The implications of the 2012 budget for women's access to financial power: Wednesday 18 April, 5 - 6pm, House of Commons

This meeting, chaired by Eleanor Laing MP, considered the implications of the March 2012 budget for women's access to financial power. It brought together key speakers:

- **Harriet Baldwin MP**, Member of the Work & Pensions Select Committee;
- **Ceri Goddard**, Chief Executive of the Fawcett Society;
- Annalise Johns on behalf of the Women's Budget Group.

Ceri Goddard began the meeting by stating that the *unintentional* consequences of policies for women need to be considered. She warned that 'in austere times is women's equality and measures for women's equality tend to be seen as the icing on the cake and not the key ingredient for economic growth', and that we could see 'equality moving backwards' if we are not careful.

Harriet Baldwin focused on 'making work pay' for women. She defined economic equality as 'women's choice and flexibility to make the decisions about their lives which mean they can say they earn the same as men for equivalent roles, that they own the same as men and that they retire on the same retirement income as men'. She highlighted that the move to Universal Credit would help incentivize work for women and also emphasized the importance of supporting women starting their own businesses.

Annalise Johns outlined the disproportionate impact of the 2012 Budget on women, criticizing the lack of a Treasury gender impact assessment of the cumulative impact of the Budget. She argued that a women's employment strategy, especially for low income women, was crucial to equality and economic recovery.

MPs from the across the political spectrum highlighted the need for a cross-party view on women's equality, stating that they had similar aims but differed in approach. They agreed that the culture amongst the male-dominated frontbench in Commons and in the civil service itself was an obstacle to progress on women's equality.