



Minutes for All-Party Parliamentary Group on Child Contact Centres and Services 19 June 2018

First meeting of APPG on Child Contact Centres and Services

Chris Leslie MP	Chair
Baroness Anne McIntosh of Pickering	Co-Chair
Stephen Pound MP	Officer
Mike Kane MP	Officer
Lee Rowley MP	Officer
Secretariat	Richard Daniels r.daniels@naccc.org.uk

In attendance

Chris Leslie MP	Chair
Baroness Anne McIntosh of Pickering	Co-Chair
Stephen Pound MP	Officer
The Earl of Listowel	HoL
Sir James Munby, President of the Family Division, and Patron of National Association of Child Contact Centres	Guest Speaker
Elizabeth Coe, CEO NACCC	Guest
Anne Dillon, Vice-Chair NACCC	Guest
Francis Judd QC	Family Law Bar Association
Mike Coote	Cafcass
Fynn McMahon, Office Chris Leslie MP	Observer
Jack Boardman, Office Chris Leslie MP	Observer
Richard Daniels, NACCC	Secretariat

Apologies

Mike Kane MP	Officer
Caroline Dinenage MP	
Jack Brereton MP	
Lee Rowley MP	Officer

Minutes of meeting

Chris Leslie MP opened the meeting. Highlighted the cost of private law cases and the need to divert cases to out of court where possible.

Sir James Munby: Except in very specific circumstances, every child not living with both parents needs 'proper contact' with the parent the child doesn't live with and NACCC and its membership provides reliable child contact centres.



There are too many private law cases going through court. 15% increase in private and public law case each year, this is unsustainable, and the system is unable to cope. Rates of mediation have also decreased.

Parents involve children in divorce disputes leading to a downward spiral in relationships. The court process is adversarial and protracted which is damaging to children. Separating couples sometimes use domestic violence as a tactical move to delay proceedings. Judges are pulled into minutia of detail.

Some Child Contact Centres sometimes not conducive to contact (e.g. lack open spaces, practical facilities to support contact). In a modern world we need proper safeguarding checks.

The Children and Families Bill / Act 2014 demonstrated the complexity of this policy area. Constitutionally only judges can rule if cases should not go to court and cases must proceed to court if there are allegations of domestic violence. Child policy is spread across too many departments of government MoJ, DWP, DoE, LA etc with conflicting priorities. There have been discussions about the need for a family justice Green Paper / consultation for the last three years. The care crisis will dominate the agenda in near term and budgetary challenges.

Stephen Pound highlighted that parents can 'weaponise' children during separation. Mentioned St Vincent centre in his constituency of North Ealing. How we can reach parents who will not cooperate? 90% of constituency cases he deals with involve Sikh and Muslim families. Stephen is keen that the APPG considers this aspect of child contact.

Elizabeth Coe: Separation process leaves partners feeling betrayed. It's important to ensure people are provided with the support to allow them to cope with the situation and manage their life moving forward.

The Earl of Listowel highlighted the issues of under-funding, lack of professional support and Home-Start volunteers to support vulnerable families. He asked Sir James Munby how we can recruit more judges like Nick Crichton and what are the obstacles to recruiting?

Sir James Munby acknowledged this as an issue. Some judges, like Nick Crichton, are forward thinking, very special and greatly skilled. While senior judges can publish guidance, they don't see the application of guidance at a district level.

Baroness Anne McIntosh of Pickering raised Child Contact Centre Accreditation Bill, Private Members' Bill 2016-7 session. Would be useful to reintroduce in Commons via Ten Minute Rule. Clarified that the purpose of the Bill was to place NACCC standards on a statutory basis. Should include more NGOs in next APPG meeting, especially Barnardo's who raised concern over the HL Accreditation Bill.

Anne Dillon explained a range of contact facilities and services existed that were not complying with the agreed National Standards commissioned by DoE in 2007 which gave rise to concerns about lack of consistency and prompted the Child Contact Centre Accreditation Bill.



Francis Judd QC highlighted issues with family justice system. Contact should include getting relationships progressing.

Mike Coote: Cafcass £1.5m budget from Ministry of Justice for contact. Manchester Cafcass pilot to run to 23 July, several iterations may be needed.

Chris Leslie reported back on the ministerial meeting with Lucy Frazer QC MP, Ministry of Justice. Suggested the MoJ take a strategic overview (Green / White Paper) to consider if the current process is effective or if it can be changed and improved. Raised 'Out of Court Pathways'. Need to keep dialogue going and a 'burning platform' as governments react to problems. MoJ door open to further discussion with NACCC.

We need to consider an approach for the pathways process in future Private Member's Bill. How can we design a system to achieve less cases proceeding through court? We will schedule the next meeting in October for November and look at holding the AGM in January.

Decisions and actions to take forward

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| • Invite wider NGO community to next APPG | Secretariat |
| • Identify MP to introduce PMB on Accreditation | APPG |
| • Consider ethnic minority groups in child contact | APPG |
| • Consider how to move child contact / 'Out of Court Pathway' up government agenda | APPG |
| • Will agree date of next meeting in October and AGM in January MP/Lady McIntosh | C Leslie |