



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children's Centres
Meeting 8 June 2010, Room O Portcullis House, 4.30-5.30



Present:

Parliamentarians

- Luciana Berger MP
- Baroness May Blood
- Annette Brooke MP
- Andrew Bull on behalf of Andrew Selous MP
- Jenny Chapman MP
- Caroline Flint MP
- Yvonne Fovargue MP
- Lilian Greenwood MP
- Emily James on behalf of Alex Cummingham MP
- Barbara Keeley MP
- Peter Price, Bishop of Bath and Wells
- Edward Timpson MP
- Baroness Joan Walmsley

Other

- Hannah Dobbin (Action for Children)
- Tim Farrow (National Childminding Association)
- Stuart Hamilton (Parentline Plus)
- Natalie Henningham (The Grandparents' Association)
- Anjali Jingree (NCT)
- Veronica King (Daycare Trust)
- Gemma Lass (Parentline Plus)
- Anne Longfield (4Children)
- Karen Mackay (Together for Children)
- Claire McCarthy (4Children)
- Megan Pacey (Early Education)
- Andrew Sharp (NCT)
- Neil Leitch (PSLA)
- Eleanor Thompson (4Children)

1 Election of Officers

Annette Brooke MP and Caroline Flint MP are to keep their positions as Chair and Vice Chair of the group, respectively. As Maria Miller MP, formerly Vice Chair of the group, is now a minister she has stood down and Andrew Selous was appointed Vice Chair in her place. Sharon Hodgson MP, Luciana Berger MP and Jenny Chapman MP were elected as officers of the group.

2 'Shout out for a sure start' campaign update

Eleanor Thompson (4Children) gave an update on the progress of the 'shout out for a sure start' campaign, including recent changes such as the introduction of theme months and the increasing website focus on individual stories and case studies.

There followed a short discussion about an editorial which appeared in the Times newspaper that day. Group members were concerned that it was based on a small section of a much wider study and because it was "muddled". It was decided not to give the article more attention than it merited. In addition the group concluded it made some good points about the low wages often paid to staff working in childcare.

Anne Longfield said 4Children could produce a briefing for journalists/MPs looking to defend

Sure Start and based on the evidence of other studies reflecting more positively on the policy.

3 Coalition plans for Sure Start

Anne Longfield (4Children) gave a summary of the coalition's position on Sure Start, highlighting that the budget has been ringfenced for the year but that funding for outreach is being redirected to pay for the 4,200 Sure Start health visitors proposed by the government.

There was concern about Local Authorities' attitudes towards Sure Start and whether cuts would be made to provision at a local level despite ring-fencing.

There was some discussion of the relative benefits and otherwise of targeting Sure Start, with health visitors being highlighted as being crucial in identifying which families need extra support. The issue of stigma was also raised, with some saying people don't want to be seen using services which class them as "failing families". Sure Start's role in building community cohesion was praised, with members saying that the isolation of young families can be a major issue which can lead them to have a deprived experience, even if they are not deprived from an economic standpoint. Members agreed that there is a problem in how to define poverty and that simply looking at postcodes is not enough.

Members also discussed joined-up working, and the potential it can have for "amazing" clinical results which result in added value for the tax payer.

It was concluded that not all Sure Start centres need to be the same. Some new parents can get by with health visitors alone, whereas others will need a whole different level of support. The issue of universality is not saying all postcodes must have exactly the same facilities. One size doesn't fit all but there should be some sort of access for all.

4 Early priorities for the group

It was decided to invite the ministers in charge of the transition from outreach to health visitors to talk to the group and explain how this transition will take place.

Annette Brooke said that after discussing the transition with minister Sarah Teather, it would be useful to discuss governance.

5 Any other business

None

6 Date of the next meeting

It was decided that this meeting with the minister would be advertised to the APPG on Children and that the next meeting of the APPG on Sure Start would take place in July, with Tuesday/Wednesday being the best days.