

**Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on
Shared Parenting**

Draft Minutes of meeting Monday 22nd February 2021

Meeting via Zoom 17.00 – 18.40 hours

1 Welcome and introductions

Present: Fulton MacGregor MSP, Gillian Martin MSP.

Ian Maxwell and John Forsyth, Shared Parenting Scotland; Emile Beattie, Dads Rock; Pete Cloke, Circle; Kenny Spence, Men in Childcare; Cheryl Lee Brown, Midlothian Sure Start; Eoin Keane; Kirsty Nicholls; Anne Wilson, Children's Health Scotland; June Loudoun, Grandparents Apart;

In attendance: Simon Stockwell, Hannah Frodsham and Wendy Georgeson, Scottish Government Family Justice Team

2 Apologies:

Jeremy Balfour MSP, Bob Doris MSP.

Adrienne Burgess, Fatherhood Institute; Eileen Brownlie, Relationships Scotland.

3 New members

Ruth Campbell, CEO of Family Journeys, formerly Family Mediation Lothian has joined.

4 Annual General meeting and Annual Report

Fulton MacGregor MSP conducted the AGM of the group. No new office bearers were elected as the group will have to be reformed after the general election. Shared Parenting Scotland agreed to continue acting as the secretariat. No subscriptions were collected in 2020 as there were no costs associated with online meetings. It was agreed that the outstanding balance of £58.37 would be retained for future activity. The Annual Report had already been circulated and was agreed with no questions.

5 Minutes of November 2020 Zoom meeting and matters arising

The minutes as circulated were agreed, proposed by Kenny Spence, seconded by Ian Maxwell. There were no matters arising.

6 Update: Implementation stages of the Children (Scotland) Act 2020

Hannah Frodsham and Simon Stockwell spoke about the timetable for implementation of the Act, mentioning the registration of Child Welfare Reporters, regulation of Child Contact Centres. There will be consultations on these matters. A guide for children on speaking to a Child Welfare Reporter has just been published and a version for young children is being worked on. Questions were asked on the pilot of alternatives to court, timescales for implementation of various aspects, how the impact of changes will be evaluated and what more is going to be done to support separating parents to avoid court.

7 Update: The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill

This Bill is at stage 3 and appears to have cross-party support. It will have a major impact of wide variety of issues. If the amendment saying that implementation has to take place within six months of Royal Assent is passed it may delay other work. It will also affect consideration of the age of a child, defined as up to 18 in the UNCRC.

8 Round table: Impact of COVID-19 measures on shared parenting

Points raised in this discussion included the current restriction on contact centres at a time when nurseries and children's centres are open. Child welfare proceedings have been interrupted; services working with vulnerable families have found it harder to engage with clients particularly fathers; support of grandparents has continued but they are facing restricted contact with grandchildren and delays in court proceedings; Some schools have overlooked their obligations to engage equally with both parents. Kinship carers also face delays and restrictions and many separated parents have had contact extensively disrupted. The pandemic has led to an understanding of the importance of children having relationships with both parents. Many parents have lost jobs or are on reduced income, increasing the pressures on separated families. Men in Childcare courses are now available Scotland-wide in virtual form.

9 Future plan – consolidating the work of the CPG over the last 3 years

A range of issues from the past three years of the group were mentioned, including the need to take lessons from other countries, the need for changes in parental leave and culture changes within many services to achieve more equality between the roles of mothers and fathers. The meeting agreed to publish a report before the end of this Parliament, highlighting the issues which should be pursued in the next parliament.

10 AOB

There were no items of AOB. The group chair Fulton MacGregor and the secretariat John Forsyth and Ian Maxwell were thanked for their work. The meeting closed at 18.40.