

## APPG on Child Contact Centres and Services

Bill meeting minutes: Palace of Westminster Committee Room 20, 3 July at 4pm

### Attendees

Chris Leslie MP	Chair
Baroness McIntosh of Pickering	Co-Chair
Stephen Pound MP	Officer
Lord Listowel	Officer
Howard Russell	The Salvation Army
Andrea Stevens	The Salvation Army
Ryan Gow	The Salvation Army
Nicola Smith	Barnardo's
Sharon Martin	Cafcass
Sue Crabb	Family Action
Wendy Jenkins	Core Assets
Michael Lewkowicz	FnF
Anne Dillon	NACCC
Elizabeth Coe	NACCC
Richard Daniels	NACCC

Chris Leslie chaired and introduced the meeting and context. The Child Contact Centres (Accreditation Bill) was introduced by Baroness McIntosh in 2016 and had its second reading at the beginning of February 2017. The purpose of the Bill was to ensure that all children should experience good quality contact by requiring all agencies, organisations and individuals providing child contact centres and services to operate to an agreed national standards. In addition they should be subject to the same accreditation and re-accreditation procedure and; that any court, agency or organisation ordering or commissioning child contact centres and services to ensure that those services or centres they refer are compliant with the agreed national standards. The purpose of the meeting was to explore key stakeholder's (providing contact services) views and any sensitivities and to understand how we can best take the Bill forward.

Anne Dillon set out the purpose of the Bill highlighting that contact centres and services are currently not subject to statutory regulation. Self-regulation was introduced by the National Association of Child Contact Centres in 2007 when NACCC were asked to develop national standards for Child Contact Centres and Services in conjunction with Cafcass by the Department for Education, and to operate a system of accreditation and re-accreditation funded annually by the MoJ. All members of NACCC have to be accredited and re-accredited every three years. A Judicial Protocol endorsed by the President of the Family Division, sets out the importance of Courts making sure that their orders in relation to child arrangements, refer children to accredited services only. The implementation of the national standards however was not necessarily being applied to contact commissioned by Local Authorities. The situation became more acute in 2013 when a change in the requirements of Special Guardianship Orders meant that all Local Authorities became responsible for supporting contact arrangements for children subject to Special Guardianship orders up to the age of 18 years old. This increased the

Secretariat: Richard Daniels [r.daniels@naccc.org.uk](mailto:r.daniels@naccc.org.uk) 07432684324

## **APPG on Child Contact Centres and Services**

demands on Local Authority services and finances and meant the numbers of children and families referred to external child contact centres and services which are not subject to the existing national standards increased.

Baroness McIntosh clarified that the national standards apply to Child Contact Centres and Services standards should apply to Public and Private law. She highlighted the 'counter briefing' by Barnardo's during the Bill's second reading (HoL) and that there was a misunderstanding around the purpose "which was not a power grab".

Anne Dillon agreed and clarified that the purpose of the Bill was to regulate the sector and ensure consistency in standards across the country - not to secure a wider remit for NACCC. Anne also said there was support for national standards by a number of Local Authorities.

Nicola Smith advised that colleagues have been unable to locate the Parliamentary briefing for the PMB. From a policy perspective aware of special guardianship and in favour of contractors which allow that to happen. In terms of regulation it's important to improve the quality of contact – 'a principle we would support'.

Number of participants questioned how many centres and services actually operate.

Elizabeth Coe explained how the standards are set and overseen by an Independent Standards Panel chaired by Sir Mark Hedley, a former High Court Judge in the Family Division.

Sue Crabb agreed that contact should provide a good and safe experience for the child. Sense that there is a "lot going on out there" and a lot of "informal arrangements". Private law loophole needs to be closed. Although cost is a potential stumbling block. Sue also proposed that Special Guardians need training.

Wendy Jenkins new to post. Supported Sue Crabb's points.

Howard Russell said that they support a "set of standards that everyone agrees with and is not overly bureaucratic". NACCC should not necessarily be named as the agency to accredit these standards.

Andrea Stevens said there was a growing need for contact in the community.

Anne Dillon highlighted the challenge of introducing standards for Child Contact Services which reflect the broad range of services commissioned.

Steve Pound raise concerns around the "difference in standards" and the impact poor contact can have on children "bad contact can be worse than no contact" and suggested an adjournment debate before CSR (Comprehensive Spending Review) to start the parliamentary work.

## APPG on Child Contact Centres and Services

Lord Listowel raised Anna Turley MP's report and need for funding to support work and proposals. <https://frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-and-friends-carers/cross-party-parliamentary-taskforce-on-kinship-care>

Chris Leslie summarised the discussion that Child Contact Centres and Services are the last remaining area of child policy which is not appropriately regulated. We should take forward actions and build parliamentary work around the consensus discussed, including a meeting with the new minister (following Conservative Party Leadership election).

- Agreement that the areas needs regulation
- Agreement that NACCC should be removed from the bill and replaced with “to be appointed by the secretary of state”

### Actions

- Parliamentary question: ‘How many child contact centres operate in England and Wales?’
- Circulate NACCC standards
- Adjournment debate
- Contact LGA to start engaging
- Review cost of accreditation
- Meeting with new minister
  
- Why is regulation required?