



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:	Muriel Orr
Job Title:	Chair
Organisation:	Northern Ireland Network of Child Contact Centres
Address:	C/O Knock Child Contact Centre Knock Presbyterian Church 53 Kings Road Belfast BT5 6JH
Tel:	9080 6091
Fax:	9087 3411
Email:	morr.kccc@ntlworld.com

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.

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.

- 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.

Mainly agree but re Economic well-being - we were concerned that this is stated so widely that it may raise unrealistic expectations

- 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.

Re paragraph 4.1 (p14) – while there is a wide range of support services, there are still long waiting lists for some services and provision may sometimes depend on location.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

YES

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

Mostly agree but see note below

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.

See comment below

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.

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.

Mostly agree but see comments below

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?

P25 Child Contact Centres

The NI Network of Child Contact Centres supports plans to financially support the existing Child Contact Centres and the development of further services across NI so that any child requiring the use of a Child Contact Centre can have access to a Centre locally. Representatives of the NI Network of CCCs have recently been involved in a consultation with Sean Holland and staff from DHSSPS re the future development of Child Contact Centres.

Q5 Re early intervention - it was felt that this is very important following family breakdown - to maintain/restore relationships between children, parents and other family members & avoid the parties becoming entrenched and polarised.

Q7 Agree with suggested actions but there is a need for more preparation for couple relationships prior to them having children - eg through schools, youth organisations, pre-marriage courses etc It can be too late to prevent breakdown of relationships once the child has arrived. We also felt that there should be more recognition of the need to see children as part of a wider extended family including grandparents, aunts/uncles etc on both sides of the family and the extra support which this can provide both for couples who stay together and where they separate.

Q12 Information sharing - we felt that this would generally be helpful between agencies. However, with regard to supported Child Contact Centres, one of the reassurances given to families using the Centres is that the Centre will not assess or report on what happens during contact unless there are concerns about the safety of a child or anyone else using the Centre. Feedback from family solicitors suggests that this can be a crucial factor in them being able to persuade parents to use a Centre. One of the strengths of the Child Contact Centres is that they are independent of the statutory bodies and the court system

Questions 14 & 15

While agreeing with the expansion of support services for families, it was felt that more financial support should be available to enable a parent to make the choice to remain at home and parent their own children rather than feeling pressured into going out to work and providing alternative child care arrangements - particularly when the children are small.

There was also concern raised about whether the proposed new Children's Centres will threaten the existence of good existing services eg playgroups, After Schools Clubs etc. Some After Schools Clubs are currently cross-community but extended schools may reduce such cross community contact.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMENTS