



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

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

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

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

Family Policy Unit
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Room C4.22
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3SQ

Fax: 02890 520529

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

(Please tick a box)	
I am responding:	<input type="checkbox"/> as an individual <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> on behalf of an organisation
Name:	Pauline McClenaghan
Job Title:	Executive Director
Organisation:	Lifestart Foundation
Address:	11A Bishop Street Londonderry BT48 6PL
Tel:	02871 365 363
Fax:	02871 365 334
Email:	pauline@lifestart04.wanadoo.co.uk

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.

The strategy should also aim to increase children and family resilience and coping skills in order to enable them to deal with stress and other factors which could have negative impacts on child development outcomes

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

YES

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

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.

Should include (1) an acknowledgement of the home as the primary site for good nurture. It is in the first months of life (and therefore in the home) that children's future learning and development capacities are set (2) the need to educate communities to provide environments conducive to children's development and growth

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.

making a positive contribution should also refer to being aware of and included in community activities and structures

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.

Early intervention and preventative action are very important but all parents can benefit from improved knowledge and information on child development stages and processes and with this knowledge can improve outcomes for their children. Universal provision limits nos. requiring more accute interventions and services.

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.

More explicit reference needs to be made to parenting education and support in the home. Surestart initiatives do not have a specific home-based educational programme for parents but some projects buy in this service from Lifestart . A specific action aimed at increasing home based parenting provision should be included .

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.

Re paragraph 5.3.1. community based organisations offering children's services can signpost parents to other family support and other relevant services and could be used as service conduits or consultation venues thereby reducing stigma often associated with statutory support provision.

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.

Regional Information Data bases should include information on non-statutory service providers and mapping exercises need to be conducted to identify local provision.

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.

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.

Statutory bodies must be encouraged to appreciate the professionalism of community and voluntary sector organisations working with and/or run by parents and these organisations need to be involved in the design and implementation of the UNOCINI assessment form.

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

YES

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

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.

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.

Effective integration and partnership working are only achievable where there is sufficient levels of understanding, mutual respect and a greater balance of power . More work needs to be done to improve levels of equity in partnership working. Lifestart should also be included as a Surestart partner.

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.

Children's centres will be an important loci for services including parental outreach services. But they will not be enough. Home-based parenting education and support services in local communities have an important role to play in ensuring better outcomes for children in NI.

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.

- 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.

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.

Additional Comments

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

The importance of this strategy for the achievement of better child outcomes in NI cannot be overstated. Research has consistently shown that a child's relationship with its parent/care-giver has important influence on his/her future physical, intellectual, psychological, economic and social well-being. Material disadvantage & economic hardship significantly impact on child outcomes but good parenting can militate against adverse childhood outcomes and improve life chances. It is important therefore to ensure high quality in parent learning and educational support. Short focused centre-based provision has its place but an integrated home-based learning curriculum on child development for parents of children from 0-5 years, such as that provided by Lifestart, and which covers all child development milestones is clearly better. There is insufficient emphasis in the strategy document on supporting systematic home-based provision, on ensuring the quality of parenting and family support services and on providing for working as well as non-working parents.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMENTS