

Meeting summary

Adoption Panel Chairs joint meeting with Panel Advisers

20 October 2023 | 10.30am–1.00pm | Zoom

1. Openness in Adoption conference

- 1.1 The group watched a recording of the roundtable discussion from the recent Adoption England Openness in Adoption conference. The panel included birth parents, adoptees and adopters who shared their experiences of staying in touch with families. Discussion about the issues raised followed.
- 1.2 Observations were that a lot of the contact situations in the film worked best without the social worker's involvement but it was acknowledged that this wouldn't be the case in every situation. One of the key messages from the film was 'still co-parenting even if you haven't met the birth parents'. The group felt there should be direct contact in all cases unless there is a strong reason not to.
- 1.3 *Please note that we are not able to share this film more widely due to copyright issues.*

2. Public Law Working Group – Adoption Sub-Group consultation on adoption practice

- 2.1 The group welcomed the consultation and were pleased that this had come from the courts and judicial system. Members discussed the following:
- 2.2 **Adoption and contact**
 - Do you agree with the recommendations in Chapter 1?
 - Do you have any other proposals?
 - In particular, what should any best practice guidance contain?
- 2.3 The group as a whole agreed with the recommendations and said they felt these were already being put into practice. The following comments were made:
 - Contact should be discussed much earlier, at Placement Order.
 - Contact plans were too formulaic. They need to do more to encourage and support children's social workers to look at contact in a different way. There is a very narrow definition of the word – e.g. letterbox or direct, indirect contact. It needs to be reframed – it's about connections for children and young people and maintaining and building on those connections.
 - When adopters are shown videos about birth family and contact at training, members can see a slight shift in adopters' attitudes.
 - The terminology used will define people's attitudes towards it and so using the right terminology is very important. A few suggestions were 'keeping in touch' and 'family time'. One agency had made changes to agreements and referral forms.



2.4 Key areas we want to comment on that have been missed out

- More support is needed for birth families. A lot of money is put into family finding and recruitment plus investment into the Adoption Support Fund but very little money is put into supporting birth families. Local authorities and government need to put more resources into this to implement the changes. Birth parents aren't lobbying government as adopters do.
- A particular area that needs resources is birth parents' input into the later life letter. It is unlikely that a child's social worker is going to have time to sit with them and do this. Birth parents need to be referred to independent support much earlier on. Birth parents need time, energy, consistency, trust and a lot of support to accept the social care decision.
- Where should face-to-face meetings happen? Contact centres are not ideal to meet the birth family. They should be held in the community somewhere rather than a social services building.

2.5 Further comments from the group:

- CPR needs changing, e.g. language.
- Probing questions need to be asked of social worker as to why they thought this arrangement was best for the child. How have they come to this recommendation?
- Questions at panel – need to be put in the assessment.
- When social workers are writing about birth parents it needs to be a balanced view and not just the negative parts. The overall picture should be given and not just why their birth child has been removed.

2.6 CoramBAAF will be submitting a response to the consultation. Members were encouraged to submit from their agencies to: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/11-Sep-23-Report-v3.pdf>. Members who wish to contribute to CoramBAAF's response can send their comments to Erica Bond - cbpracticeforum@corambaaf.org.uk - by 27 November. The consultation deadline is 30 November.

3. CoramBAAF training

3.1 A CoramBAAF Learning from Research webinar on [Managing Infant Family Time in Early Permanence – messages from research](#) will be held on 26 October. This is free to members. Members will be able to access the recording [here](#) (you need to log in as a member first).

3.2 CoramBAAF's [training and events pages](#) have recently been updated.

4. Any other business

4.1 Jan Way shared details of an international conference being held on 17/18 April 2024 in Cambridge by IAC-Coram. Keynote speakers include: Rosa Rosnati (Italy), Laurie Miller (US), Elspeth Neil (UK), with additional speakers from the UK, Netherlands, India, South Korea, Italy and Sweden.

Date of next meetings:

Adoption Panel Chairs, 8 March 2024, 9.30am-12.00pm, Zoom

Panel Advisers (Adoption & Fostering), 8 February 2024, 10.30am-1.00pm, Zoom

Further dates for 2024 tba

Members can sign up for the meetings [here](#).



Any agenda item suggestions for future meetings to be sent to:
cbpracticeforum@corambaaf.org.uk