

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Adoption and Fostering

Co-Chairmen: Edward Timpson MP, Tom Harris MP

Secretary: Jessica Lee MP; Treasurer: Lisa Nandy

16th October 2012, 16.00 pm in the Wilson Room. Portcullis House.

In Attendance: N.B. Includes only those that signed the attendance sheet

Craig Whittaker MP

Lisa Nandy MP

Tom Harris MP

Julian Brazier MP

Bill Esterson MP

Chris Smith

CVAA

David Holmes

BAAF

Sylvia Little

Lewisham CC

Christine Prickett

CVAA

Norman Goodwin

Adoption Matters NW

Mark Owers

CVAA

Andrew Thomson

CVAA

Abi Omotoso

BAAF

Sue Lucas

Assist

Lucia Hodgson

Parliamentary Assistant

Felicity Lacey

Excel Fostering

Michelle Cuffe

Excel Fostering

Elaine Grange

Faith in Families

Jean Smith

PACT

Gillian Kirsch

Norwood VAA

Carolyn Oliver

Barnardos

June Thoburn

UEA

Lindsay Wright

Borough of Islington

Gareth Crossman

TACT

Lyn Charlton

After Adoption

Iain Moore

After Adoption

Hugh Thornberry

Action for Children

H.E Glancy

Office of Sam Gyimah

Jessica Thrift

Local Government Association

Nicky Dawe

Intercountry Adoption Centre

Alexandra Nott

Office of Conor Burns MP

Jessica Thrift

Local Government Association

Natasha Findayson

The Who Cares? Trust

Oliver Wilkinson

The Who Cares? Trust

Katie Law

London Borough of Richmond

Alice Noon

Coram

Stephanie Bishop

Essex CC

Oliver Clarke

DfE

James Foyle

The Fostering Network

Robb Cann

The Fostering Network

Graham Bambrough

Action for Children

Peter Sandiman

PAC & CASA

John Allen

London Borough of Harigay

Enquiries:

Christine Prickett clerk to the APPGAF

CVAA UK (Consortium of Adoption Agencies)

Email: c.prickett@cvaa.org.uk

Apologies:-

Edward Timpson MP

Helen Grant MP

Jeanne Kaniuk

Jan Fishwick

Jean Hasnip

Caroline Davis

Glenys Thorton

Leonie Jordan

Marion Hundleby

Lynda Gilbert

Harvey Gallagher

Andy Stott

Coram

Pact

Cornerstone North East

Families for Children

Independent

Independent

Independent Consultant

Independent

NAFP

BAAF

1	Liza Nandy MP, the APPG treasurer, opened the meeting at 16.00 pm. She reported that Edward Timpson, on becoming Minister, had resigned as co-chair of the group. There had been one nomination to take ETs' place; Craig Whittaker MP. CW was duly elected to this position. Proposer : Julian Brazier Seconder: Norman Goodwin
2	CW said that he was pleased to take on this role and gave some details of his background and experience which included serving on the Cabinet of Calderdale MB Council as the portfolio holder for Children and Young People's Services. He was also the Lead Member for Children's Services and as part of his duties as an MP, Craig sits on the Education Select Committee at Westminster.
3	CW welcomed those in attendance and asked for any additional apologies to those listed. There were none.
4	CW introduced the topic for the meeting which was "The Recruitment Challenge - what the statistical data really tells us", a presentation that would be given by David Holmes CEO of BAAF and would include recruitment for sibling groups and the linked workforce challenges. (Please also see the circulated slides.)
5	DH explained that he was about to share a considerable amount of information with those present and added his intention was to illustrate how - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Data must be seen in context or it will be misunderstood ○ We need to understand what we are looking at ○ We need to notice local and regional variation ○ Triangulation is vital ○ How data can help with the recruitment challenge
6	DH emphasised the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adoption is increasing (12% up on 2010/2011 figures) ○ So is the number of children in care up 2% over 2010/2011 figures

	<p>and a 10% increase in under 1s coming into care over the last year</p> <p>He gave the example that if child A came in to care in December 2009 they, in all likelihood, would not be appearing in the statistic until 2011/12.</p> <p>Therefore the number of children placed for adoption, as well as the number of children who are the subject of adoption orders, must be considered to gain a realistic forecast for planning.</p>
7	<p>DH went on to explain that there was a</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Huge variation at local level year by year – what does this tell us? ○ Regional trends do not always follow national trends ○ The perils of small volumes and data volatility
8	<p>He added that it should also be noted that there had been</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A 10% increase in number of children with a Placement Order in a single year ○ 7,160 children currently have a Placement Order <p>He then asked -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What would happen to the adoption statistics if all these children were placed for adoption? ○ What would it take to place all these children for adoption? ○ What does this mean for recruitment strategy?
9	<p>Furthermore DH asked what does this mean for the adoption workforce?</p> <p>In summing up he stated that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The data evidences the recruitment crisis in adoption but also the workforce challenge for the system to assess, approve, match and support more adopters ○ Need to accelerate the recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters to meet demand ○ Need to recruit to address both “stock” and “flow” issues in adoption ○ We can use data both to evidence need and focus our efforts <p>However, despite these challenges he thought that there was <i>a huge opportunity to achieve permanence for thousands more children.</i></p>
10	<p>A perspective on the situation that DH had described was invited from a Local Authority.</p> <p>Sylvia Little introduced herself as working in adoption “for a long while” with Lewisham County Council. She stated that she recognised the challenges that DH had described and stated that for example there was a huge disparity between the 2,300 children waiting for permanence and the 236 families that Lewisham had approved. This was compounded if the courts ignored this.</p> <p>Another issue was that adopters didn’t always understand the complexities around confidentiality and being classed as “in” county by some London boroughs who wanted adopters from “outside”.</p> <p>SL added that she could cite a catalogue of examples that highlighted the difficulties and inefficiencies that adopters encountered and these mistakes must be learnt from.</p> <p>SL stated that she did believe opportunities were there to improve the situation, not least because of the Government’s interest in the process and its desire to change the process and implement new initiatives as, for example, the Gateway. SL thought if calls were handled efficiently and appropriately this initiative could have a positive impact on recruitment.</p>

11	<p>Chris Smith introduced herself as the director of CVAA which represented the 30 voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) working within the statutory sector to place what was the "nation's children".</p> <p>CS said that the VAAs had committed to a 20% year on year growth to try and alleviate the number of children that needed families. Last year the sector had place 16% more children and these included children that had more complex needs. However, she was pleased to report that the sector's already low disruption rate, at less than 5%, had decreased by 33% and she believed this was in part due to the specific and targeted recruitment campaigns that had been employed to attract certain types of adopters. The sector was also about to launch a social impact bond initiative targeted at the harder to place children.</p> <p>Enquiries overall had increased and more adopters had been approved but challenges still remained and it would not be easy for the sector to achieve its growth strategy because funding the front end activities of recruitment and approval were costly and were not linked to a guaranteed income. Finding sufficiently qualified and experienced staff, especially managers, was becoming more and more difficult.</p> <p>The inter agency fee, although researched by Julie Selwyn and stated at its current level as below the actual cost, was still an issue with some LAs but CVAA was working with ACDS to try and find a solution and create a level playing field.</p> <p>Finally CS stated that she believed that more children could be placed and more adopters would come forward if enhanced adoption support packages were available to them.</p>
12	<p>CW said he had heard the word crisis mentioned several times and how far away was this from being a reality?</p> <p>DH responded by stating that the VAAs commitment to growth would be welcome. However, more needed to be done to maximise the recruitment and approval process in order to address the BME, older and complex needs of children that were "stuck" in the system.</p> <p>SL stated that the London boroughs were taking different views about placement and some were targeting placing older children whilst another's emphasis was on the younger children coming into the system.</p>
13	<p>Bill Esterson MP</p> <p>BE stated that he was an adopter of 2 siblings from a group of five, and asked whether too much importance was being placed on adoption when other forms of permanence should be improved?</p> <p>DH stated that the right of permanency for a child was the right option and there was no hierarchy. However, he was concerned about the significant rise in adoption orders and that there needed to be a better flow-through, as there was not a corresponding rise in the realisation of these care plans.</p>
14	<p>BE then asked if DH was stating that the care plan was wrong?</p> <p>DH said the care plan is not wrong but they needed to be realistic as to whether adoption was likely to be achievable.</p>

	<p>SL stated that the plan might be changed in court.</p> <p>CS added that we must promote what is right for the child and meet these needs.</p>
	<p>June Thoburn - UCEA</p> <p>JT added that there was a difference between a "Need to place" and a "Right to place".</p> <p>SL Added that some foster carers wanted to adopt disabled children but did not do so because the support they were offered would stop when the young adult reached eighteen years old.</p> <p>BE suggested that there was a mechanism to allow for support to get over the transition period between 18-25</p>
15	<p>Jean Smith – PACT</p> <p>JS stated that her VAA was only approached by LAs to place those children with complex needs and how could this be addressed?</p> <p>SL stated that this goes back to the issue of a level playing field and the LAs not being able to fully quantify their costs and therefore erroneously believing that the VAAs were expensive.</p> <p>She added that although there was research to show that VAAs were not expensive it did not help because those commissioning services were told not to use them. However, she believed there should be a level playing field and this would improve the number of children placed.</p> <p>Norman Goodwin - Adoption Matters Northwest.</p> <p>NG said it was gratifying to hear such a ringing endorsement for paying the IAF for the good of the children waiting.</p> <p>A significant number of children were coming into the system this year and, as DH had stated, they needed placements. Also as the statistics showed, the VAAs were good at recruitment.</p> <p>DH agreed that a level playing field arrangement should be pursued. He said that some LAs were good at recruitment too and perhaps they and the VAAs should do it for others.</p>
16	<p>Sue Lucas – Assist</p> <p>SL stated that numerous prospective and approved adopters were put off by the delays and these needed to be tackled. She added that it might be effective to bring approved adopters from abroad into the system.</p> <p>CS stated that seven VAAs undertook inter country work. The profile was changing and those that could not adopt from abroad because of increasing delays were switching to domestic adoption. These numbers were increasing due to the increased number of younger children in the system.</p> <p>Gillian Kirsch – Norwood.</p> <p>GK stated that at her agency prospective inter country adopters very quickly switched to domestic placements if there was a good match. However, there were important cost implications for the VAAs involved.</p>
17	<p>BE asked whether adopters were getting the full picture when they approached LAs about children with complex needs?</p>

	<p>Stephanie Bishop - Essex County Council</p> <p>SB suggested that the challenge re matching was broadened and perhaps adopters should be introduced to those children waiting at the earliest opportunity? The BAAF activity days were promoting the need for all to be more creative in this regard.</p> <p>DH explained that this had been a funded BAAF project which had been running for eighteen months. These adoption parties were usually run on a Saturday and followed a USA model. He stated that 23 children had found families from the first three that had taken place which was a conversion rate of 20% and represented a higher conversion rate than other activities. He added that he saw them as part of a menu of activities.</p> <p>Lynn Charlton – Adoption Matters.</p> <p>LC stated that we live in a world where visual presentation is vital and some children’s chances are lessened by, for example, the images used of them and/or the clothes they are dressed in.</p> <p>It was commented from the floor that a face to face meeting elicited better responses than photographs on Be My Parent.</p> <p>DH said everyone needed to learn from these days and he thought they needed to be paced carefully. He also thought that not all the information was required initially as there was a life-time to sort through this.</p> <p>In response to questions he added that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The days are themed - If the children are old enough they are informed about the purpose of the day - There could be a considerable responsibility on the foster parents in preparing their children for the day
18	<p>Mark Owers – CVAA</p> <p>MO stated that it was important to have a menu of options and strategies available but there was still a large gap between adopter numbers and children waiting. He asked if that would require a huge effort of organisation from the centre to address this and bring about positive change?</p> <p>CW thought this was a good time to approach the minister as he was new in post and would be open to such questions.</p>
19	<p>CW then asked those there what they would like to see happen and what they thought would make a difference?</p> <p>MO stated that the VAAs needed some funding to help them take the risk of moving forward and increasing their capacity.</p> <p>DH stated that he would like to see the 500 sibling groups targeted. This might require support in the form of housing, cars and other necessary daily life requirements.</p> <p>JS added that adoption support packages that involved a guaranteed allowance based on assessed needs would provide more adopters.</p>

	<p>Peter Sandiman – PAC</p> <p>PS mentioned that the entitlement proposal concerning need was not an entitlement to receive this.</p> <p>SL added that an Action Plan that guaranteed support would facilitate more adopters by taking out the risk of not being able to access the appropriate support that might be required, for example CAMHS support.</p> <p>PS said that assessed need should be provided. Money was seen as a dirty word but adopters needed financial assistance for at least twelve months to cover costs such as time off work, a larger car and perhaps domestic help. Ultimately this was much less expensive than three children in care.</p>
20	<p>BE asked whether money would attract more adopters? Will some adopters do this for money?</p> <p>CS stated that adopters would not adopt for money, but money would attract more adopters especially in the current economic climate. A financial support package is not just money - it is about giving a message that we appreciate and support the job you are doing for the nation's children.</p> <p>Alice Noon – Coram</p> <p>AN stated that LAs were cutting back on what they give adopters in terms of support and she asked what message was that to give to adopters?</p>
21	<p>JT said that there was an acute shortage of qualified social workers and this needed to be addressed. She added that the least successful option was for these children to be returned home.</p> <p>CW stated that the Munro report had also referred to this and its impact. He added that a college of social workers was at least a step in the right direction.</p> <p>SL stated that a recent report had highlighted that s/ws working with adopters tended to make more sound decisions, and those that were not were unrealistic, and this type of finding about "appropriate" experienced s/ws needed to be heeded.</p>
22	<p>SL suggested that a campaign using celebrities was used to "kick start" an increase in adopters.</p> <p>Also the idea of a pilot in several boroughs was suggested.</p> <p>DH said he believed there was now an urgent need to go beyond pilots. The evidence could not be clearer.</p> <p>He added that the Minister needed to be informed that there needs to be a similar focus on recruitment and support as there is on the process of adoption.</p> <p>He added that it was vital that the National Gateway gave prospective adopters a "good" experience.</p> <p>MO stated that there were two core elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - £8m had gone to LAs to assist the situation, whilst nothing had been given to the VAAs to assist their growth plans - A level playing field needed to be established

	<p>CS added that if a VAA had £50K they would take on an additional member of staff.</p> <p>DH agreed that it would make a considerable difference.</p>
	<p>Ivor Frank – APPG for children in care</p> <p>IF Cautioned that both his group and this APPG could be unintentionally lobbying against each other. He suggested, given the numbers involved, that there was a case to be made for a Minister for Children in Care. He asked what message did this “gap” give out about the importance of children in care?</p> <p>CW mentioned the Munro report and the recommendation for a national perspective. He also thought the name change of the department to the DfE did not assist.</p>
	<p>CW stated that he would go and see Edward Timpson who was a very receptive and dedicated Minister of State to the needs of children.</p> <p>It was asked if a letter from the group could go to ET recording the group’s thanks for his previous work with them.</p> <p>CW agreed that this should be undertaken and he would sign it on the group’s behalf.</p>
	<p>CW thanked the presenters, and said he looked forward to receiving the action points and notes from the meeting.</p>
	<p>The meeting closed at 17.45pm</p>