



APPGAP: AGM and Session Minutes

Wednesday 2 November 2022, 17:00 – 18.30PM

Room W1, Westminster Hall

Parliamentary Attendees: Rachael Maskell MP (Chair), Lord Russell (Officer), Tim Loughton MP (Officer), Sarah Green MP (Officer), Lord Watson.

Speakers: Adopters, Not a Fictional Mum and Gaby

Secretariat: Katharine Slocombe (Adoption UK), Sam Lomas (Home for Good)

Apologies: Edward Timpson MP, Bill Esterson MP (both wish to remain as officers)

1) Welcome & AGM

- Rachael Maskell MP (Chair), welcomed and thanked returning and new officers.
- Rachael Maskell MP was nominated and reconfirmed as Chair of the Group. Tim Loughton MP (Con) and Sarah Green MP (Lib Dem) were elected as Vice-Chairs. Lord Russell was re-elected as an officer of the group, as were Edward Timpson MP, Bill Esterson MP and Peter Gibson MP in their absence.

<i>Rachael Maskell MP</i>	Chair
<i>Tim Loughton MP</i>	Vice Chair
<i>Sarah Green MP</i>	Vice Chair
<i>Lord Russell</i>	Officer
<i>Edward Timpson MP</i>	Officer
<i>Bill Esterson MP</i>	Officer
<i>Peter Gibson MP</i>	Officer

- Rachael Maskell MP concluded the AGM.

End of AGM

2) Introduction to the meeting

- Rachael Maskell MP thanked all for attending, giving opportunity for all in attendance to introduce themselves to the group.

3) Self-Employment and Adoption

- Rachael Maskell MP introduced the agenda item 'Self-Employed and Adoption' giving an overview of the loophole that exists around payment for self-employed adoptive parents.
- Rachael Maskell MP explained that the minister for BEIS had been invited to the meeting, but due to the recent ministerial changes was unable to attend this evening.
- Katharine Slocombe (secretariat) shared findings from the Call for Evidence:
 - There were a total number of 403 respondents to the survey. Roughly three quarters were self-employed, or their partners were self-employed. Fairly even geographical spread across the country. The results of the survey findings are divided into three sections:
 1. *The impact a lack of an equivalent to SMA on self-employed adopters has*
 2. *The impact a lack of an equivalent to SMA had on self-employed adopters/prospective adopters decision to adopt again in future*
 3. *Social worker awareness/advice*
- Katharine concluded by summarising the findings:
 - The survey gives us some clear insights into the impact this lack of support could be having on families and how it affects their future decisions around adoption.
 - It also gives us an indication that leaving this to the discretion of Local Authorities isn't working for families.
 - The government is currently looking at options to extend parental leave and pay entitlements to kinship carers, as part of its response to the Care Review. This would be an opportune moment to equalise pay for self-employed adopters too.
- Rachael Maskell MP expressed her thanks for the secretariat's work collating the findings of the survey into this report.
- Rachael Maskell MP introduced Not A Fictional Mum and Gabby to share their experience of being self-employed adopters.
- Not A Fictional Mum spoke about her experience:
 - Speaking as a self-employed adoptive mum, but also as a care-leaver.
 - A reminder to MPs and Peers that the Government had previously expressed a desire to remove barriers to children finding permanence.
 - Shared her experience of attachment trauma, sharing personal stories from her own family.
 - Since adopting, NFM has become self-employed. NFM explained her wish to expand her family once again through adoption. NFM has been approved to adopt again but was deeply concerned and upset upon discovering she was not eligible for any statutory adoption leave or pay.
 - NFM expressed that current policy is not appropriate in a modern-day society.
 - NFM raised the lack of statutory adoption pay for self-employed as an equalities issue.

- Gaby spoke about her experience:
 - Gabby adopted older siblings which brings new levels of challenge to the adoption due to past trauma.
 - Expressed how difficult the first weeks and months of adoption are.
 - Disheartened to hear the Government say that maternity leave is only for a mother's recovery. Gaby explained that the need for paid leave was of equal importance for adoptive parents to help children settle into their new families and bond with parents.
 - Gaby was self-employed for 10 years prior to adopting but had to stop work entirely due to adoption. Gaby's social worker wanted reassurance that she would be at home, but no compensation for her stopping paid work was offered.
 - After her adoption was confirmed, Gaby was told by her social worker that as her son would be turning 6 soon, had he not been adopted, then he would have been deemed as 'un-adoptable' and would have entered long-term foster care. This was upsetting to Gaby who pointed out the additional cost to local authority had her son not been adopted.

- Rachael Maskell MP thanked NFM and Gaby for sharing their personal stories adding that hearing directly from self-employed adopters makes this 'real' and helped us all to reflect on the issue at hand.

- Rachael Maskell MP opened to questions from Officers and the room:
 - Tim Loughton MP
 - It is frustrating that this issue remains even after all the reforms brought in several years ago.
 - One example of reform is the provision of grants to local authorities to pay for extensions when parents adopt siblings.
 - A short discussion with adopters on what compensation was needed, concluding it was necessary to be equal to that of other parents

 - Gaby
 - Added she would not have been able to carry on with work after adoption.

 - Tim Loughton MP
 - Suggested it wouldn't be a lot of money required, given wider picture.

 - Lord Watson
 - The Government are committed to increasing the number of adopters, so it is strange that at present adopters are being put off from adoption in this way.
 - It is important to recognise that maternity leave is about bonding with the new child not just birth recovery.

 - Katharine Slocombe

- There have been contradictory answers from Government ministers as to the rationale for their position on adoption leave.
- Emily Frith (Adoption UK, CEO)
 - How could this change happen?
- Katharine Slocombe
 - Achieving change with this issue is challenging because it falls between three Government departments: Department for Education; Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.
- Emily Frith
 - We should also bring in the equalities minister on this issue and approach it from four angles.
- NFM
 - There is nobody we have come across that disagrees with us that change is needed.
- Lord Russell
 - Somebody needs to take primary responsibility for this. Otherwise, it's not going to happen.
- Rachael Maskell MP
 - Will write to all relevant ministers, raising this issue and presenting the findings of the survey.
- Sarah Johal (RAA National Strategic Lead)
 - RAAs would be grateful for the change because they are struggling to advise on discretionary payments. Blanket statutory guidance would be helpful.
- Lord Watson
 - Asked Sarah Johal: whether social workers help adopters with applications for discretionary payments.
- Sarah Johal
 - Each local authority does it differently, some local authorities are good at this, but some do not know about it.
- Lord Watson
 - Followed up by asking Sarah Johal: what the circumstances were, in which discretionary payments were given.
- Sarah Johal
 - Parents adopting older children tend to be successful, while parents adopting babies tend to be unsuccessful.

- Lorna Hunt (Service Director, PACT)
 - All children have complex needs. It is particularly worrying that siblings are being separated when self-employed adopters can't afford to adopt again. I really support this. A little bit of money given in this area would make a huge difference. Given the economic climate at present, the last thing adoptive parents need is added financial stress.
- Katharine Slocombe
 - There are examples in the survey of self-employed adoptive parents who feel unable to adopt their child's sibling because of the lack of support.
- Rachael Maskell MP thanked everyone for contributing to the discussion.
- Rachael Maskell MP concluded this section of the agenda with a commitment to write to all departments which overlap on this issue, requesting meetings in-person with the ministers responsible.

4) Care Review

- Rachael Maskell MP introduced the agenda item 'Care Review'.
 - The final report of the Review was published in May 2022 and the Government is due to publish its response by the end of the year.
 - We had hoped someone from the Review team would join us for our meeting, but they were unavailable.
 - Several APPG's, including ours, have been successful in securing a backbench business debate on the Care Review which will take place early December. Officers were encouraged to take part in the debate.
 - Suggested a meeting of the APPG on the Care Review specifically, and when more time.

5) Forward Programme

- Rachael Maskell MP introduced discussion about the Forward Programme:
 - The next substantial meeting of the group will take place early next year.
 - There was a discussion surrounding forward programme for the next 12 months. Suggestions included were:
 - Children who wait the longest.
 - Health commissioning.
 - Trauma: Lord Russell highlighted the study being undertaken, led by John Timpson, a deep dive into trauma and attachment theory, the findings are out in March. Agreed to share details.
 - Greater diversity on panels, feeding into the issue of racial disparity in care. The secretariat would contact officers with some firm proposals in order to get agreement on the forward programme

6) AOB and close

- Rachael Maskell MP thanked all for attending and for contributing to discussion.

End of Session