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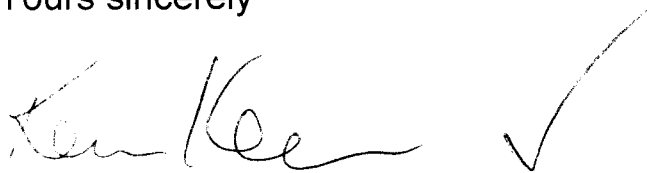
29 March 2007

Dear Mrs Bell

'FAMILIES MATTER: SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND'

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above Consultation Document. The Northern Health & Social Services Board is the lead agency for the Northern Area Children & Young People's Committee and the Northern Childcare Partnership. Please find enclosed the response in respect of both partnerships.

Yours sincerely



Kevin P Keenan
Acting Director Social Services

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Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

**FAMILIES MATTER: SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN NORTHERN
IRELAND**

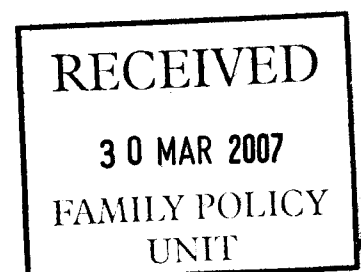
**The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's
Proposals on a Regional Family and Parenting Strategy.**

**Response Document
January 2007**

RESPONSE FROM:

**Mr Kevin Keenan
Acting Director Social Services
Northern Health & Social Services Board (NHSSB)
County Hall
182 Galgorm Road
BALLYMENA
BT42 1QB**

Responding on behalf of the following organisations: NHSSB,
Northern Area Children & Young People's Committee and
Northern Childcare Partnership.



Supporting Families

1 Do you agree that the aims stated are the right aims? YES

- Whilst emphasis on parents is welcome, it should be noted that with the increase in reconstituted families step parents' cohabitees also often play a key role in recurring children (as acknowledged in section 4.5).
- There is a need to emphasise the requirements under UNCRC at 1.5 and 1.6.
- Also at 1.8 other drivers should include UNCRC.

2 Do you agree that the vision stated is the right vision? YES

3 The document lists 10 principles that underpin the strategy. Do you agree with the principles stated? YES

But would suggest the following additions:

- At point 3 change to "The needs, rights and perspectives...";
- Children and young people have the right to take appropriate risks, with support, as part of growing up;
- The best interests of children are the paramount concern of families and those supporting them;
- All children and young people should have equal access to services which respect diversity and their individual needs, regardless of where they live;

- Policies and services should be sensitive to the individual needs and aspirations of every child and young person, taking full account of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, disability, age and social;
- Policies and services should aspire to and reach high standards of quality for the benefit of their users;
- Children and young people should have a role in the design and delivery of policies and services.

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? YES

With Comments:

- Please note above comments re: appropriate risk taking;
- Also would recommend removing “by not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour”.

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? YES

But:

We suggest that the Strategy is not confined to “particular times of need” and “stages of development” but applies across all age groups of children and young people throughout their lives;

We feel there should be more attention given to the needs of adolescents and their parents and children who are looked after.

Priority Themes

- 6 Do you agree that Theme 1 – Parental Support is an appropriate theme? YES**
- 7 Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 1 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? YES**

But would comment:

- The Sure Start model of delivery of services should extend beyond Sure Start areas;
- Mention should be made of the role that social workers can play in providing family support services;
- Children and young people with additional needs and especially children and young people with a disability should be supported in accessing universal services;
- Private day care sector has the potential to provide additional neutral venues as Child Contact Centres and other services ie; baby clinics;
- There is also an opportunity in Child Contact Centres to have issues such as Bullying, Internet Safety and general Citizenship matters addressed for parents and children. Some of the latter are aspects parents do not have access to in terms of knowledge. PSNI operates a Citizenship programme for young people by trained and accredited officers across schools in NI. This is something which could be available for parents. The increase in vulnerability to e-bullying is something many parents are unaware of a centre extended in use for parent/child education may prove worthwhile.
- Positive Parenting – it is important that parents have access to one to one support as well as group work.

- The UNCRC involves a specific mention of involvement of children in decision making surrounding their lives. It may be pertinent to include it in this section.

8 Do you agree that Theme 2 – Access to information is an appropriate theme? YES

9 Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 2 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? YES

But:

- We strongly recommend this action build on the work already carried out by each Area Children & Young People's Committee and Childcare Partnership in compiling and making available web based service directories. This also needs to be linked to the development of UNOCINI.

10 Do you agree that Theme 3 – Assessment of Needs is an appropriate theme? YES

- It is vital Police and other agencies are educated about the UNOCINI process. Unless the information is available and known valuable information could be lost or overlooked. There are specific roles such as the Youth Diversion Officer within the Police Service where consultation could take place.

11 Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 3 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? YES

- The concept for assessment is good but the action could be geared to a more definitive and accountable framework which names the parties to be involved such as the Police Service.

12 Do you agree that Theme 4 – Information Sharing is an appropriate theme? YES

- 13 Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 4 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? YES**
- 14 Do you agree Theme 5 – Integration and Multi-Agency Working is an appropriate theme? YES**
- 15 Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 5 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? YES**

However, careful consideration needs to be given to ensuring the Early Years Registration and Inspection arrangements (provided by Trusts at present) remain strong and robust irrespective of my transfer of responsibilities at Departmental level.

We would also suggest that integral and multi-agency working would be greatly enhanced by inter-departmental working and strong links with the Children's Strategy. We refer to current proposals from the 4 ACYPC for a post RPA Planning and Commissioning of children's services which includes the statutory duty to co-operate within the framework of a regional children and young people's strategic partnership and plan.

Clarification is required with regard to the scope of each Department and related service delivery. Once again we are concerned at the emphasis on children's centres and absence of a focus on 21 year olds.

Children's Centres do not provide services for children over 4, children who live outside Sure Start areas resulting in gaps in service provision for many in need and disadvantaged groups such as prisoners families, parents of teenagers, disabled children, looked after children, children and young people at risk of offending, young carers and transition stages.

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? NO

- 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? NO**
- 19 Does the proposed strategy and actions afford an opportunity to promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations? YES**
- 20 Do you have any other comments, which you think might be relevant to the development of the strategy?**

Consideration should be given to the need to fund Family Mediation and Contact Services (on top of what has been promised).

Whilst UNOCINI is quite rightly mentioned, the need for proper IT back-up and funding is required to ensure it serves the purpose it was designed for.

Further detail would be helpful about what levels of Early Years are to be picked up by the Education Department. Is it to be only the strategic, departmental element, or will base-line services also transfer over?