

All Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children's Centres

Anne Longfield Speaking Notes on Couple Relationships

- **Our three APPGs have come together to discuss the important issue of couple relationships:** 4Children has provided the secretariat for the *APPG on Sure Start Children's Centres* for a number of years, and we're very pleased to have come together today with both the *APPG on Strengthening Couple Relationships* and the *APPG on Conception to Age Two* to discuss couple relationships.
- **Children's Centre Census:** According to the most recent edition of 4Children's "Children's Centre Census", over 1 million families are now using Centres on a regular basis, including two-thirds of "vulnerable" families with a child aged 0-5. Over the last two decades, Children's Centres have grown to become a central part of the support infrastructure around children and families. As Elizabeth Truss said at the last meeting of the *APPG on Sure Start Children's Centres*, Children's Centres are now a key part of what it means to be a parent and a child in this country.
- **Government response to Education Select Committee report:** In the Government's recently published response to the Education Committee's "*Foundation Years: Sure Start Children's Centres*" inquiry, there was a welcome recognition of the valuable role that Children's Centres play. However, it's also crucial moving forward that we all continue to push for a bold and ambitious role for Children's Centres.
- **Provision of relationship support in Children's Centres:** Figures from our Census reveal that these services are an important aspect of Centres' offering – over a quarter (26%) of the Centres that we surveyed said that they will be involved in the provision of relationship support programmes over the course of this year, which is an important building block for this sort of provision. 4Children are also involved in a kite-mark scheme for support to help parents collaborate after separation, which is a valuable step forward in providing relationship support to those in difficult situations.
- **We know that when there are serious problems in a couple's relationship it can have enormous negative consequences for children:** For example, figures suggest that in some areas, roughly 80% of those families targeted by the Government's Trouble Families programme have experienced domestic violence.
- **Early intervention:** Early intervention is crucial to preventing these sorts of problems from developing, and is an important theme for this discussion. All the evidence shows that tackling problems early on, to prevent them from becoming full-blown crises further down the line, is by far the most effective approach in terms of both outcomes

and cost. Children's Centres have a vital role to play in this, supporting families from pregnancy through to birth and then beyond into the early years.

- **Children and Family Centre Hubs:** Indeed, looking forward we believe that Children's Centres can become the focal point for providing a holistic, "whole family" model of support, which brings a wide variety of services together under one roof and can help drive intergenerational change. In our recently published manifesto for the future, "*Making Britain Great for Children and Families*", we've argued that there are considerable benefits to be gained from broadening the role of Children's Centres to become Children and Family Centres, transforming them into multi-purpose hubs at the very heart of their communities, and bringing a range of professionals together to support families in a much more joined-up way than they have done previously.
- **In summary:** We are still in the early stages of our journey with Children's Centres, and many are still in the first decade of provision. This means we have a real opportunity to shape the form that Children's Centres take, and the extent of their services. The delivery of the sort of relationship support that we will hear about at this meeting is one aspect of this, and as with other issues that the *APPG on Sure Start Children's Centres* has looked at, is an important issue for parents.