by campaigners had been clearly delivered. Peter Aldous has been heavily involved with PHSO. The new Govt will have to deal urgently & in terms of compensation we need to have a Work & Pensions committee meeting set up. A solution should be Speedy, Simple, Taking account different SP delays & situations. Direct Financial loss claims would take too long but proposed a "2 prong" approach, Actual Financial Loss & normal compensation. This had already been submitted to Mel Stride however the GE was called. JC reiterated we need to pick up from where we left off.

RD asked if other pension groups would be involved in finding a solution, but JC said she couldn't see any pension groups taking part.

EL thanked JC for all the hard work which has gone into the campaign but queried why women would have to submit a claim as many would find it difficult. JC understood her concern, but publicity would be very important if & when a scheme agreed.

RD highlighted women might be reticent in dealing with DWP & reminded us that currently there are several scams directed at WASPI women.

KC has suggested she will speak to Paul O'Kane who is shadow minister for Social Security.

Meeting closed with thanks to all, particularly Jane Cowley.

Next meeting AGM Sept TBA.