

Equality Impact Assessment of the Sure Start Programme

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
An Roinn Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí

SURE START – EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1. Introduction

1.1 This Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) addresses the Sure Start programme which was introduced in Northern Ireland during 2000/01.

1.2 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires all 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.

1.3 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.

- 1.4 Schedule 9 of the Act requires public authorities to prepare Equality Schemes, which should state, inter alia, the authority's arrangements for assessing the likely impact of policies adopted, or proposed to be adopted, by the authority on the promotion of the equality of opportunity. Schedule 9 also requires a public authority, in publishing the results of an assessment, to give details of any consideration of measures which might mitigate any adverse impact of that policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity.
- 1.5 This EQIA considers the equality impacts on those considered to be affected by the Sure Start Programme. It is carried out in accordance with the procedure outlined in the Equality Commission's "Guide to the Statutory Duties" and further elaborated in its recent publication "Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment".

2. Background

- 2.1 The Sure Start Programme emerged from the current Labour Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), set up soon after they came to power in 1997. This involved a comprehensive review of government departments as well as identifying six cross-cutting reviews, one of which involved services for young children.
- 2.2 The aim of the review was to realign and better co-ordinate services for children with greater emphasis on preventative action. The review considered the evidence that early intervention and support reduces

family breakdown, strengthens children's readiness for school and benefits society in the long run by preventing social exclusion.

2.3 Sure Start is based on principles to:

- co-ordinate, streamline and add value to existing services for young families in local communities;
- involve parents;
- avoid stigma;
- ensure lasting support;
- be sensitive to particular families' needs; and
- promote participation of all local families

Sure Start in Northern Ireland

2.4 A Sure Start programme was introduced in Northern Ireland during 2000/01. In July 2000, Ministerial approval was given for 15 projects across Northern Ireland, with full year funding for these projects amounting to £4 million.

2.5 It was, however, acknowledged that there were still areas with high levels of deprivation, which were not covered by Sure Start projects and a decision was made to allocate a further £1.8 million from April 2001 to allow the creation of a small number of additional projects to fill these gaps.

- 2.6 Childcare Partnerships, based in each HSS Board area, were asked to identify localities within their area which were eligible for Sure Start projects and to support potential applicants in these areas to enable them to submit suitable proposals.
- 2.7 In March 2001, a further eight projects were created with the result that there is now a total of 23 Sure Start projects operating across Northern Ireland. The introduction of the Programme here means that over 17,000 children aged under four and their families will have access to the services provided through Sure Start.
- 2.8 A list of the 23 Sure Start projects and the ward areas they cover is shown in Annex 1.

3. The Policy

- 3.1 The overall Sure Start policy is to improve the health and well-being of families and children before and from birth, so children flourish at home and when they go to school.

Aims

- 3.2 The aim of Sure Start is to work with parents-to-be, parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children – particularly those who are disadvantaged – so that they can flourish at home and when they get to school.

Implementing authority

3.3 The policy is implemented by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in conjunction with the four Childcare Partnerships.

Outcomes

3.4 Sure Start does not exist to provide one specific service, rather it attempts to change and add to the services already existing within a particular area. The main way Sure Start aims to operate is by reshaping, enhancing and adding value to existing services, as well as providing new ones and increasing partnership working and co-ordination between agencies. The intended outcome of Sure Start is the enhancement of child, family and community functioning.

Stakeholders

3.5 The main stakeholders in relation to this policy are:

- children in need under the age of 4;
- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety;
- parents;
- organisations (statutory, private, community or voluntary) that work with, represent or provide services to children and their families; and
- Childcare Partnerships

4. Methodology

Consideration of available data and research

4.1 There is a considerable amount of data that indicates evidence of need among children and that support intervention to help children living in disadvantaged areas.

- **Age, gender and religion** – Data from the 1991 Census indicates that young people under the age of 4 make up 6% (101,533) of the total population of Northern Ireland (1,577,836). Of this 101,533 - strong group, some 51% (52,184) are male while 49% (49,349) are female. Data from the 1991 Census also suggests that approximately 47% of children and young people in Northern Ireland are Roman Catholic; 47% are Protestant; and 6% are of a different religion or no religion.
- **Disability** – data is also available to show that 2,156 children under the age of 4 in Northern Ireland are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance. (*Source DLA allowances current by age and sex at 28/02/2001 – DSD summary of Statistics.*)
- **Race** – there is little available data on differentials on grounds of race. However, statistics show that only around 18% of Traveller children participate in pre-school provision compared to a Northern Ireland average of 56%.
- **Political opinion and sexual orientation** – there is limited data available to identify differentials between children in need on

the basis of political opinion or sexual orientation. There is, however, a wide range of other indicators that highlight the fact that there are many children in need.

- ***Evidence of children in need*** – information about those in receipt of benefits shows that there were 61,120 children under 11 living in households receiving Income Support. The employment status and levels of benefit-dependency in a household are useful indicators of deprivation.

5. Assessment of Impact Assessment on Equality of Opportunity

- 5.1 An assessment of the impact of Sure Start on the equality of opportunity under the nine categories is set out below.
- 5.2 The categories considered most relevant are: age; disability; persons with/without dependants; religious belief; and racial group.

- ***Age*** - the overall policy will clearly have a differential impact in favour of children under 4, who make up approximately 6% of the total population. This is legitimate in order to promote equality of opportunity for children in need.
- ***Disability*** - Children with a disability are described as being particularly in need. Whilst children with a disability were not a target group, the Sure Start programme could have a differential impact in favour of disabled children. This is legitimate in order to promote equality of opportunity for disabled children.

- ***Persons with/without dependants*** - The overall policy will clearly have a greater effect on people with dependent children than on those without dependent children. This is legitimate in order to promote equality of opportunity for children in need.
- ***Religious belief*** - data from the 1991* Census suggest that approximately 47% of children in Northern Ireland are Roman Catholic; 47% are Protestant; and 6% are of a different religion or no religion. In terms of religious belief, the composition of the overall target group of children in need may differ from that of the total population. If one looks at the religious composition of ward areas covered by the 23 Sure Start projects here, the average % of children who would have access to Sure Start services is as follows: Roman Catholic = 50.88%; Protestant = 34.12% and those in the category of other/none/not-stated = 15.65%. In keeping with the principles of New TSN, the policy has targeted people, groups and areas in greatest social need, the composition of which may differ from the overall population. Therefore, there may be a differential impact in terms of religious belief. This is legitimate in order to promote equality of opportunity for children in greatest need. (**The figures are based on the stated religion of the head of the household.*)
- ***Racial group*** - as with religious belief, the composition of the overall target group of children in need may differ from that of the overall population. Furthermore, in keeping with the principles of New TSN, the policy has targeted people, groups, and areas in greatest social need, the composition of which may differ from the overall population. For example, many

Traveller children are known to be particularly in need and are likely to be a target group. Therefore, there may be a differential impact in terms of racial group. This is legitimate in order to promote equality of opportunity for children in greatest need.

- ***Other Section 75 Categories*** - Whilst there are no specific data available, there is no evidence to suggest that the policy will have any differential effect in relation to the other Section 75 categories.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 From what has been said, it is clear that the policy is likely to have a positive differential effect in relation to children; people with dependent children and disabled children. There is potential impact in relation to religious belief and racial group but, this will only come to light through monitoring the application of the policy.
- 6.2 These findings do not suggest any need for alternative policies or measures to reduce differential effects.

7. Questions for consultation

- 7.1 Comments are invited on whether the Sure Start policy as set out in this document have any particular implications for equality of opportunity between the nine categories or good relations as specified in the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- 7.2 In particular, if you feel that there are particular implications, please state what these are and to what extent you think these might impact on the nine categories.
- 7.3 If you feel there is a better way of meeting the objectives set out in this document which might promote better equality of opportunity or good community relations please state what they are.
- 7.4 A consultation proforma with questions has been provided.

Annex 1

SURE START PROJECTS AND WARD AREAS COVERED

Sure Start project	Ward areas covered
Downpatrick	Cathedral, Flying Horse, Ardglass, Audley's Acre, Killough, Quoile, Strangford
Inner City East Belfast	Island, Ballymacarrett, Mount, Woodstock
Kids'n'Kin	Ardoyne, Oldpark
Lower Ards Peninsula	Kircubbin, Ballywalter, Portaferry, Portavogie
Inner City South Belfast	Ballynafeigh, Shaftesbury, Botanic, Blackstaff, and Taughmonagh in Upper Malone
Shankill	Glencairn, Woodvale, Crumlin, Shankill, St. Anne's
Clan Mor	Clonard, Falls
Colin	Twinbrook, Kilwee, Collin Glen
Bushmills	Bushmills, Armoy, Mosside
Cookstown (G-OLD)	Oldtown, Gortalowry
Ballykeel	Ballykeel
Ballysally	Ballysally, Cross Glebe, Churchland

Sure Start project**Ward areas covered**

Newtownabbey	Whitehouse, Dunanney, Valley, Braden, Coole
Close to Home	Ballysaggart, Castlecaulfield, Mullaghmore, Killymeal, Moygashel
Orana	Drumalane, Ballybot, St. Mary's, St. Patrick's, Daisy Hill
Clogher Valley	Augher, Clogher, Fivemiletown
Blossom	Corcrain, Ballyoran, Ballybay
CHERISH	Irvinestown
Dungiven	Dungiven, Feeny, Upper Glenshane, Highlands
Strabane	Ballycolman, Strabane East, West, North and South
Ballymagroarty/Hazelbank	Crevagh, Springtown
Shantallow	Shantallow East, Shantallow West
Lisanelly & Strathroy Together (LAST)	Lisanelly, Strathroy

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