

## **Cross Party Group on Shared Parenting Draft Minutes of initiating meeting, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

### **Present:**

#### **MSPs**

Ivan McKee MSP (Chair)

Gillian Martin MSP, Bob Doris MSP, Adam Tomkins MSP, Finlay Carson MSP

#### **Organisations**

Brock Lueck (One Parent Families Scotland), Ian Maxwell (FNF Scotland), Kenny Spence (Men in Childcare), Jackie Tolland (Parent Netork Scotland), Barry Wright (Dads Rock), Pauline Linn (Family Mediation West), Brian McGlynn (Family Mediation West), Cheryl Brown (Midlothian Sure Start), Thomas Lynch (Dads Rock), Eileen Brownlie (Relationships Scotland), Elaine Stalker (Families Outside), Peter Cloke (Circle), John Forsyth (FNF Scotland).

#### **Individuals**

Leanne Dobson

#### **In attendance**

Jane Denholm (Office of Ivan McKee)

#### **Apologies:**

Andy Wightman MSP, Kate Forbes MSP, Sam Pringle (Fathers Network Scotland), Stella Gibson (Spark), Graeme Richards (Circle Scotland), Fiona Robertson, Amanda Ward

#### **Background and process to establishment**

Ivan McKee welcomed everyone and explained the status of this, initiating, meeting referencing the Discussion Paper that had been circulated to invitees. The process is that the outcomes from this meeting would be taken forward to the next available meeting of the Parliament's Standards Procedures and Public Appointment's Committee to gain official recognition for the CPG.

#### **Confirmation of name**

The proposed name of the Group is "Cross Party Group on Shared Parenting". Following discussion of possible alternatives such as Co-parenting, the consensus was to use the proposed name.

#### **Purpose and objectives**

The group considered and agreed the suggested text in the Discussion Paper with the following amendments/caveats:

Reordering of the opening paragraph to read:

*Where both parents are involved in their childrens' upbringing, there is clear evidence of positive educational and social development. As such, shared parenting is a key mechanism for closing the attainment gap and tackling inequalities. Gender stereotyping is an issue that impacts upon many aspects of life including economic, social and family spheres. In the family arena traditional gender assumptions around child raising is one aspect of this, but an important one, as such assumptions influence early years' perceptions, career choices and economic opportunities. [Full text at Appendix A]*

Including 'parental alienation' in the purposes and objectives. The term was new to some attendees and there is no settled definition.

In addition, the group heard that Cross Party Groups often get obsessed by what's not going well and agreed it is important to emphasise positive developments and good practice.

Noted the Council of Europe [resolution 2073](#) in 2016 from their Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination covered a broad range of issues in which gender stereotyping interfered with the parenting potential of both mothers and fathers. Shared parenting is about addressing obstacles that inhibit it in all families – from parental leave or involvement in education. The more that is normalised in intact families the more it will apply should parents separate.

The Group should hear from young people who have experienced shared parenting.

The Group should invite speakers from Scotland, the UK and other countries.

The Group should address information gaps/find out more about a range of issues.

### **Work programme/topics to be discussed in coming year**

The group was invited to identify, discuss and prioritise the issues it wishes to address. These included:

- Invite civil servants to speak about progress with eg: the Family Law Reform Review; the new parenting plan which should be launched soon
- Barriers that exist to sharing parenting and how successful attempts to tackle them have been
- The role of sheriffs – ask a retired sheriff to come and speak to the Group
- Someone from the Judicial Institute who do judges' training to come and speak to the Group eg - what follow up is there with judges on how their decisions turned out?
- Consider parental alienation
- Consider the results and evaluation of the work FMW have done on Parenting Apart (PA) training for parents
- Invite Ms Hetto-Gaasch from Luxembourg (convener of the Council of Europe Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination) via video link or in person
- Consider the benefits to children of shared parenting
- Work in the context of challenging gender stereotypes across society. For example, lack of cross-gender parenting skills in school Personal and Social Education; consider what happens right at the start, in nurseries much higher participation of men working in early years in Norway. How is that achieved?
- Consider good practice where there is no conflict between the parents eg engagement of parents in school, family learning
- How schools go about involving parents – a big issue eg problems for non-resident parents being included in the information flow from schools. Leadership within the school crucial. Invite speakers - Tracy Berry (Forthview, Edinburgh). Raploch community school (Stirling) and Easterhouse (Glasgow) were mentioned as good examples
- Work of the Children in the Middle organisation in the USA.

### **Election of Group office bearers and secretariat**

Three MSPs agreed to act as co-conveners: Ivan McKee, Adam Tomkins and Gillian Martin. FNF Scotland agreed to act as secretariat.

### **Subscription**

There was no proposal for a subscription at this time.

### **Membership**

The Group is open to all who share its aims and objectives. Attendees suggested drawing the Group to the attention of prospective members including Engender, Children's Mental Health bodies, Children 1<sup>st</sup>, Parenting Across Scotland, Home Start, Stepping Stones. Ivan McKee had met that morning with the CEO of Scottish Women's Aid who indicated they did not wish to join at this point.

### **Dates of next meetings:**

6pm - 7.30pm

13 March; 12 June; 2 October; 11 December

Room Q1.03 Scottish Parliament

### **AOCB**

There was none.

John Forsyth

20.02.2018

## APPENDIX A Purpose and Objectives

*Where both parents are involved in their childrens' upbringing, there is clear evidence of positive educational and social development. As such, shared parenting is a key mechanism for closing the attainment gap and tackling inequalities. Gender stereotyping is an issue that impacts upon many aspects of life including economic, social and family spheres. In the family arena traditional gender assumptions around child raising is one aspect of this, but an important one, as such assumptions influence early years' perceptions, career choices and economic opportunities.*

*The CPG will identify, examine and promote policy and practice that supports both parents in sharing parenting responsibilities. It will consider how gender stereotypes can be tackled in the pursuit of a better understanding of what we need to do to ensure the best possible childhood and most promising adult life for Scotland's children. It will provide a forum for MSPs, stakeholders and other interested parties to engage directly in dialogue to inform policy developments and practice which impact on parents sharing responsibilities for the role and support networking on this topic.*

*The CPG on Shared Parenting will:*

- *specifically work to inform the Scottish Government's forthcoming review of [the Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#)*
- *identify issues such as parental alienation and areas where policy and practice could be initiated or reformed*
- *gather the latest research from Scotland and elsewhere*
- *invite speakers to lead discussions on the key areas that will inform the issues*