



## All Party Parliamentary Group for Families in the Early Years

### Early Years, Children's Centres and Social Mobility

Tuesday 31 October 2017

Committee Room 9

#### Attendees

Akbar Khan	Jon Down	Miriam Brittenden
Alexandra Landes	Josh Cottell	Neil Young
Alice Haynes	Jourdelle	Nicky Hill
Amanda Crow	Judith Longstreth	Octavia Holland
Andrew Sharp	Julie Holmes	(speaker)
Anna Shaw	Katie Blay	Oliver Coppard
Anthony George	Kerie-Anne Ivory	Pam Calder
Carolyn Silberfeld	Kevin Makwikila	Cllr Richard Watts
Cheryll Adams	Laura McLaughlin	(speaker)
Edyta Pozoga	Lindsey Foster	Rowen Smith
Elaine Arnold	Lisa Knowles	Ruben Vemba
Fiona Railton	Lizzie Hodgkins	Ruth Joseph
Hilary Turner	Lord Watson of	Sandra Hedblad
Ilaria Esposito	Invergowrie	Sara Bonetti
Jade Taylor	Lucy Powell MP (chair)	Shamila Hanif
James Livingstone	Mandie Patterson	Sharon Jarrett
Jane Tunstill	Marie Moody	Sue Greenfield
Jo McGrath	Mary Moorman	Thelma Walker MP
Joe Shalam	Megan Jarvie (speaker)	Tracey Brabin MP
John Metcaff	Michaela Jones	Trevor Single

#### Minutes

Welcome and introductions from the chair, Lucy Powell MP

Cllr Richard Watts, Leader of the London Borough of Islington and chair of the children's board at the Local Government Association, shared the local authority perspective on delivering early years services:

- Early years support is fundamental to supporting families and social mobility. However, cuts to local government budgets mean there is a real risk that council budgets will only be spent on keeping children safe and out of the social care system.

- Councils have innovated to overcome these financial barriers, and there are examples of excellent practice.
- In Islington they have gone from 16 children's centres to three networks of schools, children's centres and health visitors to support local families. They have moved to charging for some services when families can afford to pay and increasing targeted services
- There is an evidence gap on what works to keep children out of care which makes it harder for councils to target activity effectively
- There is a need to recognise children as part of a family unit and to focus support on the whole family

Octavia Holland, Director of The Communication Trust, spoke about her previous work setting up Sure Start in the North East and running Coram's Field, including their children's centre, as well as the role of early years services in improving communication:

- From her time setting up Sure Start centres, Octavia found parents were very positive about the effect of these centres and dads also valued being involved in the services.
- The children's centre Octavia ran in Camden offered universal non-stigmatised support which appealed to all parents who attended. She argued that children's centres are at their best when they are imbedded with the services in the local area and it is the quality of childcare and family support that is important for social mobility.
- Language skills in the early years are the most accurate indicator on whether children will escape poverty when they grow up. The Communications Trust survey of children's centre found that there had been significant cuts to speech and language support, which was seen as detrimental to the families it previously helped.
- The Communication Trust wants to see a clearer direction for children's centres – a childcare programme cannot provide all the answers for early years, it's about the quality of the programme that'll show if it can help families or not.

Megan Jarvie, Head of Policy and Communications at the Family and Childcare Trust, discussed their new research on *The Future of Family Services*:

- The Family and Childcare Trust decided to research this area as they wanted to explore what families with young children want from services and how they need to be delivered at a time of significant change and challenges
- The approach to this research was parent-led: following training from Family and Childcare Trust staff, parent researchers went out into their respective communities and spoke to 500 parents as part of this project.
- The key findings were that a wide range of services were highly valued by families both as a way to support their children's learning and to build their own support network with other parents. However, there were some areas for improvement, including how information was provided, the services on offer and bringing together all families.
- The Family and Childcare Trust want to see a fully funded strategy for supporting families in the early years. Local and national strategies should be designed with parents and look at how to best engage and build the community.

The meeting was then opened up to questions and comments from attendees, led by the parent researchers involved in the Family and Childcare Trust research. Some of the key points that were raised were:

- It is important to get communications about services right, as if they are wrong, the services are poorly used and it is assumed that there is no demand.
- The importance of the skills and qualifications of the staff involved in delivering these services.
- The important role of health visitors in seeing and reaching out to all young children and their families and offering a gateway to other early years services
- The need for specialist services to support issues such as bereavement and kinship caring
- The most detrimental effect on children and families is completely separate from the early year's sector: the demand for secure and safe housing
- The focus should be on empowering parents to see the benefits of engaging with services and treating them as experts rather than trying to teach them
- The need to better engage fathers, perhaps through designing services that are not solely delivering Monday to Friday during the daytime
- Services work best when they are well joined up so that you can meet all the needs a family has