



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

An Roinn  
**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta  
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

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## **Families Matter: *Supporting Families in Northern Ireland***

**The Department of Health, Social Services and  
Public Safety's Proposals on a Regional Family  
and Parenting Strategy**

### **Response Document**

**January 2007**

## Consultation Questions

Please respond to the consultation document by e-mail, letter or fax.

Responses should be sent to:

e-mail: [familypolicyunit@dhsspsni.gov.uk](mailto:familypolicyunit@dhsspsni.gov.uk)

Family Policy Unit  
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Responses must be received no later than **30th March 2007**.

(Please tick a box)	
I am responding:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> as an individual <input type="checkbox"/> on behalf of an organisation
Name:	Gerry McDonald
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## **Supporting Families**

1. **Do you agree that the aims stated are the right aims? (Please tick)**

**YES**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

Need to begin with the child and be time bound e.g. by 2016 all our children and young people are fulfilling their potential and Supporting Families Strategy will assist in this by creating confident, responsible parents through access to accessible, timely, consistent, responsive services and information delivered in an integrated par

2. **Do you agree that the vision stated is the right vision? (Please tick)**

**YES**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

Like Question 1 - Question 2 is Yes - But, Good that Vision focuses on child and concept that childhood is valued and not just as preparation for adult life. But - Again problem of one departments vision

3. **The document lists 10 principles that underpin the strategy. Do you agree with the principles stated? (Please tick)**

**YES**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

Difficult to disagree in principle but should reflect Our children - Our pledge and reflect second principle by this policy being holistic and integrated rather than one departments take.

4. **The document lists 7 outcomes from the Children and Young People's strategy, 'Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge'. Do you agree that these are the right outcomes for this strategy? (Please tick)**

YES

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

Some confusion - Our children has 6 outcomes, ECM has 5. These are a mixture of both with an additional one on "Partnership Working. One example Keeping Safe is Stay Safe in ECM and Living in safety and with Stability in OC - stability is a very important factor and should not be overlooked

5. **The focus of this strategy is primarily on preventative and early intervention to support parents at particular times of need and at particular stages in the development of their child. Do you think that this is the appropriate scope for the strategy? (Please tick)**

YES

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

Strategy needs to be so much more and it should have a whole child concept not just what is relevant to a particular department. Actions are very targeted and not universal which they should also be

## Priority Themes

6. Do you agree that Theme 1 – Parental Support is an appropriate theme? (Please tick)

YES

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

7. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 1 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? (Please tick)

YES

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

However they are insufficient. There needs to be a clear understanding of what universal services are available and they need to be clear, consistent, accessible, responsive. etc. Similarly targeted services need similar treatment. Services must cross the full range and not just health.

8. Do you agree that Theme 2 – Access to Information is an appropriate theme? (Please tick)

YES

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

The theme is titled Access to Services and Information and later talks of advice. There are significant differences as provision of advice is just one service. It has already been established that there are universal services and it is their role to agree with parents their needs and help them to access it. Websites are not the an

**9. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 2 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? (Please tick)**

**YES**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

Again insufficient and we need to go back to basics - universal services need to be accessible, timely, responsive, consistent standard. Regional helpline poor substitute - how many parents access existing service - any evaluation.

**10. Do you agree that Theme 3 – Assessment of Needs is an appropriate theme? (Please tick)**

**YES**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

However UNOCINI has no legislative base and is unlikely to be accepted by other departments thus defeating a key element of it e.g. education - teachers and Education Welfare Officers, Youth Service

**11. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 3 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? (Please tick)**

**YES**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

However again the lack of legislation and integrated, multi agency way forward is a problem

**12. Do you agree that Theme 4 – Information Sharing is an appropriate theme? (Please tick)**

**YES**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

Given the attempt to shift to prevention and early intervention then protocols for information sharing at a very early stage must be agreed and delivered in a consistent fashion. Again legislation is required.

**13. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 4 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? (Please tick)**

**YES**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

Again legislation required

**14. Do you agree Theme 5 – Integration and Multi-Agency Working is an appropriate theme? (Please tick)**

**YES**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

I have some difficulty with the discussion on support here - Integration and MA working it is about service provision which is both universal and targeted. The challenges of working in this way need to be explored further and good practice developed. The comment about transfer to DE points up the need for a regional strategy and o

**15. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 5 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? (Please tick)**

**YES**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

But are they to inform how integration and multi agency working could develop - Limited evidence of reshaping arising from existing Sure Starts. Needs to be an explicit requirement. Are location, number etc of these 6 Centres based on identified need? Where is evaluation of Childrens Centres and evidence based practice?

### **Equality Implications**

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires Departments and other public authorities in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- Between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- Between men and women generally;
- Between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- Between persons with dependants and persons without.

In addition, without prejudice to the above obligation, public authorities must also in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, have regard to

the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Where there is evidence or an indication that an existing policy is having an adverse impact on equality of opportunity, or that a proposed policy may cause an adverse impact, an **Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)** may need to be carried out on the policy. The process used by a public authority to determine whether an existing policy or new policy needs an EQIA is called **screening**.

The Department is now screening the proposals set out in this consultation document and as part of the screening process, the Department invites you to consider the following questions.

The Department is inviting responses to the following questions:

- 17. Are the actions or proposals, which are set out in this document likely to have an adverse impact on any group of people in terms of the nine equality dimensions? (Please tick)**

**YES**

**NO**

If yes, please state the reasons why.

Childrens Centres will be in a specific location - will this be based on need.  
If not then adverse impact

- 18. Are you aware of any indication or evidence – qualitative or quantitative – that the actions or proposals in this document may**

have an adverse impact on equality of opportunity or good relations? (Please tick)

YES

NO

If yes, please state the reasons why and how these might be mitigated.

As above, location based on identified and agreed need

19. Does the proposed strategy and actions afford an opportunity to promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations? (Please tick)

YES

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

Some impact on equality of opportunity in terms ensuring every child has opportunity to fulfil full potential but no specific measures to show if successful. No reference to good relations

### **Additional Comments**

20. Do you have any other comments, which you think might be relevant to the development of the strategy?

This is a summative response from six Sure Start Managers / Co-ordinators in the Southern Area namely - Dungannon, Clogher Valley, Blossom, Lurgan / Brownlow, South Armagh and Orana.

The development of the Strategy is to be welcomed and we have no major difficulties in principle. In some way parts of it are ambitious and the operational implementation of parts of it will be difficult given the history of professional gatekeepers protecting professional boundaries within the health and other services. There is also some concern about the targeted nature and the need for more focus on universal services. Generally it is one department's view and from this perspective is fine but it should also be part of an integrated approach.

What we require is a regional, inter agency / department strategy (holistic as in whole child) flowing from the ten year strategy for children and young people and whilst there is some recognition of that within the document there needs to be more. Where does it fit within the Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge Action Plan 2007 - 2008?

There also needs to be a recognition of the many strategies which affect families e.g. Affordable Housing, Shared Future, Lifetime Opportunities and these should also be incorporated.

The fact that this document was produced with no reference to DE which is in the process of taking responsibility for Sure Start, the development of Children's Centres and other Early Years and childcare functions is indicative of missed opportunities. The lack of any reference to for example the cost of childcare and the challenge this poses for parents on low income, working/training parttime and unsocial hours.

Overall there is also the need to give legislative effect to the CYP strategy, to UNOCINI (or similar), to information sharing, to consistent, responsive, timely services which meets children and parents needs.

In general the lack of consultation with children and young people as service users and other service providers in terms of policy development is disappointing.

There are also some concerns about the read across of initiatives and the need to ensure that solutions that work in one set of circumstances also work in a different context

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMENTS**